

Local Voices

Summary report

A report describing the issues and concerns of disabled people and people with long-term health conditions in Tower Hamlets and how we can work with the council to make our borough better.

September 2013

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1 Introduction

In 2013, we asked local disabled people what issues they cared about and what worries or concerns they might have. The project was called Local Voices and it was run by Real, a disabled people's organisation.

Information from the project will be used by Tower Hamlets Council and other organisations to improve services and to make the borough better.

This report describes the views of over 400 local disabled people who took part. It tells you how people got involved, what issues they talked about, what happens next and how you can get involved.

Having your say has made a difference and the council is listening.

2 How people got involved

There were five ways disabled people could get involved in Local Voices to have their say: workshops, discussion groups at community activities, an all-day event, surveys and social media activity.

This meant some people had their say in groups at venues across the borough; others had their say by talking to someone in their own home. People could take part once or be involved in several events or activities.

We made the project accessible so people could have interpreters, travel support, flexibility for childcare and personal assistance.

People from all the different groups in the borough took part – so there was a mix of ages, genders, ethnic groups, faiths and sexual orientations. There were people with visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health conditions, autism spectrum disorders and/or long-term health conditions.

The whole project was supervised by a Steering Group of eight local disabled people, who had a mixture of impairments, ages, ethnicities and genders to represent the diversity of the local community.

3 What people said

This section explains the overall themes from the project as well as the specific subjects or services that were mentioned. It then talks about the ideas people had and how we worked out what should be done first.

People talked about a wide range of topics. But, worryingly, the main feeling is that disabled people in Tower Hamlets think that life's simply not fair.

Disabled people in our borough are dealing with negative attitudes towards disability, inaccessible information and services and a lack of choice and control over their lives. This is all while cuts in welfare and public services are making it harder for us to get the support we need.

People often mentioned the following problems:

- Negative attitudes towards disabled people
- Inaccessible, poor information
- Difficulty influencing decisions and being heard

These themes came up time and time again during the project. Disabled people felt these issues impacted their sense of self, their well-being and their ability to participate in society. They felt these issues mattered regardless of what services or subjects they were discussing.

People also talked about specific services or subjects. They had concerns about:

- welfare and benefits
- social care
- getting out and about
- crime, anti-social behaviour and safety
- health and healthcare
- housing
- jobs, volunteering and training.

For each of these themes or subjects, people had ideas on how to fix them. Some of the ideas are ready-to-go, others need to be agreed with

the council. Many involve disabled people supporting each other; others depend on the council or other organisations taking the lead.

With so much information, we wanted to find out what matters most to people. So, we developed a scoring system based on:

Proportion - how often an issue came up

Volume - how many disabled people in the borough would be affected

Impact - the impact it would have on their health and wellbeing

Themes and subjects were scored between 0 (none) to 3 (high) for each of these elements and added up to get a score from 0 - 9.

Having the 'priority scores' will help the council and other organisations work out what issues need to be deal with first.

The next section has more information about each of the themes or subjects people talked about. For each, we show its priority score and describe the possible actions people suggested to make things better.

4 Overall themes

There were three overall themes people talked about:

4.1 Negative attitudes towards disabled people

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
3	3	3	9

Local Voices participants commented over and over again how badly they think disabled people are being treated by society at the moment.

The main issues people talked about were: attitudes about disabled people, perceptions of people on benefits, negative attitudes from public agencies, attitudes of council staff and hate crime and harassment.

Possible actions

- Better treatment of disabled people
- Promoting role models and positive stories
- Customer service and disability awareness training for council staff

4.2 Inaccessible information

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
3	3	2	8

People felt that they didn't have enough good, understandable, accessible information to make important decisions. This was particularly true for people worried about welfare and benefit changes.

The main issues people talked about were: needing information about/from council services, inaccessible communication channels, cost and inaccessibility of council phone lines, no computer access, language barriers and having to share private information in public spaces.

Possible actions

- Using accessible communication channels
- Improving content and distribution to disabled people

4.3 Difficulty influencing decisions and getting heard

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
3	2	2	7

Overall disabled people did not feel that they were heard, or whether as individuals or collectively they had any meaningful influence.

The main issue that people talked about was: lack of influence.

Possible actions

- Council working with disabled people better

- Disabled people being part of decision-making mechanisms
- Using democracy to make changes
- Increasing advocacy and campaigning

5 Specific subjects and services

5.1 Welfare and benefits

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
2	3	3	8

Disabled people were worried about all aspects of welfare. Many were already struggling and, even though they felt they needed more information about the changes, they were predicting some significant consequences.

The main issues people talked about were: not having enough money, the possibility of more benefit cuts, the bedroom tax, impact on mental health, not having enough information, changes to universal credit, accessibility issues, affect on people's self-worth, the new assessment process and not trusting the council to get the changes right.

Possible actions

- More and better information from the council
- Financial training and self-advocacy support
- Council initiatives to protect people from the impact of cuts
- Campaigning for changes to government policy and processes
- Building peer support for information and empowerment

5.2 Social care

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
2	3	3	8

Social care was a key issue for Local Voices participants. It was the number one concern for survey respondents and was mentioned in almost all of the community activities.

The main issues people talked about were: valuing day and community centres, fear of cuts, not getting enough support, poor experiences of agencies and poor experiences of council social services.

Possible actions

- Services helping social care users find innovative and cost-effective ways to meet their support needs
- Commitment to adequately funded social care
- Involving service users in delivering improvements
- Checking the systems that make sure services are working well

5.3 Getting out and about

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
3	2	3	8

Getting out and about easily and safely was important to many Local Voices participants.

The main issues people talked about were: the value of travel support, poor pavements and roads, difficulties with buses and hospital transport.

Possible actions

- Repairing pavements
- Improving driver and passenger awareness
- Exploring council processes for travel support
- Linking with HealthWatch to explore hospital transport

5.4 Crime, anti-Social behaviour and safety

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
2	1	3	6

Crime was a relatively low priority compared to other issues. But people felt that some things were getting worse not better.

Respondents were particularly concerned about anti-social behaviour, hate crime and harassment and theft. They were worried about these things even if they hadn't experienced it themselves.

The main issues people talked about were: anti-social neighbours, fear of crime, hate crime and harassment, benefit cuts causing disabled people to commit crime and not being taken seriously by services.

Possible actions

- More CCTV on estates
- Tougher action against anti-social behaviour
- Training for disabled people on how to stay safe
- Local Voices members train as hate crime reporting supporters

5.5 Health and health care

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
2	1	2	5

Overall, health and health care was a significant priority for people who answered the Local Voices survey, who tended to be older. However, it was a lower priority issue for people in most other activities.

The main issues people talked about were: poor experience of health services, poor service due to age, concerns about staff attitudes, NHS staff's lack of awareness and skills, cuts to services and long waiting times for medical attention.

Possible actions

- More staff training about disability issues
- More co-operation between council and NHS on co-funded support
- Linking with HealthWatch and other groups

5.6 Housing

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
2	1	2	5

There were serious concerns about changes to housing benefit. Other housing concerns had a fairly moderate priority for participants.

The main issues people talked about were: accessible housing, housing conditions and disability, and overcrowding

Possible actions

- More research into dissatisfaction among residents
- Linking with housing services to develop user-led solutions
- Supporting information sharing and co-operation

5.7 Jobs, volunteering and training

Proportion	Volume	Impact	Priority
1	1	2	4

It was surprising that jobs, volunteering and training were not identified as significant priorities for Local Voices participants.

However, those who were concerned about it discussed: lack of jobs, job support, help to be independent at work, and how volunteering affects benefits.

Possible actions

- Research support to help disabled people find out about vacancies
- Help with job applications, interviews and testing
- Ensuring disabled people have enough support to keep their job
- Research to identify employment barriers and design solutions

6 What happens next

Your input has made a difference. Local Voices and the council are creating an action plan to make the borough better for the disabled people who live, work or study in Tower Hamlets.

The Local Voices network will continue connecting with disabled people about these issues and the other topics that interest them. Network members will get up to date information about the action plan and more chances to comment on what's happening.

Local Voices will help the council involve more disabled people in making decisions and designing services – we'll provide training and support for people to join focus groups, or even to work one-to-one with service managers to help them understand disabled people's needs.

We're sharing the results of the project with organisations and other networks across the borough, to reach even more disabled people.

Most important of all, the council has agreed to fund the project for another year, so that disabled people can continue to have their say.

7 How you can get involved

If you're a disabled person who lives, works or studies in Tower Hamlets please join the Local Voices network. We'll keep you up-to-date on the changes the council is making and tell you about any other ways you can have your say.

8 Get more information

You can get more information about Local Voices from:

Website: www.real.org.uk/LocalVoices

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