

Innovation in Democracy Programme case studies



The Innovation in Democracy Programme (iDP)

The [Innovation in Democracy Programme](#), commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG), supported three local authorities to involve residents in decision-making through an innovative model of deliberative democracy - citizens' assemblies.

The programme's aims were:

- To increase the capability of local people to have a greater say over decisions that affect their communities and their everyday lives;
- To encourage new relationships and build trust between citizens and local authorities;
- To strengthen local civil society by encouraging participation in local institutions.

Three authorities were selected to take part in the programme: [Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council](#), [Test Valley Borough Council](#) and the [Greater Cambridge Partnership \(GCP\)](#).¹

Dudley and Test Valley chose to focus their assemblies on the future of town centres. For Dudley council, it was Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres and in Test Valley, the area south of Romsey town centre. GCP asked assembly members to consider traffic congestion, public transport and air quality.

The case studies

These case studies have been written by the council staff that led each assembly. Each team answered the same 10 questions and we have compiled their answers into the case studies:

- Why did you want to run a citizens' assembly?
- Why did you choose your topic?
- What about your assembly was most successful?
- If you could start again, what would you do differently?
- What happens now with the assembly recommendations?
- Did any ideas come out of the assembly you wouldn't otherwise have had?
- Do you have any evidence of increased trust or an improved relationship between residents and the council as a result of the assembly?
- What do you plan to do next to carry forward the legacy of this programme?
- When recalling the experience in five years' time, what will be your abiding memory?
- What are your key recommendations for other councils considering running a citizens' assembly?

The case studies are aimed primarily at local authority officers or councillors who want to run a citizens' assembly in their local area, as well as others who are interested in deliberative democracy, such as process designers, facilitators, advocates, or researchers. While some of the guidance is specific to local citizens' assemblies, lots of the suggestions apply to regional, national and even transnational deliberations.

¹ The Greater Cambridge Partnership brings together Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the University of Cambridge and representatives of the local business community.



The case studies should be read as a companion piece to the iDP citizens' assembly handbook. It illustrates with real-world examples many of the guidelines contained in the handbook, while also capturing the subjective experience of running a citizens' assembly by the participating councils in their own words.

It can also be read alongside the independent iDP evaluation report, to get another perspective on what worked well and what didn't work so well during the design and delivery of these three assemblies.

As a triplet of reports, [the iDP Handbook](#), the evaluation report and these case studies provide a varied pool of evidence, guidance and experience that can help other local authorities run successful citizens' assemblies.





The case studies

Greater Cambridge Citizens' Assembly



September – October 2019



How do we reduce congestion, improve air quality and provide better public transport in Greater Cambridge?



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1) Why did you want to run a citizens' assembly?

The citizens' assembly provided an opportunity to engage with the public in a new and transparent way about a complex and controversial topic about which there was no political consensus. Traditional engagement exercises had worked well and had reached large numbers of people but did not give the same opportunity for learning and exchange of views that can help people give more considered views on challenging issues. Gathering views from a representative group of people was also important, giving them the chance to hear from each other and work together on recommendations. The Innovation in Democracy Programme funding was an invaluable opportunity to be supported through this process of trialling a citizens' assembly.

2) Why did you choose this particular topic?

Congestion, air quality and the future of public transport are all challenges facing the Greater Cambridge area. Congestion is a serious issue in Greater Cambridge, which causes major delays, leads to poor bus speed and reliability and has huge implications for air quality and carbon emissions. The area is also predicted to grow substantially in the next 20 years, with thousands more jobs and homes, which could put further stress on the transport network. These issues are all linked, making them well-suited to more deliberative methods of decision making as there are multiple trade-offs and no easy answers. The process provided time for members of the public – ordinary people who live and travel in and around Greater Cambridge – to digest issues and evidence about possible improvements and measures that might be needed to enable those improvements.

¹ This reflects the number of participants who completed both weekends (the same applies to the other two case studies). In each there was inevitably a small amount of drop-off between sessions.



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3) What about your assembly was most successful?

The design of the assembly, with experts to run it, enabled a group of people representative of the local population to consider high-quality evidence in depth and to give detailed and considered views and recommendations. We were particularly proud of the commitment shown by assembly members and their willingness to hear and discuss evidence from different experts about transport and air quality in the area in order to come up with some robust recommendations for the GCP to consider. The assembly members came ready to learn, discuss with others and develop their opinions on the topic over time.³

4) If you could start again, what would you do differently?

Out of necessity the timescales for our citizens' assembly were very tight. This meant that it was a challenge to get everything ready for the citizens' assembly and we had to run some workstreams in parallel. For example, if we'd had more time, we could have undertaken more activity in the run up to the assembly to increase the wider public's understanding of the process and issues. We could also have set up our advisory group earlier and run a less compressed schedule of meetings with them. The Innovation in Democracy Programme was an invaluable opportunity to be supported through the process but if we were to start again, we would give ourselves longer to prepare.

5) What happens now with the assembly recommendations?

The full report of the citizens' assembly has been presented to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's Joint Assembly and Executive Board.⁴ Citizens' assembly members attended these public meetings to share their experiences. Joint Assembly members expressed views that the citizens' assembly had been an excellent, well-designed and well-run process, and that there is a need to respond quickly and comprehensively to their recommendations. At the Executive Board, members agreed to bring forward a detailed response to the recommendations by summer 2020. As part of this, the Executive Board agreed to go ahead with some immediate interventions, including expanding the bus network and piloting road closures, as well as developing a range of packages to take forward in the longer-term.

6) Did any ideas come out of the assembly that you wouldn't otherwise have had?

- The support for road closures was unexpected, as previous engagement on this had proved very controversial. Following the citizens' assembly, the Executive Board has agreed to develop a programme of pilot road closures and we'll be reflecting on how deliberative democracy could support this.
- By giving the assembly space to come up with its own ideas, a broader range of measures was proposed including around supporting uptake of electric bikes, planting trees and franchising buses.
- The message from assembly members to "be bold and take action" has reinforced the urgency of addressing air quality, congestion and public transport issues, supporting the Joint Assembly and Executive Board to agree some immediate interventions as well as undertaking work on longer-term packages.

³ A video of participants' experiences can be found at greatercambs.filecamp.com/uniq/dOWPt9dQeXtXNaw.mp4 [accessed 5 June 2020].

⁴ The GCP's decisions are taken by the Executive Board and with advice from the Joint Assembly. The full report was due to be presented to the Greater Cambridge Partnership Joint Assembly and Executive Board in late 2019, but due to the UK General Election, this happened in early 2020 instead.



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7) Do you have any evidence of increased trust or an improved relationship between residents and the council as a result of the assembly?

72 percent of citizens' assembly members agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel more confident to engage in political decision making as a result of being involved in this citizens' assembly". 85 percent of members gave permission for us to retain their contact details to keep them informed about future developments.

8) What do you plan to do next to carry forward the legacy of this programme?

We're working with our partner councils to reflect on how deliberative democracy could be used to support other work in the area addressing some of the complex challenges we face. We're also thinking about how to use deliberative methods in the next phase of the work as we develop and implement the response to the citizens' assembly. The process showed that some previously controversial interventions, such as closing roads, can gather high levels of support when people have the opportunity to understand the evidence, hear others' views and shape the proposals through deliberation. More widely, we've seized and sought out all opportunities to share the learning nationally, including at conferences and through the media, and will continue sharing the learning about citizens' assemblies as a valuable deliberative democracy tool for complex policy issues.

9) When recalling the experience in five years' time, what will be your abiding memory?

Watching the citizens' assembly feedback its key messages on the final day was a real highlight. It was inspiring to see the participants so clearly articulate their vision for the future of our place, and why they felt different measures to reduce traffic, improve air quality and fund better public transport would help to get us there. There was a real energy in the room, and that came through in the comments calling for ambitious, bold action.

10) What are your key recommendations for other councils considering running a citizens' assembly?

- Pick your issue – a citizens' assembly must be able to genuinely influence a decision, but the issue should be well defined so you can plan a programme around it. Set your question and make sure a citizens' assembly is the right tool to consider this.
- If you're going to do it...do it right – citizens' assemblies need the right expertise to work well, and they need to be designed and facilitated by people who know what they're doing. They cost money and take time to deliver, and although there is a huge pay off in the quality of feedback you get, there are some things you can't compromise on. The process needs to have a high level of independence built into it to be credible, which has implications for scope and delivery.
- Make the most of external expertise – it's a great opportunity to bring in experts, demonstrating independence and balance, but even more than that offering real value by bringing considered evidence and fresh thinking to a problem.
- Be transparent – in order to have trust in the citizens' assembly people need to understand the process and how it integrates with decision-making. Plan to publish as much information as possible about the design, think about how to involve the wider public, and livestream the evidence presented to the assembly.
- Create space – for assembly members to ask questions, discuss the issues with each other and come up with their own ideas. It's tempting to pack in the evidence, but the real value of the assembly is in their discussions and feedback and they need time for this.



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Dudley People's Panel



November - December 2019



What can communities and the council do together to make Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres places that are vibrant, welcoming and somewhere we are proud of? How will we know we are making a difference in: 12 months; three years by 2030?



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1) Why did you want to run a citizens' assembly?

Dudley Council had a Local Government Association peer review in 2017 against a background of regular changes in political control. This recommended developing a long-term vision for the borough with all party support. The citizens' assembly was an opportunity to involve communities in developing one of the aspirations that underpinned the resulting Dudley Borough vision for 2030. The assembly also complemented other approaches being used, such as deliberative inquiry and storytelling, to engage communities and to enable them to participate in decision-making.

2) Why did you choose this particular topic?

The topic of improving town centres was important to achieving our borough vision. It was one which both main political parties could support, and which local people would have a real stake in. The borough has an exciting programme of regeneration under way and as part of this, the council is keen to involve more local people in looking at the future of our town centres. Additionally, a key component of our bids for Heritage Action Zone and Future High Street funding is community engagement.

3) What about your assembly was most successful?
The recruitment process achieved a good, representative panel. The energy and commitment shown by the panel members was fantastic, not just in giving up two weekends to take part, but in staying engaged throughout and with nearly all wanting to remain involved. The fact that a coherent set of recommendations was reached and presented to the council was impressive given that the subject was broad, people had so many different ideas and there was a lot to get through over the four days. Our elected members were involved in the journey from the beginning and have embraced the panel's recommendations. Members and officers have also gained valuable expertise in running citizens' assemblies and understand the benefits of this approach to find solutions for tricky issues.

4) If you could start again, what would you do differently?

Devoting more time to developing the session plan for the two weekends would be one thing, particularly deciding on the order and timing of the expert speakers so that this provided the information needed by members of the panel when they required it to make decisions or for voting. Getting a balance between giving the members of the panel the information they need to make decisions, while not overloading the panel with information and breaking up the intense workshop sessions with speakers throughout the four days is not easy. Learning from the experiences of other assemblies would obviously help with this.

5) What happens now with the assembly recommendations?



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The recommendations have been presented by the panel and discussed at our Place Scrutiny Committee and our cabinet in January 2020. A task and finish group of officers and members of the advisory board, which inputted into the planning for the assembly, will be set up to develop an action plan on implementation of the recommendations, involving local councillors and residents. There will be continued involvement of the panel members in delivering the recommendations. The recommendations have also been included in our Heritage Action Zone and Future High Streets funding bids.

6) Did any ideas come out of the assembly you wouldn't otherwise have had?

The assembly came up with a large number of ideas and worked hard to refine these into a final set of recommendations for Dudley and Brierley Hill town centres. It was interesting that the most strongly supported proposals were similar for both areas; focussing on 1) feeling safer/less crime, 2) more events/entertainment to bring people into the towns, and 3) improved outdoor spaces to spend time. While these are also key priorities for the council, the assembly has been successful in reinforcing that these are also important to the public and providing details of how the council and communities can work together to deliver these.

7) Do you have any evidence of increased trust or an improved relationship between residents and the council as a result of the assembly?

At the end of the assembly, in feeding back their recommendations, several panel members indicated how much they appreciated that the council had run an assembly and given them an opportunity to help shape the future of their town centres. Two panel members presented to cabinet and commented on how much they enjoyed the process and are hopeful that the council will honour its commitment to act on their recommendations and keep them informed. Members of the cabinet and opposition group congratulated the representatives of the people's panel for the presentation of their report and recommendations and thanked all volunteers for their contributions. The development of a clear action plan that includes further engagement with panel members, as well as the wider public, will build on this positive feedback.

8) What do you plan to do next to carry forward the legacy of this programme?

Cabinet agreed to consider other opportunities to use this approach to support the understanding of public views on complex or contentious issues in the future. We will use the legacy to demonstrate the value along with other methods we are using of more innovative approaches to community engagement and participatory democracy. This will help us to move away from traditional consultation approaches which often add little value.

9) When recalling the experience in five years' time, what will be your abiding memory?

Hearing directly from the people's panel members, including their feedback on the final day, presenting the recommendations to the scrutiny committee and cabinet and talking to Baroness Barran, Minister for Civil Society, when she visited Dudley in January. The enthusiasm of the panel members stood out and the opportunity clearly meant a lot to them. They really valued having a say in their own and their families' futures, that the council is listening to them and that their views are respected. The panel feedback session was also recorded, which means that their voices can be heard by officers and members who were not present on the day – this will be incredibly valuable in the years to come.

10) What are your key recommendations for other councils considering running a citizens' assembly?

- Involve elected members from the start - a political commitment to consider seriously and respond to the recommendations is vital.
- Really value your assembly members – they appreciate support to be able to attend the assembly, comfortable venues, plenty of refreshments, regular contact through the



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process and continued involvement after the assembly has met.

- Don't underestimate the amount of planning time needed – it's not a quick or a cheap option.
- The topic needs to be a contentious/difficult issue to gain maximum benefit and not a binary decision.
- Ensure expert speakers are fully briefed and are open and transparent.
- Appropriately experienced and trained facilitators are needed to run the assembly sessions.





Romsey Citizens' Assembly



November 2019



How do we improve the area around Crosfield Hall and the bus station to deliver the maximum benefit to Romsey?



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1) Why did you want to run a citizens' assembly?

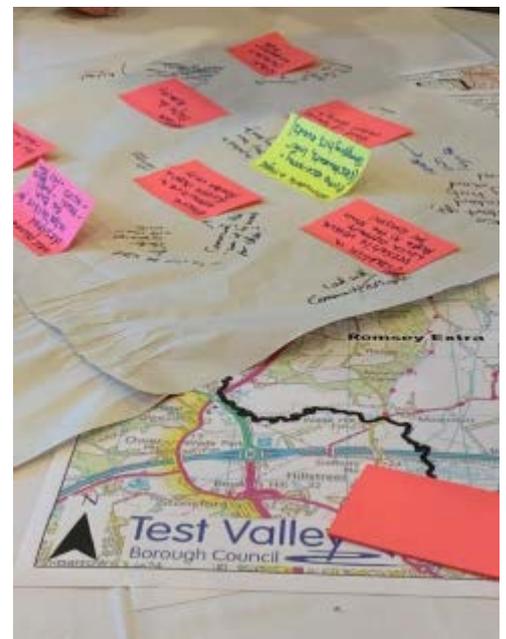
Since 2011 the council has undertaken a cross-party programme of work transforming the way it operates to be more place-based in its focus. Evidence-based decision making also sits at the core of the council's operating model. Underpinning this has been active and genuine community participation. We were keen to work with the Innovation in Democracy Programme and hold a citizens' assembly to help us deepen the connection between participative and representative democracy.

2) Why did you choose this particular topic?

Romsey Future, which is a community-led partnership, has engaged with a large number of residents in Romsey who provided a consensus that they would like to see improvements to the area south of Romsey town centre. The Romsey Future partnership commissioned a master planning process in July 2018 and recommendations from a citizens' assembly would help to provide a robust evidence base that the master planners could use to develop a proposal.

3) What about your assembly was most successful?

The range of expert speakers enabled the assembly members to discuss and deliberate a wide range of topics in relation to the question. The assembly had a series of national and subject led experts who were invaluable in highlighting what Romsey could achieve. This included hearing from local people about their lived experience which proved to be helpful for the assembly members to hear from a number of perspectives. The 'walk and talk' activity also allowed assembly members to visit the area they were discussing which brought it to life. Two students gave their opinions about the area which allowed assembly members to see it through the eyes of a young person.





4) If you could start again, what would you do differently?

One of the challenges we experienced was the tight timescale to develop and deliver the citizens' assembly. We would not underestimate the importance of spending an appropriate amount of time developing the question, sourcing experts and designing the content of the assembly.

Embedding lived experience evidence into the process was particularly important to us. Five workshops were held prior to the citizens' assembly, including with hard to reach groups, bus station and community hall users. These workshops were important and valuable, but the attendance could have been improved by earlier promotion and increased awareness to gain a deeper insight from these groups. The assembly members related to the lived experience speakers because they felt that they were representing local people, in particular the low-income group because this is a relatively hidden population in Romsey.

In addition, the advisory panel meetings were advantageous because they added an objective, non-biased view to the decision making process and highlighted areas that we may wish to consider further. We would schedule these meetings more frequently if we were to start again.

5) What happens now with the assembly recommendations?

The assembly members were invited to an event before Christmas to celebrate the citizens' assembly process and their proposed recommendations. They also signed up to present the recommendations informally to cabinet members in January. This gave assembly members the opportunity to discuss the recommendations further with cabinet members and to ask specific questions. The master planners have also already integrated the recommendations into the draft proposal which is now out for the second phase of public consultation. We will be inviting the assembly members to present their recommendations formally at a cabinet meeting at a later date.

6) Did any ideas come out of the assembly you wouldn't otherwise have had?

The assembly members confirmed that they wanted to see change in Romsey and their recommendations gave us clear ideas to use as a foundation for these changes. We were aware that a community space was of high importance to Romsey residents, but the assembly gave us a deeper insight into how they wanted that facility to look and feel. They recommended creating a flexible, multifunctional and intergenerational space that does not necessarily need to stay on the current Crosfield Hall site. A key theme, that was a golden thread amongst the recommendations, was the importance of future proofing the town centre. An example of this is that currently there is a demand for car parking provision in Romsey but assembly members were open to the idea of decked parking or a 'park and stride' model to ensure the town could adapt in line with future demand. The recommendations also featured heavily around including and enhancing green spaces and wildlife corridors in the town. The final master plan has fully embedded that assembly's recommendations and the masterplanners have identified to us where they have adapted and developed their ideas as a direct result of the assembly's recommendations as set out above.

7) Do you have any evidence of increased trust or an improved relationship between residents and the council as a result of the assembly?

The recommendations put forward by the assembly were received really well by the Romsey Future workstream leads and were not challenged by any residents. With regards to future relationships and communication with residents as a result of the citizens' assembly, over 170 residents out of the 439 that applied to be an assembly member, have told us that they would like to be kept up to date with Romsey Future projects and ideas. Additionally, we have built a relationship with two of the assembly members who work for Solent University and will be working in partnership with them on future projects.



8) What do you plan to do next to carry forward the legacy of this programme?

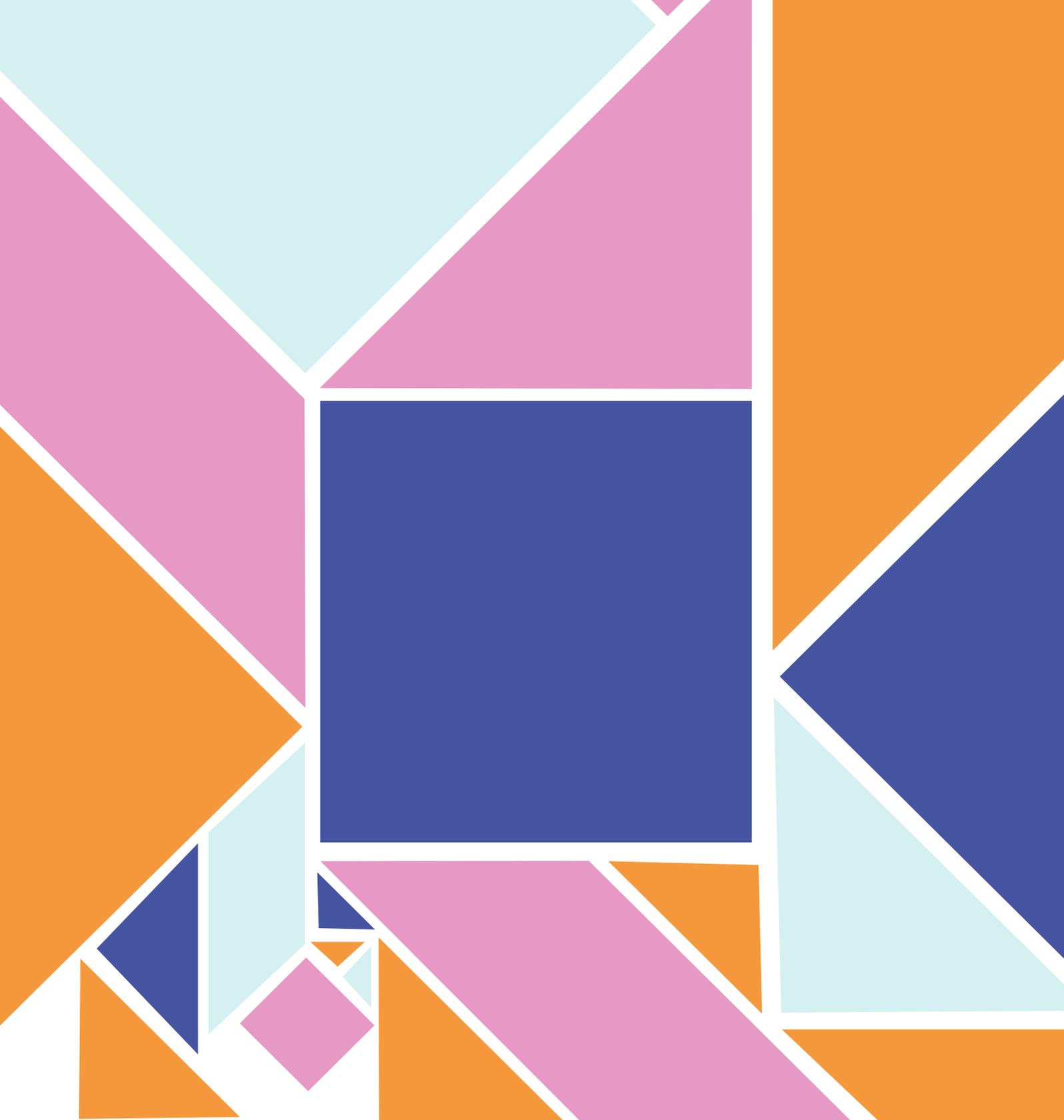
The learning and evaluation from this programme will help us to shape future practice and policy as we aim to make sustainable long-term changes. Holding a citizens' assembly may not be the answer to every issue but we will explore other types of deliberative democracy and integrate them as part of our engagement toolkit. The in-depth deliberations that took place across both weekends were driven by the assembly members being able to have informed discussions with multiple viewpoints to consider. We have learnt a huge amount from this experience and look forward to integrating lived experience and experts into our onward engagement.

9) When recalling the experience in five years' time, what will be your abiding memory?

The transformation of assembly member's opinions and mindsets about both the programme and the subject, between the start of weekend one and the end of weekend two, was remarkable. It highlighted the importance and value of identifying a diverse range of expert witnesses at a national, local and residential level in order to ensure that all voices were represented as part of the evidence. The power of the deliberative process was illustrated by assembly members arriving with their own views and leaving with a collective set of recommendations. Combining representative and participatory democracy not only empowers residents but also councillors, because they are able to understand the issue in more depth which will help them to make evidence-led policy decisions.

10) What are your key recommendations for other councils considering running a citizens' assembly?

Make sure that holding a citizens' assembly is suitable for your organisation and for the topic you are exploring. If it isn't suitable, then there are other deliberative and participatory exercises that will be. Ensure that you have a project group who have relevant experience to the subject matter to ensure their knowledge is utilised. Effective communication and engagement with residents, as well as gathering relevant data, will be essential. The expert speakers need to represent a wide range of perspectives and the advisory panel was invaluable in deciding the variety of experts the assembly should hear from. Developing creative and interesting ways for the assembly members to engage with the experts' evidence is a key component of the deliberative process. Transparency is important and, from the start, you should be clear about how the recommendations will be used and continue this communication throughout to ensure that assembly members trust the process.



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