

Ageing Better in Camden - March 2022

Best Practice: Engaging and Involving Older People in Consultations and Meetings

Between July 2015 and March 2022, Ageing Better in Camden (ABC) worked in partnership with older people and Camden organisations to tackle social isolation and loneliness. Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the programme used a 'test and learn' approach to design services which aimed to make older people's lives healthier and happier.

From the outset, older people were involved and helped to shape the programme and the activities offered. In 2016 a more formal Older People's Advisory Group (OPAG) was set up to meet monthly. The Group influenced the programme and gave their views on a wide range of issues affecting older people, covering everything from housing and new developments to health and transport. In addition, a wider mailing list of older people, known as the Voices of Camden Seniors (VoCuS), was set up to include both OPAG and those who wanted to receive information and share their views but did not want to attend regular meetings.

ABC has put together this briefing to inform and support voluntary and statutory partners who want to engage and involve older people in their work. It is based on our experiences of working with older people in Camden with the OPAG and VoCuS members.

Key points to consider when planning consultation meetings:

- The best time of day to invite older people is 10:30 in the morning. Older people do not like to travel in the dark or in the rush hour – which starts at 3pm with the school rush on the buses.
- Provide clear information – date and time, name and address of venue and travel instructions, contact name/email/telephone number for any issues. Also explain the purpose of the event the issues that will be discussed.

- Let people know what they need to do to secure a place at the event, particularly if numbers are limited. Provide an online and telephone option (this is really important as many older people are not online).
- For a focus group we would recommend 10 participants.
- The venue will need to be fully accessible including the toilets. If possible, include a small budget to pay for taxis (for those who can't use public transport).
- Have a welcome point and time with tea and coffee about half an hour before the event starts. This allows people to get comfortable after their journey and for your event to start on time.
- If you have written documents, these should be sent out by post or email one week before the event. You may need to enlarge the font on documents for people with visual impairment.
- If you have a large topic for consultation, you should still only focus on a manageable level of questions for the group. You can distribute the other questions/consultation document at the end of the meeting with an SAE and ask people to respond in their own time.
- Online materials – not everyone has internet access, so provide links if available but also offer alternative ways to reply, especially to consultations. If your event is to seek views for a consultation, print out documents for people to fill in later if they have additional comments.
- If you intend to take notes that will be shared this should be mentioned at the start of the meeting. Also let people know if individual's names will not be included as this will enable people to speak freely.

Managing the meeting:

Everyone has something interesting to say from their experience and event leads should be genuinely interested in consulting and respond to discussion meaningfully. From our own experience, meetings work best if firmly chaired, giving everyone an opportunity to speak while actively trying to involve those not joining in.

We suggest a few ground rules at the beginning:

- Ask those at the meeting to go through the facilitator or chair.

- Let people know if the meeting is being recorded or photographed and give them the option to opt out.
- Explain that you will be trying to hear the voice of everyone in the room.
- Ask everyone to be courteous and respect the opinions of others.
- Outline what will happen to the information gathered at the meeting.
- Establish if anyone is hard of hearing – and ask that they move closer to the speaker or consider using a voice enhancer device

We recommend giving everyone large post it notes and pens so that they can write down points that they might not get to say or that they want to highlight.

Presenters will need to speak:

- Loudly, clearly, and slowly.
- Jargon free and not to use abbreviations.

Useful phrases to help the conversation moving on:

- Can I just stop you there, you have told us so much valuable information – I can see by the faces of the rest of the group that you have been stimulating other thoughts, so let's hear them now.
- That is such an interesting story – I can see other people have other things to say on this point – perhaps if I can stop you there and you can talk to me after the meeting if you think I need to include any additional details in my write up.
- Interesting – has anyone else had a similar experience?
- [If someone is talking about a situation from the past] Isn't it interesting how things have changed over this period – let's consider the here and now – it was so good to hear from you.

Contact ageingbetterincamden@ageukcamden.org.uk for more information.



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