

Community Engagement

Assessment 2

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INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is a form of participatory democracy that enables a group of people to interact with government and/or agitate for its change. It aims to get buy-in from a group, encourage their participation in a process, or assuage their concerns. Community engagement is an essential tool for local councils to be able to understand the diverse needs and aspirations of the communities they serve (*Granicus.com, 2023*).

Brent Council is one of the most ethnically diverse areas in North West of London with over 339,800 people from 215 different countries. The most large religious groups in Brent are Christian, Muslim and Hindu (*futurebrent.com, 2023*).

In the first assessment, the current social issues in Brent Council were identified and analysed, as well as their community engagement principles, standards, and consultation methods, empowerment and feedback which can be applied to reduce all the problems. The first assessment focused on the main stakeholders involved and their participation and collaboration with the council to reduce these social problems.

The social issues, including housing, homeless, poverty, crime and violence, mental health, education, and a cleaner area, are prioritised and integrated in a plan of council for the next four years called 'Brent Borough Plan 2023-2027' (*futurebrent.com, 2023*).

This assessment aims to focus on the number of different principles, standards and strategies that are currently being adopted in Brent Council through the 'Brent Borough Plan 2023-2027' and some recommendations on what can be done differently to have a more seamless and effective process in their community engagement.

THE BODY

There are nine community engagement principles that can be used to guide the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of community engagement initiatives by health professionals, researchers, policymakers, and

community leaders. Each of the guiding principles addresses a wide range of practise areas and frequently several difficulties (ATSDR, 2020).

The new 'Borough Plan 2023-2027' serves as a course of action for the things the council will put first/pay more attention on, in order to transform Brent into the greatest possible place. It expands on the knowledge gained and becomes ready for the difficulties residents, communities, partners, and enterprises will face. Additionally, it recognises how the cost-of-living crisis will affect available resources and capacity. Brent Council's Borough Plan for the next four years is constructed based on their priorities and the 'Residents Attitude Survey' to capture the voices of residents and partners, the council has consulted with them and put together an evidence base. This strategy places an emphasis on Brent's prosperity, sense of pride and belonging, a cleaner, greener future, respect and renewal, the best start in life, and a healthier Brent. They will work together to improve Brent and give it a better future (*futurebrent.com*, 2023).

Brent residents and communities with the most complex needs are being hit the hardest by the cost-of-living crisis and because of this, Brent Council developed the first strategy of the 'Borough Plan 2023-2027': *Prosperity, Pride and Belonging in Brent*. To tackle inequality and ease the pressure, Brent will work with some partners to decrease the amount of financial unstable people and make sure that they have accessible direct support. They will also be a Digital Place and Digital Council to make it simpler for citizens to get assistance and interact. They work with partners to reduce poverty by providing access to services and support, delivering welfare support services, providing tailored resources to those with complex needs, and creating chances for locals to acquire abilities and find employment. The council is working with businesses to increase footfall, employ local people, attract large businesses, understand the business community, and support community wealth building. (*futurebrent.com*, 2023).

Recommendations for strategy 1:

However, if the Council was to provide not only training such as work experience but also free qualification courses, their strategy would be much more effective meaning that the number of people suffering from poverty will decrease, as a qualification will definitely secure them a higher-paid job.

The second strategy from this plan is *A Cleaner, Greener Future*. The council is devoted to making a significant effort to stop crime and anti-social behaviour. They will support those who want to abandon criminal behaviour and seek recompense for victims. Violence and sexual offences are the most common crimes in Brent, with 10,165 offences in 2022, 9% higher than 2021. Possession of weapons was the least frequent crime in 2022, with 183 offences, a 7% drop from 2021's 196 offences (*crimerate.co.uk, 2023*). Additionally, they will work with communities to foster trust, deter crime, and enhance their response to crime.

As part of the greener future aspiration, they will collaborate with locals, partners, and communities, in order to lessen their emissions and carbon footprint. To reach out to underrepresented populations, they will also collaborate with religious leaders, Brent hubs, and other partners from the non-profits and community sectors. A funding programme called 'You Decide' let's locals vote on which neighbourhood initiatives should get grants (*futurebrent.com, 2023*).

Recommendation for strategy 2:

Brent Council together with the police officers can organize several visits in schools to ensure that students decide to take the good path in life and to prevent an increase in the number of crimes and violences in Brent in the future.

Brent aspires to develop, thrive, and become a desirable destination for individuals to live and work. To do this, they put in place the next strategic priority, *Respect and Renewal in Brent*, they will make investments to make streets cleaner and healthier, more accessible and affordable housing, make it simple for local companies to invest locally, rejuvenate and enhance town centres and high streets, and guaranteeing sustainability is key to the future of their borough and local economy., and make walking and cycling safer and more accessible. The most important details in this are the objectives of Brent Council, which include delivering 1,000 new council homes, improving the use of the civic centre, creating more possibilities for community members to enhance their skill sets, investing in roads & pavement improvement, Keeping Brent on the Move, strengthening the work force, and improving the representativeness of senior management. These objectives will lead to more

affordable and accessible homes, greater local investment and social value commitments from suppliers, more people walking and cycling, and the completion of roadways and pavements are all new revenue streams for the council's maintenance of targets (*futurebrent.com, 2023*). Brent Council have put in place a number of different strategies. One of them would be to build/construct exactly 5,000 residencies by the year 2024, however the need for housing is much greater than the 5,000 they have planned (*brent.gov, 2023*).

Recommendation for strategy 3:

Therefore, one way to improve this strategy would be to allocate more time to trying to convince more of the larger scale construction companies to support them with some free constructions or free building materials and increase the number of houses that were initially proposed without increasing the cost of this process.

Through the fourth strategy, *The Best Start in Life*, Brent Council desires their teenagers to have the best start in life, receive the support they need, and receive quality education. The council will improve their approach to safeguarding and raise attainment and aspirations and they will also expand on previous investments made to upgrade the provision and the number of 'SEND' school seats. The council will provide additional platforms and venues for adolescents to voice their opinions and constantly review how the council engage with them. Success will be measured by the number of students who graduate from school with better life skills, the number of students who enter the workforce, the number of people from Black African, Caribbean, and Somali communities who achieve better outcomes, the number of students who utilise the Family Wellbeing Centre's support services more frequently, and the number of opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making. The focus is on Black African, Caribbean, and Somali communities (*futurebrent.com, 2023*).

In July 2020, it was decided to create the Black Community Action Plan (BCAP) to address the injustices that black community's experience. It will create enduring communities, include Black leaders in decision-making, provide spaces for community engagement, and carry out an internal process evaluation (*brent.gov, 2023*).

The pandemic highlighted health inequalities in Brent, particularly in elderly, males, Black and Asian people, and those who reside in less fortunate locations. This issue has pushed the council to develop strategic priority 5: *A Healthier Brent*. Brent Health Matters will employ the Health and Wellbeing Strategy action plan to ensure accessible physical activity and exercise, direct public health attention and resources to the communities most impacted by Covid, and more to address these disparities, interact with communities to access data and services, respond to the Health and Social Care Act 2022 with locality-based decision-making and service delivery, and expand on effective communication and engagement strategies used during the Covid pandemic. (*futurebrent.com, 2023*).

Mental health is an important part of the NHS, but it is mostly affected by lack of money/funding or lack of understanding. Since many young people have spoken out about the difficulties they are having with their mental health as a result of the Covid pandemic, Brent Council has been in need of more funding to provide the services and assistance they require (*Williams, 2023*).

Recommendation for strategy 5:

A great way to help fulfil the Council and the organisation's needs for solving this problem would be to bring awareness and understanding towards the severity of the mental health situation in Brent at this day in age by involving the community as much as possible through activities such as outdoor events and meetings (both online and physical depending on possibility) that can promote and emphasise the importance of solving this mental health crisis which will therefore lead to more donations towards helping those suffering from mental health as well as the community showing a higher level of understanding towards them, making them feel more accepted which will also help treat them quicker and more effortlessly meaning solving this problem will also be easier and faster.

CONCLUSION

It is important for the council to be more transparent in their decision-making process and to communicate more effectively with the community. Perhaps they could hold more public meetings and try to inform the people about the existing online forum where community members can share their thoughts and concerns as for the community to engage with the current issues and try helping out, they have to firstly be aware of these issues within their community/council. In conclusion, it is good that Brent Council has already taken action in order to help solve these larger scale issues within Brent, by applying all the strategies that have been talked about in this essay, however there is always room for improvement so in cases like these, recommendations such as the ones suggested in this essay, should be more than welcome as they are really useful and cooperate to a more successful strategy overall.

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