Local Voices

Hearing the voice of disabled people in Tower Hamlets

Full report on year 2 (2013/14)

October 2014

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Contents

Other reports and formats available

This full report is aimed at a policy audience, and is delivered in accordance with the agreed project specification. Should Real continue to be the appointed organisation delivering Local Voices next year we would use extracts of this report for:

- facilitating work with the steering group to help them work more effectively going forward

- producing a summary report for the Local Voices network.

Real can also provide accessible formats. Please contact us for more information.

Part One – Introduction and basis of report

1 Introduction

The Local Voices project is the Council's key mechanism for engaging, connecting and consulting with disabled people (including people with a long-term health condition) living, working or studying in Tower Hamlets.

The project is funded by Tower Hamlets Council, led by an independent steering group of local disabled people, and facilitated and supported by Real - the Borough's user-led organisation of disabled people.

During the year interim reports and updates have been provided by Real to the One Tower Hamlets team. This report is the full, final year report of the second stage of Local Voices. It was written by Real following consultation with the steering group on the proposed structure of the report.

The report covers the following:

Part One	This introduction.
	It also details the data sources upon which this report is based.
Part Two	Overview of project delivery. Chapter 3 covers the key differences in the project from the previous stage in terms of time and resources available, and the change in focus of the project.
	Chapter 4 describes in detail working with and support to the steering group, including recruitment, diversity of the group, and coaching, supervision and training. It also gives feedback collected from steering group members.
Part Three	Chapters 5-7 details the work delivered by the project this year, across the three agreed themes of: • access and transport • welfare and benefits

	• social care Chapter 8 explains the work done on additional projects not originally planned.
Part Four	This covers the different ways that Local Voices had been promoted and connected with local disabled people, covering printed media, online communication using our website and social media, and specific communications to the network (chapters 9-11). Chapter 12 covers both the positives and challenges of working through other organisations, and chapter 13 describes the work to connect with younger disabled people.
Part Five	This section describes what disabled people have told us this year about issues of concern to them. Chapters 14-16 cover each of the three agreed work priority areas (see Part Three) and chapter 17 covers other topics.
Part Six	In this section the staff at Real have brought together the key points that we have learned and believe need implementing in the next year in order to make Local Voices the real success it can be. They are drawn from the previous sections of the report and are themed under the following headings: • working with the steering group • developing and connecting with the network • balancing conflicting demands on resources and priorities.

At the time of writing this report is Tower Hamlets Council is currently re-commissioning Local Voices for November 2014 onwards. Should Real be reappointed we would wish to work closely with the One Tower Hamlets group at the beginning of the project's next year to consider the content of this report and how it can impact and influence the project's effectiveness and delivery going forward.

2 Basis of report

Much of the content of this report is based on notes taken at steering group meetings, from notes written up after various events, and from supervision notes throughout the life of the project. These capture issues raised by steering group members and other events participants. Information sources also include feedback from different external events, and the various issues and incident reporting mechanisms that were put in place.

To ensure the report reflected more than just the views of Real staff an independent person was appointed to interview members of the steering group at the end of Stage 2. We used one of the independent peer researchers established from an earlier project. We agreed upfront the topic guide for the interviews, which is included in Appendix 1. The peer researcher submitted detailed transcripts for each of the 5 interviews. Although made anonymous, we will not include the full transcripts as we believe it may be possible to identify particular individuals. However summaries of this information are provided in different parts of the report, including specific quotations where appropriate.

Part Two - Overview of project delivery

3 Key differences from year 1

3.1 Time and resources available

Local Voices stage 1 was delivered with twice the funding of stage 2. The larger pot of funding in the first year was to reflect the time needed to set up the project, reach out and engage other services and local disabled people, and recruit and support a steering group. It was anticipated by commissioners that stage 2 would require less support from a paid professional because the steering group would be proactive in building on the foundations set in stage 1 and delivering key work streams of activity. This was based upon their experience of working with similar forums for other equality strands/marginalised groups.

In reality this hasn't been the case. The steering group required significant support throughout stage 2 to deliver on the project. The support needed is explained more fully in section 4.6 - Feedback from the steering group.

Throughout stage 1, and at the start of stage 2, Local Voices was coordinated by Amy Greenwood - the former Knowledge and Communications Manager at Real. When Amy left unexpectedly, Real appointed Rob Johnson to take over the delivery of the project, with management support from Karen Linnane, Delivery and Development Manager.

This unanticipated change of staff caused some delays initially with project handover, and was also disruptive for the steering group. Rob spent the first 2 months establishing a positive working relationship and a project plan with the existing members.

Paul Gresty from Tower Hamlets Council, who had worked closely with Amy on stage 1 and developing the concept for stage 2, also left the project in the early stages of this second year. He was replaced by Daniel Kerr. Only Frances Jones remained involved from the previous year. This had an impact on delivery when issues with the project plan were identified and changes needed to be made. There was a common

lack of awareness as to why some deliverables had been included and by whom, which presented practical operational challenges for staff within both organisations.

After some initial teething problems both Daniel and Rob were able to work with the steering group to agree the focus of stage 2 and the outcomes for delivery. Together, Rob and Daniel agreed (with the steering group, where appropriate) a revised approach on the steering group structure and ways of working, and the project themes that would be worked on.

3.2 Focus on project delivery

The success of stage 1 was underpinned by the amazing engagement by disabled residents in having their say on the issues affecting them, and identify the solutions to addressing them. It was key in stage 2 to demonstrate that their voices had been heard. Consequently an action plan was agreed to deliver on our promise that we would work with statutory providers to begin addressing their concerns.

This was the agreed priority for the project and the steering group implemented three sub groups (see Part Three - Delivering project work) to work on the issues.

Stage 1 of Local Voices focused on consultation; stage 2 focused on responding to that consultation. There was therefore, necessarily, less further direct engagement on current issues.

4 Working with the steering group

4.1 Recruitment

The steering group had 12 members at the beginning of stage 2. However their roles were changing and the revised expectation for their role was more delivery-focused than one of consultation. This change in role resulted in 4 members leaving as they didn't want to participate in the project in that capacity.

There has been 8 members in the steering group throughout stage 2, however a further 4 of the original members have left and 4 new members have been recruited. We also have one person who hasn't officially left the project but has not engaged for several months.

Recruitment to the steering group has remained an objective throughout stage 2. This was targeted as well as open as there were particular skills required and expectations of the role which are set out in the role specification (Appendix 2). This was developed in April 2014 as a response to comments from the steering group that there should be greater clarity on the role of being a steering group member, and they were consulted on the new role specification prior to the recruitment exercise.

We openly promoted through:

- East End Life

- Our website

- The pan providers forum

- Partner organisations

- The Local Voices Network

- Real's own volunteer and client base

We also encouraged individuals who we thought would gain from the experience and would have a lot to offer the group. It was important we were very clear on the role and expectations to ensure anyone joining understood what was required and were more likely to stay - continuity was vital.

4.2 Diversity of the steering group

The current steering group is quite diverse in many respects. The following is a summary of their diversity (based on diversity monitoring forms completed by 7 steering group members):

| Impairment type

(does not add up to 7 due to multiple impairments) | Sensory impairment (4)
Physical impairment (3)
Learning disability (2)
Mental health condition (1)
Long-standing health condition (4) |
|---|---|
| Ethnicity | White British (3)
White Irish (1) |

	Black/Black British (1)
	Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi (1)
	Asian or Asian British Indian (1)
Age groups	26-35 (1)
	36-45 (1)
	46-55 (2)
	56-65 (2)
	66+ (1)
Religion or belief	Muslim (1)
	Christian (2)
	Hindu (1)
	Prefer not to say (3)
Gender	Male (4)
	Female (3)
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual/straight (4)
	Prefer not to say (3)

4.3 One-on-one coaching and supervision

Throughout stage 1 and at the beginning of stage 2 the group were supported as a whole. This was identified as an issue because some stronger members had a lot of the say whilst others didn't necessarily have the confidence or skills to contribute equally. In response, Rob began to supervise each member informally so they had one to one time to address their own motivations, the skills they wanted to utilise or develop, and identify the support they needed to engage.

It was important to support each person individually and understand what they wanted to achieve from the project for themselves. This resulted in better engagement from people on the project work, such as following through on commitments to help organise workshops.

Supervision was designed to fit in with the needs of each individual. Most wanted to catch up before or after times that they would be in Real's office. Some sessions were given over the phone. Overall the objective was to give each individual the support that they needed to

develop and feel confident in their role. It became apparent, during these sessions, that different steering group members were at quite different places on the journey towards feeling confident to take ownership of the project. All current steering group members have received two or three supervision sessions.

4.4 Supporting the group to take overall ownership

This was the project's biggest challenge. It was envisioned for stage 2 the steering group would take a proactive lead and deliver on the projects to address disabled peoples issues. This was quite different to the steering group's role in stage 1. The requirements in stage 1 were to attend meetings at Real and share their opinion on how consultations should happen, guide the project worker as to what would work well and less well and to give their opinions on the outcomes of the survey to produce the stage 1 report. The sessions were designed and run by a facilitator who guided them through the process.

In stage 2 the steering group were expected to take a lead in meetings, identify ways to address the issues raised in stage 1 and plan project work to deliver on the solutions, for example with 'welfare reform' they designed, promoted and ran a workshop on benefit changes.

Their work was supported by Rob, who encouraged them and guided them to take a lead. However in practice once the meeting ended and project deliverables were agreed, group members didn't always fulfil the commitments they had made or subsequently said they weren't available. They didn't always respond to each other's requests for support in time and lots of projects got delayed. Rob often ended up having to take a lead to ensure external organisations' deadlines could be met. This resulted in a high proportion of the project worker's hours spent connecting with statutory and other providers, attending meetings to raise issues and coordinating workshops and events. It didn't leave enough time to develop the wider Local Voices network, connect with other organisations or revisit the survey work.

Continued or regular engagement was an issue at times due to individual's impairments. The reasons for this were often health related. There were some members affected by mobility issues. Some of the group lacked work-related experiences and skills. It was a key priority for

Rob to ensure people's access needs were met, enabling maximum engagement, but sometimes this was not possible. For example one member of the steering group became disengaged due to their mental health condition which at times impacts the way they engage with others. In this particular case they had a disagreement in an email exchange with a new steering group member as they felt territorial of their position. This disagreement resulted in both them and the new member leaving the committee. This couldn't have been foreseen and as we were not included in or made aware of the emails until it was too late we didn't have the opportunity to support a positive outcome. Time was then spent trying to resolve the issue and support either one or both members back to the group but to no avail.

We also found that despite the members saying they wanted to lead on projects and deliver on tasks they didn't always attend when required to do so or disengaged for a short time when the work was required. This was a particular issue with the incident reporting line for DLR passengers. Despite two members introducing the idea for the project and at different times enquiring when the work would start they didn't engage in the set up process to move this forward. Although some reports were taken and processed the ongoing project remains outstanding.

These issues have improved. The informal supervisions were instrumental in improving on these areas. However it does continue to be a problem given the time resource there is for the project. As a result we arranged for independent interviews to be held with steering group members to understand better what the problems barriers were that they faced. This is explored further in section 4.6 below.

In addition, IT training and support has been offered to the steering group throughout stage 2, with five members accessing IT training.

4.5 Forum Theatre training

In order to address two of the areas raised as concerns for disabled people at stage 1, a technique known as Forum Theatre was identified as a tool for effecting change. Forum Theatre is an interactive training technique which creates an environment where you experience a situation from another's perspective and allows people to try out different

methods for addressing an issue with the support and feedback of the group you are training with. The group planned to utilise this technique to train staff on the DLR and social workers.

To support the steering group and prepare them for delivering the Forum Theatre technique, two training sessions were provided on this model. This was a useful development opportunity for steering group members, as these are transferable skills, and learning and using the technique would be a useful addition to their CVs.

The training was delivered over two sessions attended by 4 members of the steering group as well as 2 other disabled volunteers and 2 disabled clients of Real. This was a lower turnout than we had hoped for, and another example of a project the group wanted to implement but didn't commit to fully. The first planned session was cancelled due to low take up, the second time several people didn't turn up but the session went ahead until one person decided to leave and there wasn't enough remaining people to complete the practical element of the training and so it had to be repeated. At this point the invitation was opened up to the volunteers and clients referred to above, to ensure enough people attended to allow the 4 steering group members who wanted the training could get the maximum benefit.

4.6 Feedback from the steering group

The information in this section is a summary of the points made in the individual interviews conducted with the steering group members by the independent interviewer (see section 2 above).

Generally the steering group have said that they needed more support time to be able to deliver on projects and more support with structured project management. They've also said that they assume this means the project needs more income to be able to pay for this.

Reflecting on how meetings have been organised, they have said they would like more structure, for example setting meetings for the same time, same place, more regularly, and with better feedback from individual project teams.

There was lots of positive feedback on how they felt having been involved, and the impact they feel they are having.

One member said they had the opportunity to 'explain how it is – the truth from a disabled person's perspective.' When attending a meeting with DLR and they felt 'that their involvement was not a PR stunt when meeting specific individuals and they listened to my point of view'

Another member said he 'gets a lot out of being a member of the SG. I like getting my opinion over and I've learnt a lot from my time in the group. It has broadened my knowledge to the issues other disabled people have to contend with. It makes me feel that I'm not so badly off when I see others and their problems.'

One of our steering group joined because he wanted to be involved in the local community and things around social mobility. He wanted to improve local services. Since joining he has enjoyed his involvement and found it empowering and rewarding. He believes the work will help other people because it will be good for them to know about welfare reform and how it affects them.

Part Three - Delivering project work

Once the steering group had established the three work themes they opted to split in to sub groups and each group lead on a theme. They were to organise sub group meetings amongst themselves convenient to their group and then feed progress back to the main meetings.

Each group devised an outcomes framework for their chosen work theme based on the action plan agreed from stage 1. They agreed tasks, timeframes and key milestones.

5 Access and transport

The access group identified three outcomes:

- Better public transport for disabled people

- Safer and more secure pavements for disabled users

- Review the taxi cards policy (re number of journeys)

The project work they implemented to achieve these outcomes were:

5.1 Representation at the Transport Forum

One of the sub group was elected to represent Local Voices at the Transport Forum. They attended meetings and made links with key individuals such as Paula Akpofure and Ray Highstead (both with DLR Serco), James Grant (Senior Communications Manager, TFL), Terry Collins (Team Leader, LBTH Mobility Team) and Tony Davis (Team Leader, LBTH Transportation). This led to a good rapport with DLR management. They were also able to update and involve the Transport Forum on the transport-related work of the sub group and the project as a whole.

In addition, issues that were arising through the work of Local Voices were brought to the attention of the Transport Forum to ensure the work of both groups was connected. For example, information on access and transport issues was gathered from feedback at community group events attended by Local Voices, but where individuals did not wish to submit a formal incident report. This helped Local Voices to challenge TFL's claims about the effectiveness of bus driver training, and issues around request bus stops.

5.2 DLR - addressing accessibility issues and staff training

Having established a dialogue with the DLR contractor SERCO the group shared issues with staff's understanding of disability and access. They proposed using 'Forum theatre' techniques to improve training standards. This would be delivered by the steering group, using real scenarios, to enable staff to put themselves in the shoes of the person experiencing difficulties. This idea went down well and SERCO agreed to work with us on a pilot.

The group subsequently met with the senior management team at SERCO to discuss the wider issues disabled residents had raised. The feedback and suggested solutions were well received. In fact some things they acknowledged they would never have considered to be an issue. For example, the restructuring to three carriage trains and subsequent use of two carriage trains left some disabled people unsure which part of the platform was in use, often missing a train as they were not able to move along the platform in time. SERCO agreed to address this. The group fed back to the wider steering group they felt they had been taken seriously by the managers.

However the group were still concerned that the issues wouldn't be addressed by the new contractor, as SERCO would not be the provider from December 2015. Local Voices joined forces with Transport for All, which is a London-wide group lobbying for accessible transport. They met with senior managers from Transport for London (TFL) and shared our concerns, suggesting practical steps for positive change. The senior staff were deeply concerned by the case examples shared. The meeting resulted in very positive outcomes with TFL agreeing to address the lack of announcements, moving 'information' points and renaming them 'assistance/help' points, reviewing signage on platforms and trains, reviewing storage areas for baggage and bikes, and reassessing busy routes to provide trains with more carriages during peak times. They made assurances that all agreements would be communicated with the new contractor and that more robust processes would be in place to hold them accountable.

The next steps for this group have been arranged. They will be running a focus group to discuss the ongoing issues as this has continued to be

raised as an issue. Members of the focus group will then complete a site visit with DLR staff to enable them to understand the issues in context.

5.3 Public transport incident reporting

An outcome from one of the community visits was to provide an incident reporting line as people reported having difficulties navigating the official complaints procedure. Ten reports have been filed with TFL with responses being given on seven of the issues raised. Some of the responses were helpful, constructive and positive. Other responses were more generic and unspecific.

The information raised in the 10 reports has been used as the basis for other projects within the work of this sub group. However, with more time and resource, there could have been more follow-up on some of the issues raised and where responses have not yet been received.

5.4 Safer pavements

The group included promotion of the Incident reporting line to people having issues with pavements and access on the streets. These were to be forwarded to the council. One report was received and raised. This was around cyclists obstructing the pathways in Blackwall. The council's response was to remove cycle dismount signs. This was queried with the Transport and Highways team as it wasn't an acceptable solution. They confirmed it was not a designated cycle route and they would do further investigation to address the issue of cycle use in that area. This is still outstanding.

The group were asked to review and road test a new council app for smart phones called 'Find it, Fix it, Love it'. This was promoted through the Local Voices Network.

A member of the council's surveyor's team from Highways and Transport came to visit the group to consult on the accessibility of the new Bethnal Green Market. It was proposed the group could complete site visits for this and similar projects to ensure access and safety issues relevant to all disabled people have been considered. The group were really disappointed this work didn't go forward as the surveyor stopped engaging with them.

5.5 Reviewing taxi cards

An initial focus group was set up but no action was taken due to capacity.

5.6 Attendance at accessible transport events

The group took part in two events, one organised by the council where they ran a stall. The other event was run by TFL called 'Access all areas', which was promoted through the network and attended by members. The group felt both events were successful and generated a lot of discussion on transport. They got information on TFL's plans for upgrading the accessibility of the underground network.

Steering group members did however express concerns that some transport contractors used the Access All Areas event as a PR exercise and were not engaging sufficiently with disabled attendees or the wider disabled community to improve access and related issues.

5.7 Working with Disabled Go

Disabled Go is an organisation that seeks to provide the public with information on the accessibility of different destinations and venues. Local Voices formed a connection with this organisation after meeting them at the Accessible Transport Forum. Some preliminary discussion on how we might work together followed. Local Voices has:

- helped identify gaps and address ambiguity in their access assessments process

- explored expanding their work to public accessible areas that are not currently covered by their work, eg. some aspects of local transport infrastructure, and public toilets

- discussed specific issues around the DLR where Disabled Go were unaware of the extent of access problems.

Local Voices anticipates arranging to meet with Disabled Go representatives to discuss closer working practices, information sharing and how we might involve the steering group and active network members in Disabled Go's assessment process.

5.8 What worked well or not so well

This sub group worked really well together. They were engaged in the process and were proactive, and have achieved positive results from the work done so far. But there is still more to do to realise their outcomes.

One issue the group found was in delays caused by other people when trying to book meetings or agree dates. The group didn't always have the capacity to chase up once they had made the initial contact and this caused delays and added pressure on to the work of the coordinator.

This group's membership remained the most constant throughout the project this contributed to the success of their work. The group also benefited from support from Rob, the project coordinator, and also had some of the most active and committed steering group members as part of it.

6 Welfare and benefits

This group identified two outcomes:

- Ensure disabled people in Tower Hamlets are kept updated about welfare reforms and understand how these will impact them.

- Understand the gaps in information provision in meeting communication needs.

The project work they delivered to meet these outcomes was:

6.1 Reform Workshops

The group ran two workshops on welfare reform. One at Asda on the Isle of Dogs and one at Whitechapel Idea Store. There was a strong lead from the Council that these events should be collaborative and conversational, where people could explore and understand each other's challenges and share solutions.

The group devised an agenda for the day. They invited benefits advisors, financial inclusion project workers and representatives from LBTH to speak and provide one to one support for people attending.

The steering group and staff at Real promoted the workshops throughout their networks, professionals and clients, in addition to the general communication channels discussed in Part Four.

Feedback from the steering group who had observed the first event indicated that participants appeared to be uncomfortable sharing their personal circumstances in an open forum. Instead they preferred addressing them in the one-on-one sessions at the end of the events. Consequently the format of the second event was changed to reflect this.

Both events were poorly attended, in particular the Whitechapel event, despite benefitting from a better location and greater promotion. This was disappointing for the steering group, although those members of the public that attended reported they had received good information and advice on the day. The general feedback was that most people had a handle on the changes and were getting support to implement these where needed.

The group concluded that, because people now appeared better informed, the timing wasn't right for these events.

As a result they didn't go ahead with the third planned event. The group feel this is an issue that will be raised again when Universal Credits are rolled out. For the moment people were more interested in the financial inclusion support than in benefits.

6.2 Digital inclusion

The steering group identified that a crucial issue relevant to the welfare reforms was that a high proportion of disabled people were unable to access the internet, either due to their impairment or to their financial situation. With more benefits needing to be applied for online this had to be addressed.

The group made contact with the borough's Digital Inclusion Project. They were invited to attend a meeting with council teams and third sector providers to consult on the priorities for this project. The outcome of the meeting was an action plan and the commitment to form a steering group for the project. One of the biggest issues the group raised was around the accessibility of services providing access to computers and the internet. Following a mapping exercise it was clear the distribution of services was very poor for the South of the borough. The project team committed to addressing this in their plan.

After the meeting one of the digital inclusion project leads asked to meet with the group to consult on the issues at a grassroots level. This was a successful focus group with changes being made to the project's delivery model as a result. An interesting outcome from the group was with one particular steering group member, who historically shied away from IT and computers. They had a change of heart based on the focus group and have now signed up for IT training at Real.

The group also attended a training provided by Island Advice on supporting digital inclusion.

6.3 Understanding gaps in welfare reform information provision

As the issues of welfare reform appeared to no longer be an issue for people, the group decided to deprioritise this work stream.

6.4 What worked well or not so well

This group found the organisation of workshops and events very time consuming and relied heavily on the coordinator to support the organisation and set up of events. On the day they were very hands on and able to share their experiences as disabled people to support those attending, which worked well.

Feedback from community visits and the Local Voices events has highlighted welfare reform as not being an issue of concern to local disabled residents at the moment. This would be borne out by our experience elsewhere, running the Local Link project which provides information and advice on areas including housing and benefits. This is because many disabled people have successfully benefited from Tower Hamlets Council's use of discretionary housing payments. There remains, however, uncertainty over the future of this programme and so this may be an issue that has simply been deferred rather than resolved. It would be useful to explore this with the steering group in the next stage to see if additional work should in fact be planned going forward.

7 Social care

This group identified six outcomes, set out below. The first two were initially deemed to be short term and would be completed within the first

2 months. The last one was deemed to be an intensive piece of work affecting council policy and was deferred to 2015.

- The local services directory is accessible and up to date and that it's available to GPs, carers and non-social service users. (Jan 2014)

- New social workers understand disability issues from a disabled person's perspective. (February 2014)

- Research the impact on users of reablement and not having an allocated social worker.

- Disabled people have an input in commissioning decisions

- All children transitioning from children's services/benefits to adults services/benefits to be supported and have clear and accessible advice services available to them.

- Council Policy change- including assessment, having a named contact other than first response and customer service improvements (Deferred)

7.1 Online service directory

The group took part in a focus group the council ran on the Emarket Place. They found the work quite intensive, inputting a lot of advice and guidance on the user interface. They are still waiting for the final launch to see how their input was utilised.

7.2 New social workers understand disability issues

This area was reconsidered not to be a quick win. Initially it was thought the group would deliver a couple of short awareness raising sessions, but they discussed their plan with a student social worker who said a newly qualified social worker would already have had that type of training. The group knew it was still a need so they decided to use forum theatre techniques and real scenarios to make it both different and engaging. This required them to complete the training and go back to social services to check they would engage with the training.

Once it was agreed and they received training, they started to put the programme together and they are in the planning stages now.

7.3 Research on reablement

The group didn't have the capacity to address this area. It has been noted by the group that feedback from social care recipients has been negative around the lack of an allocated social worker and this work does need to be taken forward.

7.4 Being involved in commissioning decisions

The group went to visit Barbara Disney. Five members attended and Barbara did feedback that she had expected a higher attendance and she didn't feel the group was diverse enough.

The group wanted to explore the process by which disabled people could be involved in commissioning processes enabling them to have a say in how money was spent on services for them. The outcome was an agreement for people from the steering group and the wider network to be invited to take part at the beginning of the process inputting into the specification, and at the end at the evaluation stage. Barbara said there were issues with people being involved throughout the process as there were legal requirements which needed to be understood and that required a certain level of skill and experience. The group are waiting for Barbara to finalise the process and get in touch with them to take it forward.

7.5 Clear and accessible advice for those transitioning from children's to adult's services

The group talked to a member of Real staff who works on the Local Link project. They were leading on an advice and advocacy project for this target group. The project was fairly new and they were promoting the service and networking with appropriate services to set up referrals. It was agreed they would feed back to the group on progress of service take up. The group agreed they could consult with children and young people through a survey and possibly an event. However there were time constraints on being able to achieve this and they deprioritised to see how the Local Link-related project developed.

7.6 Enter and view

Local Voices were invited to be part of a new council initiative called Enter and View. The steering group decided that this sub group would

take the lead and one of the sub group's members chose to take it forward. They attended training to enable them to visit social care recipients with a social worker and observe their work, assessing the quality of support, information and advice the client received. The training is now complete and the group member is awaiting the council to implement the next steps.

7.7 The Care Act

The group attended the introductory session run by the council. They also promoted this through their networks with several disabled people attending as a result.

They will continue to engage with upcoming events and disseminate information to the network, as this has recently been voiced as a concern by disabled people.

7.8 What worked well or not so well

This group had the most issues at the start. Many of their outcomes depended on quite complex projects, which relied for their success on significant input from other sources and/or agreement from senior teams in the council. These dependencies made it harder for the sub group to work towards their outcomes successfully. There were also issues with continuity as members left this group and were replaced by new members. Toward the end of the year this group became more engaged, with members attending regularly due to new projects being introduced.

8 Additional projects

As described above, at the beginning of the year the steering group decided on three programmes of work. However, during the year a number of other projects were also worked on. These were either suggested or requested by individuals within Tower Hamlets Council, or came about because other organisations had heard about Local Voices and wanted to connect with the initiative.

8.1 Patient leaders

Following a joint meeting between Real and HealthWatch the Local Voices project got involved with HealthWatch's patient leaders' programme. Although not in the original scope of the social care sub group it was agreed that they would lead on this. The work started with a

training programme in which each person identifies an issue with health services which they will go on to investigate. They have recently completed their training, identifying the following issues:

- Digital inclusion at GP surgeries and hospitals

- A&E waiting times

- Promoting local activities for people with epilepsy

They will then take these issues to the relevant professionals and explore options for addressing them. The programme is widely known across the local health sector, and so enables the leader to influence change.

8.2 Out of the box

The steering group hosted an event with the organisers of this disability arts project. They continue to promote the project sessions through the network.

8.3 Community planning

LV was invited to an event run by the Tower Hamlets Partnership with the aim of representing disabled people's views within the new community plan for the borough. The steering group representatives and Local Voices network members raised issues which affect local disabled people such as cyclists using pavements, refuse collection, Council building usage and issues with parks.

8.4 Promotion of external events

The steering group have promoted and attended community events led and/or delivered by other organisations throughout the project:

- Giant germs – an event aimed at people with a visual impairment

- Sight 'n' Sound day – for people with sensory impairments

- Your say, Your day – for people using mental health services

- Local Link launch – Information, advice and advocacy promotion

Part Four - Promoting LV and connecting with local disabled people

9 East End Life

Real has, as a local community organisation, a regular six-weekly slot available in East End Life. This is used to reach out to the whole community on a variety of issues relating to the work of Real and/or the issues of concern to local disabled people.

We used this regularly, either as part of an article or sometimes a whole one, to reach out to parts of the community with whom we had not already connected. Articles included:

Publication	Summary of content
October 2013	Promotion of local voices (in the context of the report from the United Nations on the long way to go to realise the potential of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)
March 2014	Whole article covering the three themes of: • making transport and our environment more accessible • welfare benefits and reform • social care • ways you can be involved
May 2014	Whole article covering: • update on the welfare benefits and reform meeting held on the Isle of Dogs and the issues arising, together with promotion of two further meetings • promoting the new system to support people to report problems with local transport, pavements and roads services, and encouraging people to get involved in

	mystery trip journeys and commenting on major redevelopment projects in the Borough
	• promoting the forthcoming Forum Theatre training session, and explaining how it would be used to improve social care
	• promoting the Out of the Box external event, reflecting their heritage of London's East End in anticipation of UK disability history month
	Providing additional information on different ways people can be involved, and promoting the Local Voices network
July 2014	Linking to recent press coverage of reports that one in 10 people experience loneliness and isolation, references to support that can be obtained through Local Link, and also promoting Local Voices as a way of connecting with other people in the Borough to share and explore areas of common interest.
October 2014	Special issue promoting our desire to reach out to younger disabled people, explaining why and how they can contribute. Further promotion of the Local Voices network generally, and the different ways to be involved. Promotion of the external event Giant germs!, Which provided an introduction to microscopy for visually impaired people.

10 Online presence

10.1 Local Voices on the web

Real set up a dedicated section of its website for the project, which can be found at www.real.org.uk/localvoices.

This developed throughout the project, and in addition to the landing page included sections on:

- What we are working on this year

- Upcoming events and activities

- Getting involved in the network

- The role of the steering committee

- Findings from our first report.

These were regularly updated, as was the general "News section" of Real's website when there were specific items to promote.

This portal was used as a regular reference point for further information for all East End Life articles.

10.2 Social media

Real has a growing and developing presence on both Facebook and Twitter. Both social media platforms were used to promote Local Voices and specific events related to the project. We get new followers on Facebook and Twitter every week. In the next stage we would like to promote further two-way communication with social media users, albeit acknowledging the information covered elsewhere in this report that many local disabled people to not have access to the web. This could perhaps provide a focus for some of the Digital Inclusion work.

11 Communications to network

When the project was handed over to new staff at the beginning of Stage 2 there was an understanding there were nearly 100 names on the Local Voices Network. This was based on the number of people who had signed up to receive further information on Local Voices having attended events at stage 1. However, upon further analysis, it transpired that there were issues with the data, with contact details missing and some double entries. There were also many people who turned out to be what the steering group now refer to as 'associate' members, being professionals and supporters as opposed to local disabled people.

The coordinator went through a process of cleaning up the data which resulted in 45 people on the network. Throughout Stage 2 the steering group took every opportunity to increase the membership and at the end of stage 2 there are 127 Local Voices Network members.

Four email communications were sent out to the network from the time the data was cleaned up to the end of the project. These communications promoted the role of the steering group, project work people could get involved in and other events which were happening.

There were however issues with several network members not having email addresses. The project didn't have the resources available (either monetary or time) for contacting people regularly by paper mail.

Where we didn't have email addresses, or where people had stated that contact by phone was their preferred method of communication, telephone calls were sometimes made instead of communication by email. However, understandably, this was very time and resource intensive. Consideration was given on how best to approach the task of communicating with people by phone with limited time resource. It was decided to try to target information to people according to their areas of interest. Towards the end of the current year the project coordinator developed a database which records this information, enabling communications to be targeted to the right people. This will mean phoning people will not be so time intensive at each round as only people interested in an area get that information.

Currently work is being done to transfer all contacts from a spreadsheet to this database, and obtain the areas of interest for those network members who haven't yet provided it. All network members are being called to ensure we have full and correct information to put in the database.

We have identified an issue with our communications which is they tend to be one way. We are not able to easily establish the benefit of the communications. We have identified ways of addressing this to ensure a two way communication. These include:

- Ensure all our communications request input and feedback rather appearing to just give information.

- Raising awareness of local, regional and national campaigns relevant to the interest areas of network members, or other current topics affecting disabled people, and encourage participation and involvement.

- Providing a range of different methods for people to give their views, including using our social media platforms (where appropriate). We will also provide a phone line for those who preferred to receive information and communicate verbally, with recorded information updated at regular intervals and a message service where they can leave their thoughts, ideas and input.

12 Working through other organisations

We wanted to connect with other organisations to support them in taking ownership of Local Voices, and reach the disabled people with whom they already had a relationship. The plan was to visit each organisation, ideally taking part in groups they already run.

12.1 Reconnecting with stage 1 organisations

Initially we decided to revisit the organisations visited in Stage 1. This was so that we could report back to the individuals who had already contributed on the difference their input had made. However, this proved to be disappointingly difficult to achieve; there was little response to the original invitation sent by email. This was followed up with phone calls and another email but the response rate remained poor, with only four organisations responding and of those only two agreeing to visits which were completed. With the other two, one agreed to come back with a date which they haven't yet done, despite further chasing. A date was arranged with the fourth organisation, but when we attended the staff member hadn't put it in the diary and the members of the day centre were doing another activity. We have followed up to try to rearrange but without success.

Having evaluated this response we are concerned staff are acting as 'gatekeepers' as opposed to their members not wanting to engage. We have discussed ways of addressing this which include:

- Reaching individuals through other services such as their social worker, advice and advocacy workers or through GP surgeries

- Engaging first with the key workers at the organisations on a face to face basis to ensure they appreciate the value to their members

- Being flexible to each organisation so we can meet members through channels already in place

- Drawing up agreements for how we interact with other organisations so both sides can be held accountable if it doesn't work

We have had some successful engagement with other, new organisations, as set out below.

12.2 Beyond barriers

They are a user led group of people with a visual impairment. 15 members attended when we visited. They discussed access issues and the idea of the incident reporting line came from this session

12.3 Learning Disability Partnership Board

This is a forum coordinated by the council which is run and led by people with Learning Disabilities. 25 people attended when we visited, where we shared an overview of the themes and projects. As they had taken part in the consultation we also shared information on the work done based on their input in Stage 1. The main area of interest for them was access and public transport. 6 further people signed up to the network.

12.4 Create

Create is a day centre for people with learning disabilities and one of the organisations that took part in Stage 1. 50 people attended when we visited. They expressed an interest in a project on hate crime as this was a key issue for them. We also promoted the focus group which is being run to get people's input on an easy read booklet for direct payments. A few people wanted to be involved and some wanted to sign up to the network but asked that we contact them through Create rather than individually.

13 Connecting with younger disabled people

It had always been the intention in stage 2 to reach out to younger people to find out the issues of concern to them.

At the beginning of the current academic year we contacted the disabled student networks' generic email addresses and local adult education

colleges and higher and further education establishments, seeking to involve them in the work of Local Voices. No responses were received and so this was followed up. As there were still no responses additional time will need to be spent in the next year seeking named contacts to take forward this work.

As described above, it was difficult to prioritise the development of a younger disabled people's survey due to other commands on the different subgroups. It also did not fall naturally within one particular sub group.

In the end Real took the lead in developing a new version of the online survey used last year, tailored specifically for a younger audience. We decided to aim it at people of school age and up to 25.

This was released in mid-October 2014 and promoted in East End Life. We also targeted a range of intermediary organisations who could link us with young disabled people including the Transition Steering Group, Family Information Centre, special educational needs schools and a number of other local organisations.

At the date of writing this report we had, unfortunately, only received 4 responses, not all of which were complete. The results are therefore not statistically robust. However, the answers received so far are interesting as they appear to indicate some different priorities and areas of concern. We would certainly wish to revisit this in a third year to ensure that we do get meaningful and robust information and views from younger disabled people. We will also work with the intermediary organisations to understand better if there were any barriers to them communicating the initiative to the people they work with, and how this could work better.

Part Five - What has Local Voices told us this year

Throughout Stage 2 we have been talking to disabled people. This is what they told us.

14 About access and transport

Accessible transport was the most common theme. Many issues were shared with us. These were people's biggest concerns and proposed solutions:

14.1 DLR

- A need for more audio and visual announcements

- Issues with 2 carriage trains, not knowing when one is arriving affects positioning on platform. Visual and audio warning would help as would signage on platform to indicate where 2 carriage trains will stop

- Signage on platforms to indicate the location of wheelchair access points would aid access

- 2 carriage trains affect capacity which has a particularly negative effect on people with additional access needs. The Woolwich to Bank line on weekends is really busy making it inaccessible for some people. When reported, feedback from TFL was this is not a busy route / time, but people's reported experience suggests otherwise.

- Stations don't have 'help points'; instead they have "emergency points" which people are not comfortable to use when it is information or assistance they require. If the station isn't staffed a bare minimum should be an accessible, working help point.

- On the carriages the language on the signs relating to access is not appropriate and needs rewording. Signs need to be more instructive on the use of accessible seats. Passengers are using accessible areas and seats for luggage. This is a particular issue on airport routes. DLR staff don't challenge or enforce this. Also

baggage in gangways is an issue. Baggage racks would help this, particularly on airport routes.

- Bicycles cause issues blocking gangways and access to seats. A designated space that is reinforced by staff would help.

14.2 Buses

- Issues with buses with leaning mechanisms and/or ramps not working properly so preventing wheelchair access

- Issues on busy buses with drivers not enforcing appropriate use of priority seats and wheelchair area

- Buggies taking up space meant for a wheelchair user, and general public not responding to the signage that says wheelchairs should be given priority

- Issues with request stops, where drivers don't stop if the person doesn't physically indicate that want to get on. This is a problem for people with particular impairments that mean that they are not able to do this, and also those with visual impairments who cannot see the bus number as it is approaching.

- Issues with driver's general attitude to making reasonable adjustments, enforcing adjustments already in place and a lack of understanding and awareness.

14.3 Tube

- In general, where people could access the tube system they were happy with its accessibility and the adjustments that have been put in place.

- However it was noted that large parts of the tube system remain inaccessible and that the upgrade programme is going too slowly and does not include enough stations, especially in zones 1 and 2.

14.4 Pavements

- Issues with cyclists using the pavements

- Broken and uneven paving stones, often remain damaged for a long time, even after being reported.

- Issues with motorised scooters use of the pavements, providing difficulty for some people with sensory impairments. This in itself provides interesting feedback that issues are not the same for all impairment types and there is the potential for conflict between people with different impairment types.

- Lack of drop kerbs, resulting in people having to take long detours off their route to be able to cross the road.

15 About welfare and benefits

This area was not raised as a high priority for disabled people in this stage of the project. Initially there were some concerns about the 'bedroom tax' but as people accessed advice services this became less of a concern.

Disabled people did voice concerns about applications for benefits and information being digitalised, with deep-felt worries about everything having to be accessed online. People shared issues with accessing the internet, such as:

- Severe epilepsy, mental health conditions and other impairments preventing use

- Financial issues making it difficult to access

- Mistrust of the internet, or belief they are not able to learn how to use it

Another issue which people raised was money management. This included debt worries, and social implications such as not being able to visit friends or family due to lack of money.

16 About social care

Disabled people told us they were frustrated by the lack of social worker availability. They were also saying it was causing problems not having an allocated social worker, someone who knew them and had the right information on their needs.

Early on in the project people were raising concerns about cuts to their social care packages. This became less talked about as the project progressed.

More recently people have been asking us questions about the Care Act, and they want to understand what it means for them.

17 Other topics

In relation to the issues affecting disabled people, addressed in the interviews with steering group members (see section 2 above), this is what steering group members said:

X - The broad categories that are being worked on now are right but we need to re do a short research project to make sure we're on target. We need to ensure that our goals are right.

H – Future topics should be about local projects and welfare reforms that affect local people. Also Crossrail and how it would affect local people

Y - Disabled people in the borough are considered as scroungers, council workers look on claimants as scroungers.

An area to address this could be a theme around promoting positive images and dispelling myths about disabled people.

Z - Reducing stigma around mental health issues and helping parents and children who may have mental health issues.

Part Six - Key learnings

In this part of the report we have summarised the key things that we have learnt this year that will help make the project more effective next year, if addressed. We have grouped them into themes.

Working with the steering group

- There have been significant challenges in recruiting skilled steering group members with the time, capacity and ability to lead on projects. Such people have not come forward. We understand this is an assumption, but we believe it's because those individuals will already be in paid employment and perhaps not have the time or are already experiencing the difficulty of managing paid work and an impairment.

- The steering group needs facilitating and not just having access needs met. Many of the people involved have not had the benefit of a history of full-time work and so have not gained all of the skills necessary to lead projects. This is in no way intended to undermine the importance of having a user-led programme of activity, or in any way intended to suggest that their views and approach won't work. But it does mean that coaching and facilitating them to get the best out of the project appears necessary.

- Different steering group members, and external parties, appear to have had different understandings and expectations of the role of the steering group. This is both at the group level and the role of individuals. There are also indications that demands on current steering group members may not be reasonable or appropriate, or getting the best out of them. We should revisit the role of the steering group overall and individual steering group members to ensure its functions are both realistic and sustainable.

- Any work plan, and ways of working, needs to acknowledge that some members of the steering group will be unable to fulfil commitments due to their impairment and/or fluctuating health conditions. Allowance should also be made for expecting some people to leave and requiring regular re-recruitment. This requires

additional support to put in place systems for gathering information and enabling its exchange between current and new steering group members.

- Encouraging commitment and contribution from steering group members should be underpinned by an offer of value to them. We would propose working with each individual to develop a "contract", whereby they would commit to certain hours and activity and in return we would commit to an agreed, tailored, programme of support. Each individual would therefore have their own personal development plan with training, and regular reviews and supervision, supporting this. Consideration should also be given to developing other forms of reward, whether financial or non-monetary, for involvement and/or contribution beyond expectations.

Developing and communicating with the network

- As the number of topics on which Local Voices has worked on and communicated about grows, there is a risk that individuals perceive they are getting too much information or "noise". It will be important to target information channels and requests at those interested to receive it. This will require careful management of interest areas for individuals, and structured communications targeted at those interest areas.

- Significant resources are needed to genuinely meet different individuals' access needs. The array of different communication preferences is quite considerable, and not aligned just to impairment type but also other factors such as literacy and language. For some, they can only communicate by telephone rather than written communication, which is very intensive. Yet to not do so will exclude some people who otherwise would not have a voice.

- We need to develop systematic approaches to making communication useful, informative and genuinely two-way. But given that many people find writing difficult, or don't have access to online communication channels, this means that face-to-face or verbal communication can also be necessary. Ensuring we then

adequately capture those views and opinions and feed them into the project then also becomes resource intensive.

- We have successfully grown the Local Voices network this year, but we need to develop a new offer what it means to be part of that network, to encourage further growth and ensure that involvement remains meaningful for participants.

- Stage 2 has focused on responding to the issues raised during stage 1. But moving forward we need to make sure that the issues of concern remain current and relevant. This will involve further engagement. This is good but will take more resources in order to do well and effectively, particularly as the network continues to grow.

- Setting the themes that the steering group and network will work on in advance is important for managing expectations of what the project can deliver. But it also limits the ability of the project to respond to new and emerging issues. To ensure the project is perceived as relevant to local disabled people it needs to be able to engage them in new, current developments.

- Gaining access to disabled people through third-party organisations has proved consistently challenging. We don't yet know whether this is because other organisations are acting as gatekeepers, or they genuinely don't feel that Local Voices is relevant to the people they support and work with. We will need to find a new way of working with these organisations and overcoming the barriers experienced.

Balancing conflicting demands on resources and priorities

- On current resources, there have been challenges meeting conflicting demands between scheduled project work/priorities and additional ad hoc work. Careful consideration will need to be given on the parts of both Tower Hamlets Council and the steering group on agreeing next year's priorities to:

  o ensure the project and the steering group are not over-stretched and can deliver on what they agreed to; and

- o still allow capacity and time to respond to new requests for involvement in consultation which develop during the year.

- There is a potential conflict between the desire to have the focus of the project driven by grassroots views of local people, and the needs of the Council and others to consult on specific initiatives. There were some points in the last year where the Council requested quite firmly that Local Voices was used as a mechanism for consulting on an initiative, but that hadn't previously been discussed or agreed with the steering group. This will need to be managed carefully.

- The project needs to grow, and attract alternative additional funding, if it is to develop the capacity to meet all of the above challenges. It's clear that the basic model is capable of working well, subject to some of the provisions set out above. The funding currently provided by Tower Hamlets Council is probably not enough to meet all of the Council's consultation aspirations, and this does not cover requests from other organisations either.

Appendix 1 - Topic guide for steering group interviews

1 BACKGROUND

1. Please tell me a little about yourself before you got involved in the Local Voices Engagement project (background, impairment issues etc)

2. How did you get involved in the project?

3. What were your initial expectations from it?

2 LOCAL VOICES OVERALL

In year one the focus was on research and the creation of a comprehensive report
In year two the focus was upon acting upon the findings of the report – staging events, visits, training etc

4. Local Voices has been running for two years now. Were you involved in the first year Y/N

   a. If YES - could you describe the differences between Year 1 + Year 2

   b. If NO - can you tell me about what you understand what happened in Year 1, and what was the difference in the two years.

3 STEERING GROUP

5. Tell me a little bit about your Steering Group Meetings. What happens at the meetings?

6. What works well and what could be improved?

7. I understand there are separate groups for the different projects in the steering group – can you tell me how this worked?

Social Care, Transport & Welfare & Benefits

4 PROJECTS

8. Please tell me a little more about the specific projects or training that you have been involved in during phase 2 of Local Voices?

9. Which of these projects has been most rewarding for you? Why?

10.   Which of these projects have you enjoyed less? Why?

11.   Which of these projects has been most beneficial / rewarding for local disabled community? Why?

5 SUPPORT FOR YOU

12.   Can you describe the support you were given to be a Local Voices Steering Group Member.

If not raised, specifically ask about meeting access needs

13.   What other support would help you to do this role (better) in the future?

6 LOOKING FORWARD

14.   Which direction would you like to see the project going next?

15.   Are there any new areas you would like to work in?

16.   It has been hard getting people involved in the past. Why do you think this is and what could be done to improve this?

17.   Are there any final comments you would like to make?

Appendix 2 - Local Voices Steering Group Member role description

Role specification:	You will be active participant in both decision making and implementation of the Local Voice's Engagement Project in Tower Hamlets
Where:	Local Voices (at Real), Jack Dash House, London E14 9YQ
When:	A single monthly steering group meeting, plus additional project based work, sometimes at Real, sometimes in the community
Duration:	We would like a minimum commitment of 6 months.
Task Description**:**	- Attend monthly steering group meets and participate in the decision making process - Take an active role in coordinating a sub group - Help out with promoting specific project e. Phone work - General admin tasks - Attend and facilitate at events / workshops
Essential Skills:	- Natural enthusiasm - A friendly and professional manner - good communication skills - reliable - good team player - Desire to use or develop your skills and experience - confident taking part in discussions and other projects

Desired Skills (any of these would be useful):	• decision-making skills • conflict resolution skills • administration skills (eg taking notes) • IT skills (using spreadsheets, making leaflets, sending emails) • internet skills (websites, Facebook and Twitter) • focus group facilitation • event management skills (ordering catering) • customer-service skills (event registration, stall staffing)
What's In It For You:	Local Voices single premise is to improve the lot of disabled people in Tower You will be directly supporting the development of a service that aims to improve choice, control and independence for disabled people in Tower Hamlets. You will receive an induction and ongoing supervision with a view to using your skills and experience to support others. We can help you develop and acquire the skills needed to find paid work. Reasonable out of pocket expenses will be paid.