



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Rochdale MBC

## Co-operative working for public service delivery

There is a long legacy, in Rochdale, of citizen involvement in the development, delivery and leadership of services.

In 2017, a group of citizens and system leaders got together to think about the implications of devolution in Greater Manchester and the reform of public services. They agreed that it might be worthwhile to take action together to understand how citizens might be more involved in the development, delivery and leadership of system change.

With support from academics from Edge Hill University, this started with the formation of a set of principles around which joint work could take place. The citizens were then asked to consider the system in Rochdale borough, as part of the Greater Manchester City Region and identify themes or areas they'd like to focus on.

This took a number of weeks, starting with conversations about very broad themes based on a door knock community research activity which had taken place in two housing estates in the borough. From having time and attention to talk in detail about the things that were important to them, having understood what people had said on the doorstep, they came up with two themes.

The first was about cooperative democracy: how power can be shared and shifted in order to increase our potential for joint work. The second was about relationships and how they can be supported in the borough. The citizens set a challenge: "We think a good starting point for change will be to improve hope and trust by taking action together". With continued support from partners in Edge Hill University, the citizens developed a programme of formal hearings in order to "democratise" a space.

Senior leaders were invited to present, in an accessible way, some information about the two themes and the citizens had time to ask detailed questions. The hearings were chaired independently by a local leader from the voluntary and community sector who is also a local magistrate and the academics from Edge Hill University measured the equality of conversation in the room.

The experience of the hearings was both unsettling and inspiring for those who took part. There was the opportunity to ask difficult questions and the time to deal with those trickier issues in a space where all present were determined to share the power of decision making in order that action could be taken. Both parties were required to take a leap of faith and put their trust in each other to achieve this goal. The feedback on the experience from both sides was that it felt like a profoundly important event.

From the hearings, the citizens set two challenges, based on the themes. A group of system leaders were then selected to work alongside the citizens over the course of a year to take action together. This process was recorded and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, with continued support from our academic friends. Inspired by further research and a literature review, methods were tested to accelerate democratising spaces for decision making, with the speed at which decisions could be comfortably made measured. The combination of activity and willingness to innovate resulted in real change and action.

Both challenges achieved great change within the year, contributing to the learning and development programme, Leaders in GM and resulting in the co-produced appointment of a new Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Organisation and a new manifesto with measurable results for supporting relationships in the borough.

The final testing will be completed in June 2019 with the co-production of a visual final report which will summarise what has happened. Leaders and citizens are currently in preparation for that process by undertaking peer interviews to understand what's changed.

A video of the hearings was shot so that the larger group of citizens who weren't able to take part could see what had happened: <https://youtu.be/EXRAKagh-7E>

Some of the work and the methodology has been shared across Greater Manchester through the Leaders in GM programme and one of the citizens who took part presented their experiences to the Greater Manchester "Further, Faster" event which launched the GM model of public services.

Plans are in place to continue the legacy of this important work through the review of decision making processes in the borough. The governance of the local Reform Board is being altered and developments are underway to ensure the meaningful and active participation of citizens in decision making and action in the future.

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