

# Working effectively with residents

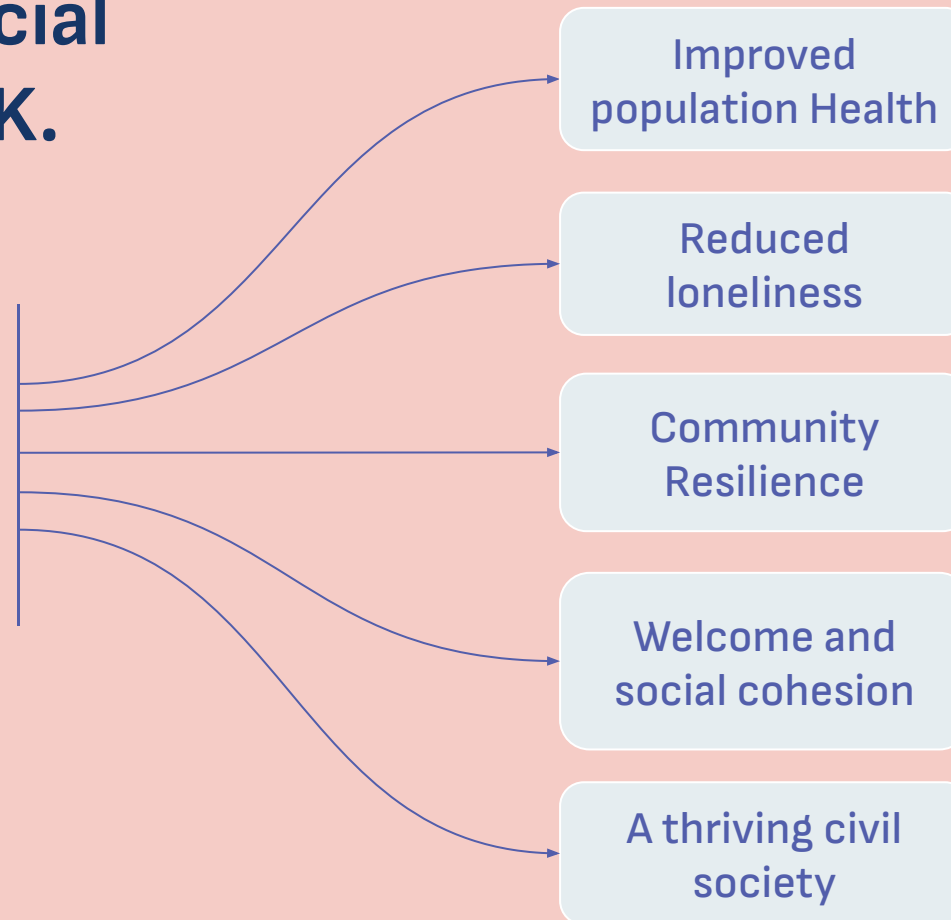
A framework for Housing Associations and Council Housing Teams



# We are **Neighbourly Lab** , a non-profit research and innovation organisation.

Our mission is to increase social connectedness across the UK.

This is because increased levels of social connectedness generate a range of **downstream outcomes** that strengthen communities



# Harnessing Social Infrastructure and the Built Environment is one of the key areas through which we pursue our mission

Through years of research and innovation, we have identified three key elements that enable homes and neighbourhoods to be set up to enable Social Infrastructure:

## The 3 elements of Social Infrastructure

**for example:**  
Streetscapes, church-halls,  
cafes, parks, waiting-areas,  
community-centres, housing  
estates

**Places to  
meet and  
inclusive built  
environment**

**for example:**  
street Whatsapp groups,  
knowledgeable shopkeepers or  
neighbours, local news-sheets,  
link-workers

**Information &  
Comms so  
people know  
what's going on  
around them**

**Stuff happening:  
activities, events  
and "social  
opportunity"**

**for example:**  
after-school clubs, pub  
quiz-nights, street-parties,  
walking-groups, talks,  
sport-leagues

# We work with work partners across the Housing sector, to support them to better work with and hear from the communities they serve



*“Neighbourly Lab’s professionalism and reliability was excellent at all times and their **ability to build positive relationships with participant respondents was particularly strong.**”*

*This ensured the necessary width of meaningful research quality to enable our specific needs moving forward. I would fully recommend this organisation and look forward to working with them again.”*



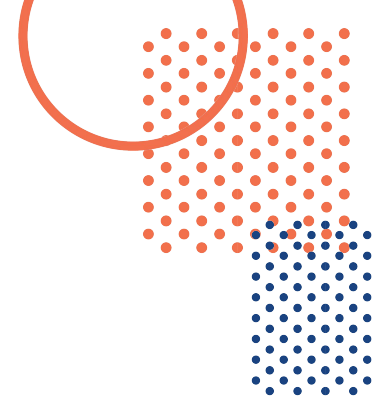
*Mark Waller, Skills Manager at Great Yarmouth Borough Council*



*We have really benefited from the commitment that Neighbourly Lab have shown to our London Boroughs Engagement project. They have worked so flexibly and empathetically, and have provided such high quality support and learning for the boroughs participating in the project, as well as us. We believe that this is enabling the councils involved in this project to carry out **more innovative engagement and work in a more sustainable and impactful way with particular communities”***

*Karen Amsden, Principal Policy and Projects Office – London Councils*

# We understand that 2025 is a difficult time for the Housing Sector and Housing Associations in particular



## Challenges include:

- **Increased pressure on home building** from a new government
- **New legislation** which places greater emphasis on Tenant Satisfaction Measures means that working well with residents is growing ever more important

## However, levels of trust amongst residents is often low:

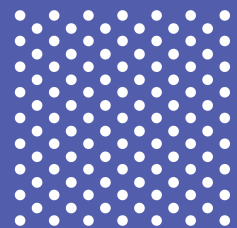
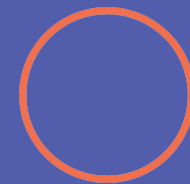
- Ombudsman and media highlighting ongoing issues with housing provision, creating a more negative view of the sector
- Much housing stock is old and in need of repairs/redevelopment but funds to do so are limited

# There is a need to work more effectively with residents and this guide can help you in your approach



Positive outcomes from engaging better with communities:

- Improved relationships and **trust** with tenants that develop **local and embedded systems of engagement**
- More **plugged in to local issues** and can address them before they catalyse into something bigger and more challenging
- Encourage **greater civic action from tenants** when they feel empowered to make change on their estate, combating the disempowerment that can come from being lesser heard
- **Reaching a more diverse group of tenants** so you're not just hearing from those who actively reach out to express concerns
- Overall, **Improved Tenant Satisfaction Measures**



# A framework for working effectively with residents

**As Housing Associations seek to meet the current sector challenges and policy changes, Neighbourly Lab has a framework of engagement that can help guide you in your thinking and planning.**

**1**

**Understand local communities**

**2**

**Listen inclusively**

**3**

**Community led design**

**4**

**Empower staff**

**5**

**Constant feedback loop**



# Understanding the local community

## What is it?



All of our experiences and perceptions are contextualised in the world around us.

To be able to fully understand resident experiences on the estate and satisfaction with their housing provision, it is **important too to understand the broader contextual factors that may be impacting these views and experiences** – e.g. local job losses, local community infrastructure, experiences of health.

This kind of data will help you to better understand the communities that you serve overall but also in each specific place, meaning that support can be more localised and impactful.

**In your resident satisfaction measurement (e.g. survey, conversations), explore also the broader context** of the local area, as well as residents' own current circumstances which may impact their experience of housing.

# Understanding the local community

## How to approach it and what to ask yourself:

### Review your current satisfaction metrics:

- What are we measuring currently?
- What are we missing?

### Workshop with key stakeholders to flesh out broader contextual measures

- What would be most valuable to measure/include?
- What would be the best way to collect this information?
- How can this information feed into our work?

### Adapt satisfaction metrics and undertake measurement with communities

- What did we learn?
- How can we serve this community differently as a result of this information?
- Any further information that we would like to capture next time?



# Listening Inclusively



## What is it?

Ensuring that you're not just hearing from the usual suspects, i.e. those most willing to come forward to share their views.

Instead **make a considered effort to hear from those lesser heard and often underserved residents**

These are residents **who may not take part in traditional satisfaction measurement due to physical or resource limitations** (e.g. age, digital literacy, disability etc)

Residents like under 18s, older residents (65+yrs), residents with disabilities and long term health conditions, residents from diverse cultural heritage

# Listening Inclusively



## How to approach it and what to ask yourself:

Take stock of who you are and are not reaching with current measures by examining past data. **Identify key target groups who you want to hear from/hear more from**

Work with **local leaders and community connectors to identify best routes to engaging these residents**

Consider if you need to take **a new approach to engagement to reach these residents**, and adapt as needed:

- What barriers might have prevented these different groups from taking part to date?
  - If English wasn't my first language or I had challenges with literacy
  - If I struggled with technology
  - If I can't psychically leave my home due to physical or mental health problems
  - If I was a young person with limited say on community issues
- How might these barriers be overcome?
  - Accessibility accommodations – e.g. paper surveys as well as digital copies, translated into local majority languages other than English
  - Structural support – e.g. childcare during a focus group, transport costs, food at any sessions
  - Going to communities where they are – e.g. parks, halls, food banks etc

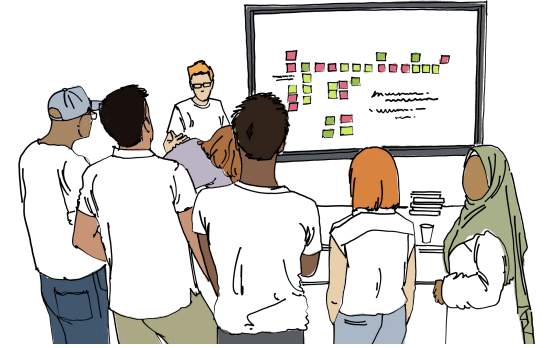
# Community led design

## What is it?

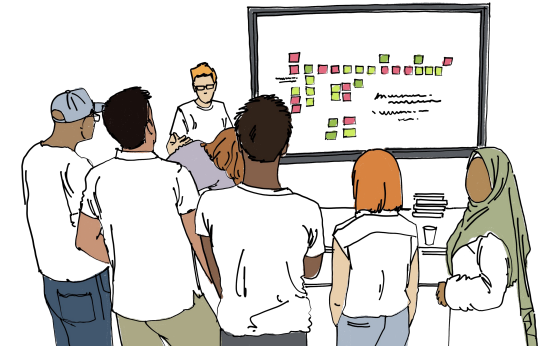
Once you understand what the local issues are, **work with communities to develop solutions** to these issues.

These solutions do not have to be costly, but developing them with communities at the heart will make them more likely to succeed.

Working with residents in a participatory way means working alongside them and **sharing power in decision making**. This two way relationship helps to **build trust with communities** .



# Community led design



## How to approach it and what to ask yourself:

Make a clear plan for what you hope to achieve and what your budget is – you need to **ensure that you're clear from the start on what is possible to avoid over promising to communities**

Explore what assets you have in the community to support the work

- Where do we have relationships with residents already?
- Where are we plugged in to local networks?

Understand your capacity to lead this work in house or whether you need external support

- Do we have the skills within our team to facilitate this work?
- Do we have the resource to commit to this work

**Plan and facilitate participatory sessions** with residents and your team/external support:

- Clear guidelines around what is in scope for this work
- Space to be creative and generate big ideas
- Prioritise favourite/s to take forward and implement
- Ensure all sessions are accessible (see principle 2 of this framework)

# Empowering staff



## What is it?

It is a difficult context currently for Housing Officers with challenges in the sector, as well as more broadly with the Cost of Living crisis, and knock on impact of Covid-19 on mental health in communities.

Officers **need to feel empowered to work in and with communities, having the right tools to engage with residents, problem solve and ultimately build trust**

They must also feel supported to work in this way from the top down

Effective engagement with communities, including those lesser heard residents, is **only possible if staff feel comfortable enough going in to communities and having, potentially difficult, conversations**

# Empowering staff



## How to approach it and what to ask yourself:

**Take stock of your team's current skills and confidence in working with the community** – e.g. reflection with management, staff survey

- Where are officers least confident vs most confident about?
- What challenges do they face when working with residents currently?
- How might they be better supported to work with residents?

Where gaps in skills and confidence are identified, consider **a training course that would help to address these gaps**

**Working groups can also be valuable in sharing learnings amongst teams and across locations**

- What has worked well in engaging and building relationships with communities?
- What are pitfalls to avoid?
- Inspiration for new and innovative approaches



# Constant feedback loop



## What is it?

Ensure that you are **well plugged in to the mood and perceptions of the local community with an ongoing feedback opportunity** – e.g. resident panel, resident peer researchers

This continuous flow of information will mean that you're **not caught off guard with any annual resident satisfaction measurement**. You can better plan for ways to address it and (hopefully) promote a higher satisfaction score overall

It also provides opportunities to be more connected to the local community and understand more about the wider neighborhood context

# Constant feedback loop



## How to approach it and what to ask yourself:

There are a number of different approaches to gathering ongoing feedback. **Different approaches will be suitable for different locations, depending on local community make up and their levels of engagement**

**Housing Officers should work with residents to identify the best approach** for that estate/area

Some examples of these approaches include:

- Resident panel: representative group of residents who feedback on behalf of the community
- Peer researchers/resident researchers who undertake research with neighbours and feed this back
- Being plugged in to local WhatsApp groups, either continually or just occasionally to gather feedback
- Engaging with community leaders as voices of and advocates for the local community

**If you would like to hear more about Neighbourly Lab's work and how we could support your organisation to strengthen the communities you serve, please get in touch.**

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