

# CCHC Call for Evidence

Response ID	Start date	Completion date
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

1	Title	[REDACTED]
1.a	If you selected Other, please specify:	
2	First Name(s)	[REDACTED]
3	Surname(s)	[REDACTED]
4	Contact email address	[REDACTED]
4.a	Additional email address (please complete this if you are submitting evidence on behalf of someone else)	
5	Location	United Kingdom (GB)
5.a	If you selected Other, please specify:	
5.b	City	London
6	Institution/Company/Organisation	The RSA
7	Summary of evidence	Please see detailed evidence submitted via email.
8	<p>Please select which exposure(s) your evidence relates to. Further explanation on these exposures can be found on a PDF file here. Please select all that apply.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning (e.g. density, green spaces, housing, transport, urban design etc.)</li> <li>• Workplaces and employment</li> <li>• Accessibility (e.g. access to healthcare, facilities, parks etc.)</li> <li>• Deprivation (e.g. income, poverty, diversity etc.)</li> </ul>
9	<p>Please select which outcome(s) the submitted research relates to. Please select all that apply.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wellbeing</li> <li>• Quality of Life</li> </ul>

10	Method of evidence submission: If you need to provide further evidence, please submit this either digitally via email or hard copy via post.	Digital (via email to <a href="mailto:gchu@kellogg.ox.ac.uk">gchu@kellogg.ox.ac.uk</a> )
11	How did you hear about the Commission on Creating Healthy Cities and the associated call for evidence?	Direct request for evidence submission

## The RSA Response to CCHC Call for Evidence

The RSA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this timely and essential commission.

At the RSA we unite people and ideas to resolve the challenges of our time. We envisage a world where everyone is able to participate in creating a better future. The RSA has been at the forefront of significant social impact for over 260 years. Our proven change process, rigorous research, innovative ideas platforms and diverse global community of over 30,000 problem-solvers deliver solutions for lasting change.

One of our key programmes of work addresses the social determinants of health and wellbeing, and the role civic and political participation can play in developing and delivering more equitable and effective programmes for individual wellbeing and social welfare. We hope the findings from our research can help to inform this commission.

### **1. Governance/decision making processes**

#### **Overarching Questions:**

*1.A - How best can City leaders ensure that the voices of citizens/users of services shape their policymaking and keep the public genuinely engaged with the process of policymaking as it proceeds from consultation to decision?*

There are many variables that combine to determine what the best approach to public engagement may be in any situation. In the recent RSA report 'Transitions to Participatory Democracy' we set out four sets of questions that can help organisers work through the key decisions that need to be made in the design of public engagement:

- 1) Why? Organisers should start by asking themselves why they are engaging with residents and what specific outcomes they want. The answer to these questions should inform the other three answers.
- 2) Where? What is the context of engagement? What internal and external factors might influence the ability of the organising agency to realise their desired outcomes and purpose?
- 3) Who? Who needs to be involved in the process from the organising agency and from the community? How can the target group(s) be brought on board?
- 4) How? How can a process be designed so that it engages the right people, accounts for the local context and delivers the right outcomes? Organisers may want to consider engagement methods that have worked elsewhere (we have compiled a list of these in the main report), though these will need to be tailored to the local context and consider

However, our research (which consisted of (i) interviews with UK and international practitioners, academics, VCSE representatives, public sector leaders, local and combined authority officers and local politicians; (ii) participatory workshops with UK local authorities; and (iii) desk research exploring international best practice and guidance for community engagement) also suggested that the project of growing local participation will require more than just well-designed methods. Civic leaders should proactively work to change the local context, to create the conditions and structures under which participation can thrive.

The project of building more participative local systems will always be a work in progress and will vary depending on pre-existing civic infrastructure and past experiences of civic engagement, but our research highlighted six broad transitions in local policy and practice

that can help to develop a local participatory infrastructure to support innovative, empowering, inclusive and impactful forms of participation on a more ongoing basis.

These six transitions are set out in the graphic below:

### Local infrastructure for participatory democracy



		DISJOINTED AND INCONSISTENT	JOINED UP AND HOLISTIC		
<b>Micro</b> Transitions in individual experience and ability to participate in local democracy	PARTICIPATION IS...	Entitled	Enabled	Embraced	Equalising participation opportunities for residents.
	PARTICIPATION IS...	Sporadic	Repetitive	Ongoing	Building sustained participation journeys for residents.
<b>Meso</b> Transitions in councils' internal culture and working patterns	ENGAGEMENT IS...	Cosmetic	Accountable	Empowering	Delegating decision-making authority to residents.
	ENGAGEMENT IS...	Methodological	Experimental	Mainstream	Embedding participation as standard practice.
<b>Macro</b> Transitions in the system-wide context for participatory democracy	VCSE SECTOR AND THE COUNCIL ARE...	Gatekeepers	Door openers	Valued partners	Engaging with residents in partnership with the VCSE sector.
	ENGAGEMENT IS...	Team-led	Organisation-led	System-led	Securing broad support for participation, within and beyond public authorities.

To read more about each of these transitions and the practical recommendations that accompany them, read our [Transitions to Participatory Democracy](#) report.

#### 1.B - What are the methods that work, and that don't work, in engaging the wider public in the task of creating a healthy city?

As we have suggested in our answer to question 1.A. the optimal methodology to use in any situation will depend on the aims of the process (the why?), the context within which it's being conducted (the where?), the people that need to have a voice in the process (the who?) and the resources and assets the public agency has at its disposal to run the process and follow-up on its outcomes (the how?).

In [figure 2 of our Transitions to Participatory Democracy report](#), we compiled an inventory of tried and tested public engagement methods. This should not be used as a shortcut to bypass the four planning stages we set out in our previous answer – the purpose and context of engagement remain paramount – but may offer inspiration and ideas to participation leaders, helping them discover, adapt and combine different engagement methods and tools to fit their purpose and context.

These methods will be more or less appropriate depending on, among other things, the stage of policymaking, the purpose of engagement, the budget for engagement, how high the stakes of engagement are, whether thin or thick engagement is required, who and how many people the engagement leader wants to hear from and how long the engagement leader wants the process to last. An unsuccessful method will be one that is designed without regard for the context, or one that produces outcomes that fail to meet the objectives of engagement.

Our research has shown that thin<sup>1</sup> and thick<sup>2</sup> forms of participation can both, in different circumstances, be very effective in terms of informing policy and empowering participants. They both have different strengths and can be combined as part of a larger engagement plan or participation infrastructure. Combining the best features of thin and thick forms of engagement can help civic leaders capture the benefit of deep engagement without losing the breadth and scale of mass engagement.

Following Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015), at the RSA we believe that ‘bad’ engagement is the inevitable result of not treating participants like adults. Both thin and thick forms of participation (contrasting, unfortunately, many forms of conventional or statutory consultation) are successful when they “provide people with information, use sound group process techniques, give people a chance to tell their stories, present a range of policy choices, give participants a sense of political legitimacy, support people to take action in a variety of ways, make participation enjoyable, and make participation convenient”<sup>3</sup>. To this list, we would add the importance of engaging with a diverse group of residents beyond the ‘usual suspects’ (including those from traditionally marginalised communities) and the importance of public input making a genuine difference to policy and practice outcomes.

### **Evidence-based Questions:**

*1.1 - Are any of the current ways of engaging citizens – Citizens Juries, Assemblies, Youth Parliaments, use of deliberative panels, focus groups et al - proven to be effective?*

There is evidence that well-designed forms of thick engagement and deliberation (including citizens’ juries, citizens’ assemblies, deliberative panels and focus groups) can (i) produce better decisions and (ii) help build civic skills and habits in participants.

(i) Producing better decisions:

Evidence shows deliberative processes tend to stimulate integrative thinking, which leads to recommendations that support good decision-making by decision-makers. Citizen recommendations have been found to be (i) salient—grasping the problems’ multiple aspects; (ii) cognisant of causality—identifying multiple sources of impacts; (iii) sequential—keeping the whole in view while focusing on specific aspects; and (iv) resolution-seeking—discovering novel ways that avoided bad choice trade-offs<sup>4</sup>.

Deliberative processes (particularly when participants are selected randomly, as is the case with most citizens’ assemblies and juries) mobilise the collective intelligence and cognitive diversity of a group. Evidence suggests that humans reason more effectively through social interactions, particularly with those who bring completely different perspectives to the table

---

<sup>1</sup> Thin engagement is “faster, easier, and more convenient. It includes a range of activities that allow people to express their opinions, make choices, or affiliate themselves with a particular group or cause”.

<sup>2</sup> Thick engagement is “intensive, informed, and deliberative. Most of the action happens in small-group discussion. Organisers... give participants chances to share their experiences; present them with a range of views or policy options; and encourage action and change at multiple levels”.

<sup>3</sup> Nabatchi, T and Leighninger, M (2015) *Public Participation for 21st Century Democracy*, Wiley, Hoboken: New Jersey

<sup>4</sup> Hartz-Karp, J.; Marinova, D (2021) *Using Deliberative Democracy for Better Urban Decision-Making through Integrative Thinking*

– this is why evidence from social science suggests that more diverse groups are better at solving problems than less diverse groups<sup>5</sup>.

(i) Building civic skills and habits<sup>6</sup>:

Evidence suggests that through participating in these processes, citizens can gain in knowledge, confidence, tolerance, social capital and public spirit. Participants develop their ability to form an argument, justify their positions and sift through complex information. Involvement has also been found to increase people’s trust in the democratic system and their political representatives. Deliberative democracy provides a gateway through which citizens might re-engage with politics and their communities more generally. Links have been drawn between structured deliberation and higher levels of voting and campaigning, while it has been demonstrated that deliberation leads to community engagement and voluntary action. When properly publicised, deliberative exercises can also positively impact the quality of public discussion and the behaviour of those not directly participating.

More evidence for these two benefits of deliberative engagement (and many more) can be found in the introduction of the OECD report, [Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions : Catching the Deliberative Wave](#).

However, as pointed out in our answer to question 1.B, the effectiveness of engagement is not simply a function of the specific method of engagement chosen, but also (i) the extent to which the final process design corresponds with the aims, desired outcomes and context of engagement, (ii) the extent to which engagement leads treat participants ‘like adults’, (iii) the extent to which efforts are made to engage beyond the ‘usual suspects’, and (iv) the extent to which public input is genuinely considered and responded to by decision-makers.

*1.2 - What is the evidence of success or failure for neighbourhood forums in England, and Community Councils in Scotland, bridging the community/municipality divide?*

The RSA has not done any research into the success or failure of English neighbourhood forums or Scottish Community Councils.

*1.3 - What is the evidence of success or failure of resourcing local government to take decisions locally produces for health and wellbeing?*

Focusing specifically on public participation in local governance, the RSA is aware of a growing body of evidence showing a range of direct and indirect positive impacts of public participation on individual and collective health and wellbeing.

A review of 29 primary studies, led by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing in 2018<sup>7</sup>, provides evidence for the beneficial impact of well-designed engagement initiatives on many determinants of health and wellbeing including “the physical conditions in which people live, social relationships, individual physical and mental health, community health, individual

<sup>5</sup> Landemore, Hélène (2013) “Deliberation, Cognitive Diversity, and Democratic Inclusiveness: an Epistemic Argument for the Random Selection of Representatives.”

<sup>6</sup> See for instance: Gastil, J., Johnson, G. F., Han, S., & Rountree, J. (2017). Assessment of the 2016 Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review on Measure 97; Grönlund, K., Setälä, M., & Herne, K. (2010). Deliberation and civic virtue: Lessons from a citizen deliberation experiment. *European Political Science Review*, 2(1), 95-117; Knobloch KR, Gastil J. Civic (Re)socialisation: The Educative Effects of Deliberative Participation. *Politics*. 2015;35(2):183-200; Knobloch, Katherine R., Michael L. Barthel, and John Gastil (2019), “Emanating Effects: The Impact of the Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review on Voters’ Political Efficacy”, *Political Studies* 2019: 1-20.

<sup>7</sup> Pennington A, Watkins M, Bagnall A-M, South J, Corcoran R (2018) A systematic review of evidence on the impacts of joint decision-making on community wellbeing. London: What Works Centre for Wellbeing.



wellbeing, and community wide levels of wellbeing”. Public engagement, it was reported, can help in “deflecting threats to the local (living) environment and in resisting ‘hollowing out’ of neighbourhood services and facilities, in maintaining and enhancing local conditions, and in attracting resources to create better places to live” The review also provides evidence that well-designed public engagement leads to “increased trust and reciprocity, control of anti-social behaviour and power ‘with’ community members to challenge unhealthy conditions”.

This evidence review is consistent with Renaisi’s evaluation of the Innovation in Democracy Programme – a major local deliberative democracy experiment co-delivered by the RSA, Involve, The Democratic Society and mySociety<sup>8</sup>. The evaluation detected positive impacts in terms of “the development of personal skills and knowledge... an increase in the sense of personal efficacy and social capital... a growth in respect for and awareness of the local authority’s aims and workstreams”. However, (also consistent with the evidence collated by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing) Renaisi also found a potential for reduced sense of efficacy and social capital and a weakening of some local relationships if “the output from the Assembly is not implemented or adequately addressed”.

The evidence review is also consistent with findings in the RSA’s Citizens’ Economic Council engagement project in 2016-2018<sup>9</sup>. For those who participated in the process, their sense of autonomy and agency markedly improved, as did their sense of optimism about the future, their sense of connectedness to others and their feelings of self-esteem.

*1.4 - Can a value-for-money case be made for encouraging and sustaining the enhanced community spirit generated by the pandemic (increased volunteering, extended neighbourliness and more charitable/community activity)?*

Anthony Zacharzewski’s work provides evidence for significant fiscal benefits of a more participative local democracy<sup>10</sup>. His research shows four areas where savings can be made through local democracy:

1. “Routing existing consultation through a single stronger system”
2. “Better information on citizen needs and attitudes helping to target cuts and spending”
3. “Closer oversight and better understanding of council business reducing costs and increasing tax morale”
4. “Savings or higher revenues from stronger economic development and greater “civic productivity” (the extent to which networks of citizens support themselves without public service involvement)”

*1.5 - Do suggested proposals for action on governance/decision-making pass the tests of being realistic, useable, specific, deliverable and affordable?*

At the RSA, we believe our proposals for a more participative democracy are realistic, useable, deliverable and affordable:

- **Realistic:** We believe that participative democracy represents a realistic step towards governance reform. Less ideologically divisive than both electoral reform and party financing and more obviously relevant to people’s lives, deliberative democracy can attract support from across the political spectrum. Deliberative and participatory reforms are relatively easy to enact and civil society experiments can be organised

<sup>8</sup> Brammall, S & Sisya, K (2020) Innovation in Democracy Programme Evaluation. Renaisi.

<sup>9</sup> Patel, R, Gibbon, K & Greenham, T (2018) Building a Public Culture of Economics: Final Report of the RSA Citizens' Economic Council.

<sup>10</sup> Zacharzewski, A (2010) Democracy pays: how democratic engagement can cut the cost of government.

anytime without the need for prior legislation. Public participation initiatives can also provide a ‘gateway’ for further reform on issues relating to health, wellbeing, poverty and inequality. Insulated from powerful interest groups and electoral considerations, the arguments that take centre stage in citizens’ assemblies do so by force of merit, not money. Both innovative and realistic, we believe participatory is an appropriate step towards more equitable and responsive governance and decision-making.

- Useable: RSA toolkits for [local participatory democracy](#), [local citizens’ assemblies](#) and [‘inclusive voice’](#) set out in practical terms how our proposals can be converted into workable processes, useable policies and effective local strategies.
- Deliverable: citizens’ assemblies, citizens’ juries, participatory budgeting and many other participatory and deliberative methodologies have been tried and tested around the world to great effect. The recent OECD report [Catching the Deliberative Wave](#) surveyed over 300 representative deliberative processes from around the world and features guidance for how these forms of engagement can be delivered effectively.
- Affordable: See our answer to question 1.4 for evidence of the fiscal benefits of greater participatory democracy.

#### **4. Health & Wellbeing (public health, social prescribing, food and exercise, health creation)**

##### **Overarching Questions:**

*4.A - Is the Commission right to see health as the prism through which to consider the full spectrum of a city’s social and public policies?*

The RSA’s programmatic work that looks at health through a broader wellbeing lens, which is underpinned by our *Reimagining the Future of Health and Social Care* report<sup>11</sup>, the report highlights the interconnection of inequalities that impact on people’s physical and mental health. Despite health being an aspect of wellbeing, to focus on it as the prism may present challenges that lead to a focus on our existing health systems (NHS, public health) as opposed to those that contribute to our health & wellbeing: housing, transport, community, economy, employment etc.

*4.B - How can our highly centralised and illness-orientated health service be transformed to achieve more responsive, more preventative, more holistic and more personalised outcomes?*

*Reimagining the Future of Health and Social Care* set out a series of scenarios and recommendations that proposed a move to a new future for our health and social care services.

These recommendations start with a people led commission and are underpinned by the principles of participation, deliberation and explore how technology, locally-based, locally-led services that are provided in different ways can help a move towards a more wellbeing, preventative focused health and social care service.

##### **Evidence-based Questions:**

*4.5 - How can citizens and local employers be involved in co-production and co-ownership of local solutions to improve health and wellbeing? Should the CCHC use surveys and opinion polls to establish how users of services can best engage in creating healthier cities?*

---

<sup>11</sup> Hannan, R. Webster, H. (2020) *Reimagining the Future of Health and Social Care*. The RSA, London.



In section 1, we set out several potential approaches to public and stakeholder engagement, including tried and tested methods and important guidance that has emerged from our past research on the topic. Finding the right approach is a design challenge, rather than a simple choice from a pre-defined list.

Surveys and polls are an effective mechanism for gathering basic information from large numbers of residents, however other processes (including citizens' juries, focus groups, interviews) will be required to get more detailed feedback and input from residents. As we suggest in section 1 of this submission, combining mass engagement exercises with narrower, deeper engagement can help to capture the dual benefits of breadth and depth.

In May 2021 Vitality and The RSA's Future Work Programme launched a research report on the future of hybrid working: *Healthy Hybrid A Blueprint for Business*. The research compiled the latest evidence of remote workers' attitudes to remote and hybrid working, evidence on the effects of hybrid working, alongside case studies on the best practice and attitudes of major employers. The research found that remote workers (who make up roughly one third of the labour market) overwhelmingly support a new hybrid model of work, working at least partly from home and partly from the office

Within the research, it was also found that Remote Workers attitudes to work is one in which they increasingly value their work's ability to offer them a fit and healthy lifestyle and where a majority of remote workers say that remote working has made it easier for them to do regular exercise. Yet tensions exist. Evidence also suggests that lockdowns made sedentary lifestyles more prevalent. How much can be attributed to remote working (i.e., the now lack of need to move rooms in the day or to commute) or attributed to the effect of lockdowns (i.e., on the closure of gyms and sports facilities) is unclear. What is clearer is the need for consistent and joined-up practices by both local actors and employers in translating increased flexibility into healthier citizens and workers as this outcome is far from inevitable.

In particular, employers must be encouraged to go beyond merely 'enabling' (i.e. by allowing flexible working) and toward 'promoting'. This can be done through (i) better monitoring and clearer accountability in terms of health and wellbeing of workers, for instance by ensuring useful and effective data and feedback loops on worker health and wellbeing. (ii) stronger accountability for worker health, such as through a 'head of wellbeing' as was seen in some employer case studies. (iii) leading by example and enforcing mandatory breaks for workers. Combined, this agenda for change can create healthier workers and citizens.

Yet joined up working between employers, citizens, and local government is also vital in promoting healthier lives. For instance, local state and non-state actors have critical roles to play in the dissemination of best practice, in providing the infrastructure for healthier lives, and in engaging and providing for marginalised groups. The RSA is currently undertaking a community assembly in Birmingham, at the neighbourhood level, exploring what residents need to live a good life. Exercises like this enable communities to identify their unique challenges and solutions.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for providing The RSA the opportunity to provide evidence to this valuable piece of work. If you require more information or have any questions about our submission please contact: 