Section 1: Why are we here?

On 29 June, Camden Health and Care Citizens' Assembly met digitally after a three-month pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the Assembly, we covered:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Where we got to last time
3. The new context
4. Revisiting the priority focus areas
5. Next steps

We started the session by hearing from **Councillor Pat Callaghan - Camden Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Tackling Health Inequality & Promoting Independence**. She welcomed the Assembly members to this second meeting and updated members on the importance of their participation in this process.

Objectives

- Regroup the Assembly
- Remind the Assembly of its objectives
- Share experience of COVID-19 pandemic
- Revisit the priority focus areas and assess whether and how they should change
- Provide instructions and materials for following steps and sessions

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Section 2: Where we got up to last time

We began the discussion by hearing the background context to what the Assembly had covered in the first event, and the priorities that were agreed prior to COVID-19.

For us, a successful Assembly process would result in:

1. Action, not just words

2. More funding for Camden

3. Practical recommendations that are acted upon, and a chance for more feedback from the community in the future

3 focus areas agreed in February

1. Ensure services are <u>inclusive</u> and meet each of our <u>individual needs</u>

2. Ensure my family, friends, neighbours and I can <u>stay healthy and well</u> in Camden

3. Ensure there is good <u>communication</u> between services, <u>and</u> between services and residents

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Section 3: Understanding our experience

Before moving forward with the Assembly, we considered the changes that happened since we first met in February:

1 As we all know, the world has changed since we last met.

2 Our situations might be quite different now compared to early in the year.

3 So our priorities for the Assembly might have changed too.

Members were split into small groups, and were asked to reflect on their experience that they, friends, family and neighbours have had during the pandemic. Members answered the question:

'What are the main challenges for you and your community?'

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Section 3: Understanding our experience

We asked 'What are the main challenges for you and your community?'

Feeling isolated / alienated from others

- "What has bothered me is when I'm going out people **cross the road to avoid me**. I feel like a leper".
- "I felt **bored, trapped and isolated** – stayed permanently in the house and didn't leave it – My partner works nights so he went out to work"
- "In my block everyone **hides away** and people are paranoid. Everyone is **nervous of other people**...we used to say hello to each other now people look away at the hedges (rather than look at you)"

Financial difficulties

- "[A family member has] **lost their job** as a direct consequence of lockdown, claiming Universal Credit has been a disaster, because it's been so difficult to navigate the benefits system"
- "[A family member is] now in **rent arrears**. There has been **no help** from Camden Council. It's affecting their **mental health** directly, and the mental health of me and my siblings"
- "...my **benefits were suspended** and I didn't know about it"

Worrying about friends and family members (particularly older relatives)

- "I'm not **worried** about myself but have concerns for **my daughter** as she has lung problems and learning difficulties. I remind her not to go near other people; I also have concerns about **my brother** as he has health issues"
- "**My parents** have really **struggled.**..there have been lots of letters, but we can only provide help over the phone, so can't physically see the letters"
- "It has really **affected my dad** in his 70s"

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We asked **'What are the main challenges for you and your community?'**

Parenting during lockdown

- Challenges of homeschooling - "I had to suddenly become a **teacher** to my young children"

- Concerns and challenges around making decisions about whether children should **go back to school**

- Challenges for **pregnant people** during lockdown, specifically difficulty to get sufficient exercise and fresh air during pregnancy

- Difficulties of **looking after very young children** during this time

Accessing health services

- It can be challenging to get a **GP appointment** face-to-face if you are not feeling well

- Routine operations have been postponed, and are now restarting. There are long **waiting times**, and this is distressing

- Concerns about **transport** and getting to appointments

Impact on disabled people and those with health conditions

- Difficulties for **disabled people to have support and receive information**. Suggestion of a line of support for disabled people to support access services

- "As a wheelchair user and single mother, Covid-19 presented an extremely challenging and scary situation...there are a lot of disabled people in the same situation...**the difficulties of infection avoidance and control are multiplied for disabled people**"

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We asked **'What are the main challenges for you and your community?'**.

Accessing the right information and relying on digital

- For isolated people not able to use digital technology, it was **difficult to receive and access information and get mental health support**

- "It was a challenge for those who aren't connected or **'IT savvy'**"

- Difficulties about receiving factual information: "Hearing bits and bobs through gossip around rare serious complications of Covid-19. **Never get someone professional to explain to us**"

Overarching impact of COVID 19 on mental health

- "**Mental health has been difficult**, I feel like I have had a breakdown".

- Impact of **gyms** closing - they were a source of happiness and community

- "In Camden we really need to focus on making sure we **look after people's mental health** as people of all **generations** have been hit by this in terms of their mental health".

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Members of the assembly also spoke about how they had been **managing the challenges** put on them as a result of COVID-19, including the support from those around them, and activities they were doing to remain positive and healthy.

Members spoke of the invaluable benefit that **speaking on the phone** to friends and family offered, as well as **virtual meetups** using platforms such as Zoom.

"To combat isolation, I try to have two phone calls a day, so the phone is invaluable."

Many members had taken to **exercise** as a tactic to stay healthy both physically and mentally. Other mentioned the benefits of enjoying outdoor spaces such as parks.

"Thought it important to remain positive, exercise, read books and my partner kept fit through cycling"

Ways of managing challenges of Covid-19

Specifically on accessing health services, some members had positive experienced using **apps** to manage their conditions, such as 'Patient Access' to manage their prescriptions.
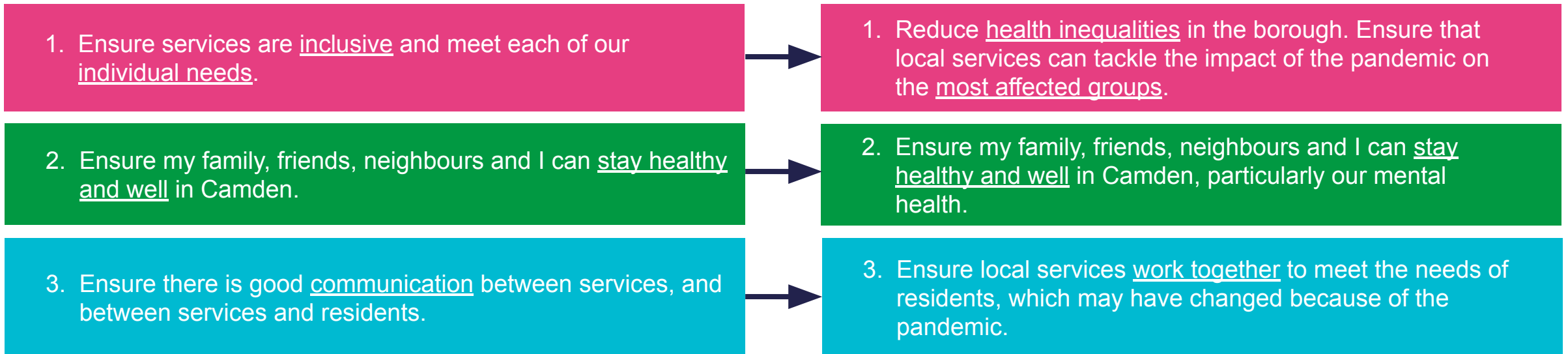
Some members spoke of an increased **sense of community** since lockdown, with more cases of neighbours looking out for one another.

"I hear the neighbour below me. I knock on her door to **make sure she is ok**. I also phone another neighbour - we keep an eye on each other"

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Section 4: Adjusting the priorities

As things had changed a lot since the last meeting, members were presented with some adapted versions of the focus areas which take into account the new COVID-19 context as a suggestion. They were then asked to reflect on the adjusted three priorities. Those adapted versions were:

1. Ensure services are <u>inclusive</u> and meet each of our <u>individual needs</u>.

→

1. Reduce <u>health inequalities</u> in the borough. Ensure that local services can tackle the impact of the pandemic on the <u>most affected groups</u>.

2. Ensure my family, friends, neighbours and I can <u>stay healthy and well</u> in Camden.

→

2. Ensure my family, friends, neighbours and I can <u>stay healthy and well</u> in Camden, particularly our mental health.

3. Ensure there is good <u>communication</u> between services, and between services and residents.

→

3. Ensure local services <u>work together</u> to meet the needs of residents, which may have changed because of the pandemic.

In small groups, participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1 What are your thoughts on the adjusted 3 priorities?

2 Do they match what you want to focus on during the Assembly?

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Section 4: Feedback on priority 1

Suggested priority 1: "Reduce <u>health inequalities</u> in the borough. Ensure that local services can tackle the impact of the pandemic on the <u>most affected groups</u>."

✓ What members liked…

Several groups were **glad that 'health inequalities' had been referenced** in the new priority wording, as these were thought to have been a big issue during the pandemic.

Some members reported that they had directly witnessed the **holes in health services** and the impact it was having on **certain groups** (including the elderly due to digital literacy issues), with others expressing that Camden needed to focus their efforts on the **Black and Asian Minority ethnic and older residents.**

? What members questioned…

The majority of groups raised questions relating to the definition of the 'most affected' groups. Several members called for more clarity on who those groups are and how they had been impacted. Groups referenced by Assembly members included: Black and Asian Minority ethnic residents, older residents, those with existing health conditions and who are on treatment, children and parents.

One member voiced their concerns over 'future proofing' the approach, stating that too much focus had been place on the most affected groups during the pandemic. "This pandemic is once in 100 years - we need to get an insurance policy and get the balance right in terms of resources"

Based on this feedback, in the next session, we will spend time exploring what we mean by the **'most affected groups'** and learning about health inequalities in the borough.

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Section 4: Feedback on priority 2

Suggested priority 2: "Ensure my family, friends, neighbours and I <u>can stay healthy</u> and well in Camden, particularly our mental health."

✓ What members liked…

Around half of the group were happy that mental health was specifically included as it was felt this was one of the main themes that came out of the first session.

Those members were supportive of the prominence mental health had in the second priority as many people's mental health had been adversely impacted by the pandemic.

? What members questioned...

Some members were unsure why mental health had been singled out. There were some concerns over creating a 'hierarchy of conditions' with mental health coming out on top. Some members thought that the focus should be on everything that contributes to someone's health and wellbeing.

One member wished to include 'safe' in the wording, as concerns around safety during the pandemic has caused great anxiety among communities.

Based on this feedback the second priority will include safety: **"Ensure my family, friends, neighbours and I can stay healthy, <u>safe,</u> and well in Camden, particularly our mental health <u>and emotional wellbeing."</u>** We will also ensure that this priority focused on covers all aspects mental wellbeing, rather than having a condition specific focus.

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Suggested priority 3: "Ensure local services <u>work together</u> to meet the needs of residents, which may have changed because of the pandemic."

✓ What members liked…

One group were happy with the wording and felt it did not need to be changed.

Others were also happy with this wording as collaboration was seen to be very important.

Some members mentioned that they would like to know how local services are defined, and would like this to include schools.

? What members questioned...

Several groups questioned why the concept of communication as multi-layered process was removed, and where the resident voice of influence was?

Some preferred including the expectation that services continuously communicate with patients, service users and residents, as well as meeting their needs.

Others agreed with 'meet the needs' but felt it was important to say how it is delivered, also felt it was important to include 'communications between services and residents' as stated in the original wording.

Based on this feedback, the third priority will focus on both services working together and communicating effectively with residents to meet their needs, **"Ensure local services work together to meet the needs of residents, and <u>communicate effectively with residents.</u>"**

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Section 4: The priorities going forward

Based on our discussions, for the next sessions, we will focus on:

Priority 1
Reduce health inequalities in the borough. Ensure that local services can tackle the impact of the pandemic on the most affected groups.

Priority 2
Ensure my family, friends, neighbours and I can stay healthy, safe, and well in Camden, particularly our mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Priority 3
Ensure local services work together to meet the needs of residents, and communicate effectively with residents.

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Section 5: Next steps - your role as a Citizen Scientist

Finally, we discussed next steps. Members were introduced to their roles as **Citizen Scientists**. Members were asked to create a testimony of **the impact COVID-19 has had on their lives**.

"Your role is to look at the impact of the pandemic on Camden's communities. In the first phase, until next meeting, we are asking you to look at **the impact of COVID-19 on your life**. We encourage you to be creative and you can include anything you want. You can film yourself, write a letter, record your voice, take a picture, etc".

- **Please only share what you feel comfortable sharing with us.** You do not have to share if you don't want to.

- **Anything that you do share will be anonymised.** This means that people seeing it will <u>not</u> know that it is from or about you, <u>unless</u> you state that you want other Assembly Members and the wider public to know it is yours.

- **Please send your contribution to** <u>HealthandCareCitizenAssembly@camden.gov.uk</u> by **Monday 20 July**.

- **If you do not have an email address,** just phone us: **020 7974 1459**.

- **We can help you to do this task,** just let us know by email or phone if you need help.

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Thank you.

Thank you for such a constructive input to the session - we really appreciate it.

We look forward to seeing you at the next digital session, taking place:

- Monday 27 July 2020, 12-1:30pm

Please email HealthandCareCitizenAssembly@camden.gov.uk or phone 020 7974 1459 for any questions you might have.

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