

Let's Talk K&C

Citizens' Panel event report

October 2022



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THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

Introduction

Background

Citizens' Panel members were invited to attend their very first event 'Let's Talk K&C' in July 2022. Unfortunately, the event had to be postponed, due to the extreme weather, and was rescheduled for 27 September 2022. This was the first in a series of events inviting residents to contribute to the community conversation about what the Council's priorities should be over the next four years informing the new Council Plan. A total of 72 Panel members attended the event, with representation from each of the borough's 18 wards.

Methodology and report

The event gave Panel members the opportunity to visit information market stalls before the event was opened by the Council Leader, Lead Member for Communities and the Chief Executive. Panel members were then invited to one of fourteen discussion tables to address the following questions:

- What do you love and value most in Kensington and Chelsea and/or your local area?
- What are the biggest issues and challenges faced by residents/the community in Kensington and Chelsea and/or your local area?
- How can the Council best support residents, businesses and partners to enhance their lives over the coming 10 years?
- Those affected by the Grenfell tragedy have challenged the Council to use the learning from Grenfell to be the best Council. What does being the best Council, in light of Grenfell, mean to you?

Tables were then invited to feedback key points from their discussions to the room and given the opportunity to ask questions before the event was closed. This report summarises the key themes from the table discussions. This is the first in a series of events, the themes and priorities that emerge from the ongoing community conversation will be subject to a more formal consultation with Panel members (and residents and stakeholders more generally) later in the year.

Introduction cont.

Appendix

Notes were taken at each of the 14 discussion tables at the event. These have been written up and can be found in the appendix document, which is available on request separately.

Attendance

Seventy-two members of the Citizens' Panel attended the event. The demographic breakdown of attendees can be found in the section 'Who attended the event: demographic breakdown'. Due to the number of attendees, the values given are the number of attendees rather than percentage.

Acknowledgements

The Council would like to thank the Panel members who attended the event for their time and feedback.

Love and value most about Kensington and Chelsea

Panel members in attendance were asked what they love and value most in Kensington and Chelsea and/or their local area. Key themes and participants' thoughts are highlighted below.

- **Diversity** – This was a key theme mentioned by participants across all tables who felt the diversity of the borough should be celebrated and there was appreciation that they were able to live in harmony alongside their neighbours.
- **Community spirit** – It was also felt that there was a lot of community spirit within the borough with people willing to come together to help each other. There was appreciation of arts festivals and other similar free events that encourage community cohesion. It was felt the Council could have a role in harnessing this and encouraging volunteering.
- **Voluntary and community sector** – It was felt there is a strong voluntary and community sector in the borough, offering a wide range of services and courses. It was felt volunteering in some areas was well developed and appreciation of residents associations and religious venues in the borough was expressed.
- **Feelings of safety** – In general, participants felt that Kensington and Chelsea was safer than other boroughs.
- **Parks and open spaces** – There was a lot of positive feedback about the parks and open spaces within the borough, which many felt were well maintained and had particularly shown their value during Covid. Holland Park and Little Wormwood Scrubs were particularly mentioned as were the events and activities on offer in the borough's parks. It was also felt that trees in the borough were well kept and improved the appearance of the streets.

Love and value most about Kensington and Chelsea cont.

- **Waste collections** – The twice weekly refuse collections were popular with participants as were the friendly refuse staff. It was acknowledged that the borough had cleaner streets when compared to other boroughs.
- **The ‘feel’ of high streets and al fresco dining and café culture** – Participants felt that the Council had made efforts to make high streets look more aesthetically pleasing with planting and benches. It was felt al fresco dining and café culture had added a ‘vibrancy’ to local high streets. There was also an appreciation of independent businesses and local shops.
- **Parking and transport** – It was felt that parking in the borough is easier as it is not zone focussed and there is good access to both resident and disabled parking. It was also recognised that there were good public transport links and the borough is easy to get around.
- **Notting Hill Carnival** – There was a strong feeling that Carnival should remain in the borough due to it’s history and as it’s such a focal point, especially for young people. There was a sense that participants had seen an improvement in the management of Carnival by the Council.
- **Local amenities** – It was recognised that there are a lot of things to see and do in the borough and it was felt there were good local amenities including: leisure centres, libraries, Chelsea and Westminster hospital, shops and markets – including farmers’ markets.

Love and value most about Kensington and Chelsea cont'

- **History and culture of the borough** – Participants loved the history and culture of the borough including the museums, historic buildings and the architecture of the houses. It was recognised that Kensington and Chelsea is an international destination and that the character of the borough should be protected.
- **Customer service** – Some participants felt that the Council picks up quickly when residents call and acts quickly on requests. Comments were also made about frontline staff being knowledgeable and friendly.

Biggest issues and challenges

Panel members in attendance were asked what they thought the biggest issues and challenges faced by residents/the community in Kensington and Chelsea were. Key themes and participants' thoughts are highlighted below.

- **Housing** – There was general concern about the lack of affordable housing in the borough and rents being too high. Concerns were raised about the length of waiting lists and housing advice being hard to access from the Council. The wait for and standard of repairs was also raised along with the lack of follow up quality checks. There was also concern about the issue of empty properties in the borough, which participants felt impacted on the sense of community in their local areas.
- **Feelings of safety** – The lack of police visibility was a key theme across all tables with calls for additional police, community officers or wardens and the need for more than the one police station in the borough. Concerns were raised about anti-social behaviour including youths loitering, aggressive begging, and drug use on the streets. More CCTV and improved street lighting were also suggested to improve feelings of safety. It was felt the cost of living crisis could push more people towards crime.
- **Lack of independent businesses and empty shops on High Streets** – It was recognised that businesses were struggling, especially smaller independent ones, leading to empty shops.
- **Challenges to reach net zero** – Some felt the Council was not ambitious enough in its green ambitions, as the carbon neutral by 2030 doesn't cover whole borough. Concerns were raised about the lack of electric vehicle charging points, the need for more recycling, especially food waste, and the need for enforcement against those not recycling correctly.

Biggest issues and challenges cont.

- **Communication and transparency from the Council** – There was a general sense that there was a lack of information conveyed to residents. It was felt communication was sometimes too focussed on estates and the Council needed to utilise local businesses and Council spaces better to communicate with all residents. The need for transparency was also emphasised. It was also felt that there wasn't enough feedback when residents participate in consultations and engagements.
- **Customer service and ease of getting in touch with the Council** – Some participants felt that residents struggle to contact the Council with ease, although the phone is answered quickly it was hard to be put through the right people who can help.
- **Noise and pollution from traffic and construction** – Concerns were raised about noise and pollution caused by traffic and construction sites within the borough. Basement conversions were seen as particularly disruptive and a concern due to potential flooding.
- **Rubbish and litter on streets** – There was a general sense that this was getting worse in the borough with more rubbish left out on the pavements at the wrong times and increased dog fouling. Fly tipping was also raised as a concern.
- **Education** – Concerns were raised by some participants about a lack of school places. There were also general concerns about a lack of investment in local schools, class sizes being too big and a need for alternatives to university at post 16.

Biggest issues and challenges cont.

- **Bike and scooter safety** – Concerns were raised about the number of scooters and mopeds in the borough, which were viewed as noisy and at times dangerous. Concerns were raised about these riding on pavements as well as cycling on the pavements. There was also concern about the number of abandoned rental bikes causing obstructions.
- **Improved accessibility** – Some participants mentioned the need for improved accessibility including parking bays, public benches, and accessibility in parks, playgrounds and markets.
- **More support for young people** – There was a general sense that there wasn't enough support for young people, that they needed more to do and that there should be specific support for those with drug/alcohol problems.
- **Focus on particular wards rather than all** – There was a perceived disparity between the North and South of the borough in terms of amenities, parking enforcement and voluntary and community sector services and courses.
- **Notting Hill Carnival** – Although overall there was a lot of support for Carnival, some participants expressed concerns for personal safety and the need for more support from the Council.
- **Lack of enforcement** – A perceived lack of enforcement was a theme across many of the issues raised including against cycling on the pavement, dog fouling, rubbish left at the wrong times, antisocial behaviour, recycling incorrectly etc. It was felt the Council needed to take more of a role in encouraging civic responsibility.

Supporting residents, businesses and partners

Panel members in attendance were asked how can the Council best support its residents, businesses and partners to enhance their lives over the coming 10 years. Key themes and participants' thoughts are highlighted below.

- **Support for independent businesses** – It was felt that independent businesses, shops and charities need more support from the Council including differential business rates and rents and/or the Council offering loans. Participants wanted to see diversity in the businesses in the borough to help maintain character in the high streets and better meet local needs.
- **Being carbon neutral should be a priority** – Participants suggested the Council should have a policy on renewable energy, including encouraging the switch to electric cars and having more charging points. Participants would also welcome advice on, and support to insulate their homes and make them more energy efficient. It was also felt by some that there were too many cars in the borough and the Council should look at policies to help reduce them.
- **Improved communication and promotion of events** – It was felt there needed to be improved communication with all residents and consistency in the advice and information given. There also needed to be more promotion around Council events.
- **Support for community events** - Participants felt that the Council could give more support to community events and it was suggested there should be more ward/place based events to bring people together and promote their area. It was also felt the Council could do more to establish and promote volunteering schemes.

Supporting residents, businesses and partners cont.

- **Improved customer service** – Some participants felt there were lengthy waiting times and that they were often passed between different departments. It was felt there needed to be a more robust system for reporting housing repairs and regular updates whenever a resident contacts the Council. It was also felt too many services were centralised at the Town Hall and there should be more service hubs for residents throughout the borough, perhaps in libraries.
- **Improving opportunities for young people** – Suggestions included making activities for children more affordable to families, more provision for older children, more funding for young people's activities including youth clubs and other extra curricular activities across the borough.
- **Improved support for vulnerable/elderly residents who live independently in community** – It was felt that it was particularly important to support and carry out welfare checks on vulnerable/elderly residents in the community due to the cost of living crisis.
- **Improving access to engagement (digital and otherwise)** - Participants felt that the Council should actively seek residents' views and ensure that there is open and transparent feedback on what happens as a result. There needs to be clarity on what is a priority, and why, and if something isn't then why not. Area based consultations/panels to address localised problems were suggested.
- **Community safety** – Participants wanted to see more of a visible community safety presence in their local areas whether it be police, community support officers or wardens. There should also be more enforcement against antisocial behaviour and cycling/scooters on the pavement.

Supporting residents, businesses and partners cont.

- **Availability of social housing** – Concerns were raised about the lack of affordable housing in the borough and it was noted that there are no schemes to retain those who grew up in the borough, meaning a sense of loss of community.
- **Flooding** – Some participants felt that there needed to be improved infrastructure and more work done with Thames Water to develop solutions to prevent flooding. There needs to be a warning system and messaging relating to flooding.
- **Education** – Participants wanted to see the Council support education for all: primary, secondary and adult education, which some felt should be subsidised.
- **Community ambassadors** - It was felt that the Council could work more in partnership with the community and the voluntary and community sector. It was suggested community ambassadors could be identified to help harness community contributions e.g. food vouchers to help in cost of living crisis.
- **Empty properties/shops** – There were suggestions that empty shops could be used as community spaces where people could meet/relax/spend time and learn something about the borough whilst they are there. There was also a suggestion of imposing a tax on empty homes as a revenue raising opportunity.

Being the best Council, in light of Grenfell

Panel members in attendance were asked what being the best Council, in light of Grenfell meant to them. Key themes and participants' thoughts are highlighted below.

- **Grenfell inquiry** - The Council must implement the recommendations of the inquiry and remain transparent. It needs to be open about what went wrong at Grenfell and needs to reflect on how Grenfell victims were treated and continue to be treated. There was also support for a Grenfell Memorial.
- **Council as a leader** - The Council needs to be a leader in creating a green borough and driving community cohesion. Participants would welcome more information/guidance about reaching net zero for listed buildings and properties in conversation areas, as well as how they can make their homes more energy efficient. They would also like a Council policy on renewable energy. It was also felt the Council should take a lead in promoting civic responsibility to residents. The Council should look to others to learn from their best practice.
- **Need to develop trust** – The Council needs to stop saying they will do one thing and then do another, this gives residents the feeling that the Council doesn't follow through on its promises. Transparency and honesty is key. The Council needs to listen, act on what it hears, and admit when things go wrong. Communication should be two way, it is important for residents to be listened to.
- **Customer Service** - There needs to be greater focus on customer service and responsiveness, ensuring that every time residents contact the Council, staff are helpful and act with honesty and integrity. Participants appreciate direct and honest responses to issues and concerns they raise with clear explanations of delays and decisions made

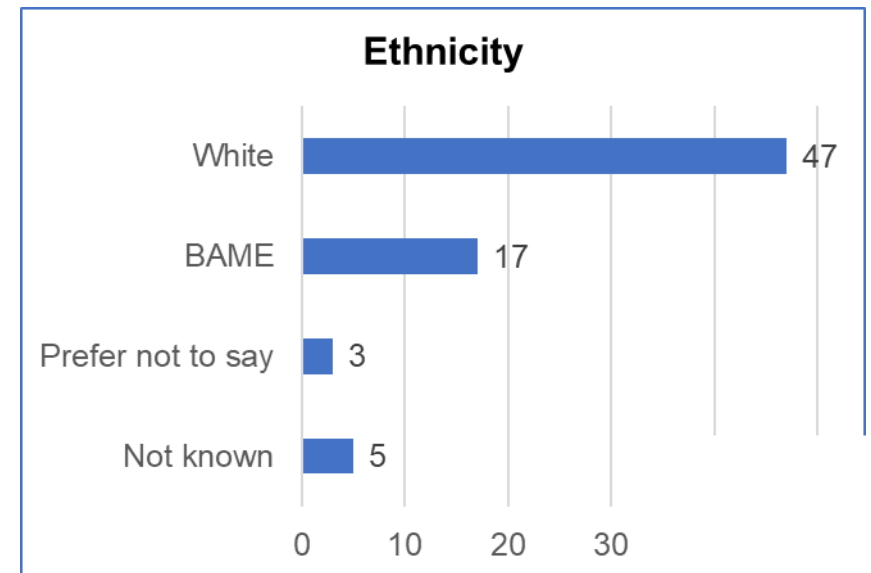
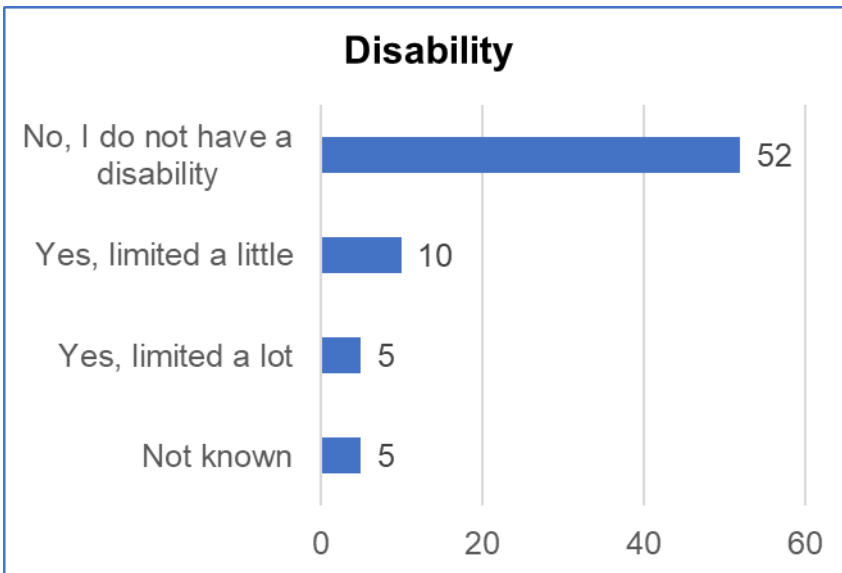
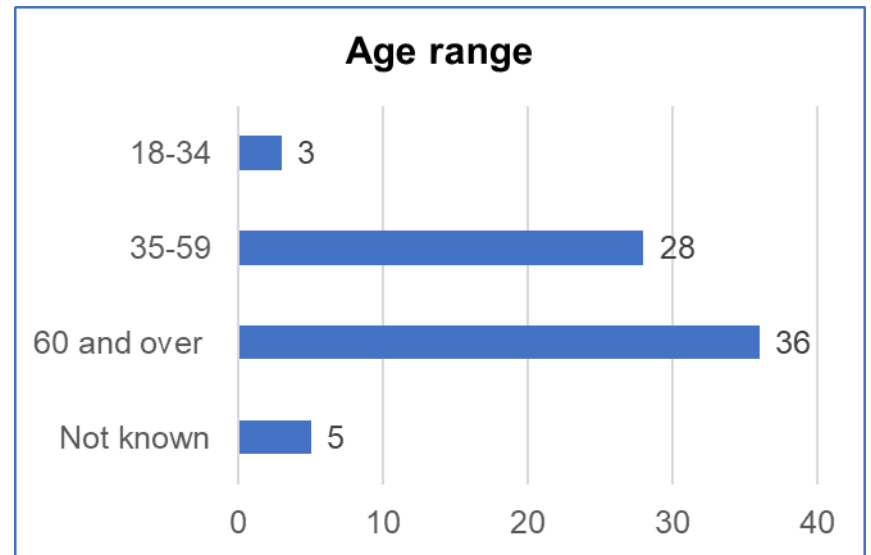
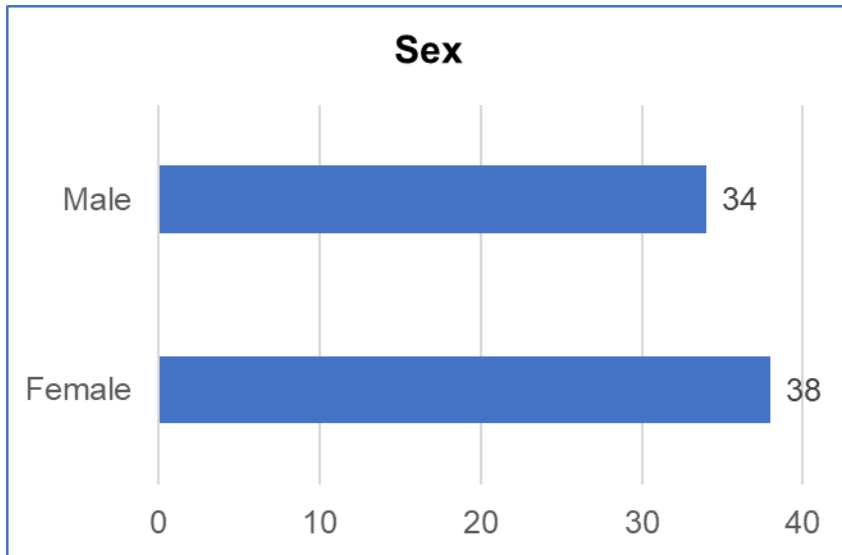
Being the best Council, in light of Grenfell cont.

- **Emergency response planning** - The Council needs to ensure it has proper emergency response planning and training in place. The Council should be proactive in preparing/managing for the next possible crisis (e.g. flooding) and be creating a strong partnership emergency response.
- **Building safety** - Buildings should be properly built, maintained and, if they fail, those responsible held accountable. It was generally felt more attention needed to be paid to building safety and that there should be more transparency about what has been done across the borough to improve building safety.
- **Planning** - The Council's Planning Team needs to place residents at the heart of decision making rather than vested interests.
- **Housing repairs** - There is a need for the Council to provide clarity on what housing tenants should expect regarding repairs and also to conduct quality checks where necessary. Participants gave examples of poor workmanship and having to have work repeated.
- **Community Centres** - The Council should aim to utilise the borough's community centres as a place dedicated to supporting refugees to integrate into the community.

Being the best Council, in light of Grenfell cont.

- **Housing** – The Council needs to prioritise social housing and improve responses to their tenants. It was suggested the Council should build partnerships with landlords throughout the borough and work closer with Housing Associations to meet the needs of social tenants.
- **Public participation** – The Council needs to encourage residents to be more involved and look for imaginative and innovate ways to feedback. Participants would appreciate more access to Councillors and decision makers.
- **Support for young people** – The Council needs to provide more support and facilities for young people to divert them from anti-social behaviour.
- **Social care** – It was recognised that social care should become a big focus for the Council.

Who attended the event: demographic breakdown



Who attended the event: demographic breakdown cont.

