



**CONNECT
HACKNEY**
ageing better



EVALUATION ANNUAL REPORT

(May 2020)

Reducing social isolation and loneliness amongst older people in Hackney

*Interim findings from the phase two
programme evaluation**

** Evaluation activities described in this report were all conducted prior to COVID-19
and the subsequent lockdown, imposed by the UK government on 23 March 2020.*





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Foreword

The Connect Hackney Programme has been a vital part of the voluntary and community sector in Hackney since its inception in 2015. With a focus on people aged 50 and over and working to combat social isolation and loneliness, the programme has reached 4521 people to date. This is an incredible feat especially as the challenges of social isolation and loneliness has such a significant impact on people's physical and mental health and wellbeing.

We have over 57,000 people aged 50 and over living in Hackney so a dedicated programme of activity that focuses on this important category of residents has been really valuable. Connect Hackney has worked not only to reduce and prevent isolation for older people through a range of different programmes, but has also worked hard to increase participation of older people in decision making forums and raising awareness of the important contributions that older people continue to make. Their programmes have targeted underrepresented groups such as those from a minority ethnic communities or LGBTQ+ backgrounds and increased engagement from older men, something that we know at a national level is a challenge to achieve. I have barely scratched the surface of these diverse projects myself, but when I have visited they never fail to be innovative and inspiring.

In Hackney, one of our key manifesto commitments is to develop a co-produced Ageing Well strategy, that would support older people to age well in the borough and Connect Hackney have played a substantial role in inspiring and informing the development of this strategy. This is not only in terms of being a key stakeholder but also taking a lead in recruiting and training residents to enable a peer research approach that has meant older people's voices have been at the heart and forefront of this work. Indeed Connect Hackney's work continues to inform the actions we want to take to ensure that older residents in Hackney feel empowered, informed, valued and supported, through age-friendly communities, services and specialist care when the need arises. We want Hackney to be a great place to live and grow old in and Connect Hackney's work has produced a brilliant footprint in which to continue. The current Covid-19 crisis has shown how important this work is now and will be in the future, as we think about eventual recovery and building back better services and partnerships in the future.

This report makes important reading for all who are working with older people and sheds light on the needs of older people in Hackney in particular- taking a very localised view. This report will be used to further develop the actions around our Ageing Well Strategy and I urge all partners to also consider how to incorporate the findings from this report into your own practice - a lot of work has gone into this over the last 5 years and we want to be able to continue this legacy moving forward.

Mayor Philip Glanville





Key messages

'Connect Hackney' is addressing social isolation and loneliness for people aged 50 and over. Fifty projects delivered by local community and voluntary sector organisations have been commissioned and these have reached 4251 residents to date. Connect Hackney is part of the 'Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better' programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund from 2015 for six years. The local evaluation is seeking to find out how the programme is making a difference to older residents in Hackney. These key messages were generated from findings before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown. They are, however, even more relevant during this time and for life as the lockdown eases.

- Taking a programme approach is important as this can systematically harness the strengths of the community and voluntary sector in working with diverse and underserved groups. These include men, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and older people at greatest risk of loneliness such as carers and those with long term health conditions or disabilities.
- Working in partnership with older people is fundamental to delivering activities which can meet their needs and aspirations. Co-production in the commissioning, design, delivery, and monitoring of services is still a very new way of working. Challenges can be overcome through co-production training for professionals to avoid tokenism and dedicated resources for administration and pastoral care.
- Dedicated investment in targeted outreach and skills in partnership working, branding and marketing is needed to achieve good

reach. Strong networks of referral across the voluntary, public and private sectors need to be developed and supported within the local system. Proactive creation of 'social glue' – warm and friendly staff and peers, refreshments, unstructured time for socialising alongside structured activities, an open door policy – is key for engagement and retention in activities.

- The provision of inclusive and engaging community activities is important but not sufficient. Older people who are already socially isolated and lonely are likely to need one to one support before they can take part in community activities. One to one coaching provided by the Community Connector programme was a powerful catalyst for change amongst participant interviewees who reported improved wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence.
- It is necessary to achieve a balance between digital and non-digital activities and support. Older people can develop new skills in using tablets and smartphones, but the use of new skills is dependent on whether participants own a device, their personal preferences and abilities for engaging with technology, and availability of Wi-Fi at home or data packages. The time required to train or upskill older people in the use of technology should not be underestimated.
- The experience and appetite for volunteering amongst participants in the Connect Hackney programme should be mobilised in a systematic way to support the co-production aspirations of local policy initiatives

Summary

Background and purpose

The 'Connect Hackney' programme is addressing social isolation and loneliness for people aged 50 and over. A total of 50 projects¹ have been commissioned in two phases (phase 1 and 2) to provide a range of community-based projects. To date these projects have reached 4521 residents. Connect Hackney is part of the 'Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better' programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund² in 14 areas in England.

The local evaluation is focused on phase 2 (2018-21) of the programme and is seeking to find out how the programme is making a difference to older residents in Hackney through documenting the experiences of participants, project staff, and wider stakeholders. The findings are from evaluation activities conducted before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the first year of the evaluation with a view to helping local stakeholders to embed learning in local policies and initiatives within and across health and social care, housing, public and community spaces and transport.

Who is the programme reaching?

The programme has reached diverse groups of older people, including those groups that are traditionally underserved such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups and participants identifying as LGBT+. Men are known to be a group that social programmes often find harder to engage. Projects targeting men were introduced in Phase 2 and numbers have increased from just over one quarter of all participants to over a third of participants.

The programme is also reaching socially isolated and lonely older people and those at risk including those aged 80 and over, carers, those living alone and those who have a longstanding illness or disability.

What strategies work to reach older people?

Successful strategies for promoting projects were those combining print and other media with targeted outreach to other organisations and older people themselves⁴.

“Efforts are needed to go to the places where men hang out. Pubs and barber shops and things like that.”

Digital Inclusion project provider

Expertise in marketing, branding and outreach is key. Outreach skills include relationship building for partnership working.

What strategies work to engage and retain older people in community projects?

Partnership working with community transport facilities helped participants unable to travel independently to get to projects.



67% BAME group // 66% longstanding illness or disability //

48% already socially isolated and lonely // 38% men // 34% Live alone // 21% aged 80 and over // 7% LGBT+ // 6% carer ³

1 A total of 26 projects were commissioned in Phase 1 (2015-2018) and 24 projects in Phase 2 (2018-2021).

2 <https://www.nlcommunityfund.org.uk>

3 These survey findings are based on 297 participants in phase 2 of the programme. Figures are subject to change and reflect data up to the beginning of December 2019. For full details of the findings

see 'Connect Hackney Phase Two Baseline Profile Report' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

4 For full details see the 'Reach, engagement and retention of participants in phase two Connect Hackney projects: interim findings from project providers and participants' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

Projects need to create a warm environment which is supportive and friendly. Key components include: providing refreshments; 'social butterfly' participants; unstructured as well as structured time for socialising, and working with people's interests and need.

“*The community co-ordinator was very friendly, very kind, very approachable. I felt perfectly comfortable with her.*”

Community Connector participant

Project staff and volunteers need to be kind, approachable and non-judgemental. Key skills are group facilitation and the ability to listen.

A flexible 'open door' policy helped older people to keep coming back to projects. Preventing drop-out could be achieved through project staff keeping in touch and making it clear that people were welcome back at any point.

How can already socially isolated and lonely older people be supported to make new social connections and friendships?

The Community Connector project aimed to (re) connect older people to community activities through one to one coaching, referral and support to attend community projects. Community co-ordinators offered sessions in participants homes or community venues.

“*Talking to someone who shows an interest and cares. That's a big deal you know. It makes you feel human again. Makes you feel you've got something to offer, you're not over the hill.*”

Community Connector project participant

One to one coaching was a powerful catalyst for change amongst participant interviewees who reported improved wellbeing; self-esteem and confidence⁵. Some participants reported new friendships or social connections from

taking part in community activities, others were simply enjoying the feeling of being noticed and remembered by others.

Step by step approaches worked best for those socially isolated and lonely for a number of years; focusing on the activity rather than the group worked better for those who did not like 'groups' and; linking with community transport projects helped with mobility issues.

Can developing tablets or smartphone skills help older people to create and maintain social connections?

Digital inclusion projects⁶ provided group based sessions to develop smartphone and tablet skills. The opportunity to learn digital skills was attractive to older people, especially those aged 70 and over. For those with no or limited prior knowledge and skills, sessions supported participants inclusion in conversations about digital life. Those with higher levels of prior skills were able to develop these further and were keen to attend follow-up courses.

“*You are isolated, you don't see people. Going to that place is really good. I make some friends.*”

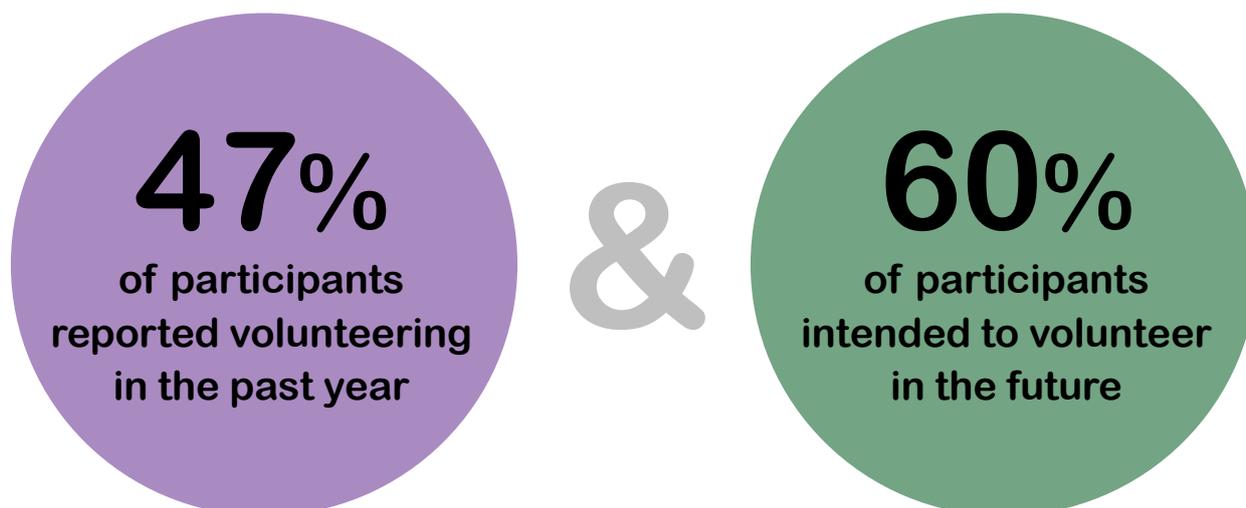
Digital Inclusion project participant

Some participants developed social connections during group sessions. All participants had non-digital ways of staying in touch with family and friends; technology provided a new tool for communication, but it did not replace usual ways of communicating.

There was limited evidence on the impact of any new digital skills developed supporting participants to create and maintain social connections beyond the project. The use of new skills was dependent on whether participants owned a device, their personal preferences in engaging with technology, and whether they had Wi-Fi at home or data packages.

5 Please note these are interim findings and are subject to changes as more data become available. For full details see 'An in-depth study of the Community Connectors project for older people in Hackney living with or at risk of social isolation and loneliness' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

6 As previous footnote, these are interim findings and are subject to changes as more data become available. For full details of findings so far see 'An in-depth study of Digital Inclusion projects for older people in Hackney living with or at risk of social isolation and loneliness' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>



How can commissioners and providers work in partnership with older people to shape local policy and services?

There is considerable appetite for volunteering amongst Connect Hackney participants. This can be mobilised in support of the co-production aspirations of local policy initiatives.

The Connect Hackney Older People's Committee is a key mechanism for co-production on the programme. The Committee have helped to commission projects that are more likely to meet the needs of older people aged over 50 and developed more inclusive working practices within the Connect Hackney team.

Co-production is a very new way of working. Challenges were overcome through co-production training for the Connect Hackney team to avoid tokenism and dedicated resources for administration and pastoral care. Developing shared understandings and expectations around co-production should be a focus of practice going forward.

Conclusion

The findings of the evaluation thus far provide evidence on: how to reach, engage and retain diverse and underserved groups of older people in projects to reduce social isolation and loneliness; the perceived impact of projects on older people; and the processes needed to facilitate good quality co-production. The focus of the second year of the evaluation will be on: assessing the extent of changes in quantitative measures of social isolation and loneliness, deepening understanding of the characteristics of effective projects, and examining the wider impact of the programme on the local system. The second year will also examine the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown on projects and participants. Taken together, the findings from the first and second year will contribute to promoting lockdown recovery and resilience amongst communities aged over 50 in Hackney and the organisations that support them.



1. Introduction

'Connect Hackney' is part of the 'Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better' programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk>) in 14 areas in England. The programme aims to develop creative ways for people aged 50 and over to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation and loneliness are linked to poor health and the English Government has launched a loneliness strategy to build the evidence base, embed loneliness as a consideration across government policy, and support a national conversation on loneliness⁷.

The intended outcomes of the Connect Hackney programme reflect those of the national programme (Box 1.1).

Connect Hackney was commissioned in two phases: 26 projects in Phase 1 (2015-2018) and 24 projects in Phase 2 (2018-2021). To date the programme has reached 4521 residents. Evaluation and learning are now focused on the 24 projects commissioned in phase two of the programme⁸. These projects were commissioned within seven themes (Box 1.2).

Hackney has significant levels of deprivation: it is ranked 22nd in England on the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation and the borough has the second highest rate of poverty among the elderly⁹. As one of the five 2012 Olympic boroughs, Hackney has experienced significant levels of development and gentrification in recent years which can bring opportunities, but also

Box 1.1: Connect Hackney programme outcomes

OUTCOME 1: Increased numbers of older people who are socially isolated engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities which result in new friendships, sustained networks, improved resourcefulness, more confidence and thus, ultimately, a better quality of life.

OUTCOME 2: Increased numbers of older people who are at risk of social isolation engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities which result in new friendships, sustained networks, improved resourcefulness, more confidence and thus, ultimately, a better quality of life.

OUTCOME 3: Embed an asset model towards ageing and older people, where the latter are more actively engaged in the community and valued for the contributions they make.

OUTCOME 4: Increased direct involvement of older people and people as they age in shaping policy and holding key stakeholders to account, leading to stronger partnerships.

7 Government's Loneliness Strategy (2018) A connected society A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

8 For evaluation and learning from Phase 1 see <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

9 Source: ONS, English Indices of Deprivation, 2019

challenges as a result of increasing inequality. Hackney is the 6th most ethnically diverse borough in London¹⁰. The programme and its delivery partners have been required to tailor their approach to this context.

The evaluation is seeking to find out how the programme is making a difference to older residents in Hackney. The University of East London is collecting feedback and documenting experiences from a range of people, including: participants, project staff, and wider stakeholders. Research findings are based on interviews and a participant survey. The local evaluation is also contributing to a national evaluation of the Ageing Better programme.

This report draws on the evaluation findings to date from:

- A first round of interviews with delivery staff from 15 projects In-depth studies of the Community Connectors and Digital Inclusion projects¹¹
- Survey findings from 297 participants to assess levels of: social isolation and loneliness, well-being, involvement in co-production and volunteering activities¹²
- A review of the Connect Hackney Older People's Committee which forms part of the governance structure for the programme and is a key vehicle for co-production.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the evaluation to date in particular with a view to helping local stakeholders to embed the learning from the programme in relevant local policies and initiatives within and across health and social care, housing, public and community spaces and transport. For example, there is key learning for those developing the borough wide Ageing Well Strategy and those planning and implementing the borough's local Integrated Health and Care System and Primary Care Networks which have a strong emphasis on prevention. Working at a neighbourhood level, the ambition of the prevention work stream of this new system is to support:

¹⁰ United Kingdom Census, 2011

¹¹ Interviews have been conducted with projects within all themes detailed in Box 1.2 except for projects focused on complex needs and BAME groups. Projects within these themes started in July and August 2019 and will be included in evaluation activities in year 2.

¹² See 'Connect Hackney Phase Two Baseline Profile Report' for full details of the participant survey. <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

Box 1.2: Project themes in Connect Hackney phase two

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

Groups: social activities and practical support for specific groups (e.g. Latin American women, Somali elders).

Complex Needs: social activities for older people with extra support needs (mental health issues; difficulties leaving home carers)

Digital inclusion: group-based learning to develop skills in using mobile phones, tablets and the internet.

Community activities: intergenerational social activities including theatre making skills, singing, and food sharing events.

Community connectors: one to one coaching and group activities for already socially isolated and lonely older people.

Learning disabilities: activities to improve skills and confidence and provide opportunities to socialise.

Men: social activities and support for men including befriending and peer-led activities.

- residents to become more aware of things that affect their wellbeing and empower them to take action to manage their own health and the health of their families and;
- staff to understand the wider influences on people's health, including social isolation and loneliness, and develop their competencies to support patients and the public to identify and take action to address these wider influences.

The neighbourhood pilots programme within the prevention workstream has much in common with the aims of the Connect Hackney programme to connect older people to their communities so they can benefit from the activities and support on offer. For example, there is work underway to join up the various social prescribing schemes in the borough under an overall community navigation model to support people to connect to community activities. The findings are also relevant when planning and designing care for older people with long term health conditions and helping to re-integrate older people into the community after acute health episodes such as falls or strokes.

2. Who is the programme reaching?

The Connect Hackney programme has reached diverse groups of older people (figures 4.1 to 4.4), including those groups that are traditionally underserved such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups (Figure 4.3) and participants identifying as LGBT+ (figure 4.4)¹³. Over a third of participants were men which is encouraging given that men are known to be a group that social programmes often find harder to engage

(Figure 4.2) With the introduction of specific projects targeting men in phase 2 (2018-21) of the programme, the proportion of men reached has increased compared to phase 1 (2015-18) of the programme in which only 28 per cent of participants were men.

The programme is also reaching groups which are known to be more at risk of loneliness and social isolation including those aged 80 and over (Figure 4.1), carers, those living alone and those who have a longstanding illness or disability (Figure 4.5) as well as older people who are already socially isolated and lonely (Figures 4.6).

¹³ The survey findings are based on 297 participants in phase 2 of the programme. Figures are subject to change and reflect data up to the beginning of December 2019. For full details of the findings see 'Connect Hackney Phase Two Baseline Profile Report' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

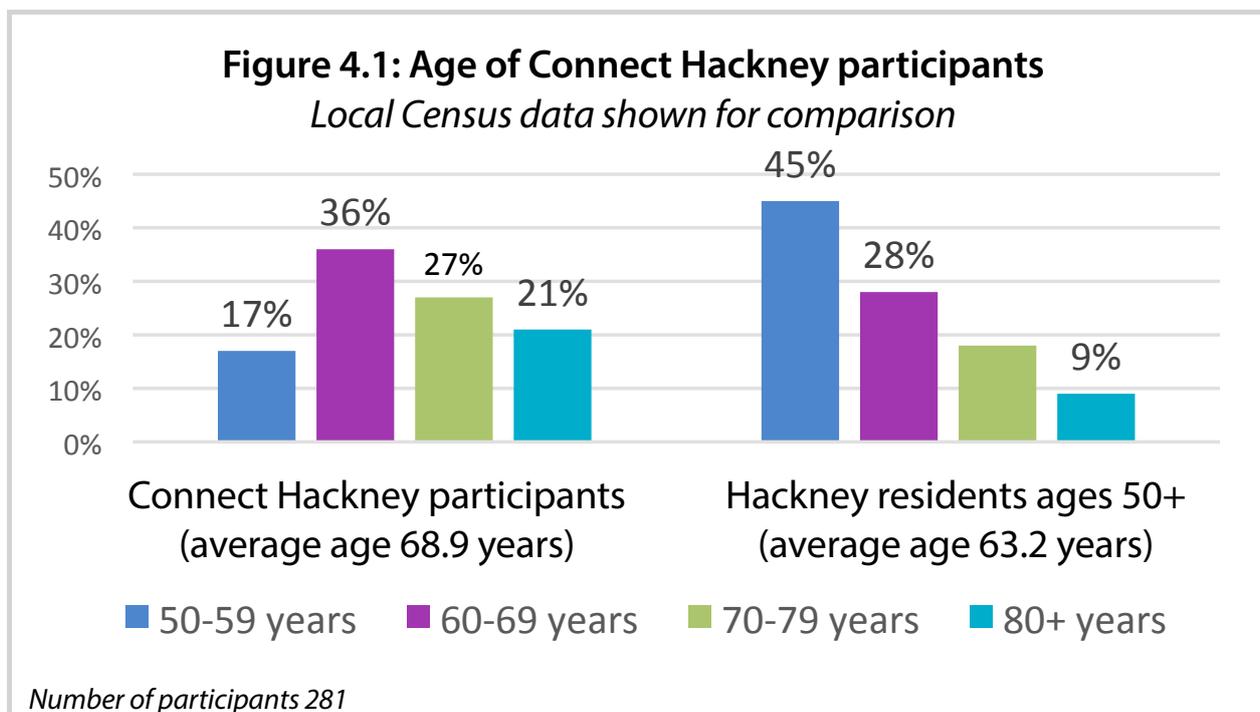
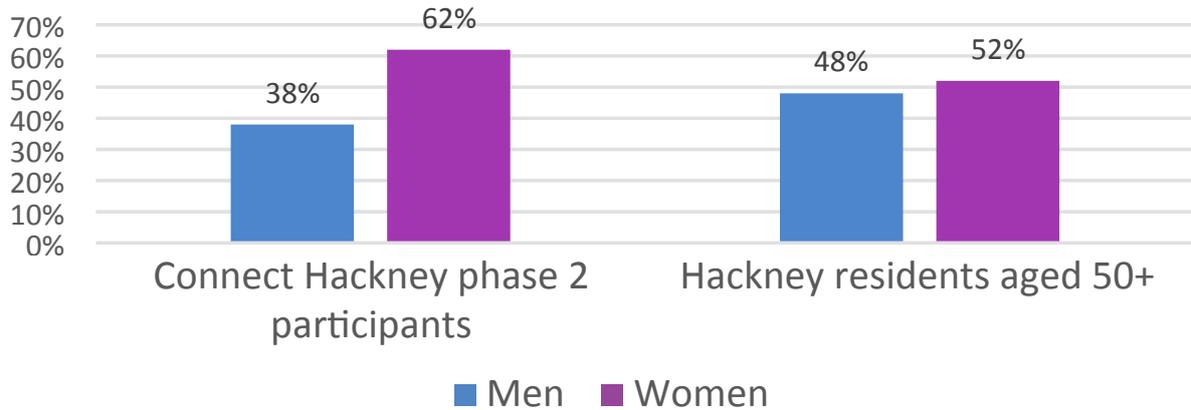
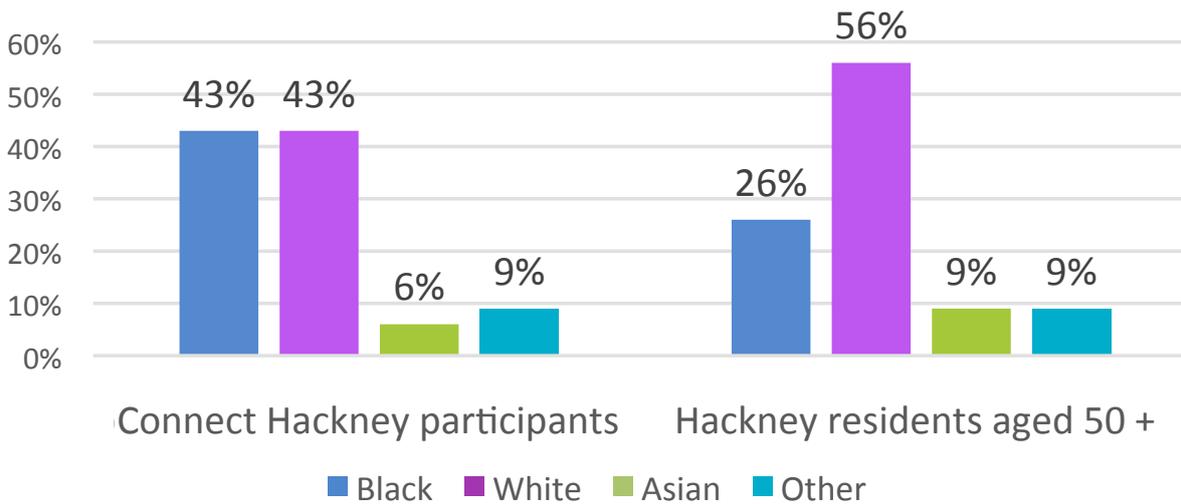


Figure 4.2: Gender of Connect Hackney participants
Local Census data shown for comparison



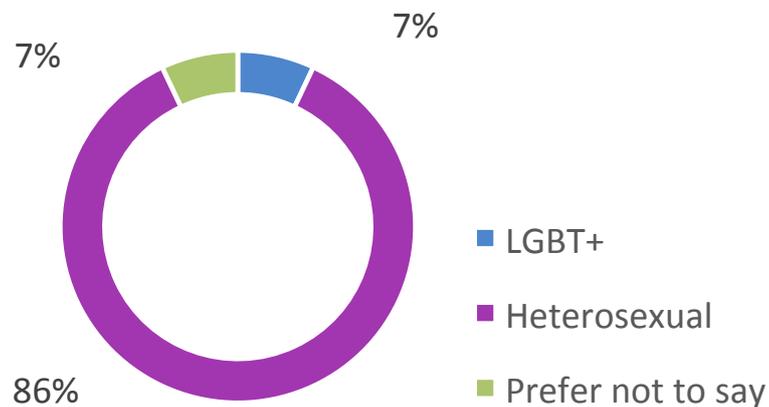
Number of participants 291

Figure 4.3: Ethnicity of Connect Hackney participants
Local Census data shown for comparison



Number of participants 286

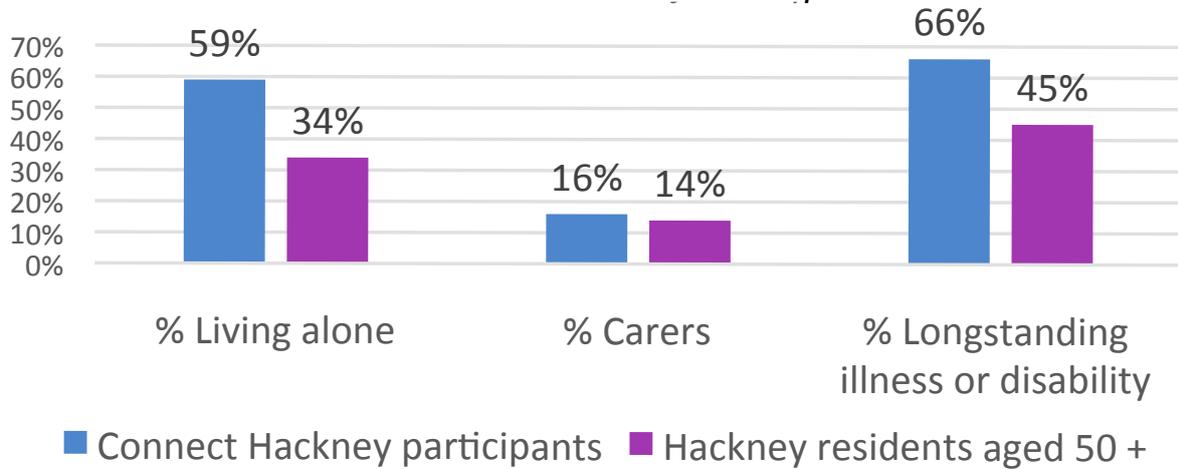
Figure 4.4: Sexuality of Connect Hackney participants



Number of participants 224

Figure 4.5: Living arrangements, carer status and longstanding illness or disability

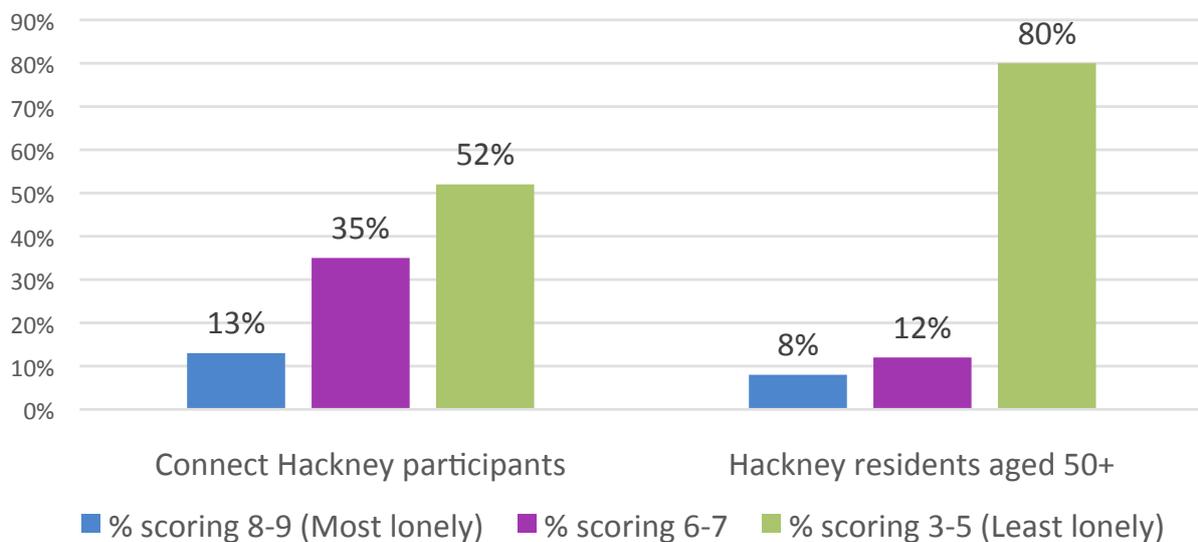
Local Census data shown for comparison



Number of participants 273

Figure 4.6: Levels of loneliness* at programme entry

With local levels for comparison



Number of participants 249

* Loneliness measured on the UCLA scale scored on 3 items: 1. How often do you feel left out? 2. How often do you feel isolated from others? 3. How often do you feel in tune with the people around you?

3. Taking part in community activities, connecting with others and making new friends

3.1 Strategies for reaching older people

Before older people can take part in community activities, they need to become aware of them. Several strategies and enablers to reach older people have been identified as successful, especially for reaching the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, by the evaluation so far¹⁴ (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1: Strategies and enablers for reaching potential participants

- Multi-modal strategies combining print and media as well as targeted direct and indirect outreach seen as optimum.
- Projects with well-developed organisational registers and established referral links with other projects and services
- Expertise in outreach and in marketing to create a strong brand
- Geographical location – being or getting close to target group, including home visits when appropriate

Targeted personal outreach to establish referral partners and reach specific groups of older people was found to be one of the most successful ways to increase numbers of older people taking part in projects.

Personal outreach meant that members of the project team could engage directly with older people or staff at referral organisations (e.g. GP practices or other Connect Hackney projects) to help them understand who could be referred to the project and what the benefits might be.

“Where we’ve met other providers of the programme whose focus is older adults, but not necessarily older adults with learning disabilities but through that process you are able to get referrals” (Learning Disabilities project provider)

¹⁴ For full details of these findings please see the ‘Reach, engagement and retention of participants in phase two Connect Hackney projects: interim findings from project providers and participants’ <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

“We recently did a short presentation at one of the GP practices not far from here. And they were all very keen to engage their patients with the projects that we have on offer when they just have that limited interaction with a patient” (Community Connector project provider)

Despite the overall successes of the programme in reaching diverse groups of older people, there is, however, variability across projects. **Promotional efforts, as well as the location in which projects are held, are likely to have an impact on the reach of projects and the diversity of participants attending projects.** Some groups of participants were less well represented in some projects – for example, in the digital inclusion projects men, older residents from Asian and Chinese communities, and older people who are already socially isolated and lonely or at higher risk were less well represented – and these are likely to need targeted outreach to engage them.

“I think men hang out in different places. More concerted efforts [are needed] to go to the places where men hang out, just specifically to try to get more men involved. Pubs and barber shops and things like that” (Digital Inclusion project provider)

3.2 Engaging and retaining older people in community activities

Once older people are aware of the community activities on offer in the programme the next set of challenges relate to how to engage them in the activities and support them to keep coming back on a more sustained basis (Box 3.2).

The importance of creating a supportive and friendly environment was essential to engaging older people in projects. Kind and patient facilitators, use of humour, tea and coffee, a warm welcome, including unstructured as well as structured time for participants to interact and get to know each other, and working with people’s interests and levels of need were all key components.

“Providing a nice warm space, I think that’s such a crucial part of this whole course, a nice space they can come to, and have nice friendly people, other people welcoming them, have a cup of

Box 3.2: Strategies and enablers to support engagement and retention of older participants

- Linking with community transport facilities for those not able to travel independently
- A warm and welcoming environment, including project staff and 'social butterfly' participants
- A focus on activities which are meaningful to the target group or coming together around a common theme identity/shared values
- Providing a mix of opportunities for social interaction as well as structured sessions for practical skill development/advice sessions
- Ability to manage group dynamics
- Managing expectations e.g. sharing project activities in advance
- Regular contact in between sessions (phone/text, newsletter, social media groups)
- Following up with non-attenders with an 'open door' policy
- For men in particular (but not exclusively) projects can engage and retain when they relate to personal interests/ hobbies or have a focus on learning new skills
- Development of social connections and friendships amongst participants

tea, have a little chat, and have a little look at something, and maybe take something away from it, without it being that kind of pressure of learning." (Digital inclusion project provider)

The personal qualities (e.g. approachable, non-judgemental) and skills (e.g. listening, empathy, group facilitation) of project staff were crucial for engaging and retaining participants in both group-based projects and those with a substantial one to one component such as the Community Connector project.

"You've got to find a way to make people feel that you're on their side and you want to listen to them" (Community Activities project provider)

"Well I didn't know what to expect, because I didn't know this person. But she was very friendly,

very kind, very approachable. I felt perfectly comfortable with her." (Community Connector participant)

Retention could be challenging for participants with multiple or complex problems but these could be overcome using a flexible 'open door' policy. For example, poor health or benefit issues could stop participants coming back to projects but they were more likely to re-engage if project staff kept in touch and made it clear they could re-join at any time.

"We are trying to be as flexible as possible, because I think the worst thing you can do as a provider is be very rigid [...] you are dealing with very vulnerable people who have been socially excluded" (Learning Disabilities project provider)

3.3 Supporting older people into community activities to make new social connections and friendships

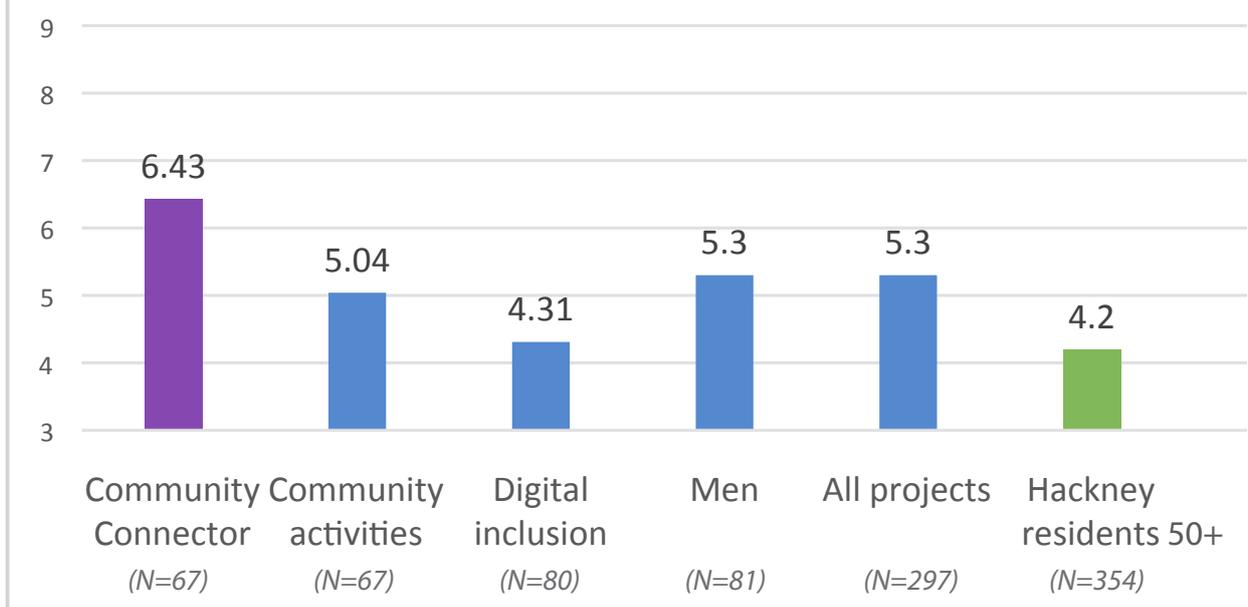
As highlighted in section 2, the Connect Hackney programme is reaching older people who are already socially isolated and lonely. This is particularly apparent for participants in the Community Connector project who have higher average levels of loneliness compared to other projects at project entry (Figure 3.1).

The in-depth study of the Community Connector project¹⁵ found that **one to one sessions between the community coordinator and participants were a powerful way to support participants to (re)connect with their communities and the activities and support within them.** Positive impacts of these sessions as perceived by participant interviewees were improved wellbeing (e.g. feeling more optimistic); self-esteem and confidence. One participant summed up the impact of the sessions as leading to 'feeling human again'.

"Talking to someone who shows an interest and cares. That's a big deal you know. It makes you feel human again. Makes you feel you've got something to offer, you're not over the hill" (Community Connector project participant)

¹⁵ Please note these are interim findings and are subject to changes as more data become available. For full details of findings so far see 'An in-depth study of the Community Connectors project for older people in Hackney living with or at risk of social isolation and loneliness' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

Figure 3.1: Mean loneliness score* at project entry by project theme. With local levels for comparison**



* Measured by the UCLA loneliness scale scored from 3 (least lonely) to 9 (most lonely)

** Local levels assessed by Ageing Better Wave 1 population survey in Hackney

The practical ways in which participants were supported into community activities were most effective when they were tailored according to participants needs, circumstances and aspirations. For example, provider interviewees highlighted step by step approaches worked best with those that had been socially isolated and lonely for a number of years; focusing on the activity rather than the group worked better for those who did not like 'groups' and; linking with community transport projects could help those with physical disabilities.

No longer feeling alone through connecting, interacting and sharing experiences with others was a key outcome reported by participant interviewees from the Community Connector project who had gone on to participate in community activities. Some participant interviewees reported that new friendships or networks had been developed, others were simply enjoying the feeling of being noticed and remembered as a result of regular attendance at community activities.

"Sometimes when we feel down we feel we are the only person in the world and the group help us to see that everyone is struggling with their own problems. It has encouraged me to feel a bit more optimistic with my life" (Community Connector project participant)

3.4 The role of the digital world in creating and maintaining social connections

The in-depth study of the digital inclusion projects¹⁶, which provided group based sessions for older people to develop skills in using smartphones and tablets, found that **the primary way the projects appeared to improve social connectedness was the experience of attending the group itself.**

"You are isolated, you don't see people. Going to that place is really good. I make some friends" (Digital Inclusion project participant)

"We met at the gym [after the group]. I just say 'how are you doing?', 'How are you keeping?'" (Digital Inclusion project participant)

Evidence was much more limited in terms of technology helping participants to stay in contact with friends and family, making new friends or finding new social activities to participate in. All participants had non-digital ways of staying in touch with family and friends; the key mode for doing this was by telephone, through face-to-face visits, or through attendance at weekly community groups, for example, church. Technology provided another way of staying in touch with

¹⁶ As previous footnote, these are interim findings and are subject to changes as more data become available. For full details of findings so far see 'An in-depth study of Digital Inclusion projects for older people in Hackney living with or at risk of social isolation and loneliness' <https://www.connecthackney.org.uk>

people – a new tool for communication – but it did not replace any of the ways that they usually communicated. The opportunity to learn digital skills was, however, a powerful hook for older people to join group sessions.

The use of technology outside of the digital inclusion project sessions was influenced by contextual factors such as individuals' ability to use the device, their personal preferences in engaging with technology, whether they owned a device, or had Wi-Fi outside of the group. Although the projects did not necessarily assume that participants would own devices or have Wi-Fi at home, it was clear from the participant interviews that these were crucial factors in determining whether or not older people are able to continue using

and developing their digital skills outside of the project sessions.

An eight-week digital skills course was enough to provide some foundational learning only; a six-week course was akin to an extensive taster course in digital technology. For some older people with no or limited digital knowledge and skills this foundation was enough for them to be included in conversations about digital life. Participants starting with higher levels of knowledge and skills were able to develop their skills further through the project and were keen to attend follow-up courses. This highlights the importance of recognising the different needs of participants and of signposting to further opportunities for learning.

4. Harnessing the strengths of older people and working with them to shape local policy and services.

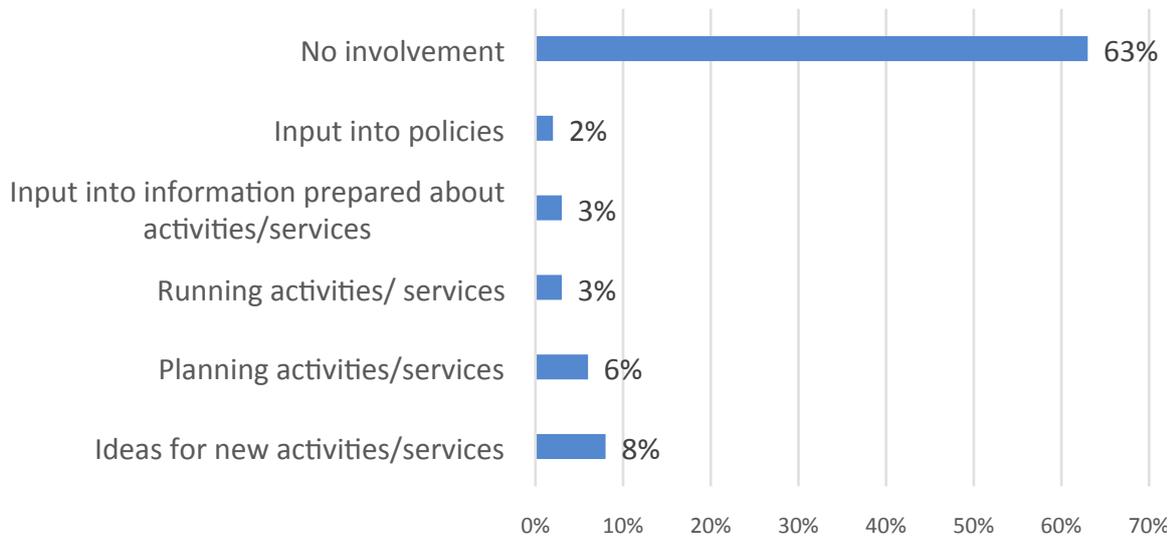


The Connect Hackney programme has a strong commitment to co-production defined as working in collaboration with people aged 50 and over to influence and steer the development of Connect Hackney and its funded projects.

This includes: identifying the priorities for addressing social isolation; planning how and where to address these priorities; helping to manage or deliver new or better services where appropriate; and supporting the learning, evaluation and improvement of any approaches.

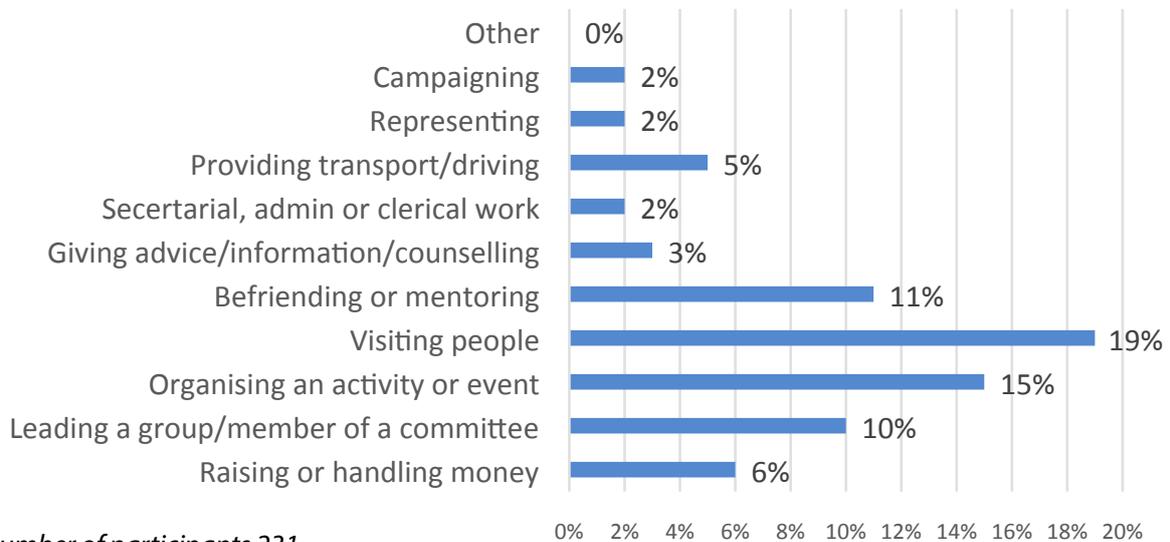
Co-production is also central to achieving programme outcomes 3 and 4 whereby older people become more actively engaged and valued in their communities and are able play a role in influencing policy and practice in the borough. This section of the report reviews what the evaluation has found so far in relation to co-production. The findings will be of particular relevance to the co-production work being undertaken as part of local initiatives such as Hackney's Ageing Well Strategy and the new local Integrated Care System.

Figure 4.1: Connect Hackney participants involvement in co-production activities at programme entry



Number of participants 254

Figure 4.2: Type of volunteering activity amongst Connect Hackney participants at project entry



Number of participants 231

4.1 Older people's experiences of co-production including volunteering at programme entry

The participant survey found that close to two thirds of Connect Hackney participants (63 per cent) have not been involved in any co-production activities¹⁷ (Figure 4.1) and three-quarters (76 per cent) felt that they have no influence over local decision-making. The co-production and ability

¹⁷ Participants are asked to tick whether they have been involved in a range of co-production activities.

to influence decisions measures will be used to gauge the extent to which the Connect Hackney programme is achieving its goal to increase older peoples' involvement in shaping policy. The proportion of those involved in co-production and those who feel able to influence decisions are expected to increase at follow-up.

There appears to be a real appetite for volunteering amongst Connect Hackney participants and this could be mobilised in support of the co-production aspirations of local policy initiatives in collaboration with the community and voluntary sector. Of those taking part in the participant survey, compared to older residents in Hackney in general, Connect Hackney participants were more likely to report volunteering activity in the last year (47 per cent compared to 10 per cent). A higher proportion of participants said they intended to volunteer in the

future (62 per cent). The most common types of volunteering participants were involved in were visiting people or organising an activity or event (Figure 4.2).

4.2 Learning from a co-production model in practice: The Connect Hackney Older People's Committee

The Older People's Committee (OPC) forms part of Connect Hackney's governance structure. It was established by Connect Hackney in January 2018 following a review of the programme's governance structure, which saw the programme's Steering Group replaced by a new Strategic Partnership Board and the Older People's Committee with an advisory role (Box 4.1).

The review of the OPC aimed to: examine its successes and challenges, assess the extent to which it has influenced decision-making and

Box 4.1: Structure and function of the Connect Hackney Older People's Committee

The Connect Hackney Older People's Committee (OPC) is the main forum through which older people's views are able to shape the overall Connect Hackney programme. The current committee membership is 21 older residents recruited from local community projects. Members serve a term of two years although this can be extended, subject to the findings of a yearly review.

The committee's objectives are to:

- help shape and identify the programme's priorities based on the needs of older people in Hackney and in line with the programme's aims
- contribute to the design, delivery and evaluation of pieces of work that help deliver the programme's aims of reducing or preventing social isolation
- work with the Connect Hackney programme team to deliver specific aspects of the programme
- share learning from the programme and its impact with a wider audience
- represent Connect Hackney at meetings and/or events, both within Hackney and as part of the wider Ageing Better programme
- take part in programme-level decision-making.

OPC members are asked to attend six OPC meetings a year which last for two and a half hours with lunch afterwards. There is no set time commitment for other activities although OPC representatives attend the quarterly Strategic Partnership Board, a quarterly Evaluation Advisory Group and an evaluation workshop once or twice a quarter.

The OPC is supported on a fractional basis by the Learning & Engagement Lead and an Programme Co-ordinator from the Connect Hackney programme team. They are the first point of contact for OPC members and provide pastoral care, facilitate OPC meetings and organise and support OPC members contribution within other activities and forums. They also run induction sessions for new members to enable them to be confident and productive in their role.

ways of working, and identify options for the sustainability of the committee beyond the end of the Connect Hackney programme. A mixture of methods were used including a survey and inquiry workshop with OPC members and interviews with staff members supporting the OPC. The learning from this review could help to embed co-production as a way service design and re-design is routinely carried out within the borough. The capacity and skills built within the Older People's Committee itself is a newly created asset which professionals within the borough could harness and develop further.

Key achievements of the Connect Hackney Older People's Committee and supporting factors

As an example of co-production, one of the key achievements of the OPC has been **influencing the commissioning, and through this the design and implementation, of projects targeted at people aged over 50 in Hackney.** OPC members were involved in the commissioning of new projects in phase 2 of the programme and were able to contribute their lived experience, bringing new perspectives and knowledge to the table, so that commissioning decisions were able to more accurately reflect the needs and expectations of potential participants. This in turn supported the commissioning of projects that are more likely to meet the needs of older people living in Hackney and sends out a clear message to all that the views of older people are valued and have a real impact. The Connect Hackney team reflected how OPC members have provided them with a different perspective, influencing how they have then gone on to design, implement and communicate different aspects of the programme. As one OPC member noted, older people are in touch with real needs and experiences that may not be obvious to professionals or those not in the same age group and staff can 'feed on this'.

Another key achievement is **the influence the OPC has had on the working practices of the Connect Hackney team** such as changing meetings structures and formats and, through the Strategic Partnership Board and the Evaluation Advisory Group and workshops, setting the conditions for more inclusive and equal working practices and supporting a process to enable older people's views to be heard alongside other stakeholders. These meetings provided other stakeholders an opportunity to interact with older

people who will be recipients of community-based or statutory services and are experts by experience and strengthened relationships with older people and the public and third sector.

These achievements were supported by:

- **Initial specialist external training and support in co-production to build capacity amongst the Connect Hackney team.** This established productive ways of working in the group itself such as creating workshop rather than boardroom style of meetings; ensuring documentation is jargon free, co-producing a set of ground rules and terms of reference and scheduling afternoon rather than morning meetings with time built to facilitate social connections between members. OPC members welcomed these ways of working and all members felt included in meetings.
- **Recognising the importance of avoiding tokenism and ensuring that the OPC is clearly embedded within the programme.** Better alignment of the OPC and its activities to the strategic priorities of the programme ensured that the OPC was seen as part of the routine practice of the programme rather than an 'add-on'.

There were some **challenges** identified in the OPC review such as:

- the timeframe in which paperwork is sent out to OPC members to be read in advance of meetings
- the sequencing of the commissioning process and length of the pre-meeting to go through the specifications with OPC members
- the level of involvement OPC members have in commissioning meetings to ask questions and probe
- who determines the commissioning criteria the OPC members are asked to scrutinise

These could be addressed through **revisiting and updating the definition of co-production being used within the programme** to help all parties to have a shared understanding, manage expectations, balance power sharing and make processes even more transparent. OPC members were also keen to develop their skills further to more confidently take part in commissioning meetings. More emphasis on building the skills and the personal and social development of OPC members would help to make their involvement more reciprocal in line with definitions of co-production such as the one included in the



glossary of this report:

Co-production refers to the process of citizens

and professionals working together in an equal

and reciprocal relationship to achieve common

goals. Enhancing the skills and knowledge of both

parties, adding value through the generation of

long-term assets (individual, organisational and

community), new insights, and social relations.

Loneliness strategy	This is a national cross-government strategy which builds on the work of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness and sets out the government's approach to tackling loneliness in England. The strategy highlights the role that everyone can play in tackling loneliness, including government, communities and the individual. The government's work on loneliness is guided by three
Active Ageing	overarching goals: building the evidence base, embedding loneliness as a consideration across government policy, and building a national conversation on loneliness, to raise awareness of its impacts and to help tackle stigma ¹⁹ . Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age ²⁰ .
Age-friendly cities Primary Care Networks	An age-friendly city encourages active ageing by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age ²¹ . Primary Care Networks were introduced in January 2019 as part of NHS Long Term Plan. They are formed from three to five GP practices joining together in a network to create a fully integrated community-based health service serving neighbourhoods of between 30,000 to 50,000 people.
Ageing Well Strategy	Networks will be required to deliver a strategy developed through a process including older people which will set out what the health professionals and individuals of getting on with the health and care provision services could meet their needs better. The strategy will take an advocacy approach to look for what can be done to ensure people, the ageing well will need to provide a wider range of services than previously required such as extended access and social prescribing and will need to work with a wider set of partners such as the community and voluntary sector ²² .
Assets	Assets refer to resources (psychological, social, economic or physical) which enhance the ability of individuals, groups, communities, populations, social systems and/or institutions to maintain and
Social isolation and loneliness	The aim is to help people to reduce social isolation and loneliness. In general, social isolation can be conceptualised as an objective circumstance and related to the number or quantity of
Asset-based community development	social contacts someone has ²⁰ . Loneliness can be understood as a subjective state, an unwelcome feeling of a lack or loss of companionship. Whilst both concepts are distinct, they are interrelated and can be seen as contributing to each other. Asset-based community development is a process of mobilising and building on the strengths and resources of individuals and communities to improve their quality of life and well-being. Asset Based Community Development's premise is that communities
Test and learn	test drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilising existing, but often unrecognized assets. They do this through a series of challenges and activities that have been successful in other contexts. The aim is to provide a practical learning for others. Using this learning, the programme aims to improve how services and interventions to tackle loneliness are delivered, and ultimately
Co-design	contribute to an evidence base to influence future service development ²² . Co-design is an innovation methodology that uses a collaborative design process to develop solutions that build on the expertise of end users, non-users and professionals ²² . Co-design can
Whole system approach	As systems are a collection of fairly independent elements within the broader system, the parts are something that can be changed without affecting the whole. A whole system approach is one that considers the system as a whole, rather than just the parts. A whole system approach responds to complexity through an ongoing, dynamic and flexible way of working. It enables local
Community	stakeholders, including communities, to come together, share an understanding of the reality of the challenge, consider how the local system is operating and where there are the greatest opportunities for change. External stakeholders are invited to join the network, how to work together in an integrated way to bring about sustainable, long term systems change ²⁵ . Community is an umbrella term used to cover groups of people sharing a common characteristic of affinity, such as living in a neighbourhood, or being in a specific population group, or sharing a common faith or belief. Communities are dynamic and complex; people's identities and allegiances may shift over time and in different social circumstances ²⁵ .
Co-production	Co-production refers to the process of citizens and professionals working together in an equal and reciprocal relationship to achieve common goals. Enhancing the skills and knowledge of both parties, adding value through the generation of long-term assets (individual, organisational and community), new insights, and social relations ^{25, 26} .
Community Navigation model	Also known as social prescribing, the community navigation model in Hackney aims to bring together the social prescribing offer in the borough. The model varies ranging from a 'light touch' signposting of participants to community activities through to a coaching type intervention delivered by a 'link worker' (or 'navigator' or 'social prescriber').
Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better	The 'Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better' programme aims to develop creative ways for people aged 50 and over to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. Ageing Better is a National Lottery funded programme set up by the National Lottery Community fund (https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk), the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It is a six year programme which started in 2015 and will run until 2021. As well as addressing social isolation and loneliness, Ageing Better also aims to enable people aged 50 and over to become: actively involved in their local communities with their views and participation valued more highly and; more engaged in the design and delivery of services that improve their social connections.
Integrated Care Systems and Partnerships	Integrated care systems (ICs) and Integrated care partnerships (ICPs) plan and commission care and health improvement for large geographical areas and provide system leadership. They bring together NHS providers and commissioners, local authorities and the third sector to work in partnership in improving health and care in their area ²⁷ .

5. Conclusion

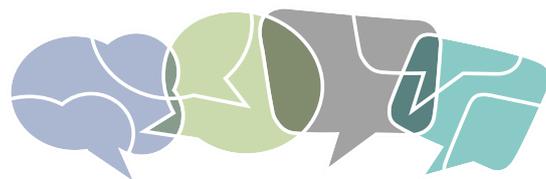
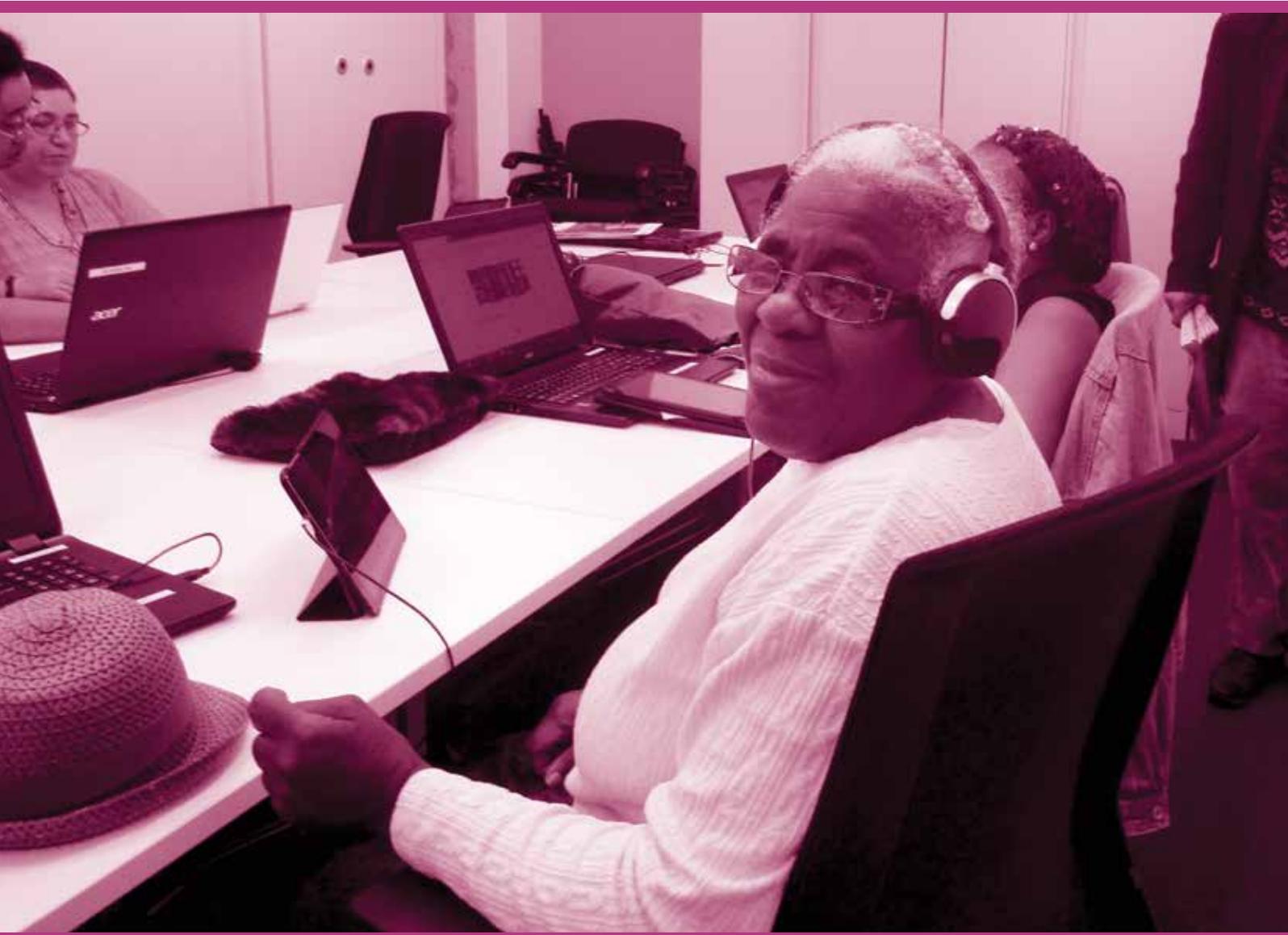
This annual report has summarised the interim findings from the first year of the local evaluation of phase 2 of the Connect Hackney programme. The primary audience for this report is those developing and implementing new policies and programmes in Hackney that could address social isolation and loneliness amongst older people such as the Integrated Care System and the Ageing Well Strategy. The findings of the evaluation so far provide evidence and learning on: how to reach, engage and retain diverse and underserved groups of older people in projects and services; the perceived impact of projects which have supported older people in a variety of ways to increase their social contact and participation; and the processes needed to facilitate good quality co-production. Looking forward, the focus of the second year of the evaluation will be on: assessing whether there have been any improvements in participants social isolation and loneliness, deepening the understanding from the programme on the characteristics of effective projects, and examining the wider impact of the programme on the local system.

6. Supporting information

The evaluation so far has produced a number of final and interim outputs and these have formed the basis of this annual report. These outputs are listed below, and are available on the Connect Hackney website: connecthackney.org.uk/evaluation-and-learning.

1. Initial evaluation and programme monitoring review
2. Reach, engagement and retention of participants in phase two Connect Hackney projects: findings from project providers and participants.
3. An in-depth study of digital inclusion projects for older people in Hackney living with or at risk of social isolation and loneliness
4. An in-depth study of the Community Connectors project for older people in Hackney living with or at risk of social isolation and loneliness
5. Connect Hackney Phase Two Baseline Profile Report
6. Connect Hackney Phase One: Analysis of programme reach and participant outcomes

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