Live Well
everyday support in
every neighbourhood

GM Live Well Citizens' Assembly

Learning Report



together
we are
GREATER
MANCHESTER

> Connections, friendships and collaboration are key in getting communities involved and fired up.

Commissioned through GM Live Well, Greater Manchester's public services, voluntary sector and communities working together to develop everyday support in every neighbourhood.

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1. Why we held a GM Live Well Citizens' Assembly

The story behind the Assembly and what we wanted to change.



1. Why we held a GM Live Well Citizens' Assembly



Live Well

Live Well is Greater Manchester's commitment to ensuring everyday support is available in every neighbourhood – making it easier for people to get the help, opportunities and connections they need, in the right place and at the right time.

It brings together residents and communities, public services, health and care, employment and housing support, and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to work differently around people and places.

At its heart, Live Well is community-led and system-enabled. It recognises that local people know their communities best and should have greater influence over the support they receive, the places they live and the decisions that affect them.







GM Live Well Alliance

Achieving Greater Manchester's Live Well ambition requires a radical shift in how communities, public services and partners work together. Rather than relying on traditional, top-down models, Live Well seeks to grow alliances that share power with communities, recognising their knowledge, relationships and assets as essential to shaping and leading change.

National Lottery Community funded Live Well Accelerator Sites provided a test-and-learn environment to explore what this could look like in practice. Across the sites, communities, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) partners, and public services tested different ways of working together, moving beyond traditional partnership models.

This learning informed the co-design of the **Live Well Alliance Blueprint***, a framework for putting communities at the heart of Live Well implementation - from inception and design through to governance and evaluation.



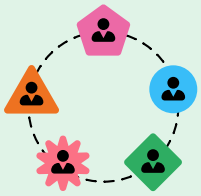
*Please see **page 46** for the full list of web links.

Live Well Alliance

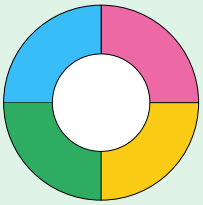
The Blueprint

Live Well Alliances are an approach to shaping Live Well practice and systems in partnership with communities, to grow community action, power and wealth.

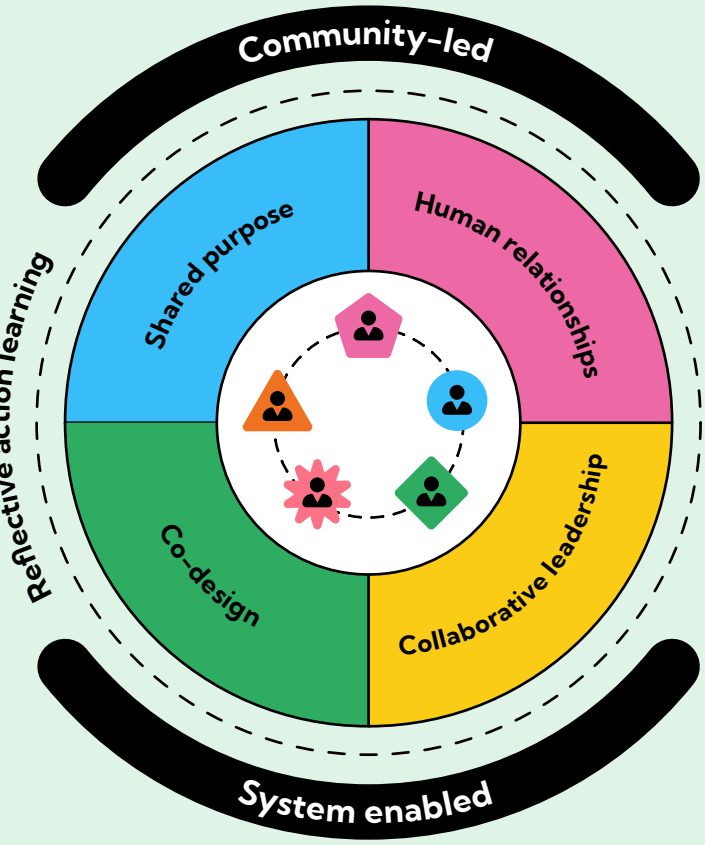
An Alliance is made up of:



People connected by purpose
Residents, local leaders and practitioners who hold shared ambitions for the future of their community connect as an alliance for change.



Accelerator space
A focused and resourced space where the Alliance is empowered to co-design, test, and support each other in developing practice and shaping solutions.



This raised an important question for Live Well: **if our approach is community-led and system-enabled, how should our decision-making and governance work in the same way?**

Rather than designing the answer within existing structures, we wanted communities to help shape it. Building on the launch of **Greater Manchester's Participation Playbook**, we used a Citizens' Assembly approach to bring together people from across Greater Manchester to deliberate and develop recommendations for a new approach to community-led governance.

At the heart of the Assembly was a bigger question: **how can communities, public services and partners organise differently to shift decision-making and resources closer to communities and what does this mean in practice for how Greater Manchester (GM) Live Well is governed?**

The Assembly's recommendations have shaped the development of the GM Live Well Alliance – a community-led and system-enabled governance model designed to grow community power and create new ways for communities and public services to share decision-making, accountability and leadership.

Citizen Assemblies

We chose a Citizen Assembly approach because it was well suited to finding some answers to this big question and the decisions we needed to make. We wanted to create the time and space to go deeper, hear different perspectives and reach informed recommendations with a broad and representative group of people.

We also wanted the process to create space for innovation and creative thinking, while drawing on existing expertise, evidence and learning about community-led decision-making and governance from across Greater Manchester and beyond.

*Please see **page 46** for the full list of web links.

The Assembly at a glance

35 Assembly members



10 Greater Manchester boroughs

202 People wanted to be part of the Assembly

3 Days together

19 Hours of deliberation



13 Expert witnesses

10 Final recommendations to mobilise the GM Live Well Alliance

10 Community and system leadership facilitators



Citizens' Assemblies and Juries



What is it?

A deliberative process in which a group of residents consider an issue over a period of time to create a set of recommendations. A citizens' assembly typically involves 50+ randomly selected people to reflect the wider population. A citizens' jury, also called a 'mini public,' uses the same process but with fewer people, usually involving 12–30 people.

How does it work?

Four key phases follow the planning and recruitment of participants:

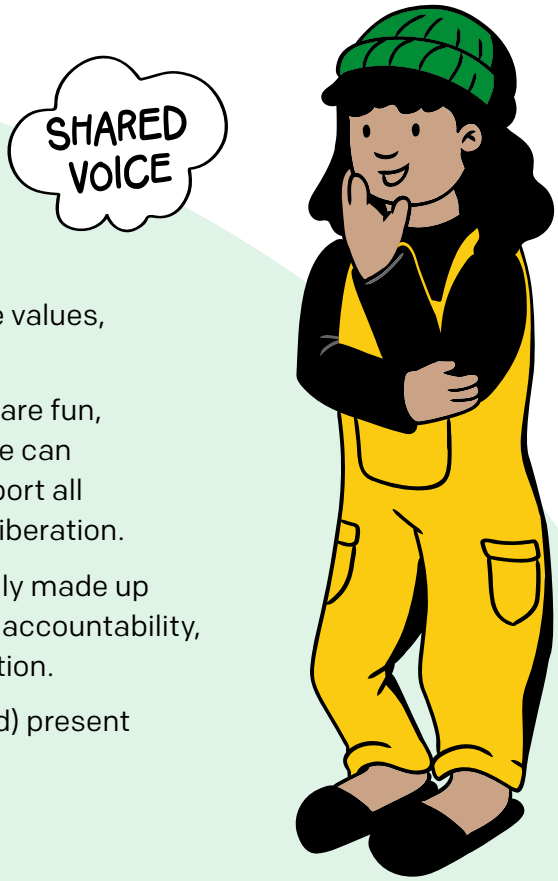
1. Learning: Participants learn from one another and from people with in-depth knowledge of the issue.

2. Deliberating: With facilitator support, the group debates, reflects, and analyses evidence and perspectives.

3. Decision Making: The group develops a set of recommendations for decision makers to consider.

4. Implementation: In the best case scenario, decision-makers follow the assembly's recommendations and commit to an implementation plan and timeframe.

The process is built on these principles



Representation: A cross-section of society brings diverse values, knowledge, and experiences.

Structure and equity: Skilled facilitators ensure sessions are fun, inclusive, engaging, and accessible for all so that everyone can participate and feel good in doing so. The facilitators support all participants in the process and guide the framing and deliberation.

Transparency and governance: An oversight group, usually made up of people with insight and influence on the issue, ensures accountability, suggests information sources, and supports implementation.

Knowledge and expertise: Experts (both lived and learned) present evidence, ideas, perspectives and answer questions.



When is it useful?

Ideal for any issue that requires broad input but particularly useful when considering complex, emotive, contentious, or high-impact issues. The process often ends with energised and enthusiastic groups of community members who want to be part of the solution.

Local examples

In 2019, Tonge with the Haulgh Big Local Partnership (TwtHBLP) in Bolton aimed to involve young people in decision-making and commissioned Creative City to lead an assembly-style process with local youth. Over 12 weeks, young participants played games, met stakeholders, and developed 24 recommendations. Impressed by the outcome, TwtHBLP handed over the youth budget to the group, leading to a participatory budgeting process the following year.





In 2022, 12 Greater Manchester residents met over six sessions to explore and make recommendations on a governance model for the local energy market. This process was delivered by Carbon Coop as part of a wider effort to ensure greater transparency and accountability around this issue, to meet the energy needs of all residents. These local recommendations influenced the public engagement built into the Regional Energy System Planner and were shared with national bodies such as Ofgem and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

2. Bringing the Assembly together

How people were recruited, selected and supported to take part.

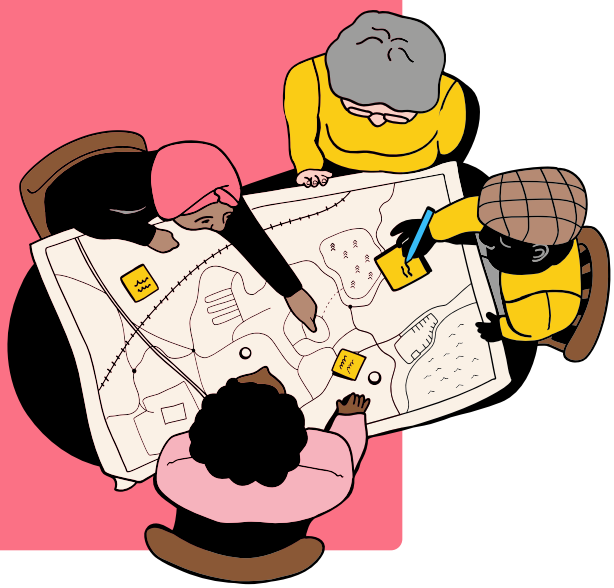


2. Bringing the Assembly together

We wanted the Assembly to bring together people with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives from across our city-region.

An open invitation to take part was shared across the Live Well movement through community networks, leaders and partner organisations, reaching people across all 10 Greater Manchester boroughs. Two online information sessions gave people the opportunity to hear more about the Assembly, understand what taking part would involve and ask questions before deciding whether to apply.

At the same time, the Assembly itself was designed collaboratively. Community leaders, VCFSE organisations and public service partners worked together to shape the recruitment process, programme, expert witnesses and facilitation across the three days. Just as much attention was given to how people would experience the Assembly as to what would be discussed.





The Assembly's design was guided by seven Live Well principles:

- **Accessible** – removing physical, social, emotional and financial barriers so everyone could contribute in ways that worked for them.
- **Creative** – using different and non-traditional ways to think, share, deliberate and learn together.
- **Representative** – bringing together different experiences and perspectives and modelling a different approach to power.
- **Empowering** – building people's relationships, knowledge, skills and confidence to act.
- **Trusted** – valuing different forms of knowledge and experience, with space for listening, relationship-building and honest conversations.
- **Connected and collaborative** – creating relationships and opportunities for action across communities, organisations and sectors.
- **Energising** – creating an experience rooted in hope, joy and a sense of shared purpose.

Following the application process, 35 Assembly members were selected from 202 people who signed up, using a sortition process. Members were organised into four groups that stayed together throughout the Assembly, giving people time to build relationships and allowing conversations to deepen across the three days. Facilitators were drawn from both community and system leadership.

Before coming together in person, Assembly members were invited to an online welcome and briefing session. This helped people know what to expect, identify any accessibility or support needs and meet the other members and facilitators they would be working alongside.

Why sortition?

We didn't want to hear only from the people who usually get involved. Sortition gave us a fair and transparent way to bring a wider range of voices from communities that are often underrepresented in decision-making into the Assembly. It combines random selection with agreed criteria to create a group that broadly reflects the wider population, while ensuring different backgrounds, identities and experiences are represented.

Age

25%
18–30

50%
30–65

25%
65+

Education

50%+
Not university educated

Ethnicity

30%+
Ethnically diverse

Gender identity

50%+
Women

10%+
Different gender identity from biological sex at birth

40%+
Men

Sexual orientation

20%+
Lesbian, gay or bisexual

Household income

50%+
Household income below £40,000

Disability

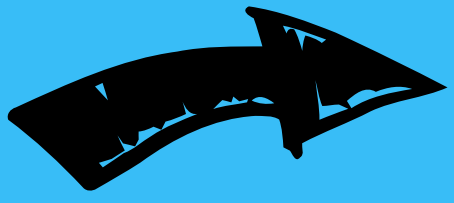
25%+
Disabled

Place

10 Greater Manchester boroughs
Equal representation

3. Three days of learning, challenge and decision-making

Over three days, Assembly members moved from exploring power and agreeing the principles that should underpin the GM Live Well Alliance, to designing how it could work, deciding who should be involved, and finally voting on the recommendations they wanted to take forward.



Day 1: Exploring power and the values that matter

The big question: What should power look and feel like in the GM Live Well Alliance?

The first day was about power. Assembly members critically analysed how power operates, how it can become hidden or concentrated, and what needs to be different if communities and public services are to work together as equal partners.

The Assembly heard

The day opened with spoken word from **Helen Davies (Rochdale Council)**, 'Jo wrote to us' – a response to Jo Freeman's *Tyranny of Structurelessness*. This opening set a clear invitation for Assembly members to reflect critically on how power operates within decision-making and accountability structures of social movements and community organising.



"They wanted a new way of being together, saw structure as the cause of the pain. And so they said, no leaders, no bosses – that's the man's way. Without rules to trap us, we'll be free, we'll all be equal, we will rise together.

But there was something they didn't know, a thing they hadn't noticed. What they built was, in fact, a hierarchy, only this time, there were no roles, and they found that some just rose to power, while others were left voiceless, and the ones with the power couldn't see it.

The power was hidden. It was not in the form of a man; it was in the form of privilege.

And so Jo wrote to us: Unfairness is written into our society. And if we don't work to build something different, we will unconsciously rebuild the very thing we are trying to escape."

Can a group ever really be without power?

The *Tyranny of Structurelessness* is a 1970 essay by feminist writer Jo Freeman. It challenges the idea that removing formal roles, rules or leadership automatically makes a group more equal.

Freeman argues that there is no such thing as a truly structureless group. Whenever people come together, patterns of leadership, influence and decision-making naturally emerge. If these aren't made visible, power doesn't disappear – it becomes informal, hidden and harder to challenge.

In practice, influence can come from friendships, confidence, expertise or access to information, rather than through open and accountable processes. This can unintentionally exclude people who are new, less confident or outside existing networks, because the unwritten 'rules' of participation are often known only to insiders.

The lesson isn't that structure itself is the problem. It's that power needs to be visible, transparent and accountable. By being clear about roles, responsibilities and how decisions are made, groups can create more opportunities for people to participate and share power equitably.

Exploring and sharing power

Zain Hafeez from **Civic Power** then introduced different perspectives on power and how it can be shared. He invited Assembly members to think about power as the ability to act and influence, rather than whether it is good or bad. Instead, the focus was on where power sits, who can exercise it, and whether it is concentrated or shared.

Assembly members then heard from the **Rochdale Live Well Accelerator team** and **GM Shapers** as Greater Manchester case studies of how power can be shared in practice.

Safia Cragg from **Kusoma Training and Consultancy's** 'It's Not About Who, It's About How' presentation highlighted how power and oppressive dynamics can show up in decision-making spaces. She encouraged Assembly members to think beyond who is in the room and consider how power operates, whose voices are heard, and how this shapes decisions



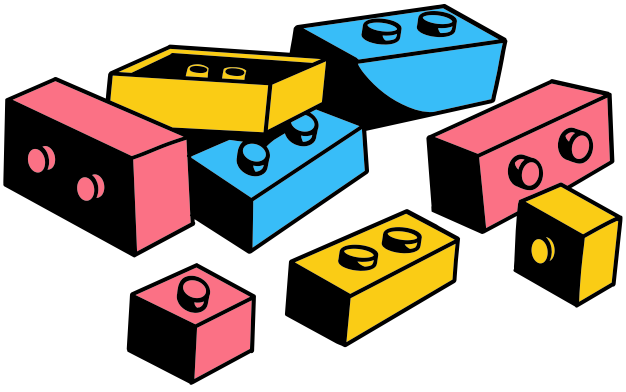
The Assembly explored

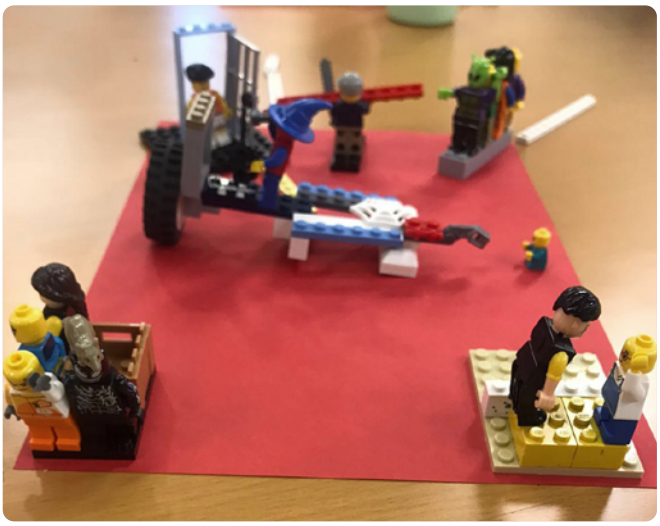
Through weaving trust rotations, Assembly members reflected on their own experiences of power before turning to the values, principles and behaviours they wanted to underpin the GM Live Well Alliance.





Using LEGO Serious Play®, members built individual and group models to bring these values, principles and behaviours to life. They then used the models to compare perspectives, deliberate together and develop their thinking.





The Assembly agreed what matters

Five strong themes emerged:

1. Community power and inclusion – putting communities at the heart of decisions, making sure different voices are heard and recognising different starting points.

2. Trust, transparency and accountability – building relationships based on trust and respect, with clear and visible decision-making and accountability to communities.

3. Fairness, justice and anti-oppression – understanding inequalities through an intersectional lens and actively addressing power imbalances.

4. Long-term impact for future generations – making decisions that create lasting change, rather than focusing only on immediate challenges.

5. Kindness and empathy – creating judgement-free, trauma-informed and person-centred ways of working together.

Putting communities at the heart of decisions.

What the Assembly took forward

From Day 1, Assembly members recommended:

1. Transparency in everything we do.

2. Develop and embed an inclusive Charter, underpinned by transparency, honesty, integrity, trust, respect and accountability.

3. Run for us, by us – facilitated by an independent body, with people paid for the time they give.

4. Equitable access – valuing people's time, experience, expertise beyond the 'norm', and what people need to participate.

Day 2: Designing a different kind of Alliance

The big question: If we want to share power differently, what kind of structure could make that happen?

Day 2 moved from principles to practical design. Assembly members were introduced to different approaches to participatory and transformative governance, considering what could work in Greater Manchester and what might not.

The Assembly heard

Assembly members heard about different structures and methods for sharing power and decision-making. This included **Community Covenants** and the **We're Right Here** campaign as examples of structuring decision-making around community leadership and local voices.

They also heard about participation methods and case studies featured in **Greater Manchester's Participation Playbook**, and how these have been embedded into organisational practice at **People Power**. They also heard about examples of transformative governance models from around the world.



COMMUNITY COVENANTS

#GMLIVEWELL ASSEMBLY NEWS

WHAT IS IT?

Community Covenants provide a flexible mechanism for community organisations and local people to take on more power to shape their areas, within the context of a wider devolution framework.

WHAT DECISIONS CAN BE MADE?

Having formed a Community Covenant, the partner organisation would be able to exercise a range of rights and powers. They would be empowered to shape Neighbourhood plans and Community Economic Development plans; contribute as statutory consultees to budgetary decisions; co-design an approach to community asset transfer with their partner council; and trigger a joint review of a local public service.

Covenant partners would receive capacity building support to allow them to exercise these powers effectively. Local authorities might enter into a Community Covenant agreement with either a single partner or with multiple partners, provided that they are able to demonstrate that they are appropriately accountable to the local community.

HOW WOULD THIS WORK OR NOT WORK FOR THE ALLIANCE?

NY OFFICE OF MASS ENGAGEMENT

#GMLIVEWELL ASSEMBLY NEWS

WHAT IS IT?

In January 2026, New York City created the Office of Mass Engagement (OME) to radically improve how everyday New Yorkers engage with their local government. This followed years of frustration with civic processes that were too slow, too bureaucratic, and dominated by a small number of people with time and resources.

New York City recognised that its existing systems:

- Privileged the well-connected
- Required long meetings, confusing applications, and complex processes
- Collected feedback inconsistently, with little evidence it shaped policy
- Left most New Yorkers feeling disconnected, disenchanted, and unheard

The OME brings together several previously separate units - Community Affairs, Public Engagement, NYC Service, and faith-based partnerships - into one coordinated structure. Its mission is to reach people where they are and create engagement that is:

- Widespread (not limited to the usual voices)
- Organised and consistent
- Impactful, producing outcomes that clearly influence Leadership

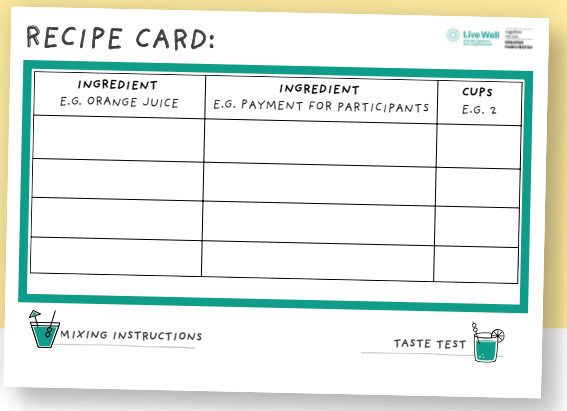
HOW WOULD THIS WORK OR NOT WORK FOR THE ALLIANCE?



The Assembly tested

In groups, Assembly members deliberated on the strengths and challenges of different governance models and participatory methods, considering what would and would not work for the GM Live Well Alliance.

They then moved between groups to test and challenge each other's ideas before coming back together to identify the 'key ingredients' they felt were needed for a successful Alliance. They used a mocktail-making exercise to bring these ideas together, creating and sharing their own 'recipes' for the Alliance.



RECIPE CARD:

INGREDIENT E.G. ORANGE JUICE	INGREDIENT E.G. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS	CUPS E.G. 2

MIXING INSTRUCTIONS

TASTE TEST

The Assembly agreed what matters

The approaches Assembly members most wanted to see reflected in the Alliance were:

Participatory budgeting

Sociocracy light

Sortition

Community organising

Mass engagement

Co-operative structures



Sociocracy light

Sociocracy Light is an informal approach to shared decision-making, adapted from sociocracy. It uses consent-based decisions and structured speaking rounds to help everyone have a voice, share power and make decisions together while removing complexity and bureaucracy of a formal sociocratic system.

What the Assembly took forward



From Day 2, Assembly members recommended:

1. Using mass engagement to reach people, ensuring language and cultural differences are not barriers and there are multiple flexible ways to participate.



2. The Alliance should grow its collective power by ensuring lived experience and community-led solutions strengthen community accountability, inform strategic decision-making and shape investment through participatory budgeting. It should also develop options for how its relationship with the GM Live Well Board could evolve to deepen shared power, influence and accountability.



3. An overarching co-operative membership for the wider Live Well movement, with members having a say in who sits on the Alliance, holding it to account and voting on key decisions.

Day 3: Who should be part of the Alliance and who decides?

The big question: Who gets to be part of the Alliance, and how should they get there?

The final day focused on membership including who should be part of the Alliance and how members should be selected.

The Assembly heard

Assembly members heard different perspectives on how inclusive and adaptive governance could work in practice.

Sarah McAdam from **Transformational Governance Collective** asked the Assembly to consider how the Alliance could evolve as relationships deepen and socio-political contexts change, and what a first step could look like that is "good enough for now, safe enough to try".

Annette Dhami from **Dark Matter Labs** shared learning on how organisations can avoid returning to the status quo while finding new ways to organise in response to complex and changing systems.

Professor Erinma Bell, Community Peace Activist and CEO of **CARISMA Services**, drew on her experience of building relationships and community power in Moss Side by connecting local residents and systems together to create change.



The Assembly designed

Each Assembly member developed their own proposal for how membership of the GM Live Well Alliance could work. They then brought their ideas together to share, test and challenge different approaches before refining their thinking as a group.



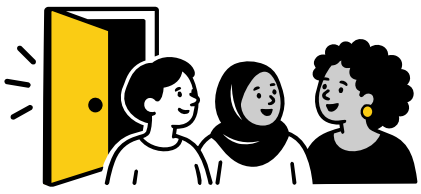
The Assembly agreed what matters

Members identified several important elements:

- A core membership group from across Greater Manchester.
- A wider, flexible network that people could opt in and out of.
- Co-opted members brought in around particular issues or expertise.
- Assembly-style participation feeding into decision-making.
- Multiple routes for people to get involved, including open sign-up, community outreach, networks and sortition.

What the Assembly took forward

From Day 3, Assembly members recommended:

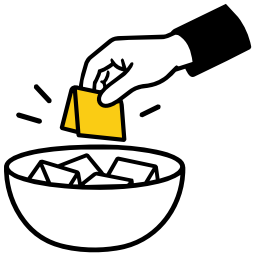


1. The Alliance should be open to all Greater Manchester residents – particularly people rooted in communities, with time to give and a commitment to its purpose, vision and values.



2. The Alliance should be intergenerational, with specific opportunities for young people to be involved.

3. Alliance membership should be decided through sortition, with everyone putting themselves forward who are committed to the GM Live Well Alliance Charter.



The final vote:

From ideas to decisions

After three days of **listening**, **learning**, **challenging**, **deliberating** and **designing together**, Assembly members made their final decisions.

Members voted on the recommendations they wanted to take forward across the three areas they had explored:

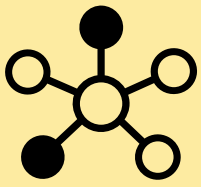
1. Values

How should the Alliance work together?



2. Model

How should power and decision-making work?



3. Membership

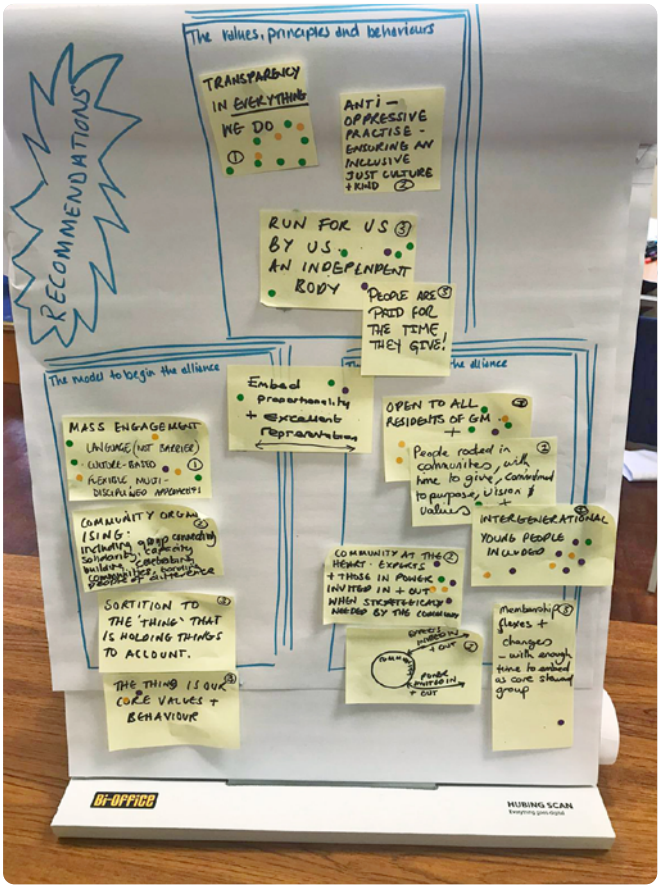
Who should be involved and how should they be selected?

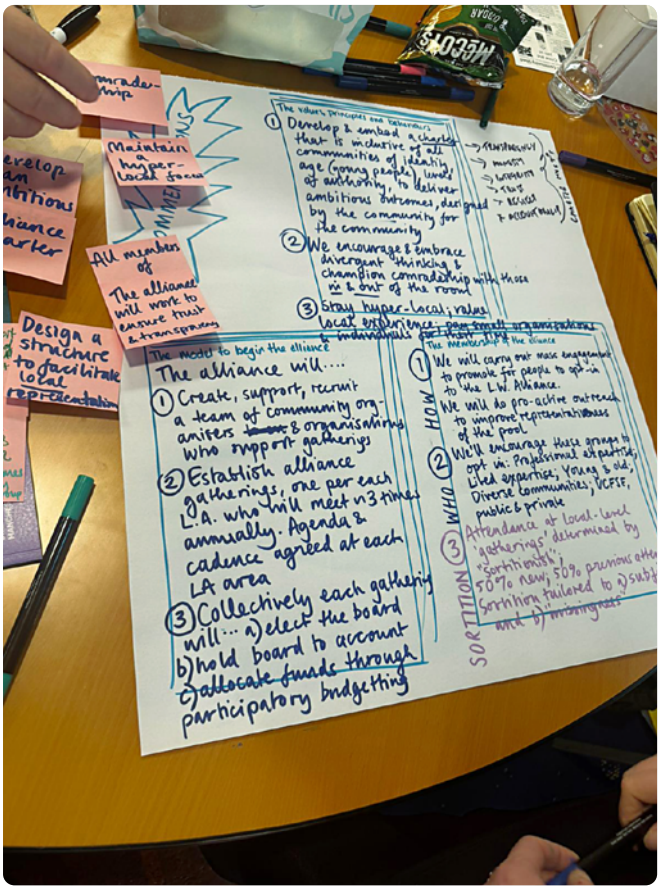


Voting used a simple colour coded system:

- **Green** – strongly resonated
- **Purple** – liked, but not fully considered in detail
- **Orange** – uncertain or needed further reflection

The recommendations receiving the strongest support in each of the three areas formed the final set of recommendations taken forward by the Assembly.





4. Turning recommendations into action

Following the Assembly, facilitators came back together to reflect on the discussions and deliberations from across the three days and make sure they had a shared understanding of the thinking behind each recommendation. They then considered what each recommendation could mean in practice and identified the first steps towards putting them into action.



4. Turning recommendations into action

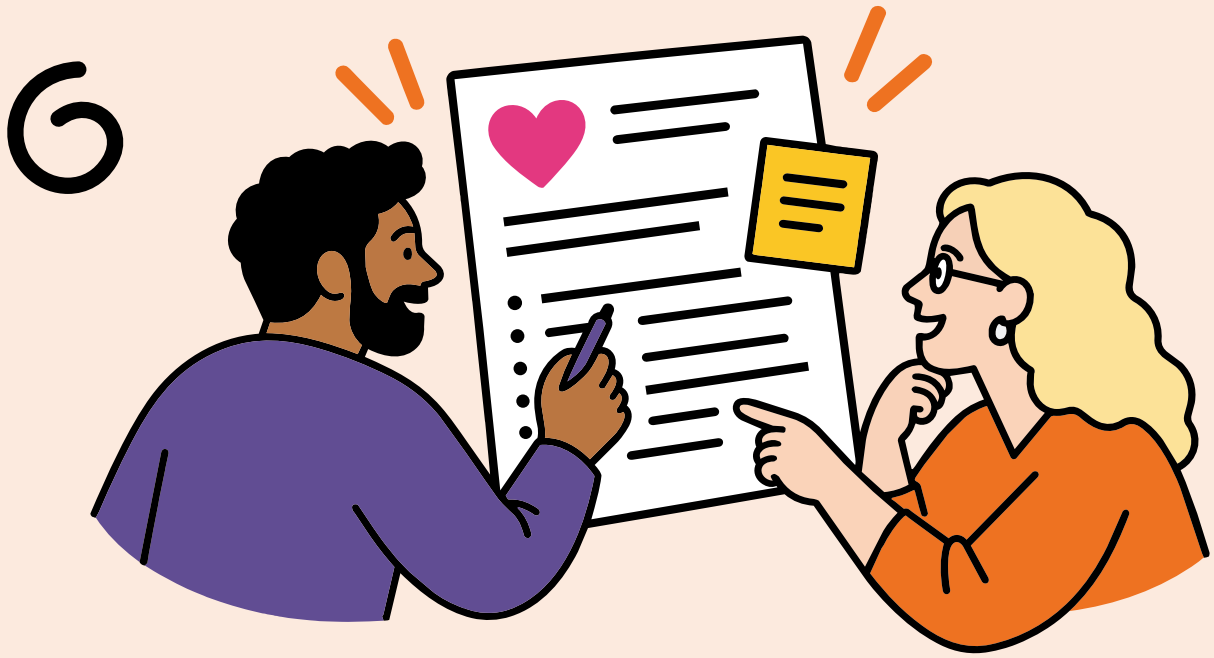
The Assembly and its emerging recommendations were shared with the Greater Manchester Live Well Board. Representatives from the Assembly will return to present their final recommendations directly and hear how they are being taken forward.

The recommendations now provide the foundations for developing the GM Live Well Alliance. The Alliance will develop in stages, creating opportunities to test, learn and adapt the model as it develops.



Step 1: Create the GM Live Well Alliance Charter

The first step is to develop a founding GM Live Well Alliance Charter, underpinned by the values and principles identified by the Assembly on Day 1. The Charter will provide a shared foundation for how Alliance members commit to working together, with cooperation at its heart.



This puts into action the Assembly's recommendations to:

Be transparent in everything we do.

Develop and embed an inclusive Charter underpinned by transparency, honesty, integrity, trust, respect and accountability.

Ensure equitable access, valuing people's time, experience, different forms of expertise and what people need to participate.

Step 2: Bring together the first GM Live Well Alliance

The next step is to recruit the first members of the GM Live Well Alliance through a fair and inclusive process.

A 'sortition plus' approach will combine sortition with wider engagement to reach people and communities across Greater Manchester. Anyone in Greater Manchester who is committed to the founding GM Live Well Alliance Charter will be able to put themselves forward to join the Alliance, with particular attention given to involving people experiencing poverty, young people and communities that are often underrepresented in decision-making.

The Alliance will be made up of community members, rather than people participating through their paid public service roles. Members will use participatory approaches to shape decisions, connect with the wider Live Well movement and influence how resources are allocated, including through participatory budgeting.

Importantly, not everything will be decided for the Alliance in advance. One of the Alliance's first decisions will be what support it needs and how it wants to be hosted and facilitated.

This puts into action the Assembly's recommendations to:

Be "run for us, by us", with independent facilitation and people paid for the time they give.

Be open to Greater Manchester residents who are rooted in communities and committed to its purpose, vision and values.

Use mass engagement, with flexible and culturally relevant approaches and multiple routes to participate.

Use sortition to select Alliance members, with those putting themselves forward committed to founding GM Live Well Alliance Charter.

Be intergenerational, with specific opportunities for young people to participate.

Step 3: Grow a wider movement for shared decision-making

The longer-term ambition goes beyond the people who sit on the Alliance.

The aim is to grow a wider cooperative movement for shared decision-making, connecting people across Live Well and creating ways for those who are not Alliance members to participate and influence decisions too.

Using mass engagement and other participatory and cooperative approaches, this could create new ways for communities to vote, make decisions and influence the use of resources.

This builds on the Assembly's recommendations that:

The Alliance should grow its collective power by ensuring lived experience and community-led solutions strengthen community accountability and inform strategic decision-making.

Funding should be allocated through participatory budgeting.

Options for how the Alliance's relationship with the GM Live Well Board could evolve to deepen shared power, influence and accountability.

A wider co-operative membership should enable people across the movement to have a say in who is part of the Alliance, hold it to account and vote on key decisions.



5. What we learned

At the end of the Assembly, members shared their reflections through an ‘evaluation Valerie’. They shared practical suggestions about how the Assembly could work better, as well as reflections on relationships, hope and their experience of being part of the process.



Here is a flavour of what Assembly members shared:

One thing I will remember...

If it is good enough, do it!

"The learning and opportunity to do more, the fire in me it lit."

"How people came together with different experiences and backgrounds to develop something."

"The amazing people I've met and our amazing table facilitator."

We have the power to do things differently.

One thing I would do differently...

"Shorter days over a longer period. It's hard to do the hard thinking at 3.30pm after a long day."

"Ooo... hard one, would like liked to mingle more with people on other tables."

"Struggled with the online speakers but understand the reality of gathering people in person – but all amazing speakers."

"I'd have found out more about GM Live Well in advance – I didn't know what I didn't know."



One thing I didn't like...

"Early start!"

"Food!"

"Too many enrichment games on Monday."

"Remote speakers and slides that were unreadable."

One thing I'll take away...

"How dynamic group thinking can be."

"Some hope that this process will lead to CHANGE!"

"Connections, friendships and collaboration are key in getting communities involved and fired up."

"A sense of hopefulness."

One thing I loved...

How we got to be creative over the three days.

"The diversity and inclusion of lived experience and background."

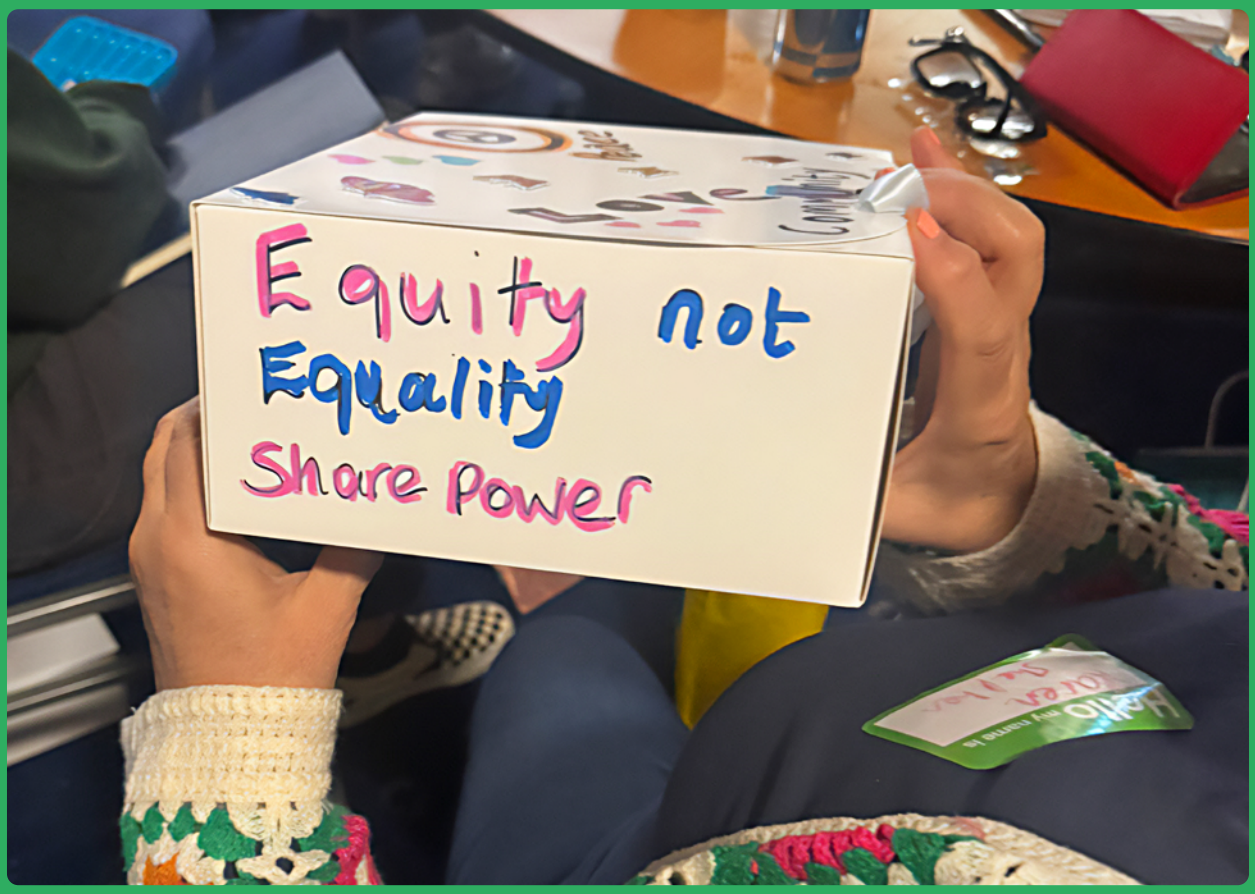
"Being treated fairly and not judged for needing to be 'busy' whilst listening."

"The belly laughs and great company!"

You can hear more from Assembly members themselves in the **'passing the mic'*** short clip and **'we connected'*** online blog by Atarazia For All.

*Please see **page 46** for the full list of web links.

To close the Assembly, each member was given a memory box to take home as a keepsake, and it closed with a beautiful poem written by Paula.



They have given us a memory box, by Paula

They have given us a memory box, table one is in mine,

Our hope for three days to listen, learn and eat crap and refine,

So, when I lift off this lid in three years time,

I will remember you all, live well heroes and sheros,

One at a time for opening my mind.

To Becca for championing young people and children so well,

To Shakeela for lifting up women with her famous three Ls 'Levenshulme Lovely Ladies',

To Shuff for amazing table energy and fun,

To Folashade for your infectious enthusiasm, shared power and virtual whip to get things done,

To Pete for doing Live Well 2.0 all again after forty years and quizzing us along the way,

To James for mocktail maths, green space promotion and all-round good vibes,

To Deborah for jargon busting and reminding us all to say life how it really is,

To Allison for killer Lego play, positivity and a table full of sweets,

And Dave for doodles and brews.

They have given us a memory box, table one is in mine,

We are the rock, paper and scissors champions,

The manchatter mixologists,

And we have shared the air with fairness and flair,

We may not meet again but that doesn't matter,

Just live well because aren't we all uplifted and bolded by our kickass matter.

Lessons for future Citizen Assemblies

The following reflections are intended to support others planning and delivering Citizen Assemblies, drawing on learning from the GM Live Well Assembly.



Remove financial barriers to participation

Assembly members were paid for their participation to recognise the value of the insight and experience they brought into the room. Remuneration also covered additional costs, so people could take part comfortably without financial barriers getting in the way.



Create space for reflective learning

To reflect Live Well's community-led and system-enabled approach, each Assembly group had a lead and support facilitator, bringing both community and system perspectives. Facilitators were essential in managing group dynamics, keeping discussions focused and providing a trusted point of contact throughout the three days. Giving facilitators dedicated time to debrief after each day meant they could reflect on what was happening, share learning and adapt their approach in response to emerging challenges.



Plan with accessibility in mind

Accessibility was built into the planning of the Assembly. For example, a red card system gave members a simple way to pause discussions when language was unclear, including acronyms and technical terms. A sensory-friendly space was also available for anyone who needed a break, with books, colouring materials, puzzles and games to provide a calm place to reset before returning to the Assembly.



Trust-building is part of the deliberation process

Short ice-breaker activities, such as mapping birthplaces and table rock-paper-scissors, were deliberately planned at the start of each day and between deliberation sessions. They gave Assembly members a chance to be playful, step away from the intensity of discussions and return with a refreshed focus. They also helped members find common ground and build relationships across different experiences and perspectives - creating a stronger foundation for more challenging conversations.

Turn the page for more



Bring together a range of perspectives

A wide range of expert witnesses helped Assembly members explore different ideas, evidence, and examples of practice. They brought academic, professional, community, and system perspectives, helping people understand issues from multiple viewpoints. While not every speaker resonated with everyone, the breadth of voices enabled Assembly members to draw on a range of insights and perspectives when developing their own thinking.



Pay attention to the small details

Think about the whole experience of taking part, not just the Assembly itself. On arrival, members took a Polaroid photo and received a participation party bag with a Participation Playbook, fidget toys, notebooks, sweets and small keepsakes. At the end of the Assembly, everyone received a memory box to collect their photos, learning and mementoes. These small touches helped make the Assembly feel personal and gave members something to take away and remember the experience by.



Have a trusted Assembly host

Having a dedicated Assembly host gave members, speakers and facilitators a clear point of contact throughout the process. The host supported members through the full journey, from onboarding and payments to helping people understand what was happening and why. They also responded to questions, concerns and frustrations as they arose. Where possible, having this role separate from those with a direct stake in the Assembly recommendations can help build confidence in the process.



Recognise the Assemblies value beyond the recommendations

The recommendations were an important outcome of the Assembly, but they were only one part of its impact. Over the three days, Assembly members built relationships with people from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives which created opportunities for greater understanding across difference. For some members, these relationships continued beyond the Assembly through group chats, meeting for coffee and staying in touch.

Useful links

Explore the resources mentioned in this report. Click the links in the digital edition, or enter the web addresses below.

Live Well Alliance Blueprint

Referenced on page 7:
goodlivesgm.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Live-Well-Alliance-Blueprint.pdf

‘Passing the mic’ video

Hear more from Assembly members. Referenced on page 39:
www.instagram.com/reels/DW6p_eygbRb/

‘We connected’ blog

Read more about the Assembly experience. Referenced on page 39:
wbcf.co.uk/we-connected-quickly-what-the-gm-live-well-summit-revealed-about-power-people-and-possibility/

In the **GM Live Well Participation Playbook** you’ll find a collection of participatory tools and methods that can support communities and decision-makers to work collaboratively, shaping how we live well together.

Take a look ›



“Communities hold the relationships, knowledge and assets needed to drive change.”

Live Well

everyday support in
every neighbourhood



together
we are

GREATER MANCHESTER

www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/live-well