Rethinking Green Transitions in London

A youth-led peer research project

November 2026



LSE The London School of Economics and Political Science

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Partnership for Young London

Islington For a more equal future

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Summary

Young Londoners arguably have the most at stake when it comes to the city's green transition. Decisions made today on heat, air, housing, transport and jobs will shape their lives, and the liveability of their city and planet, for decades to come.

Across London, councils and civil society organisations recognise this and want to bring younger generations to the centre of green policymaking. This project set out to understand their current efforts and explore what it would take to strengthen them.

However, young people are consistently under-represented in decision-making about local responses to the climate crisis. Between April and October 2026, four peer researchers aged 20 to 25 interviewed officers and councillors in 19 of London's 33 councils, staff at the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and four civil society organisations, and ten young people – 38 interviews in total. On 23 September 2026 we tested what we had found with more than 100 policymakers and practitioners who came to our event at City Hall – from young participants in local climate action to policy officers and local councillors. This is what we learned.

The peer researchers



Phool Ashraf



Maddy Westhead



Jakaria Uddin



Cindy Boa



Ten main findings

1 **There is a wealth of green policy participation for young people across London, but little cross-borough exchange and learning.** We found 12 types of participatory mechanism across 19 councils and beyond, from school charters to paid youth advisers, but most of these efforts are developing in isolation without pan-London knowledge transfer and peer learning.

2 **Most of this work focuses on education and behaviour change through schools, often primary schools.** That work is valuable, but it is rarely a route to shared decisions on policy, and it misses opportunities to engage young adults (aged 16–25), who should be a high priority, especially with votes at 16 coming.

3 **Some areas of green policy are more likely to engage young people than others.** Young people are being brought into policymaking around parks, streets and public space, but they are less involved in areas like energy, retrofit or green jobs.

4 **Sharing decision-making power is rare.** Young people co-decided or led in 7 of the 35 initiatives we could assess. Only 5 of 38 interviewees could name a decision changed by young people. 17 could name none.

5 **Staff capacity is the biggest barrier (26 of 38 interviews), then funding (20).** Youth work takes between 1 and 20 per cent of an officer's time, in climate teams of one to seven people. Climate and youth teams rarely work together, and strong initiatives often end when individual staff members leave or funding is not renewed.

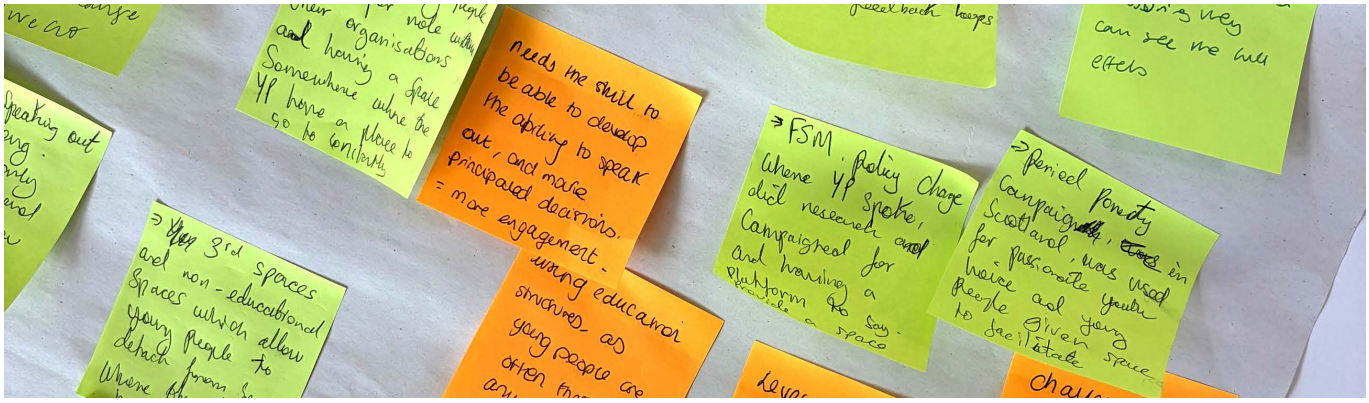
6 **Success often depends on partnerships.** In the absence of consistent staff capacity and structural support from within local councils, youth green policy participation is enabled by collaborations with trusted external partners such as the voluntary and community sector or universities (the most-cited success factor in 27 of 38 interviews).

7 **Timing is crucial – where young people had the most influence, they came in before plans were written.** Many young people are wary of being invited to give input too late in policy and decision-making processes. They called for more honesty and transparency about what they have power to influence and what has already been decided, or cannot be changed.

8 **Engagement reaches young people who are already engaged in climate action or democracy work.** 18 of 38 interviews said only the already-engaged take part and cited lack of clear routes to and knowledge of how to best engage with **underrepresented** groups. One of our peer researchers has co-developed a toolkit from the data collected (How to involve us).

9 **Young people are more likely to be inspired to shape London's green transition when it is framed as more than climate and 'net zero'.** Communication around the green transition needs to link climate action to jobs, bills, heat and safety. Framing was the second-biggest theme at City Hall, in 77 of 409 notes.

10 **The weakest link is what happens afterwards.** Young people who took part in participatory activities to shape green policy could rarely say what changed. Staff leading the activities often also struggled – evaluation is rarely properly resourced, and impact – especially policy impact – is hard to identify.



Recommendations

Our findings led us to seven recommendations for boroughs, the Greater London Authority, Transport for London, funders and the voluntary sector. We developed them with the peer research team, drawing on practitioner feedback and creative ideas collected at the City Hall event.

Recommendation 1

Bring young people into climate plans before they are written, with a clear scope

For boroughs, the Greater London Authority and Transport for London.

Involve young people at the concept stage of a climate action plan refresh, a public realm scheme or a communications plan, not once the direction is set. Say at the start what they can influence, what they cannot and why. Extend it beyond parks and public space, where most of the real influence we found sits, to energy, retrofit and green jobs, where almost none of it does. Evidence: Chapters 2 and 3.

Recommendation 2

Make participation structures permanent: a named lead, a duty on every team, and climate and youth teams working together

For boroughs.

Name a lead for youth participation in climate work, with time in their job description rather than at the edges of their main tasks, and give every team that makes climate decisions a duty to show how young people shaped them. Put climate and youth teams in the same meetings. Views differed on whether this means a dedicated post or a change to everyone's job; the evidence points to both. Evidence: Chapter 3.

> "Make youth climate engagement mandatory! 10 years from now."
> — City Hall event participant

Recommendation 3

Go where 16- to 25-year-olds are, and work with organisations they already trust

For boroughs, the voluntary sector and funders.

Do not rely on school emails, open applications or the existing youth council. Go to colleges, youth clubs, gyms, faith groups, estates and workplaces, and recruit through the youth organisations and charities that already have relationships; fund them to do it. Track who is in the room, and recruit across ages and backgrounds. Evidence: Chapter 2 and the toolkit.

> "I heard about it from one of our teachers at school, but also from the lead on the Transport Museum's educational programme."
> — Young person

> "Youth voice needs to be the starting point!"
> — City Hall event, participant card

Recommendation 4

Pay young people, cover their costs, and link taking part to green skills and jobs

For everyone, and funders in particular.

Pay young people for their time as any other adviser at the table is paid, in a form that is useful to them. Where you cannot, cover travel and food and say why. Make the link to careers concrete: references, accreditation, work experience, introductions and, where possible, paid roles. Evidence: Chapter 1 and the toolkit.

> "Not expecting young people to do this for free."
> — City Hall event, participant card

Recommendation 5

Be transparent about impact, and measure it in terms of policy and climate action outcomes, not youth attendance

For boroughs and the Greater London Authority.

End every engagement with a public account of what young people said, what was accepted or rejected and why, who is responsible and when it will be reviewed, and tell the young people directly. Invite them back to check. Measure success by whether recommendations moved policy, budgets or delivery, not by how many people came. Evidence: the toolkit (How to involve us).

> "Importance of showing the impact of young people inputting to projects, e.g. information boards next to projects that describe the history of the project."
> — City Hall event, participant card

Recommendation 6

Use young people's language, and be frank about the scale of the climate crisis

For everyone.

Lead with jobs, bills, heat, safety and the places young people already use, not 'net zero', and let young people write the communications themselves where you can. Everyday framing is not a reason to soften the scale of the crisis: young people asked for frankness about the challenges we face as well as the many ways we can set about tackling them. Evidence: Chapter 1 and the toolkit.

> "Ask [young] people what they want: and see how to deliver it in a low carbon way."
> — City Hall event participant

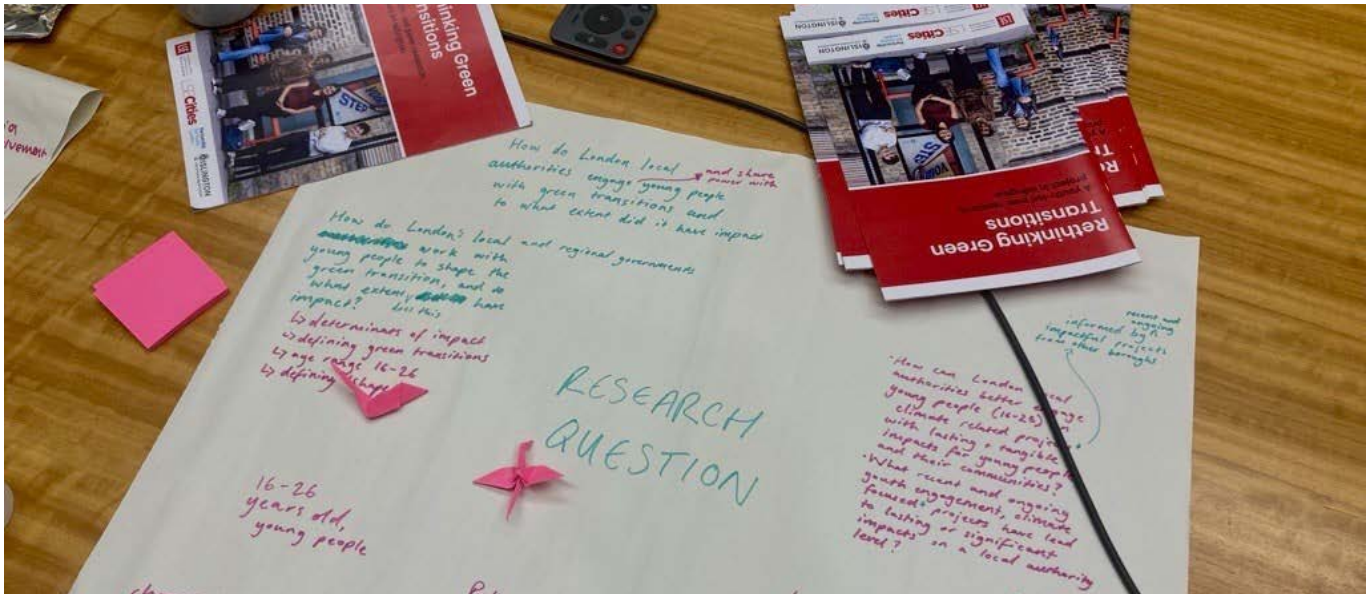
Recommendation 7

Build a London-wide partnership for youth participation in green policy

For the Greater London Authority, London Councils and funders.

Three things no single borough can do alone. A London-wide register of initiatives in this space, so that the activity we found becomes visible to the people running it. A cross-borough exchange through London Councils' youth leads, so that what works in one borough reaches the next. Longer-term funding for the voluntary-sector partners that much of this work depends on. Evidence: Chapters 2 and 3.





Introduction

London needs a green transition that is fast, fair and far-reaching. In 2026, the capital saw record heat in May, June and August (when Kew Gardens registered over 38 degrees Celsius). There is no doubt that the climate crisis is already hitting London, stretching emergency services, sparking wildfires, and threatening water security. There is also no doubt that the most disadvantaged Londoners are disproportionately exposed to risk, living in housing vulnerable to overheating or flooding, and working low-paid jobs exposed to extreme weather – and these risks are only set to escalate over the coming years.

Back in 2024, when we began the first phase of this project in Islington, we asked our young peer research team what 'the green transition' meant to them. They were clear that it meant adaptation to these worsening conditions, but it also meant tackling social injustice and the root causes of the climate crisis. The green transition could be an opportunity to re-think broader social and political systems, and to build a fairer future.

> This project defines the green transition as the journey towards social and environmental sustainability, ensuring liveable cities and a liveable planet for all.

Young Londoners have a vital role to play on this journey – after all, our team emphasised, it is their future at stake.

And yet, in London and beyond, young people are consistently under-represented in public debates and policy processes shaping local green transitions. Last year's research in Islington found that 16- to 26-year-olds made up less than one per cent of respondents to the council's Liveable Neighbourhoods consultations.

> By young people we mean 16- to 25-year-olds. They are the group most often missed by youth engagement work. They are often on the move, between school, college, work and training, and increasingly outside the institutions that make younger children easy to reach. They are also at the age when social and political identities form.

In this context, councils, community organisations, funders and young people themselves are asking the same question: **how does the city move to a greener, more resilient and more just future that young people have helped to shape?**

There is growing momentum around this question. The Greater London Authority, including the Deputy Mayor for Energy and the Environment, Mete Coban, and increasing numbers of councils and civil society organisations, from London Museum to Thames21, have recognised young people as central to London's green transition.

But even the most enthusiastic champions of youth participation in green policy are wary that much of it currently falls short. Most of what councils call youth green participation is climate education in schools.

> **"There's a lot of willingness amongst people to bring youth voices into the room. There is less understanding of how to turn that into action. And the danger is that it becomes performative."**
> — Teacher and co-founder of a council youth environment board

Real influence exists in a handful of places and depends on a few determined people. The young people whose voices are most needed are the ones least engaged, and almost nobody can say what changed afterwards. There is a gap between enthusiasm to involve young people and a practical understanding of how to bring them into decisions on green policies.

> "Two sixth formers came to me and said they've gotten fed up with people asking young people for their opinion and patting them on their heads and going away and saying, that's very nice, and then just disappearing. What we want to do is create change."
> Councillor and committee chair

These cautions will not surprise anyone who does this work. But our research also illuminated examples of innovative participatory work that really did create change, and that could be learnt from and built upon. The dynamism we found rarely came from a strategy document, but from a manifesto commitment, a deputy mayor, an officer who took a lead, or two teenagers who pitched an idea on a school tour.

About this research

This pan-London project builds on our first peer research project, in Islington, which ran from June 2024 to July 2025 in partnership with Islington Council. Four peer researchers (aged 20–27) worked with 158 young people and the officers and councillors who make decisions about the borough, to map how young people could shape the green transitions locally.

We found young Londoners with creative enthusiasm for shaping their city's future, who also struggle with climate anxiety, social isolation and a sense that politics is not for them, and who had largely switched off from heated green transition debates. The report made 31 recommendations to the council, which were welcomed by policy officers, political leaders and the youth council, and many of which have resonated during this pan-London research phase.

> **"We absolutely want to understand what it is that's impacting [young people] but also how we can do something to help … We don't hear enough from young people. If we do go out to an engagement or consultation, the number of young people who engage in that way is very low. I think there is also a real benefit for young people in becoming part of their community and that really strengthens the communities themselves."**
> — Cllr Rowena Champion, Executive Member for Climate, Environment & Transport, Islington Council

In early 2026, we began a follow-on, pan-London peer research project that picked up where the project in Islington left off. We set out to explore the range of tools being tried across the city, from peer research and youth advisory boards to digital campaigns. Few of these efforts are developing in dialogue with each other, and fewer still ask young people directly what works and what should come next. **At a time when funding for participatory work is competitive and time-consuming to secure, more exchange between the people doing it across London is needed. Through this research and the event for policymakers at City Hall that formed part of it, we have begun to build that exchange.**

The report brings together what we found over seven months of peer research: the current pan-London picture of youth participation in the green transition, what holds it back, what helps, and what is needed next. It is written for the people who can act on it: council officers and councillors, civil society practitioners, funders and researchers, in London first but not only in London.

Why now?

We are publishing this report at an exciting moment for youth participation in the green transition, in London and beyond.

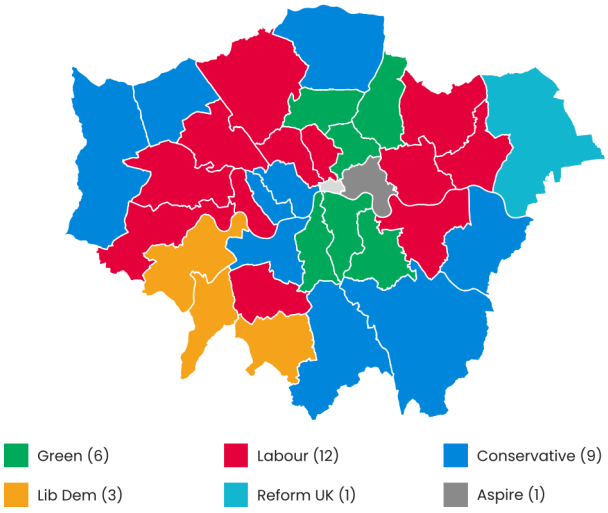
Young people want change. In 2026, students are protesting in numbers not seen for sixty years, and what they are asking for is a future that is fairer and more secure: jobs and homes they can afford and investment in education and public services. Climate action has rarely been an explicit rallying call for these movements, but the climate crisis remains one of the biggest threats to young people's fair and secure future. It is time for a green transition that invites young people to look beyond net zero, as our peer research team does, to ask bigger questions about social and environmental justice, and how to engage with policymaking and climate action on their own terms.

In London, we've seen young people engaging with the 2026 May local elections (some for the first time) and seeking new voices and agendas to represent them.

On 7 May 2026 every council seat in London's 32 boroughs was contested and the capital's political map changed dramatically. Labour's share of the vote fell from 40.3 to 25.6 per cent; the Green Party's rose from 11.4 to 22.3 per cent and it now leads six boroughs.

Reform UK won its first London borough and nine boroughs were left with no party in overall control.

Who leads each London borough after 7 May 2026

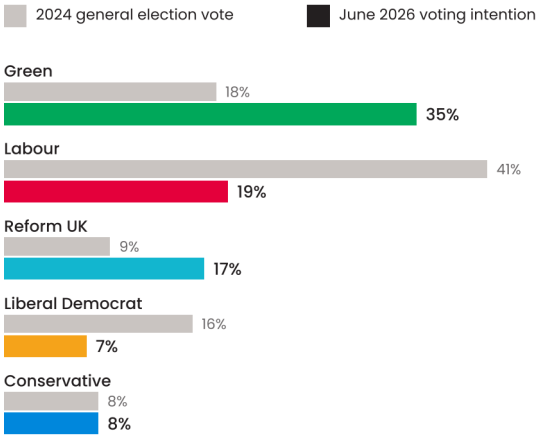


Green-led: Hackney, Lewisham and Waltham Forest, and minority or coalition administrations in Haringey, Lambeth and Southwark.

Sources: OnLondon results and council declarations.

No poll splits London's local vote by age, but national polling shows how far young people have moved: in June 2026, 35 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds said they would vote Green, up from 18 per cent at the 2024 general election (figures compiled by James Sloam at Royal Holloway). This was not simply a vote about climate: the cost of living mattered most to voters. But whichever party they support, many young Londoners are looking for change they can see in their own neighbourhoods. That is an appetite councils of every political colour can respond to.

18- to 24-year-olds, Great Britain



No poll splits London's local vote by age. Figures compiled by James Sloam (Royal Holloway) from Focaldata and YouGov.

At the same time, across the UK, votes at 16 is bringing young people's democratic participation into focus. The Representation of the People Bill, introduced in February 2026, means that many of the young people councils are failing to reach now will be voting in the next borough elections. This timeline is also leading to calls to extend youth participation beyond the ballot box, to deliver political education at scale and embed young people in governance mechanisms.

The Bill would give around 1.7 million 16- and 17-year-olds across the UK a vote in every election. London's next borough elections are due in May 2030, so many of today's secondary-school pupils will be on the register by then.

Research by Royal Holloway with Partnership for Young London and the Pan-London Children in Care Council shows what is at stake. In focus groups before and after the 2024 general election, marginalised young Londoners said their votes made no difference and that the ideas of youth councils were not acted on. They still wanted to help shape policy. The report's recommendations run alongside ours: direct engagement where young people feel listened to, better civic education, and co-creating policy with diverse groups of young people.

A complementary case for rebalancing societal priorities in favour of the young and generations to come is being made by the global future generations governance movement. Much of this governance innovation is being explored at the national or international level, but there is an opportunity for cities and local governments to experiment with new frameworks, especially in the UK where devolution is bringing greater powers to local government.





Methodology

19
London councils interviewed, out of 33

26
interviews with council staff: 15 climate officers, 6 councillors, 3 other officers, 2 youth participation leads

12
interviews beyond the boroughs: GLA environment and resilience teams, Transport for London, four civil society organisations

10
interviews or focus groups with young people: members of a funder's youth board, alumni of Transport for London Youth Panel, young people from Participation People, young people working inside councils and former peer researchers

The intended participants for this research were institutions themselves, more specifically local authorities within London (as opposed to young people, as this was the aim of last year's project in Islington). We set out to listen directly to policymakers and practitioners to understand how young people are currently involved in green policymaking. We asked what works, what doesn't, and what needs to be improved, both inside local authorities and across the wider sector.

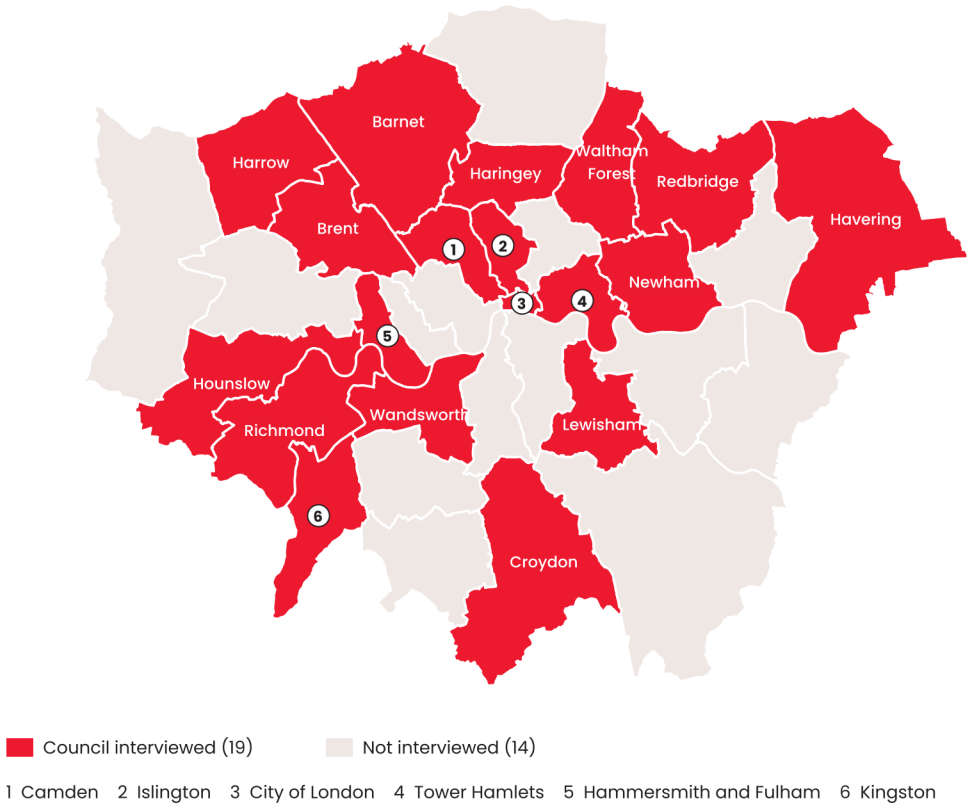
We also recognised that civil society organisations may be doing just as impactful work within the space and deserve to be spotlighted just as much as local government. We were able to interview a few but, because research capacity was limited, we prioritised interviews with local government.

There was capacity to interview a small number of young people to understand how they themselves experience participation initiatives or what role they saw for youth voice in the green transition. Young people were compensated for their involvement.

Future research would benefit from a primary focus on these latter two groups.

Our research question

How do young Londoners take part in and shape climate and green-transition policy across the capital, and what would it take for them to do so with real influence?



How the peer researchers did it

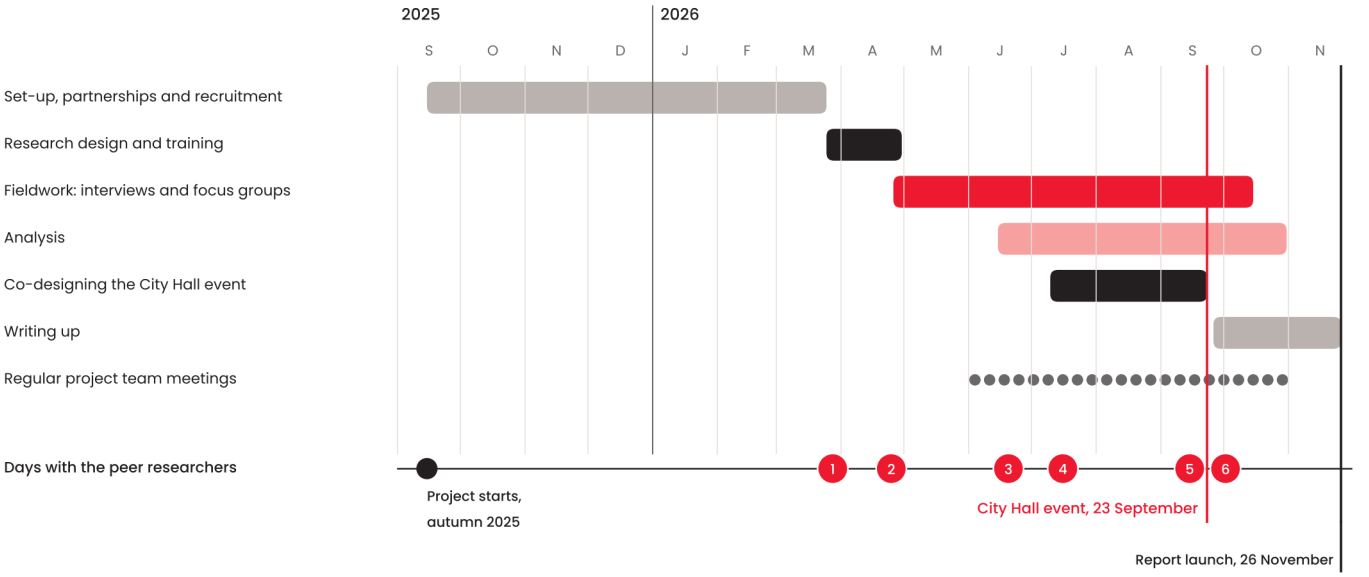
This second phase of Re-thinking Green Transitions was funded by the LSE Research and Innovation Engagement and Partnerships Fund. Four peer researchers were paid London Living Wage, trained in research methods and held the design decisions, working through full-day sessions from March to September.

- **Designing the questions.** The team mapped how decisions on green policies are made in London, set the research question, and wrote their own one-page interview guides for officers, councillors, activists and young people.
- **Conducting the interviews.** Each peer researcher took a set of boroughs to interview. Interviews were mostly 30 minutes online, recorded with consent and transcribed. The study was reviewed under LSE's research ethics policy: interviewees are anonymous by default and councils are named only with permission. Field notes from events (for example, the 2026 London Climate Action Week Youth Summit, engagement sessions run by the GLA, and our own City Hall event) fed the data collection and triangulated our findings from interviews.
- **Analysing the data.** Printed transcript strips were cut up and clustered into eight themes by all peer researchers, and later manually coded by one of them who had additional time on the project as a Research Assistant at LSE Cities. An AI-assisted reading of the full set was used only to check nothing had been missed, and every theme was verified by the team. The eight themes were condensed into the findings we presented at City Hall and outline in this report.
- **Convening an event.** The team presented key findings and recommendations to the 173 people who registered for our event at City Hall on 23 September 2026 (see p. 13).
- **Writing up findings.** Peer researchers have co-produced this report itself, having the freedom to add ideas, challenge things, and input their own sections. One of the peer researchers who was also a Research Assistant on the project led on selecting data for inclusion in the report. The bulk of the first draft of the report was then written by the Research Assistant and staff team, with the rest of the peer research team contributing sections and reviewing and commenting to shape the final report.

The charts in this report come from a second, structured pass over all 38 transcripts against a fixed codebook (mechanisms in place, barriers and enablers raised, the highest level of influence young people held, and whether a concrete decision changed). Counts are of interviews in which a point was raised, not of people; interviews were semi-structured, so a barrier not mentioned was not necessarily absent. Four interviews from October 2026 were coded after the main analysis and are included in the counts.

Limitations

- **Who we heard from.** We interviewed 19 of London's 33 councils. Fifteen of the 26 council interviews were with climate officers and only two with youth participation leads, so we heard more about climate teams' view of youth work than the reverse.
- **The sample is uneven across London.** There was strong representation north of the river and significant underrepresentation to the south (14 authorities in North London versus 5 in South London). The sample is also concentrated in two blocks: a North-West corridor stretching from Harrow to Islington, and an East London core running from the City of London to Waltham Forest. The outreach process revealed the sheer difficulty in reaching out to some local authorities. Some boroughs had no publicly available climate team emails, and emails to general inboxes were met with no replies. Some boroughs had not replied at all while other boroughs gave reasons such as limited capacity, inability to provide useful insights to the research area, or how climate work was split across different departments.
- **Short interviews.** Most interviews were 30 minutes, online. They give breadth rather than depth, and we took people's accounts of their own work at face value.



1 28 March: Research design day

2 25 April: Methods day

3 20 June: Mid-fieldwork check-in and analysis day

4 16 July: Event planning workshop

5 19 Sept: Event preparation and practice day

6 26 Sept: Analysis of the event data





THE CITY HALL EVENT

Testing the findings with London

On 23 September 2026 the four peer researchers presented their emerging findings and recommendations at City Hall. In the room were councillors, council officers, youth workers, campaigners, researchers and young people; 173 people registered.

The event was hosted by Partnership for Young London and LSE Cities, with Islington Council, the Centre for Youth Voice and the Greater London Authority. Its purpose was to test what the interviews had found: to hear what people working on this every day recognised, what they would add and where they disagreed.

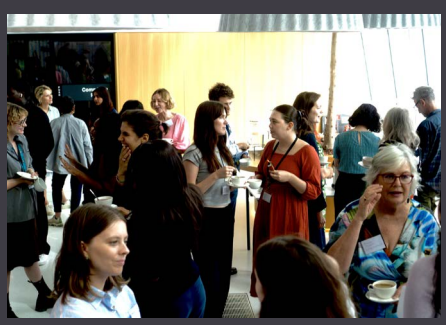
What happened on the day

The findings. The peer researchers set out five findings and six recommendations from the interviews.

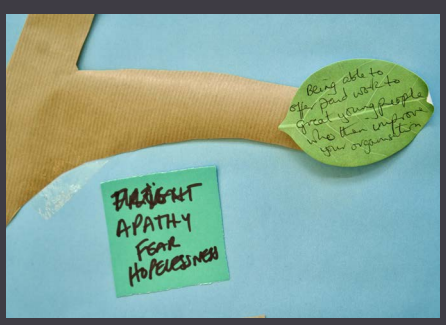
Four rounds at the tables. The room worked as one, in four rounds of table discussion, each opened by short talks: young people's priorities (London Young Assembly and Samia Dumbuya, The People's Ark); tools for participation and co-design (Tim Alcroft, Newham youth service, and Pip Sayers, The Politics Project); collaborating across London (Stephanie Fernandes, Thames21, and Carlos Izsak, UrbanWise); and imagining the future (Martha Dillon, London Climate Story Bank, and Bronwyn Hayward, University of Canterbury).

Lunch stations. A participation tree, with roots for what helps and weather for what gets in the way; a map of initiatives; and boards for needs and offers.

Data collected. Thirteen table flipcharts and the lunch stations were photographed, transcribed and coded against the findings and recommendations.







173
people registered

4
rounds of table discussion

409
notes transcribed and coded

254
notes confirmed a finding. 145 extended one and 10 pushed back

What the room said

Power, budgets and a cautionary tale

Power and structure was the biggest theme. 93 notes asked for young people to have a seat at the table, a share of the budget or a statutory role. The room added examples of early, shared decisions: a park in Chingford redesigned around girls' safety by the youth council; a school campaign that changed what a council buys. It also named a failure: an inclusive play-ground co-designed with one group of young people that displaced a family picnic area, 'right intention, wrong output'.

"Co-production needs to start at the beginning (to be real). Young people need to know they can effect change."
City Hall event, note from the tables

Making it permanent: the room split

How to make participation last drew the most notes, 114, and the most pushback. Capacity and funding ran through every round (71 notes). Four tables asked for hard levers: youth input in impact assessments, a quota, committee seats, a requirement in the Local Plan, and roles that are not fixed-term. One table argued the opposite: ring-fenced programmes 'downgrade impact', and co-production money belongs in core budgets across every strategy. Our second recommendation tries to bring together both.

"10 years is 2 political cycles. Politicians rarely think that far ahead."
City Hall event, note from the tables

Routes in, and showing what changed

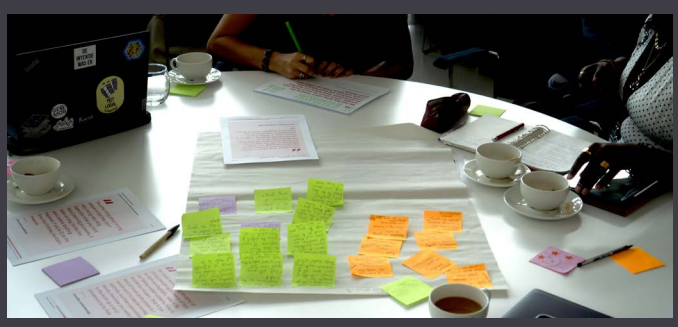
Reaching those who are missing was the most practical theme (68 notes): participation should not only begin in classrooms but in third spaces, faith and cultural groups, ESOL classes and student unions, and with peers who go out on the streets. Schools were treated as a partner that needs support, with a ready-made lesson plan to lighten the load. For what happens afterwards the room supplied mechanisms: information boards on completed projects, a council scorecard or 'democracy index', youth auditors, a published response and an annual check-in.

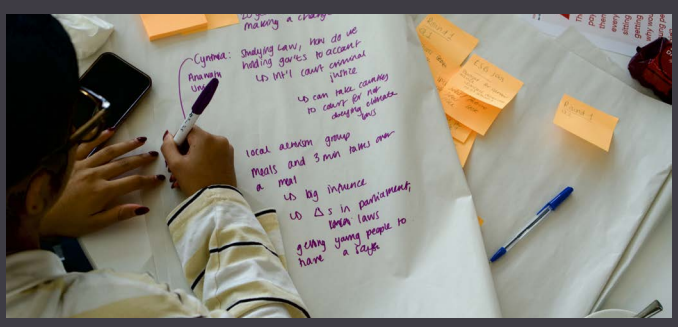
"Young people sick of being asked the same questions. Need practical delivery."
City Hall event, note from the tables

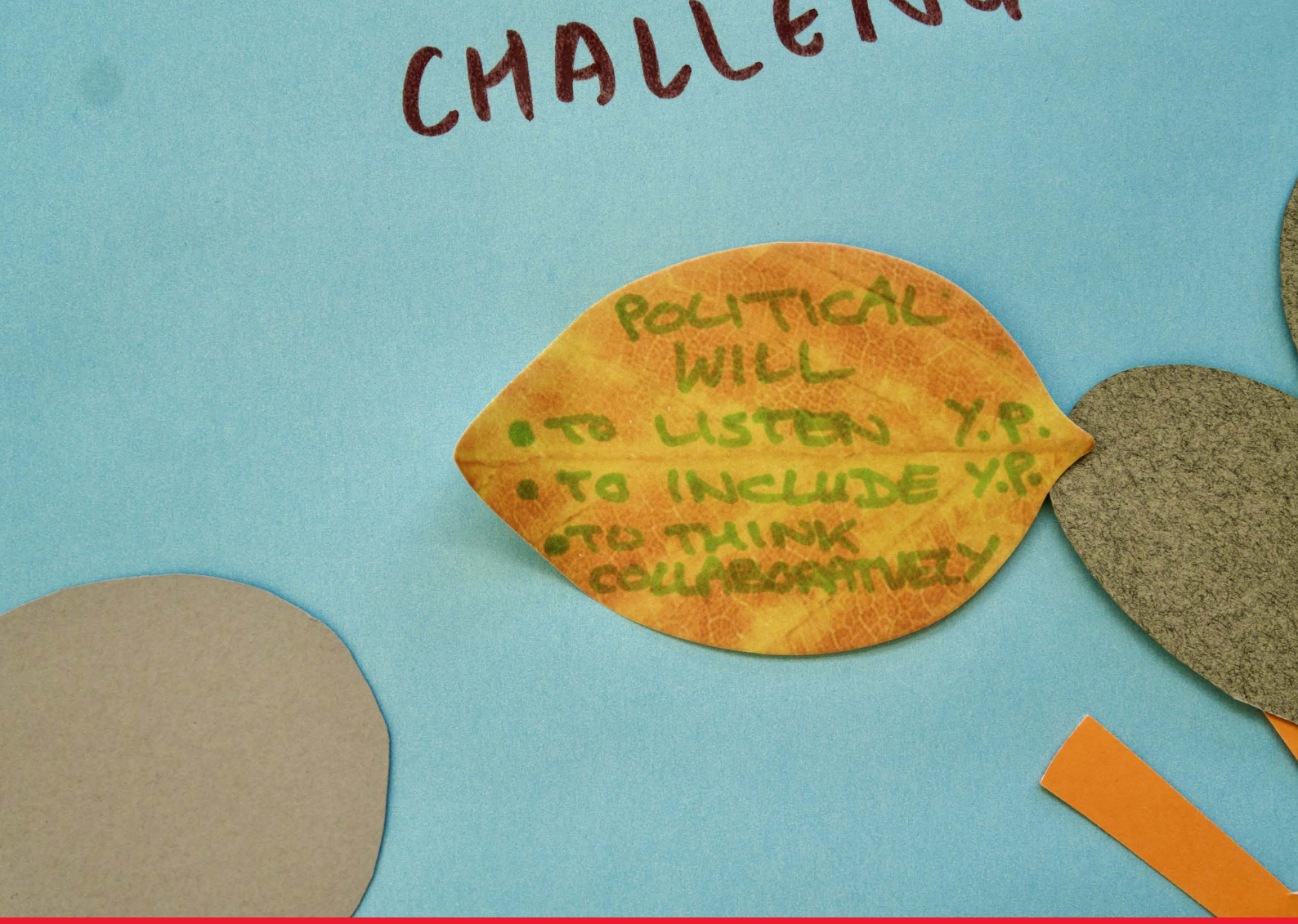
What the room added

Beyond the findings we presented, the room put most weight on communications and framing, politics and trust, green jobs as a way in, and climate anxiety and hope.

About half the notes are facilitators' summaries rather than participants' own words, the tables are not identified and one table produced nearly a fifth of the notes. We use them to test and illustrate the findings, not as a second sample.







Chapter 1

Why young people belong in decision-making about London's green transition

Everyone we interviewed had a reason for involving young people in climate and green transition work, and their reasons were rarely the ones written in official strategies.

Chapter 1

Reflection by Maddy Westhead



Maddy Westhead

There are so many reasons why young Londoners should be involved in green transition decisions, it almost makes it hard to understand why we so often are not. It may seem obvious to say that 'young people are stewards of the future', that 'young people have a desire to shape the future'. And yet, we find ourselves in this reality, where young people are systematically left out of conversations and decisions about said future.

Any youth engagement that is done, is often tokenistic, aiming to appear outwardly responsive and engaged, but without giving young people any real power or influence. Young people do not belong in green transitions only for positive political image. We belong because we have valuable and important things to say and to offer.

This is not to say that the process of meaningful engagement is simple and easy. Young Londoners are not a homogeneity, we are a hugely diverse mix of individuals, with unique needs and perspectives. There are a wide variety of factors that make us harder to reach, compared to school age children or older adults. But rather than this being viewed as an obstacle, I urge for this to be seen as confirmation of necessity.

Our 'complexity' allows for nuance, and for a broader awareness of the intersectionality of social and justice issues. This breadth of experience and opinion is what makes our input so valuable. Yes, it may be a more difficult undertaking, but the outcomes of such work has the potential to be revolutionary – on both a personal and societal level.

Why young people belong in decision-making about London's green transition

Before we unpack the current landscape of youth participation in green policymaking in London, we pause to assess why this work is valuable in the first place. Chapter 1 shares what drives individual officers and staff members to pursue it – despite the many challenges they face – and what motivates young people to take part in these initiatives.

Motivations for engaging young people

Societal and moral responsibility

Local government and civil society representatives alike recognise that they have a basic duty of care to serve the needs of whoever their actions affect, whether constituents, communities, students or employees. Many express a sense of responsibility to work with young people as part of their wider commitment to safeguard trusting, collaborative relations with communities.

> **"Councils are here to serve the community and so they need to know what their lives are like and what they feel about the future…if we want to a council that's fit for purpose, it's key that we engage with young people and it builds trust and mutual respect."**
> — Former sustainability engagement officer

Moreover, they know that young people will live for the longest with the impacts of the climate crisis, alongside all the other social and economic impacts from decisions being made today. Enabling young people to shape the green transition is a recognition of this – expressed, for many of our participants, in morally charged terms.

> **"What kind of world are young people inheriting? And what are we doing as ancestors? Like we made such a mess of it and I know that it's not all of us, but we all contribute in our own way. There's a real moral imperative for older people."**
> — Charity CEO

But young people – like every generation – will not experience these impacts evenly, and should not be imagined as a homogeneous group.

> **"Shocks, crises, emergencies, disproportionately affect different communities because of long standing prejudice and discrimination. And not everyone experiences things the same. I saw a great analogy saying: we might all be in the same storm, but we're in different boats."**
> — Resilience manager, regional government

Young people as stewards of the future

Young people will be responsible for our planet in the decades to come. Climate action must then be rooted in the empowerment of young people, giving them a platform not only to express their views but also to build their capacities to manage and create change in an uncertain world.

> **"If you are not creating opportunities for students to have agency within systems, then I would argue that fundamentally you are not really preparing them for the way the world is, you're preparing them for the way the world used to be."**
> — Teacher and co-founder of a council youth environment board

> **"They're the stewards of our planet going forward. If we don't engage them now and we just dictate rules, strategies, and services, then they're less likely to use them, understand them, see the benefit of them and to be part of them."**
> — Waste development officer

One research participant described how attitudes to environmental stewardship are shaped by our cultural contexts. Londoners, according to them, could learn from parts of the world where there is a less distinct separation between humanity and nature, and where caring for the environment and thinking of future generations is unquestioned.

> **"People in different cultures have a different way of looking at the environment. In Western culture we tend to separate it from the rest of our lives. This is our life, and here's the environment. Whereas in a lot of cultures the environment is part of [people's] lives. They don't need to be told to look after it, because they look after it, and that's how they see the world."**
> — Engagement and learning lead, environmental charity

In a highly urban city like London, where there can be large inequality between two areas, that connection to nature can be hard or even impossible for some communities, as a lack of green space becomes the norm.

Three seventeen-year-olds and a deer

I had three 17-year-old boys come and do a work experience for me and I took them to a really important nature reserve down in the South. We were fortunate enough to see a deer, a fox, and a sheep in the same field.

I was surprised by their faces... they were so shocked to the core... 2 of them had never seen a deer before in their life and thought that they had to see it in a zoo or wildlife sanctuary... Just seeing these 17-year-old lads who were very quiet to themselves, express this emotion, was such a wonderful thing to see.

And just show them that actually this is in their borough (they lived in the North of borough, which is obviously very urban and I took them not too far away), it made me realise how important it is for young people, especially in an urban area, to see what's in their borough, what's accessible to them for free, and providing opportunities for that.

It was so nice to be part of a journey where they'd experienced something for the first time at 17 years old. I got a lovely card from one of them at the end, which just made me want to cry because it was so nice to receive some wonderful feedback, an appreciation.

— Senior parks project manager

The creative contributions of young people

Officers, councillors and civil society leaders described young people as unusually clear-eyed about climate: less defended than adults, more willing to think long term, able to bring innovative and creative ideas, and quick to connect climate to the things that shape their lives, from renting and the cost of travel to feeling safe in a park after dark.

> **"What stood out was how knowledgeable young people are, how intuitively they understand these issues because they haven't developed the psychological defence mechanisms that people my age have built up over a lifetime. Their feelings about it are very raw, and there's real disappointment there."**
> — Climate action officer, London borough

> **"A lot of young people, although they may not be tempered with the experience of age, have the undiluted passion of youth - the daring to dream that something could actually be better, before society comes in and crushes those dreams."**
> — Councillor and cabinet member for environment

"It's not about giving young people a voice, young people have voices. They're very opinionated. They have a lot of ideas and they will tell you. It's about what happens next [with] that information."
Charity CEO

Staff in local authorities often contrasted young people's intuitive understanding and ability to dream with the confining conventions of local government. But young people themselves had practical advice for how to design initiatives that make space for this kind of unscripted creativity.

> **"Give them the freedom to speak as they wish. Don't try [to] give them a binary option: 'It's this or that.' Let the youth bring their own opinion to the table […] The youth might have another opinion and another solution that probably hasn't been heard of, because we tend to not have biases [about] what can be done and can't be done, or 'that's the way it's always been done'."**
> — Young participant in a youth-climate board

Young people as advocates

Young people can influence their peers, family, and the institutions they interact with on a daily basis. They raise awareness of topical issues in informal ways that can help build wider engagement with the green transition, especially when education systems and institutions fail to do so.

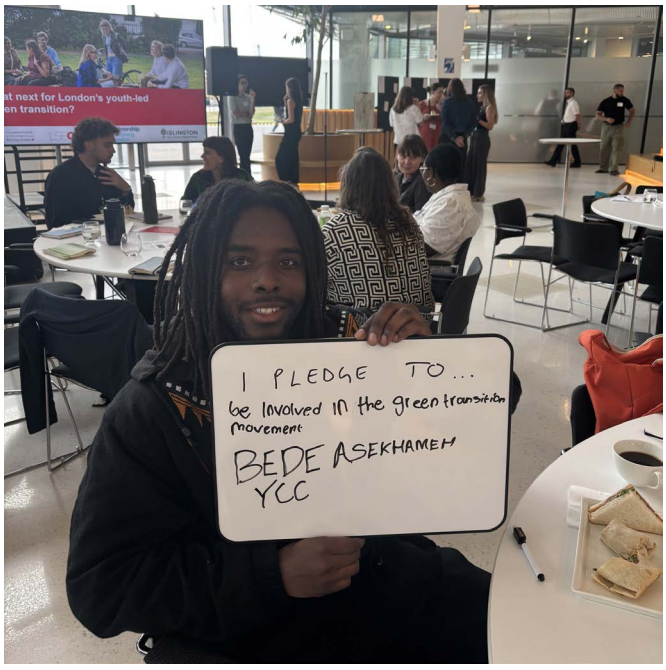
> **"You see the older boys engaging with the young children and the young children asking questions, being interested in how those boys get got to where they are now and everything that they are doing."**
> — Climate change programme officer

What motivates young people?

Desire to shape the future

The young people we spoke to who have participated in programmes and initiatives around local green transitions were motivated by many of the same convictions that we found in staff members. Our young interviewees believed that, as young people, they have distinct needs and creative ideas around the green transition. They often cared deeply about climate or biodiversity (although not all of them had been originally motivated by this – some discovered an interest in environmental topics through their participation). All of them, however, recognised their right to be involved in decision-making, and wanted, on some level, to shape the future of the city and planet they call home.

> **"Each generation becomes very distinct in their needs and in such a rapidly evolving world with things changing so intensely, it's important to engage young people on what their needs and priorities are, to build infrastructure and systems that support that and change and dismantle infrastructure and systems that uphold things that aren't useful anymore or become oppressive."**
> — Young person



A pledge made at our City Hall event, 23 September 2026: "I pledge to be involved in the green transition movement."

Relevance of the green transition to everyday challenges

Young people care about the future, but they also see the green transition as connected to their experiences of the city today. One of the central messages of last year's report in Islington was around language and framing: young people are motivated by social and economic justice as much as by environmental justice and recognise that the two cannot be separated.

This year, at our event at City Hall, the same message resonated: the 'why' has to be in young people's own terms. Jobs, affordability, safety, and a sense that the council 'isn't just a last resort'. Thirty notes in the first discussion round alone were about framing: 'net zero' sounds negative, where the case for the green transition should be about what could be improved.

> **"Cost of living is climate change and climate change is cost of living."**
> City Hall event, facilitator's note

> **"Net zero is linked to 'losing things' or giving things up, but the framing should be about climate action improving things: social justice, sustainable economies. It's also not about inducing fear of the negative impacts, but what we can gain."**
> — City Hall event, facilitator's note

Personal and professional development

An immediately tangible way youth participation activities can be made relevant to the everyday lives of young people is by offering personal and professional development. Young people benefit from opportunities – from learning transferable skills, gaining deeper industry knowledge, networking and further career opportunities, to gaining more confidence and sense of their own agency. Especially with the UK government's Milburn report finding that one million young people aged 16-24 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), the need for more opportunities for young people has never been more urgent.

> **"I actually didn't come in thinking I wanted to work in climate - I was more interested in something like quantity surveying. But being here, and especially having those meetings with each member of the team to hear what they do beyond what I've been working on - particularly around the social housing retrofitting work - that has genuinely made me think differently.'"**
> — Young person

> **"Given there's been a rise in unemployment amongst young people...These are skills that would help them. [Taking part should be] see[n as] an opportunity rather than a burden, because ultimately, it will alleviate pressures."**
> — Young person

Such skills-building opportunities mainly benefit the individual young people who take part in initiatives. However, our interviewees were ambitious to see a wider effort to build the capacities of a new generation of workers fit to deliver a green transition at scale.

> **"We could be training an army of young people up in terms of how to farm ecologically, how to fix our failing water systems, how to retrofit our houses. That is the kind of mass scale projects I would want to see be funded centrally, but then administered locally."**
> — Councillor

The scale of the opportunity is large. Research for London's sub-regional partnerships projects that green jobs in the capital could rise from around 234,000 in 2020 to 505,000 by 2030 and more than a million by 2050, if a net zero pathway is followed. Young people are already weighing this up. In Calling for Change, 54 per cent of young Londoners said environmental issues mattered to their choice of work, and a 2023 KPMG survey of UK workers and students found that one in three 18- to 24-year-olds had turned down a job offer because an employer's environmental and social commitments did not match their values. Linking participation to green skills and jobs meets young people where their own choices already are.



Sources: WPI Economics and Institute for Employment Studies, Green Jobs and Skills in London (2021), central projection; KPMG UK survey (2023); Calling for Change (2022).

CASE STUDY

Transport for London

TfL Youth Panel: Tomorrow's TfL

Ages 16–25 · Youth advisory panel and policy report · Report launched October 2023

16–25
youth panel age range

~30
volunteer panel members

12 months
2022–23 exploration

9
policy recommendations

Description

The TfL Youth Panel is TfL's dedicated advisory panel of young people aged 16–25 who travel in London. During 2022–23, the panel undertook a year-long exploration of the intersection between environmental sustainability and equity, diversity and inclusion. The work culminated in the panel-authored report Tomorrow's TfL: The Youth Panel's vision for the future, published in October 2023.

How young people were involved

- Panel members undertook research, interviews, workshops and discussions with experts and stakeholders.
- They held public hearings with expert witnesses at City Hall in late 2022, questioned witnesses and used the evidence to develop and prioritise recommendations.
- The report presents nine recommendations under four themes: Community Outreach; Inclusive Decisions; Embracing Opportunity; and Equitable Futures.

Impact

- TfL publicly supported the report's findings. In February 2024, it introduced regular Youth Panel representation at two senior TfL panels, with representatives reviewing papers and raising questions with leaders.
- TfL's 2025 progress paper records continued engagement with the Youth Panel to progress its recommendations.

What is particularly interesting

The case shows a route from youth advice to formal organisational scrutiny: a youth-authored report led to regular representation at senior governance meetings. It is also a strong climate case because the recommendations connect sustainable transport with climate adaptation and environmental inequalities.

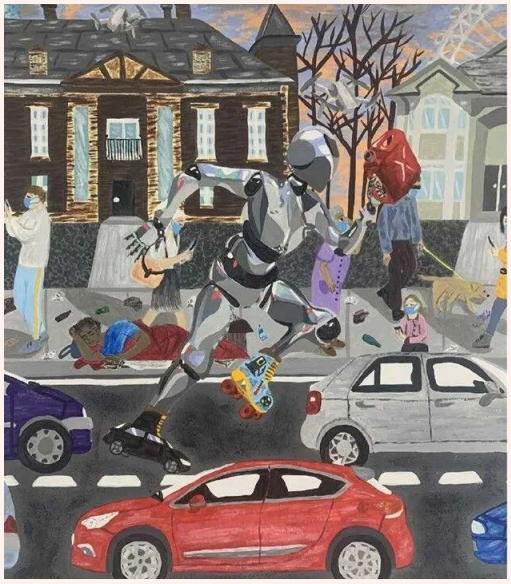
> "When I sit on the Customer, Sustainability and Operations Panel as the youth rep, it's been really good to formulate my questions in a way that links back to the report, because it always gives more weight to what I'm asking."
>
> — Youth Panel member

Sources: TfL Youth Panel, Tomorrow's TfL (October 2023); TfL press release (13 February 2024); TfL progress paper (3 July 2025); interviews with TfL staff and Youth Panel members.

CASE STUDY

Calling for Change: what 1,023 young Londoners said about a sustainable city

In 2022, London Museum and Partnership for Young London asked young Londoners what a sustainable future for their city should look like. Five peer researchers aged 17 to 25 worked on it: a survey of 1,023 16- to 25-year-olds and four focus groups. Its findings sit behind much of what we heard this year.



Katie Watling, a young person's view of London without inclusive climate action

Interested in environmental issues

85%



More than eight in ten of the 1,023 young Londoners surveyed

Is London doing well on sustainability?



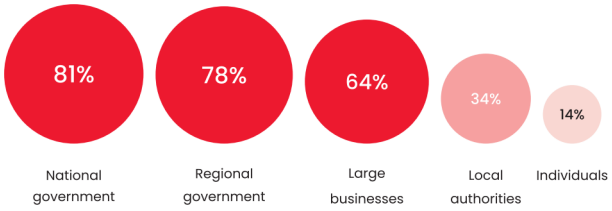
37% badly | 49% neither | 14% well

Transport they want more of by 2035, in order



1 Cycling, 2 Walking, 3 Tube, 4 Buses, 5 Trains, 6 Cars, 7 Taxis

Who is most responsible for a sustainable London?



What stops them getting more involved

- 36% Lack of time
- 36% Not knowing how to get involved
- 33% Belief it makes no difference
- 29% Personal finances
- 23% Lack of education on the issues
- 18% Fear of repercussions

They support

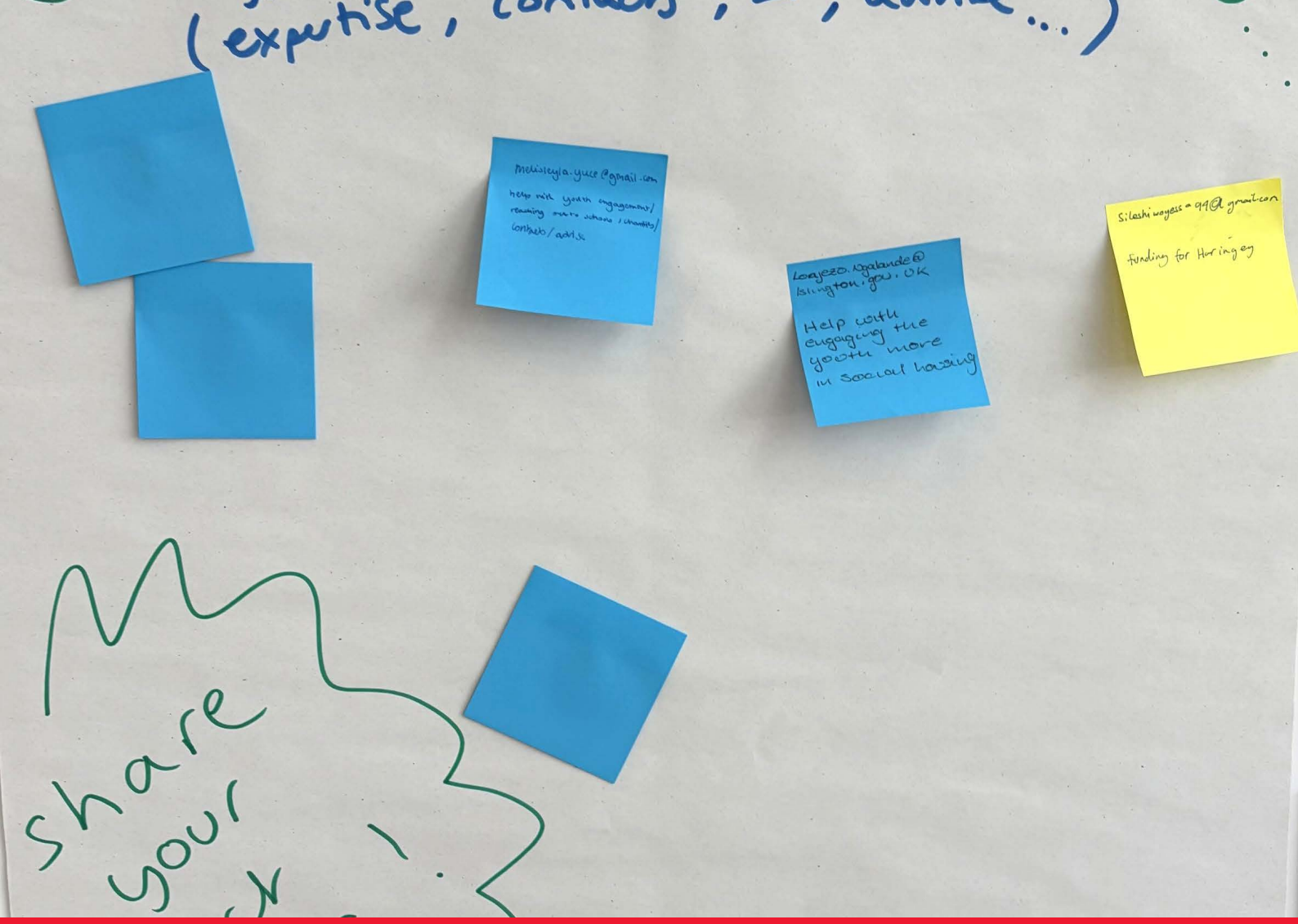
- 82% free public transport for 16- to 24-year-olds
- 80% expanding the Ultra Low Emission Zone
- 75% Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

Where they learn

- 66% social media
- 47% school or college

Why it matters here. Young Londoners placed responsibility for a sustainable city with government far more than with individuals. What held them back from taking part was time, not knowing how, and a belief that it would make no difference: the same missing routes to influence that this report describes. Asked how they would most like to be heard, they ranked youth voice structures first.

Source: Calling for Change: Young Londoners' views on a sustainable future for their city (London Museum with Partnership for Young London, 2022). Percentages are rounded.



Chapter 2

The picture today: lots of activity, little power-sharing

This chapter describes the range of methods local authorities use to engage young people in green policymaking. It then asks the harder questions: who is taking part, and how often does any of this change a decision?

Chapter 2

Reflection by Jakaria Uddin



Jakaria Uddin

One thing that stood out to me in this research was the difference between involving young people and giving them the agency to shape decisions. Across London, we found a wide range of initiatives, from youth councils and climate assemblies to peer research and school programmes. While much of this engagement focuses on educating young people, education without the conditions that enable agency risks becoming an end in itself. Similarly, providing platforms for young people to share their perspectives without taking practical steps to act on them risks cultivating a culture where meaningful decisions are continually deferred to the future, while young people live with the consequences of decisions being made today.

Existing initiatives often reach those who are already confident, supported or engaged. For young people juggling work, education, caring responsibilities or financial pressures, their absence is not necessarily evidence of disengagement. When we describe young people as 'hard to reach', are they really hard to reach, or are we simply not doing enough of the reaching out?

If we step outside the status quo, can we break this double bind, where institutions rely on methods that engage only a subset of young people, while patchworking their perspectives into decisions that have already been made.

Perhaps meaningful participation begins with the willingness to suspend judgement, to recognise what we do not yet know, to resist the rush to fill every silence, and to understand disagreement not as something to overcome, but as something we might learn from. Ultimately, meaningful participation requires institutions to find comfort in listening to young people, and in doing so will they become more comfortable with sharing power.

The research also gave me reasons to be optimistic. Examples of young people influencing public spaces and shaping plans show that meaningful participation is possible when opportunities are created early and responsibilities are shared. But success cannot be defined merely by the number of available opportunities but by their quality, accessibility and impact.

Anyone can say a word. I suppose what we ought to ask is what mechanisms are in place for that word to influence change that young people can see?

The picture today: lots of activity, little power-sharing

This year we found a wide range of youth participation in London's green transition: twelve kinds of mechanism across 19 councils, each with their own strengths and difficulties, and all with a great deal of commitment from the people running them. Most of this activity is education through schools, and shared decisions are rare. This chapter sets out what exists and where young people sit on the spectrum from being informed to leading. It then asks who is taking part, and how often any of it changes a decision.

Mechanism	Examples we found across London	Where young people sit
School charters, parliaments and networks	Children's Environmental Parliament (20 years, run by a charity); borough schools' sustainability charters; climate ambassadors	Informed to consulted; mostly primary-age
Summits, festivals, mock COPs	London Youth Climate Summit; borough schools' climate conferences and mock COPs; a 'Love Your Climate' summit feeding a climate action plan; a borough youth climate forum held in the council chamber and co-designed with pupils each year	Informed to consulted
Citizen science, growing and internships	Thames foreshore surveys run by pupils; 'right to grow' and school growing sites; climate centre eco-graduate internships	Involved in delivery; rarely in decisions
Citizens' and youth assemblies	Barnet and Camden climate assemblies; Newham's youth climate assembly; Hackney and Southwark climate juries; community people's assemblies run by a climate centre; a randomly selected residents' climate panel that reports back on progress every year	Consulted; involved where the council formally responds to every recommendation
Youth councils, young mayors, youth parliaments, takeover days	Young mayor climate subgroups with a discretionary budget; youth council supporting the development of a climate action plan	Consulted to involved; co-deciding where they control money
Youth boards and panels inside governance	Transport for London Youth Panel; City of London Natural Environment Youth Board; Mayor's Fund for London Youth Board; a borough Youth Climate Network (18–25)	Consulted to involved; co-deciding where the board holds a budget or a seat at board level
Seats on scrutiny and board-level committees	A youth representative at TfL's Customer, Sustainability and Operations Panel; young people sitting on council scrutiny committees alongside councillors	Involved, with a route to accountability
Deliberative workshops on plans	A youth panel convened before a rivers plan was drafted; a deliberative workshop setting principles for a regional climate action plan; child-friendly planning guidance co-written with a youth parliament	Involved; co-deciding where the output becomes binding
Microgrants and dragons' dens	Green Roots Fund youth micro-grants panel; joint youth council climate fund; school travel campaign pitches with £500 budgets	Involved; co-deciding where young people assess and award
Paid young advisors and peer outreach	Young Advisors (since 2008); Streetbase peer patrols; GLA Peer Outreach Workers	Involved to co-deciding; young people are paid and commissioned
Paid peer researchers	Re-thinking Green Transitions in Islington; Our City, Our Resilience; Calling for Change; Hopeful Futures	Youth-led research; uptake depends on the commissioning body
Youth-made media and youth-led organisations	Youth climate documentaries; podcasts and zines; youth-led campaigns and collectives; young people co-designing a national charity's climate and gardening resources	Youth-led content and campaigning

What youth participation in London's green transition looks like today

The table sets out the twelve main mechanisms we found and where, in our assessment, young people usually sat on the spectrum from informed, through consulted and involved, to co-deciding and youth-led.

We rated each organisation on a five-step spectrum: informed (young people are told what is happening), consulted (asked, with no decision-making power), involved (their input is accepted and acted on), co-deciding (a vote, a budget or a seat on a board) and youth-led (designed and run by young people).

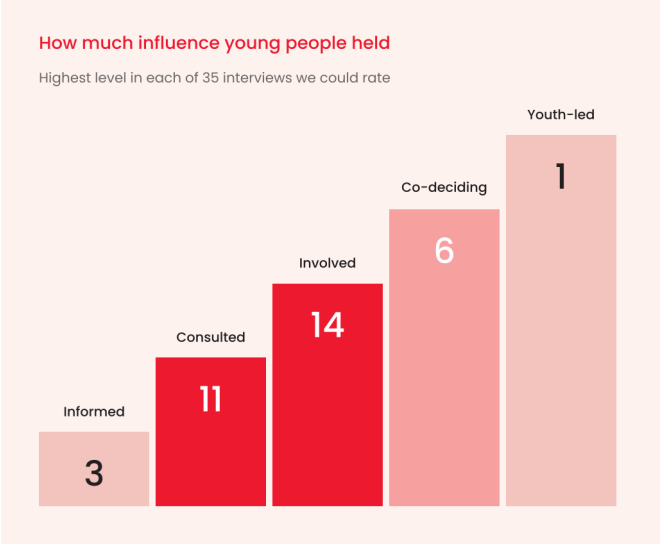


Figure 1. Each interview was rated for the highest level of influence young people demonstrably held over a climate or green-transition decision in that organisation, using a five-step ladder. Three interviews (new councillors and a non-climate role) could not be rated.

Our analysis of the pan-London landscape of youth participation in green policymaking suggests two overall patterns:

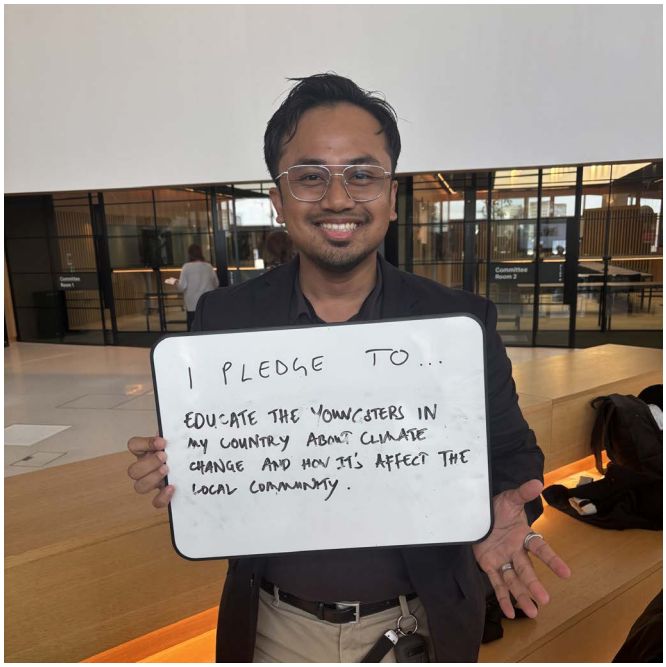
1. Most councils describe their youth green policy participation as education and behaviour change, delivered through schools, rather than as a way of sharing decisions. Much of this educational work is very valuable. Benefits include raising awareness, building technical skills, allowing participants to influence others beyond the project, offering a moment of inspiration, and developing personal and professional skills. But councils currently miss opportunities to build on it with more extensive participation and power sharing.
2. The mechanisms that give young people the most power (e.g. a scrutiny seat, a budget to allocate, a panel convened before a plan is written) are rare, recent, and almost always the work of one or two determined people.

Engagement reaches primary schools and the already-committed, not 16- to 25-year-olds

'Young people' in climate work often means pupils reached through a school as schools tend to be easier places to access young people in large numbers. Primary schools in particular were over-represented within projects. Young people aged 16 to 25, whether in sixth form, college, work, training or none of these, tend to be the 'hardest' group to reach by local governments and therefore the ones few services now target. Opt-in panels, summits and youth councils attract confident, well-supported young people; the environmental sector's own lack of diversity compounds the problem; and the practical costs of taking part fall hardest on those with least. With votes at 16 on the way, this is the group whose democratic participation councils can least afford to keep missing.

> **"It was very heavily weighted towards schools of very good reputation, who clearly had teachers who just had the time and the strong willingness to push their young people into extracurriculars."**
> — Former sustainability engagement officer

> **"The environmental sector…It's very white, middle class, and male. That's something I find unacceptable. Especially in a city like London, you cannot have that lack of diversity and carry on as a charity… I was shocked when I came into this sector. I'm normally very careful with my words, but I do think it's systemically racist, to be honest. There's a problem there, because if you're not getting people from specific backgrounds, you're not doing the work to get them. That's on us."**
> — Engagement and learning lead, environmental charity



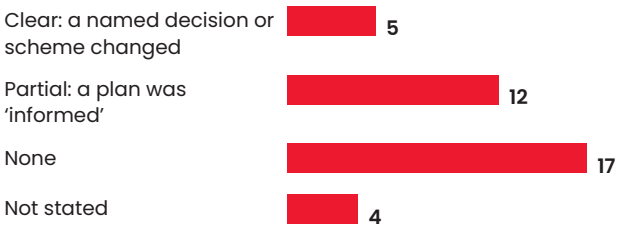
A pledge made at our City Hall event, 23 September 2026: "I pledge to educate the youngsters in my country about climate change and how it affects the local community."

Influence is real where young people come in early and a decision is actually shared

Most engagement arrived after the direction had been set, or was designed solely for education rather than decision-making. Only five of our 38 interviewees could name a concrete change.

Figure 2. Whether the interviewee could name a decision, scheme, plan or budget that changed because of young people's input. 'Partial' means a plan was described as

informed by young people without a specific change being identified.



> **"We were brought in just to do the summary page. And it was like, 'Oh, okay. Have you already finished the strategy?' 'Yeah, we've already finished it [so] the most you can do is a page'."**
>
> — Young person

However, great practice also exists in London today. Interviewees who had seen influence work described two factors that underpinned successful initiatives. First, young people were brought into the room at the outset, before plans are written and decisions are taken. Second, they were presented with a clear statement of what is open to them to influence.

Young participants need to have a clear map of the aims and remit of their participation at the outset of the project. This means being explicit about what young people can influence, what they cannot, and why; one officer called this 'defining the sandpit'.

Instances where green-transition decisions changed because young people were involved were limited, but there were exceptions. They cluster in two places: place-based public realm and green space (for example, a park redesigned around girls' safety, a rain garden designed with flood engineers and pupils); and the shaping of plans where young people were convened before drafting began (for example, a youth strand of a climate assembly whose 20 joint recommendations were all accepted and actioned; a youth panel inside the governance of a regional rivers plan; a youth board whose recommendations went straight to planning and greening teams).

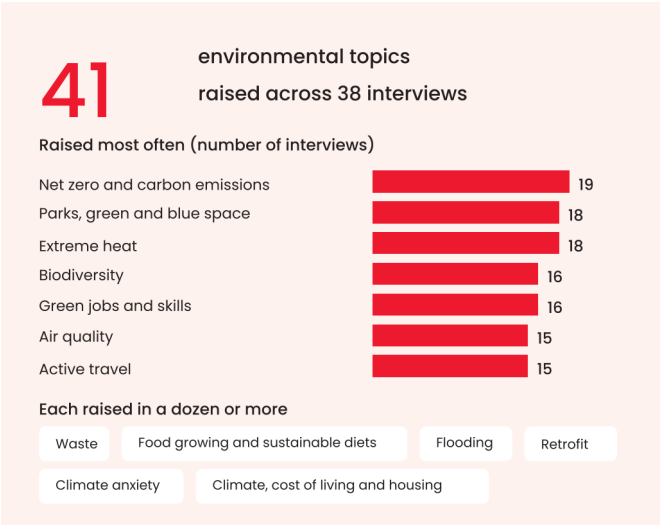
> **"There's been a youth panel set up as part of the governance structure of that work, having a formal governance structure for young people to influence the decision-making from a really early stage. They were convened before there was any plan."**
>
> — Senior policy officer, regional government environment team

> **"They specifically wanted to improve the park and safety for young girls. Our team did a couple of workshops with young girls from the area. They did a whole report and then the changes have happened."**
>
> — Head of youth engagement, London borough

The wider context

What interviewees meant by the green transition

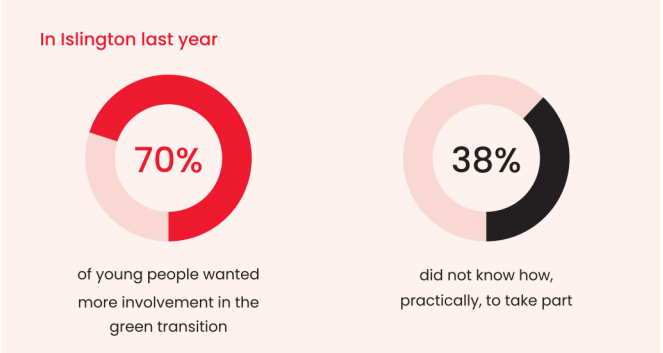
Interviewees talked about 41 environmental topics across the 38 transcripts. The most frequent were net zero and carbon emissions (19 transcripts), parks and access to green and blue space (18), extreme heat (18), biodiversity (16), green jobs and skills (16), air quality (15) and active travel (15). Waste, food growing and sustainable diets, flooding, retrofit, climate anxiety, and the links between climate, the cost of living and housing each came up in a dozen or more.



A topic is counted once per interview in which it came up.

What young people told us in Islington

Our research in Islington last year showed that what young people often lack is not awareness of the climate crisis but a route to influence: a place where their insight is expected, resourced and acted on. In that survey, 70 per cent of young people wanted more involvement in the green transition, and 38 per cent did not know how, practically, to take part.



Survey of 116 young people in Islington, Re-thinking Green Transitions phase one (2025).

CASE STUDY

Mayor's Fund for London, London Resilience and Berkeley Foundation

Our City, Our Resilience

Ages 16–25 · Youth-led research and engagement on emergency preparedness · 2025–2026

124
survey respondents aged 16–25

37
workshop participants

3
boroughs: Westminster, Lambeth and Newham

50,000+
digital campaign views

Description

Our City, Our Resilience is a youth-led research project developed by the Mayor's Fund for London with London Resilience partners and commissioned by the London Resilience Unit. It explored how young Londoners understand disruption and emergencies, how prepared they feel, and what support and information they need. Its scope includes climate risks alongside economic pressure, housing instability, public health and infrastructure disruption.

How young people were involved

- Mayor's Fund for London Youth Board members were Project Co-Leaders: they co-designed the research approach, workshop delivery and digital campaign.
- A wider range of young people were reached through the survey, the workshops and the digital campaign.
- Co-Leaders helped interpret findings and presented them at events including the 2026 Resilience Summit in City Hall.

Impact

- The report has directly led the Resilience Unit to set up a Youth Advisory Board within its governance structure. It is the first of its kind within the resilience space and will recruit its first members in early 2027.
- The report found a gap between young people's understanding of resilience and their confidence about what to do in a real emergency.
- The digital campaign generated more than 50,000 views and reached more than 33,000 users, according to the project report.

What is particularly interesting

The project treats resilience as a lived, collective issue rather than only an emergency-services responsibility. Young people helped shape the research design, gather evidence, test messages and interpret findings.

> "I felt that this was often a flip in the script where educating people was now coming from the bottom up rather than top down."
>
> — Youth Board member

Sources: Mayor's Fund for London, Our City, Our Resilience final report; interview with Youth Board members (August 2026); Youth Board Terms of Reference (June 2024).

The A4 page

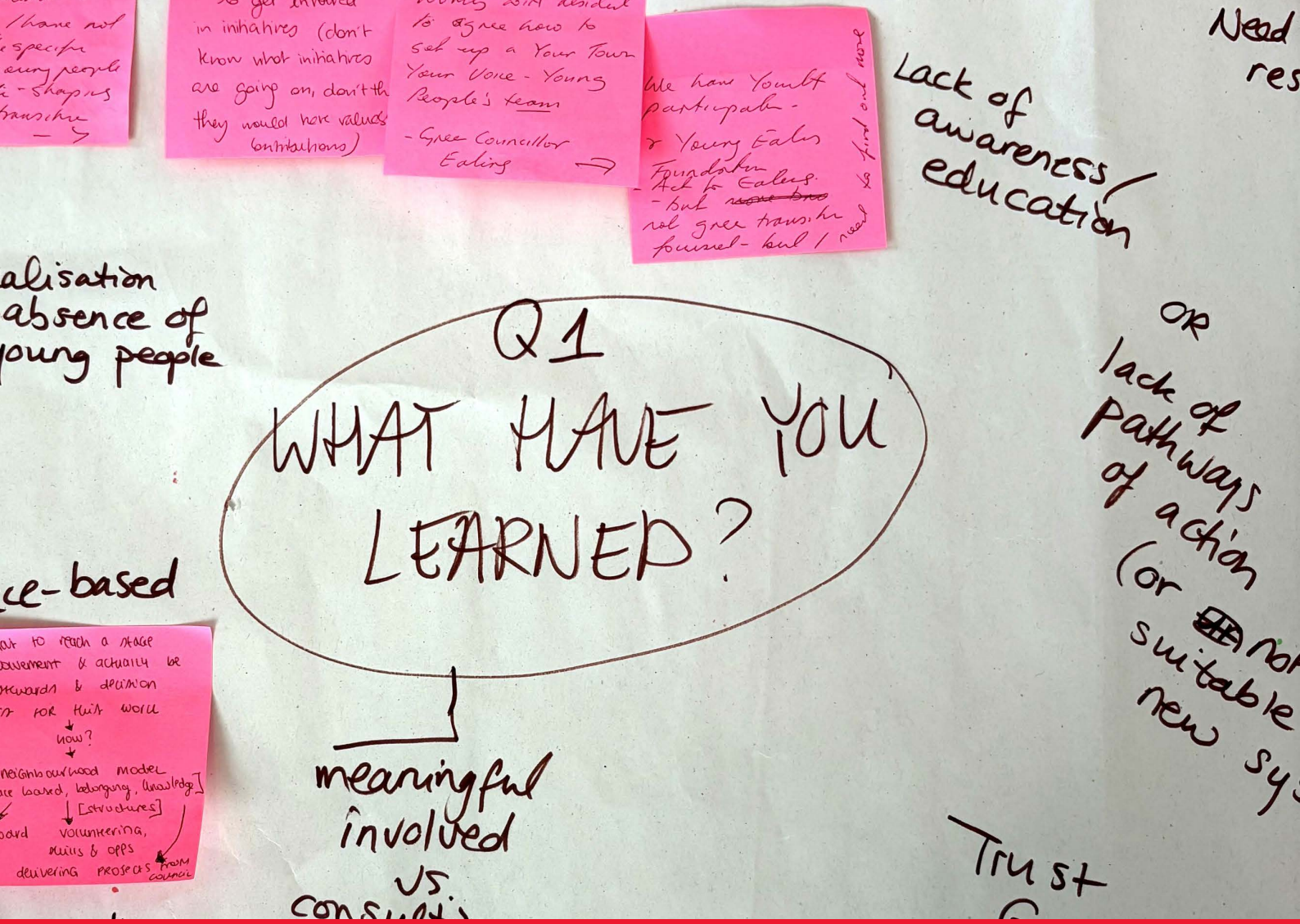
We came away with such rich text and contributions and really meaningful things that we had to say about our London. But the way it was diluted, because we only had to fit it on an A4 piece of paper, was really frustrating...

They had written up the youth principles and when I read it, I was like, you haven't really captured everything that we wanted... it just felt like this is probably something that ChatGPT could have come up with...

The conversations that we actually had were a lot more nuanced than that, but I think they had to censor it a little bit...

I understand, like you have to make it like accessible for the format you're making it into, but then maybe it could have been good to like actually say what we had said, maybe in a different format so that it didn't go to waste.

— Young person



Chapter 3

Inside institutions: what holds youth participation back, what helps

Councils want to do this work. Much of what stops them is their internal capacity to deliver it: few staff, scant budgets, slow approvals, and teams that do not talk to each other. This chapter takes each in turn, mostly in interviewees' own words, then turns to what helps: partners, leadership, a route into governance and a clear scope. It is the chapter for people who work inside the institutions of local government.

Chapter 3

Reflection by Cindy Boa



Cindy Boa

By this point in the report, you're probably thinking: well, how are we actually supposed to make all of this happen? And if you work in a council, you've probably already got a list of very real reasons why it feels difficult. Not enough staff, not enough funding, slow approvals, and sometimes even working out whose responsibility youth engagement is. Is it the climate team's job? The children and young people's team that sits upstairs and you don't really work with? Or someone else's entirely?

What really stood out to me from this research is how much good work relies on one passionate person going above and beyond their day job. While those people are invaluable, we cannot keep relying on individual goodwill to make meaningful youth participation happen. We need better structures, collaboration across teams and leadership that makes this a genuine priority.

Again, you're probably thinking, well, I'm a council officer, I'm not exactly going to change departmental structures on top of my day job, am I? And that's exactly the point. These are institutional barriers that cannot be solved by individual officers alone. Our research also uncovered wider organisational cultures, from risk-aversion to bureaucracy and resistance to doing things differently, that can make progress even harder. Addressing these barriers requires change from the top, not just more effort from those already stretched.

But there's also a real urgency here. As one interviewee puts it, young people don't stay young forever. While councils navigate lengthy processes and competing priorities, young people are growing up, often without ever seeing the impact of their contributions. With the climate emergency already shaping their futures, they deserve more than being consulted and then left wondering what happened.

This chapter explores these barriers, but importantly, also what has helped overcome them, from trusted external partners to creative approaches and stronger leadership. I hope you see it as an opportunity to reflect on the challenges you may be facing, learn from what others are already doing and think about what needs to change. Above all, it's a call for collective action and stronger leadership to make meaningful youth participation a lasting part of how councils work, rather than something that relies on the goodwill of a few passionate individuals.

Inside institutions: what holds youth participation back, what helps

Recent work at LSE Cities has explored what it takes for governments to deliver complex innovations, such as youth participation in the green transition. It suggests that councils need both specific competencies in individual staff and cross-organisational capabilities, both of which rely on a council's overall powers and resources. We refer to these categories throughout the chapter as we unpack the institutional barriers and enablers of youth participation in London's green transition.

What holds local authorities back?

We asked our interviewees what the main institutional barriers were to delivering youth participation in green policy. Figure 3 shows how often each barrier came up. The sections that follow unpack the dynamics of some of the most important barriers.

Figure 3. Barriers raised, by number of interviews (of 38)

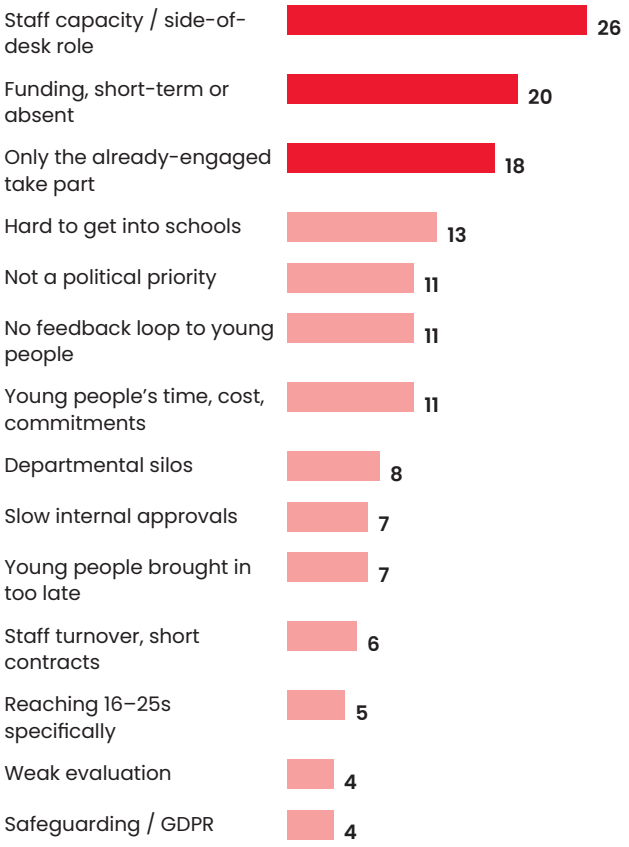


Figure 3. Barriers to youth participation in climate work, by the number of interviews in which each was raised. Dark bars: raised in more than 15 interviews.

Staff competencies and capacity

Many interviewees noted that delivering youth participation work takes staff with specific skillsets and experience.

> **"[Youth participation is] a very skilled thing to do, it's something that takes a lot of thought, process, understanding and analysis after… And a lot of the things that we're trying to talk about are very complex and specific."**
> — Natural environment manager

But in many councils, there are no dedicated engagement officers in each service, let alone experts on youth engagement. This means hiring new staff members with the right competencies, or delivering training and development for existing staff interested in youth participation.

Even when staff do have the right competencies, they rarely have enough capacity to deliver this work. Council climate teams tend to be small, often one to seven people, and youth engagement is usually a side-of-desk job that officers said took one to twenty per cent of their time. When successful initiatives rest on one or two enthusiastic officers, they are fragile.

> **"What kind of precedent does this set, where people in the public sector who really want to make a change have to go way, way over their day jobs to make any sort of progressive lasting change? … It depends on individual exceptionalism, and that probably shouldn't be the case."**
> — Youth panel lead, transport authority

Departmental siloes

Collaborative working across a council could do something to challenge this individual exceptionalism. But youth services, where participation expertise sits, usually sit in a different directorate from environmental policy teams, and the two rarely work together. This means that sometimes youth structures exist but employees in another part of the council do not know about them.

Climate action work can also be split between departments and directorates – which, in theory, could help make the green transition a cross-council shared mission, but, in practice, often means that opportunities to work together are missed.

> **"I know who [the council] are. But they don't know who each other are. There are 4,000 people who work at the council. So, a lot of what we've been doing [as an organisation] is helping them meet each other... they're not always just in the environment department. They could be in transport, they could be in food, they're all over the place."**
> — Co-founder of a community climate centre

These siloes, which are mirrored in the wider youth and climate sectors, need to be challenged to make space for new ways of working. Solutions included regular cross-team meetings, frequent email updates, joining different networks, forums and events at different scales where learnings can be shared, and accessing existing work through repositories. The wider benefit also goes beyond short-term change. As one council climate change programme officer put it:

> **"If all different departments are coming in with this one goal, then that cuts out the political, 'oh, you can't do that because of this and that'. But then if you can collaboratively, collectively do things together, then you have a lot more impact."**
> — Council climate change programme officer

Funding

Youth participation projects are time-consuming and resource intensive. This is a challenge when, following years of austerity, local authorities have become less able to deliver outside of their core roles.

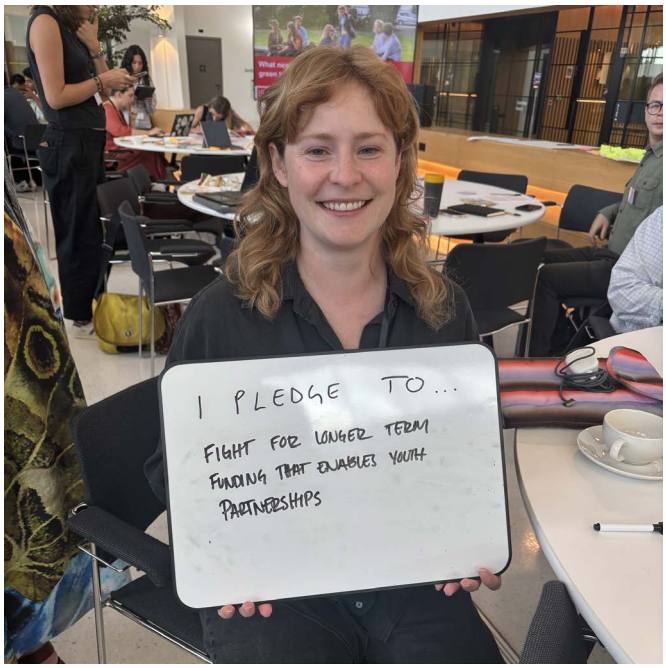
> **"Core services are core services, aren't they? As much as a youth climate forum is really important, if your bins don't [get] collected, then..."**
> Council waste development officer

> **"The whole funding system is just so incredibly broken...Central government could be funding more projects locally for young people rather than [councils] just having to rely on these scraps of money from private developers. It's infuriating... And that's a political choice... It's not that they can't, it's that central government has chosen to not let them."**
> — Councillor and ecological economist

External funding opportunities are short-term or absent, have strict eligibility criteria, overly long applications to complete, or rely on existing youth engagement structures in order to gain eligibility. Precarity in the funding system means engagement levels across London are uneven, and where there is action, it is short-lived. This also produces ethical challenges: where engagement is temporary, relationships, hopes, and opportunities are cut short. This is not to argue against short-term programmes: different participatory mechanisms, with different intended outcomes, all have their place – but aims need to be aligned with timelines.

Whilst there should be structural changes in the funding system, some councils suggested short-term strategies such as shorter funding application forms (which one borough uses in their own community grant making and would like to see more of from external funders):

> **"Our application form is two pages long and I've seen other boroughs that give small groups a 10-page form that's very technical. I think it's just understanding that, okay, we need a certain amount of information [...] but [let's] actually keep it to the bare minimum and be flexible."**
> — Principal climate officer



A pledge made at our City Hall event, 23 September 2026: "I pledge to fight for longer term funding that enables youth partnerships."

Lack of political prioritisation

Investment in youth green policy participation also depends on the political priorities of a council, which are shaped by our broader political context – across London and beyond.

Participants raised how different elements of our political context are shaping the feasibility and impact of participatory initiatives. On a local level, it matters whether parties have political majorities and individual politicians can get behind initiatives.

The lottery bid

I put together this National Lottery bid, which would have been a £650,000 budget project across three years... And it took months to get it together. And then the Lottery [were] seven months late to get back to us and then we didn't get it, which is really disappointing.

I was really excited about that, it's so gutting. There's so little funding available to local authorities for that kind of thing.

That would have been focused on delivering climate literacy, green skills, gardening, repair, clothes fixing, energy efficiency – whatever the young people chose. It would have funded a citizens' assembly every year at a different youth club, and then a programme of green events... as well as training young people in media and communications in order to document the green skills that they're learning and put out nice explainers on TikTok and other formats, demystifying climate action.

So [I was] gutted.

— Climate communications and engagement officer

> **"Our leader of the council has said that they'll only put in a school street … if we have the support from ward councillors, and that has been quite difficult. Where we might get support from the school and a local community, we don't get the support from some members…and vice versa."**
> — School travel officer

> **"Because the Green Party doesn't have a majority, they're not able to get anything through…If they're not even able to get it through on the internal side, then how are you supposed to get involved as a resident?"**
> — Young person

Short election cycles mean that political leaders want to prioritise quick electoral wins rather than ambitious long-term, participatory programmes.

> **"People were very clear that their priorities were having cleaner streets and, fairer use of curbside space.. So those will be the things on which we will be judged in the first instance…it depends on what the people of [this borough] want."**
> — Councillor and cabinet member for health and environment

Local political priorities are also driven by wider trends – for example, in recent years we've seen climate work increasingly deprioritised at national and international levels. One interviewee noted that there is little space in politics today for debates around our overarching societal goals and priorities – for example, should we prioritise economic growth today over the needs of future generations which might be better served by sufficiency economics, or community wealth building? These are the kinds of questions which the green transition asks us to engage with, but few youth participation initiatives explicitly create space for critiquing and re-imagining the political and economic status quo.

> **"It's a bit this classic issue of: you cannot solve a problem inside its own paradigm. You need to step outside and change the paradigm to solve it."**
> — Director of an environmental education charity

Cultural barriers

Related to this is a broader set of cultural norms inside institutions that can hold back youth participation in green policy. Risk-aversion is one of them: it often seems easier to keep doing things in the way they have always been done, and structures and funding rarely reward trying something new.

> **"I think the main barrier is us and our attitude, and that we haven't really looked at it seriously."**
> Engagement and learning lead, environmental charity

A second is treating participation as a communications exercise. Staff at civil society organisations and charities – many of whom have been doing this work for decades – described youth engagement being used to showcase an organisation rather than to change what it does.

> **"Put your money where your mouth is… A lot of councils, companies, people- they talk a good talk, but they're not really doing the work. They're more worried about doing a glossy leaflet saying how sustainable they are, or a press release or a photo opportunity… We need to get to more sophisticated, in-depth work."**
> — Director of an environmental education charity

A third is a paternalistic assumption that professionals know best, which leaves little time to listen carefully and learn from the lived experiences and expertise of young people.

> **"[Council officers] say 'Oh, [youth participation] takes too long, we haven't got time for all of that, and we know best anyway.' No, they don't know best. What they know best is how to implement policy. They don't know best what the policy could be."**
> — Co-founder of a community climate centre

Slow internal approvals

Ironically, for every policymaker frustrated by the time participatory processes take, there is a young person who finds the pace of local government painfully slow. Policies, strategies and programmes – especially youth engagement projects – take a lot of time to plan, sign-off, deliver and take effect (one of our young interviewees called this 'institutional delay').

> **"There was a long delay between recruitment and actually being allowed to engage with [the young people] because of internal approvals. By the time we were finally able to communicate properly - about a month later - I think a lot of participants had already lost interest or forgotten they'd signed up."**
> — Consultation and engagement officer, former net zero engagement lead

Many professionals put this slowness down to factors like an absence of leadership buy-in, funding constraints, programme planning, the pressures of pre-election periods, slow digital infrastructures, mandatory assessments and procedures like risk assessments, GDPR and so on.

> **"We turned around and said we need to communicate with them and follow up with them. Can we get their school emails? No, you can't get their school emails. Okay, can I get their phone numbers? No, you can't get their phone numbers. So how are we supposed to continue the good work that we're doing?"**
>
> — Young person

These bureaucratic procedures are very often necessary for transparency, accountability and safeguarding, but councils can still do more to streamline processes and test new systems of communications and delivery that operate on timescales that young people can engage with and relate to.

> "The other thing about young people is that they don't stay young very long. Especially when you think about planning processes, [which] take so long: it's like five years before anything happens. If you're 13, by the time that finishes… that's massive'"
>
> Charity CEO

What helps

Interviewees were as clear about what worked as about what did not. Figure 4 shows what they credited for success. Partnership with a trusted external organisation was named far more often than any internal factor, followed by creative, hands-on methods and leadership buy-in.

Figure 4. What interviewees credited for success, by number of interviews (of 38)

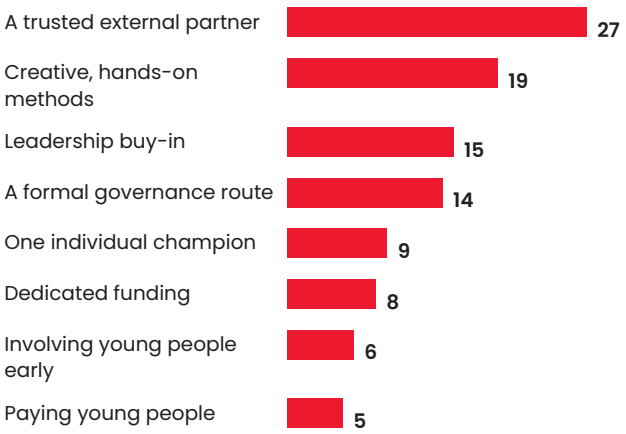


Figure 4. What interviewees credited for the success of their youth green policy participation, by number of interviews. Partnership with a trusted external organisation was cited far more often than any internal factor.

Much of the capacity to facilitate green policy participation sits outside the council. A trusted external partner was the most-cited success factor, named in 27 of 38 interviews. Charities, climate centres, youth organisations and schools bring the things councils said they lack: time, relationships with young people, youth-work skills and payment for participation. That makes funding civil society organisations a participation lever in its own right. It also means the fragility described above applies to them too: most are on short grants, and when a grant ends the relationship ends with it. At City Hall, one table wanted budgets for this work to be held outside the council altogether, because the council was not trusted to hold it; another described the split of effort as '80:20 voluntary sector to councils'.

27 of 38

A trusted external partner was the most-cited success factor, named in 27 of 38 interviews.

"A trusted external partner"

The majority of practitioners mentioned they partnered with external organisations in some capacity on youth engagement. These actors ranged from the private sector, other local authorities, charities, universities, researchers, student unions, community organisations, schools and academies, consultancies, local businesses, religious spaces, youth boards, existing schemes (DofE), activists to social media influencers. These partnerships were essential in providing youth and/or environmental expertise, project support, facilitation, providing a physical space for a session, providing access to a group of young people and so on. This was especially the case when there was limited staff capacity and specialised training amongst existing teams.

> **"We're funding organisations that are better placed than us, to be honest, to engage with students because they've got the experience and the knowledge that we don't have."**
>
> — Principal climate officer

> **"Instead of talking, let's try things. We have a lot of ideas of what we can do. We're a small charity with limited capacity and funds, but we have acquired a lot of knowledge over the last few years in terms of what works and what doesn't and the kind of tone that we should be using for [young people]. We'll be happy to share that because that's our job as a charity."**
>
> — Director of an environmental education charity

However, it is also important to recognise that small charities and other smaller organisations can face

capacity and funding limits. Partnerships should therefore aim to be intentional, truly collaborative and mutually beneficial.

> **"We've worked for a number of groups where it's literally two people and they're both volunteers and they spend like three hours a week on this or something…They've got full time jobs and families."**
> — Principal climate officer



A pledge made at our City Hall event, 23 September 2026: "I pledge to engage in community-led programmes that give young people the power to make a difference in their community."

A named lead, or everyone's job?

There were mixed opinions when it came to how to embed youth engagement within council structures. On the one hand, participants raised the importance of having a dedicated youth participation lead within a climate team.

> **"It needs to be a full-time job if [councils] have the budget for it… if they really want to do this well, they need to dedicate somebody and enough resources to sustain it and uphold it and somebody that's trained on how to do it. Otherwise, it's not going to be sustainable."**
> — Young person

Others argued that youth engagement should be an a priori consideration amongst all teams in general, not just climate. This would prevent engagement from becoming bottlenecked at one or two people when it should ideally be a normalised part of many job roles.

> **"Core council budgets need to devote money for co-production rather than a dedicated engagement team."**
> — City Hall event participant

Peer learning across London and beyond

Council officers and civil society organisations working on climate find networks an important way to exchange ideas and learn from their peers.

> **"There are [climate action] groups all over the country and they're all in slightly different networks and I keep coming across new ones all the time, which is so exciting…it really pays to be a bit nosy… we've got to change our thinking about ownership of ideas."**
> — Co-founder of a community climate centre

The networks interviewees used include the London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum and the other London Councils and GLA specialist officer groups; borough climate officers' forums, including a West London climate emergency officers' group; the pan-London participation officers' group; Transport for London's Travel for Life network for school travel officers; and the borough climate partnerships and alliances that bring businesses, schools and the third sector together. Most of these are for officers. None of them yet connects the people running youth green policy participation across boroughs, which is the gap Recommendation 7 is about.

> **"Lose the competition between organisations and start finding ways to connect and share collective goals."**
> City Hall event participant



CASE STUDIES

Seven more examples from across London

These examples come from our interviews and from what the organisations involved have published. Each is marked with the age group it works with: several of the council programmes run through schools, which is the pattern Chapter 2 describes. All relate to green policy, some more directly than others.



London-wide: TfL Youth Panel; Our City, Our Resilience; OUR AIR, OUR VOICES; Groundwork London. UK-wide: SOS-UK.

BARNET COUNCIL

Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change and Biodiversity

Ages 12–17 · Borough-wide deliberative process · February–May 2023

20 young people in an 18-hour Young People's Assembly · 20 joint recommendations

A dedicated Young People's Assembly ran alongside the adult assembly, with the two groups joining at key points to agree 20 recommendations across five themes. The Council set out its response and follow-up actions in November 2024. Follow-up activity for young participants included a 'Go Green this Christmas' social-media campaign and a council work-experience day.

"We had a whole session on the whole life cycle of bubble tea, the product production and supply chain, usage and wastage."

— Interviewee

REDBRIDGE COUNCIL

Youth Climate and Sustainability Forum and Youth Eco Skills Festival

Secondary-school pupils · Council-led programme · 2023–2026

11 secondary schools in 2026 · Third year running

A recurring programme that brings secondary-school pupils together for climate learning and hands-on activities, from repair to sustainable cooking. Creative Policy workshops invite pupils to identify the climate issues they want the Council to prioritise. The Council's Climate Change Strategy 2026–2030 reports that youth engagement helped shape the strategy's themes.

"As part of the climate garden, they wrote out what they wish to see in the future. What do they want to see in 10 years time? And we said no idea is too small."

— Interviewee

HARROW COUNCIL

Travel Ambassador Project

Secondary-school pupils · Active-travel campaigns

4 secondary schools · £500 campaign funding bid

Small groups of pupils chose a travel issue affecting their school and developed a campaign over six sessions of research, data collection, budgeting and planning. They then pitched to senior Council staff and councillors for £500 to put it into practice. The interview does not quantify resulting changes in travel behaviour.

"That was purely peer led. It was facilitated by an adult, but it was all about the children and what they wanted."

— Interviewee

URBANWISE WITH HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM AND KENSINGTON & CHELSEA COUNCILS

Children's Environmental Parliament

Year 6 pupils · Annual joint-borough programme

About 80 pupils from 10 primary schools in 2023 · 20th Parliament

Year 6 pupils investigate an environmental issue linked to their school or local area through site visits, interviews and classroom work, then present their research at the annual Parliament event. Council officers have chaired it and contributed to judging. The process starts with pupils' own research and school context, rather than a pre-set consultation question.

"Making things tangible, practical, is what work best."
— Interviewee

ASTHMA + LUNG UK

OUR AIR, OUR VOICES

Ages 16–24 · Co-produced clean-air policy · Report published 2026

19 young people in two days of workshops · 3 headline policy calls

Young Londoners disproportionately affected by air pollution shaped the direction of the project and its recommendations, reviewing drafts in several stages. The report calls for legally binding air-quality targets, a national public-awareness campaign and meaningful involvement of the communities most affected. Participants were invited to its launch at Parliament in June 2026.

"Taking part in this project has really made me think about the social injustice of exposure to air pollution."
— Participant

GROUNDWORK LONDON, FUNDED BY THE BERKELEY FOUNDATION

Youth Leadership Programme

Ages 16–19 · 14-week leadership and green social action programme · 2022–2026

350+ young people over four years

Designed for young people facing barriers to opportunity and access to green space, the programme combined personal development with social-action projects in their communities, a leadership residential and mentoring from Berkeley Group colleagues. Berkeley Foundation reported that 84% of participants said they had a better understanding of the green economy and available careers.

"The social action project about increasing green spaces at my sixth form made me think creatively and outside the box to find solutions."
— Programme graduate

SOS-UK

Green Schools Revolution

School pupils · UK-wide · 2023–January 2026

24 school Climate Action Plans · 350+ young people involved

A three-year programme that created opportunities for pupils to take the lead in greening their schools. Pupils helped develop Climate Action Plans in 24 schools, and more than 200 young people took part in school wilding activities, including creating ponds for wildlife.

"The most important change for me was… giving my opinion. It made me confident and I realised that my opinions matter."
— Climate Action Plans student

CASE STUDY

Lewisham Council

Young Mayor's Advisers: Climate Action Subgroup

Secondary-school age and Young Advisers · Youth governance and climate action · Subgroup created 2024

2004
Young Mayor programme began

£25k
Young Mayor's annual budget

2024
Climate Action Subgroup created

4
secondary schools at the 2026 summit

Description

A climate-focused workstream within Lewisham's established Young Mayor and Young Advisers programme. Working with the Council's Climate Resilience Team and trusted youth organisations, it creates practical climate activities and opportunities for young people to contribute to local climate priorities.

How young people were involved

- The Climate Action Subgroup was established in 2024 and worked with the Council's Climate Resilience Team to identify environmental priorities and opportunities to influence climate action.
- Young people took part in activities on sustainable food, cooking, repair, reuse, recycling and the circular economy.
- Young Advisers worked with officers to develop questions and topics for discussion with local leaders.

Impact

- In October 2026, young people from four secondary schools took part in Climate Question Time at the Young Mayor's Summit, discussing borough climate priorities directly with the Mayor and Lead Member for Children and Young People.
- The group has also held a sustainable-food event with local residents and developed plans for peer-led climate justice training and food-based climate activities.

What is particularly interesting

Climate action is embedded within an existing youth governance structure rather than being a one-off consultation. This provides continuity and an established route to council officers and elected leaders.

> "The key thing has been identifying partners [...] where they've already got really trusted, safe places to go and good relationships built. And then working with those groups to embed climate activity rather than starting from scratch."
>
> — Interviewee

Sources: Lewisham Council, Update on Lewisham's Youth Offer (November 2026); Climate Action Plan Update 2025; The Young Mayor programme; interview.

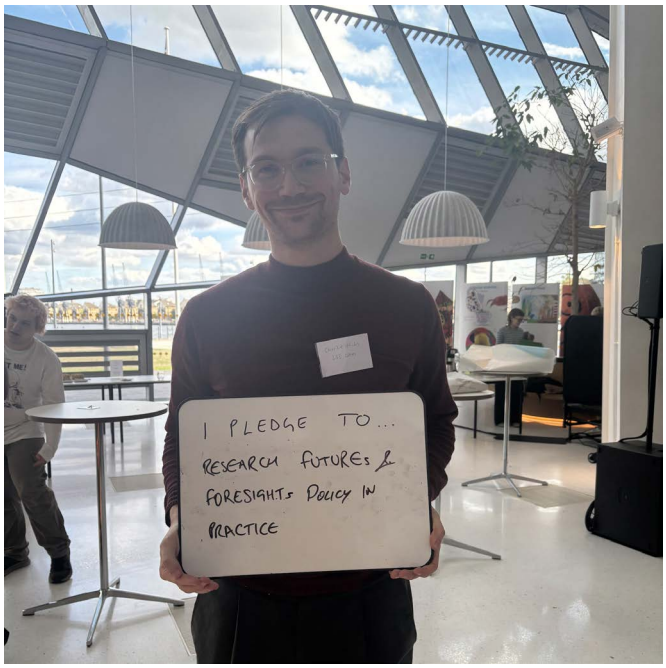


Conclusion and what next

We asked how young Londoners take part in and shape climate and green-transition policy across the capital. The short answer is: widely, but shallowly. There is more youth participation in green policy in London than any one borough can see, and most of it is education in schools. Real influence exists, in a handful of places, where young people were in the room before the plan was written and where someone with authority made it a priority. It is mostly in parks and public space, and it depends on a trusted partner and on one or two determined people. The young people who most need reaching, those aged 16 to 25 and those not yet interested, are the least reached. And almost nobody, on either side, can say what changed afterwards.

None of this is for want of goodwill. The officers, councillors and practitioners we spoke to want to do this work, and the room at City Hall wanted to do more of it. What is missing is routine: a lead, a duty, a budget line, a feedback loop and a habit of asking young people first. The recommendations above are the shape of that routine. Most of them cost little. The ones that cost more, pay and partners, are the ones with the strongest evidence behind them.

> "Young people engaged when the output of their work is seen and acted on."
> City Hall event, participant card



A pledge made at our City Hall event, 23 September 2026: "I pledge to research futures, foresight and policy in practice."

What next. We launch this report at an online seminar on 26 November 2026, with the peer researchers presenting, and will share it through London Councils' youth leads and the practitioner networks named in Chapter 3.

Read on: How to involve us

The toolkit that follows sets out young Londoners' own advice on green policy, in five steps and ten questions to ask yourself before you start.

How to involve us

A toolkit of young Londoners' advice on green policy



Introduced by

Phool Ashraf

Peer researcher

I would like to ask you to think back to when you were a young person yourself. What did your days look like? Were you studying, working, or both? What was your support network like? What were you passionate about? And, most importantly, did you feel as though you had a voice in decisions about the place you lived?

That is the 'why' of this toolkit. Young Londoners will live longest with the decisions being made now about heat, flooding, air, transport, homes and jobs. The rest of this report looks at the institutional factors that make it possible to involve us in those decisions, and we must tackle them. But we must always bring it back to a young person's actual experience.

Much of what follows will not be new to anyone who works with young people. What we can offer is what young Londoners told us, this year, about being asked to shape green policy in particular. We are four peer researchers who interviewed 38 people, including council officers, councillors, charities and ten young people aged 16 to 25, and then tested what we heard with 173 people at City Hall.

Climate brings its own difficulties. Many of us care about our park, our street and our bills without ever using words like "biodiversity" or "net zero". Many of us are anxious about the crisis and tired of bad news that comes with nothing to do about it. And as Maddy says earlier in this report, young people are not a homogeneous group: being neurodivergent, growing up in a low-income area, being care-experienced or facing a language barrier all change how the green transition reaches you, and whether anyone asks what you think of it.

The toolkit is the 'how'. If you put yourself in the shoes of a young person, its five steps will make sense. You would want people to be straight with you about what you can change in a climate plan and what has already been decided. You would want them to come to the spaces you already use. You would want it to be worth your time, whether that is payment, skills, a route into green work or simply free food. You would want sessions that start from your life and give you something to do about the problem. And you would want to be told where your input led.

You will not be able to do all of it. Where you cannot, tell us, because being honest about limits is part of doing this well. The toolkit ends with ten questions from us to ask yourself before you start. They are the questions we all need to ask if we genuinely care about young people's views on the future of their city.

1. Before you ask us anything, be straight with us
2. Come to where we are
3. Make it worth our time
4. Run sessions we would want to come back to
5. Tell us what happened next

Step 1 of 5

Before you ask us anything, be straight with us



Tell us at the start what we can change and what has already been decided. We can tell when something is not genuine.

Be transparent about everything

There is already a lot of distrust of the system. Taking the time to be open and frank is something young people notice and appreciate.

- **Say what is possible and what is not.** Explain the budget, the timescale and the barriers that could stop a change happening.
- **Show us the day-to-day reality.** Tell us how your organisation works, what it can do and what it cannot. You do not need to have all the answers.
- **Keep it up.** Trust comes from regular contact, honest updates and ways for us to hold you to what you said.

Teach us the system before you ask us to change it

You cannot expect a young person to share honest opinions in a completely unfamiliar setting. Not knowing how things work is a failure of the system, not of the individual. The projects that worked did some teaching before the real work began:

- the basics of the climate crisis and the specific issue in front of us
- how decisions are made, at every level, and who the main players are
- what your organisation does, and what is outside its control
- a question and answer session with the staff who make the decisions
- an easy-read version of your plan
- space to talk about misinformation and climate anxiety

Make it easy to find you

- Run information sessions and write short guides, on the topic and on how the system works.
- Use social media and in-person contact together. Not everyone is online.
- Show up-to-date contact details clearly.
- Share what has changed, where it has changed.

Point us somewhere useful

If we raise something that is not your job, tell us whose job it is and who else can help. We get fed up saying the same things and ending up nowhere. If a young person needs urgent support, follow your safeguarding procedures.

> "Even though I live here, I didn't really know what the council did beyond the obvious things like housing."
> Young person

> "Sometimes it can be overwhelming, or you can't show up as your best self if you're not prepared."
> Founder of a youth climate organisation

Step 2 of 5

Come to where we are

If you only use school emails, open applications and the youth council, you will keep meeting the same young people.



Go to our places

Try to reach the young people who are not already involved and do not know much about climate.

- **Education:** secondary schools, sixth forms, colleges and student unions.
- **Free time:** youth clubs, libraries, gyms and sports clubs, scout groups.
- **Community:** faith and cultural groups, community organisations, estates, ESOL classes, home educators.
- **Work and the high street:** workplaces, careers fairs and local businesses, like the local chicken shop.

If your project affects one area, involve the young people who live there, so they can see the changes for themselves.

Use our channels and our words

- Use word of mouth, posters and social media. We mean TikTok and Instagram, not just LinkedIn.
- Send young people out to talk to other young people. Peers reach people that staff cannot.
- Listen for how we talk about the environment. Many communities care about nature without using the words an environmental organisation would use.

> "They might say, 'I really enjoy my local park' but they won't say, 'I want to think about the biodiversity of the bees'. It's a language disconnect."
> Peer researcher

Work with people who already know us

If you truly do not have the capacity to go out, connect with specialist youth organisations and charities that already have a network of young people. There is a lot of good grassroots work that most people do not know exists.

Keep the door wide

- **Recruit across ages, backgrounds and experience.** Do different things and you will get different people.
- **Do not be strict with requirements.** Young carers, young parents, care-experienced young people and those with youth-justice orders often come to things later and have less experience on paper.
- **Match the activity to the age.** A 10-year-old and a 20-year-old need to be involved differently.

Make it easy for secondary schools

Secondary-age young people are reached the least. Timetables and the curriculum are strict, teachers are stretched, there is no single person to contact and your funding year does not match the school year. The people who made schools work treated them as partners:

- offer a ready-made lesson plan
- work through a club that already exists
- run sessions in the holidays and at weekends
- find a named contact for enrichment in each school
- explain clearly what the school and its students get out of it

> "If you're not careful, a panel of 16 to 25 year olds ends up being 21 to 25 year olds from privileged backgrounds."
> Youth panel lead, transport authority

Step 3 of 5

Make it worth our time

Caring about the climate is not enough of a reason on its own. We are also thinking about rent, work, study and what comes next.

Tell us why, in plain words

To get us through the door, the reason for taking part has to be clear and direct. Say what it will cost us in time and what we will come away with.

Pay us, and ask how

- **Pay us as you would any other adviser.** Everyone else around the table is being paid.
- **Ask what form works.** Young people and professionals agreed on paying and disagreed on how. Many of us would choose money over vouchers, because we have bills. Vouchers can feel like being handed credits to go and have fun with.
- **Cover travel and food.** Food matters more than you think. Tell people they can eat it.
- **If you cannot pay, say so and say why.** Small organisations may not be able to. For something short, like a one-off event or a week of work experience, some of us will take part anyway because we want to learn.

> "It feels a bit infantile in a way. It's like, here's some sort of credits for you to go and do something fun with, and while we're young people, we also have financial insecurity."
> Young person

Help us get somewhere

Pay is one kind of return. Tell us what else taking part gives us:

- transferable skills, and a certificate or accreditation to show for them
- a job reference
- a chance to speak at an event
- prizes, vouchers or workshops that are useful in our lives

You have years of experience and contacts. Use them for us where you can:

- have a coffee and a chat about our plans
- point us to opportunities and invite us to events
- be a mentor
- offer work experience or a summer internship
- hire us

All of it makes a difference. If it is not possible, say so.

> "We need to be improving their quality of life, not just extracting insights."
> Climate communications and engagement officer

> "Sometimes the vouchers are not the most useful thing. Like I don't really need 100 pounds to spend at ASOS. I need to pay my bills."
> Young person



Step 4 of 5

Run sessions we would want to come back to



Where, and how many

- **Meet in person when you can.** There are few places left for young people to meet, we spend a lot of time online, and many of us feel anxious about the climate. Being in a room together builds community and rebuilds trust in institutions.
- **Choose a venue that says we matter.** A council chamber or a company's head office tells us our views are taken as seriously as a professional's.
- **Fit the numbers to the format.** Reach as many young people as you can when a project will affect a lot of people. Keep groups small when you want depth, because we say more and listen to each other more.
- **Offer online and remote options.** Sessions online, or tasks we can do in our own time, fit around school, exams and part-time work.

> "You do remember the hearings: how quickly they happened, being explained all the different parts, learning how to use the microphones in the chamber. Those things stick with you."
> Young person

Make it practical, creative and fun

Most people are tired of bad news about the climate. Learning about a problem without knowing what to do about it leaves us feeling powerless. Show us how to act on what we learn, and be honest that changing our own behaviour only goes so far.

- **Get us outdoors and using our hands.** Planting, growing, litter picks, testing water quality. Things you can hold or smell stay with you.
- **Let us make things.** TikToks, short films, podcasts, music, zines, collages, performances, maps and installations.
- **Turn it into a game.** Treasure hunts, crisis scenarios and "ideal world" exercises where we imagine the city we want.
- **Show us people who are making a difference.** Local organisations and individuals, not only the scale of the problem.

One officer ran a session on the life cycle of bubble tea. A school travel officer worked with pupils and a music producer on a video about bus travel, which reached their friends in a way no adult could.

Talk about our lives

Climate can feel secondary when we are worried about housing, money, food, work and our mental health. These things are connected, and it is your job to show how.

- Start with jobs, bills, heat, safety and the places we already use, then connect them to climate.
- Use real examples from our area and our communities.
- Avoid terms like "net zero".
- Do not play down the size of the crisis. Talk about it seriously, and talk about solutions at the same time.

Who else is in the room

- **Bring in guest speakers.** Local changemakers, charities, people from your own networks and other young people. New faces and different viewpoints keep us interested.
- **Be careful with big names.** A well-known person can bring attention and show the work is backed. Some of us do not want to be tied to politics.
- **If senior people come, they should stay and listen.** A speech and a quick exit feels tokenistic. Be present, or do not come.
- **Treat it as a two-way conversation.** Young people rarely sit in front of council staff and councillors, and that distance breeds distrust. We learn from your

experience and you learn from ours. Make it fine for both sides to get things wrong.

- **Bring the generations together.** We have a lot to learn from people with years of personal and professional experience, and they have a lot to learn from us. School and work rarely give us the chance to talk across generations, so make room for it on purpose.
- **Let both sides get it wrong.** Officers told us they are afraid of being called out if they try this and make a mistake. We are afraid that if we mess up, we will not be asked back. Say at the start that this is new for everyone and that mistakes are part of learning together.

> "How can we create this culture on both sides where people are kind to each other and they understand that they're in this together and to give each other grace for making mistakes, on both ends?"
> Founder of a youth climate organisation

Be flexible

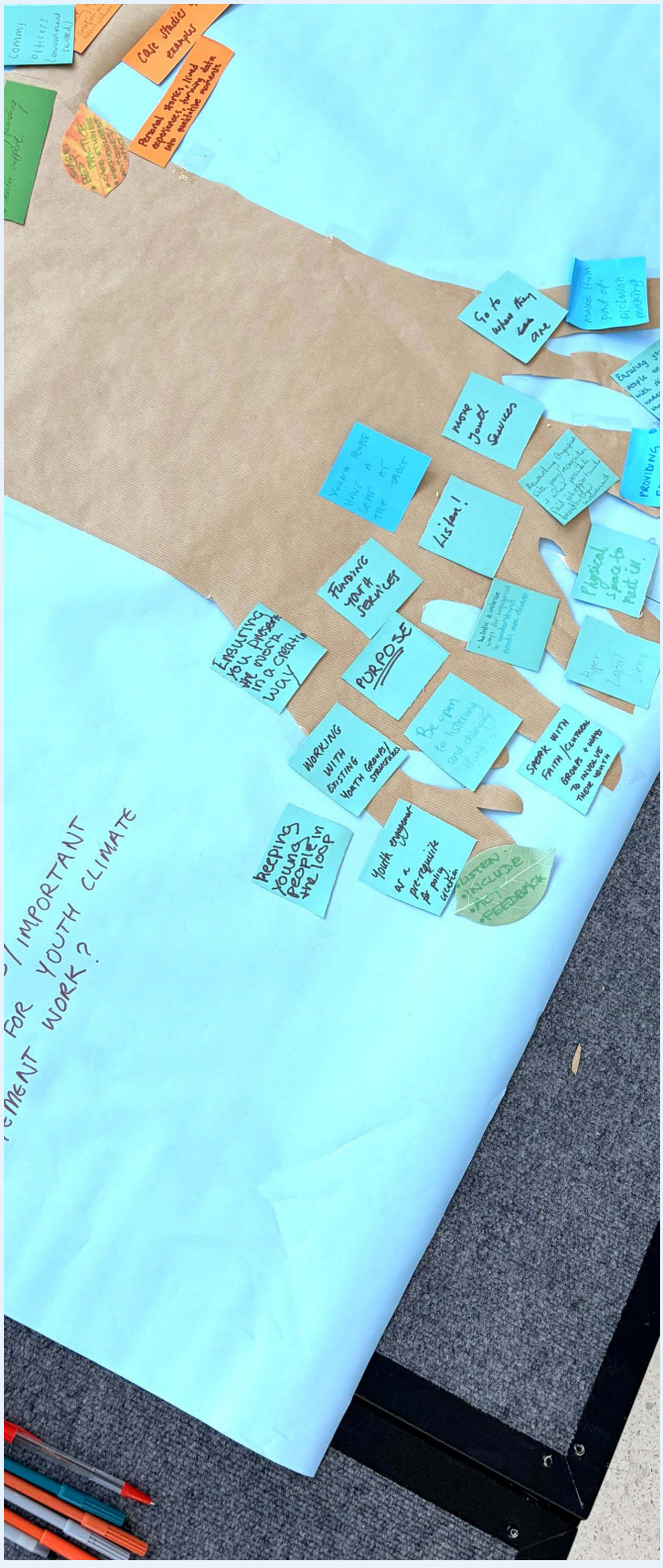
We are balancing study, exams, part-time jobs and things nobody planned for.

- Run a WhatsApp poll to find a time that suits.
- Meet in the evenings, at weekends, in the holidays and outside exam season.
- Let us join online, and share the slides or a recording.
- Take our input by email or message afterwards.
- Understand if someone has to do less for a while, and keep them involved.
- Let the project change as it goes. Not knowing exactly how it will end can be a good thing.

Make it safe to speak

- **Give it time.** Officers told us that deadlines and fixed agendas made projects feel rushed, so young people were not fully heard.
- **Listen, do not just hold a listening session.** One phrase we heard was that people are "over consulted and underheard".
- **Let us raise difficult subjects.** Some young people are afraid to speak about issues seen as controversial.
- **Look at your own team.** If nobody on your staff looks like us, we will not see ourselves there.
- **Leave room for fun.** Hold socials and celebrate what people have contributed. Not everything has to be about collecting our ideas.

> "[A politician] arriving for 20 minutes of Play-Doh and then giving a little speech and leaving felt a little bit tokenistic."
> Young person



Step 5 of 5

Tell us what happened next

This is the part that goes wrong most often. Young people who had taken part in programmes often could not tell us what had changed because of them.



Close the loop

- **Report back to us directly.** At the end of every project, publish what we said, what you accepted, what you rejected and why, who is responsible and when it will be reviewed.
- **Do not go quiet for months.** Short, regular updates keep us involved, even by text.
- **Do not water down what we said.** Do not filter our words to make them fit the professional world. We should recognise ourselves in what you publish.

> "The conversations that we actually had were a lot more nuanced than that."
> Young person, on reading the one-page summary of a youth panel's work

Let us hold you to it

- **Invite us back to check progress.** One youth panel member now sits on a board and asks what happened to the panel's own recommendations.
- **Publish a response to every recommendation.** One council did this after its citizens' assembly.
- **Make the change visible.** Put up information boards on finished projects saying how young people shaped them.
- **Score yourself in public.** City Hall suggested a council scorecard, a "democracy index" or public pledges.
- **Involve us in the impact report.**
- **Measure what changed.** Count the policies, budgets and projects that moved. Attendance and how confident we felt are not enough.

Stay with us

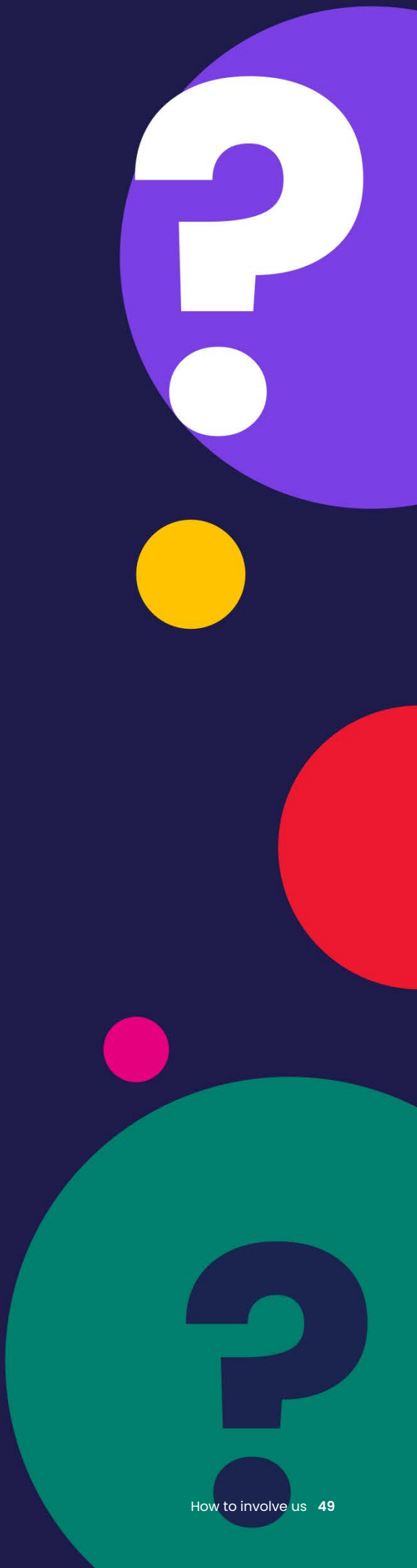
- **Think long term.** Relationships take time, and a two-hour workshop only scratches the surface. Longer programmes let us build skills and contacts and see things through.
- **Do not keep swapping us for new people.** Reaching more young people matters, but a strict cut-off date makes those already involved feel disregarded.
- **Keep a rhythm.** Yearly summits and festivals have their place. If sessions are too far apart, people drift away, so check in between them.
- **Plan past the next election.** Young people think long term by nature. The system around us mostly does not.

> "It's just common courtesy. Young people, we want to get involved. We want to put our voice up there. And in turn, we also want to hear the impact of our work and where it's going."
> Young person

> "If young people can't track the action, then young people will think, well, there's no point in me doing this. I don't need another talking shop."
> Councillor and committee chair

Ten questions to ask yourself

1. Have we told young people what they can change and what is already decided?
2. Have we explained how our organisation works, in plain words?
3. Are we reaching young people who are not already involved?
4. Have we gone to them, or only asked them to come to us?
5. Are we paying them, and did we ask how they want to be paid?
6. Do they know what they will come away with?
7. Is the session practical, creative and about their lives?
8. Can they take part around study, work and caring?
9. Will we tell them directly what we did with what they said, and why?
10. Will we still be working with them in a year?



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