

Rapid review of Brent emotional wellbeing and mental health Hyper Local Forums

Imperial College Health Partners
July 2021



Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Introduction and approach	3
Methodology.....	3
Process to set up the Hyper Local Forums	3
What worked on the day and areas for improvement.....	5
Considerations for sustainability of Hyper Local Forums	8

Executive summary

Helpforce has supported Brent Health Matters (BHM) to deliver a project in Brent to address health inequalities with a focus on people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. The project has established 'Hyper Local Forums' in the communities of Church End and Alperton, as these are two of the areas in Brent that have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19. The first Hyper Local Forums brought together groups of local people and local stakeholders to discuss the communities' emotional and mental health priorities and develop action plans. These are part of the wider BHM health inequalities programme in Brent.

ICHP were asked to provide a rapid review of the Hyper Local Forums. This review focusses on how the process has worked to date and deriving learnings for other sites interested in setting up their own Hyper Local Forums.

Some of the key findings from this evaluation were:

- **There is a lot of potential in Hyper Local Forums as an approach to addressing health inequalities, but many benefits will only be seen in the longer term** – the approach adopted in Alperton and Church end has started a dialogue in neighbourhoods with distrust of statutory services, mobilised volunteers and local people, with the aim to address mental health in a culturally appropriate way. However, more time will be needed to understand if the action plans now agreed will lead to meaningful changes in the community.
- **Overall, participants were satisfied with the Hyper Local Forums** - there were some anticipated differences in the two communities. Satisfaction with the forums was widespread, especially in Alperton. In Church End the team reflected that the community has higher levels of distrust in statutory services. While participants of the Church End forum engaged with the meeting and plan to stay involved, organisers recognised that it may take more time and effort to embed the forum in the community, compared to Alperton.
- **The forums struck a good balance of attendees, which meant local people felt comfortable speaking out.** One of the key successes of the initial forums was the rich discussion that came from breakout groups, where local people felt comfortable sharing their opinions. Organisers deliberately planned the forums so that attendees had a link to the local area.
- **This approach requires willingness to hand over power to local people** – Hyper Local Forums in Brent are seeking to support emotional wellbeing and mental health. Some of the best ways to support may sit with statutory services, but others may best be addressed by local charities and community groups. Council and health providers will continue to be crucial stakeholders in this work, but decision-making on priorities should sit with local people. This shift in mindset will also be essential for the action plans that were agreed at the forums to generate impact: e.g. it might be helpful to agree if any stakeholders need to have sight of their implementation, how the plans will be shared with relevant statutory services, and how statutory services and communities will work together to deliver them (clearly outlining the responsibilities of both)
- **Balance contributions made at borough-level and hyper-local level**– There is a genuine desire across Brent to work together and share information across services. BHM has been particularly good at making connections between people and organisations at the borough level, but forum organisers felt this could happen more at a hyper local level. While there are benefits of being part of a borough-wide programme (e.g. shared vision and resourcing), working at the hyper local level is ultimately about shifting the balance of power to the community and this is best achieved through local decision-making structures.
- **Sustaining the Hyper Local Forums will require capacity from different types of stakeholders** – organisers should consider involving a neutral third-party organisation (to continue work started by Helpforce and others), freeing up local statutory service staff to attend, and coordinating between the local council, health providers and third sector organisations.
- **Hyper Local Forums in Brent provide a framework that can be applied to other communities in North West London (NWL).** Each community's priorities will be different, but the format and overall approach can be spread. In the final section of the report, we have derived some core principles and flexible principles for scaling and spreading to other areas.
- **Learnings from this engagement model can be spread beyond volunteering programme** – e.g. the Population Health Management and Inequalities programmes may also benefit from using this model of community engagement

Introduction and approach

Covid-19 has shed light on significant health inequalities, and populations in Brent with diverse communities have been most affected by the pandemic. Helpforce is delivering a project in Brent to address health inequalities with a focus on people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. It aims to:

- Reduce community reliance on statutory services by building resilience and mutual support (volunteering) - an emotionally literate community.
- Support effective collaboration (at a 'hyper local' level) between statutory providers and local communities, focused on local empowerment and improvement.

The project has focussed on the 'hyper local' communities of Church End and Alperton, as these are two of the areas in Brent that have been most disproportionately affected by Covid-19. It is part of the larger Brent Health Matters (BHM) health inequalities programme in Brent. Helpforce's work in Brent reports into the North West London ICS Volunteering Programme Board.

The project, with support from local volunteers, conducted a community survey in Church End and Alperton. The survey aimed to understand levels of awareness of existing emotional health and wellbeing support, and whether people feel equipped to help people in their communities to access support. The project then organised Hyper Local Forums for local people to analyse the results of the survey and develop action plans. The forums were organised with the help of Community Coordinators (paid roles) and Community Champions (volunteers) who were recruited as part of BHM.

ICHP were asked to help understand the experience of participants of the two Hyper Local Forums in May and June 2021 Church End and Alperton. This builds on the interim evaluation ICHP conducted of the BHM programme, where it was agreed that ICHP would continue to support only with the Hyper Local Forum element of BHM.

The purpose of this rapid formative evaluation is not to provide a summative assessment of the impact of Hyper Local Forums in Brent. Outcomes previously proposed by ICHP to the NWL volunteering board (around awareness, access and activation) are still the aspirational measures to evaluate the programme in the future, but it was previously agreed that ICHP would focus mainly on how the process has worked to date and derive learnings for other sites interested in setting up their own Hyper Local Forums.

This report is structured into three sections; what was required to set up the Forums, how the Forums went, and recommendations for sustainability. Recommendations are constructed in a way that is both relevant to the Brent Hyper Local Forum organisers as they plan future engagement, but also to other communities that may be interested in setting up similar projects.

Methodology

Information was collected in the following ways:

- **Semi-structured interviews** - we carried out semi structured interviews with key stakeholders including:
 - 4x forum organisers, including the lead from Helpforce and two Community Coordinators (Brent Health Matters staff) involved in setting up and running the hyper local forums in Alperton and Church End
 - 4x participants of the Hyper Local Forums, including two Community Champions (volunteers), one local mental health charity representative and one local councillor
- **Survey of forum participants** - we conducted two separate surveys for participants of each forum (Alperton and Church End):
 - Survey sent to participants (mix of volunteers and representatives from local organisations), to assess their experience (n=13 responses Alperton, n=9 responses Church End)

Process to set up the Hyper Local Forums

We spoke to organisers of the Hyper Local Forums (Community Coordinators from BHM, and the project lead from Helpforce) to understand what elements in the planning and preparation of the forums contributed to the observed outcomes. The main elements identified by forum organisers were:

- **Building an understanding of local community needs** – The first step was to conduct a survey of local people in Alperton and Church End. It was time intensive and difficult to get participation. Although the survey was translated into key local languages, few people responded to the translated versions online. Success came through speaking to people face to face, such as at the foodbank, and supporting them to answer the survey. Despite the challenges, organisers reflected it was crucial to start with community research to uncover local priorities. 119 people responded to the survey. It showed that local people did not know what support was available for mental health and wellbeing or how to access it. For example, 58% of respondents from Alperton said they would not know how to help someone that was having a mental health crisis. The survey also showed that people wanted to get involved, with around a third of respondents from Alperton saying they would like to know how to connect people to different services, and a similar proportion saying they would be interested in mental health awareness training.
- **Mapping and engaging local players** – The team gathered information on which local organisations were working on mental health and wellbeing. This both built up a picture of what support was available locally and meant they could invite local organisations to participate.
- **Identify resource to support forums and outline decision-making process and scope** – in the case of Brent, there were paid roles as part of Brent Health Matters and support from Helpforce to organise the forums; in addition, outlining who makes decisions and how, and the scope of decisions that can be made through the forums, can facilitate communication with statutory services
- **Addressing stakeholder concerns related to involving local communities in decision-making** – The rationale for organising Hyper Local Forums was to address high levels of distrust in the community towards statutory services. To address this effectively, statutory service staff would need to be willing to hand over some power to local people. When planning the forums, any concerns should be addressed explicitly, and clear expectations and roles should be defined for statutory staff and community participants. This shift in mindset will also be essential for the action plans that were agreed at the forums to generate impact: e.g. it might be helpful to agree if any stakeholders need to have sight of their implementation, how the plans will be shared with relevant statutory services, and how statutory services and communities will work together to deliver them (clearly outlining the responsibilities of both)
- **Recruiting and training volunteers that represented the local community** – The forums were linked to BHM, so were connected to the Community Champions network (formally recruited volunteer roles). The nature of the BHM Community Champion programme was to offer flexible volunteering opportunities based on people's interests. As the Hyper Local Forum was a very specific vehicle for engagement around mental health and emotional wellbeing, it attracted support from the Community Champions who had an interest in the topic. The team also promoted the forums locally to also encourage ad hoc volunteers/participants.
- **Communicating about the forums** – The forums had good attendance but required several reminders. Even with regular communication, some Community Champions expressed it was difficult to keep track of the forum due to the range of other requests on their time.
- **Balancing contributions made at borough-level and hyper-local level** – There is a genuine desire across Brent to work together and share information across services. BHM has been particularly good at making connections between people and organisations at the borough level, but forum organisers felt this could happen more at a hyper local level. While there are benefits of being part of a borough-wide programme (e.g. shared vision and resourcing), working at the hyper local level is ultimately about shifting the balance of power to the community and this is best achieved through local decision-making structures.
- **Making time for local statutory staff to attend forums** - Forum organisers reflected that forums would benefit from involving the right level of statutory staff – e.g. local staff who work in these communities such as social prescribing link workers. However, health service staff sometimes did not attend because they did not feel they had the capacity on top of delivering services. Given the low frequency of the forums (i.e. once every 2 months) ideally this would be built into staff roles and expectations to enable them to attend.

Recommendations for setup:

- Start with community research to understand the needs of local people.
- Assess if there is willingness from commissioners for local people to take ownership and find ways to allay any concerns e.g. by having clear definitions for the scope of the forums and outlining roles for statutory services and local communities.

- Link forums to structured volunteering programmes like Community Champions, while also encouraging attendance from more ad hoc volunteers, to ensure volunteers represent the hyper local communities as much as possible.
- When inviting local organisations and statutory services, encourage attendance from representatives who work or live in the locality.
- Empower staff from statutory services to be part of these groups by building attendance into job roles and freeing up service delivery time.

What worked on the day and areas for improvement

The first Hyper Local Forums took place virtually over Zoom. The Alperton forum took place on 26th May 2021 (20 attendees) and the Church End forum on 14th June 2021 (17 attendees). Participants were a mix of Community Champions (volunteer roles), people who lived or worked locally, and staff from mental health, wellbeing and council services.

The forums brought together groups of local people and local stakeholders to discuss the Alperton/Church End community survey results. Following small breakout discussions, the groups developed some clear actions in response to those results.

A survey and follow up calls were conducted with attendees of the Alperton and Church End Hyper Local Forums. This section summarises participant feedback and makes recommendations for future forums. Please see the appendix for the full results of the survey sent to forum participants.

Motivations and overall satisfaction with the forums

- **Participants were motivated to get involved for a range of reasons**, most commonly because 'they wanted to improve things' ('very important' to 19 out of 23 respondents), 'felt there was a need in their local community' ('very important' to 17 out of 23 respondents), and that 'the cause was important to them' ('very important' to 16 out of 23 respondents).
- **Overall, participants were satisfied with the Hyper Local Forums.** There were some anticipated differences in the two communities. The Church End team reflected that the community has higher levels of distrust in statutory services. Participants have engaged with the Church End forum and want to stay involved, but there was recognition from organisers that it may take more time and effort to embed the forum in the community, compared to Alperton.

Overall, how satisfied do you feel about your experience of participating in the Hyper Local Forum?

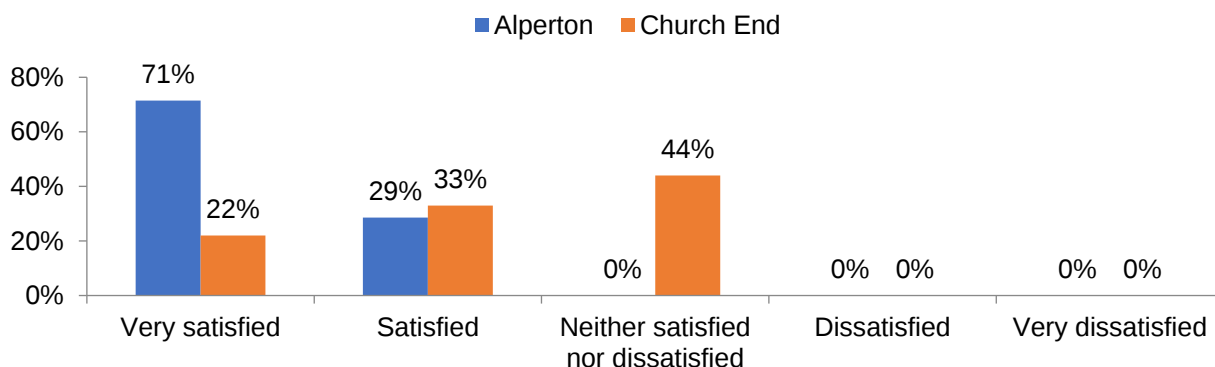


Figure 1: Participant feedback survey (n=13 Alperton, n=9 Church End)

- **Participants expressed a high likelihood to attend future events and help deliver the action plans.** They also said they were highly likely to attend similar Hyper Local Forums for other projects.

How likely are you to do the following?

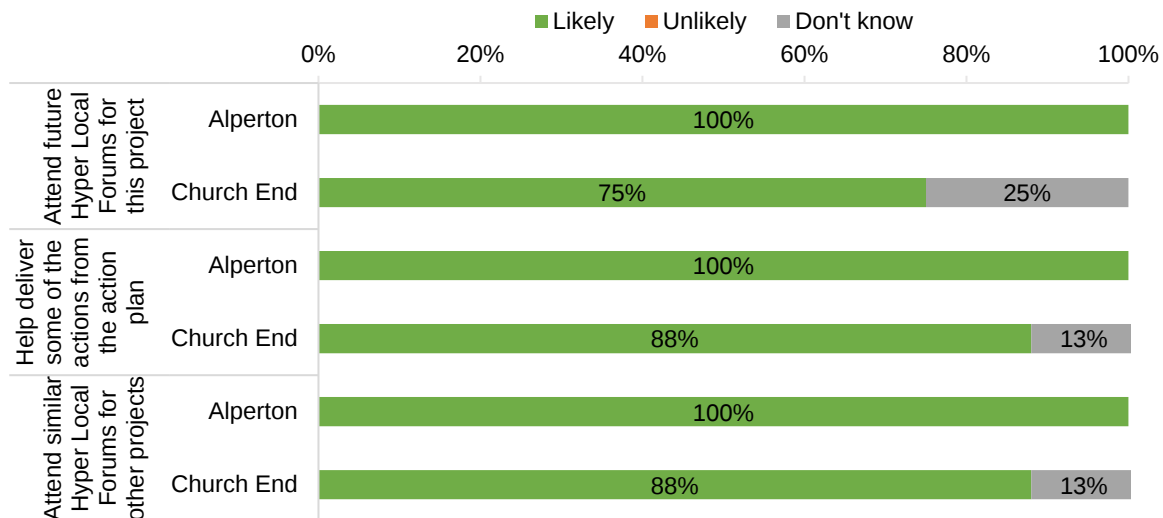


Figure 2: Participant feedback survey (n=13 Alpertion, n=9 Church End)

What went well

- Focus on breakout rooms enabled rich discussions.** There was a deliberate decision to not have formal presentations, and to instead dedicate most of the meeting to discussion in small breakout rooms. Both local people and representatives from local organisations praised this approach, as it enabled a rich discussion and created the right environment for local people to feel they could speak out. A team member was responsible for administering the virtual meeting, which ensured a mix of community representatives were allocated to each breakout room.

"The groups gave people more breathing room. The various voices and experiences were very valuable." - Volunteer for local charity in Alpertion

- There was an appropriate mix of attendees.** Local people and volunteers felt they could speak out. The organisers deliberately limited the number of participants who did not have a link to the local area. One participant suggested that in future there could be one main representative from each statutory service, *"to avoid having too many officials"*. Despite this, several volunteers commented that they were happy to see staff from statutory services attending to listen to the experiences of local people and felt their presence was important for action to happen.

"I'm so happy with [the forum] because the people from the community have been given a voice. Because of that they have been listened to. Now they are going back and organising around our talks [...] Really impressed at the number of officers who turned up to hear for themselves." - Community Champion, Church End

- Having a neutral third-party was praised** – volunteers and organisers said the role of Helpforce and the programme lead (Giles Piercy) helped to broker relationships between statutory services (the council and health services) and the local community. This did not just apply to the forums themselves but also to setting up the project. Building trust with the local communities in Alpertion and Church End will take time, so having an independent person was valued by volunteers and organisers from the council.

"We need to build up a lot of goodwill. It's incredibly hard to do. Giles's role is critical - there are sensitivities and it's helpful to have independent mediator to help with these conversations." - Community Coordinator, Brent Council

Areas for continual improvement

It was widely acknowledged that the Hyper Local Forums will take time to become established and that they are off to a great start. Feedback from participants highlighted some areas where the project can focus efforts to continue to improve in future:

- **Focusing forums on identifying and pursuing concrete actions** – As part of the session, the group created an 'action plan'. The aim of the action plan was to encourage volunteering and build emotional resilience in the local community. In general, participants felt the action plan was meaningful and achievable, but there were again differences between the two communities: Alpertion forum participants felt very positive about the approach while opinions in Church End were more split.

Please select how much you agree with the following statements:

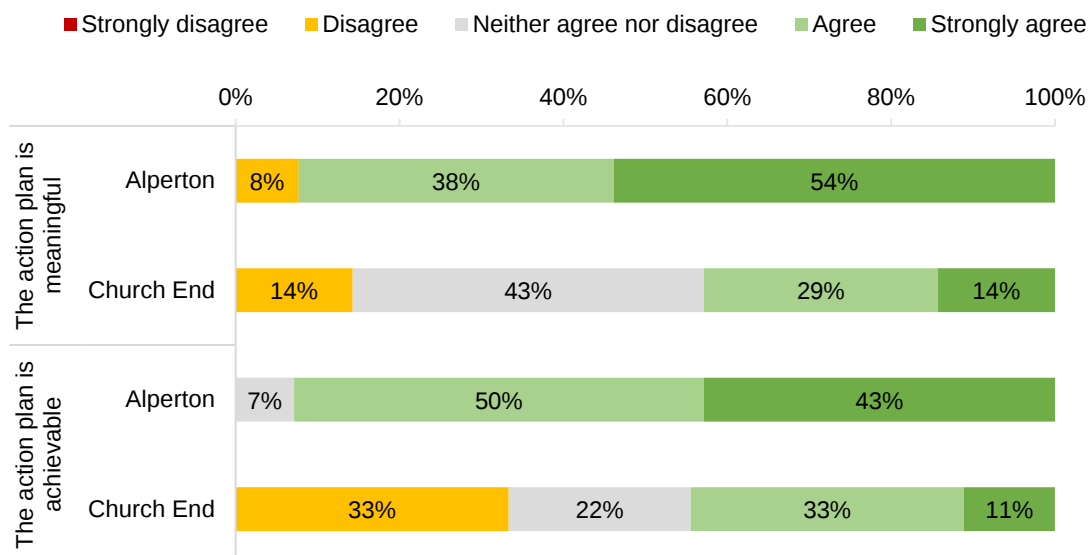


Figure 3: Participant feedback survey (n=13 Alpertion, n=9 Church End)

"The hyper local plan is working for the first time in Brent. Community organisations, faith groups and people from the BAME community have started to trust some of the services being provided, for example the Vaccine Bus, getting tested at Covid-19 test centres and receiving the Covid-19 Vaccines." Community Champion- Church End

In addition to action planning, another core aim of the initial forums was to consider how to increase participation (e.g. reaching out to more local organisations and strategies to involve more volunteers). One volunteer felt frustrated that they were regularly asked "how do we recruit more volunteers?" when she felt they should be capitalising on the volunteers already involved to drive towards concrete outcomes. This reiterates the importance of orientating the forums towards action (rather than planning) as quickly as possible.

The real impact of the action plans cannot be evaluated at this initial stage. To accurately assess any impact, it will be important for the forum organisers to get feedback from forum participants once the forums are more established.

- **Encouraging broad representation** – The forum organisers and BHM more broadly have worked hard to ensure participants and volunteers represent the local area, with significant ethnic minority representation in volunteer and paid roles. Alpertion and Church End are very diverse communities, and the forums have successfully engaged people with different faiths, beliefs, and

languages. Participants reflected that it would be good to have more representation from young people and that this was particularly important due to increasing demand for young people's mental health services. The Community Coordinators are considering whether these Hyper Local Forums are the best vehicle to engage young people, or whether this would create duplication with other local initiatives.

Recommendations for future forums:

- Keep engaging current volunteers and forum participants on concrete actions to avoid losing momentum. This could involve a simple check to make sure all participants are supporting at least one part of the action plan they feel passionate about, before moving on to recruit more volunteers
- Gather feedback from participants at a later date to assess whether action plans are meaningful and achievable
- Community Coordinators should explore opportunities to engaging young people; if this is done via a separate forum, consider how to best link with the existing Hyper Local Forums in Alpertown and Church End to ensure coordination and shared learning.

Considerations for sustainability of Hyper Local Forums

A vast amount of hard work, resource and passion have gone into establishing the Brent Hyper Local Forums. While the long-term goal is for the forums to become embedded in the local communities, the forums are at an early stage and we have outlined some considerations for their sustainability.

Recommendations for maintaining Brent Hyper Local Forums

- Statutory services involved (the council and local health services) should commit to taking some immediate actions based on issues raised in the forums. This will be key for sustainability by showing the community that these services are serious about this approach.
- Continue the Hyper Local Forum working group to ensure collaboration between council and statutory mental health services.
- Consider and address any gaps in resourcing if Helpforce is no longer supporting the programme. The role of Helpforce as an independent coordinator was heavily praised by volunteers, participants and BHM staff. The BHM team should assess whether there are opportunities for local organisations to support as 'neutral coordinators' between the communities and statutory services.
- Create an alternative to a written application form for Community Champion volunteers to increase accessibility (this was flagged as a barrier by a current volunteer)
- Develop an approach to reward and recognise people's time as part of the Hyper Local Forums. This can involve different approaches with different levels of involvement, from thanking volunteers for their time and ensuring they are kept informed of the impact their contribution has created, to assigning a budget to organise a celebration or issuing thank you vouchers at key project milestones.

Learnings for scaling

The experience of delivering mental health and wellbeing Hyper Local Forums in Brent has highlighted some learnings for other communities who may be interested in implementing a similar model. We have derived some core principles and flexible principles for scaling and spreading to other areas. Many of these are common with previously identified principles for the BHM Community Champions programme, with a few added in italics that are specific to Hyper Local Forums:

Core principles	Flexible principles
• <i>Conduct community research to understand local health needs</i> • Map neighbourhoods to ensure Community Champions reflect demographics of neighbourhood, and an appropriate mix of community organisations are engaged • <i>Commit to a shared vision of a future where local people take on a greater decision-making role</i>	• Consider which types of stakeholders to involve (e.g. social housing providers, faith groups) • Adapt training content for Community Champions/volunteers according to initiative needs and area of focus • Adapt structure, style and location of forums (e.g. weekday vs. weekend, online vs. in person)

• <i>Involve people primarily at the local level over borough level</i> • <i>Bring community together in some form of chat/forum at the hyper local level</i> • Ensure priorities are identified by the community • Commit to collective ownership of actions (community and statutory health services) • Share learnings with other communities running similar initiatives	• Tailor communications materials (language translations vs. English-only) • <i>Involving a neutral third-party organisation to broker relationship between the community and statutory services (when there is high distrust in statutory services)</i>
--	---

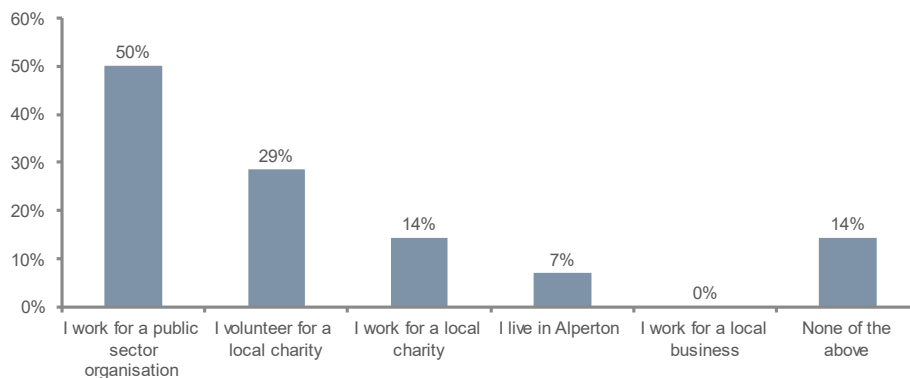
Appendix – Hyper Local Forum participant feedback survey results

2 surveys conducted:

- Alperton: 27th May – 8th June 2021. Responses from 14 attendees out of 20 participants (70%)
- Church End: 22nd June – 5th July 2021. Responses from 9 attendees out of 17 participants (53%)

Q1 - Alperton

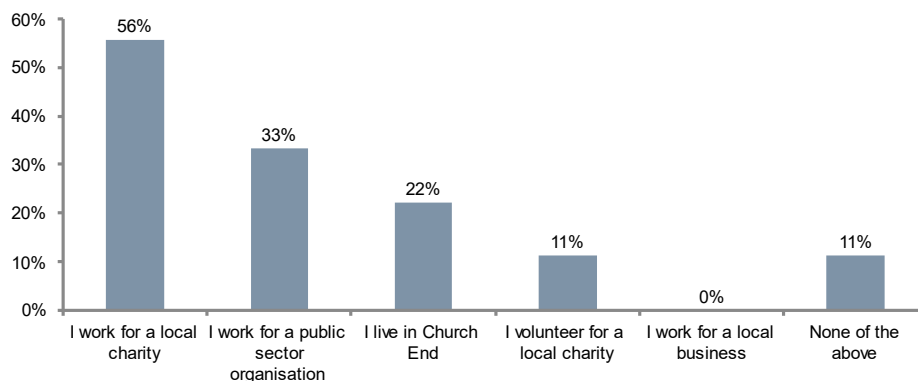
Did you attend the forum as a local resident or someone who works for a local organisation? (Please tick all that apply)



3 N= 14, Alperton Hyper Local Forum

Q1- Church End

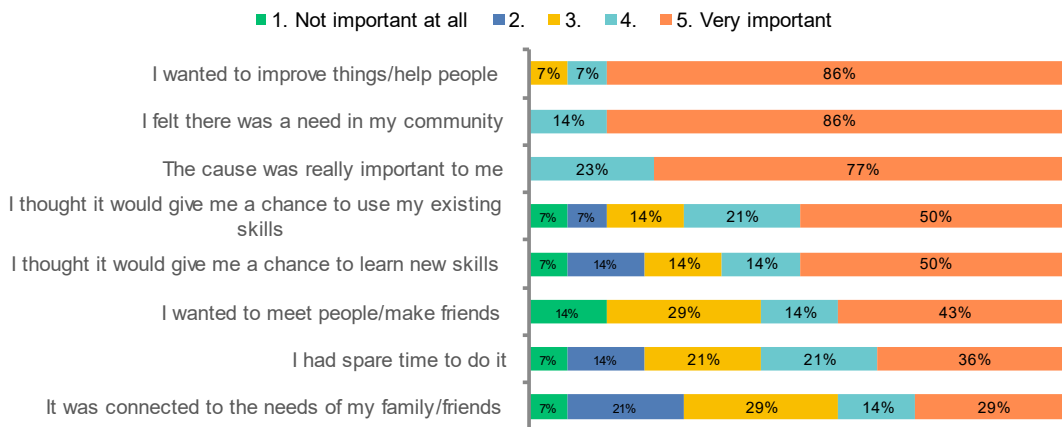
Did you attend the forum as a local resident or someone who works for a local organisation? (Please tick all that apply)



3 N= 9, Church End Hyper Local Forum

Q2- Alperton

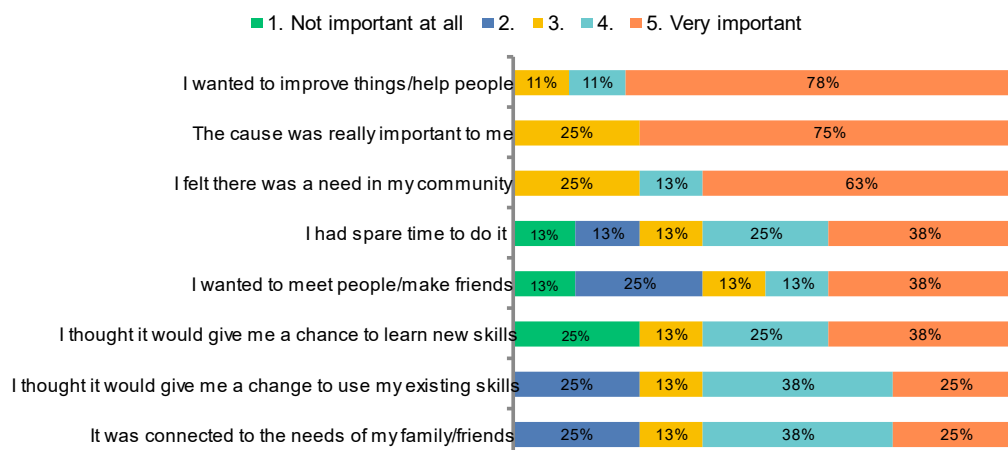
How important were the following in your decision to get involved in the hyper local forum?



4 N= 14, Alperton Hyper Local Forum

Q2 – Church End

How important were the following in your decision to get involved in the hyper local forum?



4 N= 9, Church End Hyper Local Forum

Q3 - Alperton

What aspects of the hyper local forum worked particularly well?



- Ideas of how to get local people involved with the Forum and other facilities in the community
- Finding out how the participants feel about certain issues, and in discussions we could try to see how we could improve what wasn't working well
- Understanding the Alperton community and its needs better
- Listening to other forum members
- Allowing the community to have their say for most of the meeting, and good attendance by the community to help them bounce ideas off each other.
- Zoom calls
- The breakout rooms allowed for greater depth in conversations
- The groups gave people more breathing room. The various voices and experience was very valuable
- The space to discuss and talk about ideas and experiences. The break out rooms were great and allowed me to talk to community members directly.
- The break out session where we were able to discuss issues and ideas in smaller groups which were then fed back in the larger forum.
- Lived experiences was shared to the benefit of the community
- The break out rooms
- Open discussion and break out rooms

Q3 – Church End

What aspects of the hyper local forum worked particularly well?



- Improving the health and security for the people in Church Road particularly the young
- Meeting others with similar interest to help. Also for networking
- The discussions
- The breakout rooms discussions
- Helping the local community
- Encouraging Tenants on Church End to participate with local organisation when in need of help whether In Health Care or Financial Problems.
- The various organisations and individuals coming together to share concerns but to look at solutions
- Online makes it easy for everyone to participate.
- Breakout rooms

Q4 - Alperton

What elements of the hyper local forum would you change?



- None
- It is too early, I believe to make changes, but in subsequent meetings we could think about it; just my opinion...!
- None, worked really well
- Encourage more BAME Residents to get involved with the Forum
- I think the first meeting went well, I wouldn't change anything. However I think future meetings don't need to follow the same structure, it could be adapted to the objectives if they are different.
- Soon to find out more
- N/A
- You tried your best but people still waffle. Maybe limit peoples answers to 10 or 20 seconds?
- More interaction maybe using Menti?
- Longer break out sessions.
- The hyper forum should be implemented across all 8 Wembley wards not just Alperton.
- Asking people for opinions if they didn't have their hand up
- Nothing.

Q4 – Church End

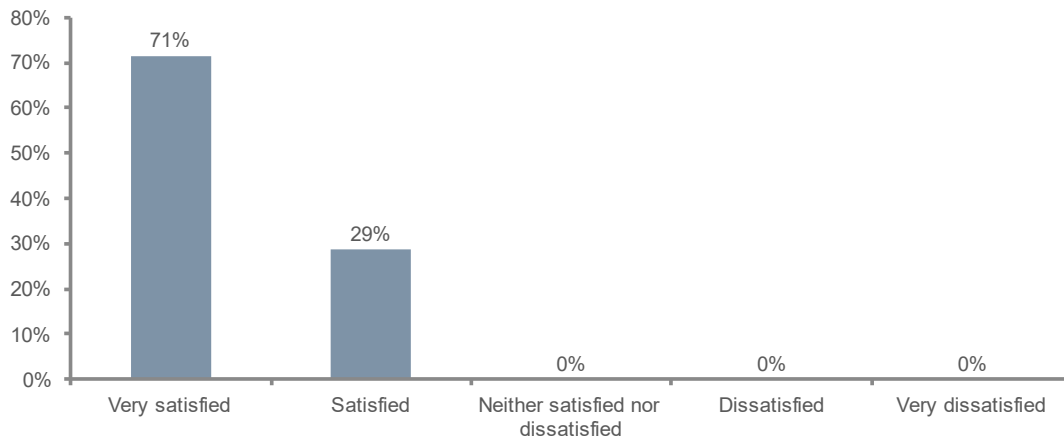
What elements of the hyper local forum would you change?



- Getting to know each other to work together and learn from a positive integration
- Nothing
- I don't know.
- None the focus is well thought out.
- It would be good to have more young people involved in the discussion, therefore we should look at how best to involve them
- N/A

Q5 - Alperton

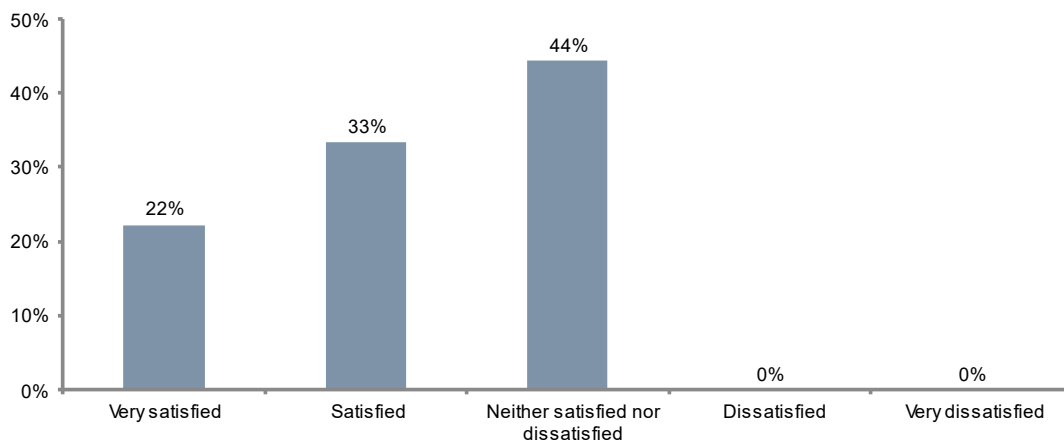
Overall, how satisfied do you feel about your experience of participating in the hyper local forum?



7 N= 14, Alperton Hyper Local Forum

Q5 – Church End

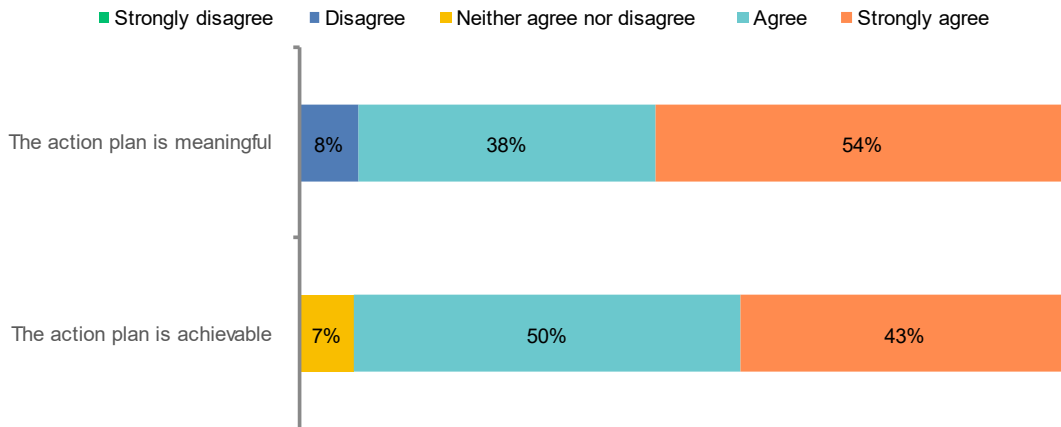
Overall, how satisfied do you feel about your experience of participating in the hyper local forum?



7 N= 9, Church End Hyper Local Forum

Q6- Alperton

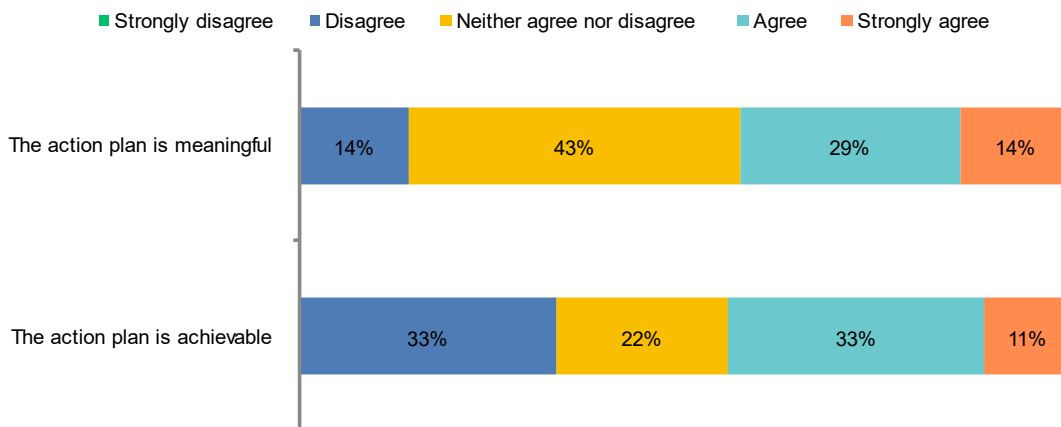
As part of the session, we created an 'action plan'. The aim of the action plan was to encourage volunteering and build emotional resilience in the local community. Please select how much you agree with the following statements:



8 N= 14, Alperton Hyper Local Forum

Q6 – Church End

As part of the session, we created an 'action plan'. The aim of the action plan was to encourage volunteering and build emotional resilience in the local community. Please select how much you agree with the following statements:



8 N= 9, Church End Hyper Local Forum

Q7 - Alpertown

Please comment on your answers to the previous question



- By the community working with the Local Authority Trust issues that was once a problem to achieve feedback on Grey Areas in Service provision is now being laid on the table for discussion.
- It is meaningful because it was thought of, in order to make changes, and to see what fits
- the action plan was meaningful
- By encouraging residents to speak their minds will enable a better understanding of other people's needs.
- I think the action plan captures the community's ideas well, this will now need to be shaped into something locally relevant and tangible.
- Nil
- The turnout was great and I have a lot of faith in Umit and Lee.
- By looking at all the ideas we can look at what can be done by the group now and what needs more support and further planning. But, with a view to delivering actions together.
- Key issues were discussed and good plans come up with to alleviate the inequalities exposed by the pandemic and also ways to connect people within the community.
- Members of the grieving families should be consulted, supported and encouraged by to attend & engage with the hyper local forum
- It seems Forum has been talking for a long time, but little action has been taken.

Q7 – Church End

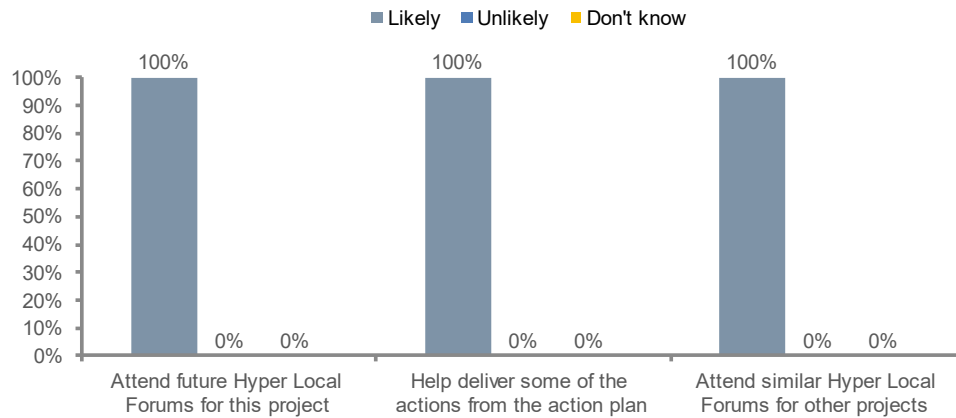
Please comment on your answers to the previous question



- Communities are empowered when they know help is at hand. Local govt taking serious interest in community may help community take local govt plans more seriously too.
- I think you should concentrate on the volunteers you have and get things moving and the volunteers will come when there is action.
- The hyper local plan is working for the first time in Brent Community Organisation, Faith Groups and people from the BAME Community have started to Trust some of the service provisions being provided for example the Vaccine Bus, and getting tested at Covid -19 test centres and are receiving the Covid -19 Vaccines
- The action plan is only achievable if we have the right people around involved in the planning and delivery of the activities
- Not really clear what next steps are

Q8 - Alperton

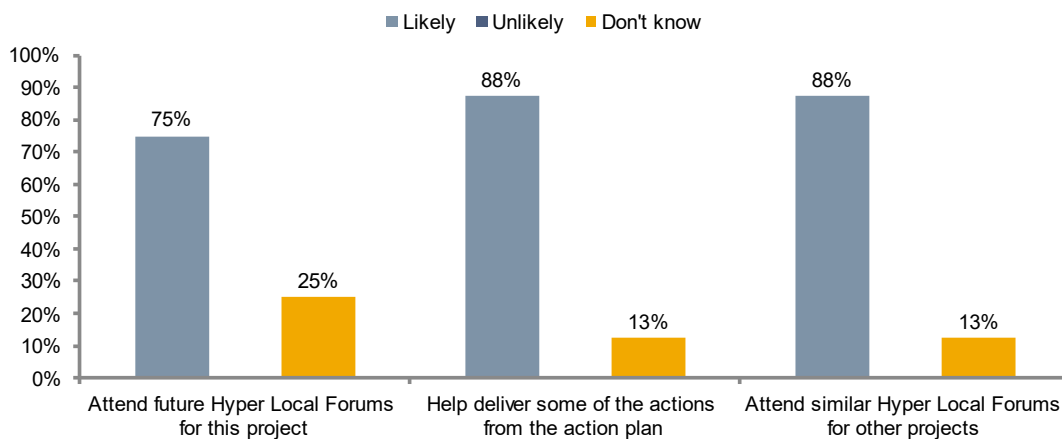
How likely are you to do the following?



10 N= 14, Alperton Hyper Local Forum

Q8 – Church End

How likely are you to do the following?



10 N= 8, Church End Hyper Local Forum