Brief Critique of Resident Participation Framework: So Far

We are planning a range of focused workshops on specific aspects of the framework. So far we are planning sessions on:

If these *sessions use Teams, I'm not bothering*, I do not wish to be forced by the council into the Microsoft software eco-system. Is someone being incentivised to do this? Zoom is perfectly adequate.

There are even *open* alternatives jitsi[1], for example, but these would require serious up-skilling within the council.

Newham Co-Create: Discuss and tackle issues with the Newham Co-Create online platform. We are planning to deliver an online workshop on either the 13th December or 17th January

Yes that's sensible, it's a flashy, currently an ineffective, complex mess, lots of pretty pictures (as usual) and labyrinthine navigation and 'phases'. Anecdotally, every non-IT person I've spoken too dislikes trying to use and navigate this.

After 40 years in IT including about 20 for the web[2], I'm not that happy either. Had a Zoom with IT but they're defensive rather than cooperative.

How to best do different types of participation and involve residents, e.g. co-production, consultation, and cross-cutting issues like inclusivity: We'll ask what you want to have input on at a later date. Sessions will be over January and February 2022

These all overlap anyway. It's interesting that the council in making this 'framework' is creating silos and ontology[3] (qv) immediately without a more general discussion. Or there probably is a discussion *but it hasn't, for example been minuted*.

People need to be able to define these then, if they wish, go to all of them.

Opportunities for residents to develop new skills for participation: We plan to hold these sessions in January 2022

How about *resident-led opportunities for elected and paid officers to develop new skills for listening (including active listening) and acting honestly on what they have heard*? Rather than 'comms', defensiveness and wooden, Sir Humphrey-esque language.

Or maybe we should re-title this as 'new skills for trying to participate with Newham council officers'? That may be more accurate.

---

1   https://jitsi.org/
2   See bottom of page for brief CV
3   https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-ontology/

I'm quite serious about this and prepared (after a decade of dealing with Tower Hamlets Homes and more recently Newham Council) to lead a couple of them. In the real world this is known as 'upward feedback' since the officers usually hold most of the levers of power, access and substantial change, they are the 'upward' destination in this case.

Opportunities for residents to develop new skills for resident-led activities: We plan to hold these sessions in January 2022

That's pretty patronising, we usually do pretty well, *fending for ourselves*. Or are these, as above, skills for 'resident-led but interacting with with officers'?

Addressing residents' expectations of participation: This will build on our initial workshop and go into specific expectations

I'd guess this should be called *lowering expectations*? This is vague, in the extreme:
providing context - of what?
efficient design - this seems to address the Local Plan, therefore *very limited*, otherwise it's vague?
transparency - unlikely, given the preference for 'comms' and Orwellian near-meaningless language
addressing wider concerns - vague?

How we best develop the framework into a toolkit and training that is interactive and works for everyone:

For everyone or for deflecting and 'shaping' interactions with the council?

Conclusions

The above may be somewhat unpalatable, but it's hopefully a 'learning experience'. Participation doesn't work when it's 'shaped' in this way, beforehand. It's almost as if *the council doesn't really trust its residents*, isn't it? Actually, in the main, the *residents are often ahead of and more imaginative than the council*, cycling, green issues, informal gardening. **We live here** (as opposed to 'We Are Newham' and 'People at the Heart of Everything We Do' and other 'comms' inspired Orwellian idiocies).

This is also an error of (especially premature) *organisation imposed legibility*, see the recipe paragraph in this[4].

One big thing that's missing from all this is *tech tools for participation and (pace Illich) conviviality*. Actually this was flagged up, way back, in the Democracy Commission report. *Even Trump has managed* to deploy a Mastodon instance, for example. That requires also some open mindeness about open source and some serious upskilling in the ranks of council officials too. Probably won't happen, therefore.

---

4   https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2010/07/26/a-big-little-idea-called-legibility/