

A COMMUNITY LEADERS' AND CONNECTORS' GUIDE TO NEIGHBOURHOOD HEALTH

Questions for residents, local group leaders, VCSE organisers,
and community connectors to hold health systems
accountable and promote community power.

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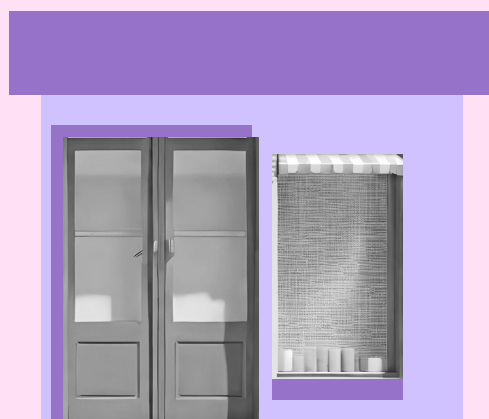
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When health and local government bodies talk about Neighbourhood Health Plans, they are stepping into the space where you live, build relationships, and organise every day. True neighbourhood health does not come from a hospital or a council office; it is created on park benches, around kitchen tables, in local clubs, and through neighbours looking out for one another.

This is why, in the recently published [*Putting the Neighbourhood Back into Neighbourhood Health*](#), we propose treating the neighbourhood itself as a primary unit of health, and communities as health creators rather than simply clients of services. Its organising principle is that institutions should supplement community power rather than supplant it, with services on tap rather than on top.

This guide provides practical questions, organised across five themes, which you can use when meeting with health officials, councillors, local authority leads, and service providers to influence the direction of neighbourhood health. These questions may also be useful when speaking with other members of your community. Use them to ensure system leaders back your community's existing strengths rather than inadvertently taking over your local space and side-stepping community power.



1. Recognising community power: whose plan is this?

- **Recognising what exists:** How will you take time to learn about the strengths, skills, groups, and relationships that are already keeping people well here?
- **Who leads?** Are you asking us to help deliver your institutional health plan, or are you offering resources and support to back the plans we are already making for our own neighbourhood's wellbeing?
- **Defining health:** Do you see neighbourhood health as just opening clinics and running medical services, or do you recognise that housing, local environment, financial security, and social connections drive most of our wellbeing?

2. Genuine partnership: seat at the table or rubber stamp?

- **Timing of involvement:** At what stage are we being brought in? Are you involving us when priorities are being decided, or are you consulting us on pre-made decisions?
- **Decision-making power:** What actual power do residents and local groups have in your governance structure? Can we say "no" or change the direction of funding and priorities?
- **Value for grassroots groups:** Are local voluntary and community groups being treated as equal strategic partners?

3. Following the money: direct support for local action

- **Direct community funding:** How much of the total budget for this neighbourhood plan will go directly to community groups and residents to control and spend on local priorities and build on what is already strong?
- **Removing red tape:** Are you making funding available through simple, accessible micro-grants and trust-based funding, or are you requiring small grassroots groups to engage with complex, institutional bidding processes, and to compete against each other?
- **Sustaining community infrastructure:** Will you help us fund and protect the physical gathering places, like community halls, parks, and hubs, where our community naturally meets and grows?

4. Protecting social fabric: supporting without controlling

- **Preserving autonomy:** How will you support local volunteers, resident connectors, and informal groups without imposing rigid rules, regulations, or bureaucracy on us?
- **Bridging divides:** How are you helping us reach people in our neighbourhood who are isolated, marginalised, or excluded, ensuring everyone's voice and contributions are included?

5. Accountability and ownership: measuring what actually matters

- Defining success:** Who decides whether this neighbourhood plan is working? Will success measures include whether residents feel safer, more connected, and more powerful in their place?
- Holding services accountable:** How will you know whether institutional staff are listening to residents, sharing power, and stepping back when necessary?
- Reporting back:** How will you demonstrate to our community that our time and input have resulted in tangible changes in how services operate and how funds are spent?
- How can we support you?** As residents, we have much to offer that can help you in helping us. How can we support you?
- Resolving issues:** When issues arise, how will we resolve them fairly?



New Local is an independent think tank and network with a mission to transform public services and unlock community power.

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