

We Value Working Together

**Reward and Recognition Guidance for
Co-Production and Engagement – Adults and Health**



Introduction

We value the experiences and expertise of our residents and their engagement is essential to improving local services and the local area. Many residents get involved because they want to make a positive difference for their community. This guidance demonstrates that we value the contribution they make, acknowledge their input, and celebrate the achievements made when we work together.

The guidance sets out some principles and considerations for recognising and rewarding engagement, ensuring that all our projects and staff across Adults and Health reward residents who take part fairly and consistently, whilst understanding that engagement is a voluntary activity. It should be read alongside other guidance for staff about facilitating engagement activities. The guidance applies to individual residents and carers in Newham who are involved in participatory activities, collectively referred to as 'residents' throughout the guidance. This guidance does not apply to our work with public organisations, such as charities or voluntary and community organisations. It is recognised that working with charities and the voluntary and community sector also brings valuable insight and input to our work. Neither does it apply to people who work for Newham Council.

Engagement encompasses a variety of roles, from attending an information sharing session or engagement event, to being the Co-Chair/Facilitator or Co-Production representative of a local group or forum. This guidance provides a framework to determining the level of reward and recognition that is appropriate to the resident involvement.

This guidance has been informed by residents who took part in workshops about how the council could improve engagement and by council officers who regularly facilitate engagement activities.

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Glossary

Here are explanations of key words that Newham Council uses in relation to acknowledging and valuing residents' contributions. These terms may be defined differently by other organisations.

Recognition | demonstrating that involvement is valued and appreciated. Examples of this include feedback on the impact of people's engagement, thank you letters, references, nominations for awards, or celebration events.

Reward | giving something that is of value to the resident. Examples include payments, vouchers, providing a meal, tickets for an event, a toy, or providing a learning and development opportunity.

Expenses | financial costs a resident has incurred in order to participate, such as travel costs, childcare costs, respite care, or carer support.

Accessibility | steps taken to remove any barriers to participation to ensure activities are open and welcome to the diverse communities living in Newham.

Co-production | a type of participation where Council officers and residents work together in equal partnership to reach a collective outcome, for example designing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating services.

What this guidance covers

Reward and recognition is about demonstrating that residents' involvement is valued and appreciated, and that they are given something of value back in recognition that they have provided their time, skills and expertise. The reward can be financial, or it can be something non-financial that is of value to the resident.

This guidance also covers expenses, the financial costs that a resident may incur in order to participate, such as travel costs, childcare costs, replacement care, or carer support. These expenses can become a barrier to engagement, and we recognise that we need to remove or minimise the financial barriers that can prevent or discourage engagement. Reimbursing expenses is intended to support inclusion and create an incentive for active engagement.

The guidance highlights when it is appropriate to provide nourishment. Participation activities can be an energy-intensive process. Providing food and hydration makes sessions comfortable and accessible, helping with concentration and productivity.

The guidance should be made available to any resident who requests it. An accompanying guidance document for reward and recognition is available for staff, as well as a separate guide for residents.

This guidance does not cover how to decide, recruit, prepare for, and run participatory initiatives.

Principles

When we recognise and reward the contribution of residents, we follow these principles:

1. **Transparency** – Be open and transparent with residents in advance of the engagement activity about the types of reward and recognition that will be used and what actions they need to take, so they can make an informed decision about getting involved.
2. **Equity** - Do it in a consistent and fair way so that reward and recognition reflects the nature and demands of the activity and similar activities are rewarded equitably across all the Council's work.

3. **Choice** – Involve participants in the decision about how they are rewarded and acknowledged, with flexibility to allow for individuals' preferences or personal circumstance. Rewards for young children are also agreed with their parent or carer.
4. **Accessible** – Seek to remove barriers to engagement to encourage a wide range of residents to participate, through reimbursing expenses and offering rewards for involvement.

Reward and Recognition considerations

The following things are taken into account when considering how to recognise and reward the contribution of residents:

Level of participation | The type of recognition and reward takes into account what is being asked of the resident, the level of responsibility and decision-making they will have, and the level of commitment the participation requires.

Inclusive to all participants | For some people, payment for their engagement may affect certain welfare benefits they are entitled to and they may prefer to have their contribution recognised in a different way. We will be clear about the impact of benefits and ask participants how they would like to be rewarded to ensure that the process is as inclusive as possible.

Reward and Recognition for different activities

There is a range of ways in which residents may participate and there are many types of rewards that can be offered as thanks and recognition. For all types of engagement, residents should receive thanks and acknowledgement. This should cover as a minimum:

- Explicit thanks for their time and input;
- Explanation of why their input is valuable and how it will be used;
- Timely and pro-active sharing of project outputs and notification of decisions during and at end of process.

We have categorised the different engagement opportunities that we offer. These have been linked to the appropriate reward and recognition to ensure equity across Adults and Health.

Table 1 | Involvement role and the level of reward and recognition

Involvement Role	Examples	Level of Reward and Recognition
Resident chooses to respond to open access information sharing, consultation or engagement opportunities. • Attending an open meeting where Adults and Health shares information, to discuss changes in guidance, or where community views are sought. • Responding to an online survey or statutory consultation to inform decision-making about a new proposal or a guidance or service change.	• Carers Resident Advisory Group • Voting on projects via Newham co-create online platform	• Thanks and acknowledgement. • Refreshments (water, tea, coffee) for in-person, indoor events where people are expected to attend for 2 or more hours.
Resident is personally invited to attend session(s) where they are actively involved in shaping something. • The resident has been personally invited to attend one or several sessions to help shape something. • This can cover a range of activities to generate understanding, design something, or test something. It could be in the form of a focus group, workshop, or a user testing/prototyping exercise.	• Workshop to develop a strategy or framework of working Session to user test the Survey design • Session to inform the design of a new service	• Thanks and acknowledgement. • Nourishment appropriate to the timing and duration of any in-person, indoor session. • Travel and care expenses. • Financial reward based on time spent in sessions.
Resident is a member of a co-production team for a time-limited project, working together with council staff to co-design, co-commission, or co-evaluate a service. • Co-production team has a process to be a member and consists of the same group who work together.	• Improvement task group (identified through Co-Production Forum or a Resident Advisory Group open engagement session)	• Thanks and acknowledgement. • Nourishment appropriate to the timing and duration of any in-person, indoor session. • Travel and care expenses.

Involvement Role	Examples	Level of Reward and Recognition
Activities involve some decision-making such as a procurement exercise or developing design proposals.	- Designing an Adult Social Care pathway e.g. Hospital discharge - Designing embedding strengths-based approaches	- Financial reward based on time spent in sessions and may include time spent on relevant preparation or follow up work. - Certificate for participation. - End of project thank you event.
Resident is a member of a regular co-production group set up to work with the Council to improve services. - Co-production team has a process to be a member and consists of the same group who work together. - Group is embedded in strategic decision-making processes. They may act as a scrutiny group or be involved in staff recruitment panels.	- Newham Co-Production Forum - Resident Advisory Groups	- Thanks and acknowledgement. - Nourishment appropriate to the timing and duration of any in-person, indoor session. - Travel and care expenses. - Financial reward based on time spent in formal sessions and may include time spent on relevant preparation or follow up work.
Resident is invited to support procurement decisions and contract monitoring of commissioned services.	- Mystery shopper visits - Quarterly contract/performance monitoring meetings - Preparing qualitative insights to commissioners on a service's performance and delivery of services - Care home visits - Supported Living Survey visits	- Thanks and acknowledgement. - Travel and care expenses. - Financial reward based on time spent on the activity and may include time spent on relevant preparation or follow up work.

Involvement Role	Examples	Level of Reward and Recognition
	Procurement Resident Panel	
Resident has taken on a leadership role as an elected representative or chair of a participatory panel, forum, group or board.	- Co-Chair of Co-Production Forum - Co-chair of a Resident Advisory Group	- Thanks and acknowledgement. - Travel and care expenses. - Financial reward based on time spent in sessions and may include time spent on relevant preparation or follow up work.
Resident attends training as a non-financial reward for their involvement in the above activities As an alternative to a financial reward payment residents may opt to attend a relevant training or development session, as agreed with the lead officer.	Attendance at Strengths based training session	Agreed expenses only

Recognition and reward types

Reward

Rewards are appropriate for residents who contribute significant time, skills and expertise, and have a level of responsibility or decision-making. Rewards for involvement can be financial or non-financial, both of which are covered below. The Council will not make any payment outside of the criteria set out in this guidance.

Reward | Financial

Financial reward payments are not to be considered a wage or an offer of employment but a recognition of the contribution that residents make to improving services. Where residents are to be paid for their involvement, agree with them that they accept this payment as a reward for their involvement and not a contract of employment.

From June 2026, where a financial reward is being offered this will be £15 per hour. The number of hours that can be claimed for should be agreed in advance of the activity. This payment can be made by bank transfer or via gift vouchers.

Benefits & Tax Implications

Receiving a financial reward payment can have tax implications and affect benefit eligibility. It is essential that residents are advised to check the impact of their prospective role and reward on their circumstances before they start. Find out more in the section 'Benefits and Tax Implications'.

Reward | Non-Financial

Non-financial rewards are a good alternative to a financial reward, in Adults and Health we can do by acknowledging the contribution of residents in reports and presentations, nominating them for an award, providing training, references for employment or providing opportunities to socialise and celebrate such as a meal or party.

These non-financial rewards, which provide something of value to the resident, can also help incentivise people to get and stay involved.

Expenses

Expenses are the financial costs a resident has incurred in order to participate, such as travel costs, childcare costs, carer support or replacement care costs. We need to ensure that we cover expenses in a way that is fair, being mindful of offering 'best

value' when spending public funds. Both our staff and residents have responsibilities to identify and use the most cost-effective options, balancing the need to minimise any financial or other barriers to engagement with the need to minimise costs to the taxpayer. There may be additional expenses which the Lead Officer wishes to cover in their reward and recognition scheme (e.g. phone minutes, meals/nourishments). These need to be discussed and agreed with the lead officer in advance of making the purchase, including the item and the cost.

Expenses | Travel

Travel expenses may be claimed depending upon the budget for each project. These costs must be agreed with the lead officer in advance.

For activities where travel expenses can be reimbursed, this should cover the cost of the return trip from home or place of work/ to the venue on public transport. Claims need to be accompanied by evidence of the expense, normally a ticket or receipt.

If the person would prefer to travel to the activity venue in a private vehicle, and this is cost effective, travel and parking can be claimed. HMRC mileage rates are used for travel costs and as of April 2025, this is:

Type of vehicle	Rate per mile
Private car	45p
Motorcycle	24p

If it is agreed in advance that using a taxi is necessary this will be reimbursed as an expense. A maximum of £15 can be reimbursed and the claim must be accompanied by a receipt. A taxi might be necessary:

- Where it is cost effective due to numbers travelling together
- For journeys for which there is no other suitable method of public transport

If a person is using their Taxicard allowance to attend an activity, they can claim a maximum of £5 per journey.

Expenses | Overnight

Although it will not be usual for the Council to cover overnight expenses this may be appropriate in some circumstances. Overnight expenses could occur, for instance if

someone is attending a conference outside of London in their role as a co-production team member. As an example, if the conference takes place over more than one day, or it starts at a time when the resident would need to leave home prior to 6am to arrive at the event, overnight expenses may be covered. It may also be appropriate to cover expenses where a resident has a disability that makes travelling for too long in one day difficult. This needs to be agreed between the resident and the lead officer in advance.

It is preferable that accommodation is booked on behalf of the resident rather than reimbursed so costs do not become an issue for their engagement. Booking arrangements should be made in good time to ensure that cost effective options can be utilised and appropriate accommodation can be secured, including accommodating any access needs.

Expenses | Carer Costs

Payment for carer costs may be considered but this will depend on the budgets for each project. Carer costs are where a resident needs the support of another individual to enable them to attend the activity, such as a carer, support worker or personal assistant. It also covers replacement care costs, where a carer employs a registered care agency to look after their loved one while attending an activity.

For activities where carer costs can be reimbursed, the general principle is that the Council will reimburse costs that are higher than those normally incurred. For example, if the personal assistant would normally be required when the meeting takes place, no claim may be made for their time, however their travel expenses may be reimbursed. This needs to be agreed between the resident and the lead officer in advance.

The calculations will be worked out on an individual basis. Payments for carer costs may be regarded as taxable income by the Inland Revenue so any payment received must be declared to the relevant tax and benefits authorities by the person receiving the payment.

Expenses | Childcare Costs

Payment for childcare costs may be considered but this will depend upon the budgets for each project.

For activities where childcare costs can be reimbursed, payments up to £16.00¹ per hour per child for registered childcare will be reimbursed where these are additional expenses. For example, if the child usually attends day care and attending an engagement event means the child needs to stay in day care for an extra hour, only the extra hour will be covered. The calculations will be worked out on an individual basis and need to be agreed between the resident and the lead officer in advance.

Payments to a participant's family or friend undertaking childcare responsibilities are acceptable for up to two hours. Childcare for over two hours will need to be undertaken by a registered child carer. Registered childcare includes nurseries, childminders, play schools and nannies.

Nourishment

Where nourishment is offered it should be relevant to the time of day. For instance, outside of meal times, drinks such as water, tea and coffee would be suitable. Appropriate meals should be provided where individual attendance is expected across the whole of these times:

- Breakfast - 08:00-10:00
- Lunch - 12:00-14:00
- Dinner - 18:00-20:00

Nourishment should be suitable for the intended participants, for instance age and dietary appropriate.

Communal meals or party food can also provide opportunities to socialise and celebrate. They incentivise people to get and stay involved and can be offered as a non-financial reward.

Cancellations

If residents have made adjustments to their work schedules or incurred costs to attend an event or meeting, then remuneration can be offered. This is in the case of an event or meeting lasting three hours or more, which is then cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, Lead Officer should consider whether residents should be offered remunerated for their time.

¹ <https://www.childcare.co.uk/costs/E12>

Benefits and tax implications

The reimbursement of expenses to residents does not affect either their tax status or their entitlement to benefits as expenses are not seen as earnings. Reimbursed expenses must exactly match the expenditure or it will be classed as earnings.

If reimbursement of expenses is the only financial payment received, people's contribution is considered volunteering. Volunteering is supported if participants are receiving benefits, and they will need to [Contact Jobcentre Plus](#) to tell them that they are doing it before they start.

If people are receiving Universal Credit their volunteering can count to up to half the time they agree to spend looking for and preparing for work in their 'Claimant Commitment'. If benefits are received for health reasons or a disability, voluntary engagement activities will not trigger a Work Capability Assessment, and people will not need to provide evidence from their doctor about their volunteering.²

When payment is provided above what can be counted as expenses, it becomes liable for tax and national insurance. If participants are in receipt of any benefits, it may also have an impact on eligibility for these or reduce the amount they receive. This covers all payments, whether one-off or more frequent (previously a payment for a single activity during a one-year period was ignored but this is no longer the case). Generally, the use of vouchers does not negate tax or benefit implications as they are treated as earnings and they need to be declared in the same way as cash or bank transfers.

The limits on payments that can be received without benefits being affected vary widely, can differ for each person, and can change from year to year. It is essential that participants are advised to check the impact of their prospective role and reward on their individual circumstances before they start. They can contact [Our Newham Money](#) on 020 8430 2041, which is open Monday to Friday 9am-5pm.

Residents should be given the option of asking for a financial reward payment at a lower amount so they can be paid less than their benefit limit or be able to decline a payment.

People who are paid for involvement should be provided with a payment slip that shows the amount of reimbursed expenses separately to the financial reward amount. If expenses and a financial reward are grouped together in a single 'thank you' payment, the whole payment will be classed as earnings. For example, a 'thank

² [Volunteering and claiming benefits - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

you' payment of £25 that also covers any travel costs will be seen as £25 of earnings and this may affect the person's benefits entitlements.³

The Council will provide any information requested by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), or other government departments or agencies, regarding payments made to residents.

Budget

The budget should be agreed beforehand and built into the funding for any engagement project. The budget should be sufficient to reward and recognise all participants for the entire duration of the project. While some people may choose not to accept a financial payment, budgeting should be done on the basis that they will as non-financial ways of showing recognition could be offered.

Where a project's budget is not sufficient to cover rewards and recognition and costs as outlined in this guidance, alternatives should be explored, such as providing free in-house training to participants. Residents must be told in advance of the engagement activity what reward and recognition is being offered so they can make an informed decision about getting involved.

This guidance focuses on reward and recognition with the associated costs, along with resident expenses and providing nourishment. There will be other costs to enable meaningful engagement that also need to be built into the funding arrangements, such as training, venues, and promotional material. There might also be costs to ensure the engagement sessions are accessible such as a sign-language interpreter, or language translations to involve residents whose first language is not English. Refer to Newham's Accessible Events Checklist for further details.

Claiming and payment methods

- The lead officer for the event/project/meeting will provide support to the resident to complete the Reward & Recognition claim form. It is the lead officer's responsibility to ensure that this information is accurate and that the form is legible when completed
- The Reward and Recognition claim form **must** be completed and submitted to the Co-Production Team as soon as possible following the completion of the relevant event, meeting, or project, and no later than **3-months** after the activity has taken place. Claims submitted after the **3-month deadline** may be declined unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated, such as a

³ [NIHR, Payments guidance for researchers and professionals, Version 1.4, July 2023](#)

period of hospitalisation or another significant event that prevented submission within the required timeframe

- All receipts must be provided alongside the claim form
- Payments are processed on a weekly basis to ensure prompt payment to residents and in line with good practice; recognising that this is essential for many people who are reliant on prompt payments.

Resident responsibilities

- It is the residents' responsibility to seek advice so they fully understand the impact of their involvement on their benefits and the tax implications, so they can make an informed choice and avoid any inadvertent financial loss.
- If a resident is receiving benefits, it is their responsibility to [Contact Jobcentre Plus](#) to tell them that they are participating before they start.
- If a resident receives a payment and is in receipt of benefits, it is their responsibility to inform the relevant benefit agency of any payment which has to be declared under the terms of that benefit.
- It is the responsibility of the individual claiming and receiving payment for an agreed service or contribution to consider the impact on their income. A reward and recognition payment is for involvement, they will not be considered as entering into an employment relationship with the Council.
- Anyone experiencing specific barriers or with support needs should contact the relevant lead contact for the event, project or meeting who will do their best to resolve any issues in advance of the event.

Externally commissioned organisations

Newham Council expects providers to develop their own detailed procedures to ensure a consistent approach to recognising and rewarding residents in line with the principles and considerations outlined above. Payment as part of reward and recognition from all providers will be in line with the amount stated in this guidance. Any variation must be agreed with the commissioning lead of the service. The budget for recognising and rewarding engagement should be included in the price provided in response to the tender.

Where residents have set up their own community-led projects, the Council is not responsible for providing reward and recognition, although the Council may be able to support the project in other ways if approached.

Guidance ownership

This guidance is owned by the Co-Production Team (Adults and Health). It will be reviewed at least annually to ensure that it remains appropriate.

The guidance was last updated in June 2026