co-operationireland

‘How Could We Make Derry/Londonderry a Safer and More Inclusive Space for Everyone?’

voice matters

Voice Matters Deliberative Panel Report and Recommendations (2025)

Who is involved?

Co-operation Ireland

Co-operation Ireland is a peacebuilding organisation which works to promote and encourage interaction, dialogue, and practical collaboration between the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Our mission is to sustain peace by helping to build a shared and cohesive society. Co-operation Ireland commissioned and delivered the 'Voice Matters' project and People's Panel events.

Saint Columb's Hall Trust

St. Columb's Hall Trust is a charitable organisation, established in 2019 to regenerate St. Columb's Hall and contribute positively to the community. St. Columb's Hall was utilised as the venue for all the in person 'Voice Matters' events.

The Sortition Foundation

The Sortition Foundation promotes the use of sortition (random selection) in decision making. They were responsible for recruiting people to take part in the People's Panel.

Dembrane

Dembrane is a tech startup from the Netherlands and our official technology partner on this project. They provide a digital platform designed to support deliberative processes by capturing, organizing, and analysing dialogue data

Contents

Joint Statement

Derry/Londonderry's greatest strength lies in its people. Over four years, the Voice Matters process has grown into a powerful example of how inclusive dialogue and community leadership can shape solutions to complex challenges. What we see today is not only a process but a demonstration of radical community building: a spirit of inclusion, the courage to speak openly, and a commitment to learn and improve.

The insights gathered through this process make one thing clear — safety is built when needs are met, voices are heard, and decisions are shared. Internal safety, the ability to feel secure in our own lives and communities, comes when we address inequality, instability, and exclusion. These are not distant challenges, but, lived realities for many in our city.

Key Needs Identified by Communities

Through deep listening and engagement, the process has revealed clear priorities:

- **Youth** need meaningful opportunities and spaces where they can belong and lead.
- **Refugees and newcomers** need safety and pathways to fully belong in this city.
- **Women and girls** need freedom from violence and harassment, supported by prevention and accountability.
- **Young men** need connections, purpose, and spaces where they can positively contribute.

These needs reflect wider gaps in support: housing, mental health, family wellbeing, and safe public spaces. Addressing them is central to building a safer, more inclusive Derry/Londonderry.

Recommendations from the Process

1. Integrated education and cross-community dialogue.
2. Comprehensive support for mental health and housing.
3. Safe public spaces that prioritise women and girls.
4. Sustained support for families and caregivers.
5. Clear and accessible information for all residents.

These proposals are rooted in the lived experiences of the city and the deep insights gathered over three days of engagement. They represent a clear roadmap for change.

A Call to Council and Decision-Makers

We call on the Council to embed processes like Voice Matters into governance — not as an occasional consultation, but as a standard way of working. This is not a request — it is an urgent necessity. The knowledge, capacity, and ideas already exist. Now is the time for leadership and action.

We are stronger when we are together. This is the shared commitment of the Voice Matters process — to build a city where safety, belonging, and inclusion are not aspirations, but realities.

The Voice Matters Working Group

Executive Summary

The 2025 Voice Matters People's Panel brought together thirty randomly selected residents of *Derry/Londonderry* to answer one defining question:

"How can we make Derry/Londonderry a safer and more inclusive place for everyone?"

Delivered by Co-operation Ireland, in partnership with St. Columb's Hall Trust, The Sortition Foundation, and Dembrane, the panel marks a milestone in deliberative practice — one that adapts and modifies international models through Co-operation Ireland's peacebuilding approach, designed specifically for a post-conflict context. By combining structured skills development and AI-assisted deliberation, this process demonstrates how participatory methods can not only generate policy recommendations but also rebuild civic trust, foster empathy, and model new forms of shared leadership in divided societies.

Purpose and Process

Over three days in April 2025, participants engaged in structured learning, dialogue, and deliberation. With support from expert speakers, skilled facilitators, and an AI-assisted dialogue platform, they examined the deep links between safety, inclusion, housing, education, mental health, poverty, and trust. The process combined data, experience, and community voice to co-create a shared vision for change.

From 10,500 invitations, 134 residents responded, and 30 were selected by random stratified sampling to form a panel that reflected Derry/Londonderry's diversity. Accessibility, childcare, and transport support ensured every participant could take part fully and fairly.

Key Insights

Panel discussions revealed that safety and inclusion are not single issues—they are the result of systems working together or, too often, failing together. Participants agreed that real safety depends on belonging, and belonging depends on fairness, visibility, and opportunity.

Five cross-cutting lessons stood out:

1. Inclusion is built through connection, not neutrality. True inclusion requires shared spaces, shared stories, and shared action.
2. Economic fairness is essential for social trust. Transparent decision-making over resources prevents division and strengthens unity.
3. The past still shapes the present. Lasting inclusion requires acknowledging trauma, memory, and the legacies of conflict.
4. Deliberation is part of healing. Listening, learning, and deciding together creates civic trust that no policy can substitute.
5. Visibility and access matter. Services and support must be easier to find, understand, and use for everyone.

Top Recommendations

Through collaborative dialogue and open voting, the panel identified clear priorities for immediate and long-term action:

1. **Expand integrated schools** and embed intercultural, anti-bias education from early years.

2. **Increase mental health and addiction support,** including local “drop-in” hubs and wraparound care.

3. **Build new mixed social housing** with no divisive symbols, supported by enforceable tenant charters.

4. **Reduce commercial rates for new local businesses** to revitalise derelict spaces and create jobs.

5. **Introduce cultural awareness education** from nursery level onward.

6. **Invest in cross-community arts, sports, and social projects** for all ages.

7. **Improve communication and visibility of local services,** making support visible and accessible.

8. **Reform civil registration** to remove community background labelling.

9. **Create “one-stop” community service hubs** providing mental health, welfare, and employment support.

10. **Expand apprenticeships and upskilling opportunities** linked to regeneration and local industry.

A Call to Council and City Leadership

The Voice Matters panel offers a roadmap for change, authored by the people who live with these challenges every day.

The message from participants is clear: these recommendations must not simply be noted; they must be acted upon.

We call on **Derry City and Strabane District Council** and all relevant agencies to:

- Listen actively to what residents have said through this process;
- Adopt these recommendations as guiding priorities for city policy and investment; and
- Embed the deliberative model as a standard part of governance, ensuring citizens continue to shape decisions, not just respond to them.

The people of Derry/Londonderry have shown that when given space, trust, and time, they can come together to imagine and design a safer, more inclusive future. The challenge and opportunity now lie with city leaders to listen, respond, and act.

Project Background

Co-operation Ireland began its initial outreach and stakeholder engagement in Derry/Londonderry and the wider Northwest region during 2019 and 2020. Through a blend of feedback sessions, seminars, and one-to-one conversations, we established meaningful connections with local communities, civic leaders, and representatives from the community and voluntary sector. These early engagements played a vital role in shaping the focus and design of what would become the Voice Matters project.

Over the past four years, Co-operation Ireland has continued to evolve and deliver the Voice Matters Project. This sustained effort has enabled us to refine our proof of concept, foster broad community buy-in, and deepen our relationships across Derry/Londonderry. Each year, the People's Panel has focused on a different topic of community relevance including mental health, participatory democracy, young people, and, most recently, safety and inclusivity. With each iteration, we have introduced innovations to improve the process, including, this year, the piloting of a dedicated skills workshop and an AI-assisted dialogue tool to enhance citizen voice and strengthen the clarity of policy recommendations.

This work forms part of Co-operation Ireland's wider strategy to embed participatory processes such as deliberative democracy as tools for peacebuilding and reconciliation. By equipping citizens with the skills to engage in meaningful discussion, and by promoting dialogue as a method for addressing division, we aim to create the conditions for more inclusive and sustainable decision-making. Through ongoing research and practice, we continue to refine these processes so that they remain unique to the realities of a post-conflict society and responsive to local challenges.

The Voice Matters project embodies this approach by emphasising radical community building, grounded in the belief that citizens themselves are best placed to shape decisions affecting their lives. Our current model — combining skills, learning, dialogue, and deliberation — offers a practical pathway for engaging with contentious topics, while at the same time fostering a sense of shared civic allegiance that transcends traditional identity politics.

Panel Design and Participant Selection

Preparation, Support, Oversight

All participants, along with previous panel members, were invited to take part in a pilot skills workshop designed to build the capacities of participants and enhance the quality of dialogue during the People's Panel. This workshop focused on values-based discussion, critical reasoning, and learning around bias and unconscious bias. To ensure all participants could fully engage, Co-operation Ireland covered transport costs, accessibility needs, childcare requirements, and translation services for all panel events. These arrangements removed practical barriers to participation and reflected our commitment to inclusivity and fairness.

This work was led by Co-operation Ireland in partnership with Sortition Foundation, Dembrane, and St. Columb's Hall. Facilitation during the panel was provided by Mediation NI and Co-operation Ireland staff, ensuring safe, structured, and impartial dialogue throughout.

Given the use of AI-assisted facilitation tools, data governance and consent were central to the process. All participants were informed in detail about where their data would be stored and how it would be used, and each was given the option to opt out. Over the panel weekend, the co-founder of Dembrane, Evelien Nieuwenburg, presented to the group and made herself available to speak individually with participants who had questions or concerns. All photography and media coverage was also subject to participant consent.

Following the panel, a working group was established, bringing together all participants who expressed interest in contributing to and supporting the development of the report. This step ensured that participants remained engaged beyond the panel weekend and could help shape how their insights were represented and used.

Panel Purpose

The 2025 People's Panel focused on the theme of safety and inclusivity, a topic chosen based on insights gathered through previous drop-in sessions and ongoing community consultations across Derry/Londonderry. This theme reflects pressing community concerns and offers an opportunity for citizens to explore how safety can be experienced equitably across diverse groups.

To ensure a rich and informed discussion, subject matter experts were identified and invited to contribute presentations covering a broad range of relevant issues. Subject matter experts were selected by identifying key sub-themes within the broader topic of safety and inclusion, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and interpretations. While some voices were unavailable due to scheduling constraints, participants were encouraged to remain mindful of these perspectives throughout the weekend to foster an inclusive and balanced discussion. The voices present in the panel included violence against women and girls, public space design, cultural diversity, LGBTQIA+ rights, the experiences of migrants and asylum seekers, policing, and community safety.

Key partners in this process included Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC), Foyle Women's Aid, Mark Hackett Architect, Northwest Islamic Association (NWIA), Alliance for Choice Derry, Foyle Pride, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Community Safety Wardens, and Youth Work Alliance. These organisations brought invaluable expertise, perspectives, and lived experience to the process, helping to shape both the dialogue and the recommendations presented in this report.

Through this panel, we aimed not only to produce tangible policy recommendations, but also to provide a safe, structured space for citizens to deliberate, build mutual understanding, and explore practical solutions for a safer and more inclusive community.

Participant Selection

Who should be in the room is an extremely important question and one we at Co-operation Ireland takes very seriously. For this reason, Co-operation Ireland partnered with the Sortition Foundation, the leading international organisation recognised for its expertise in random selection and representative recruitment for citizens' assemblies and panels. Sortition is considered the gold standard in this field, ensuring that the participants brought together reflect the broadest possible cross-section of the community.

For this panel, the Sortition Foundation worked with us to carefully design invitation packages, which were distributed across a wide range of postcodes in Derry/Londonderry. In total, 10,500 invitations were sent to households asking residents to register their interest. From these invitations, 134[1] people applied to take part in the People's Panel.

Using a process called random stratified sampling, Sortition Foundation then selected 30 participants to form the final panel. This process uses census data to set demographic targets (including age, sex, disability, ethnicity, and socio-economic background) and then selects participants by lottery to match those targets as closely as possible.

While the response pool was not large enough to guarantee perfect representativeness, the resulting group of 30 participants broadly reflects the diversity of the local community in the targeted areas. To ensure accessibility, the invitation made clear that participants would be supported with any individual needs, travel or care costs, and would receive a One4All voucher to the value of £180 in recognition of their time and contribution

[1] The response rate was relatively low at 1.28% compared to the norm for deliberative processes, which ranges from 2% to 5%. It is however within the bounds of normal for an area experiencing more deprivation. Response rates are also generally lower for projects that are not formally part of a policymaking process. A relatively low response rate like this can make it more challenging to hit all the demographic targets. If future events are planned which focus on small geographies, we suggest experimenting with approaches designed to increase the response rate, for example offering a higher rate of financial compensation, and/or carrying out some amount of door-to-door recruitment in support of the postal invitations. This is also likely to increase the diversity of thinking and experience in the room.

Demographics of the People's Panel

CRITERIA	CATEGORIES	TARGET %	FINAL 30%
Gender[2]	Female	50.8	52.9
	Male	49.2	47.1
Age	16-21	9.5	0.0
	22-29	12.8	14.7
	30-44	24.3	23.5
	45-64	33.6	41.2
	65+	19.8	20.6
Ethnicity[3]	White	98.0	91.2
	Diverse Ethnic Communities	2.0	8.8
Disability	Yes	23.0	26.5
	No	77.0	73.5
Education	No formal qualifications	17.9	23.5
	Qualifications below NVQ4 level	47.0	41.2
	NVQ4 level qualification or above	35.1	35.3
Geography	Ballyarnett	15.9	17.6
	Derg	12.1	2.9
	Faughan	12.7	8.8
	Foyleside	12.6	11.8
	Sperrin	16.4	11.8
	The Moor	11.6	20.6
	Waterside	18.7	26.5
Religion	Catholic	72.0	67.6
	Protestant	23.0	23.5
	Other Religions	1.0	2.9
	None	4.0	5.9

[2] We did not have a recruitment target for people with non-binary gender identities as there is no recognised baseline statistic to model from, but the recruitment process ensured that they had the same probability of selection as others.

[3] People were given all the ethnicities that featured on the Northern Ireland census to choose from in the registration process. However, because the target area is overwhelmingly White in its composition, it would be hard to represent diverse ethnic communities in a group of 30, so to create the sample, we aggregated non-white categories into one 'diverse ethnic communities' category.

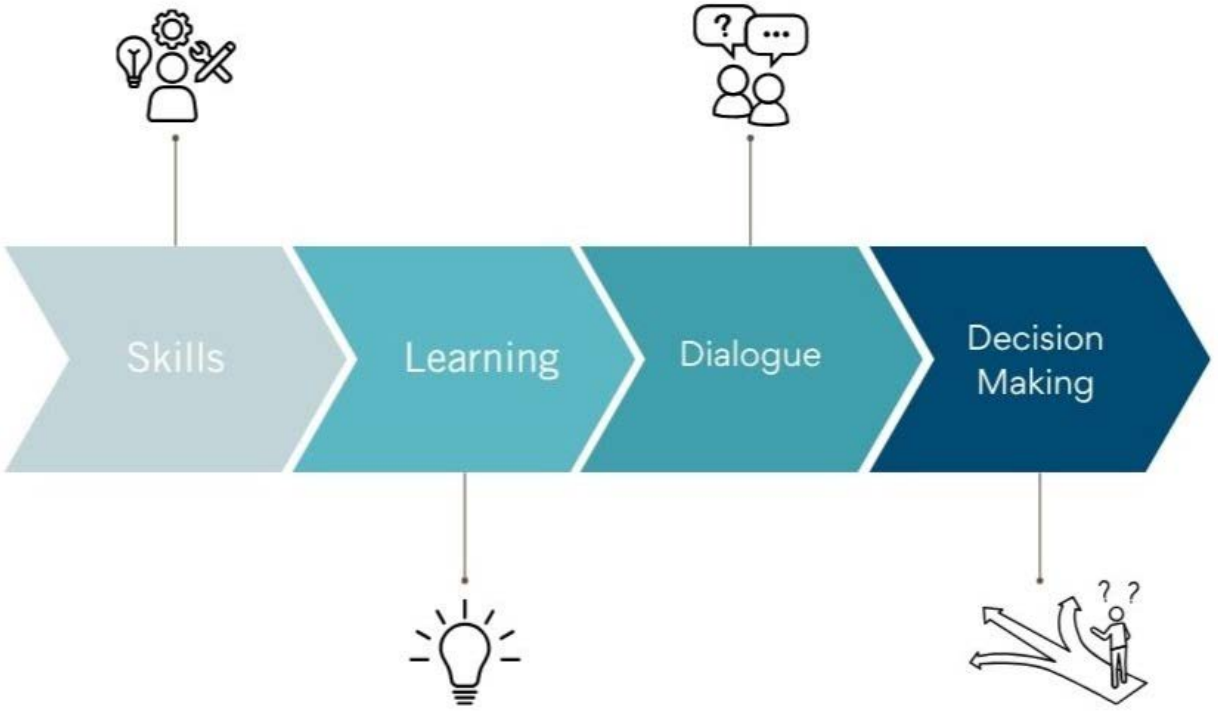
Panel Design

The 2025 People's Panel was designed around Co-operation Ireland's four-phase model of skills, learning, dialogue, and deliberation. This approach ensures participants are equipped, informed, and supported to work collaboratively towards meaningful recommendations.

Key phases included:

- **Skills** – Building capacity through critical reasoning, values-based discussion, and understanding bias.
- **Learning** – Gaining knowledge via expert presentations and research.
- **Dialogue** – Creating safe spaces to explore perspectives and "dig deeper" into issues.
- **Deliberation** – Shaping priorities and recommendations through imaginative yet practical collaboration.

Core activities included setting the scene, values mapping, prioritising issues and impacts, and envisioning solutions — combining imagination with pragmatism to foster collective decision-making.



Skills Workshop

The Voice Matters: Skills Workshop was a pilot one-day event open to current and past participants of the Voice Matters programme, designed as a preparatory and developmental space ahead of the People's Panel. The workshop didn't just share information—it aimed to foster deeper personal and collective insight among participants in Derry/Londonderry.

Core Purpose

- To help participants interrogate their own values, assumptions, and biases, while learning to engage more openly with difference—both personally and in the broader community context.
- To help build *civic allegiance* (a sense of shared community responsibility) *over group identity.*

Key Features

- Personal Reflection & Sharing: Activities encouraged participants to name and examine their core values, connect these to their actions, and reflect on where their behaviour does and doesn't align (congruence vs. incongruence).
- Exploring Human Needs: The workshop challenged participants to apply—and interrogate—the usefulness of frameworks like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Max-Neef's model, linking these directly to community realities in Northern Ireland.
- Critical Thinking and Addressing Bias: By exposing the inevitability and function of stereotypes, the session aimed not at "eliminating bias" but at making people aware of unconscious patterns, and equipping them to pause, reflect, and question their gut assumptions.
- Working From/ Exploring Lived Experience: With deep awareness of the ongoing separations (schools, politics, identity), the workshop explored what it means to build inclusion and safety in Derry/Londonderry—using small groups and a community panel to surface lived questions, not just theoretical ideals.

Intended Outcomes

- To move participants beyond token "inclusion," equipping them to hold uncertainty, ambiguity, and difference in real conversations.
- To lay groundwork for systemic, not just interpersonal, change—by inviting critical thinking and a systemic lens on their lives and community work.

- Ultimately, to prepare participants for meaningful participation in public dialogue (the People's Panel) where critical, nuanced thinking about identity, safety, and inclusion is urgently needed.

The workshop was less about providing simple answers and more about challenging participants to confront their own blind spots, to understand the hidden forces shaping community life, and to experiment with ways of relating and thinking that might make Derry/Londonderry safer and more inclusive for all.

Following the skills workshop, participants had the opportunity to hear from Derry City and Strabane District Council about their current plans, followed by a Q&A session. This engagement not only helped identify key themes and shape relevant topics for the panel in April but also provided a practical opportunity to experience early phases of the process, including learning and dialogue.

People's Panel

From April 5th to 6th and again on April 13th, 2025, thirty citizens of Derry/Londonderry gathered at St. Columb's Hall to participate in the Voice Matters Citizens' Panel. Their charge was to explore and address a critical question *How can we make Derry/Londonderry a safer and more inclusive place for everyone?*

Spanning three days; April 5th, 6th, and 13th, the panel's work combined expert briefings, facilitated discussions, and hands-on group activities. This inclusive process enabled participants to share personal experiences, challenge assumptions, and build consensus across difference.

This following presents a comprehensive, activity-by-activity account of the panel's deliberations. It traces the evolution of group insights, maps how priorities were identified, and details the development and agreement of final recommendations. The aim is to offer not just a record of outcomes, but a transparent view into how decisions were made.

April 5th: Learning

Day One began with an invitation not just to share perspectives, but to listen, question, and map how personal and public experiences intersect in Derry/Londonderry's everyday life. The opening plenary emphasized collective purpose:

> ***"Democracy thrives when people come together, we listen, we discuss, and most importantly, we act."***

Morning Plenary 1: Domestic and Gender Based Violence

Presenter: Marie Brown, Foyle Family Justice Centre

Marie Brown outlined Derry/Londonderry's high rate of domestic violence, stressing that abuse is often hidden, persistent, and not just physical but emotional and coercive. She highlighted the serious impacts on families and children, the barriers victims face, and the importance of integrated, trauma-informed support like the Family Justice Centre. Her key message: addressing domestic violence requires collective, systemic change across the whole community.

Impacts on Panel Discussion: The focus on the hidden and persistent nature of domestic violence, as well as the barriers to support, prompted panel members to address these issues directly in their conversations. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of trauma-informed services and collective, community-wide responses for improving safety and inclusion.

April 5th: Learning

Morning Plenary 2: Urban/Public Space and Inclusion

Presenter: Mark Hackett, Architect/Planner

Mark Hackett, architect and urban planner, provided an analysis of Derry/Londonderry's built environment, emphasizing the lingering effects of conflict-era urban design such as divided neighbourhoods, car-centric infrastructure, and underutilized or fragmented public spaces. He highlighted how these spatial issues limit walkability, social connection, accessibility, and a sense of community belonging. Hackett advocated for reimagining urban planning to prioritize inclusive, accessible, and connected public spaces, using international examples to illustrate potential local strategies.

Impacts on Panel Discussion: Mark Hackett's presentation prompted panel members to critically examine the role of physical environment in shaping experiences of safety and inclusion. His analysis led participants to consider accessible urban design, walkability, and the removal of physical and symbolic barriers as key priorities.

Table Sessions and Group Activities

Following the initial expert presentations, panel participants engaged in a series of facilitated table sessions, working in small, diverse groups to explore core themes such as ***schools, housing, public spaces, community services, and nightlife.*** Participants separated into one of the themes based on their own preference. Each table/theme examined challenges, shared personal experiences, and identified practical opportunities for enhancing safety and inclusion in these areas. Insights and key ideas from each discussion were recorded and then visually interpreted using AI tools, which transformed the group's collective vision into imagery. This creative process helped participants and observers to see abstract priorities and aspirations in a tangible, accessible form.

April 5th: Learning

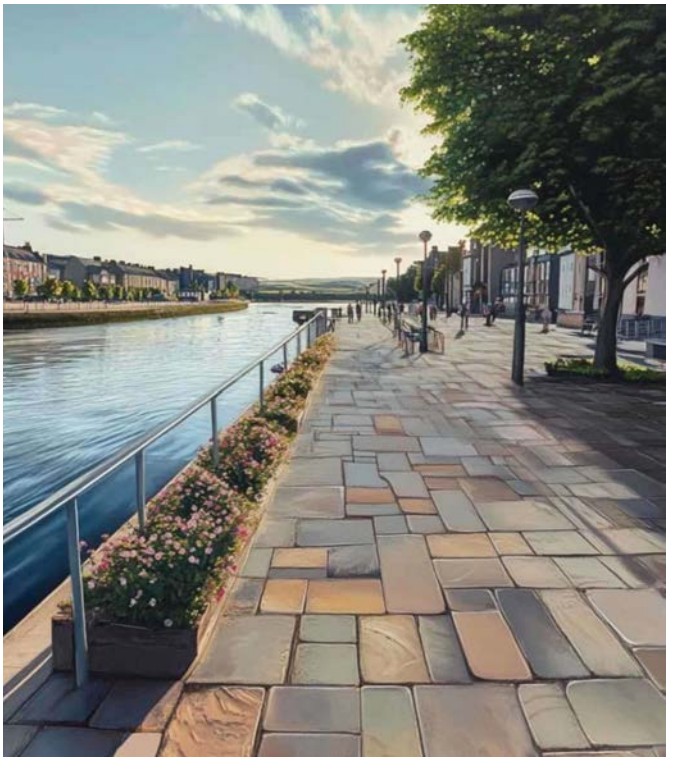
Table 1: Schools

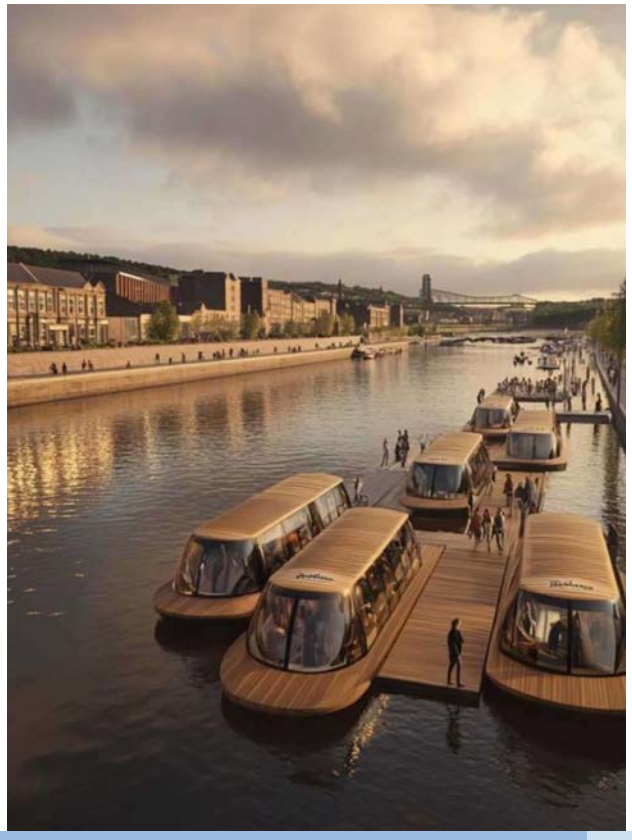
- Desire for integrated, multicultural, accessible schools
- Calls for “buddy benches,” multilingual signage, and strong intergenerational parent/community hubs
- Need to address practical barriers: location, safe walking routes, affordable after-schools, accessible to children with disabilities/parents without cars (“traffic lights and controlled crossings needed”)
- Expectation that schools must become a site for early education against division and for inclusion: kindness, respect, healthy relationships

April 5th: Learning

Table 2: Public Space & Parks

- Overwhelming concern about derelict buildings and closed shops ("Too many shops closed—let's bring people back to the centre")
- Calls for more green, soft planting, and benches; better lighting, especially for older people and those with mobility issues ("handrails everywhere needed")
- Use the river for new modes of transport ("river taxis"); turn waste ground along the river into parkland and play areas
- Activities for all ages—walks, cookery, knitting, "community gardens"
- Physical changes must welcome everyone: wide pavements for wheelchairs, "no dark corners," spaces for parents and children, and open places for single people/socially isolated to join in





April 5th: Learning

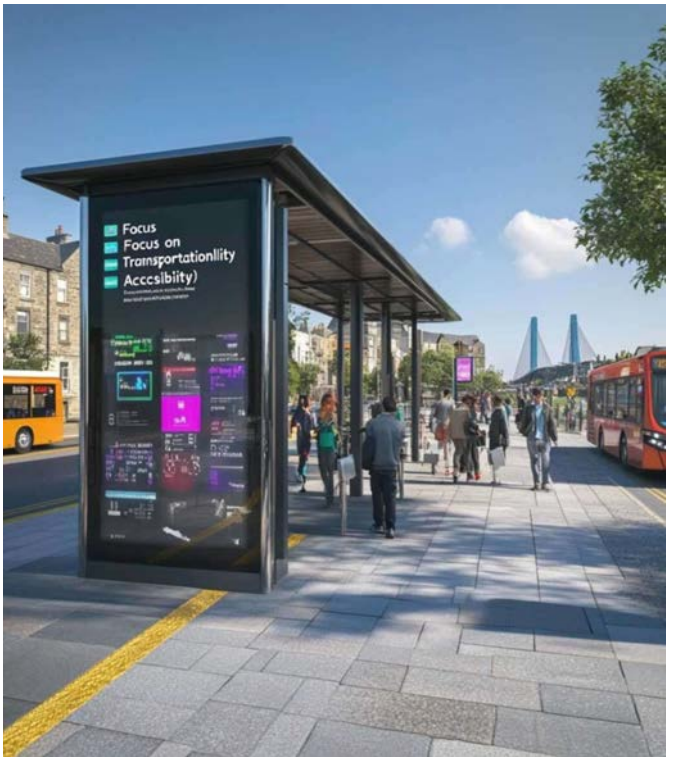
Table 3: Nightlife & Safety

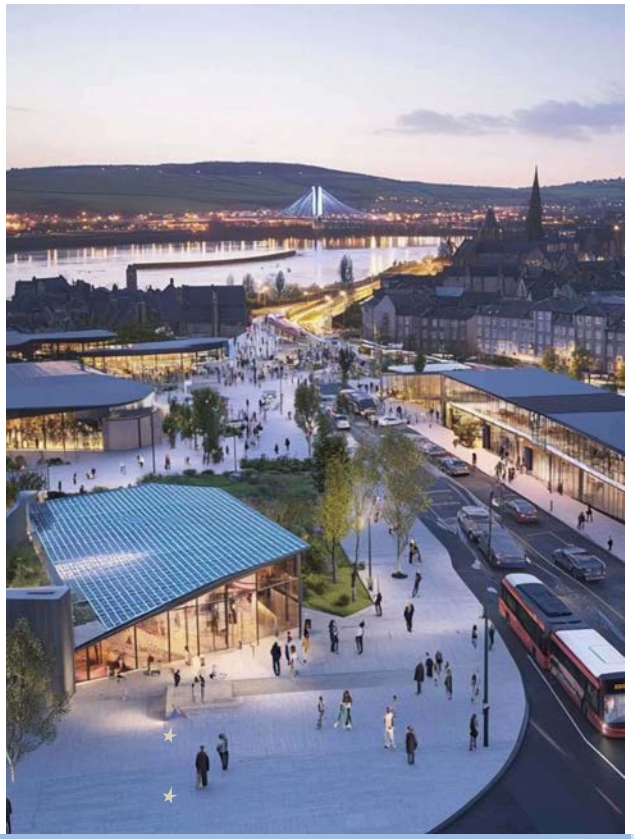
- Specific streets/areas (Waterloo St, Quay) are poorly lit and feel unsafe at night, with sexual harassment and assault reported, and young people at risk
- Suggestion: volunteer night teams or safe-walk patrols, better trained door staff, more visible official presence (not just police)
- Transport frequently cited as a barrier: “no night buses, taxis too expensive/not always safe”
- Lack of non-alcoholic late-night alternatives; “diverse social venues” wanted to reduce risks (“we need places that aren’t just bars”)
- Mention of “Ask Angela” (discrete way to get help in bars) but staff not always aware/trained

April 5th: Learning

Table 4: Community Services & Transport

- Public transport seen as unreliable, infrequent, expensive; “people who depend on buses are left behind”
- Isolated areas (esp. at night) and lack of park-and-ride compounds city’s social fragmentation; “without a car you’re stuck”
- Gaps in community service information— “you have to Google it, but what if you don’t know where to look?”
- Advocated for bus services akin to “Dublin’s Luas” or “late-night buses covering estates,” subsidized or volunteer-driven if needed





April 5th: Learning

Table 5: Housing/Residential

- Universal desire to "remove divisive emblems" (murals, flags, paramilitary markings) from housing
- Support for green/play space in all new estates, higher standards for lighting, accessibility
- Affordability a major worry: "young people can't get a start," very little social housing provision for those fleeing abuse or exclusion
- Experiences of minorities and recent migrants (e.g., "seeing all the flags, I thought: is it safe for me?")
- "Cameras and security must be evenly available, not just for those facing paramilitary threat but for victims of domestic abuse too."

April 5th: Learning

Lightning Rounds

The Lightning Rounds featured a series of brief presentations by community representatives, each highlighting key challenges and perspectives from their area of expertise. After their presentations, the speakers rotated between all the tables, engaging in short, timed discussions with panel participants to answer questions and deepen the conversation on safety and inclusion.

Foyle Pride (LGBTQIA+):

Representatives from Foyle Pride highlighted ongoing challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in Derry/Londonderry, including high rates of hate crime, lack of dedicated queer spaces, barriers to healthcare—especially for trans individuals—and the urgent need for education, visibility, and stronger legal protections.

Jason Dunne (Chairperson, Foyle Pride Festival)

Northwest Islamic Association:

The Northwest Islamic Association discussed the experiences of Muslim and migrant communities, describing issues such as Islamophobia, social isolation, the persistence of negative stereotypes, and the importance of education, cross-community engagement, and accurate representation to foster genuine inclusion.

Dr. Sameh Hassan (Chairman, NW Islamic Association)

April 5th: Learning

Alliance for Choice:

Alliance for Choice outlined the difficulties in accessing reproductive healthcare and abortion services in Northern Ireland, highlighted the stigma and logistical barriers faced by those seeking care, and stressed the importance of a rights-based, inclusive approach to reproductive justice.

Margo Carr (Alliance for Choice Derry)

Cross-cutting Themes:

- Minority groups consistently face intersectional barriers to inclusion
- Calls for more allies, visible leadership, and better public education

Panel Reflections from Day One

Patterns that Emerged Throughout the Day:

- *Integration is Everything:* Housing, urban policy, service provision, and education must all be tackled as a system; piecemeal fixes risk exclusion
- *Importance of Visibility:* "You can't be what you can't see." Funding arts, festivals, and cross-community initiatives is essential to belonging
- *Prevention, not just reaction:* Practical safety steps (lighting, benches, staff training, night transport) are necessary, in addition to measures to embed more education on inclusivity and empathy
- *Inclusive Participation:* The process of this panel was seen as a model for what Derry/Londonderry needs: real listening, honest engagement, willingness to change minds

April 5th: Learning

Frustrations/Challenges Documented:

- Lack of funding for youth/mental health services, sexual health/relationship education, community groups
- Perception that public authorities are slow to respond or fail to listen to lived experience
- Ongoing debate about how to balance the preservation of tradition/culture with the urgent need to confront territoriality and division

Emerging Recommendations (In Participants' Words):

- Violence Prevention: "We need trauma-informed, all-gender support services in every district"
- Design for Inclusion: "Greener spaces, safer streets, and remove anything that marks one side over another—all new housing should be neutral"
- Transport: "Reliable, affordable night transport isn't a luxury; it's a precondition for people being safe"
- Education: "Integrated education with curriculum on respect, inclusivity, and real-world diversity from day one"
- Supporting Marginalized Communities: "Spaces for everyone, but also for specific communities—queer, Muslim, migrant—for safety and real belonging"
- Ongoing Participation: "This process—this listening—can't end here. We should have permanent, regular citizen panels."

By the close of Day One, the atmosphere was changed as participants spoke of hope and a sense of responsibility. The day concluded with a renewed sense of determination, showcasing the process itself as a model of inclusive and deliberative democracy in action.

April 6th: Deliberation

Day Two focused on deepening participant engagement through expert presentations, group exercises, and deliberative table discussions. Emphasis was placed on values, priorities, and resources as core pillars of deliberative democracy. Participants examined challenges, mapped shared values, and brainstormed actionable solutions across key themes: Community Safety & Trust, Education & Inclusion, Housing & Community Planning, Poverty & Jobs, and Mental Health & Addiction

Morning Plenary 1: Community Policing

Presenter: Constable Josie Crawford and Constable Melanie Miller, PSNI

The PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) presentation addressed the current approach to community policing in Derry/Londonderry, outlining strategies for crime prevention, building trust with local residents, and tackling hate crime and anti-social behaviour. The presentation emphasized partnership working, responsiveness to community concerns, and efforts to improve visibility and engagement in all neighbourhoods.

Impact on Panel Discussion:
The PSNI's input prompted panel members to critically discuss the relationship between policing and community trust. Participants explored the balance between visible policing and more holistic approaches to safety, considering both the importance and potential limitations of law enforcement in fostering inclusion and feelings of security.

From left to right: Carol Dunbar (Co-operation Ireland), Ireland Twiggs (Co-operation Ireland), Former Deputy Mayor Alderman Darren Guy (DSDC), Constable Melanie Millar (PSNI) and Constable Josie Crawford (PSNI).

April 6th: Deliberation

Morning Plenary 2: Community Safety

Presenter: Peter Evans, Community Safety Warden

The Community Safety Wardens' presentation described their role as on-the-ground support for public safety and cohesion. Wardens explained how they provide a visible presence in local areas, mediate minor conflicts, report environmental issues, and act as a bridge between residents, statutory agencies, and emergency services—contributing to both real and perceived safety across the city.

Impact on Panel Discussion:
Insights from the wardens encouraged the panel to consider the value of non-policing interventions in community safety. Panellists discussed how wardens could complement formal policing by building relationships, addressing low-level issues proactively, and helping create safer environments—especially for vulnerable groups—through day-to-day local engagement.

Values Mapping and Group Deliberation

Following the expert presentations and table discussions, the panel participated in a values mapping and group deliberation exercise. This session was designed to surface the core values and shared priorities of participants, ensuring that the group's recommendations would reflect both practical needs and underlying community principles. Using interactive tools and facilitated dialogue, panel members articulated what mattered most to them, then worked together to align individual perspectives and collectively deliberate on the most effective pathways to achieve their goals.

April 6th: Deliberation

Across multiple tables, participants collectively identified core values they believe should underpin a safer, more inclusive city. Recurring values included:

- **Respect, Equity, Fairness, Inclusion, Diversity, and Decency**
- **Empathy and Collaboration, with a call for more partnership between citizens, service providers, and minority groups**
- **Equality of Access for people with disabilities, different cultural backgrounds, and all age groups**

There was a shared call to make these values tangible, not theoretical, and to embed them in how systems, services, and neighbourhoods are run.

Prioritization and Resource Inventory

After establishing shared values, the panel engaged in a prioritization exercise to identify the most pressing issues and actionable opportunities for improving safety and inclusion. Participants then completed a resource inventory, mapping out available assets, existing barriers, and gaps in support across the community. This process enabled the group to focus their recommendations on high-impact areas and to align proposed solutions with realistic resource considerations.

Recurring Data from Prioritization and Resource Inventory Exercises

Key Priorities Identified

Community Safety

- High prioritization of trauma-informed support services
- Demand for visible, accessible, and non-policing safety measures (e.g., Community Safety Wardens, better street lighting)

Inclusive Public Spaces

- Frequent calls for removal of divisive symbols (flags, murals) and creation of welcoming, neutral environments
- Need for accessible design (benches, ramps, pathways for those with mobility challenges)

April 6th: Deliberation

Reliable and Affordable Transport

- Persistent concerns over inadequate night/evening transport, particularly impacting youth, women, and marginalized groups
- Recognition that improving public transit options enhances both real and perceived safety

Integrated Services

- Strong consensus on connecting health, mental health, policing, education, and community supports
- Calls for “one-stop” services to reduce barriers and duplication

Multicultural and Youth Engagement

- Emphasis on culturally sensitive programming and celebration of diversity
- Need for more youth clubs, after-school activities, and safe, alcohol-free meeting places for young people

28

April 6th: Deliberation

Commonly Noted Resources and Gaps

Existing Assets

- Community groups, sports clubs, and faith-based organizations already building trust and delivering support
- Some trauma-informed models (like the Family Justice Centre)
- Dedicated wardens and local volunteers providing informal guidance and mediation

Identified Gaps

- Shortage of reliable late evening/night transportation
- Lack of truly neutral shared spaces and facilities
- Insufficient mental health services, especially for youth and minorities
- Limited funding and staffing for community safety and inclusive programming
- Barriers for accessing information about available local resources

Cross-Cutting Observations

- Collaboration among agencies and sectors is inconsistent but widely seen as both important and improvable
- Participants highlighted digital and communication gaps as a barrier to resource awareness
- Resident willingness to engage and volunteer is high—but resources for coordination are lacking

In-Depth Thematic Deliberations

Participants then separated into themed groups for intensive discussion. The five themes identified—**mental health and addiction, poverty and jobs, housing and planning, education, and community trust**—were selected based on priorities and recurring concerns identified during the panel's earlier activities and discussions. By analysing participants shared experiences and the most frequently raised issues, these core themes emerged as the areas with the greatest influence on daily life, safety, and inclusion in Derry/Londonderry.

- **Mental Health & Addiction:** Conversations repeatedly circled back to the chronic lack of timely, accessible mental health and addiction support. Issues of bureaucratic hurdles, long waiting lists, and a lack of a local detox centre were persistent themes. The positive impact of grassroots organisations, peer support networks, Men's Sheds, and well clinics was noted—but so too was the overwhelming need for coordinated, "one-stop" support that people can find and use.

April 6th: Deliberation

• **Poverty & Jobs:** While unemployment rates were reportedly low, the nature and quality of available work—a proliferation of insecure, low-paid, and zero-hour jobs—came up as a major challenge. Disabled people, newcomers, and those with health conditions face particular barriers. There was frustration about political neglect and a lack of real investment in the city compared to others. Apprenticeships, retraining opportunities, language support for immigrants, and incentives for small businesses and start-ups were mentioned as solutions.

• **Housing & Community Planning:** The housing emergency was palpable in group stories: people waiting over a decade for a secure tenancy, families stuck in temporary accommodation, and an ageing housing stock. Participants identified a pressing need to repurpose derelict/vacant city centre buildings, overhaul allocation systems, and ensure new developments include green spaces and facilities for children. Removing divisive symbols from public spaces and building genuinely mixed communities were also major topics.

• **Education:** There was optimism about positive trends in primary education, but concern about inconsistent practice as young people transition into secondary school and adulthood. Calls were made for education systems to be more inclusive of cultural diversity, practical life skills, and resilience—starting from nursery and involving parents and the broader community. Adult learning and opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational exchange were seen as vital steps forward.

• **Building Community Trust:** Many groups highlighted a disconnect between services and service-users—a "huge information gap" about what exists, how to access it, and who it is for. Historic community divides and a legacy of distrust in authorities (especially the police and statutory bodies) remain, influencing experiences of safety and belonging. Participants showcased existing hubs, events, and interfaith initiatives as proof that trust-building is possible, but urged more visibility, engagement, and recruitment of minority group members into local leadership.

April 6th: Deliberation

Silent Reflection & Small Group Sharing

To conclude the panel, participants engaged in a silent reflection exercise, allowing time for personal consideration of what they had learned and experienced. This was followed by a round of group sharing, where members voiced their key insights, shifted perspectives, and hopes for the city.

Participants reflected on:

- **What Stood Out:** The strong alignment on mental health, the scale of the housing crisis, and the under-appreciation of local services and community strengths.
- **Concrete Actions:** Reaching out to other cultures, participating in local hubs, advocating for one-stop shops (e.g., poverty/mental health), empathy and signposting, direct volunteering, and support for victims of domestic violence.
- **Personal Roles:** Many committed to "do something"—whether by sharing information, boosting awareness, volunteering, or supporting local charities.

April 6th: Deliberation

Group Synthesis & Final Takeaways

By the end of Day Two, key cross-cutting themes and big ideas identified for potential recommendation included:

1. A central well-being hub or "one-stop shop" for mental health, addiction, poverty, and support services

2. Repurposing derelict/vacant buildings for housing, skills training, and community use

3. Expanding integrated, practical, and inclusive education at all stages

4. Robust, joined-up communication—making information about services, events, and support accessible to all

5. Cultural awareness and proactive trust-building—making diversity visible and valued

6. A sustained focus on empathy, decency, and respect as shared community values

7. Community-led, government-supported measures to address underlying inequalities in housing, jobs, and health

Overarching Reflections

- The Panel displayed optimism and alignment on pressing challenges and feasible solutions.

- Participants repeatedly called for "all hands-on deck"—stressing collective responsibility, local leadership, and the role of every resident in fostering a safer, more inclusive future.

- There was a profound desire for practical action, not just continued conversation: "If our voices can be heard in here, then our voices should be heard outside... if we work and shout loud enough together, we can change our wee city for the better."

End of Day Two Summary

Day Two successfully moved the Panel from diagnosis of issues to concrete visions and proposals, grounded in lived experience and shared deliberation. The emerging recommendations reflect both the urgent challenges facing Derry/Londonderry and a strong sense of hope, pride, and possibility for positive change.

April 13th: Decision Making

Morning Plenary 1: City Regeneration: Plans, Priorities, and Public Participation

Presenter: Tony Monaghan & Anne Carlin, Derry City & Strabane District Council Regeneration Team

The regeneration team outlined the Council's vision for urban renewal, highlighting major investment projects such as riverfront redevelopment, public realm improvements, and revitalization of derelict properties. They emphasized planned accessibility enhancements, strategies for business and cultural district growth, and the alignment of these projects with broader economic and community inclusion goals. The team also referenced funding mechanisms, ongoing and future public engagement, and how regeneration ties into long-term city competitiveness and sustainability.

Impact on Panel Discussion:

- Sparked a candid discussion about the inclusivity and effectiveness of past public consultations, with some panellists expressing scepticism about how community voices are incorporated into strategic planning.
- Elevated the need for authentic, ongoing engagement and transparency between Council, developers, and the public, prompting panellists to advocate for more participatory approaches.
- Influenced participants to focus their recommendations on not just infrastructure, but also accessibility for marginalized groups, tackling dereliction, public safety, and the broader social impact of urban design.

From left to right: Tony Monaghan (DCSDC), Anne Carlin (DCSDC), and Ireland Twiggs (Co-operation Ireland).

April 13th: Decision Making

Morning Plenary 2: Transforming Lives: Youth Safety and Community Resilience

Presenter: John Lynch, Youth Work Alliance

John Lynch offered a grassroots perspective on supporting children and young people in Derry/Londonderry, especially in relation to violence prevention, lifelong trauma, and community trust. He presented real-life examples of effective youth interventions, emphasizing the importance of wraparound support services, safe spaces, mental health outreach, and meaningful engagement of young voices in decision-making. Lynch highlighted how feeling valued, safe, and included can change life trajectories, and called for systemic collaboration across agencies to address persistent social challenges.

John Lynch (CEO, Youth Work Alliance)

Impact on Panel Discussion:

- Shifted the dialogue toward holistic wellbeing, not just physical safety—underscoring the lifelong impact of trauma, social isolation, and the need for visible, accessible support.
- Inspired panellists to prioritize recommendations centred on community-based safe spaces, early intervention, wraparound care, and youth empowerment.
- Moved the group to recognize the connection between physical regeneration and social resilience, challenging them to craft solutions that foster trust, belonging, and hope for the city's next generation.

April 13th: Decision Making

After the morning plenary, panel participants divided into five themed groups, each supported by a facilitator. Each group revisited prior notes, testimonies, and challenges, then brainstormed and honed actionable recommendations. Facilitators encouraged realism, feasibility, and a focus on both impact and inclusion. Several conversations highlighted the need to distinguish between ambitious “wish list” items and those that were truly deliverable.

Housing:
Deliberations focused on the urgent need for more social housing, prioritizing mixed developments free from flags and sectarian symbols, streamlining planning approvals, and converting derelict properties into liveable homes.

Mental Health & Addiction:
Groups prioritized expanding safe "drop-in" spaces, installing chatty benches, offering holistic wraparound and detox services, enhancing proactive community-based care, and improving awareness and navigation of available support.

Community Trust:
Discussions centred on fostering trust through regular cross-community arts, sports, and social projects, increasing transparency and participation in local decision-making, and ensuring institutional actions authentically reflect community voices.

Education:
Participants highlighted the importance of expanding integrated schools, embedding intercultural and anti-bias learning from early years, supporting joint extracurricular programs, and promoting gradual reforms that connect classroom learning with community realities.

Poverty & Jobs:
The group addressed barriers to employment and social mobility by proposing incentives for new businesses, targeted support for revitalizing vacant spaces, and expanding apprenticeship and upskilling schemes to serve both young people and adults.

April 13th: Decision Making

Roundtable and Recommendation Voting

After each group finalized their initial recommendations, the panel held a “gallery walk” roundtable. Participants rotated around the room, reviewed each group’s proposals, and offered direct feedback—asking clarifying questions, highlighting overlaps, and suggesting refinements. Groups then had dedicated time to discuss this feedback and adjust their recommendations, ensuring that suggestions from across the panel were incorporated.

Once each group made any needed revisions, participants moved into the sticky dot voting phase. All recommendations were displayed together, and each person was given a set number of dots to allocate to the proposals they felt were most impactful or urgent. This transparent process allowed the entire panel to collectively prioritize the final set of recommendations, ensuring the outcomes were shaped by broad consensus and collective wisdom.

April 13th: Decision Making

Top Recommendations (Most Highly Voted):

1. **Developing More Integrated Schools**

   • Expand and prioritize integrated schools, embedding intercultural, cross-community education from the earliest years and making social mixing the norm in education.

2. **Increase Services for Mental Health and Addiction**

   • Scale up accessible mental health and addiction services, with an emphasis on safe "drop-in" spaces, proactive community care, holistic wraparound support, and improved communication of what help is available.

3. **Building New Mixed Social Housing with No Divisive Symbols or Flags**

   • Create new social housing developments that are mixed (across backgrounds) and strictly prohibit divisive markers (flags, curb painting, political symbols), with tenancy charters enforcing these standards.

4. **Reduced Rates for New Businesses for Three to Five Years**

   • Provide significant rate relief (no or reduced business rates) for new local businesses, especially those activating vacant properties, to encourage economic regeneration.

Other Highly Voted Recommendations:

5. **Cultural Awareness Education Starting from Nursery Age**

   • Integrate multicultural and anti-bias education from nursery onwards, exposing children early to a variety of cultures, religions, backgrounds, and the stories of people who live in Derry/Londonderry.

6. **Cross-Community Projects Spanning Preschool, Youth, and Adults**

   • Invest in sports, arts, and social initiatives designed to bring together people from across communities and age groups, allowing friendship, trust, and understanding to grow through shared activities.

7. **Better Communication of Available Mental Health and Addiction Services**

   • Improve outreach, visibility, and clarity about what supports exist, making it easier for residents to find and access help when it's needed.

8. **Neutral Civil Registration System**

   • Reform administrative processes to do away with required community background labels, making access to public services and jobs identity neutral.

These recommendations stand out as being prioritized by the panel for both their immediate impact and their relevance to long-term safety, inclusion, and city transformation. They each received strong support through the sticky dot voting, reflecting broad consensus among participants about where the community wants to see action and investment.

April 13th: Decision Making

Survey and Cluster Results

While votes on the panel's recommendations were being tallied, two complementary surveys were distributed to participants. The first survey gathered individual feedback on each of the proposed recommendations, capturing levels of agreement and perceived importance. The second survey collected sentiment data toward key statements that had emerged during panel discussions, allowing the team to understand how participants emotionally and cognitively engaged with the themes being debated.

Administering both surveys in parallel ensured that individual perspectives were aligned with the collective recommendations and that the statements articulated throughout the panel resonated broadly among participants. This process strengthened the reliability of the findings and reinforced participants' trust in the deliberative process.

Analysis of the survey[4] data revealed clear and consistent patterns. The recommendation survey produced two distinct clusters, representing a broadly supportive majority and a smaller, less intensive subgroup. The sentiment survey, by contrast, identified four clusters capturing a range of emotional tones—from highly optimistic and solution-oriented, through pragmatic and mixed, to a very small, more critical outlier. Together, these patterns demonstrate a strong consensus around the direction of proposed actions, combined with nuanced variation in individual intensity and sentiment. This alignment between recommendation support and expressed sentiment underscores both the coherence of the panel's outcomes and the depth of participant engagement in the process.

Ireland Twiggs (Co-operation Ireland) and Evelien Nieuwenburg (Co-founder, Dembrane)

[4]Both the recommendation and sentiment clusters can be found in the appendices.

April 13th: Decision Making

Final Reflections and Closing

The day concluded with collective—and individual—reflections:

- **Sense of Achievement and Hope:** Participants noted a genuine sense of pride in reaching consensus and learning from each other ("Despite our reputation for division, we can all come together and sing from the same sheet…").
- **Desire for Follow-Through:** Persistent calls for continued involvement, real-world action, and not letting the ideas "gather dust." Participants requested working group follow-ups, feedback loops, and a role in presenting findings to council and broader stakeholders.
- **Evaluation of Process:** Widespread appreciation for the deliberative model, but also honest critique: need for more expert input, more involvement of statutory authorities, and, in future, perhaps even more direct participant decision-making about topics/speakers.
- **Personal Growth:** Participants frequently mentioned the value of learning, new friendships, and cross-community discovery ("This process has given me new friends, guys. I have new friends.").

Participants from the People's Panel 2025.

Key Themes: Deep Contexts Underlying the Recommendations

While the final recommendations tackle urgent needs in Derry/Londonderry, they reflect much deeper issues and recurring themes identified throughout the panel's work. Understanding these themes—some straightforward and some more complex—helps explain exactly how.

Connection and Inclusion Over Neutrality

A major debate in the panel was whether simply removing divisive symbols (like flags, murals, or curb painting) is enough to make a place welcoming. Many panellists saw that while symbolic neutrality can reduce open conflict, it doesn't automatically create true inclusion. Some people feel safe when markers are removed, but others feel their identities are being erased. The group recognized that real progress comes when the city not only avoids division but builds respect and positive exchanges between different groups—what some called "lived pluralism." This points to the need for not just symbol-free spaces, but shared activities, education, and policies that actively bring people together and acknowledge every group's story and presence.

Scarcity Can Bring People Together—or Push Them Further Apart

Economic challenges and limited funding came up often. Panellists observed that sometimes, when resources are scarce, it motivates residents from all backgrounds to advocate together for their common needs—building new alliances and a sense of joint purpose. However, there were also examples where scarcity made groups more protective, competitive, or suspicious, especially over housing allocations or city investments. The group concluded that leaders must carefully manage scarce resources with total fairness and transparency, or risk deepening old divisions instead of using tough times to create new unity.

The Lasting Impact of Memory and Trauma

Panellists repeatedly stressed how Derry/Londonderry's past—The Troubles, historic mistrust, and ongoing trauma—deeply shape how people react to new policies or proposals. For example, suggestions for integrated schools or administrative reforms were seen not just as policy changes but as opportunities for healing, or, if handled wrongly, as possible threats. Many people approach any change with strong feelings linked to family histories, community narratives, and old wounds. The group agreed that policy—especially on sensitive issues like housing, education, and service access—must recognize these lived experiences. Ignoring them can lead to suspicion or even active resistance, while acknowledging them builds trust and the willingness to try new solutions.,

Deliberation Is Both Decision-Making and Community-Building

An important, less obvious theme was the impact of the panel process itself. Some participants were sceptical about the potential for real policy change, but many found unexpected value in the deliberative process. By sharing stories, listening, and debating together, people built new networks, greater empathy, and a sense of ownership over the outcomes. The discussions became a starting point for building civic trust—a resource as vital as any single new service or policy. The panel's experience showed that open, honest discussion isn't just a temporary method for generating recommendations but a key long-term investment in a healthier, more connected city. Deliberation helped participants see each other less as members of rival groups and more as neighbours with a shared future.

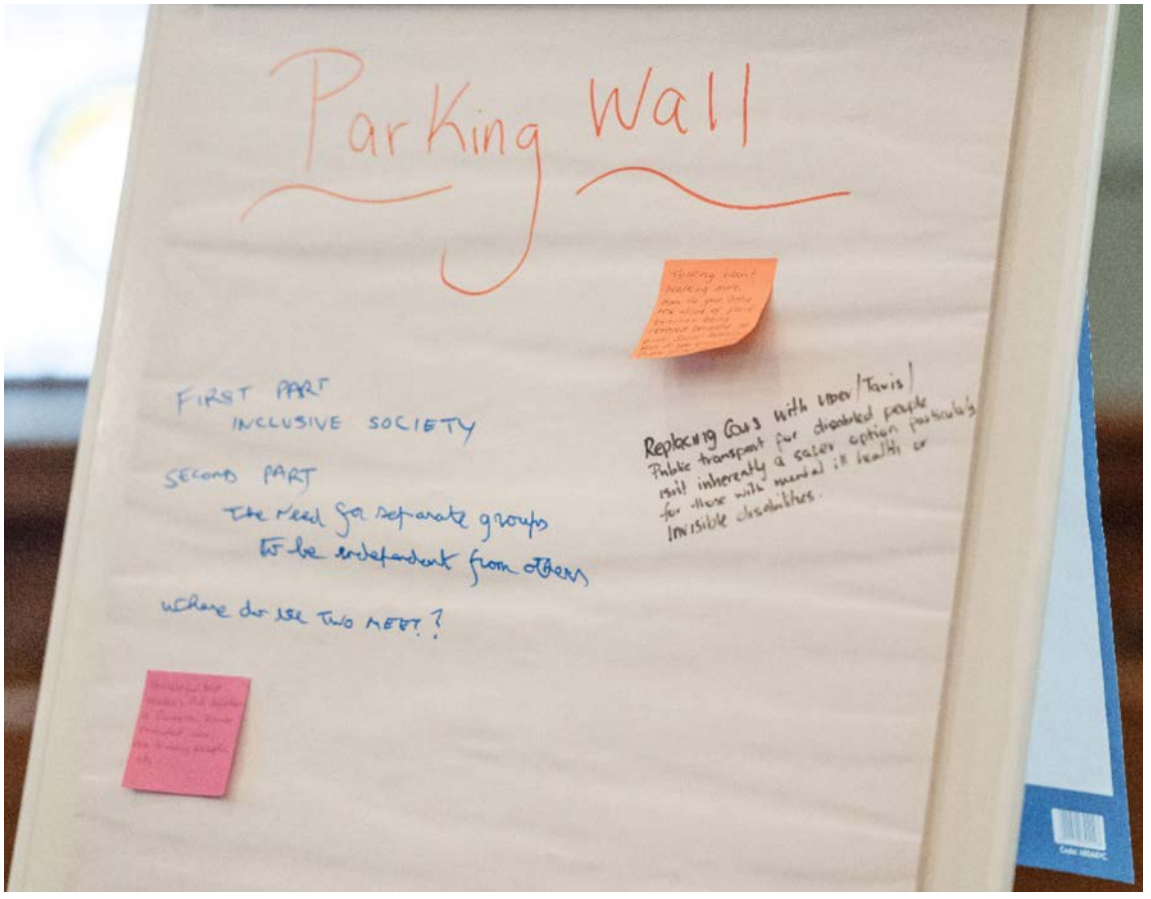
Key Themes: Deep Contexts Underlying the Recommendations

Visibility, Access, and Pathways Out of Exclusion

Across all groups, there was agreement that services—whether for mental health, housing, jobs, or youth—must be both visible and easy to use. Too often, people feel isolated not because services don't exist, but because they are hard to find, come with stigma or barriers, or require navigating confusing systems. Recommendations prioritized initiatives like "chatty benches," community hubs, clear communication campaigns, and local apprenticeships as ways to create open pathways for people who might otherwise feel left behind. The emphasis was not just on adding resources, but on ensuring that help—and a sense of belonging—reaches everyone, especially those who have previously felt excluded.

In summary:

The recommendations from the Voice Matters panel are grounded in core themes: balancing the limits of mere neutrality with the richness of pluralism, harnessing resource challenges for unity rather than division, honestly addressing the scars of past conflict and trauma, viewing deliberation as a foundation for civic trust, and making support visibly and equally available for all. Only by addressing these underlying issues can Derry/Londonderry make meaningful, lasting progress toward a safer, more inclusive city for everyone.



Recommendations

The following recommendations represent a comprehensive response to the core challenges and aspirations identified throughout the Voice Matters panel. These proposals are not isolated ideas; they reflect the underlying themes of inclusion, trust, accessibility, healing from the past, and practical opportunity that were present in every stage of discussion.

How the Recommendations Were Developed

The recommendations emerged from an intensive and participatory process involving thirty randomly selected panellists who reflected Derry/Londonderry's demographic diversity. Each participant brought personal experience, local knowledge, and insight to the table. Over several sessions, and especially on the final day, panellists worked in themed groups (housing and community planning, mental health and addiction, community trust, education, and poverty and jobs) to revisit prior discussions, listen to community and expert testimonies, and identify real-world obstacles and opportunities.

Facilitators guided each group in balancing ambition with realism—encouraging proposals that were both impactful and deliverable. Throughout the process, ideas were refined, challenged, and sharpened. Groups distinguished between "wishlist" items and practical solutions, ensuring that the final recommendations were rooted in community priorities and capable of making a measurable difference.

How the Recommendations Were Voted On

Once each group had developed and refined its list of recommendations, the panel came together for a structured voting process. In a "gallery walk," all participants circulated around the room, reviewing the recommendations from each group. Individuals provided feedback and suggestions, which groups could incorporate before finalizing their lists.

For the final prioritization, each panellist was given a set number of sticky dots. Participants allocated these to the recommendations they believed were most important, impactful, or urgent—placing multiple dots on those they felt especially passionate about. This open, participatory voting system captured both consensus and intensity of support.

The votes were tallied openly, and the highest-priority recommendations were then discussed and confirmed in a closing plenary, ensuring broad ownership and collective buy-in from the entire group. This method allowed the panel to transparently identify the proposals with the greatest level of support, forming a robust basis for action by local stakeholders.

Recommendations

Top Recommendations

1. Expand Integrated Schools and Intercultural Education

Increase the number of integrated schools and embed cross-community, intercultural, and anti-bias education from nursery age upward. This aims to break down segregation, promote social mixing, and lay foundations for lifelong inclusion.

2. Increase Accessible Mental Health and Addiction Services

Enhance and expand mental health and addiction support through safe "drop-in" spaces, chatty benches, wraparound and holistic care, and better communication about available help. Focus on proactive outreach and visible, stigma-free support in the community.

3. Build New Mixed Social Housing Without Divisive Symbols

Prioritize the construction of mixed social housing developments that actively prohibit the display of sectarian symbols (flags, painted curbs, murals) via enforceable tenant charters, and ensure access regardless of background.

4. Reduce Commercial Rates for New Businesses (3–5 Years)

Offer significant or full rates relief to new local businesses, especially those revitalizing vacant properties or derelict buildings, to drive economic regeneration and community vibrancy.

5. Implement Cultural Awareness Education from Early Years

Integrate cultural, religious, and social diversity learning into early-years and primary education to foster lasting understanding, reduce prejudice, and support minority and new-entrant families.

6. Sustain and Grow Cross-Community Projects for All Ages

Invest in ongoing, visible community events, sports, arts, and social programs that encourage real friendships and trust-building across divides, involving preschoolers, youth, and adults alike.

7. Improve Communication and Visibility of Support Services

Develop simple, accessible ways (digital and physical) for residents to find out what mental health, addiction, employment, and social support is available, improving signposting and active outreach.

Recommendations

8. Reform Civil Registration for Greater Neutrality

Remove the requirement to declare or assign community background (religious, political) for civic access and public services, ensuring systems support equality and respect for diverse identities.

9. Create Community Service Hubs ("One Stop Shops")

Establish easily accessible community hubs offering multiple forms of wraparound support—including mental health, welfare, and employment services—in a single, welcoming place.

10. Increase and Modernize Apprenticeships and Job Pathways

Expand apprenticeships and upskilling opportunities for all age groups, link employment schemes to regeneration projects, and encourage employers to create new routes to quality jobs for local residents.

Insights and Impact

The Voice Matters panel process has been more than a consultation—it is evidence of how ordinary people, when given structured support and genuine agency, can redefine city priorities and create actionable solutions together. Through open dialogue, personal storytelling, and collaborative decision-making, participants developed a shared understanding that transcended traditional divides and addressed complex challenges at their root.

Key Insights:

The panel revealed that issues like safety, inclusion, and opportunity are deeply connected. True inclusion is not just the absence of conflict markers, but the presence of trust, visible shared experiences, and proactive engagement across historic lines. Participants highlighted the necessity of both tangible services and intangible cultural shifts: mental health services need to be welcoming, and accessible, public spaces need to reflect a plural community, and economic opportunities must reach the city's most marginalized. Another major insight is the enduring influence of trauma and collective memory—policy must be informed by both the past and the aspirations of Derry/Londonderry's future generations.

Tangible and Intangible Impact:

The deliberative process had immediate effects on many participants, reported through testimonial and observation. People from diverse backgrounds expressed new confidence in their voices, discovered unexpected common ground, and established relationships that may serve as the foundation for social initiatives and further participatory work. There is now also a greater appetite and skill set within the community for holding local authorities accountable and tracking progress on shared goals. The recommendations themselves have become a rallying point—widely supported, practical, and emblematic of a renewed sense of civic responsibility.

Wider Influence:

This panel process has generated a new model for civic engagement in Derry/Londonderry—one rooted in deep listening, visible transparency, and sustained inclusion. It demonstrates to policymakers, community organizers, and partner cities that bringing citizens together in a guided, deliberative setting can produce solutions that are both realistic and ambitious, pragmatic and bold.

Policy and Next Steps

The recommendations in this report provide a clear, community-backed roadmap for building a safer and more inclusive Derry/Londonderry. However, moving from words to action requires coordinated effort across city institutions, elected representatives, community organizations, and residents.

Insights and Impact

Policy Directions:

Policymakers are urged to embed integrated schools and intercultural education into education strategies; prioritize mental health and addiction funding toward visible, accessible community-based care; and reform planning and housing regulations to fast-track mixed, symbol-free developments.

Governance and Accountability:

It is recommended that the city council and key partners commit to regular public forums where progress is reviewed, obstacles addressed, and priorities adjusted as needed. Citizen panellists should remain actively involved in this oversight process, helping ensure fidelity to the recommendations and rapid response to any emerging challenges or inequities.

Inclusive Engagement Going Forward:

Maintaining momentum will require continued and deliberate efforts to include marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, disabled residents, and those traditionally underrepresented in civic life. Efforts like participatory budgeting, open feedback channels, and community storytelling events should become regular features of the city's policy landscape.

Call to Action:

Derry/Londonderry is poised to become a national leader in participatory, inclusive policymaking. The next step is for political, civic, and community leaders to adopt these recommendations, allocate necessary resources, and publicly commit to specific timelines for implementation. Residents are encouraged to stay involved, monitor progress, and continue shaping the city's future.

Closing Remarks

As we conclude this year's Voice Matters programme, I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who has supported this initiative from its beginnings as an idea to its successful fourth year of delivery.

This work is made possible through collaboration and shared commitment. I would particularly like to thank the staff of Cooperation Ireland, our skilled facilitators, and our partners at Dembrane for their expertise and dedication. Thanks also to Claudes for their catering, St. Columb's Hall for providing an excellent venue, the Council for their continued support, our speakers for their contributions, and the people of Derry/Londonderry for their engagement and generosity throughout the process.

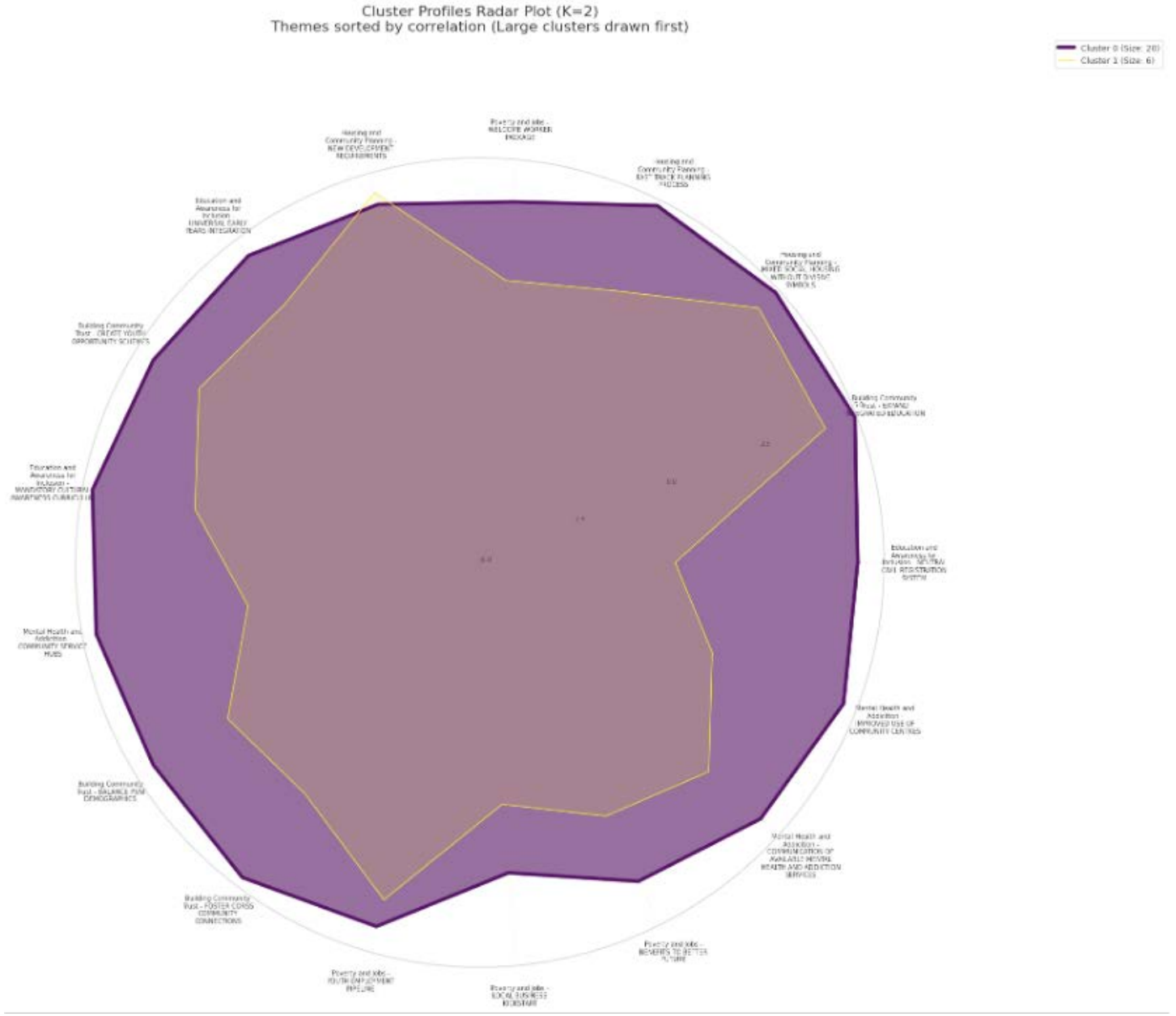
Each year, Voice Matters has continued to evolve. What we see today reflects a growing culture of community connection, open dialogue, and a shared willingness to learn and adapt. This report presents the recommendations that have emerged, while also capturing the depth of insight and community strength demonstrated over the three days of the programme.

For any further queries, clarifications, or discussions on the insights — or on how to design a process like this — please contact me at itwiggs@cooperationireland.org.

Ireland Twiggs, Programme Manager, Cooperation Ireland

Appendices

Recommendation Cluster Profile



Appendices

Sentiment Cluster Profile