



‘The Environment’

**Report of the Lewisham People’s
Parliament October 2021**

This report is written in plain English

The Lewisham People's Parliament

The People's Parliament is here to represent the views of people with learning disabilities who live in Lewisham. It is a project run by Lewisham Speaking Up and it is funded by the Big Lottery Community Fund.

There are six Lewisham People's Parliament reps who are elected by other people with learning disabilities. They are paid the London Living Wage for their work with Lewisham Speaking Up.

Background to this report on The Environment

The Environment has been a subject that the Lewisham People's Parliament has been thinking about for quite a while now. We arranged this People's Parliament to link with the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow 2021.

The People's Parliament reps decided that it would be a good subject to talk about. They thought that we should concentrate on 4 main areas. These were:

- Climate change and global warming
- Green spaces and looking after nature
- Pollution and air quality
- Plastic waste and recycling

The People's Parliament was still happening online because of Covid. We chose to try a new way of holding the Parliament and this time we did it in 4 separate zoom meetings and 1 small face-to-face meeting.

All of the meetings happened in October 2021.

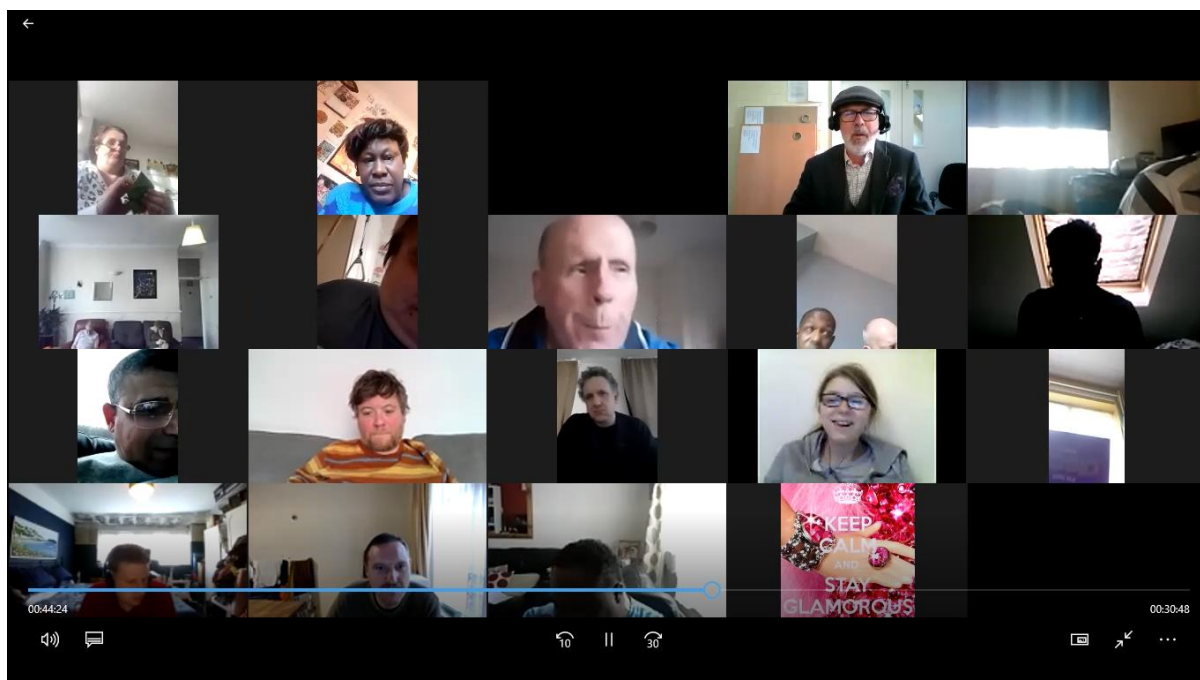
33 different people with learning disabilities joined the meetings at various times during the month.

Unfortunately, due to Covid 19 and other pressures, this report was not completed until January 2022.

Below is a summary of what people said about each subject:

Subject 1. Climate Change and Global Warming

The session started with a reminder about why we were talking about global warming. This is because of the COP 26 summit that will happen in Glasgow starting on October 31st.



Zoom meeting talking about climate change

We watched some short films about climate change and talked about what it means. We asked people what they thought climate change means. This is what they said:

- Where you have really hot summers
- Holes in the ozone layer and it's getting warmer
- I've been watching programmes where in Alaska there has been hardly no snow at all
- When the weather is changing, with odd seasons where it's not right
- Look at all the fires and drought. Different areas have got different things going on
- The planet will get really hot, then in the end, there won't be anything left on the planet
- There is more risk of flash flooding
- It's a very complex situation and it's hard to explain

When we were talking we found that climate change was a difficult idea for some people with learning disabilities to understand.

One helpful way of thinking about it is when a person has a high temperature that makes them feel ill. We said that climate change was like the whole planet Earth having a high temperature or a fever. This helped some people understand why a change of a few degrees over a long time makes a difference to the environment.

People said they would like more simple ways to understand environmental issues.

What we say about climate change

We asked people with learning disabilities what they had to say on the subject of climate change. This is what they said:

- You have got to think about the next generation, the people who are younger than us. What are they going to face?
- If you don't do anything now, it will be too late to do anything about it.
- If we didn't do anything now, then we will be in trouble.
- We have got to save the world's resources for future generations. I think it's important that we take action now before it's too late.
- I'm trying to switch to things I can re-use and wash, like cups and water bottles.

What we want to happen about climate change

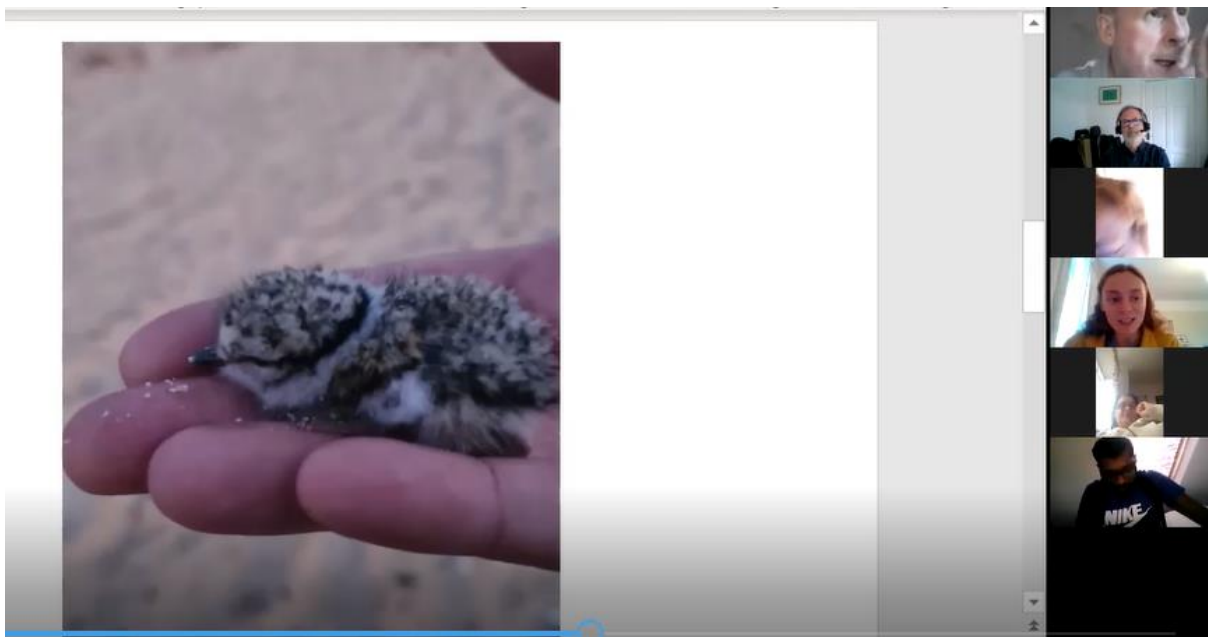
We asked people with learning disabilities what they thought could be done about climate change. This is what they said should happen:

- Recycle, take public transport and everyone do your little bit, because that does help.
- We need to act now before it's too late.
- The world leaders need to do what's right with the environment and climate change.

- Boris Johnson is leaving it too late, he needs to act now rather than later.
- They should encourage people to recycle more and make them aware of the benefits to the environment.
- They should do something about climate change.
- They need to sort out our world, because our world is going down the pan.
- We need more electric cars and more recycling.
- We need to start using more renewable energy.

Subject 2. Green spaces and looking after nature

For this session, we were joined by Tara Watson who works for the RSPB as a warden in Norfolk. Tara is especially interested in making green spaces more accessible to disabled people.



Tara telling the group about her work with the RSPB

We started the session with Tara asking everyone what came into their mind when they thought about a green space. Some people talked about wildlife and plants, whilst others talked about ideas like freedom and relaxation.

Tara asked people what would make it easier for them to get more access to green spaces. There was a good discussion on how to make things easier for disabled people.

What we say about green spaces

We asked people with learning disabilities what they had to say on the subject of green spaces. This is what they said:

- Some people in the group preferred to go to spaces very close to home and others want to travel further.
- Several people wanted to travel further, but found that difficult. The difficulties mentioned were around cost and finding or getting to the green space.
- Walking to a green space can be the best way to travel if it's close enough.
- Moving around a green space can be difficult when paths aren't wide enough, especially for wheelchair users.
- We need to look after the animals.
- We need to make sure wildlife doesn't come to any harm.
- There should be more access for disabled people.
- The way they design it, they try to accommodate people, but it's not enough. For example, if there is just one disabled toilet, it doesn't make life easy for people.
- I can't read maps easily, it's too hard for me.

What we want to change about green spaces

We asked people with learning disabilities what they thought should happen to make green spaces more accessible. This is what they said:

- There should be wider paths and more accessible toilets.
- There should be clearer signs and directions to green spaces.
- There should be visual maps to help you get around.
- It can be too expensive to get to green spaces.
- There should be discounted or free travel to green spaces. You can't use your freedom pass outside of London.

- It would be good to have support to learn how to get to green spaces or test out the journey before you go by yourself.

Subject 3. Air Pollution

For our third session on air pollution, Lewisham Councillor Samantha Latouche joined us. Samantha is the Air Quality Champion for Lewisham.

To start with, we watched a short clip about air quality from the Earthshot Prize TV show. This said that 90% of people in the world breathe unclean air every day.

We then watched a BBC News clip about a young girl called Ella, who lived in Lewisham. Sadly, she died aged 9 and it was the first time in the UK that air pollution was given as a cause of a person's death.



A Clip of the BBC News film about air pollution in Catford

Councillor Samantha Latouche told us about some of things that Lewisham Council has done to improve air quality. She said that there has been some progress, but that there is still a lot to do.

Samantha said that Lewisham was one of the first 5 London boroughs to say there was a 'climate emergency' happening.

This means they think that urgent action is needed to improve the environment. This includes improving air quality.

Samantha said that the Council were doing these things:

- Being part of the new London Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ)
- Introducing clean bus routes
- Having 'school streets' where roads near schools are closed off to traffic
- Encouraging more cycling
- Putting in more electric car charging points
- Planting more trees
- Regularly checking the quality of the air in Lewisham
- Making a Lewisham air quality app that can check air quality. You can also plan walking routes with less air pollution
- Giving fines to drivers who park with their engines running

The group discussed air pollution with Councillor Latouche and asked some questions. People made some good points and said some of the things that they think need to happen.

What we say about air pollution

We asked people with learning disabilities what they had to say on the subject of air pollution. This is what they said:

- There are some big main roads that go through Lewisham - that makes things worse.
- The air pollution is bad in Catford.
- Some people still need to use cars to get about if they are disabled. Public transport is not accessible for everyone.
- With air pollution we have to act now before it's too late.
- Why can't we have fresh air? We haven't got clean air, we've got dirty air.
- I have seen vehicles with black smoke coming out of the exhaust and you're wondering where that's going.
- There aren't enough places to charge electric cars.

- What happens if you can't park outside your house to charge an electric car? How do you charge an electric car if you live in a flat?
- Some places don't have good bus routes.
- We need to stop air pollution for people who have asthma.

What we want to change about air pollution

We asked people with learning disabilities what they thought should happen to make air quality better. This is what they said:

- The government has to come into this and intervene.
- We need to have more electric vehicles and cut down on greenhouse gases.
- We need to have more electric car charging points.
- Some people do need a car, but electric cars are too expensive for people to afford.
- The Government needs to improve more transport links.
- We need greener aeroplanes.
- You can't have people charging electric cars with cables all over the pavements. It's dangerous for disabled people.

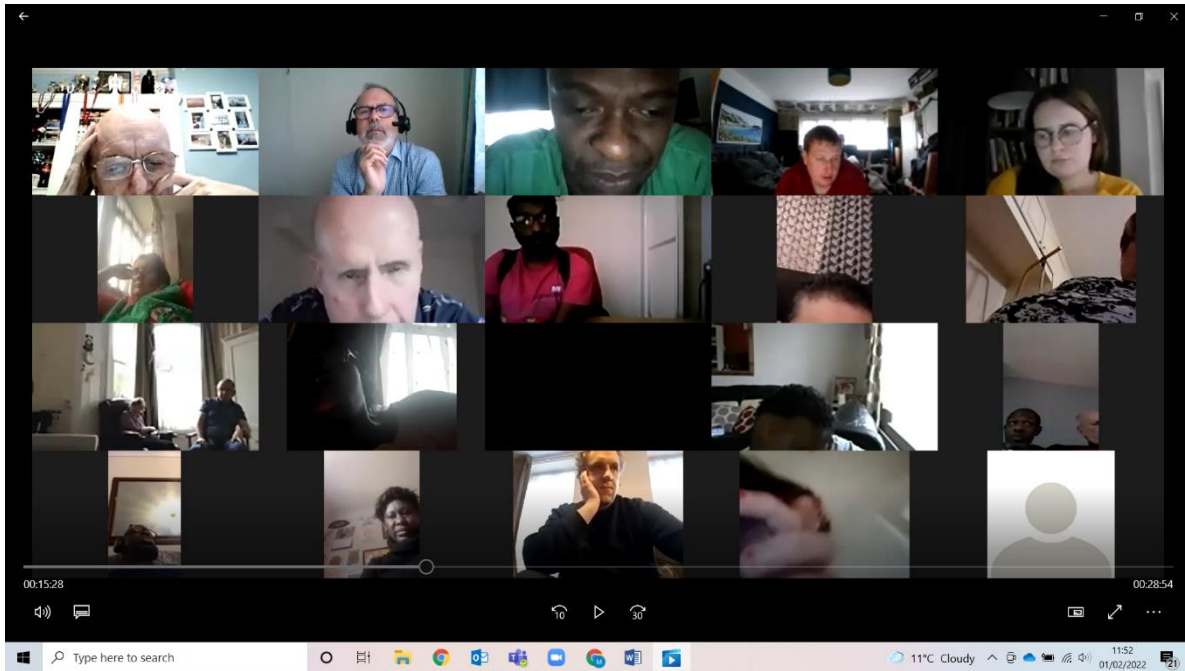
Subject 4. Plastic Waste

Our final subject was plastic waste and recycling. We talked about some news stories showing plastic waste in the seas or being burnt.

We also talked about the 'Three Rs' which are

- Reduce
- Re-use
- Recycle

People had a good understanding of recycling, but found it hard to imagine a world without plastic. Some felt that it would be hard to get rid of plastic. Some talked about how they re-use plastic like shopping bags or drinks bottles.



Zoom discussion on plastic waste

What we say about plastic waste

We asked people with learning disabilities what they had to say on the subject of plastic waste. This is what they said:

- It is really hard to avoid plastic.
- Plastic film is on everything you buy.
- Plastic waste is disgusting. It makes you feel sick.
- It hurts the animals and wildlife.
- There is lots of rubbish on the street and in the sea.
- What alternatives to plastic are there that can be used?
- The younger generations will have to clear up the sea, so the government should do something to put the UK in a better place.
- Plastic waste is not good because of all the pollution.
- If recycling doesn't work, then what are the alternatives?
- People want things and plastic is useful, so it's hard to reduce it.
- I use a refillable bottle for my water.
- People don't get things fixed anymore, they just throw them away.

What we want to change about plastic waste

We asked people with learning disabilities what they thought could be done about plastic waste. This is what they said:

- We should do more recycling.
- There should be more help for us to recycle things.
- We should use more cardboard and less plastic.
- Take a bag with you when you go shopping.
- Supermarkets should do more about having less plastic packaging.
- To save the planet we need to act now and that goes for all the world leaders too.

Summary

People with learning disabilities are worried about the environment, like a lot of non-disabled people. Some of the issues are hard to understand and simpler, easy read information would help.

People with learning disabilities value being out in natural spaces, but they aren't always as accessible as they could be.

Air pollution is a concern for disabled people, but so is the cost of electric vehicles. There is not enough in place for electric vehicles to be widely used.

Plastic waste needs to be reduced, but people felt it was hard to avoid plastic in their daily lives.

On all of the issues we talked about, people recognised that everyone has to take responsibility for making changes.

Overall, people felt that the UK Government and governments around the world need to do more to make changes happen.

What Next?

These are the things that the People's Parliament will do next:

- Send this report to the Minister for the Environment
- Send this report to local MPs

- Send this report to Lewisham Council
- Send the report to environmental charities like Greenpeace and the RSPB
- Ask for more easy to understand information about environmental issues

For more information or to discuss anything to do with this report contact Lewisham Speaking Up.

info@lsup.org.uk

lsup.org.uk

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