

GM=EqAl Conference 2026: Equity by Design: Practice Through Lived Experience

Attendee Feedback Summary

Breakout 2: Collaborative Commissioning for Inclusion

Thank you for being in the room. Thank you for being part of the Collaborative Commissioning for Inclusion session at Equity By Design. You gave us some of the most honest and important conversation of the day. Here is what we heard - and what we're going to do with it.

What the room said

The post-it notes and conversations from the session returned to one clear theme: **people want to understand how commissioning works before they can engage with making it more inclusive.** That is not a failure of ambition. It shows where people are - and where the system has left them.

Participants wanted to know who the commissioners are - specifically across GMCA and the NHS - who holds budget authority, and who could walk a community organisation through it. They wanted to understand how funding decisions are made and where organisations can influence them, not just respond.

The session was also described, directly, as **too theoretical for most people in the room.** One post it put it plainly: **'We need Live Well team members to lead on this. This session was too theoretical for most.'* That is fair feedback, and we are taking it seriously.

Three questions captured what the session needed to address, but did not fully reach:

1. **What can GM actually do?**
2. **How do we feed into the process?**
3. **Can we understand who the commissioners are - and how they see this?**

There was also something positive in the room. One participant noted that what felt most meaningful was what felt personal and organic - the real conversations happening between people, rather than the formal structure of the session. That is worth paying attention to when we think about how to design this conversation next time.

What GM=EqAl heard

We heard that the inclusion lens cannot be applied to a process people do not yet understand. Before the question of **how to commission inclusively**, there is a prior question: *** How does commissioning work at all, who controls it, and what is the realistic**

space for community influence within it? * We designed a session that assumed more shared baseline than existed in the room.

We heard that people want commissioners in the room - not as observers, but as co-participants. They want to hear directly from the people who hold the money and the mechanisms: what flexibility exists, what security commissioners need to feel confident commissioning differently, and what types of work genuinely lend themselves to collaborative approaches and what does not. That is a different session to the one we ran.

We heard that the facilitators were working with material they had not had enough time or support to fully own. That is a design issue and a resourcing issue, and it is ours to address - not theirs.

We also heard what was not said. Community organisations with deep experience of being shut out of commissioning processes - those who have applied, been rejected, received no feedback and watched the same organisations get funded year after year - were not the loudest voices in this room. That experience is the most important evidence base for what inclusive commissioning actually requires. We need to design a space where it can be heard.

What happens next

- We will not run this session in the same format again. Instead, collaborative commissioning will become a dedicated GM=EqAI Working Group agenda item, with commissioners from GMCA, NHS GM and local authorities in the room as active participants.
- We will share current practice (e.g. [the Greater Manchester Participation Playbook](#)) and a plain-English guide to collaborative commissioning in Greater Manchester, including key commissioners, decision-making, routes to influence and where collaborative approaches fit. This will be shared with all conference participants.

- The three questions from the post it notes - What can GM actually do? How do we feed into the process? Who are the commissioners? - will be put directly to our partners within the GM Live Well structure as part of our ongoing equity partner role. We will share their responses.

If you were in this session and want to continue the conversation - or if you could not make it and this is the topic you most wanted to engage with - reply to gmeqal@vsnw.org.uk

An honest note

This session did not work as well as it should have. We are naming that plainly because the people who gave their time to attend deserve honesty, not a polished account that erases the gap between intention and delivery.

The learning is ours. Collaborative Commissioning is one of the most important conversations happening in Greater Manchester right now – about who gets funded, who gets to influence how money moves, and whether the system can genuinely share power with communities rather than consult them about decisions already made. That conversation is too important to get wrong a second time. We are committed to getting it right.