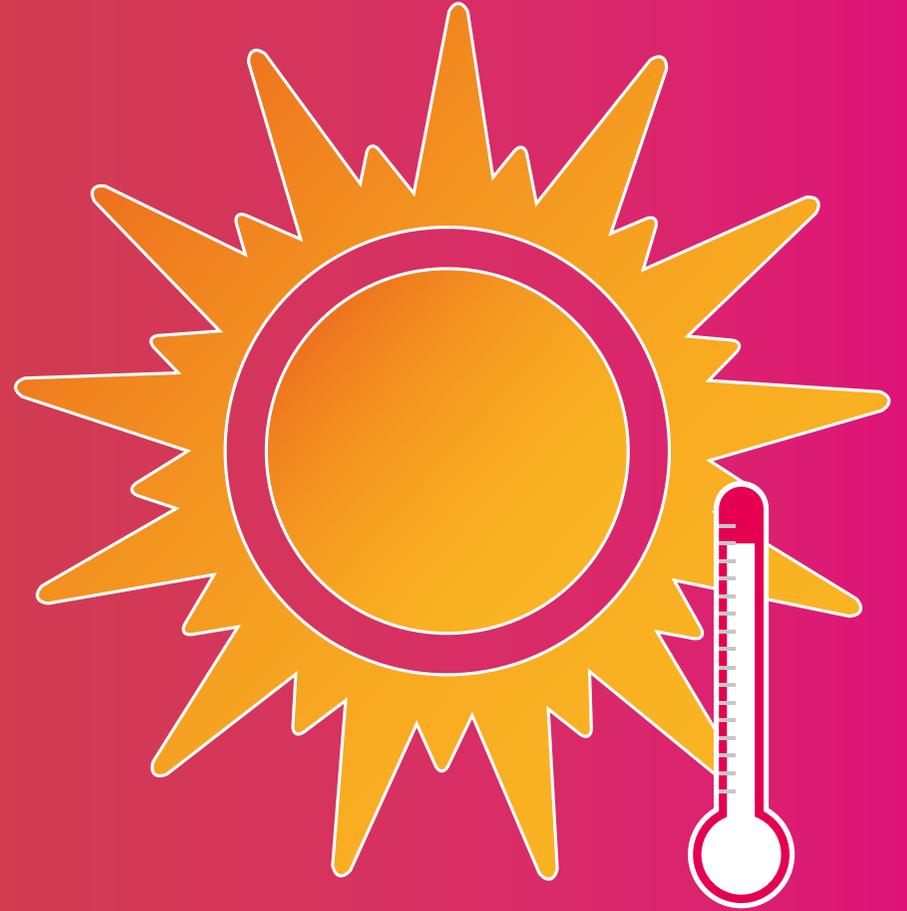


# Preparing for Hotter Summers:

## Insights from Lambeth residents



In partnership with

Impact  
on **Urban**  
**Health**

  
**Lambeth**

# Foreword

Heat risk is not just a concern for the future. It's an immediate and increasing challenge. The Cooling Fiveways project shows why adapting to hotter summers must be at the heart of building a fairer, more resilient borough. By listening directly to residents, especially those most affected, this project strengthens our understanding of how heat is felt in everyday situations like homes, streets and community spaces.

Cooling Fiveways reflects the Borough Plan's commitment to reducing inequality, improving health and wellbeing, and working in partnership to create a cleaner, greener and safer Lambeth. The insights shared by residents and our voluntary and community sector partners highlight both the pressures people face and the practical steps that make a real difference: tailored advice, trusted local relationships, and access to safe, cool spaces.

I want to thank every resident and organisation that contributed to this work. Your experiences will help us design climate action that is grounded in lived reality and ensure that support reaches those who need it most. By continuing to work alongside our communities, we can build a borough that is better prepared for hotter summers and where no one has to face extreme heat alone.



**Cllr Rezina Chowdhury**  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for  
Clean Air and Sustainable Lambeth



**Robin Minchom**  
Portfolio Manager at Impact on Urban Health

In cities, climate change is one of the most pressing long-term threats to health equity. People in living in poor-quality housing, managing long-term health conditions, or surviving on low incomes are disproportionately vulnerable to extreme temperatures.

We know that rising temperatures are already having an impact on people's health. These impacts are not felt equally and without targeted action, the climate crisis will deepen already existing inequalities.

While structural change is essential in adapting to a changing climate, communities play a vital role in responding to crises and must lead the design and delivery of solutions. That's why we're proud to have supported Cooling Fiveways - demonstrating how local authorities can partner with residents and community groups to future-proof neighbourhoods. We're excited to see how lessons from this innovative project are applied across Lambeth and beyond.

# Summary

The Cooling Fiveways project was funded by Impact on Urban Health, managed by the Lambeth Council Climate Change and Sustainability team, and delivered in partnership with residents and local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, in particular North Brixton Big Local. It has helped us understand how extreme heat is really experienced by residents in Lambeth and what helps people cope when summers get hotter. What residents shared paints a clear picture: heatwaves are already affecting daily life, but with the right support, people can feel safer, more confident and less alone.

The data and lived experiences gathered during the hottest summer on record show that heat is not just a weather issue. It affects mental well-being, health, finances and social connection. It is shaped by where we live, the type of home we live in, and what support is available in our neighbourhoods. Feeling too hot, whether at home or outside, can affect everyday life in many ways, and these experiences are not the same for everyone. There is significant and deepening inequality.

The project also showed what helps. Simple tools like fans, blinds and thermometers made a real difference. Clear, practical advice, especially when tailored to people's homes, helped residents feel more prepared. Most importantly, human connection mattered. Talking to trusted local organisations, seeing familiar faces at community events, and sharing experiences with neighbours helped reduce stress and build confidence. However, it also showed a need for long-term adaptation work to make homes and neighbourhoods heat adapted. This report will examine residents' responses to heat risk, exploring their thoughts and insights, and the implications for the future of heat risk management in Lambeth.



# Introduction

## Heat risk in Lambeth

2025 was a double-record-breaker, with the UK measuring the warmest and sunniest year on record<sup>1</sup>. Lambeth Residents experienced four separate heatwaves during the summer months<sup>2</sup>, where temperatures exceeded the 28°C thresholds for three or more days, triggering Heat Health alerts from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Lambeth, like many inner London boroughs, feels the impact of these heat episodes intensely. High population density, crowded built environments and lack of green space boost the Urban Heat Island effect, leading to higher neighbourhood air and ground temperatures in the borough, compared to outer London areas<sup>3</sup>.

**London's inner boroughs**, including Lambeth, experience **strong Urban Heat Island effects**, producing heatwave temperatures of **4.5°C to 10°C** higher than in surrounding areas<sup>4</sup>.

This impact is felt unequally by our residents. Those living in older high-density housing often experience indoor daytime temperatures well above outdoor temperatures, which stay dangerously hot through the night<sup>5</sup>.

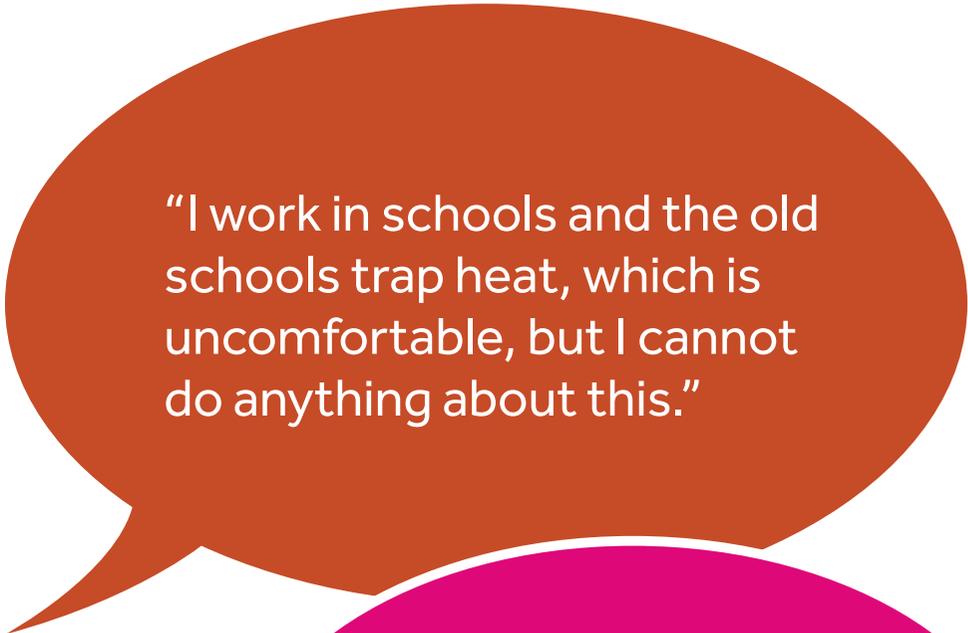
Lower-income households are also less able to escape from the heat. Their homes are more likely to overheat due to property type or standard, and few, if any, low-income households in the UK have access to air conditioning units. Even cooling measures such as electric fans, cooling mats or reflective blinds can be unaffordable. Access to cool spaces like swimming pools or cinemas may be too costly, and even the cost of transport to the nearest park or outside cool space may be unaffordable for those on very low incomes.



These same households are likely to have adults working in jobs that expose them to heat at work, with a large number of Lambeth residents working in occupations such as retail (9.8%), education (8.8%), healthcare (8.5%) and hospitality (5.5%)<sup>6</sup>.

Lambeth's Climate Action Plan has recognised the challenge posed by heat risk and the need for strategic and collaborative action to address it. By working with the health sector, major institutions, and the voluntary and community sector to we can strengthen community resilience and better prepare and respond to climate shocks like heatwaves. This will help to reduce the risk of extreme heat impacts on vulnerable resident groups.

In early 2025, Lambeth secured funding from Impact on Urban Health to research what support systems or 'social infrastructure' exist in our communities and how those community connections can be used to support residents in extreme summer temperatures.



"I work in schools and the old schools trap heat, which is uncomfortable, but I cannot do anything about this."



"I work outside, we have to finish by 11am now as it is too hot."

<sup>1</sup> 2025 is double-record breaker: UK's warmest and sunniest year on record - Met Office

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/articles/c1kz18d3wjro>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/environmental-services/flooding/soak-lambeth-suds-programme/risks-associated-with-climate-change-lambeth>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.arup.com/insights/urban-heat-snapshot/>

<sup>5</sup> It's getting hot in here. How ever-warmer UK summer temperatures will have an outsized impact on low-income households and low-paid workers. 15 August 2023.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are based on census and NOMIS employment figures for Lambeth.

# The Cooling Fiveways Project

The Cooling Fiveways project was created to:

- Identify which Lambeth neighbourhoods are most exposed to extreme heat in the summer.
- Better understand how the factors we know determine people’s vulnerability to heat.
- Listen to and understand the lived experiences of residents coping with overheating homes and heatwaves in the context of their neighbourhoods, communities and lives.
- Look into how existing community support systems and proven ways of reducing the impact of heat can help residents cope with extreme summer temperatures.
- Test the effectiveness of practical solutions to heat risk with residents.

We began by looking at data on housing, access to green space, income levels and the physical environment around homes to find out where heat risk is highest in the Borough. This data showed a strong link between the areas and homes that get the hottest and the neighbourhoods where people may already be facing challenges such as overcrowding, low income or limited access to outdoor space. The project also needed an area with a strong network of organisations that were embedded and trusted in the community it could work with and through.

Based on this, we focused our work on areas in and around Loughborough Junction, where there are some of the highest heat inequality in Lambeth and a strong voluntary and community sector network. We partnered with Big Local North Brixton, which helped us connect with more than 30 local organisations, including Loughborough Junction Action Group (LJAG), Marcus Lipton, and Ecosystem Coldharbour.



Community involvement was at the heart of the project. Throughout summer 2025, over 400 residents shared their real-life experiences of coping with hot weather at community events, workshops, focus groups and through one-to-one interviews.

People told us about overheating in their homes, how they tried to stay cool, and what information or support they felt they needed. This helped us understand how heat affects daily life, especially for those at greater risk.

The project also selected 62 households to represent three groups at particular risk: people aged 65 or older, families with young children under 5, and people with health conditions. Speaking with the same households several times helped us see how experiences and behaviours changed as they experienced the four heatwaves of 2025.

**Our community researchers spoke to our ‘Cool Kit Cohort’ at three points throughout the summer:**

- At the beginning of the summer, to provide them with their cool kit, containing water bottles, thermometers, fans, blinds and cooling mats.
- After at least one heatwave while they were using their cool kits.
- At the end of the summer.

This approach helped us understand what was working, what wasn’t, and what got in the way of staying cool, and allowed us to assess the overall success of the cool kits. It also gave residents a chance to talk openly about the emotional and physical impact of heat, the difficulties of cooling down flats or rented homes, and who they felt should be responsible for helping keep homes safe during extreme heat. These conversations provided important insight into the wider pressures people face in heat emergencies.

The team also attended local community events to share practical advice on coping with hot weather and to raise awareness of heat-related health risks. Local partners helped spread key messages through their usual communication channels to reach people ahead of forecast heatwaves.



Cool kits ready for distribution at Loughborough Children’s Centre

**As a result of this work, we now have:**

- A clearer picture of how extreme summer heat impacts our most vulnerable residents and how the overlap of hot neighbourhoods, poor housing, low income and poor health increases the impact of heat and deepens inequalities.
- First-hand insights into how residents experience and cope with extreme heat, including what equipment and advice worked and what did not.
- A stronger foundation for planning for the future and designing more equitable and effective heat adaptation measures.

The findings showed that combining formal data-driven research with direct community input is essential for creating practical, local solutions that help everyone stay safe and comfortable during extreme heat.

**Combatting isolation and improving mental health with community**

“Being always at home because of the heat makes me feel so low sometimes...”

“Services alone will never be enough... we need the community to come together.”

Heat is an isolator; community is crucial in supporting residents during heat events. Seven per cent of households in Lambeth are made up of single older people over the age of 66<sup>1</sup>, and our focus groups revealed multiple reports of older people experiencing loneliness and poor mental health during heatwaves. This indicates that our vulnerable residents require additional support during heat events, particularly those on medications which make them more sensitive to higher temperatures. Activating community infrastructure could help address this issue.

1 Lambeth Living Well Network Alliance Progress Report 2023-24 <https://www.lambethtogether.net/long-read/lambeth-living-well-network-alliance-progress-report-2023-24-four-year-in-numbers/>

Community, Mental health, Older people, Social infrastructure, Perception of heat risk, Public realm, Mitigation, Healthcare

**Lambeth**

Impact on Urban Health, NBBL

# Emerging themes

Analysis of all the comments, survey responses, and focus groups also provided new insights into heatwave response and revealed several important themes

- Combatting Isolation and Supporting Mental Wellbeing Through Community
- Healthy and Resilient Homes
- Healthy and Resilient Neighbourhoods
- Caring for Our Most Vulnerable Residents

The following analysis dives into each of these themes. It aims to paint a clearer picture of how heat risk is really felt across Lambeth, and where action can make the greatest difference.

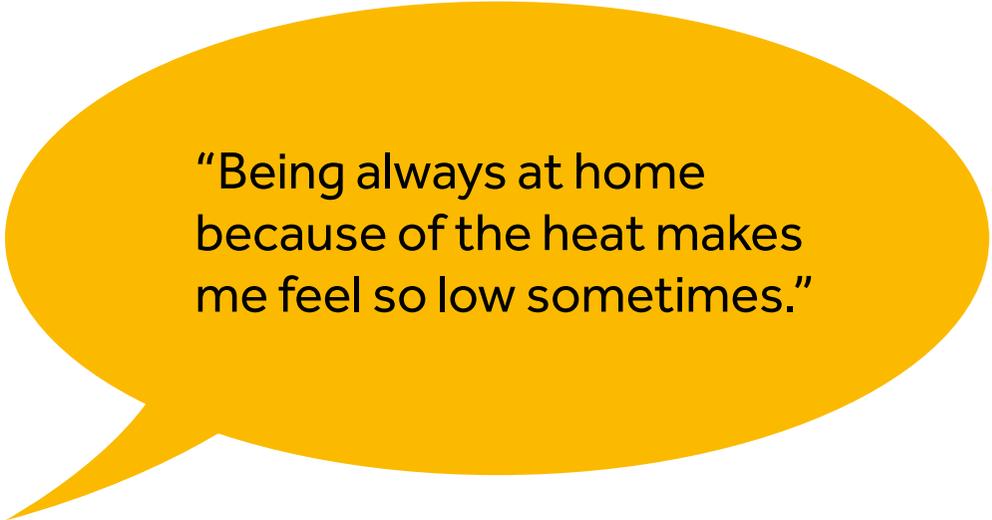
# Combatting Isolation and Supporting Mental Wellbeing Through Community

For many residents, heatwaves affected more than just physical comfort; they also took a real toll on mental well-being. Four in ten households told us that hot weather made them feel stressed, anxious or low, showing that extreme heat can be emotionally draining as well as physically exhausting.

Heat is an isolator. One of our participants shared that they 'get excited about the hot weather, but when it arrives, I feel differently,' and being 'alone inside makes me miserable.' Residents explained that dealing with heat on their own often made things feel worse.

Many felt the government advice provided was too generic, didn't reflect their type of home, or didn't take into account personal challenges such as health conditions, mobility issues or lack of time. 'I have trouble moving around, meaning being at home or outside during these heatwaves is hard, I sit in my car outside with the air con on or with my feet in cold water for relief.' Some residents also said they needed more hands-on help to put the advice into practice, such as installing blinds or improving ventilation.

Several participants, especially parents of young children, shared that trying to manage the heat alone felt overwhelming and that digesting the advice provided was not something they had time for. Coming together with others facing the same challenges helped reduce stress and made the situation feel more



"Being always at home because of the heat makes me feel so low sometimes."

manageable. During our Loughborough Children's Centre focus group, participants shared that 'three parents had children experience eczema flare-ups,' meeting and sharing their experiences supported these families in making the connection between heat events and these symptoms and discussing solutions together!

**The data showed just how important human connection was during hot weather.** Nearly three-quarters of residents said that in-person support was "really important" to them during periods of extreme heat. This shows that having someone to talk to, check in, or offer practical help can make a meaningful difference when temperatures rise.

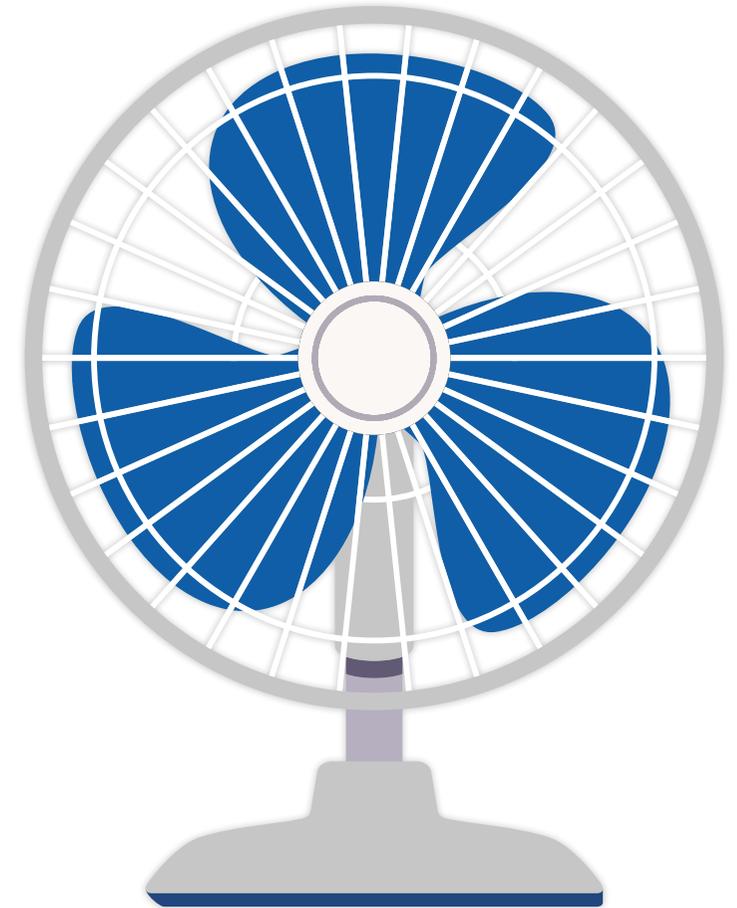
**Residents found in-person support particularly helpful in two ways:**

- Turning advice into action, such as understanding how to use cooling tools or make small changes at home.
- Reducing stress by feeling supported rather than facing heatwaves alone.

Many residents said that being part of the project made them feel more “supported” and “looked after” during heatwaves. It also helped people feel more connected to those around them, with over half of the participants saying the project encouraged them to talk more about heat risk with family, friends or neighbours. This helps spread the benefits of the project, heat risk awareness and support beyond participating households.

Focus group discussions brought this to life even more clearly. Older residents and those with limited mobility often described feeling especially isolated during heatwaves, as hot weather made it harder to leave home or take part in social activities. Having community workers and local leaders present at events was described as reassuring, helping residents feel seen, listened to and less alone.

Sharing experiences, tips and worries with others helped build confidence and a sense of togetherness. As one resident put it:



“Services alone will never be enough... we need the community to come together.”

# Healthy and Resilient Homes

One thing residents made very clear was that the type of home you live in has a big impact on how hot it gets in summer. Those living in flats and rented houses described their homes as getting uncomfortably hot and staying that way for long periods of time. People spoke about poor ventilation, lots of direct sunlight, and not having much control over changes to the building, such as adding shading or improving airflow. For many households, there weren't enough existing tools or resources to help manage indoor heat. The issue of overcrowded homes was also discussed, with many residents describing how it made heatwaves even harder to cope with.

More than 85 per cent of participants said that getting access to 'cool kits' was the key reason they participated in the project. Residents said the thermometers helped them better understand how hot their homes were getting during the heatwaves and made them feel more confident about managing heat, especially during the hottest days.

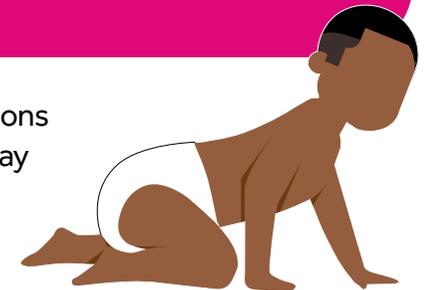
"I worry about my son, he does not want to come home because it is too hot in the house."

"My three children share a bed, it is hard to keep them cool at night, they get hot from body heat too."

"The thermometer made us think about the temperature inside."

"Fans were a lifesaver; they allowed my mother to cook in the kitchen, which gets very hot."

This shows that relatively low-cost solutions can have a real positive impact on everyday life, improving mental well-being and supporting residents to protect themselves and their families from heat.





“I live in a high-rise building, at the top it gets too hot!”

“Insulation traps the heat in my flat... it is unbearable.”

While our work clearly showed that cool kits can help a lot, the research did show that their effectiveness was limited, particularly in homes that were not designed with heat in mind. For some people, even simple advice like “open your windows” wasn’t realistic. Nearly half of the participants said they worried about security if they left windows open. Participants of focus groups shared a variety of similar challenges in keeping their homes cool.

**This showed that advice alone isn’t always enough; many homes simply don’t have the basic conditions needed for natural cooling.** This was felt more by our older participants and those in sheltered housing, who faced challenges installing or using some of the equipment. Moving cooling mats between rooms or installing blinds was difficult without additional support. Alongside the equipment, residents said that clear, practical guidance tailored to their type of home and individual circumstances would be most useful. This made a real difference:

Overall, the insights showed that simple, low-cost tools and tailored advice can help people cope better with heat in the short term. However, one size does not fit all, and support needs to be reflective of individuals’ needs, practical and easy to follow. This project demonstrated the limits of individual action and the importance of remembering this.

# Healthy and Resilient Neighbourhoods

Heat can also pose a risk to residents beyond their homes' walls. The neighbourhood that the home sits within also plays a vital role in reducing heat risk. Many highlighted the importance of their direct local area when it came to keeping cool. They said that shaded streets, green spaces, and cool public buildings made a big difference in whether they felt safe leaving their homes during extreme heat events. Where there were safe, cool spaces nearby and easy to reach, residents felt more confident getting out for fresh air, errands or social engagements. Where there weren't, people often felt stuck indoors, even as their homes overheated.

Residents living in built-up areas with fewer trees and green spaces said they had far fewer options for relief from the heat. One resident described how even short journeys felt overwhelming.

“Living in a green estate, I have cool spaces, but moving around the borough, I notice the heat coming off the buildings.”



The focus groups also highlighted how unequal access to cool spaces and the cost of cooling can limit people's options, especially in neighbourhoods with fewer nearby places to cool down.

- Fewer than half of the residents who participated said they had access to indoor public places where they could stay cool during heatwaves
- Half of the participants said there were not enough shaded walking routes near their homes.
- 36 per cent of residents worried about access to water and toilets when trying to stay hydrated outside.

These issues made it much harder for people to leave overheating homes, particularly for older residents and those with health conditions. For some, the effort and risk of going out in the heat outweighed the benefits:

“We try to plan a route that has shade.”

“Walking the boys to school can get too hot, but the bus is worse. I have to slow down. By 1-2 pm, the heat is unbearable.”

“I have to go to public spaces like the National Gallery to stay cool, as these are free.”

Participants also explained how basic facilities, or the lack of them, affected their ability to move around the borough:

“Going out was tough because the water bottles kept going empty and I couldn't afford to buy bottles in shops... We need more water fountains in public spaces.”

“I am disabled, I cannot drink lots of water when out, as there are not enough accessible bathrooms in public places.”



When neighbourhoods lack shade, water, toilets and indoor cool spaces, public health advice like “get out of the house” or “stay hydrated” becomes much harder to follow. This can increase heat stress, isolation and health risks, especially during longer heatwaves. **In fact, 70% of the public we surveyed said their main concern about staying cool was when they were outside their homes, not inside.** This shows that public spaces play a critical role in helping residents cope with extreme heat.

# Caring for Our Most Vulnerable Residents

Another clear theme was that heat does not affect everyone in Lambeth equally. The biggest impacts were felt by older residents, families with young children, and people with long-term health conditions. Many residents in these groups were also dealing with other pressures at the same time, such as tight finances, insecure housing or limited support networks, which made coping with extreme heat even harder.

By speaking to residents at different points over the summer, the project helped show how people's understanding of heat risk changes over time. At the beginning of the summer, people's perception of heat as a risk was low. When surveyed at the end of the summer, awareness of the risk increased significantly. Along with a better understanding of the risk, residents also reported better confidence in dealing with heat risk.

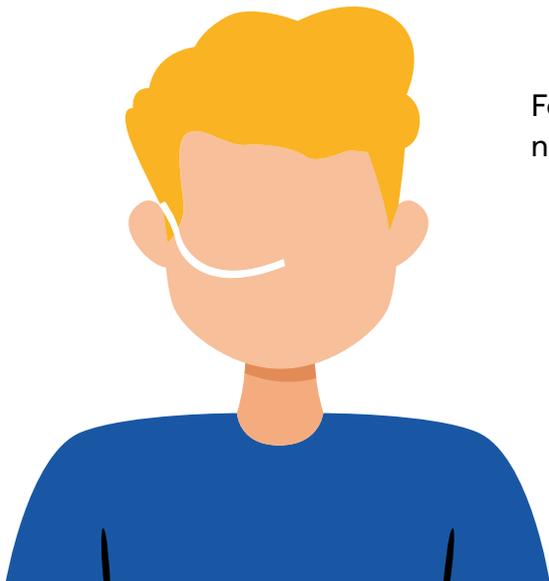
For many, it wasn't until they experienced very hot weather that the risks became real, demonstrating why raising awareness and embedding support early, before heatwaves hit, is so important. Having access to clear advice and practical help before temperatures rise means people can prepare their homes, check on neighbours, recognise warning signs, protect their health and feel more in control. **Being empowered to plan ahead reduces stress, prevents avoidable emergencies, and helps communities look after one another, rather than reacting once a crisis has already begun.**

Residents said they particularly valued resources and advice when it came from trusted local organisations and familiar community settings and channels. Trusted individuals with whom they had existing

relationships were able to provide one-to-one support, taking into account their individual needs, demonstrating the value of working with local partners. It also helped to use existing digital channels like WhatsApp and Facebook groups to share guidance suitable for specific groups.

"It made a big difference, because it enabled me to be better prepared, stay hydrated and manage things better."

"The support regarding the heat wave was very good for me. It made me feel safe."



Focus group conversations highlighted just how serious heat can be for people with health conditions or care needs, with residents sharing worrying experiences, including medical emergencies linked to extreme heat.

“A member of our community group came in, and we had to call an ambulance for her – she was diagnosed with heat stroke.”

Others spoke about how heat affected care and support at home:

“Both members of the household struggle with neurological conditions, including epilepsy and depression, however have been unable to have carers coming into their home during the heatwave as the property has been unfit.”

“My eldest son is epileptic...we’ve had to stop carers coming into our home as it gets too hot for them”

These stories reflect a wider issue; people with long-term health conditions or who rely on care at home are especially vulnerable during heatwaves. Across London, extreme summer heat has already been linked to hundreds of extra deaths, with older people at the greatest risk.

# Conclusion

The Cooling Fiveways project was shaped by what residents told us. We set out to understand how extreme heat is really experienced by residents in Lambeth and what helps people cope when summers get hotter. What residents shared paints a clear picture: heatwaves are already affecting daily life, but with the right support, people can feel safer, more confident and less alone.

The data and lived experiences gathered during the hottest summer on record show that heat is not just a weather issue. It affects mental well-being, health, finances and social connection. It is shaped by where we live, the type of home we live in, and what support is available in our neighbourhoods. Feeling too hot, whether at home or outside, can affect everyday life in many ways. And these experiences are not the same for everyone.

## Residents told us that:

- Heat can feel stressful and isolating, especially when people feel they are coping alone.
- Homes matter; flats, rented properties and upper-floor homes often get hotter and stay hot for longer
- Neighbourhoods matter; access to shade, water, toilets and cool public buildings affects whether people feel safe leaving home
- Some people face greater risks, particularly older residents, families with young children, and those with health conditions.

At the same time, the project also showed what helps. Many residents said that simple tools like fans, blinds and thermometers made a real difference. Clear, practical advice, especially when tailored to people's homes, helped residents feel more prepared. Most importantly, human connection mattered. Talking to trusted local organisations, seeing familiar faces at community events, and sharing experiences with neighbours helped reduce stress and build confidence.

## By the end of the summer 2025:

- Nearly three-quarters of participants felt more confident about dealing with heat
- Many residents became more aware of heat risks, not just for themselves but for friends, family and neighbours
- Conversations about heat spread beyond the project, helping to strengthen community awareness and support.

The biggest lesson from Cooling Fiveways is simple but powerful: no one should have to face extreme heat alone. Individual actions can help, but they have limits, particularly in homes and neighbourhoods that were never designed for hotter summers. Keeping people safe means combining practical tools, clear information and strong community support, with longer-term improvements to homes and public spaces.

As summers continue to get hotter, the experiences shared through this project show that by listening to residents and learning from lived experience and by building on local knowledge and community strength, Lambeth can continue to build a safer, fairer and more resilient borough where people feel informed, supported and prepared – whatever the weather brings.

Thank you to everyone who took part, shared their experiences and helped shape this work. Your experiences have helped Lambeth better understand what really works for residents — not just in theory, but in real life. This learning will be used to improve how heat risk is planned for and responded to across the borough.



**You can read more about the project's delivery and in-depth findings in our [Case Study here](#).**