Future Governance Forum

Growth and Reform Network

GOOD GROWTH FROM KING'S CROSS TO KILBURN

How Camden Council can deliver place-based inclusive growth

By Alex Bevan, Erica Fletcher and Kristina Stipetic

Published November 2026

This paper was first published in November 2026.
The contents and opinions expressed in
this paper are those of the authors only.

Company number, England & Wales: 14406854

Contents

About 2

About The Future Governance Forum 2

About the authors and acknowledgements 3

Executive summary 5

Introduction 7

Part 1: The power of orchestrating businesses behind a clear purpose 9

Part 2: Skills and Employment 18

Part 3: Purpose and storytelling 24

Conclusion 29

Appendix A: Economies with similar sectoral composition 30

About The Future Governance Forum

The Future Governance Forum (FGF) is a progressive, non-partisan think tank focused on transforming the state with the ultimate goal of renewing the nation. We make politically credible recommendations for reforms that can be delivered nationally and locally, build strong networks to test new ideas, and collaborate and use our relationships with public, private and social sector leaders to innovate.

Our current programmes of work explore:

- **Vital Institutions:** How can we reform existing state institutions and establish new ones so they are fit for purpose and built to last?
- **Better Services:** How can we build public services that are faster, more reliable and built around people's needs?
- **Progressive Markets:** How can we rethink markets and unlock investment to renew the economy, and deliver for people and places?
- **Impactful Devolution:** How can we meaningfully and permanently devolve power in one of the most centralised countries in the world?
- **Rethinking Migration:** How might we deliver a more effective asylum system that sustains greater public confidence, while remaining consistent with the principles of international law and progressive values?

By prioritising these questions we are thinking about new progressive models of governance for the long term. Our working model is to convene experts and find ways in which we can bring perspectives from very different organisations together to suggest ways in which the "how" of government could be more effective at every level.

Get in touch:

hello@futuregovernanceforum.co.uk
futuregovernanceforum.co.uk
@FutureGovForum
The Future Governance Forum FGF
@futuregovforum
@futuregovforum.bsky.social

About the authors and acknowledgements

Alex Bevan

Alex is a Research Fellow at The Future Governance Forum. He is a former Chief of Staff to the First Minister of Wales and worked as a special adviser across finance and economy departments. At FGF, Alex has written about energy, rail, devolution, industrial strategy and the economy more broadly.

Erica Fletcher

Erica Fletcher is a Senior Researcher at the Future Governance Forum and Growth and Reform Network. She was previously a researcher at Bournemouth University Business School with a focus on people and workforce issues within the NHS.

Kristina Stipetic

Kristina Stipetic is a Research Analyst at Metro Dynamics. She brings a wide range of methodologies thanks to her background in quantitative economics and a strong sense of visual storytelling thanks to her background in visual arts. Prior to working at GRN, she worked on large-scale research projects for the European Commission, mainly in science and innovation policy, including the evaluation of the Horizon Europe funding scheme.

Acknowledgements

This report has been produced by The Future Governance Forum in partnership with the Growth and Reform Network for the London Borough of Camden, without whose support this project would not have been possible. We are very grateful to everyone who took part in both the interviews and the workshop and who were so generous with both their time and expertise, including:

- Lauren Andres, Professor of Planning at the Bartlett School of Planning, Pro-Vice-Provost Inequalities, UCL Grand Challenge Amy Buxton-Jennings, Strategic Director of Strategy, Change and Communities, London Borough of Waltham Forest
- Rachel Coldicutt, Founder, Careful Industries
- Rebecca Heron, Strategic Director Growth and Development, Manchester City Council
- Catherine Howe, Chief Executive, Dorset Council
- Arielle Garton, Director Strategy, Partnerships and External Affairs, Dartington Service Design Lab
- Mathu Jeyaloganathan, Chief Investment Officer, Community Wealth Fund, London Borough of Camden
- Evie John, Managing Director, Inner Circle ConsultingRachel Laurence, formerly Co-Director, Centre for Thriving Places
- Saul Klein, Co-Founder and Chair, Phoenix Court, home of LocalGlobe, Latitude, Solar and Basecamp funds and Phoenix Court Works
- Ben Lucas, Founding Director, Metro Dynamics

- Hope McGee, Senior Policy Officer, Greater London Authority
- Chris Paddock, Director of Economy, West Midlands Combined Authority
- Anthony Painter, Director of Strategic Engagement at Ufi Voc Tech Trust
- Isadora Schappell, Consultant, Inner Circle Consulting
- Huw Thomas, Finance Director, Hywel Dda University Health Board
- Shaheen Warren, Associate Director, Practice and Innovation, Power to Change
- Lucy Webb, Director, Inner Circle Consulting

Executive Summary

Camden is a borough of contrasts: it hosts world-class frontier businesses and higher education institutions, and in 2023 Camden's economy generated around £40 billion[1] in Gross Value Added (GVA). Yet 42%[2] of residents live in poverty. This paper acts as a provocation and contribution to how Camden Council might think about local economic policy as it develops a new inclusive growth strategy. We use the term inclusive growth - also referred to as good growth - as a frame for approaches that enable as many people as possible to contribute to, and benefit from, economic growth.

This paper draws on interviews, a workshop with Camden Council staff and external practitioners and experts, a literature review, and economic analysis. From this, we have drawn out three interconnected pillars we suggest the Council consider in order to pursue and sustain an ambitious inclusive growth strategy.

1. The power of orchestration

Camden Council plays an important role as an orchestrator in the borough with the ability to both intervene and convene powerful partners across business, government and civic society. This strength should be harnessed to actively shape how businesses spend, hire, and invest to reduce local inequalities. Drawing on models from cities such as Leeds, Preston, Manchester and Plymouth, this report outlines five steps for Camden in its orchestrating role:

- **Diagnose the problem:** Use data and local insight to understand the specific problems Camden faces.
- **Build relationships around a shared vision:** Invest time and effort in relationships to generate buy-in from businesses and anchor institutions to foster genuine commitment to a shared vision.
- **Create governance structures:** Establish clear and collaborative structures with stakeholders to ensure accountability and shared ownership.
- **Embed priorities:** Integrate inclusive growth priorities into all council functions so that they are embedded throughout the organisation.
- **Monitor and adapt:** Have clear frameworks for how inclusive growth progress will be measured and opportunities to adapt as context and priorities change.

1 ONS, UK small area gross value added (GVA) estimates, UK small area gross value added (GVA) estimates - Office for National Statistics.

2 Camden Council, State of the Borough 2026 report, State of the Borough 2026: Inclusive Local Economy - Camden Council.

2. Skills and Employment

This paper suggests that Camden's inclusive growth strategy should start where most residents actually experience the economy. 42% of residents live in poverty and the economic inactivity rate exceeds the London average (25% compared to 21% in 2023[3]), driven disproportionately by long-term illness.

An inclusive growth strategy should ensure that four elements are included for skills and employment:

1. Residents should be involved in shaping these strategies so that they are informed by the real needs of those living in the borough.

2. It should look to improve job quality, pay, and progression in the everyday economy that employs the majority of the workforce for Camden residents.

3. It should ensure high-growth sectors and regeneration projects include tangible benefits for residents furthest from those opportunities.

4. Addressing economic inactivity should use a whole systems approach, addressing the overlapping barriers of health, childcare, housing, and transport that prevent residents from entering and remaining in the labour market.

3. Purpose and storytelling

A strategy that mobilises the organisation and its partners while resonating with residents will require a clarity of purpose based on clear political priorities. Consistent decision making that reinforces these shared priorities could support a process of positive culture change where required, with tangible examples that are visible to residents. We argue that Camden can build on its innovative approach to engaging citizens and develop a story of the borough that has the potential to mobilise residents, staff, and partners.

The council is uniquely positioned to tell a credible story that connects the borough's history and its enduring challenges with the opportunities before it. Drawing on UK examples and international literature, we suggest Camden roots its story in that context and considers a single challenge-led mission to focus its efforts and positive culture change.

These three themes all connect through the same underlying principles: inclusive growth must become an institutional priority, and that it must reflect the real experience of residents' lives in the borough.

3 ONS, Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity in Camden, Camden's employment, unemployment and economic inactivity - ONS, 2023.

Introduction

This report aims to provide helpful provocations to Camden Council as it develops its inclusive growth strategy. It is written from the perspective of an external observer, rather than a detailed documentation of current work in the borough. This work intends to offer ideas that provoke discussion and inspire future work. To do this, we reflect the main themes that consistently emerged through our interviews, workshop, and engagement with wider literature.

To inform this report, we spoke to 16 experts from a range of backgrounds, including from local authorities, universities, research organisations, and not-for-profits, through a series of semi-structured interviews. We also brought together Camden Council staff and external speakers in a two-hour online workshop to discuss the themes of this research. Alongside this, we reviewed national and international evidence and examples of inclusive growth approaches, and carried out economic analysis of Camden's economy.

'Inclusive Growth' is a term used widely but often without a clear, shared definition. **We believe that fair, place-based inclusive growth means enabling as many people as possible to contribute to and benefit from growth.**[4] As we argued in research for the Local Government Association (LGA)[5], local government's role in driving inclusive growth is broad. Local authorities are growth enablers, service providers, orchestrators, and anchor institutions, and their reach into every community enables action that strengthens local economies and expands opportunity.

Camden is a place of both significant opportunity and stark inequality. The borough hosts world-class anchor institutions, major regeneration sites, and a rich network of community assets. Yet it also faces acute challenges, including high rates of child poverty, housing affordability pressures, and significant place-based inequalities, all driving an urgency for a genuinely renewed approach to inclusive growth. The council could adopt a leadership role within a wider ecosystem of local authorities. Across our interviews, we repeatedly heard the sentiment: *'if Camden can't, who can?'*

Camden's assets are exceptional, but its ambition and internal coherence must match its scale. Inclusive growth cannot remain the work of a few committed teams, but instead must become an institutional priority, embedded in strategy and culture across the whole council - akin to the momentum behind Camden Council's shared understanding of relational practice.[6]

Both inclusive growth and relational practice are responses to the same observation: that fragmented, transactional approaches to people and places produce worse outcomes. Both are driven by questions such as: *Who is this*

4 RSA, 'Inclusive Growth Commission: Making our economy work for everyone', 7 March 2017.

5 Annabel Smith, Hamida Ali, Rosie Fogden, Kristina Stipetic and Tanya Singh, 'A force for growth: Spotlighting the role of councils in enabling inclusive economic growth', The Future Governance Forum, Growth and Reform Network and Local Government Association, 10 December 2025.

6 Local Government Association, Corporate Peer Challenge, November 2026.

being designed for? Who benefits from it? Who is being left behind? What is the holistic approach to tackling this? Who has power and who doesn't? Camden Council should embrace the interconnections between relational service delivery and inclusive growth because the conditions of people's lives are made by their access to good work, health, childcare, transport and skills.

This paper is structured around three themes: the power of orchestration, skills and employment, and purpose and storytelling.

Part 1: The power of orchestrating businesses behind a clear purpose

Councils are significant economic actors in their own right as major employers and buyers in their places. But effective councils recognise they cannot achieve growth alone. They convene diverse cross-sectoral partners from the public, private, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sectors around shared objectives. In other words, they are an orchestrator.[7]

Camden's anchor institutions and business networks are world-class, and the council already has considerable orchestration practice to build on. The Knowledge Quarter Network, the Good Life Camden Community of Practice, and the Inclusive Business Network, for example, bring institutions together around shared goals. Building on the start that Camden Council has made in this arena, this section provides inspiration as to where it could go next.

The opportunity for the council is to make orchestration a fundamental feature of its inclusive growth strategy. Actively shaping how businesses spend, hire, and invest to reduce inequalities and provide opportunities for the borough's residents. This would require Camden Council to set a clear, shared, overarching direction for what anchor institutions should be achieving in the borough, and leveraging relationships towards that. The partnerships and networks that currently exist in Camden should be assessed to see if they are fit for the purpose the council wants to achieve, and address any gaps. Aligned with the principle of the council's Partnerships Team, partnerships need to be rooted in strategic commitment from senior leadership, without taking away from day-to-day connection at a programmatic level with businesses.

This section draws on five examples to take inspiration from:

- **Leeds:** The Leeds Anchor Network[8], established in 2018, brings together 13 of the city's largest employers to focus on areas where they can collectively make a difference for the people of Leeds. The focus areas include: strengthening the local economy, reducing inequality, and improving health outcomes.
- **Preston:** Preston's Community Wealth Building model[9] began with an exercise that analysed the spending of the city's anchor institutions and found that there was a £450 million 'leakage' of spending outside of Lancashire. The anchor institutions agreed a

7 Marianna Mazzucato, Sarah Doyle, Nick Kimber, Dan Wainwright and Grace Wyld, Mission Critical 01: Statecraft for 21st Century, The Future Governance Forum, May 2024.

8 Inclusive Growth Leeds, Leeds Anchors | Inclusive Growth Leeds.

9 CLES, 'How we built community wealth in Preston', CLES_Preston-Document_WEB-AW.pdf.

statement of intent to better retain wealth locally by redirecting spending toward local businesses and cooperatives. Where the local supplier market was too thin to be competitive, the council supported new businesses and cooperatives to fill the gap.

- **Manchester:** In 2016, Manchester City Council was one of the first local authorities to increase its social value weighting to 20%. Their social value framework[10] applies to all of their tenders, and suppliers are required to make a demonstrable contribution towards at least one of the social value priorities. It is also a locally adaptable framework to address different needs in specific areas. For example, in North Manchester they have created a 'social benefits framework' which has generated over 3,000 jobs, provided work experience for people facing disadvantage, and given support to local charities.

- **Bristol:** Bristol's One City Approach[11] is a long-term vision (currently running up to 2050), co-developed across sectors (public, private, voluntary, community and social enterprise), aligning Bristol's priorities around shared goals. The approach is described as a way to sequence activity to meet long-term goals; a tool for partners to use to meaningfully engage with the city's future; and a way of describing what Bristol will be like in the future.

- **Plymouth:** Team Plymouth[12] is an example of a place mobilising around a single catalyst, in this case, defence investment. Launched in September 2025, Team Plymouth unites anchor institutions and key stakeholders around shared themes to ensure that the investment in defence has benefits for residents beyond the defence sector itself.

These examples emerged from our interviews, the workshop, and literature analysis. In our economic analysis, we found that in the top ten local authorities with the most similar sectoral composition compared to Camden, Manchester had the most similar sectoral composition, Bristol was the fourth most similar, and Leeds was the seventh most similar.[13] For further comparison, Camden's GVA (Gross Value Added) in 2023 was around £40 billion, in Leeds it was around £37 billion, and in Manchester it was around £36 billion.[14] While the different scales (a city compared to a London borough) may not be directly comparable to Camden, their underlying principles provide useful insight into how places have shaped inclusive growth.

10 Manchester City Council, Social Value Policy, Social Value Policy | Manchester City Council.

11 Bristol One City, The One City Approach - Bristol One City.

12 Invest Plymouth, Team Plymouth | Invest Plymouth.

13 See Appendix A.

14 ONS, UK small area gross value added (GVA) estimates, UK small area gross value added (GVA) estimates - Office for National Statistics.

The context of Camden's significant assets, scale of its economy, and being a borough within London impacts market flows, supply chain relationships and spending 'leakage' outside of the borough. The unique characteristics of Camden do not prevent us from taking inspiration from different contexts, but is important to acknowledge that its influence within the Greater London economy will need to be considered alongside its role as a local authority.

In these examples, each place took stock of how their current system works, what issues are arising, and what needs to change to shift outcomes. Taken together, they share common elements that offer transferable lessons:

1. Diagnose the problem
2. Build relationships around a shared vision
3. Create governance structures
4. Embed priorities into organisation systems
5. Monitor and adapt

Diagnose the problem

Diagnosing problems facing the local area can be done through data-driven approaches, such as economic analysis, and collaboratively with local stakeholders including businesses, residents, community and volunteer organisations to identify shared priorities.

Both the Leeds and Preston models were data-driven, built on the analysis of local business and anchor institution spending. The Leeds Anchor Network was established after research found that if ten anchor organisations moved 10% of their spend to local suppliers it would generate £196 million for the city economy.[15] Preston's leakage mapping found that only 5% of anchor institution spending was spent in Preston and 39% within Lancashire, meaning £450 million was 'leaking' outside of the Lancashire economy.[16] This also shows the value of understanding an economy at more than one scale. Camden will similarly need to think about its position both as a borough in its own right and as part of London.

The second route to diagnosis is understanding the problems affecting local stakeholders. When designing Manchester's Social Value Framework, one co-design session was held with the voluntary sector and resident representatives, and another with current and prospective suppliers and membership bodies. Both groups were asked for their priorities, and their overlapping priorities informed the resulting framework. Bristol's One City Approach began at a City Gathering, where 70 civic leaders from every sector across the city came

15 Inclusive Growth Leeds, Leeds Anchors FAQ's, Leeds Anchors FAQ's | Inclusive Growth Leeds.

16 CLES, 'How we built community wealth in Preston', CLES_Preston-Document_WEB-AW.pdf.

together to discuss Bristol's big challenges and ways they could be tackled together.

Each of these examples began by clearly identifying the problem they wanted to solve. For Leeds, this was how to leverage anchor institutions more beneficially for the city. For Preston, it was identifying and addressing financial leakage. For Manchester, it was asking what social value should achieve. For Bristol, it was building one shared vision across the whole city.

The common thread is that Camden's starting point must be establishing the central issue and ensuring the '*why*' behind any strategy is grounded in the problems facing residents and stakeholders.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- What does 'inclusive growth' mean to Camden Council?
- What problems are local stakeholders, including businesses, residents, and voluntary groups in Camden, facing right now? Where do these overlap?
- How do different communities experience opportunities and barriers to contributing to and benefiting from Camden's growth?
- What existing strengths/assets can Camden Council build on to support more inclusive growth?
- Which outcomes are most important over the next 5-10 years?
- What does it mean to live a good life in Camden now and in the years to come?

Build relationships around a shared vision

Once priorities have been established through diagnosis, the next step is to build relationships with stakeholders around a shared vision. This involves encouraging buy-in and ownership so that all partners are working towards the same goal.

The common theme across the examples is that time and effort were invested in relationship building so that key stakeholders felt committed to a shared goal and had genuine ownership over the vision, rather than experiencing it as a top-down approach from the council.

The Leeds Anchor Network in particular spent time building trust and shared ambition with its stakeholders before expecting any behaviour change. The lessons from Leeds highlights that securing commitment early on from even a small group of influential stakeholders across sectors can generate momentum and cohesion in the longer term. The Preston Model shows a similar pattern - a

shared sense of civic responsibility for a good local economy can bring anchor institutions together. Building relationships around the belief that a thriving local economy benefits everyone encourages organisations and businesses to go beyond their formal duties to serve the wider public interest.

In our workshop that informed this paper, the example of Team Plymouth was discussed, and showed that the relationship building was centred on the '*why*', and grounded in evidence, so everyone understood the need for behaviour change. Both Team Plymouth and the Leeds Anchor Network underline the importance of buy-in from partners at the highest level to drive behaviour in their institutions.

A further lesson from Plymouth is that they drew on existing relationships with key stakeholders rather than starting from scratch. Camden Council already has excellent relationships and strong relational practice skills. Rather than building a new programme from the ground up, the focus should be on identifying which relationships already exist and how they can be strengthened. This will also help in understanding which anchor institutions, and to what extent, the council has influence with, as well as what can be realistically changed in the short, medium, and long-term.

It is important when relationship building that the reason for bringing a group together is clear and purpose driven. This may mean that more than one group is necessary to tackle certain issues. For example, addressing local spending and hiring may call for a network of businesses and anchor institutions, whereas working with other London boroughs on issues beyond Camden's control alone may call for a network of local authorities, potentially drawing on ones that already exist, such as Central London Forward.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- What networks and relationships already exist? And how is power and decision-making distributed across them?
- Are the current networks fit for achieving the council's overarching aims? Are there any gaps or changes to be made?
- Who should be included in the networks and why?
- What is the 'why' that will resonate across stakeholders?
- How can relationships be strengthened before behavioral change is expected?
- What decisions do organisations currently make independently that could become collaborative?
- Which relationships and decisions can Camden Council influence in the short, medium, and long-term, and where is its ability to influence limited?

Create governance structures

Clear governance structures are essential. These may take the form of networks, boards, working groups, or new dedicated teams. These should be collaborative, involving multiple stakeholders from different sectors and groups (such as the council, universities, anchor institutions, business groups, and community representatives), so that power and responsibility are shared across the group. This shared ownership enables genuine buy-in. Structures should also have clearly designated roles and responsibilities, so accountability for driving priorities forward is unambiguous. A concern raised throughout this research was that attempts at embracing inclusive growth interventions elsewhere have stalled when accountability and responsibility were never clearly assigned. One participant with experience told us that in this scenario, many of those with the ability to act will consider their core pressures and conclude '*nobody will sack me if I don't deliver on this agenda*'.

A key lesson from the Leeds Anchor Network is that leadership is shared across its membership, different organisations chair the groups best suited to their expertise. This increases members' sense of ownership and reflects the council's role as convenor, knowing who is best placed to lead on a given issue. It also makes it easier to track responsibility and measure progress since it is clear who is leading and accountable on each issue. Leeds' experience also points to the importance of finding the right meeting rhythm to maintain momentum. For them, senior leaders meet quarterly while sub-groups meet more regularly on specific issues such as employment or sustainability.

Governance may require creating a new team. For example, the City Office was created to support the Bristol One City Approach. A designated team sitting within the council can provide strategic planning and tools to support those implementing the vision. As the City Office sits outside political cycles, it can also act as a supportive function outside of political priorities.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- Which existing governance structures can be strengthened or aligned to support inclusive growth, and where are new structures needed?
- For each group and network: Who convenes? Who chairs? Who is accountable and how? How is progress evaluated and who is responsible for this?
- How often should partners meet?
- What resources are needed to keep collaboration functioning?
- What role should residents play in shaping these networks, participating in them, and holding them to account?

Embed priorities into organisation structures

Inclusive growth must become a way of working, rather than a peripheral objective sitting on top of existing processes. This will involve embedding a clear, shared definition of what inclusive growth means in Camden so that it becomes an approach running across council functions, not the responsibility of a single team.

This may mean changing how some processes are done. For example, in Preston, encouraging local spending and helping new businesses fill supply gaps required simplifying procurement processes, building knowledge of local suppliers, and identifying competitive local contracts. Manchester's Social Value Framework required changes to their procurement and commissioning processes to embed a new goal of a 20% social value weighting in their contracts. Manchester also considered how this could be reinforced, introducing financial incentives: financial penalties for underperformance and retrospective payment for overachieving. This appears to be paying off, as reports show that in 2024 suppliers had overperformed in 14 out of 18 KPIs - a tangible outcome of this was that 239 new jobs were created, compared to the target of 45.[17]

To begin this process, inclusive growth needs to be embedded across internal processes and departments with greater coherence. There should be a good level of economic literacy among teams to understand what inclusive growth means in practice. Currently, inclusive growth is not yet understood to the same degree as relational practice within Camden Council. This risks it remaining the work of a small number of committed individuals which will not be sufficient to meet the scale of the opportunity. Ensuring the whole council and any networks share a clear understanding of inclusive growth, and then introducing inclusive growth targets across all directorates, particularly for budget holders, could be one way to steer strategic and consistent decision making.

In Section 3, we explore the role of purpose and storytelling in sustaining a new inclusive growth strategy. A clarity of purpose can only emerge when political decisions are made about what is to be prioritised. While definitions can provide a framework for a shared understanding of a project, it is decisions about political priorities - based on the challenges and opportunities in an area - that ultimately shape implementation. Camden may choose to prioritise youth unemployment, for instance, which will require trade-offs on wider agendas that may be considered important for inclusive growth. That may involve accepting higher costs to extend provision or funding new activity for this cohort and being explicit about what other work will need to be scaled back or cancelled.

Where the overriding purpose is not clear, and trade-offs not acknowledged and calibrated, confusion will undermine strategic decision-making and the workforce will feel less accountable to a strategy that is not clear about what needs to change in order to meet objectives. This, in turn, makes it difficult for external partners to fully buy in and develop partnerships capable of impact. Moreover, it is unlikely that the public would notice a strategy that fails to communicate a noticeable signal of intent and direction. Where internal

17 Cooperative Councils Network, 'Creating a Social Value Ecosystem', Creating a Social Value Ecosystem - Cooperative Councils Innovation Network.

challenges emerge over specific definitions, the political leadership will need to act to ensure it has the information required to take a decision on how it wishes to interpret and implement inclusive growth.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- Which council functions have the greatest influence over the issues that need to be addressed?
- Which partner organisations have equivalent influence?
- Which existing processes already shape these outcomes and how would they need to change?
- Does everyone within the council understand the role they play in meeting Camden's inclusive growth goals?

Monitor and adapt

The council should be clear on how it will measure progress against its priorities, and build in regular points to revisit and adjust where necessary. None of the examples drawn on here are static one-off programmes. They have changed and adapted as the local context has required them to and as priorities have evolved. Bristol's One City Approach is explicit that it is not a fixed document; it is revised annually and adjusted to the city's current needs.

Monitoring is not a box-ticking exercise; it ensures progress is being made, encourages accountability, momentum, and motivation. There is a clear demand for inclusive growth to be measured in ways that connect to how people live day-to-day. Camden Council reports on programmes, activities, and investment, but less so on how these collectively contribute to the overall impact on residents' lives. This could be addressed by clearly linking economic strategy to indicators such as health, wages, housing quality, education outcomes, and life expectancy. GLC wellbeing framework provides a great opportunity to more closely link resident experience to inclusive growth by committing to a small selection of the indicators from the GLC that matter most to residents and would be impacted by inclusive growth.

It is worth considering what trade-offs this approach may require. Once priorities are clear, some proposals and investments may look less attractive if they do not align with them. It is important that the council can return to the structures it has put in place when making these decisions and is clear on what that process looks like.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- Aligned with Camden Council's priorities, what should be measured to best reflect change?
- How often will progress be reviewed, and how will this feed into the evolution of the strategy?
- How will this information be shared with residents, businesses, anchor institutions, and other stakeholders?
- What types of investment best aligns with Camden Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy? And what trade-offs may that require?
- How will Camden Council review how trade-offs are managed so that decisions are always aligned with priorities?
- How can the Good Life Camden wellbeing framework be used to measure outcomes that the Inclusive Growth Strategy is seeking to achieve?

Part 1 conclusion

Taken together, these transferable lessons show what making orchestration a fundamental feature of a strategy can look like in practice, and how other places have used their existing relationships to achieve tangible outcomes. The five key examples highlighted here are to act as inspiration. Camden's task is to build on these elements (diagnosis, relationships, governance, embedding, and monitoring), using its existing strengths as a foundation and putting in place the governance and organisational systems to turn an inclusive growth strategy into action that yields results. The borough's strong anchor institutions and networks already give it a head start; the opportunity is to convert that advantage into a directed plan that delivers inclusive growth in practice.

Part 2: Skills and Employment

Camden's economy is most often described through the lens of its knowledge economy, including life sciences and technology, clustered around the Knowledge Quarter. The Knowledge Quarter, situated within a one-mile radius of Kings Cross, hosts over 30 knowledge-based institutions. However, most residents experience the economy very differently. The economic activity in the borough generates around £40 billion[18] GVA a year (according to 2023 data) and hosts world-class anchor institutions, with a median equivalised household income of £52,048[19] in 2025 - yet 42%[20] of residents live in poverty. Camden is a borough of exceptional economic output, but not all residents share in that success the same way some businesses do.

Designing an inclusive growth strategy around local needs means giving both residents and businesses a voice in shaping its direction and genuine power to determine what they need. This should be woven throughout the strategy. For the council, this requires understanding what co-design would mean for its individual context, focusing on the areas it has influence over such as local recruitment, skills pathways, commissioning and procurement, and local business engagement. It is also important not to see residents as a homogenous group but to understand complex and overlapping barriers they face, driven by persistent inequalities based on socioeconomic background, gender, race, age and disability. Residents should be involved throughout the process to ensure that any changes, and their outcomes, will sufficiently meet their needs. Camden Council already has a history of using co-design and participatory approaches and it is vital to ensure such approaches remain central to the inclusive growth strategy.

An inclusive growth strategy should start from where most residents actually experience the economy. While most residents may not relate to the language of 'inclusive growth', they can relate to whether they can access jobs, and whether those jobs pay well enough and offer career progression. This means addressing the foundational and middle economy by improving the quality, progression and accessibility of those jobs, while ensuring residents can benefit from growth in the borough's high-value sectors. This also requires a recognition of the wider ecosystem that enables economic participation, including services and networks that help residents develop skills, find work, and pursue new opportunities.

An inclusive growth strategy should go beyond helping residents access Camden's existing economy to reshaping the economy so that it works better for the people who already live there.

18 ONS, UK small area gross value added (GVA) estimates, UK small area gross value added (GVA) estimates - Office for National Statistics.

19 Camden Council, State of the Borough 2026 report, State of the Borough 2026: Inclusive Local Economy - Camden Council.

20 Camden Council, Strategic Statement on Inclusive Growth (SC/2026/14), 25 February 2026.

Inspiration can come from:

- **West Midlands:** The West Midlands Growth Plan[21] includes a dedicated section on the everyday economy, in recognition that industrial strategies that prioritise high-growth sectors risk overlooking the parts of the economy that underpin daily life and which are where the majority of residents are employed.
- **East Midlands:** The Opportunity Escalator[22], designed for the East Midlands, asked what skills the region's existing workforce already has and identified realistic career paths. The tool underpins industrial strategy, skills planning, and investment and seeks to tackle barriers including transport, childcare, health, and housing.
- **North East:** Tackling child poverty is a defining priority of Mayor Kim McGuinness and this priority is being threaded through the region's strategies. For example, looking at childcare as a way of helping parents enter and remain in employment.

Improving job quality and career progression in the everyday economy

The everyday economy, also known as the foundational economy, refers to the services and goods required to sustain our everyday lives.[23] A significant proportion of Camden residents work in the financial sector (32%).[24] However, the remaining two-thirds predominantly work in public administration, education and health (21%); distribution, hotels and restaurants (includes retail) (17%); and transport and communications (10%). Due to the large proportion of Camden residents these sectors employ, changes within them would have a significant impact on residents' lives. These sectors are essential to Camden's daily functioning yet are generally associated with lower pay and less job security. These sectors should be at the heart of an inclusive growth strategy, investing in improving pay, progression, and job quality within them.

The task is to turn the everyday service economy into good work while opening up the wider labour market. This means looking at how jobs can be improved where residents currently work, as well as how residents can develop the skills needed to progress into better-quality, better-paid roles. This requires supporting businesses to improve job quality through offering more secure hours, fair pay, flexible working practices, and routes for career progression. These changes would provide greater financial stability, widen job

21 West Midlands Combined Authority, West Midlands Growth Plan.

22 The Opportunity Escalator.

23 Enterprise Research Centre, Rethinking the Everyday Economy: Why Improving "Average" Firms Matters Most - Enterprise Research Centre, 1 June 2026.

24 Office for National Statistics (ONS), annual population survey, Nomis, 2024 data. Note 2024 data used to allow for comparison with non-residents using the most recent (2024) Business Register and Employment (BRES) survey.

opportunities to people with caring responsibilities, and support residents in building their careers.

The West Midlands Growth Plan[25] offers two useful examples of this approach in practice. First, alongside its plan for high-growth sectors, and in keeping with its tagline of 'growth for everyone', it sets out a strategy for the everyday economy. It recognises that this part of the economy makes up nearly two-thirds of jobs in the region and that health, education, retail, hospitality, construction, and transport provide the services that keep the day-to-day economy running. Second, it is explicit about the change residents and businesses should see and feel. For residents, this means more money and better living standards, more secure work, a better balance between work and caring responsibilities, and a stronger voice in the workplace, with knock-on effects for health outcomes and local spending. For businesses, it means better recruitment, motivation and staff retention, and more money in residents' pockets.

Camden Council should look at the jobs people already have and ask what are the experiences of this work. Are people leaving work because of the impact on their health? Are jobs paying enough? Do they offer flexible working hours to meet caring responsibilities? Can people progress in their careers?

Improving the everyday economy is not just about improving the quality of the job someone already does; it is also about helping residents progress into realistic, better-quality jobs, building on the skills they already have. The Opportunity Escalator, developed for the East Midlands, is a useful model to draw on. Rather than starting from current job vacancies, it begins by mapping the skills residents already have and the better paid roles those skills could realistically lead to, allowing them to estimate the gap to be closed. For a tool like this to be useful however, depends on the council being able to collect good-quality, granular local labour market data. Camden Council may need to assess what data they currently have and any missing gaps and address that first.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- How can we sufficiently understand residents' experience of Camden's economy, including their experience of the quality and accessibility of the jobs available to them?
- How can residents shape future skills and employment priorities? And what would genuine co-design look like?
- How can Camden Council balance investment in the sectors that generate the most wealth with those that employ the greatest number of residents?
- Which foundational economy sectors offer the greatest opportunity to improve living standards?

25 West Midlands Combined Authority, West Midlands Growth Plan.

- Improving job quality in care, hospitality, and community services often means accepting higher commissioning costs. The council has a direct lever where they commission these services. Is this a trade-off Camden Council would consider?

Growth needs clear pathways towards opportunity

At present, the spotlight on turning growth into opportunity in Camden largely falls on career pathways into life sciences and technology careers through apprenticeships, job vacancies, and skills development. The tension between growth and opportunity was acknowledged in the Knowledge Quarter strategy (the KQ2050: a Knowledge Quarter Unlocked strategy[26]) that highlights meaningful anchor partnerships including the London AI Campus[27] with Google, and the STEAM[28] programme which connects students with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) industry employers. However, for residents furthest away from the knowledge economy and these careers, including those who live in the areas of highest poverty, it needs to be clearer how they benefit from Camden's high-growth sectors and regeneration projects. This should be a live consideration of the Euston regeneration project.

Taking this approach could look like formalising what business and anchor institutions are expected to contribute beyond funding, including technological capability, skills programmes, and local spending. Pathways should be designed to reach all residents across the borough and be based on local need as well as the demand of employers. Local spending is central to Preston's Community Wealth Building model, which encourages anchor institutions to spend locally, for example on catering and cleaning contracts. These are ways that anchor institutions can support residents in the jobs they already hold, rather than limiting their contribution to new job creation.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- How can Camden Council influence the impact of high-growth sectors so that the benefits are felt by all residents across the borough, including those furthest away from these opportunities?
- What commitments can major employers make to resident skills and career pathways?
- How can business growth create wider benefits for residents?
- Beyond job creation and investment, what can anchor institutions offer in Camden to provide tangible benefits to residents?

26 KQ 2050: A Knowledge Quarter Unlocked A Strategy for an Inclusive Innovation District, KQ2050 Strategy 2023 FINAL.pdf, 2023.

27 Camden Learning, London AI Campus, London AI Campus - Camden Learning.

28 Camden Council, Camden STEAM, Camden STEAM - Camden Council.

- How will Camden Council measure the benefits of high-growth sectors and regeneration projects on its residents?
- How can residents shape the commitments that major employers, anchor institutions, and regeneration projects make to their communities?
- Which aspects of the Euston regeneration project can the council influence to maximise the benefits for residents and local businesses?

Interconnected barriers to employment

Camden's economic inactivity rate exceeds the London average (25% compared to 21% in 2023[29]), and in 2025 a striking 34%[30] of inactivity was attributed to long-term illness, compared with 19% across London. Therefore, the issue of inactivity goes beyond a skills gap. Addressing this requires systems thinking, recognising the complex and overlapping barriers that feed into economic inactivity including health, childcare, housing, transport, and caring responsibilities.

The North East's Working Well Hubs[31] offer one model for addressing this. They bring local authority officers, the Department for Work and Pensions, mental health services, housing associations and skills providers into a single accessible setting. This design more easily enables people to be connected to the right services. This is a model the Good Work Camden programme could extend to, treating access to work as a holistic issue across systems.

Camden Council is already taking this cross-system approach in some places. The Marmot Estates pilot, for example, uses co-design principles to work with residents on improving health and wellbeing across two estates. There are also examples of enabling work, for example providing small enabling grants to help with transport costs and accessibility. Extending this approach across the borough and applying it to skills and employment strategies would help embed a cross-system approach within the inclusive growth strategy.

Foundational barriers need to be addressed and understood as preventative measures that help people access and remain in work. In the workshop that fed into this research, one example of this was the work the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority is doing through their childcare strategy. This strategy is feeding into their wider goal of reducing child poverty, viewing accessible and affordable childcare systems as vital to labour market access, particularly for mothers. This is a useful example of a place with a core mission and where multiple strands of policy contribute.

29 ONS, Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity in Camden, Camden's employment, unemployment and economic inactivity - ONS, 2023.

30 ONS, annual population survey, Nomis, 2025 data.

31 Employment and Skills North Tyneside, Working Well North Tyneside, Working Well North Tyneside - Employment & Skills North Tyneside.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- How can Camden Council identify and address the root causes of economic inactivity?
- How can Camden Council work with residents to understand the barriers they face and help to shape the solutions?
- Which barriers, if addressed, would have the biggest impact on helping residents access work?
- How can Camden Council help different services and providers work together towards shared employment outcomes?
- How can employment support connect with interrelated issues such as housing, childcare, health and transport?
- Could Good Work Camden act as a model to expand to tackle multiple barriers of unemployment across the borough?

Part 2 conclusion

Addressing these questions will shift Camden's approach from helping residents access the existing economy, to shaping the economy so it works better for people. Camden's growth is significant, but growth in the life sciences, technology and knowledge sectors will not close the gap between the borough's economic output and residents' lived experience of poverty alone. Closing the gap requires intervention in the sectors where residents work, and the systems around employment. However, these strands should not be considered in isolation; investing in the everyday economy without connecting residents to growth in the Knowledge Quarter, for example, risks locking people into sectors with little progression. Equally, opening pathways into high-growth careers without addressing interconnected barriers risks reaching only those already closest to the opportunity. These scenarios require enabling residents to have real influence over the strategies that impact them and their needs. While an approach that addresses skills and employment in these ways should be embedded throughout the council and the borough, the Euston regeneration project offers a particularly valuable opportunity to test what can be achieved.

Part 3: Purpose and storytelling

How can Camden tell a coherent story about inclusive growth in a way that supports the purpose of the new strategy and resonates with residents?

Beyond the press release - a narrative that mobilises people and culture

The purpose that steers a new inclusive growth strategy should be clear and easily described in plain language. This discipline will aid the development of a narrative that is user friendly for the organisation and more accessible for residents.

A study of the Viable Cities[32] project in Sweden explores the role 'Narratives of Change' play in mobilising people in the context of local urban strategies. The aim of a narrative in this context is to *'provide a relatable framework for groups of actors and [to] shape our understanding of the world'.*

It finds that narratives that blur the lines between the author / institution and the public are more likely to be picked up and repeated by audiences, giving greater purchase to the values and norms the institution seeks to promote. While action plans should provide the necessary analysis and evidence for decisions in a transparent and accessible way, narratives (or mission statements) should perform a distinct, but related function. A practitioner from the Viable Cities project argues that: *'the vision statement is the story that makes sense of the facts... the plans are "the how", the statement is "the why"'.*

An effective narrative that works with evidence and the lessons of best practice, may help a complex project appear more relevant and immediate to those delivering it as well as residents. Insights from More in Common and Climate Outreach point to the evidence for this focus on clear and relevant messages.[33] The same research highlights positive responses to leaders and organisations that demonstrate passion, empathy and credibility specifically. The role local authorities play as champions of their place with close proximity to local challenges and wide-ranging responsibilities means they are better placed than more distant levels of government to display these attributes in a sophisticated way. During the workshop that informed this project, expert practitioners reflected the benefits of local government narratives that authentically amplify the voices and experiences of residents as well as a sense of how a community's journey will shape what comes next.

While communication outputs play an important role in this work, this alone will not be enough. The extent to which residents notice the benefits of a new economic strategy will be determined by their interaction with services, local infrastructure and the environment.

32 Dobroć, P., Bögel, P., & Upham, P. (2023). Narratives of change: Strategies for inclusivity in shaping socio-technical future visions. Futures, 145, 103076.

33 Climate Outreach, Beyond 'trusted messengers', 21 May 2024.

Clarity of purpose, reinforced by subsequent decisions, is more likely to mobilise people (both internally and externally) and help justify difficult trade-offs. Where the communication of a strategic purpose is divorced from wider delivery, it is unlikely to impact upon daily decision-making throughout an organisation. In that scenario, any new message is likely to be broadly ignored by residents. In recent years, efforts to promote and implement a foundational (or everyday) economy approach have been found to falter when public servants and partners have struggled to understand overly complex terminology. An effort to apply a similar policy approach should seek to avoid repeating this mistake.[34]

Importance of narrative for the workforce as well as the citizen

The Bloomberg Centre for Cities has helpfully argued that any government workforce needs to feel equipped, authorised and motivated to work towards the purpose set by its leadership.

> *'People's values, beliefs, behaviors and professional logic add up to an organizational culture that can be hard to alter. Clarifying what the purpose of the work is, which values should guide it… and what success looks like will be as important as addressing structural issues and redesigning user experience.'*[35]
>
> *Jorrit De Jong, Director, Bloomberg Center for Cities, Harvard University*

When considering how to implement a new strategy then, a local authority should reflect on its existing organisational culture and consider what is needed to maintain or enhance a positive culture or to address failure or dysfunction. This task is more extensive than a communications exercise but the benefits of such a robust approach would allow an effective council to tell a more authentic story that is better connected with the services residents experience in practice.

The importance of aligning organisational purpose with everyday practice can be reflected in how local authorities deliver services. A case study[36] from the Harvard City Leadership Initiative provides a striking example of how a shared commitment to improving residents' wellbeing can translate into practical changes and how organisations work together. The US city authority used a cross-silo solution to better tackle risks to public health. By training building inspectors to make social service referrals, the city was able to act on public health risks that had previously been identified, but not properly addressed.

34 Senedd Research, Fixing the foundations? The foundational economy in Wales 8 July 2025.

35 Harvard Kennedy School (interview with Jorrit De Jong): How governments can move beyond bureaucracy 25 March 2025.

36 Harvard City Leadership Initiative, More than the Sum of the Parts: Integrating Housing Inspections and Social Services to Improve Community Health 9 June 2025.

This allowed an improved service to enhance the quality of life for some of the city's most vulnerable residents at the same time as increasing the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the workforce.

The purpose and priorities defined in any strategy for economic inclusion should act as a catalyst for innovations that motivate the workforce at the same time as offering a tangible difference to the public that speaks to the council's values.

Time and place: How we got here, where we are going

While it represents an important principle, the term inclusive growth will mean little to most residents and would, by itself, be unlikely to help link a service reform or new project to the authority's wider strategic purpose.

The 'Step Up' project[37] designed to support low income workers in London reflected the need to avoid jargon as far as possible to engage participants. A new inclusive economic strategy should allow time for the development of messaging that conveys its purpose in plain language with consistent themes that are likely to resonate.

The borough's history should be captured to frame what Camden hopes to achieve next, drawing on recent work such as 'We Make Camden' to demonstrate authenticity.

Camden's distinctive story could be leveraged to amplify the authority's credibility and values and make clear how its priorities match the needs and hopes of the place. The use of time as a frame also allows a local authority to communicate abstract ideas in a relevant and emotional way, especially when messages tap into a challenge or characteristic that is seen as enduring. Furthermore, by establishing the borough's history and present as the starting point for a new strategy, the local authority can be honest about the trade-offs and challenges it faces, including the external pressures that fuel them.

Inspiration could come from

- **The West Midlands**: Telling the region's story is one of the four strategic priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority's Local Growth Plan. The plan sets out to tell "a more sophisticated story grounded in who we are", told through a diverse range of voices and rooted in the variety of its places and shared experiences. Steven Knight, the creator of Peaky Blinders, wrote the Plan's prologue, which serves as a striking example of how to connect the history and culture of a place with its economic future. The combined authority also specifically regards the investment leveraged against the Growth Plan as a measure of the impact of effective storytelling over time.

37 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, How local industrial strategies can deliver inclusive growth 28 February 2019.

- **Wales:** *Better Jobs, Closer to Home* became the public rationale for the Welsh Government's drive to embrace the foundational economy, specifically within the deprived South Wales Valleys area. A complex industrial policy encompassing procurement, housing, business support and planning was translated into a plain challenge that spoke to an enduring frustration felt within the community. While this was led by a larger, devolved layer of government, the project was deliberately rooted in one place, which allowed for a focus on messaging the public understood. The frame was regularly used to promote interventions such as the decision to locate a new public body's HQ in the area and the use of supported employment for the procurement of visible contracts such as NHS and transport garments.

A consistent, shared narrative also does some of the important work that budgets and formal levers alone cannot. Camden's resources do not match the challenges its residents face, with child poverty and housing being prime examples of issues which are fundamentally shaped by wider UK decisions. However, the ability to convene and set a consistent direction lets local leaders drive change beyond the formal boundaries of their powers. Such an approach also allows partners to more easily attach their work to a shared project that is greater than the sum of its parts.

To inject a sense of pace and focus, Camden could choose one symbolic, challenge-led mission from within the new strategy to drive culture change inside the organisation and how it works with partners. Given the well-understood – and enduring – economic disparity set out in Part 2, Camden could choose to make opportunities for young people a priority that tests a Total Place[38] style intervention that brings anchors such as Google and UCL into a collaborative project driven by a new guiding narrative.

That mission would set out how the priority/challenge speaks to Camden's journey as a community, who will benefit and what will need to change to make it happen. That should include what is needed, and from whom, including City Hall, Whitehall, businesses and the council itself. The council could, for instance, declare consistently that '*Camden cannot prosper while children live in poverty*' as part of a mantra that leans into the well-understood picture of stark inequalities within the local economy. Against this backdrop, Camden could also use a new narrative to encourage a sense of belonging, using an everyday concept to promote the collective benefits of a more inclusive economy.

38 Future Governance Forum: 'Why Total Place is vital for Labour's chance of reforming public services' 16 March 2026.

Questions for Camden Council to ask:

- What is the Mission Statement that explains the purpose of the new strategy?
- Which challenge could galvanise positive changes to organisational culture in support of a new narrative for economic inclusion? How would partners and residents notice what has changed and why?
- How can the stories residents tell about Camden be reflected in the way the local authority defines its new goals?

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Camden already has a head start with its world-class anchor institutions, significant economic output, and strong relational practice. What is needed next is a shared definition of inclusive growth, clear governance to drive priorities, and to embed inclusive growth throughout the organisation.

The three themes discussed here are interconnected. Orchestrating anchor institutions and businesses behind a shared purpose requires a clear vision from the council, and to link resident benefits to the sectors and barriers that shape their everyday lives. A compelling story about Camden's future will only resonate if it reflects the experience of residents and is backed by the governance and decisions to deliver it.

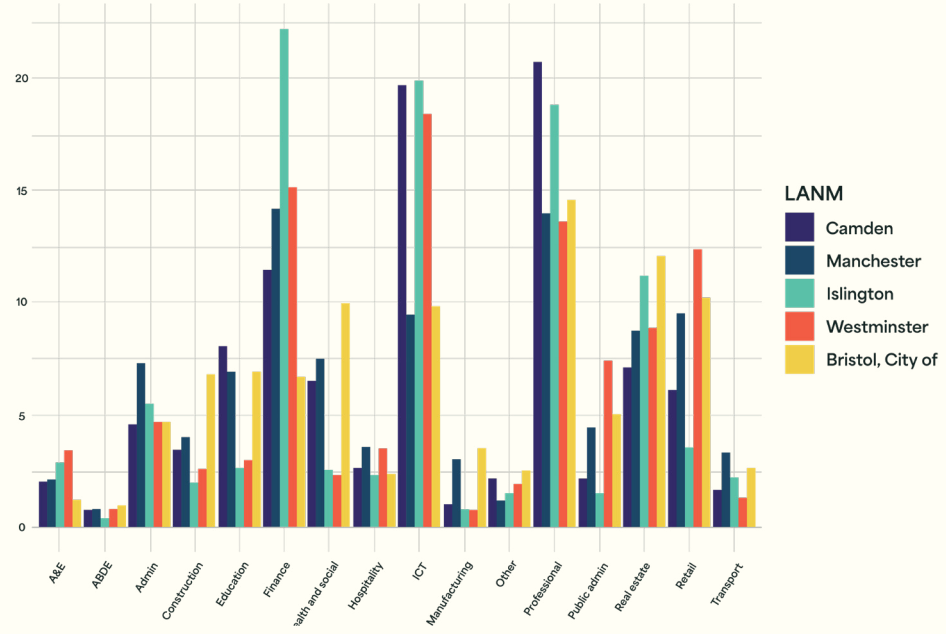
These aspects should be embedded throughout the whole borough with a focus on reducing inequalities. Additionally, the Euston regeneration project offers an opportunity to test a new inclusive growth approach in practice. It can act as a live site to orchestrate partners around a shared vision, it provides opportunities for co-design with residents so they can better access the benefits of the project, and it can ground a borough-wide narrative in a tangible example. Camden's task now is to convert the advantages it currently holds into an ambitious inclusive growth strategy and a cohesive plan to deliver it in practice.

Appendix A: Economies with similar sectoral composition

The following analysis explores economies that are similar to Camden. Gross Value Added (GVA) has been used as the main indicator. The percent of total GVA that each sector contributes to each local authority's total GVA (for example, Professional Services make up 21% of Camden's GVA) was calculated for each of the 296 local authorities in England and compared Camden's sectoral makeup to find the closest match.

The closest match was calculated using the Kullback-Leibler Divergence, which is a measure of how much one probability distribution differs from another. Although these are not probability distributions, the calculation still identified close similarities between economies. The four most similar economies are visualised below:

GVA per sector as percent of total



Source: GRN analysis

The ten local authorities with most-similar sectoral composition to Camden are:

1. Manchester
2. Islington
3. Westminster
4. Bristol
5. Hackney
6. Cambridge
7. Leeds
8. Bracknell Forest
9. Tunbridge Wells
10. Mole Valley

GRN analysis from ONS data, source: Gross Value Added (GVA) - Office for National Statistics

FGF

Growth and Reform Network