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Olsen, Dennis (2026) Policy brief: embedding Arts and Humanities in Ageing Well policy. Documentation. University of West London, London Research & Policy Partnership, London, UK.

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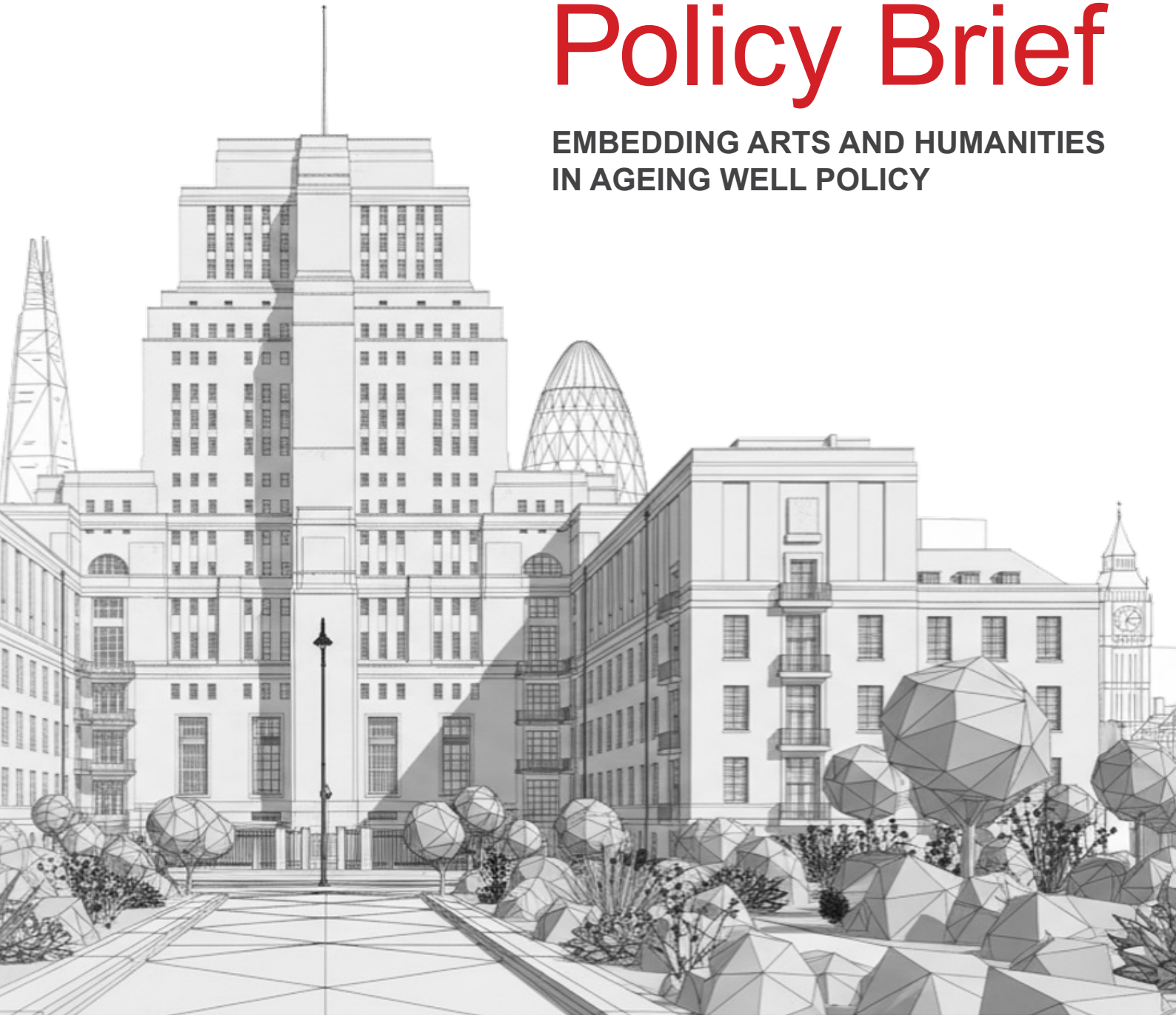
Policy Brief

EMBEDDING ARTS AND HUMANITIES IN AGEING WELL POLICY



LONDON RESEARCH & POLICY PARTNERSHIP

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Purpose

To offer a cost-effective, scalable model that helps London councils integrate arts and humanities insights into Ageing Well policy. The model broadens evidence use, strengthens case-making and improves policy relevance without increasing workload.*

The Problem

Local Ageing Well strategies across London overwhelmingly draw on biomedical, social science and statutory evidence. While essential, these sources do not fully reflect how ageing is experienced. Arts and humanities research – covering identity, narrative, language, place and cultural participation – is rarely cited explicitly, even when such insights already appear implicitly through consultation or lived experience.

When this lens is missing, policies risk becoming less inclusive, less holistic and less impactful, because they overlook how ageing is shaped by culture, meaning, representation and environment.

Why This Matters Now

- Older residents thrive when policy speaks to how ageing feels, not only how it functions.
- Arts and humanities perspectives help councils design strategies that recognise older people as community members, cultural participants and narrators of their own experience, not only as recipients of care.
- Incorporating cultural evidence also strengthens case-making, aligns with age-friendly frameworks and broadens the research base used in public decision-making.
- When arts and humanities perspectives are missing, policies risk becoming less inclusive, less holistic and less effective because they overlook how identity, culture and lived experience shape ageing.
- Ultimately, this is about policies that genuinely enhance the quality of life and wellbeing of older Londoners.

* Although based on a pilot between the University of West London and Ealing London Borough Council, this brief provides general recommendations that can be adopted by any council–university partnership.

What We Did

London-wide ageing policy scan
We conducted online searches and enquiries with all London boroughs and the City of London to identify ageing-related policies, what evidence types they referenced and how ageing was framed.

West London evidence gap mapping
We completed a detailed review across Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hillingdon, Harrow and Hounslow. Documents were coded for topic, ageing presence and evidence type, highlighting where arts and humanities perspectives could add value.

Co-creation workshop
Senior council officers and university colleagues used creative, discussion-based methods to test alignment tools, explore practical barriers and design repeatable solutions that fit local government priorities and timelines.

From these steps, we developed a reusable Engagement Protocol and a practical Evidence Gap Map tool, both designed to scale beyond ageing.

What We Found

A systematic skew in evidence use

- Strong citation habits for biomedical, social science and legal sources.
- Arts and humanities principles appear only implicitly through community narratives.
- Cultural, experiential and place-based aspects of ageing appear far less often in published policy.

Officer-reported barriers

- Limited time and capacity to search beyond statutory evidence.
- Consultation fatigue among residents, especially older citizens frequently asked for input.
- Need for stronger political and organisational buy-in to diversify evidence.

Strong appetite to partner

Council and university staff endorsed light, repeatable practices that fit local cycles, support case-making and reduce ad-hoc searching. Participants wanted mechanisms that are easy to maintain and scalable across policy areas.

What we recommend

1 Set up a Council–University Research Alignment Forum

Purpose: Keep priorities synchronised, time evidence inputs to policy cycles and agree quick actions.

Format: Quarterly, 30 minutes, scheduled 12 months ahead.

Attendees: A council research or policy officer plus a university research/ impact lead.

Agenda: Upcoming strategy reviews; new evidence needs; funding calls; action log.

2 Create an Evidence Request Service

Purpose: Provide fast, scoped research syntheses officers can cite directly.

How it works:

- A single email intake form.
- Clear scoping questions and agreed turnaround times.
- Two tiers of output:
  - Rapid note (1–2 pages)
  - Short synthesis (2–4 pages)

Who delivers it: University researchers or the designated research partner.

3 Build a Council Policy Research Bank

Purpose: Make it easy for officers to access and cite relevant research.

How to build it:

- Collate council policies in one place.
- Add short, plain-language summaries curated by the university.
- Start with three cross-priority themes (e.g. Ageing Well, Digital Inclusion, Pride in Place).
- Update quarterly in line with the forum schedule.

4 Coordinate Collaborative Funding Applications

Purpose: Bring in external resources to sustain joint research and shared capacity.

Approach:

- Use the forum to identify suitable calls.
- Match opportunities to shared priorities.
- Assign named bid leads (one within the council, one within the university) with clear responsibilities.

Implementation Roadmap
First 90 Days

Week 0–2
Nominate council and university leads • Schedule three quarterly forum dates • Publish a simple agenda and action log template
Week 2–4
Launch the single email intake for evidence requests • Agree service levels for rapid notes and short syntheses • Select two live questions to test the service
Week 3–6
Seed the research bank with around twelve short summaries • Collate links to source documents and council policies
Week 6–8
Review turnaround times and officer feedback • Prioritise the next two topics for synthesis • Identify one to two joint funding calls
Week 8–12
Add six to eight new summaries to the research bank • Run two more evidence requests • Hold the first alignment forum

Benefits for Councils and Partners

- Stronger case-making through citable arts and humanities sources supporting statutory and clinical evidence
- Time savings through a standing pipeline for research requests
- Clearer links between lived experience, narrative insight and policy drafting
- Better resonance with residents when policy reflects identity, place and cultural participation
- Improved alignment with age-friendly frameworks and cross-priority strategies

Contact

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Acknowledgements

This policy brief draws on findings from the University of West London and Ealing London Borough Council pilot, funded by the London Research and Policy Partnership (LRaPP) under the Impact in Place initiative.

To cite this document:
doi.org/10.36828/report.14706.

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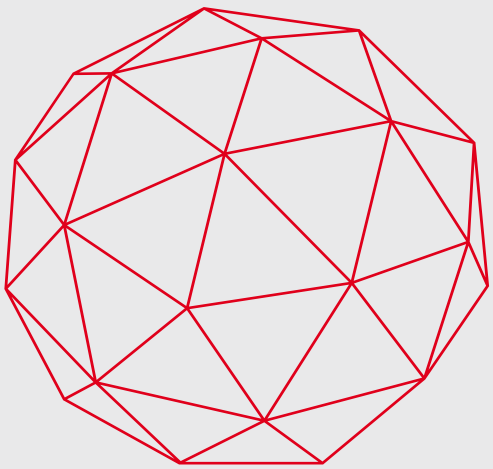
For further tools and resources, see the accompanying Evidence Gap Mapping, Engagement Protocol and related materials in this series.