Your Wellbeing, Your Government project initial report

Barriers to engagement for diverse communities and delivering better engagement of all diverse communities

Open Government Network Wales equality project

A report for the Open Government Network Wales Big Lottery funded project delivered by Diverse Cymru and C3SC

Introduction

This project intends to:

- identify barriers to engagement with the public sector for diverse communities in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan
- provide information on how the public sector works and how to get your voice heard to diverse communities and
- co-produce solutions and new ways of delivering engagement between public sector organisations and diverse communities

The first project events were training events. These skilled up diverse individuals in how the public sector works in Wales; the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and its implications for involving diverse communities; and current involvement methods.

After this training and information session participants discussed barriers they face to involvement and their first thoughts on solutions.

16 diverse individuals, 2 third sector representative organisations, and 2 public sector representatives attended the event in Cardiff on 26th January. Older and disabled people and women were particularly well represented. There were also BME and LGB people involved in the event and people between 26 and 60. It is important to note we encourage participants to complete equality monitoring forms and explain we use this information to ensure we are reaching all diverse communities and to take targeted action to reach communities who are not engaging with us. However, only 11 of the 20 people present completed equality monitoring forms.

13 diverse individuals and 2 representatives of public sector organisations attended the Vale of Glamorgan event on 31st January.

The second set of events for this project introduced participants to how public sector organisations currently engage diverse communities. These involved a range of public sector organisations presenting their current engagement methods to diverse individuals. After these presentations, participants discussed barriers to engagement and solutions. Public sector organisations and diverse individuals discussed potential new engagement models and solutions together to ensure these work for both diverse individuals and public sector organisations.

22 diverse individuals and 3 representatives of public sector organisations attended the event in Cardiff on 12th February.

6 diverse individuals and 4 representatives of public sector organisations attended the Vale of Glamorgan event on 15th February in Colcot.

The project is running a series of engagement events in March, April and May moving around different geographic communities in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. These include evening events in April to reach diverse individuals with caring or work responsibilities during the day. These events focus on public sector organisations and diverse individuals co-producing an engagement model. They explore and expand on barriers already identified and solutions suggested to develop a model that delivers effective involvement for diverse communities.

10 diverse individuals and representatives of community groups and 2 representatives of public sector organisations attended the Cardiff event in Llanederyn on 12th March. 4 diverse individuals and 1 representative of public sector organisations attended the Vale of Glamorgan event in lower Penarth on 13th March.

Some diverse individuals attended multiple events. Representatives of public sector organisations have remained relatively consistent or shared representation amongst a small team throughout the project to date. To date 48 different diverse individuals or representatives of community groups and 13 representatives of public sector organisations have attended our events.

This report is a summary of the barriers to involvement and initial thoughts about potential solutions. It presents a model or way of engaging diverse communities that meets everyone's needs. It intends to provide public sector organisations in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan with background information and to support public sector involvement in the project to co-produce improved involvement with diverse communities.

Initial project report

This is a summary report of the barriers to getting involved for diverse individuals expressed by participants in the project. The solutions have been co-produced by diverse individuals and public sector organisations. Further details and other issues raised will be part of the full report at the end of the project in June 2018.

This report ends with a proposed way of delivering engagement in ways that work more effectively for diverse communities.

We invite public sector organisations to consider signing up to deliver this model together.

Barriers to involving diverse people

Feeling engagement changes nothing

Many participants expressed frustration with current engagement by public sector organisations. They felt that they see no evidence of being listened to or changes in legislation, policy or practice when they do express their views and get involved.

Participants also felt that every current consultation or engagement activity is about cutting budgets and not about delivering services that meet the needs of diverse communities.

Some participants had experiences of trying to get involved and only receiving automated responses, which put them off. Others had experiences of having to form campaigning groups or work through third sector organisations to get to the right people and find someone who would take their concerns forward.

Some participants had experiences of receiving contradictory responses and information from different people in the same public sector organisation.

Many participants felt that even when they get involved things do not often change. Participants felt that getting involved and voicing their experiences and views is often pointless, as nothing changes. They felt disheartened and often disengage, especially in a culture of constant consultations on what seems like the same issue. They also felt less likely to engage as cutting immediate costs seems to be more important than preventing issues or meeting people's needs, wishes, and outcomes.

Participants felt 50+ forums and petitions are good ways of voicing views and experiences, but they are not accessible to everyone.

Lack of information on how to get involved

Another key barrier was that people do not know who to go to and how to express their views. Participants felt that the public sector system is very complex and it is very hard to know who you need to speak to. They felt that the only way to raise issues and get their voices heard to is to have a personal connection with decision-makers.

They felt that Councillors and other politicians are only visible during election campaigns and need to be out in the community more. They felt politicians are not very accountable to the public between elections and they need to be.

Participants felt that when contacting organisations does not make a difference and Councillors are not very accessible, they have to threaten to take an issue to the media to be taken seriously and see action.

Another barrier was the lack of diversity amongst elected members, as people do not see themselves represented and therefore feel they will not be listened to. This lack of diversity also means that issues facing different communities are not highlighted in Council meetings effectively.

People felt they do not know who to raise an issue with or how to find out about consultations or engagement.

People also felt that sometimes issues that have an impact on them are decided through cabinet meetings and scrutiny committees, where there is little public notice or involvement.

They also raised issues with short consultation periods and difficulty finding out what is being consulted upon and when. They felt consultation only tends to happen on draft documents, when public sector organisations have already reached a conclusion on what the issues are and what they are going to do.

Participants felt it is important to be able to raise issues, their experiences, and possible solutions at the start of the process of developing or reviewing any legislation, policy, practice, or service. They felt involvement needs to be about identifying issues from citizens and addressing them, not just reviewing draft documents, changes, or service proposals.

Participants felt that there are many consultations, engagement events and experience surveys, but these are all separate. They felt that responses to one form of engagement or opportunity are not considered when public sector organisations look at any other, related changes. They felt that they often have to give their experience and views in response to several surveys or consultations and to several organisations to change any systemic issues or anything where more than one organisation has responsibility.

They felt there is no point of contact or way to raise an issue outside of the consultation process. They felt that there are ways to complain or complement services, but there are no ways to tell their story or experience and suggest solutions to issues.

They also felt consultations and engagement are geared towards people choosing from a range of drafted options. Participants felt that the public have ideas and views that can improve services and experiences for diverse communities. They felt public sector organisations need to proactively capture their views and ideas at the start of

the engagement process and throughout service design, development, implementation and review.

Language and accessibility

People felt there is too much jargon and public sector speak in engagement and consultation. They felt it is difficult to understand what proposals are and what they should say. They also felt it is very difficult to find out what is coming up at scrutiny committees or council meetings with enough notice to be able to get involved.

They felt language used and the format of meetings is too formal and prescribed, which excludes people.

They felt meetings and engagement events are usually held during the day and in one central location. This stops many people getting involved and will not reach all diverse citizens. Transport costs and the amount of time it takes to get to engagement events by public transport, costs and difficult arranging childcare or replacement care for carers are also barriers to getting involved. Another significant barrier is people not seeing the relevance of consultations or engagement to their lives and not having time to participate. The formal language used in consultations and engagement, which does not seem relevant to people's experiences, makes this worse.

Participants raised additional serious barriers around a lack of accessible formats, community languages and off-line information. People also felt Easy Read versions miss a lot of the key information and should include all the information in an accessible format.

People also expressed that this jargon makes them feel that they have to be able to use the same language and jargon to be heard. They felt that public sector organisations do not take their views and experiences seriously if they do not use the same public sector language in the documents.

Access, confidence and health

Participants expressed issues with involvement happening at particular times and places, with very limited options to get involved. Some disabled participants, especially people with fluctuating health conditions and mental ill health, found the lack of flexibility and short timescales stopped them getting involved. Venues used for engagement are also not always fully accessible. They felt this is particularly an issue in relation to sensory and mental health access.

Participants felt that they do not have the knowledge and information to felt involved. When information is available, they felt they lack confidence to speak up and have their say. They felt that community training, skill building, and confidence development should be widely available and promoted.

Effective ways to engage diverse individuals and communities

Engage early and base it on people's experiences

Participant felt that engagement should start with the public.

They felt engagement should not be about the public sector taking their agenda and drafts to people. Instead, public sector organisations should set their agenda by listening to people and continually involving them. The public sector's agenda should be people's agendas. This would also help address the concern that people feel that the titles of consultations or engagement activities are not relevant to them.

Participants felt we could give AMs, MPs, Councillors etc. written documents of how diverse communities want meetings run and what we want to see from them.

Participants felt public sector organisations use leading questions, which makes them feel engagement is a tick-box. Participants felt that trained researchers should be involved in designing engagement and surveys. Researchers should check questions for bias and provide open opportunities to say what they want to in every engagement activity or consultation.

Participants felt that with the stress of daily life, people will not get involved unless it is clear something is relevant to them. Public sector organisations must ensure all engagement activities are clear opportunities for people to tell their stories, share their experiences and suggest solutions relevant to their own lives.

Educate young people about their rights and engagement in schools

In the long-term participants felt that schools, colleges, and youth groups should educate young people on our rights, getting involved, and how to have our say. They felt this education must start in primary school and continue throughout education. They felt that children and young people becoming active citizens from an early age could address many barriers to engagement. Intergenerational working and sharing experiences could be part of this.

Value people's experiences and train staff

Participants felt that the value of having experienced something yourself and being in a better position to comment needs to be understood by public sector organisations. They felt public sector organisations see engagement as an activity, something they do at a specific point in time and complete. Participants felt this focus on engagement as an activity does not value people's experiences and views.

They felt engagement must be ongoing. People want ways to be able to voice their stories and views at any time. They felt that public sector organisations must provide good listeners and space for people to express their worries, concerns and views in their own way, not just in response to set questions or documents.

Engagement needs to be part of everything the public sector do and well resourced. Engagement staff also need to have in-depth training in engaging with different diverse groups and in different engagement methods to be able to effectively reach and involve everyone.

They also felt that an introduction to engaging diverse individuals and communities and the value of citizens' voices should be part of induction for all elected members, committees or boards, and public sector staff.

Engagement must be easy to understand

Participants felt it is important to make sure engagement makes sense to lay people and is in everyday language. They felt that a lot of information and knowledge is implicit in engagement and consultation. Public sector organisations assume everyone already knows and understands what the terms they use mean and some of the background to the consultation. Participants felt this information needs to be explicit so everyone can understand and follow.

Participants also felt online documents need to be easy to print or available in a format optimised for printing. Documents with full-page photos every few pages, text on a colour background, or in PDF format are not accessible and not easy to print.

All information, publications and engagement must be available in a wide range of community languages and accessible formats. Public sector organisations should get groups of individuals and organisations like Cardiff People First, Sefyll, Learning Disability Wales, and RNIB to look at information publication.

Encourage diverse communities to get involved

Participants felt public sector organisation should reach out and encourage diverse communities to have their say and feel their voice is wanted.

Participants felt public sector organisations should produce public information leaflets and contact cards with short bullet points on who to contact about what issues and what you should do. These should include information such as taking reference or case numbers when contacting emergency services. Public sector organisations should produce joint information, posters and leaflets. The public sector should put these in community venues and send them to a wide range of community groups. Volunteers could help ensure that engagement opportunities and information on the public sector reach local communities, such as through door-to-door leaflet drops.

Participants felt that not seeing people like them in public sector organisations makes them feel their views will not be valued. Public sector organisations should publicly promote the diversity of their staff, boards and elected members. This needs

to be across the protected characteristics and include LGBT+, Autistic Spectrum, and learning disabled role models.

Make engagement opportunities easy to find

Participants felt public sector organisations should jointly provide an accessible, central point of information, which supports engagement. This would address issues with information being hard to find, online only, or inaccessible. They felt that contact centres are useful for making complaints about specific services or issues. However, contact centres need to be able to take individuals' experiences and stories and feed them through into policy and practice. Contact centres also need to know what engagement is happening across the local public and third sectors and direct individuals to ways they can engage.

Participants felt that public sector organisation need to improve transparency and openness around engagement, decision-making, and what they do.

Some participants suggested Council Tax bill mail-outs should include information on local engagement and who to contact to voice issues and experiences on different topics. They felt this would reach almost every household without increasing postage costs. People wanted contact details for named individuals who they can contact by email, phone, text, and post for each issue. All details should be widely publicised on- and off-line.

They also felt that having a flow chart of who to influence on different issues and at what level would help them navigate complex public sector organisations and raise their issues and views with decision-makers.

Support training for diverse individuals to get involved

Participants felt that diverse individuals, community groups, and the public and communities need training in how to get involved and have their say. They felt this training should include why individuals should get involved and focus on building confidence.

They felt that community groups representing different diverse communities should facilitate these community skilling up sessions. This would ensure that sessions are tailored to different groups and their barriers to involvement. Participants felt public sector organisations need to support people to engage. They felt training should include digital engagement.

Engage with people where they already go

Participants felt public sector organisations need to go to people where they already are to engage effectively. This includes visiting and actively engaging workplaces, as well as schools, colleges, universities, community venues, community groups,

CABx, County Voluntary Councils, libraries, hubs, GP surgeries, hospitals, care homes, hospices, and religious buildings. Participants also suggested working through third sector organisations to reach diverse communities as a good solution. A wide range of third sector organisations and community groups need to be involved and funded to deliver engagement. Community connectors and link people in communities are an important part of this.

Some participants felt that public sector organisations could use the hubs more as ways for communities to participate and get involved. They felt that the public sector often seems like it is hidden in offices buildings that are not open to the public. They felt that the hubs are a good example of the public sector coming out into the community.

Participants also felt that public sector organisations should be going to existing forums and community groups more.

Engagement should be promote through leaflets, posters and information in libraries, religious buildings, hubs, community groups, community centres, County Voluntary Councils, supermarkets etc. as well as through social media and websites.

Collaborate more with other public and third sector organisations

Participants felt public sector organisations need to work more collaboratively across different departments and with other local organisations. They felt that public sector organisations working together, with engaging diverse communities at the heart, will ensure that root causes of issues are more effectively identified and addressed.

Elected representatives and board members should be part of these engagement mechanisms alongside staff. Some participants felt Councillors need to have more of a presence in communities and to be friendly, approachable and known to their constituents.

They felt that public sector staff who visit people in the community or meet the public should know more about different public and third sector organisations. They should pass on information to people as well as gathering and sharing people's views and experiences across the public sector.

Participants felt the focus needs to be on outcomes for people, rather than which public sector organisation is responsible. Participants felt that public sector organisations should use integrated budgets to address issues proactively and take collaborative preventative action in response to people's views and experiences.

Use a wide variety of accessible, inclusive engagement methods

Participants felt public sector organisations need to engage through a wide variety of methods. They highlighted that inclusive engagement involves flexibility and people being able to participate when, where and how they want to.

Engagement methods must include face-to-face events; visiting community groups; attending community events; forums; phone meetings; Skype meetings; online forums; social media and online presence; radio shows information in newspapers, videos and murals; surgeries or drop-ins; online and hard copy surveys; and feedback by telephone, post and email.

Some participants also felt that having people in towns, outside shops, asking people if they are interested like town criers, would help reach more people.

Having forums and events at various times is also vital. Some people can only do daytime events in the middle of the day, for example people who do not work and have childcare or caring responsibilities. Some of these people cannot get to events before 10 am if it is local to them or 11 am if they have to travel within the area and they have to leave by 2 pm or 3 pm. Other people can only do evening or weekend events, for example diverse individuals who are in full-time employment during the day. A wide range of times should be available, in various neighbourhoods and towns.

Face-to-face engagement should include events in all towns and neighbourhoods. Events should also happen on different days, including weekends, and both during the day and evening. All engagement events must happen in accessible buildings.

Participants voiced concern that face-to-face engagement often involves people having to pay their own travel expenses, childcare, and/or replacement care costs to get to a meeting or venue. They felt that reimbursing travel and care expenses and making sure it is easy to travel to engagement events is vital to involving diverse communities.

Engage proactively around topics

Participants felt that public sector organisations must engage diverse communities together and proactively hear people's views and experiences on different topics or themes. They felt engagement should not only happen on draft documents, but that views on topics should happen first and feed into draft documents. This would support a more preventative approach, where issue are identified and addressed before they become serious.

Public sector organisations should engage proactively. They should focus engagement on personal experiences, good as well as bad, not just how to raise a complaint. Participants felt engaging around topics moves to a preventative approach and helps design services that work most effectively for diverse communities, rather than only fixing complaints and problems later.

Participants felt that engagement should be around topics. Public sector organisations should arrange to work together and go out to communities and through third sector organisations with a theme or topic. This should be quite broad such as transport or health. Engagement should be a conversation and honest

discussion of people's experiences and views proactively, before draft documents are developed. Participants considered honesty and openness around timescales and what public sector organisation can and cannot do essential.

This joint engagement would also stop people going round the houses until they find the right organisation or person to talk to.

People should be able to come to those events and forums with their stories and views and have their voices heard once. All public sector organisations should then keep that information and use it to inform a wide-range of legislation, policy and practice. People should be able to raise their issues on a topic once, not in response to each consultation on different parts of a service or issue.

Show the difference engagement has made

Participants mentioned the need for positive stories of how people have made a difference.

They suggested joint public sector newsletters and radio programmes as a good way of promoting positive stories, providing feedback, and encouraging further engagement.

Participants also felt public sector organisations need to be honest and clear about what can happen and what cannot and why. They felt that public sector organisations must provide clear feedback on comments and views received and what they have done with them. Participants suggested tables of 'you said x, we did y' and bullet pointed reports about the main issues that came from that consultation and reasons doing it and not, as accessible, simple and clear feedback methods.

Participants felt that a solution focus, rather than a problem focus, would help. They felt public sector organisations must run news features on positive work and engagement, not just on things that go wrong.

Key parts of improved engagement with diverse communities

This last part of the report is a summary of effective ways to engage diverse communities. It is a short overview of a model of improved engagement with diverse communities. We invite public sector organisations to commit to delivering engagement this way.

- All public sector organisations in an area should deliver joint engagement
- Engagement should be based around broad topics, not specific policies or strategies
- Engagement topics should be set by diverse people and influence the public sector's agendas
- Engagement on specific strategies or policies should happen before documents are drafted and continue throughout the process
- Staff delivering engagement must be well trained in working with diverse communities
- Young people should be taught to be active citizens
- Public sector organisations should develop short information on how to get engaged
- All engagement information and documents must be easy to understand and in accessible formats and community languages
- Engagement must go to communities and community groups
- Engagement must include a wide variety of ways to get involved
- Events must take place in every neighbourhood and in evenings as well as daytime
- A single point of contact for engagement should be developed by all local public sector organisations jointly
- There should be training for diverse individuals and communities on how to get involved
- All engagement must be based on gathering and sharing people's experiences and stories
- Clear information on the difference engagement has made should be publicly shared