



# Making the Connections: Engaging the Public in Decisions - The Citizen's Voice

Research to investigate the way people  
living in Wales want to be engaged by  
public services

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi

YMCHWIL GYMDEITHASOL  
Y LLYWODRAETH

**GSR**

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Royal National Institute of the Deaf

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South East Wales Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Forum

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Stonewall Cymru

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Gypsy Council

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Kings' Fund

Learning Disability Advisory Group

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Mental Health Foundation

MEWN Cymru

Newport Somali Association

NHS Wales

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Refugee Council

Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health

Save the Children

Scottish Consumer Council

Scottish Executive

Social Exclusion Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Stonewall

Stonewall Cymru

Wales Rural Observatory

Welsh Consumer Council

Welsh Language Board

## Key Messages

The main findings from a comprehensive literature review and primary research with approximately 350 people with different needs, preferences and backgrounds in relation to public engagement <sup>1</sup> can be structured around three themes: the public services people would be interested in shaping; the depth of involvement they want; and the methods and techniques they would like public services to use to involve them.

### Areas of interest

- People liked the idea of becoming involved in decisions relating to their services, but public engagement was not a term they were familiar with. Often their only reference point for public services talking to the public as a group was a public meeting-style event or a survey; they were not familiar with other forms of engagement.
- People said they were interested in 'local' issues, which affect their daily lives. These included issues in the areas of health and education. In terms of health this might cover issues such as the length of GP surgery opening hours. For education it would be things like proposed changes to the length of the school day. They were also interested in other issues that they referred to as 'quality of life' – litter, rowdy youngsters and noisy neighbours. 'Local' issues tend to be small-scale problems which they would like public services to respond to and resolve quickly.
- People also said they were interested in bigger 'national' issues, which might not affect their daily lives immediately but would have important local manifestations over the long term. The issues covered health, education, housing, immigration and the setting of public service

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<sup>1</sup> "public engagement" being defined as the involvement of citizens in the design, management and delivery of services.

priorities. These 'national' issues may be things they have heard about in the national media which they think will filter down to have a local impact. They thought that public services could take a more proactive role in explaining what the local impacts of decisions taken nationally might be.

- People said that opportunities for involvement need to be chosen well. They only wanted to be consulted about issues that they can relate to and that will affect them. They said that dialogue needs to happen when decisions are 'live' – that is when a decision is still to be taken and open to influence. People felt that, too often, they are asked for their views when a decision has already been made. In this latter instance engagement is just about rubber-stamping a decision.

### Depth of involvement

- People wanted information about planned changes to public services, particularly when these changes relate to the 'local' and 'national' issues they are interested in. They are also interested in the performance of services. If the planned changes or the dip in performance affects them, they want the opportunity to voice their views. They need information to be able to monitor 'local' and 'national' issues and decide whether they want to be involved.
- Participants wanted the opportunity to enter a formal or informal dialogue about intended changes. A formal dialogue might be a structured public engagement approach where local people are invited to take part in a consultation exercise. An informal dialogue is having the opportunity to raise a concern with a public service organisation as and when it is a concern, rather than having to wait to be invited to take part in a structured consultation exercise.
- Most people were not particularly interested in being directly involved in the delivery of services or taking control of them. However, some groups, for example people with mental health problems or learning

disabilities, were often more interested in this level of involvement. They felt that direct involvement can help in the design of appropriate services and ensure that public services recognise their needs.

- People thought that when they had been engaged by public services, they were not informed what had happened or changed as a result of their participation. Feedback is seen as an essential element to good public engagement. If people are not informed about the impact that their involvement has had, they can become critical about the value of public engagement.

## Methods and techniques

- Where appropriate, for example when discussing a complex issue, people said they would like dialogue to be deliberative in nature. This means that they wanted to be informed about the detail of the issue and an overview of the pros and cons of the possible decisions that could be taken. They wanted to thoroughly understand the issue they were discussing before giving their views.
- People thought that public engagement should move beyond the 'usual suspects' – those who usually turn up to things like public meetings - and seek to engage people who do not usually get involved. To achieve this, people thought that public services should reach out and invite people to take part in consultations, rather than waiting to see who turns up for different events.
- People wanted public services to use a mix of public engagement methods, as different sections of the population prefer different approaches. People thought that public service organisations often didn't understand that different people have different public engagement preferences and often used their own preferred approaches.
- The methods people wanted public services to use, included user panels, citizens' juries, planning for real, public meetings, surveys and e-consultation. The method they thought most appropriate depended on

the issue under consideration, the time it would demand of them, and its appropriateness to different target group(s). They felt there was no single solution when it came to public engagement in terms of how to involve people. The suitability of approaches to different segments of the population is explored in more detail later in this report.

# 1. Introduction and Context

**1.1** This report sets out the key findings from an extensive programme of qualitative research to support the *citizen-centred services* strand of the Assembly Government's public services improvement agenda, *Making the Connections*. The report marks the first step towards developing a national evidence base on citizens' experiences of public services in Wales.

**1.2** In January 2006, the Assembly Government commissioned OPM<sup>2</sup> to investigate the customer service and public engagement (in service design, management and delivery) citizens would like from their public services. The project included a particular focus on those people widely considered to have a less positive experience of public services.

**1.3** The project was commissioned to ensure that the policies and implementation activities designed by the Assembly Government to improve customer service and public engagement would:

- a.** be informed and shaped by what people living in Wales consider to be good customer service;
- b.** consider what, and how, people living in Wales would like to be involved decisions that could affect the public services they receive;
- c.** ensure that citizens receive equitable customer service and opportunities for public engagement, regardless of their circumstances, backgrounds, or any disadvantages they face.

**1.4** The qualitative research programme is being complimented with a major national survey of citizen's experiences of seventeen public service

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<sup>2</sup> OPM is an independent, not for profit centre, founded in 1989. It works with people to develop high quality management, professional practice and public engagement in

areas in 2006 and 2007. Initial results from this survey will be available early in 2007.

**1.5** This summary report details findings from the public engagement strand of the research. This report sits alongside two others detailing findings from the customer service strand of the research and the full findings (the latter will be available from late October 2006).

**1.6** This report comprises of two sections. The first details the rationale for, and elements of, the methodology employed to answer the main research questions. The second considers the findings from two citizen forums, a comprehensive evidence review and specific workshops about the important issues on which people would like to engaged, the level of involvement they want, and their preferred methods of engagement.

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organisations that aim to improve social results. In 2002, OPM became the UK's first public interest company.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 The findings in this report are drawn from three different stages of research:

- a review of existing research evidence;
- two citizen forums; and
- deliberative workshops and telephone interviews.

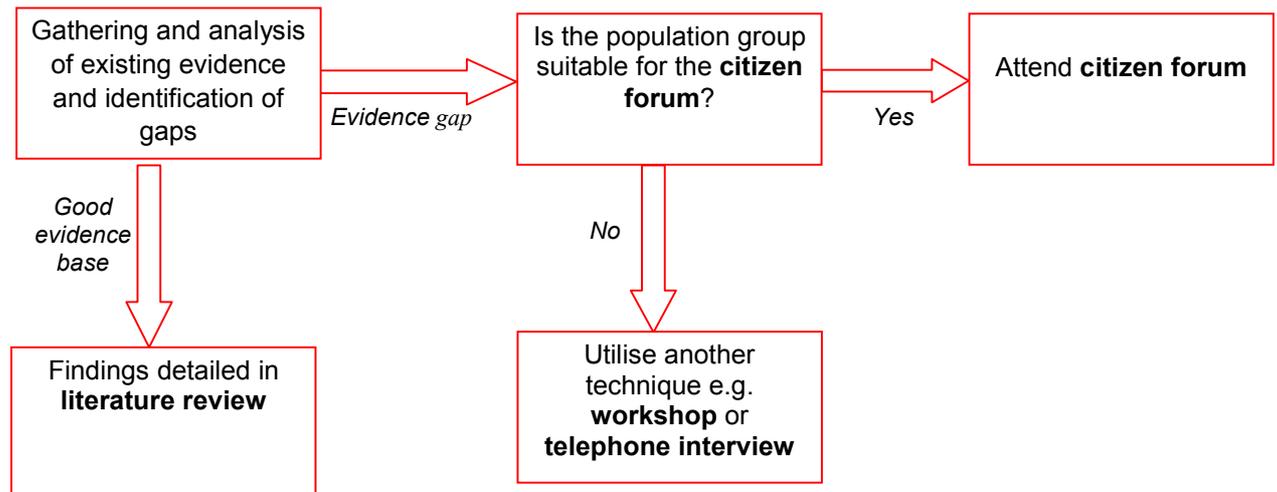
2.2 The first stage of the research was to carry out a comprehensive **review of the existing UK research evidence**, looking at what different population groups want in terms of public engagement from publicly funded services. The evidence review concentrated on people widely thought to have particular public engagement requirements because of their backgrounds, circumstances or disadvantages they face.

2.3 The **citizen forums** were day-long events for 70 to 80 local residents, held in Swansea and Wrexham. Participants were selected to be broadly representative of the population of the Swansea Bay and Western Valleys and North East Wales Border and Coast Spatial plan areas, according to Census (2001) data. ‘Booster’ samples of Welsh language speakers and older people were included at the Wrexham event, and of Welsh language speakers, older people, and black and minority ethnic groups at the Swansea event. All participants at the citizen forums were selected using on-street recruitment.

2.4 Where the literature review revealed gaps in existing knowledge, and the citizen forums were considered not to be the most effective ways of seeking the views of the population groups in question, we undertook **deliberative workshops** or **interviews**. The workshops and interviews were primarily held with sections of the public who are often not consulted about their views, and often feel that public services are not meeting their needs.

Throughout the report these population groups are referred to as underrepresented. The method used varied slightly to suit each population group. A full list of the population groups and methods used to consult them is included in the annex of this summary report.

## Research process



**2.5** The approach taken to facilitation at the citizen forums and workshops was to identify the changes that public services could make to improve public engagement for the citizens they serve. Whilst participants discussed previous encounters with public services and their perceptions of different public service organisations, they were encouraged to think about practical steps that organisations could take to improve public engagement. All participants were encouraged to think about what was most important to them.

## Limitations of the research approach

**2.6** The majority of the findings presented in this report are based on qualitative research. Many of these findings mirror those found through the comprehensive literature review.

**2.7** The qualitative approach adopted has allowed a deeper exploration of how people feel about the issues being discussed and the reasons why. It has

also allowed them to express their feelings in their own terms. However, care should be taken when drawing inferences from the research. The findings are indicative of what a particular population group feels about the issue, but are not statistically valid for that group. Likewise, the findings as a whole are not a statistical representation of the views of the whole population of Wales.

**2.8** It should also be noted that for practical reasons, the participants for the workshops and interviews were grouped using a set of common characteristics (e.g. by an impairment or age) that are widely considered – on the basis of existing research – to influence their views about public engagement. It is acknowledged that each workshop group had people from a variety of backgrounds with different needs that must be met for effective public engagement.

## 3. Findings

**3.1** The findings are set out in three sections: 1) the public services that people felt they would like to be consulted about 2) the depth of involvement they want 3) their preferred methods of engagement.

**3.2** Within each of the three sections general views that are relevant to most participants in the research are presented first. Although the examples are mainly drawn from the citizen forums they should be seen as also applicable to those population groups who participated in other stages of the research. This is followed by a discussion of issues that seem to be more relevant to specific population groups. These findings are taken from the workshops, interviews, and the literature review.

### What issues do people want to be involved in?

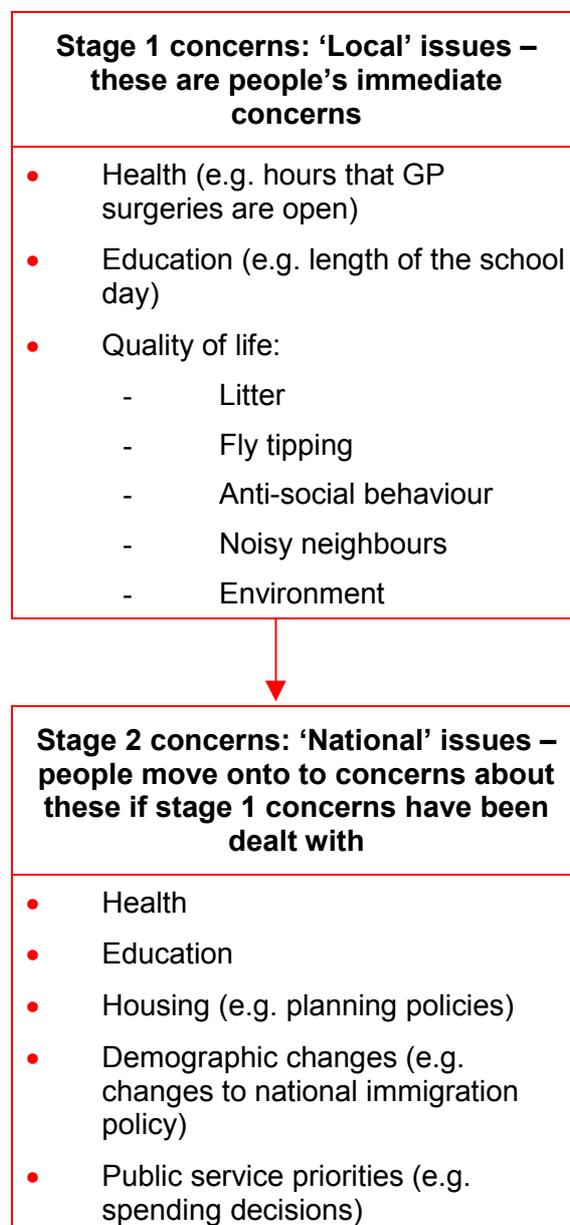
**3.3** People were asked to identify and discuss the types of public service issues they were interested in and which they feel organisations should be consulting them about.

**3.4** The issues can be clustered into two groupings. Firstly, there were issues that were very 'local' and immediately affect people's daily lives. People often wanted to voice their feelings when changes to a service had an impact on their normal routine, or when something happens that affects their quality of life. Secondly, people were interested in 'national' level issues, which may not affect their day to day life immediately, but in the longer run may have a profound effect.

**3.5** It is not easy to segment who is interested in what type of issues. To some extent people seemed to have a hierarchy of concerns. If people were concerned about the quality of their daily life and unwelcome changes to their routine, this would usually take priority over national level issues in terms of what they wanted to be consulted about. Likewise, if people were satisfied

with their quality of life and there are no immediate service changes that will upset their daily life, they were more interested in being consulted about 'national' issues. An important point to note here is that people are much more likely to want to be consulted about an issue when it is seen as a threat, rather than if it is something that they are likely to welcome. To this extent people might be termed as monitorial. They will monitor what is happening locally and nationally, and only want to voice their views when something might have a negative impact on them and their family.

### Hierarchy of issues



## **‘Local’ issues**

**3.6** People identified the following important ‘local’ issues:

### **Health**

**3.7** A number of people said they were concerned about issues such as GP opening hours. They felt, for example, if hours were reduced, it might be difficult for people to see a GP. They were also aware that this could lead to pressures elsewhere in NHS, particularly increased waiting times.

### **Education**

**3.8** Some people gave changes to the length of the school day as an example of an issue on which they would like to be consulted, as this could affect elements of their day-to-day life, such as when they picked their children up from school.

### **Quality of life**

**3.9** This was the term people gave to cover issues that affect how they feel about their local area and whether it is a pleasant and safe place to live. Typical quality of life concerns included litter, fly tipping, unruly groups of young people and noisy neighbours. Concern about quality of life issues like these were of relevance to most of the participants in this research.

**3.10** A service specific quality of life issue that people were interested in was refuse collection. At the Wrexham citizen forum some people said that their local authority had recently changed this service from once a week to once every two weeks. Because they felt this had been a mistake they were keen to voice their opinions about it to the local authority. In contrast, most participants at the Swansea forum were happy with their refuse collection service and were not interested in being consulted about it.

## **‘National’ issues**

**3.11** People identified the following as important ‘national’ issues:

## Health

**3.12** People wanted to have their say on hospital closures and the variability of service provision in certain areas. Some participants referred to this as the 'postcode lottery'. They were more interested in the broad direction of the health service, particularly what it would mean in their local area, and also interested in what clinical care is available as part of the NHS, and again, if it is available in their area.

## Education

**3.13** Participants gave the example of school closures as an issue on which they would want to be consulted, particularly if it was likely to have an impact on them. A closure was seen as having potential long-term effects for a local community - for example, it could mean children having to travel further and more pressure on school places. At the Swansea forum, there was also a specific Welsh language issue. Participants thought that all the places had been taken at Welsh medium schools in Swansea and there were no plans to provide more.

## Housing

**3.14** People were interested in having their say about proposed new housing developments for two reasons. They wanted to be involved in ensuring that a new development meets local needs, for example, that it provides sufficient affordable housing. They also wanted to be sure that any development would not have a negative impact on the quality of the local environment or their own house prices.

## Demographic change

**3.15** People were concerned about rapid demographic change among the people in their local communities/neighbourhoods, especially in terms of immigration. People felt that many eastern European workers had moved into both Wrexham and Swansea. There were two main reasons why they want to be consulted about this. First, they were concerned that this might result in

unacceptable competition for jobs, and secondly they felt uncomfortable about the rate of immigration and the impact this would have on an area. They were worried that high levels of immigration would change the nature of an area too quickly. For many people rapid change can feel unsettling.

### **Public service priorities**

**3.16** People were acutely aware of the increasing amounts of money being spent on public services. They were interested in whether the balance of spending priorities across all public service areas is correct - for example, how much is spent on education, health and policing. They wanted to ensure that the public's voice on what these priorities should be was heard by decision-makers.

### **Issues specific to particular groups**

**3.17** There were a number of issues from the workshops with under-represented groups that related to themes that people would like to get involved in rather than specific services. The themes were physical access and discrimination and access. .

### **Physical access**

**3.18** Groups of people with physical, visual and hearing disabilities tended to be particularly interested in being consulted about issues around service accessibility. Participants in the hearing impairments group and people with physical disabilities were interested in the design of buildings provided by public services, such as hospitals, GP surgeries and council offices. They felt that their involvement could help improve the design of these buildings. One group of participants felt it would be a good idea if people with a disability were given access to the plans for any new public buildings and then asked to approve them before they went ahead. Accessibility was seen as just as important in other settings, including the design of housing and public transport.

**3.19** They were also interested being consulted about other local issues that affect their quality of life, people with a visual impairment were concerned about issues that affect their day-to-day lives, such as the design and placing of street furniture, street lighting, access to buildings, and the availability of large print documents. One participant said:

*'it's dangerous when you cannot see – I feel I cannot go anywhere'*.

**3.20** Referring to the placing of advertising boards outside shops, one person said that there are bylaws covering this that are not being adhered to:

*'the council seems reluctant to enforce them'*.

**3.21** People within the hearing impairment group thought that hearing impairments often had a much lower profile with public services than other disabilities, such as visual impairments or physical disability. One participant said that often:

*'deafness is on the backburner'; another said 'we have an invisible disability...and we've got to start making it visible'*.

**3.22** They saw engagement as a means of bringing about change.

**3.23** As well as public services being more aware of hearing impairment, people said they would like to be consulted about how services can become more accessible for them through the installation of hearing loops and buildings designed so that people can be heard and visual information is used. One participant commented:

*'wherever the local authority meets its customers...if you're hard of hearing you need a loop system at that point of contact'*.

**3.24** For several groups being able to access services was an issue because of where they live in relation to where services are physically provided. The literature review highlights that this is a particular concern for people from more disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>3</sup> and the citizen forum

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<sup>3</sup> Duffy B., 'Satisfaction and Expectations: Attitudes to public services in deprived areas', Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE, December 2005

demonstrated likewise for older people<sup>4</sup>. In more practical terms, when people with these concerns are asked what issues they would like to be engaged in, the focus was often on the provision of public transport.

## Discrimination and access

**3.25** Several groups were particularly interested in being consulted about issues where they felt discriminated against by public services.

**3.26** The literature shows that Gypsies and Travellers who do not stay in one place for any period of time think that public services fail to engage them and, as a consequence, fail to meet their requirements<sup>5</sup>. Two of the main issues they would like to become involved in are the provision of sites and the availability of housing; and ensuring that services are designed to meet their needs. This might mean that suitable sites or more permanent housing are made available, or that services such as health and education can adapt to meet the requirements associated with their lifestyle, which involves moving frequently.

**3.27** People from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community also thought that public services do not take into account the particular needs of LGBT people. They said they would like to be involved in discussions about the design and provision of health, education, housing and older people's services. The nature of the discussions they wanted to have about each of these varied; for example, with health they wanted to discuss sensitive personalised provision, but with housing it was much more about protection from avert homophobic behaviour by local residents. Likewise, in education they wanted to discuss homophobic bullying in schools. They wanted improved and expanded opportunities for consultation to result in better understanding across public services of the particular needs of the LGBT community.

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<sup>4</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, Social Policy Division, 'When I'm 64....and more: The report from the advisory group on a strategy for older people in Wales', 2002

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/cmo/improvement/older/when-im-64?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> National Assembly for Wales, 'Review of Service provision for Gypsies and Travellers', 2003  
<http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassembliesequalcomm2/content/gypsy-report-e.pdf>

**3.28** From the literature review, some black, minority and ethnic (BME) people and asylum seekers and refugees are reported as being particularly interested in being consulted about services. These often concern services where they feel they may: face discrimination; need staff to be sensitive in some aspects of service delivery; or struggle to communicate with the service. Many BME people, asylum seekers and refugees feel that public service staff are often not sufficiently aware of their different needs, which reduces their willingness to become engaged with public services<sup>6</sup>.

### Issues specific to only one group

**3.29** There were also several areas that people wanted to be engaged in that only seemed relevant to one particular population group.

**3.30** Most **children and young people** said they were only interested in getting involved in certain issues relating to public services. They were not interested in discussing the finer details of service delivery from GPs, hospitals, local authorities and so on. But, they were interested in giving their views about the environment within which these services are delivered. They wanted to discuss, for example, what toys and reading material should be available to occupy them while they were waiting in reception areas. They were also interested in the general appearance of facilities, and how they can be made to feel warm and welcoming to children and young people.

**3.31** However, children and young people were interested in being consulted in more detail about leisure services, particularly playgrounds, sports centres and parks. The particular issues they were interested in varied according to the age group: for example, younger children were interested in playgrounds while older children were more interested in youth facilities.

**3.32** People living in **deprived areas** had a particular interest in services that they use more heavily than most other groups, such as housing, GPs and benefits services.

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<sup>6</sup> MEWN Cymru, 'Bridging the Gap', 2004  
<http://www.webcell.co.uk/Final%20Dev/aboutus/images/Bridging%20the%20Gap%2012.4.05.doc>

**3.33 Older people** were more interested in services they are high users of, such as health, social care and housing. They were concerned about access to these services and that they are tailored to meet their specific needs. They wanted to see closer links between these services, limiting the amount of times they need to contact them.

**3.34 Homeless people** were interested in being consulted about housing and, to a slightly lesser extent, health – in particular the problem of accessing these services when they may not have a permanent address.

### Issues that people do not want to be involved in

**3.35** As much as people want to be involved in a wide array of issues there are also many instances where people do not want to be involved. As stated at the beginning of this section, most people only want to keep an eye on what is going on and get involved if an issue is likely to have an impact on them or their family. There is also another cluster of issues that most people would rather not be involved in. These are often complex areas where they feel decisions are best left to the experts. An example of this that was brought up by participants in the citizen forums was GP contracts. They felt that this may have an impact on them in some way, but they felt that this was probably a complex area which they would be able to add little value to.

### What depth of involvement do people want?

**3.36** Participants were asked to discuss the depth of public engagement they wanted. At the very least they wanted information about public services, particularly on any planned changes and how they were performing. If they were concerned with what was planned or what was happening to a service they wanted the opportunity to voice their opinions and for these to have an impact. Only a very few specific population groups were interested in taking public engagement one step further and wanting more direct control over services. In instances where this was the case it tended to be on an individual level, with people wanting a close relationship with a service provider and about a service they were receiving.

## General involvement needs

**3.37** People do want the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with public service providers. If public engagement is seen as three blocks of increasing levels of public engagement, then most people are interested in the first and second block – information and dialogue.



**3.38** In many instances people wanted to receive information about public services, but did not think of this as public engagement. When an issue is important ‘locally’ or ‘nationally’ they want an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with service providers. Interestingly, there was very little evidence from citizens’ forums that people want to take engagement one stage further and have joint or delegated power over public services. There was a feeling that people lead very busy lives and just want to be ‘monitorial’ rather than ‘active’ citizens, having the information to monitor what is going on, with the option to let their views be known rather than being continuously involved or taking more control of services. When it is important, they want reassurance that the public’s voice will be heard at the decision-making table. An example of where they wanted this type of input would be if there was proposal for school closures.

**3.39** People did not see the relationship between information provision and dialogue as one or the other: rather, they saw information as a pre-requisite for meaningful dialogue. They recognised that some of the issues people are interested in are fairly complex, and that members of the public would need a good understanding of policy/service options and their implications before making a contribution. Participants said that it would be worrying if public services were basing their decisions on the initial responses from citizens instead of a more informed thoughtful approach. They felt that people wanted the time and information to come to a thoughtful view about what service

providers should do; furthermore, they worried that 'top-of-mind' responses might not reflect the 'real' public voice. Some participants contrasted the time and space given in citizen forums for people to have their say, with the less structured environment of a public meeting.

**3.40** People felt that too much of what passes for public consultation is not of a sufficiently high quality and happens at the wrong time. They said that engagement happens too late in the decision-making process, often when important decisions have already been taken by service providers. When engagement happens at this stage of decision-making people feel they are just rubber-stamping a decision rather than informing and influencing. They want public engagement to be more carefully planned and for it to happen at an early stage of decision making so that the public's voice can have real impact.

**3.41** People wanted to be engaged across the range of issues listed earlier. They thought it was important to use more active forms of engagement, involving dialogue, when a service is under performing, or when there is a new issue that may affect them. They felt it was important to be able to respond to events when something had gone wrong, and to help to shape policy on contentious issues. For example, participants at the Wrexham forum were keen to air their views about recent changes in refuse collection services. Likewise, the 'national' issues are most important when there is an important 'live' decision to be taken, such as the location of a new housing development and the level of affordable housing that might be provided on it.

**3.42** However, this does not mean that public engagement should only happen when something has gone wrong or there is a contentious issue to be decided. People also felt that public services could be more proactive about involving the public at other times. In this sense the public could be asked to help provide a feedback on how a service is doing and suggest ways of improving it. By doing this a good service might become an excellent service.

**3.43** When people are concerned about 'local' issues the nature of engagement they are interested in can often be informal – just the opportunity to raise a concern with a service provider. Engagement does not always need

to take the form of set-piece events. Engagement is as much about day-to-day conversations as it is about sophisticated consultation events.

### Specific involvement needs

**3.44** The views of the under-represented groups on the level of involvement they wanted were similar to those of the citizens' forum participants. However, they gave some different reasons for wanting to be involved. For some groups, such as **lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)** people and people with **visual impairments** engagement is as much about trying to change the public's understanding of their needs and interests as it is about policy and service change on an issue-specific basis.

**3.45** For some groups, particularly people with **mental health problems** and **learning disabilities**, much of the public engagement they are interested in is at the level of the individual rather than a group. They want to be involved in decisions about their own service provision, ensuring that services are tailored to meet their needs and having more personal empowerment, helping them to take more control of their lives and gain greater independence and confidence in dealing with the wider world.

### What methods are people interested in?

**3.46** People were presented with information about a range of methods<sup>7</sup> for public engagement. They were asked to review these saying which they liked and those they did not. There was no clear method which they felt was much better than any other. They felt that some methods were more suited for different population groups than other ones and public bodies when planning engagement activities, should try and use a range of approaches, particularly when engaging a wide cross-section of the public.

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<sup>7</sup> A list of these methods is included in the annex of this report. From the public involvement literature we attempted to summarise the essence of each technique and highlight some of their strengths and weaknesses.

## Good practice principles

3.47 Participants in the research identified a number of good practice principles that should underpin how organisations approach engagement:

- Clear information should be provided about proposed changes to policy or service delivery, allowing people to make an informed contribution to the decision-making process.
- A wide range of people should be involved in public engagement, not just the easy-to-reach 'usual suspects'. If possible, a representative cross-section of the community should be engaged.
- Engagement needs to be well timed and planned, giving people sufficient time to get involved and taking place at a stage when decision making can still be influenced.
- Engagement should be planned around the convenience of the participants rather than the commissioning organisation. Events should happen at the time most suitable for the public and in a location which is known and accessible.
- Feedback should be provided to the participants and wider public following any consultation. Feedback should both outline the findings from the consultation exercise and detail what will happen as a result.

## Specific methods

3.48 People said that public organisations should use a range of methods, depending on who they wanted to consult. For example, while young people said they might respond to e-consultation, some older people did not feel this would be appropriate for them. They also felt that methods could be sequenced, so that the findings from one approach could feed into the next stage of the consultation. A number of people felt that a survey would be a useful way of gaining initial opinion on an issue, but then this should be followed up by a more in-depth qualitative approach to look at some of the survey findings in more detail.

- User panel

**3.49** Most people felt that a user panel would be the best way of providing relevant information about how a service is performing, but some thought that it might not pick up reasons why eligible people are not using a service. People thought that user panel membership should be rotated regularly to ensure that a range of people air their views and to ensure that the panel does not 'go native'.

- Citizens' jury

**3.50** Some participants were very keen on this approach, feeling it enables people to become experts on an issue and give a truly informed view. Others felt it involves too few people so is not representative of the demographic profile of the community, and that it would be difficult to get people to commit to a four-day event.

- Focus group

**3.51** People were mainly positive about this approach, but there were some concerns that focus groups might be too small scale to involve a good representative sample of the local population.

- Planning for Real

**3.52** The majority of participants who looked at this approach liked the idea of being able to see a 3D representation of how an area might look. They felt it would be an appropriate tool for looking at new housing development proposals. But some people thought it would be too time consuming.

- Public meeting

**3.53** People liked the familiarity and openness of public meetings, but felt that often they could be too adversarial and a forum for the 'usual suspects'. Some individuals felt that they would not be confident about voicing their views in a large-group setting.

- Survey

**3.54** A survey was seen as a good way of gathering initial opinions, but one that should often be supported by a more in-depth qualitative approach.

- E-consultation

**3.55** Participants thought that e-consultation would be convenient and cheap, but not inclusive, as some people are not computer literate. It also loses the face-to-face interaction that people like.

**3.56** In conclusion, participants found it difficult to match the best way of engaging them on specific issues. They felt that public services would need to take these decisions. However, they did say that the more complex and/or contentious an issue is, the more deliberative and imaginative the approach to consultation needs to be. For a simpler public service issue such as refuse collection, a low cost, simple approach such as a survey would probably be appropriate.

### Views specific to particular groups

**3.57** Some of the under-represented groups wanted to be involved in specific and different ways to those set out above. The main differences are listed below.

**3.58** As discussed earlier in this report, for people with a **hearing impairments** public engagement is about raising the profile of hearing impairment as an issue. They want to be involved as an interest group as well as on an individual level. However, they worried that working as a group can mean that events can get hijacked by politically minded people. Services looking to consult with them should try and get beyond these activists and access the views of others with hearing impairments. Looking at the specific detail of engagement methods, they felt consultation by writing can be a good means of involving them.

**3.59** Participants from the **LGBT** community said that they would be interested in a mix of one-off exercises and a more established forum so they

can feed in their views. Consultation methods need to be safe for LGBT people, allowing the participation of those who are not 'out'. This might mean that methods for consultation need to be anonymous, such as suggestion boxes or through the local media. As well as targeted LGBT consultation, they wanted to be included in mainstream consultation initiatives.

**3.60** People with **basic skills** felt that consultation should be advertised through the media that people would normally use, such as the local paper and radio stations. But when it comes to the actual consultation participants said that face-to-face approaches were more suitable than written ones; particularly small meetings, as these were more constructive than larger-scale, and often adversarial, public meetings, where some people might not have the confidence to voice their views. One participant commented: *'I'm getting there, but I'm not quite confident enough yet'*; another said, *'people are shy...they have an opinion, but they don't like getting involved...they're worried about saying something stupid.'* People said that no single method of consultation should be used; different approaches are needed for different parts of the population, but that whatever approach is taken it should, as one participant put it, be *'short and sweet'*.

**3.61** The literature review showed that low literacy levels among the **Gypsy and Traveller** community mean that face-to-face approaches may be more effective. Using intermediary people such as a site manager can be effective, as levels of trust between Gypsies and Travellers and public bodies are often low<sup>8</sup>.

**3.62** For people with **learning disabilities**, involvement on an individual level is considered to be important and empowering. They felt that, to help them engage as fully as possible, face-to-face verbal consultation is much more helpful than written consultation; and that time needs to be allowed to help them fully understand the conversations they are engaged in, so they are able to make an informed response.

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<sup>8</sup> National Assembly for Wales, 'Review of Service provision for Gypsies and Travellers', 2003 <http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemequalcomm2/content/gypsy-report-e.pdf>

**3.63** Participants with **physical disabilities** were keen on being involved in informed, deliberative style discussions at an early stage of policy and service planning. They felt that approaches should reflect the range of physical disabilities and adapt accordingly; for example, locations used for consultation events need to be accessible to all types of disabled people.

**3.64** For some **black and minority ethnic** (BME) people and **asylum seekers and refugees**, particularly non-English speakers, the literature highlights that qualitative consultation methods using peer group facilitators are often most appropriate<sup>9</sup>. It may take some time and development of trust between participants and the researcher before public service issues can be explored in detail.

**3.65** **Children and young people** felt that engagement sessions need to be shorter, particularly with younger age groups. Participants from a youth forum felt that such forums can be a good approach to involving young people over a longer period of time. Other methods that appealed included surveys and consultation over the Internet and through mobile phone/text messages. There was a feeling that group discussion approaches might need to be followed up with wider surveys, in case people have not been able to voice their opinions. This differs from some other participants' comments that qualitative consultation should follow the quantitative.

**3.66** The literature shows that people with **mental health problems** feel that the use of peer group interviewers and facilitators can help build trust. Within group settings, the use of pairs who know each other can be supportive. Consultation events may also need to allow for more time for issues to be explored. Where people are unable to participate, advocate interpreters can be useful. People with mental health problems also often want to be consulted at an individual level about the services they are using<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> MORI, Rose J. and Pierce A. , 'The Value Of Peers', 2005, <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/publications/jar/the-value-of-peers.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Wallcraft, J., 'On our own terms', The Sainsbury Centre For Mental Health, 2003 [http://www.scmh.org.uk/80256FBD004F3555/vWeb/flPCHN6FTF5G/\\$file/on+our+own+terms.pdf](http://www.scmh.org.uk/80256FBD004F3555/vWeb/flPCHN6FTF5G/$file/on+our+own+terms.pdf)

**3.67 Older people** expressed a slight preference for face-to-face approaches over written ones, and said that more time may be needed to discuss issues; but apart from this their preferences were fairly similar to those of the citizens' forum participants.

**3.68** People with **visual impairments** favoured consultation using large print and/or audio materials. The method used for this research project was a telephone conference, which was seen as preferable to asking them to meet physically, due to potential difficulties some people may face in reaching the venue. Participants also felt that community and voluntary sector groups can be a useful means for consulting them: *'It would be lovely...to go and talk, and they could represent views to the council...I feel quite isolated here being visually impaired'*.

**3.69** People in **rural areas** said that the telephone and internet can be suitable means for consultation. Face-to-face contact is less appropriate if people have to travel. They thought that a good alternative would be for public service providers to travel to visit them.

**3.70 Welsh language speakers** said that they favour approaches such as small groups, where they feel more confident in voicing their opinions. Like other groups, they said that large scale events, such as public meetings, can be too intimidating to allow some people to voice their opinions.

### **Who should be involved?**

**3.71** People felt that it would not be appropriate or feasible for public services to try and involve everyone in each consultation exercise even if some of the larger scale techniques were used. They felt that public services need to plan their consultation by making the connections between different issues and recognising the wider impact of a decision, and then consulting people appropriately. They felt that public services should not only consult the users of a service but also others who may be affected by an intended change - for example, if a school closes or if there is likely to be more choice in the selection of a school, there might be more traffic on the roads.

3.72 Some people also felt that public engagement could be a useful means for local councillors to become more aware of public opinion. They thought councillors should be involved in consultation initiatives to inform their decision making or holding to account in council meetings, making them more aware of the public's view and giving them a stronger democratic mandate.

## Annex One

### Groups Consulted

The groups included in the deliberative workshops and interviews stage of this research are set out in the table below.

| Population Group                             | Locality                          | Area                            | Method        | Group through which participants recruited                            | Number of participants |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|---|------------------------|
| <b>Completed Groups</b>                      |                                   |                                 |               |   |                        |
| General population                           | Wrexham                           | North East – Border and Coast   | Citizen Forum | Plus Four recruitment   | c80                    |
| General population                           | Swansea                           | Swansea Bay and Western Valleys | Citizen Forum | Plus Four recruitment   | c80                    |
| Welsh speakers                               | Caernarfon                        | North West Wales                | Workshop      | Plus Four recruitment   | 11                     |
| Hearing impairments                          | Penarth                           | South East Wales                | Workshop      | Wales Council for the Deaf and Penarth Hearing Impaired Support Group | 16                     |
| LGBT Cardiff                                 | Cardiff                           | South East Wales                | Workshop      | Stonewall, Terrence Higgins Trust and South East LGB forum            | 17                     |
| Literacy, language and numeracy difficulties | Pontypridd                        | South East Wales                | Workshops     | Basic Skills Agency and Open Learning Centre, Morgannwg               | 14                     |
| Physical disability                          | Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire | North East Wales                | Workshop      | Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire Disability Forums                | 14                     |
| Primary school                               | Chepstow                          | South East Wales                | Workshop      | Thornwell Primary School, Chepstow                                    | 24                     |

|                     |                                 |                                 |                      |   |    |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|---|----|
| Youth group (11-25) | Blaenau Gwent                   | South East Wales                | Workshop             | Blaenau Gwent Youth Participation Forum | 20 |
| Secondary school    | Penarth                         | South East Wales                | Workshop             | TBC                                     | 36 |
| Visual impairments  | All Wales                       | South East Wales                | Telephone conference | Wales Council for the Blind             | 3  |
| Homeless            | Cardiff and Swansea             | South West and South East Wales | Interviews           | Cardiff Tenant Support Team             | 15 |
| LGBT North Wales    | North, north west and mid Wales | North, north west and mid Wales | Telephone interviews | Stonewall mailing list and website      | 5  |

## Annex Two

### Literature Review Groups

The population groups covered in the literature review are listed below. The groups marked with an asterix were also considered using primary research due to gaps in the existing evidence base.

- Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- BME groups\*
- People living in deprived areas\*
- People living in rural areas\*
- Gypsy-Travellers
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health problems
- Younger People\*
- Older people\*
- Disabled people (hearing, sight and physical)\*
- People with literacy language and numeracy difficulties
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender people
- Welsh Speakers\*
- Homeless people\*

# Annex Three

## Public Engagement Methods Reviewed

### User Panel

Regular meetings of people who use a particular service.

Strengths:

- The user panels can identify the concerns of service users and generate good ideas for improvements
- Everyone who takes part knows about the service and has views about it

Weaknesses:

- The people who attend may not represent the views of all users
- People who could use the service but do not do so are not represented

### Citizens' Jury

A small panel of people work together to examine an important issue and deliver a 'verdict'. The jury is given information on the issue, along with a range of options for tackling it.

Strengths:

- People have time to understand complex and difficult issues and reach an informed decision

Weaknesses:

- Only a small number of people can take part
- It takes time – a citizens' jury lasts between one and four days

- It can be expensive

## Focus Group

A structured discussion with a small group of people who share certain characteristics or interests. Over the course of 1.5 to 2 hours, a moderator introduces a range of issues for the group to discuss.

Strengths:

- Flexibility: a focus group can be used to explore opinions in depth, generate ideas and deal with sensitive issues
- The conversational style makes it feel natural for participants
- It is fairly inexpensive
- A focus group can reassure a community that their views are being taken seriously.

Weaknesses:

- Because many different views will be put forward, the findings can be difficult to analyse
- They only capture the views of a small group of people.

## Planning for Real

Participants make a 3D model of their local area and mark on it how they would like the community to develop. They then prioritise these ideas in groups and create an action plan.

Strengths:

- Planning for real engages people who would not normally get involved
- It is a good way of capturing the views of people for whom English or Welsh is not a first language

- It builds a shared vision of the future of the area

Weaknesses:

- Planning for real tends to work best on a local, rather than national or regional level

## Public Meeting

An open meeting, which anyone is free to attend. A public meeting is usually advertised in advance, for example in the local press or on community noticeboards.

Strengths:

- Some people are familiar and comfortable with public meetings
- It is inexpensive
- The event can convey the message that the organisation has come to the community.

Weaknesses:

- A poorly planned public meeting may have a confrontational 'us and them' feel, or attract only very few people
- It can be dominated by factions or individuals who are not representative of the wider community
- Some people may find it intimidating to speak to a room full of people, be uncomfortable at mixed gender events or find formal processes off-putting.

## Survey

A series of questions that people are asked, by post, phone, face-to-face, or, increasingly, over the Internet.

Strengths:

- A well-designed survey can gather reliable statistical information about people's opinions
- The results can be analysed objectively and accurately

Weaknesses:

- A survey is very good for measuring 'what' people say, but often weaker at explaining 'why' people say it

There is no conversation between members of the public who take part in the survey.

