

50+ Citizen Engagement Project

Barriers to Engagement: tackling both sides in Denbighshire

Pilot Report

Introduction

Fit for the job – skills for engagement

In a project workshop, we recognised the need for more and better training on engaging the public. Staff working on engagement have not always received training for that role. As a result, they may lack both an understanding of the issues and confidence in what they do – that's not good for them. Also, the lack of appropriate skills could actually make matters worse. For instance, a badly handled consultation could put older people off the idea of engagement for good. So there are sound reasons for making sure professionals are skilled for engagement jobs.

As for older people themselves, the importance of giving them opportunities to improve skills as citizens has been long recognised. For example, both [Age Concern](#) and [Help The Aged](#) have been offering training in, say, how to speak up with confidence at a meeting. Denbighshire County Council also have a great record in offering this sort of training to the over 50s.

Putting two-and-two-together, it seemed a good idea to link up 'trained' older citizens with public and voluntary sector staff who want to learn more about participation skills. So, the pilot was all about 'it takes two to tango'. There are barriers to engagement amongst both older people and, for instance, the providers of services. People can't tango when both sides see barriers in the way! The pilot in Denbighshire took up the challenge of getting everyone to understand more about how to engage each other – and then making citizen engagement happen even more.

This brief report covers:

- The route taken from the original idea of "fit for the job" to the pilot as it was actually undertaken;
- Details of what happened in Denbighshire;
- Pilot evaluation.

Acknowledgements

In addition to the general acknowledgements made by the 50+ Citizen Engagement Project, in respect to this pilot the following people are acknowledged for their expertise, advice and support.

Denbighshire County Council

Directorate of Social Services & Housing, especially Nikki, Paula and Sandra

Denbighshire Pensioners' Parliament

Flo, Jean, Margaret and May

From Idea To Reality

At the beginning

One of the main aims of the 50+ Citizen Engagement Project is to generate better understanding of the barriers to active citizenship for older people. In a series of workshops, these barriers and other citizenship issues were discussed. As should also happen in a workshop, we produced ideas that could be developed into ways of achieving more and better citizen engagement.

One idea that came from the first project workshop was:

Fit for the Job - Up-skilling our professionals

The notes on this original idea can be found in Appendix 1.

Taking the idea forwards

All the ideas coming out of the project workshops were passed to the project's work group. The ideas were discussed for strengths & weaknesses; especially do-ability given the project's limited timeframe and resources.

At this stage, some excellent ideas were dropped just because they weren't do-able in the project. Selected feasible ideas were then considered in more detail and improvements made.

Turning the idea into reality

Revised ideas were considered by the Project Board and evaluated using the grid shown in Appendix 2. A list of the most do-able suggestions was drawn up. This set of suggestions was circulated amongst the project stakeholders with a view to them running a pilot.

Denbighshire County Council have a fine record for their engagement work with older people. They were interested in developing the pilot proposal approved by the Project Board.

What Happened

Turning a good idea into excellence – that's what happened in this pilot.

Sandra, Denbighshire's Older People's Strategy Development Officer, suggested improving the engagement skills of Local Authority staff by building on the good work already done. As well as their Pensioners' Parliament, Denbighshire had provided [Voice & Choice](#) training for local older people. In other words, Denbighshire had been tackling the barriers to engagement as viewed by older citizens – and wanted to use these successes to work on the barriers as seen by Local Authority staff.

Why not invite trained and engaged members of the Pensioners' Parliament to a staff training day on participation?

Why not! – exactly what some engagement should be about: face-to-face contact between older people and Local Authority officials. If you want to do engagement, then you have to engage with people on the other side of the barrier.

So, the pilot idea had developed. Giving Local Authority staff new engagement skills was still the main aim. But this aim was now to be achieved with the involvement of older people themselves. People on both sides of the barriers to citizen engagement would have the chance to meet and talk about the barriers that separated them and also prevented more older people being active citizens.

Denbighshire County Council Directorate of Social Services & Housing – Staff Conference on Participation

There was an opportunity to try out this approach at the conference for social services & housing staff on February 1st, 2008. Partners in the NHS and third sector would also be present. The theme for the day was ‘participation’.

Conferences need considerable preparation and organisation – and the conference on February 1st was no exception. Including colleagues from partner organisations – in the spirit of participation – added to the organisational demands. And if that wasn’t enough, there was dovetailing with the 50+ Citizen Engagement Project and, most important, older people from the Pensioners’ Parliament. All to the credit of Denbighshire.

So, the conference on February 1st didn’t just pay lip service to participation. There was lots of participating in support of that theme. It’s not the job of this pilot report to comment on the day as a whole – although the very positive evaluations are included below. Let’s just say: including two workshops dedicated to 50+ citizen engagement issues as part of the overall theme of participation – that seemed to work particularly well.

The Barriers to Engagement Workshops

In the staff conference, there was a dedicated workshop on the barriers to engagement for 50+ citizens. The workshop held in the morning was repeated after lunch. The workshop was jointly facilitated by Nikki (Denbighshire County Council) and Flo, Jean, Margaret and May – all from the Pensioners’ Parliament.

Workshop design was traditional, using: key prompts, discussion, flip-charts and post-its.

Flo, Jean, Margaret and May brought something very different and special to the facilitation. Plenty of interesting comments and ideas were generated. There was a good ‘buzz’ to the workshops.

The full ‘flip-chart & post-it’ record of the workshops is reproduced below under evaluation.

Main Findings from the Workshops

➤ What does involvement mean?

This question was looked at from both the older person’s and the professional’s perspective. Although there were obvious differences in details, three main themes emerged within almost all comments could be slotted.

These three themes are:

- Listening & hearing
- Working together
- Focussing on care needs

➤ What are the barriers to involvement?

Table 1 is the flip-chart records of participants' workshop responses.

Table 1: Flip-chart record of responses on 'Barriers to Involvement'
What are the barriers to involvement from an older person point of view?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labelled "pensioner" • Stereotyping • Ability to participate • Decisions made for you
Barriers to Involvement?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other people's perceptions/not thought of as equals • Stereotyping • Belittling • Overprotective • Ability
What can staff do about barriers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain Language • Involvement • Treat equally • Re-phrase
What can staff do about the barriers for older people?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask Older People what they want • Re-phrase questions • Involve with planning • Communication
Where staff are getting it right?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with other departments • Good warden service • Extra care housing • Monthly meetings with tenants reps and housing officers
Where staff could do better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highways • Social Services should be more involved • Personal contact • Shout louder • More partnership working across the departments • Social Services & Housing more personal communication • Stop stereotyping • More sheltered housing • More publicity • Involvement with planning

Table 1 provides useful food for thought for Denbighshire and more generally when participation is being considered.

Generating information that can be acted upon is a pilot bonus. After all, the main aim of the pilot was to test whether the double-sided nature of the barriers to engagement could be approached in this way. At which point, we can move on to evaluation.

Evaluation

This was a small-scale pilot with very limited resources. The scope for evaluation was necessarily restricted. Despite these limitations, the pilot was evaluated along the lines set out in the TOOLKIT.

Further Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Nikki for all her help in processing workshop data. Some of the graphics in this section are also due to her.

Did the pilot do what it was intended to do?

Yes.

This affirmative assessment is demonstrated by a comparison between the pilot intentions set out in the appendices and the above account of what happened.

Problems encountered

This pilot ran smoothly from start to finish. There was one minor incident of note. Two of the Local Authority participants were not used to the style of workshops. They had been asked to attend by their line-manager. After an initial misunderstanding, the two soon got into the swing of things.

The incident was a good reminder that what seems obvious to the experienced isn't to others. The style of some engagement events can put some people off.

Who participated?

Table 2 shows the number of people who recorded videos and information on gender and age.

Table 2: People participating in the workshops			
Total (number)	Female (number)	Male (number)	Age over 70 (number)
24	20	4	4

What were the citizenship characteristics of the participants?

Table 3 shows information about the participants' characteristics as citizens. The characteristics are taken from the TOOLKIT.

Citizen characteristic	Yes (Number)	No (Number)
Voted	21	3
Contacted elected member	9	15
Signed petition	16	8
Joined phone-in	3	21
Contacted newspaper	4	20
Used Internet	10	13
Gone on march / protest / demo	1	22
Attended government meeting	8	15
Member of campaigning group	4	20
Member of political party	-	23
Member of trade union	12	10
Member of faith community	14	10
Formal volunteer	13	10

No formal analysis of the information is presented.

The most significant observations from the table are:

- The great majority of participants vote.
- None of the participants have been a member of a political party.
- Very few participants have joined a phone-in or contacted a newspaper.

No firm conclusions can be drawn. However, scanning the table generates the suggestion that, apart from voting, citizenship issues were of mixed interest to this group.

Fourteen participants responded to the question: "Has your view of citizen engagement changed due to your participation in this event?" Four responded 'yes'. If a one-hour workshop helped four people to change their views, then that is interesting. Something must have gone on!

Being an active citizen – what does that mean to you?

This box shows what participants understand by active citizenship

Being an active citizen – what does that mean to you?

- Meeting and mixing with older people – Being able to join in –
- Being heard – Taking an interest – Joining in with discussions –
- Feeling involved – Being able to make a difference –
- Taking part in local and regional discussions, being proactive –
- Can mean involvement with local groups, active in carrying out local activities – Getting involved in the community –
- Taking part, having opinions listened to – Being involved –
- Being able to contribute and participate with fellow friends –
- Joining in, with discussions – Making a change and support my community

What were the participants' reactions to the pilot?

The following set of boxes show the reactions of some of the participants to the pilot.

What have you enjoyed?

- Meeting people other teams/getting together
- All discussions meeting other people
- Being here
- Ladies from the tenants association
- All
- Listening to views
- Hearing volunteers views
- Interaction
- Group discussion
- Listening to other sector volunteers
- Being part of group discussions
- Getting involved

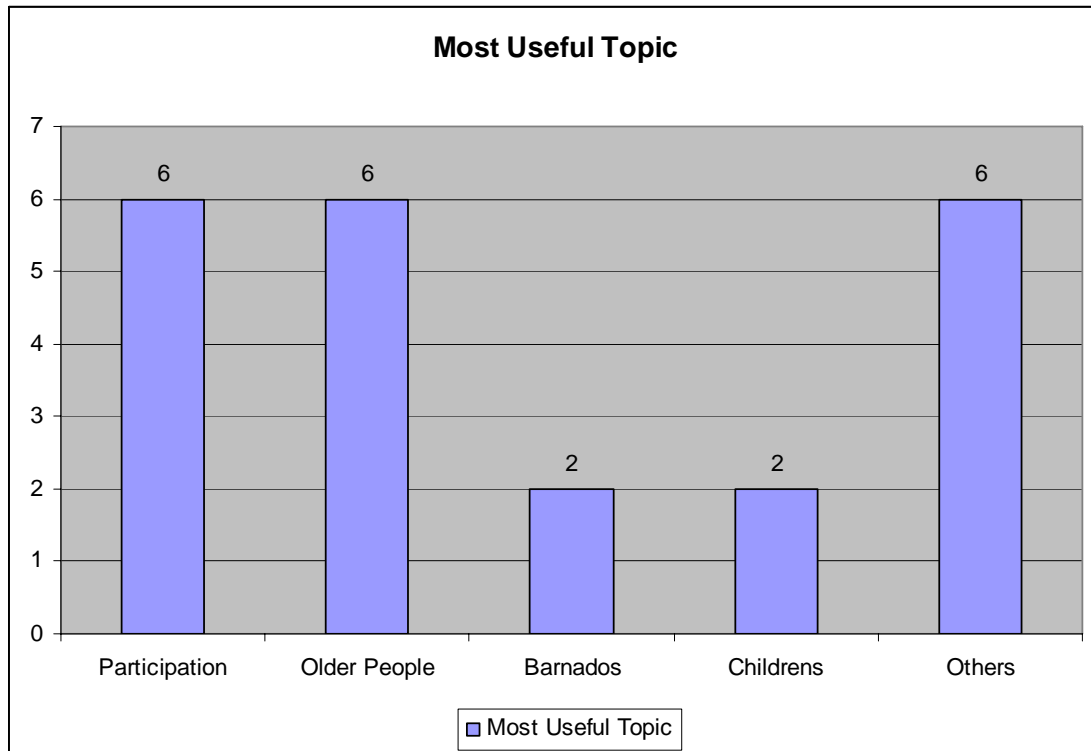
What have you found useful and will take away with you?

- Other people's views
- That people will listen, if you see them face to face
- User views
- Re-phrase "Do you have the ability?"
- Inspiration to take part more
- Over 50's
- Listening views
- Everything

What were participants' reactions to the workshop in the conference as a whole?

As noted above, this question doesn't really belong in this report. Even so, the following graphic and additional information does indicate the impression made by the issues of older people and participation.

➤ Question 1: Of the topics covered at the Staff Conference, which will be most useful to you?



To keep this graph manageable, I have only listed the 5 main responses. However, 'others' included:

- Communication
- Different ways of participating
- Details of tenants' participation scheme
- Consultation/partnership
- All topics covered were of equal importance
- To know there are over 50's forums around the County. To know that DCC are working towards overcoming barriers and to communicate better between SU's and providers

Source: Conference Report

What resources were used?

The pilot kept within its £200 budget – largely through piggy-backing on the conference!

The pilot relied heavily on the goodwill and support of people acknowledged at the start of this report. A reminder that people and their relationships are always the vital resource. Further thanks to Denbighshire County Council Directorate of Social Services & Housing for being great partners to work with.

Appendix 1

Fit for the Job - Up-skilling our professionals

Aim:

- To ensure those tasked with engagement projects* feel empowered to do the task, and have the appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure engagement is effective, worthwhile and outcome based and that feedback on the outcomes goes to the appropriate professional for action and members of the public for information. (*and ultimately everyone involved in the voluntary & statutory sectors – creating a culture of engagement.)

Why:

We feel there is at this point a shortage in these skills. Professionals are often “set” in the way they approach engagement and settle for less the effective results. Communications and presentation skills are often poor which results in less effective engagement and feedback despite significant effort and time being put into the process.

How:

Deliver a series of 3 morning or afternoon Engagement Skills Sessions which would include the following:

- The importance of having a clear idea of the aims and objectives of a particular piece of engagement - 20 mins
- How to get your message across and managing expectations – 20 mins
- Understanding that everyone has a different communication style and people take in information in different ways – 20 mins
- Comfort break
- Doing things differently – the risks and add value that can bring – 20
- Workshop sessions given a scenario to work on in small groups or spend time sharing ideas on the types of engagement they normally undertake and how they might now do it differently – 45 min

Evaluation/ outcomes:

- Evaluation on training on the day to assess whether people feel more empowered to engage effectively.
- Identify through evaluation on the day current gaps in knowledge and add if possible that to the next sessions.
- Contact after 3 months to see if the training has made any difference and if not what do they now feel is the gap in their knowledge.

Appendix 2

50+ Citizen Engagement

Pilot Assessment Sheet – Project Board 15/09/07

Pilot:

Fit for the Job – Up-skilling our professionals

Do-able in the timeframe:

Yes / No

Resources:

Time - High / Medium / Low

Money - High / Medium / Low

Engagement considerations:

The lead: Older people / statutory sector / voluntary sector

Doing engagement: to / on behalf of / with older people

Related to: Awareness raising
Interest generating
Consultation exercise
Engagement project
Decision-making

Innovation in: support / communication / approach / type

Can the pilot be evaluated?

Yes or No

Is this pilot too similar to others?

Yes or No

Pilot Details

Pilot Name: Fit for the Job – Up-skilling our professionals

Brief Pilot Description, including location:

Empowering professionals with skills & knowledge to work effectively & efficiently in 50+ citizen engagement settings

Delivered as set of interactive sessions or workshops with key elements

- Managing expectations
- Communications issues
- Working with innovations – risks& rewards
- Scenarios

Evaluation – has been given first thoughts

Location? – Caerphilly, Merthyr or RCT?

Pilot Assessment Using The Research Review Tools

Core classification:

Directed towards barriers for older people?	
Directed towards barriers for professionals?	Mostly
Addresses relationships between older people & professionals?	Some
One-off event?	Needs further consideration
Involve a sequence of engagement exercises?	?
Develops an existing engagement project?	?
Type of innovation (see separate table)	Resources ? / Communication ? / Approach ✓ ? / Type ✓

Level of Engagement:

Awareness raising?	Yes
Interest creating?	Yes
Consultation style?	
Engagement project?	Possibly
Decision-making?	

Targeting & Recruitment:

- What is the target population?
All 50+
- Where will they be recruited?
Statutory (&3rd?) sectors
- How will they be recruited?
Direct invitation

Timeframe:

- Short – just a matter of giving enough advance warning

Resources required:

- Money - room hire & catering
- Time - preparation & delivery
- People - can deliver through project people
- Other ?

Barriers to Engagement (Professionals Perspective): Assessment & Innovation Type

Lack of organisational resources	Fit for the job
o Lack of time to develop relationships & trust	X
o Shortage of dedicated finance	X
o Lack of knowledge / expertise	✓
Lack of motivation	
o Citizen engagement is a low priority	✓
o Engagement is just another tick box	✓
o Citizen apathy	X
o Consultation overload with no definite outcomes or impacts	X
o Scepticism about the purpose of engagement exercises	✓
o Recognition that informal engagement is more powerful	✓ ?
Previous negative experiences	
o Failed or unsatisfactory engagement exercises	✓
o Difficulties in engaging minority groups	X
o The past creation of unrealistic public expectations	✓
Cultural Issues	
o Focus on consumerist engagement	✓
o Don't recognise or understand democratic innovations, e.g. participative democracy	✓
o Professional protectionism	✓
o Bureaucratic inertia – especially 'bogged down with paperwork'	✓
o Perception of them (public) and us (professionals)	✓

Key;

- ✓ - barrier to engagement dealt with
- ✓ ? - barrier possibly dealt with
- X** – barrier not dealt with

Evaluation Framework

Yet to be done.

Recall that as far as the 'professionals' are concerned we have got a bit ahead of ourselves.

The research review gave a reasonable picture of the 50+ perspective on the barriers to engagement. We have put that knowledge to good use.

However, the research review only touched upon the 'supply-side' barriers. Our professional workshops are designed to provide more information here – but we've only had one of them!