

Consulting With Hard To Reach Users Of Housing Related Support Services At The Strategic Level For 'Supporting People'

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ROCC

Promoting Partnerships through the provision of
training, advice and consultancy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project, funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was to find effective consultation methods for strategic decision making for Supporting People (SP) with hard to reach clients in Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

Hard to reach clients were defined as individuals who were:

- homeless people
- people with alcohol and/or substance issues and addictions
- women escaping domestic violence
- vulnerable young people, often with histories of being in care
- people from black minority ethnic (BME) groups including gypsies and travellers
- people who have offended or may be at risk from offending
- those with complex needs (i.e. two or more of the above), and may be compounded by mental health problems.

Drawing on individuals' experiences, preferred methods for strategic planning consultation were ascertained. These contributed to a set of Good Practice Guidance for clients, service providers and commissioners.

Client feedback indicated that agencies providing housing related support services were usually consulting about daily decisions and short term planning. Agencies were rarely including service users in higher level organisational management or strategic planning. Those that had attained the strategic level consultation, tended to do it well. Few clients were taking part in strategic planning for SP, with the notable exception of young people.

Motivation for taking part in consultation processes was examined and clients developed a model to inform service providers and commissioners. The research found that interest in, and ability to, contribute to strategic planning tended to develop when clients had moved out of a crisis period. However, day-to-day consultation could aid longer term planning provided information was sought in ways that enabled rather than hindered clients participation.

The research found that Commissioners require accurate and valid data from clients which is gained independently from service providers.

As a result of this research a consultation model is proposed that utilises primary and secondary methods of consultation both for those who have moved on to a more settled life, and those still in crisis. Primary methods consist of the more traditional questionnaires and meeting forums which are better suited to those who are more settled. Secondary methods, for example, creative writing and drama video work have a self development purpose for the client and are more useful when consulting with those in a crisis period. Both methods can be used in the strategic planning process provided appropriate training and reward is available.

It is recommended that this consultation model is implemented so that consistent standards are maintained for client involvement across Supporting People functions and geographical areas. It is further recommended that the model be utilised in conjunction

with relevant structures already in place, such as networks currently provided by Connexions and Social Cohesion Units, for young people and BME groups.

INTRODUCTION

This section examines the nature of consultation with hard to reach service users and in particular at the level of strategic planning for Supporting People.

What is Consultation?

This project adopted the ethos that clients should be offered the opportunity to be consulted, as far as is meaningfully possible, in all aspects of the Supporting People (SP) services they receive; and that their views be used to assist in strategic planning of these services as evidence shows that this produces better services for clients.

In 'Service User participation, concepts, trends, practices' the authors list eleven terms in common usage relating to the degrees to which service users are engaged in participation, involvement and consultation.

Some Definitions:

Service user involvement

A generic term which could be used to describe almost any activity or initiative.

User participation

A generic term, although narrower than service user involvement, suggesting that users are taking a part in some aspect of the organisations work and therefore have some influence in decision making.

User consultation

The gathering of information and /or opinions from users about existing services, or plans for changes, or new services drawn up by the organisation. Also known as market research.

User empowerment

A process through which users gain power so that they can influence decisions about their own individual circumstances, and/or services and organisations. Empowerment can be initiated either by users themselves, or by workers, managers and governors/trustees in organisations.

Models of service user participation are many and varied, and although interesting as a way of understanding the values and dynamics of the processes in themselves, also have practical applications for planning and evaluating a participation initiative.

'In planning a participatory initiative, it would be valuable to identify what level of control is being transferred, and what level of input are being sought' (Service User Participation).

From an empowerment model perspective, user control can be measured to see how much real power both parties have. Arnstein's Ladder (1969) indicates degrees of citizen participation where conflicts can lead to disempowerment and tokenism. He defines levels of non-participation as manipulation, therapy and informing, degrees of tokenism as informing consultation and placation, and degrees of citizen power as partnership, delegated power and citizen control.

Each organisation or commissioner may need to take a view on the degree of power that clients are going to be genuinely allowed to have in order to effectively develop

consultation methodologies for strategic planning. This can be aided by deciding whether or not they want clients to participate, be consulted with or empowered.

There are various guides to consultation methodologies for service users such as the DTR's Developing Good Practice in Tenant Participation - Housing (1999), the Housing Corporations 'Just Do It !' (2000) a directory of examples of service users involvement in supported housing, and their Directory of Tenant and Resident Involvement Information (2001) on CD format.

Ideas for good practice in generic service user involvement are well documented in 'User Involvement - Principles and Practice for Involving Users in the Design and Delivery of Public Services'. These ideas are positive and suggest an ethos of commitment by professionals in developing an empowering organisation that supports and enables involvement of service users at all levels.

The focus of the majority of the literature reviewed tends to remain however, on tenants and/or relatively stable recipients of supported housing services rather than the hard to reach groups defined in this project.

'Hard To Reach' Service Users

Housing related support services are available to vulnerable individuals in need of help to develop or sustain independent living. 'Vulnerability' is however a term open to interpretation and those users of housing related support services may define themselves as 'vulnerable,' or in need, to a greater or lesser extent.

This project focussed its attention on individuals from the groups listed in the Executive Summary, as often they do not have contact with statutory services, and in addition have no fixed address. This may be either because they are not seen as fulfilling statutory requirements, or because they have excluded themselves, or because they have had their primary contact with voluntary sector agencies (i.e. our hard to reach service users fulfil at least one of these criteria below):

- Transitory.
- Not directly in criteria for LA care.
- Excluded by services, or have excluded themselves (e.g. runaways).

In addition, these individuals or more often, labelled groups such as 'addicts' are usually unpopular by UK media standards, and hard to work with by Social Care and Health standards, as they often have chaotic lives and are not necessarily compliant or predictable.

They may also consider themselves to be socially excluded or have 'an inability to participate effectively in economic; social and political and cultural life, alienation and distance from mainstream society.' (Supporting People definition).

For the purpose of this research, it was decided that those that met the hard to reach criteria could be:

- a potential user of a housing related support service.
- be currently using a housing related support service.

- have recently 'moved on' to independence.

Current Thinking on Consultation With Hard To Reach Service Users

To date, limited research has been undertaken in consulting with hard to reach service users, and in particular there is a 'near absolute absence of studies of service user involvement in a homelessness context specifically' (Scottish Council for Single Homeless 2001 bib?). Relevant research projects which have been undertaken, in the specific areas, are:-

- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, renowned for their work into social exclusion, have produced papers addressing issues such as increasing user involvement and control in the voluntary sector (1994, 1997). Some of these describe key issues such as personal contact positively affecting consultation exercises for marginalised groups, and the difficulties in involving users at higher levels of strategic planning.
- The Community Care legislation specified a requirement for health, social services, the independent sector providers and service users to develop services appropriate to need by working together.
- In 1994 the Race Equality Unit produced guidance on working towards developing user led services. (Begum & Gillespie-Sells)
- The National User Involvement Project was established in order to widen the range of service users involved in commissioning decisions and included those from BME groups, older people, as well as those with mental health problems and learning difficulties.
- In January 1999 the Evaluation of the National User Involvement Project was published. This showed that there was a gap in 'understanding of the key access needs for these groups to be able to become involved in terms of information formats and cultural practices. It was also found that users of services were still more involved in general planning than decision making, and that service users needed a range of support and training in order to participate as fully as possible. This subsequent research shows that this is still an issue for Commissioners of SP.
- In July 2003 an action research study that distinguished between the concepts of 'user-centred user involvement' and 'management centred user involvement' in voluntary organisations found that there were key enablers of change and key barriers to progress. Enablers included consistent commitment by supportive and facilitative leaders who opened up structures for service users and encouraged relationship development. Barriers included slow progress, varying commitment levels and availability of resources. (Increasing User Involvement in Voluntary Organisations).

As stated above, surveys involving marginalised groups as the primary focus especially homeless people, are however scarce. Groundswell appears to be the only well known vehicle that consistently campaigns to raise awareness of issues for homeless people, as seen by homeless people, and have produced the 'Toolkit for Change'.

Utilising this previous research, and through holding workshops relevant topics and definitions were discussed including what user led really means, management practices and approaches, representation, power, valuing users and communication.

Consultation in Supporting People

The Supporting People Programme is designed to enable vulnerable people to achieve and maintain independence through the use of housing related support services. In order to ensure that services are flexible to meet the needs of the individual, service users need to be at the centre of the support planning process.

As part of a process of becoming an independent individual able to contribute and function within a community, it is important for a client to feel that they have a voice and a valid contribution to make. Bringing together a group of people to achieve their goals can also be a cohesive and powerful force in itself.

The Supporting People Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) reflects the merging demands of the Housing Corporation, Audit Commission, Best Value etc that all require demonstrable influence of service users in housing related support services. But if quality is more than just compliance with externally set performance indicators, a more inside-out approach is needed by an organisation. Despite the pressures of time, money, skills, etc that will be examined in this paper; devising a meaningful strategy of client involvement will demonstrate not only compliance with external standards but commitment to continuous improvement and real quality of service for clients.

Levels of Client Consultation in Supporting People

The ODPM has defined four levels at which service users can and should be making contributions and has produced a 'Guide to User Involvement for Organisations providing Housing Related Support Services', providing clear guidance and examples of good practice for all levels, defined as:

1. Dialogue/information
2. Day to day
3. Planning and Policy
4. Service Management

Strategic Planning for Supporting People

Barnes et al 1997 identified areas within which 'user control' can be exercised, and covers the ODPM's 4 levels and a higher 5th level of strategic planning. It includes elements of day to day, service and management contact and planning, as well as:

- Committee management and policy development
- Local Authority-wide and inter-agency management and policy development
- National policy development

This project examined how service users can effectively be involved at this fifth level - for Supporting People. At this level service users are able to contribute their views to the highest level of planning SP services by engaging with commissioners and having their views taken into account in the planning and prioritising of SP services.

Currently under SP the District Core Group would be the place for strategic planning at a local level, although these decisions are subject to alteration at the Higher level – the County Core Group. It has been suggested by one commissioner interviewed as part of this project that in fact ,‘the real decisions are taken by the Strategic Housing Officers Group’, which includes people from GOSE and the Housing Corporation – a local government officers group and not formally part of the SP structure at all.

District Core Groups make the local strategic plans but currently don’t have any access by clients. In authorities where clients are involved they are only involved in either the Inclusive Forum or working groups, which tend to focus on learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health and domestic violence.

On the Isle of Wight, groups feed into the Inclusive Forum, Strategic Core Group the Council and other linked strategies. Commonly Primary Care Trusts and Health Authorities have their own systems of consultation and local authorities may have other consultation frameworks with greater or lesser co-ordination, overlap, and information exchange.

There is a distinction between the contribution clients views as part of the regular activity of receiving a service, and the special attendance or involvement in consultation exercises for strategic planning. It is with the latter that pay and reward issues for participation must be addressed; suggestions are made in Conclusions and Recommendations.

Recent Strategic Level Consultation Reviewed

During the time that this project was being undertaken the Pathways Research, (supported by Joseph Rowntree Foundation) ‘Supporting People: Real Change?’ (2003) a study reviewing how Supporting People had impacted on the planning for housing and support for marginalised groups. Here the defined groups were:

- people with complex needs
- people who were high risk or presented a risk to themselves or others, (through offending behaviour, drugs and alcohol, mental health problems)
- people who were at risk from others (women escaping domestic violence)
- people who are hard to reach or hard to find.

‘Hard to reach’ in this case were defined as those resistant to services or those who have been excluded from services (e.g. long term homeless people). ‘Hard to find’ included those in BME groups with little or no connection with formal care services, or those whose homeless state is ‘hidden’ such as young people ‘sofa surfing’ (permanently living in different temporary accommodation with friends or family).

The Pathways research found that despite the policy commitment of SP to the housing and support of marginalised groups, at a local level there had been the more immediate pressures of the transitional period to contend with. Although keen to pursue improvements for the above marginalised groups there was evident concern about the level of availability of resources to do so in the short term.

Hackney Borough Council has written a draft Strategy for User Involvement. This clarifies what is and is not consultation, and cites examples of consultation processes that can be used at the individual, scheme and strategy level, including the Inclusive Forum, Hackney Service User Group and an Annual Speak-Out Event.

Hackney's strategy highlights the importance of asking how people would like to be consulted, and proposes methods that could be used such as 'e – conferencing', roadshows and focus groups. There appears to be commitment to Hackney SP going out to visit meetings and events rather than expecting people to come to them, and there is a focus on the inclusion of BME groups and cultural sensitivity. There is however, little explicit mention of how to engage with 'hard to reach' service users.

METHODOLOGY

Parameters of Research for the User Development Project

This project was funded as a piece of action research with the intention that methods could be tried, tested, and adapted in the light of feedback. The process was designed to be developmental and organic, and created a wealth of learning and development for all the participants, clients, service providers, consultant fieldworkers and commissioners.

The geographical area to be covered was Hampshire, a designated 'Excellent' local authority which includes New Forest, Test Valley, Basingstoke, Hart, Rushmoor, Aldershot, East Hampshire, Winchester, Havant, Fareham Gosport and Eastleigh. Also included were the unitary authorities of Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight

As the target area was very large and varied it was acknowledged that there were limitations in the ability to consult with all groups in all areas so only samples from some areas would be possible.

It was agreed that the majority of the fieldwork should take place in day centre type settings for the following reasons:

- We should go out to clients and not expect them to come to us
- The majority of hard to reach people had a presence here (e.g. multi cultural centres, homelessness day centres, drugs and alcohol drop in centres etc).
- Individuals might be more forthcoming if they were not interviewed within a service where they held a tenancy (as far as this was possible)
- Drop in type centres are not directly funded to provide housing related support services, although they often fulfil essential needs
- Refuges for women escaping violence generally try to maintain confidentiality of address as far as possible

Due to the difficulties in getting, developing and maintaining contact, participation and trust with hard to reach service users it was decided to ask them about their experiences of previous consultation, and how they would like to be consulted for strategic decision making for SP. In order to put people at ease, consultants spent time chatting to service users, explaining terms, issues of confidentiality and getting to know about them as far as reasonably possible in the time available.

Individual consultants arranged to meet with service users in one or more of the following ways: on a one-to-one basis, informal groups, pre-arranged focus groups. One of the consultants conducted more formal interviews with service Commissioners.

Informal opportunities were also taken to seek views such as conversations with young people struck up at events attended by the Project Manager.

The Good Practice Group

This group was tasked with being a challenge group for the project, and was a pilot joint working group of clients, commissioners and a service provider facilitated by an independent consultant.

In terms of its development and achievements this was the most interesting group as there was a lot of sharing of individual experiences. Commissioners stated that they found the experience immensely rewarding as they were encouraged by the service users to 'be themselves' which improved group trust.

The group was able to undertake tasks on behalf of the project such as reviewing a draft vulnerability protocol for a local council, and draft letters to tenants explaining rent changes under Supporting People. Some individuals also took the opportunity to visit drug agencies to seek views and advertise the project. Members also helped devise the questionnaire format for interviewing commissioners, and assisted with some of the fieldwork (e.g. interviewing gypsies and travellers with the Project Manager).

The Steering Group consisted of representation from Supporting People, service providers, clients and the ROCC Board of Trustees.

In consultation with clients, a list of values was drawn up as a commitment for all individuals involved in the project. This was particularly for professionals to be mindful of their perceived power and also the importance and value of input from service users. (See Values Statement Appendix A)

Communications

The ROCC membership was a good starting point for advertising and gaining commitment to the project, as the membership includes organisations that provide housing related support services for vulnerable people, including our hard to reach groups across the designated region.

The organisations were also used as access points to hard to reach service users. Information that was sent out to organisations was then passed to service users both verbally and in poster form by staff members.

The Project Manager wrote an informal 'Dear Diary' column, which was posted monthly on the ROCC website, and hard copies sent out in the ROCC monthly mailings. To make it more interesting visually graphics were added by members of the SPITTS project that operates IT training for homeless people in Portsmouth.

RESULTS

This section focuses on barriers and enablers to consultation at the strategic level and examines the results of the fieldwork with hard to reach service users.

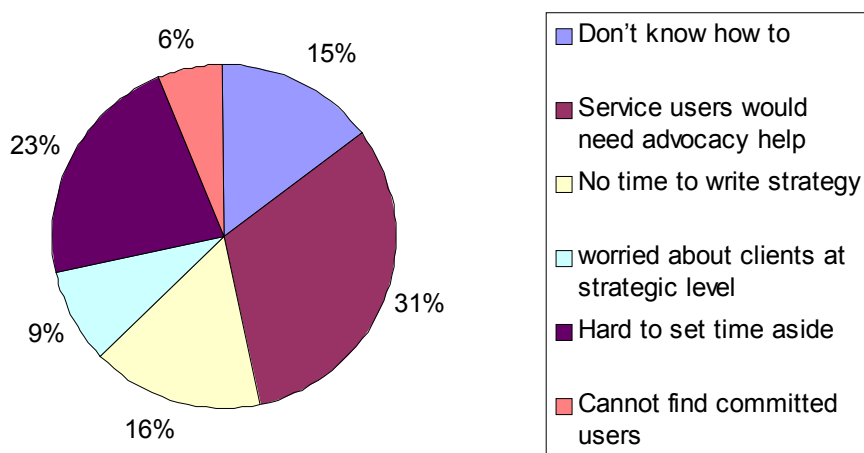
Barriers to Consultation at a Strategic Level

There are barriers to consultation at a strategic level as perceived by professionals and clients, some of which may be shared, and others more specific to the individual's role. This section explores some of the barriers faced by professionals and clients then addresses enablers of involvement.

Providers

At the outset of this project a questionnaire was sent out to the ROCC membership, which included this very question, and could be returned anonymously, (Appendix B). Responses were received back from approximately a third of the members (37), and appeared to be very honest as respondents answered the question:

'What barriers get in the way of having a service user consultation strategy for strategic decision making?':



Other issues were:

- 'No one person (staff) has a specific remit'
- 'Users get stuck in trivia and can't see the whole picture'
- 'Have tried various formats but can't sustain (clients) interest'
- 'The women have pressing needs now and no energy left for management issues'
- 'Would need a crèche'
- 'The meetings are barriers in themselves as they use jargon and are held at inaccessible times and venues'
- 'Changing client group and hearing those who aren't as vocal'

If this is typical of the agencies in our geographical area then there are clear needs in terms of investment in time for staff and support for clients wanting to take part. There is

also a clear admission that some professionals do not feel that they know how to embark on a strategy for service user consultation at a strategic level.

Robson et al. (1997) surveyed 42 voluntary sector organisations and found that over half the senior managers felt the biggest barrier to service user participation was users' preferred interest in the quality of the service they received, rather than 'management issues'. Other barriers perceived were reported as service users' state of mental health, understanding of committee procedures, travelling, and lacking motivation.

It would seem from this research and the literature that barriers faced by staff are practical in terms of time and money/resources, and affected by perceptions of service user motivation.

Attitude

When examining professional attitudes, such as the above, it is worth considering which of these are real or imagined barriers, conscious decisions or subconscious attitudes born out of the fear of challenge or change. If professionals have been of a mind to 'do to' rather than 'work with' clients their very role, value and purpose is being confronted. It may take decidedly longer to assist a client to do something for themselves than doing it for them, whether that is making a phone call or a strategic decision. The value however is in the increase to the clients personal independence and development within the immediate or wider community.

The attitude that doesn't recognise a clients capacity to develop and grow can only limit that growth and development, and engender a prejudiced view of what vulnerable people can and cannot achieve. If this is the case in the daily workplace then it is bound to restrict the expectations of exactly what clients can be consulted about. Such resistance needs to be worked with and broken down, so genuinely useful structures can be developed that allow and respect a clients right to participate and be consulted.

Although policy makers have increasingly pushed for greater participation by clients and it is a requirement of SP, it is better to have full and genuine support rather than lip service if the concept is to be meaningfully embedded in housing related support services planning and delivery.

Staff Structures & Jargon

Throughout this project the Project Manager and consultants have tried to question their own assumptions and experiences of professional jargon, structures and expectations, as it was believed that only by being open to suggestion and change was it going to be possible to hear what clients had to say.

Barriers to Strategic Consultation Faced by Clients

Service User Motivation

In contrast to some professionals perception that clients are not interested in being consulted with for strategic planning, clients involved in this project, and the literature, demonstrated that there are people who want to be involved - in a way that suits them and meets their needs.

Cummings et al 2000 found that 57 young homeless people in Scotland resented their lack of voice in decision making and wanted to be consulted about service provision. Care Leavers were also very dissatisfied about their involvement and wanted more of a say in their care planning (The Big Step 2000).

Emmaus UK 2000 found that 80 from 97 homeless and ex-homeless people wanted to be able to take part in day-to-day decision making in a shared living scheme. (cited in Service User Participation, 2001).

There could be concern amongst clients that speaking out may have an adverse effect on how they are treated, that they may experience pressure or discrimination from the service provider or other clients, however this was harder to evidence. This may be of great concern if the client is from a hard to reach group e.g. homeless and reliant on a service for shelter and support.

Clients cease to be motivated to take part in consultation exercises if they do not receive feedback as to action that has been taken as a result of their input. Service users have repeatedly said that there is no point in saying things if no one listens or does anything about it. Also that a 'no' decision was better than not hearing whether or not a decision had been taken at all.

Personal confidence does have a part to play in motivation as often clients have expressed the view that they are embarrassed to ask for clarity of jargon, or concepts. People who are sleeping rough or have addiction issues may also feel very isolated and stigmatised.

The Good Practice Group devised a model of motivation for consultation for themselves as they considered that they fitted or had previously fitted the project's criteria for hard to reach groups (see Appendix C).

The model shows a clear awakening to the bigger picture as basic needs are fulfilled, and a client feels more settled. They are then more aware and motivated to participate or be consulted at the higher of the ODPM levels once they are out of crisis. There is an interesting parallel with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, also where as needs are fulfilled individuals move up from 1 to 8 to the highest level.

Factors and Methods that Enable Client Consultation at a Strategic Level

This section summarises the results gained from the field work with each of the hard to reach groups individually, then draws comparisons and contrasts between the motivations and methods for individuals in consultation at a strategic level.

Homeless People

Clearly there are more urgent survival needs with homeless people than strategic planning, but this is not to say however that current consultation methods are not varied and could be improved by enabling greater participation of clients. There is a great reliance on staff helping them and not therefore a surprising dependence on staff to advocate on their behalf wherever deemed necessary.

Despite the transitory nature of the clients using these services it would still be possible to ask the same questions of everyone over a year then collate the results as part of a strategic exercise, if all clients felt their views counted.

People with Drug, Alcohol and Substance Issues

Clients said that due to the nature of the residential units there is a high expectation of compliance to a set regime so they would not expect to be consulted much about service changes.

In the view of the consultant 'the majority of the service users...were both capable and keen to advocate for themselves and whilst they might appreciate staff support they did not necessarily need it.' (Marc Mordey) This may be due to the therapeutic and constructively confrontational models of treatment often used in drug rehabilitation schemes that often leads to significantly increased skills.

Overall as with homeless service users, those not yet resettled were more concerned with their immediate housing need than those who had moved on and were interested in being consulted at a strategic level

Women Escaping Domestic Violence

It was clear from the fieldwork that the relationship with the staff is of great importance for women in refuges, and they rely on them for support and information. Generally the refuge system has encouraged an ethos of empowerment of vulnerable women escaping abuse as a method of rebuilding their self esteem and confidence shattered by an abusive partners misuse of power over them.

Many women were anxious to maintain their anonymity if they were to attend external meetings, in terms of being seen by the partner they were fleeing and having their names on documents etc.

Women that have moved through the system and are now ready to move on, or have done so are interested in participating in consultation and planning of services as they see themselves as having a clear understanding of the particular needs of this group.

Young People

Obviously not all young people are vulnerable by definition, but this study was interested in young people who are already involved in strategic planning processes for service commissioning and Supporting People.

On the Isle of Wight and in Hampshire young people were thoroughly enjoying their roles as mentors/advisors in the Care Action Team, the Hampshire Young Pregnancy Strategy group, the Youth Council and Connexions. In particular they found their roles to support other young people, and have a voice at a high level both exciting and challenging.

Across all these services young people said that their motivation was primarily to help other young people of the future who may have had similar or worse life experiences, and to increase their own skills personally and professionally. It was also important that their work was flexible to fit in with benefit or other job/training requirements.

Gypsies and Travellers

Gypsies and travellers are probably the least popular of all the hard to reach groups as defined in the introduction. Not only are they homeless they are seen as being intentionally so and rejecting house dwellers society norms. Their only media coverage tends to be negative and biased, but they are an ethnic minority group(s). They are entitled to housing related support services regardless of tenure, along with everyone else who fits the criteria.

The Hampshire Gypsy Liaison Officer (GLO) outlined the history of gypsies and travellers, and his role as well as the legislation that is dealt with regularly. The role of the GLO is to represent gypsies and travellers and act as a go between for the council and courts, social services and education authorities as well as any other service that may be needed. The GLO facilitated access to sites to undertake interviews.

The research found that Gypsies and travellers wanted to be represented through the GLO.

Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

The main view put forward by individuals from BME groups in Hampshire was that they feel marginalised, particularly at the current time with perceived increasing racism in the UK following '9/11' and the invasion of Iraq. It was also acknowledged that they often feel over consulted yet under informed.

The DTLR guide 'Reflecting the Needs and Concerns of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Supporting People' is a useful starting point for service providers and commissioners as there are important additional issues to be addressed in order to engage and work effectively with these groups.

Commissioners' Views

SP commissioners' views were sought primarily in terms of the value they placed on clients views, how much these were weighted against other considerations, methods they currently use or would be happy to use, and how they thought about reaching the 'hard to reach'.

Current information is mostly qualitative offering suggestions for service improvements and some quantitative information such as waiting times and levels of use of facilities. Although this can contribute to service improvement it is not currently of use in terms of strategic planning or decision making for services or SP.

In terms of influence, most commissioners interviewed said that clients views were 'very influential' in the decision making process although little concrete evidence was provided. Commissioners all said that information they obtained would need to be accurate, representational and independent in order to be valid for use in the planning cycle. For example services are reviewed under SP and include input from clients, it was felt that this could be expanded over time to ask more about strategic views.

Trust building was also important to commissioners who felt that developing positive relationships with providers and their clients was crucial. For example Portsmouth City Council SP staff have undertaken placements lasting several weeks in provider organisations to allow clients time to get to know them through informal dialogue about their thoughts and needs.

None had tried some of the more creative suggestions put forward by clients in the project such as using websites or video but were open to the possibility of trying them.

Enabling Methods of Consultation

	Homeless		Drugs & Alcohol		Women fleeing DV		Young People		Gypsies and Travellers		Black Minority Ethnic	
	Crisis	Stable	Crisis	Stable	Crisis	Stable	Crisis	Stable	Crisis	Stable	Crisis	Stable
Link to current networks					√				√	√		√
Community outreach												√
Staff advocacy	√		√		√		√		√	√		
Advocate for others		√		√		√		√				√
Day centre visits by Commissioners	√	√										
Hostel visits by Commissioners	√		√									
Inclusive Forums		√		√				√				√
Drama			√				√					
Creative Writing	√		√		√							
Newsletters	√											
Video							√					
IT	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The defined 'hard to reach groups' are small relative to those groups excluded from this research, and the numbers willing to participate in strategic planning for SP even smaller but valid. It is therefore important to seek solutions that are cost effective and practical, yet as inclusive as reasonably possible to allow those that want to be involved to take part in strategic decision making processes in a variety of ways in line with their current life pressures.

The Good Practice Group's Developmental Model of User Involvement demonstrates an increase in motivation in line with the decrease of personal crisis and has similarity with Maslow's Hierarchy of need. This also has parallels with the ODPMs four levels of client consultation where most (though not all) people are actively involved at the information and day to day levels, but fewest at the level of management or strategic planning.

This demonstrated that clients are at their least able and interested to take part in strategic planning when 'in crisis', but as these needs are met and they become more stable in their lives, they can take a wider perspective.

Where examples of effective consultation at ODPM levels 3 and 4 were found this has tended to have been a progression from firm foundations of client involvement at levels 1 and 2. This is not to say however that clients operate in a purely linear fashion. Some individuals had no interest in the day to day consultation and wanted to talk strategy and service improvements with the 'movers and shakers' who they thought could take positive action.

It may not even be useful to define four (or five) levels of consultation, as on a daily basis for example, the same questions can be asked to all visitors over a year about say hostel provision in the area and a picture built up about needs and provision.

Primary and Secondary Methods

Clients may not wish to be fitted into traditional styles of consultation on strategic decision making particularly if in crisis, when more creative possibilities might be utilised. There will always be concerns about literacy, understanding jargon, passive exclusion or tokenism in involving clients in high level meetings and although these can be successfully addressed with commitment to time and resources, they may be better suited to those clients at a more stable place in their lives.

Two types of consultation methods were defined, those whose primary purpose is to consult, (traditional meetings, questionnaires) and those activities that may be engaged in by clients for their personal development but can be used and shared (e.g. IT, art, drama projects). These could have a secondary purpose as channels of information to contribute to strategic decision making.

Good Practice Example:

Students on a Drama and Video degree course at Winchester College had been working on a community based project in partnership with City Road, a hostel for care leavers run by Winchester Care and Support. Through seeking the Manager's consent and advertising the project on the hostel notice board, young people expressed an interest in being part of a drama and video project.

The students turned up weekly for 3 hours at a time in the evening over 3 months with a view to helping young people express themselves through the media of video and drama, provide them with an interesting and potentially therapeutic activity, and increase their video making skills.

Students said they believe the young people benefited from being able to express their views about their lives in the hostel including their likes and dislikes. The students perceive that the young people were interested in learning new skills as well as feeling they could connect with the students (who are also young people) who had a lot of similarities e.g. living in shared accommodation, managing independent living and having little available cash. Young people have also said they felt that the students understood them, that they cared, and that the project was a positive diversion from less healthy activities.

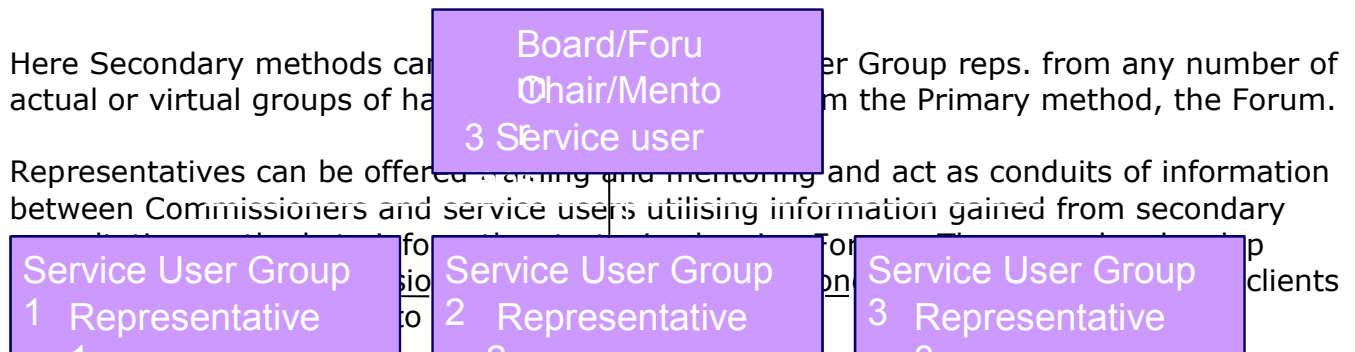
An in-context viewing was held at King Alfred's College and by taking their shoes off on arrival participants were encouraged to be without usual footwear and follow in the paper footsteps of a young care leaver using the service. A realistic mock up of a young care leaver's bedroom was complete down to the unfinished take-away and person asleep in bed!

Although the project was not originally designed with service review in mind, information gained from the young people has contributed to service development and strategic planning at a county level through the Care Leavers Team.

Martin Simpson was one of the students m.j.simpson@wicac.ac.uk

Although there is strong motivation by some individuals to contribute their views to a planning process to help future clients most clients interviewed want to see results quickly and there are risks that this will not necessarily happen using traditional planning and long term mechanisms. Benefits can be obtained from the process of consultation i.e. from the learning and representative role that can be taken on by clients, and the process of more flexible consultation methods such as creative writing.

Generic and Specific User Groups Utilising Primary and Secondary Methods:



Costs

Although there are costs associated with involving service users at the strategic planning level, it is still a worthwhile investment. There are differences in funding streams and these will have an impact on the resources available to consult with clients of particular groups.

Traditional (Primary) methods of consultation can be quite costly as payment needs to be made for transport, attendance, parking, refreshments for a number of people. Utilising secondary methodologies these costs could be significantly reduced as in this model few people need to be retained, trained and paid as they access the greater numbers wishing to contribute through the representatives using secondary methods. Appendix D has a Calculating the Cost check list and an example of a Community Chest venture.

It is recommended that providers and commissioners liaise to ensure knowledge of existing structures and mechanisms for consultation especially with BME groups in order to prevent replication and consultation fatigue for example Social Cohesion Units, Gypsy Liaison Officer and SP.

Development Issues

The continued training of service providers and commissioners in the area of Racial Harassment would help to raise awareness of the issues facing individuals from BME groups needing inclusion into the wider community as well as improved access to housing related support services. Reawakening professionals so that they become more open with clients lessens the 'them and us' divide. In the Good Practice Group adopting this strategy speeded up the process of getting to know each other as people, rather than in the stark roles of 'staff' and 'client'.

Top Ten Tips for Clients, Commissioners and Providers

Clients

- Do want to be involved in ways that suit them
- Do want respect and to be treated as equals
- Don't want tokenism or to be patronized
- Do want training, mentor/facilitation for strategic planning and decision making concepts/systems/committee papers etc. Also assertiveness, groupworking, representation and advocacy.
- Do want feedback when they have been asked for views
- Do want Commissioners to come to them and see individual differences between groups and between people
- May only want to speak for themselves
- Some people may want anonymity
- Women in refuges prefer their own group to a generic client consultation group
- Want to be rewarded/paid for their input and often need travel expenses in advance

Commissioners

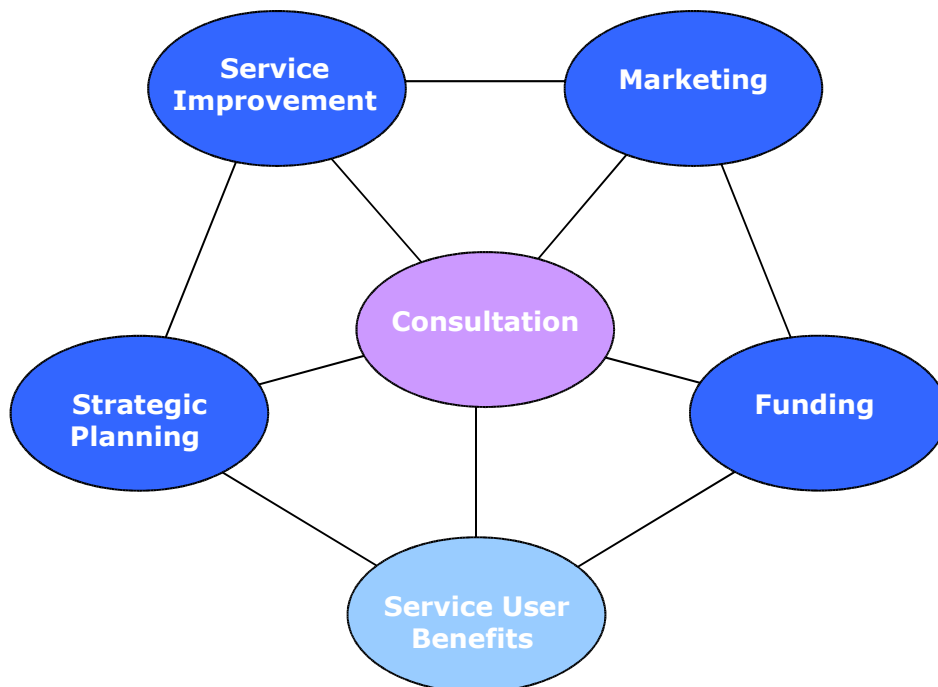
- Prefer independently collated views, statistically valid surveys etc. can set standards for providers to meet if they are consulting on their behalf
- Need to offer choice of methods of consultation in order to engage clients i.e. flexible times/methods of involvement and consultation including development of current District Inclusive Forums and working groups
- Accept the validity of creative writing, drama, video etc., as complementary qualitative information but be prepared to collate into public body-speak
- Need (and say they want to) go out and see clients in their services
- Need to offer practical partnerships for like agencies to set up independent user groups
- Pay for consultation structures to be set up and run
- Be clear about expectations, role and weight of views
- Accept some clients are happy for staff to speak for them
- Need to offer payment/reward for contributions
- Set up mechanism for sharing good practice and establish common quality standards of user involvement in strategic planning

Service Providers

- Know they could/should do more and would like assistance
- Develop culture to commitment to client involvement - examine how real barriers actually are
- Need to (as some do) demonstrate an open leadership style, and commitment from the top of the hierarchy, as if there is consultation at levels 1, 2 can reach 3, 4
- Assist clients development to participate now or in their futures in strategic planning exercises
- Commitment to working with clients to gain knowledge about how they want to be consulted and not putting structures on them
- Developing structures alongside clients that they want and can use
- Provide clear expectations what's offered v expected by clients
- Plan the time, cost, quality of client involvement with them
- Engage in dialogue with commissioners liaise with day centres/open venues etc for open days and invite commissioners in
- Share good practice

Through the design of a framework to ensure common standards for service user consultation processes, consistency and authenticity can be established and measured across different geographical areas and client groups.

By applying the core value of empowering vulnerable individuals to function as fully as possible within their community and involving them in effective consultation methods, service users views can help develop a fully integrated approach to strategic planning and decision making for Supporting People.



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LANGUAGE

The Service User Definition

Throughout the project people who use housing related support services rejected the label 'service users' preferring the titles:

- Participants
- People/a Person
- Tenants
- Residents
- Citizens
- Clients
- Partners
- People who Use Services

As the most popular titles were 'clients' or 'people' the author has tried to use either of these terms as long as a distinction is clear for the purposes of the report.

Abbreviations

SP - Supporting People, BME - Black and Minority Ethnic, ODPM – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

APPENDIX A – Values Statement

Values

Group members are committed to the belief that all people using supported housing services have the right to choose to be consulted about the services they may be receiving now, and in the future AND about their preferred methods of effective consultation.

The Group believes that involving current and ex-service users in planning for the future will improve the quality and effectiveness of those services.

Group Members value diversity of membership in order to produce a wide range of opinions and achieve a greater level of creativity in finding effective consultation strategies.

Aims

- To develop effective and inclusive user consultation methods.
- To present complex issues in as simple a way as possible, avoid jargon and provide a user friendly environment for discussions.
- To try to be honest about what can and can't be changed or influenced outside the group.
- To endeavour to research and build on established good or interesting practice.

Mechanism/Method

The Project will trial and review various consultation methods for involving service users in strategic planning and actively seek advice and feedback from the Good Practice Group.

ALL project participants, Steering and Good Practice Group Members will actively encourage and value the input of those using services project related activities and will take account of their views.

Steering and Good Practice, and Reference Group members will offer training and coaching to service users wishing to be part of the project if requested.

All participants will genuinely share their power and ownership, communicate honestly and be respectful of individual needs.

APPENDIX B – Questionnaire for Providers

Would you be interested in attending training on user consultation methods? Yes No

If so where would be a convenient geographical area for you to attend?

Do you work with any of the hard to reach/underrepresented people below:

Young people Yes No

People who have committed offences Yes No

People who are or have been homeless Yes No

Women escaping domestic violence Yes No

People who have addition issues Yes No

Black and minority ethnic groups Yes No

People with complex needs Yes No

Are there people in your organisation you would rather we contact direct who work with these groups Yes No

Please give contact name(s) and numbers(s)

Do you currently have any service user groups that meet? Yes No

If so please give details so that we can add to the directory

How do you consult with service users currently, if at all?

(NB this isn't an exercise in guilt making, but finding ways of making it easier!)

At a personal level

At the service level

At the strategic level

What barriers do you find get in the way of having a service user consultation strategy for strategic decision making?

Don't know how to Yes No

Service users would need advocacy help Yes No

No time to write a strategy Yes No

Worried about having service users at a strategic level Yes No

Hard to set aside time Yes No

Other

How could we best communicate with your service users for this project?

Staff distribution of info. e.g. posters/letters Yes No

Website Yes No

Arranging visits with them as individuals/groups within a service they use Yes No

APPENDIX C – Participation in Strategic Planning, a Process of Development and Experience:- Describing a Personal Journey

	Focus of Interest
1 Motivation to change something Homelessness Offending Drug/Alcohol misuse Chaotic Lifestyle	Individual
2 Early contact and possibility of change Need to talk to someone who has been through the same experience	Individual
3 Early Progress Aspirations change, some hope, desire for something better possibly a tenancy, more settled life etc	Individual & wider view
4 Achieving a more settled life Tenancy – awareness of getting and keeping Awareness of being part of a local community Facing up to fear involved in this responsibility and this locality	Individual & community
5 Growing confidence To represent myself Other clients, friends, service users My group or organisation	Individual & as part of a group or organisation
6 Member of a Group or Organisation Recognition of my group How can my group or organisation represent itself to be seen as important and credible How can our work and worth be recognised Who has the power to help us, how do we talk to them? How do we get representation	The Organisation
7 My Contribution How can I put something back into the system? How can I make a contribution to enable people to benefit from opportunities? How can I manage this responsibility? What support do I need?	Representative / Consultant

Appendix D – Calculating the Cost of Client Consultation?

A 'Calculating the Cost' check list has been devised to help Commissioners and providers plan and cost their client consultation strategy and can be adapted for one off exercises, a series of meetings, etc. It is by no means exhaustive but gives a clear structure to start to calculate the cost of client involvement.

Calculating the cost	£ per hour etc	Total
Professionals		
Preparation for meetings		
Board discussion time		
Managers time		
Staff teams time		
Interagency meetings		
Professionals & Clients		
Communications with clients		
Preparations/training of clients		
Designing posters, questionnaires		
Holding workshops		
Holding open days		
Attending open days		
Attending training/development opportunities		
Defining strategy		
Consultation methods		
Primary – meetings/questionnaires		
Secondary – drama, creative writing		
Clients seeking other clients views		
Monitoring and review		
Practical costs		
Room hire		
Food refreshments		
Crèche / childcare		
Transport		
Payment/reward/vouchers		

Helen Brafield

Treasure/Community Chest

At a recent ROCC workshop on involving mental health service users in the design, delivery and evaluation of training it was suggested that the value of users' involvement be acknowledged by the benefiting organisation making a payment into a "Community or Treasure Chest". This fund could then be used to provide additional activities or services for users such as training, social events or, perhaps, payments to individuals to help them move into employment or live independently. Such a fund could, potentially, serve all groups of service users and cover both statutory and voluntary/independent agencies. In its initial stages, it might simply benefit those individual service users who had put time, effort and commitment into consultation/involvement process. It could, however, be developed over time to benefit the wider population of users. It could also move beyond making payments or grants to individuals and develop as a micro-credit scheme offering low or no interest loans to members of the community who might otherwise be unable to access credit at reasonable cost. *Dr Ian Barrett*