



The co-productive approach taken to develop the statutory framework for the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: Qualitative research with Welsh Government stakeholders

Summary

1. Background

1.1 The Welsh Government used a co-productive approach to engage stakeholders in developing the statutory framework issued under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Three groups were established for engagement at a strategic and leadership level to set direction: the National Social Services Partnership Forum, the Leadership Group and the National Social Services Citizen Panel (hereafter Citizen Panel). A number of technical groups were also established for engagement at a service level to develop the detailed policy. The groups were made up of representatives from local government, health and the voluntary and private sectors, as well as members of the general public with personal experience of care and support services.

2. Research Aims and Methodology

2.1 As part of the Welsh Government's Stakeholder Research Programme, qualitative research was carried out to evaluate the co-productive approach taken. The research sought to understand stakeholders' views of how the co-productive approach worked in practice, including what worked well and what could be improved. The aim was to identify lessons to help inform approaches to engaging stakeholders in the development of policy and legislation in the future.

2.2 Twenty stakeholders were selected to take part in semi-structured interviews, including five Leadership Group members, five Citizen Panel members and ten technical group members. Thirteen telephone interviews and six face-to-face interviews were conducted between 6 September and 9 November 2016. One stakeholder requested to respond in writing instead. All interviews were audio recorded, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically.

3. Key Findings

Taking a co-productive approach

3.1 Stakeholders in the Leadership Group, technical groups and Citizen Panel were overwhelmingly positive about the Welsh Government attempting to use an approach that engaged stakeholders and citizens more in the development of policy than has typically been done in the past. The Welsh Government was praised for having led the way, modelling on a large-scale a partnership approach that stakeholders expect to be used more extensively in future. The approach was said to be a departure from what was seen as the traditional model of prescription from the centre.

Use of stakeholder knowledge and expertise

- 3.2 Leadership Group and technical group members were largely positive about representation within their own groups. Leadership Group members appeared satisfied that key stakeholders were represented. For technical group members, the diversity of viewpoints was seen as most important, and they generally felt their groups were diverse in terms of the range of sectors and job roles included. This was said to be reflected in the wide range of perspectives shared and rich debates during meetings. However, some areas for improvement were noted. Members of some technical groups felt that involvement could have been strengthened from the health sector and on the delivery side. A suggestion was that groups could discuss any viewpoints not represented at the first meeting and continuously re-evaluate this throughout the process.
- 3.3 Citizen Panel members were also positive about diversity within their group. They felt that representation from people who provided care and support, and those who received different types of care and support, uncovered a range of experiences. The panel's regional diversity was also praised. Some young people were involved initially, but dropped out early on in the process; this was described as a gap that required careful consideration.
- 3.4 A prominent viewpoint that arose across the three groups was that the co-productive approach would have benefited from wider engagement, beyond those who were gathered around the table as part of the groups. For stakeholders who made this point, there was a need to go out to people – to communities; to new or existing groups or networks of people who receive or provide care and support; and to services and social enterprises. This wider engagement was seen as something that could serve different functions: partly understanding what is happening on the ground, partly obtaining perspectives from the front line, and partly disseminating to communities and practitioners.
- 3.5 A second point made in relation to wider engagement was that there appeared to be little clarity on the role that Leadership Group and technical group members were expected to play in terms of representing and consulting others, whether staff within their organisations, or the organisations, providers or communities they represented.

Co-production in practice

- 3.6 In regards to how the partnership with the Welsh Government worked in practice, some stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive, while others felt it fell short of 'true co-production' or could have gone further.
- 3.7 Leadership Group and technical group members reported that Welsh Government officials went out of their way to engage stakeholders, demonstrating genuine, purposeful interest in getting people involved and working in partnership. Stakeholders from the Leadership Group were impressed with the Welsh Government's resolve to hold the partnership together until the end, despite challenges along the way. It was also valued when Welsh Government officials were open about what was feasible and the resource implications, though views differed on the extent to which this was done.
- 3.8 Views varied across the three groups on the balance in the partnership. Some stakeholders perceived an equal partnership; others felt improvements could be made in this regard. Views appeared to be linked to the nature of the task stakeholders were set and the stage in the process at which they became involved. One perspective was that the process started too internally and that stakeholders should have been involved in co-producing the idea of what was needed, before any decisions were made on the policy direction. From another perspective, however, the stage at which stakeholders became involved was appropriate, and having initial drafts in advance helped rather than hindered the process. In regards to the balance in the partnership, the Citizen Panel also noted that co-production should involve setting the agenda for what they explore as a group, but their views differed on the extent to which this was done.
- 3.9 Leadership Group and technical group members consistently reported having opportunities to say what they wanted during meetings, and to discuss and debate everyone's viewpoints. The quality of facilitation was viewed as key in this regard. Encouraging quieter group members to share their views was seen as important and was perceived to have been managed fairly well overall, although some stakeholders felt more could have been done in their groups. Diversity within groups was also said to be important in ensuring that certain sectors or alternative perspectives did not feel intimidated or drowned out.
- 3.10 Leadership Group and technical group members also reported that their views were listened to and respected, and that there was a concerted effort to understand the issues they raised. Of course, not all views were taken forward, but stakeholders were generally accepting of constraints in this regard. Rather, what was vital to them was evidence that their views were considered and looked at in more detail.
- 3.11 There was a consensus among Leadership Group members that their involvement impacted on both the process and outcome. They perceived that drafts were adapted in response to the points they raised and their suggestions for improvements. They felt that good attempts were made to recognise and respond to their views, and they were said to have received open and honest feedback.

- 3.12 For technical group members, it was important that at least some of their points were taken up and used, and they largely felt this had taken place. However, some members would have appreciated more explicit feedback on the points they made, what was done as a result, and why certain points were not taken forward.
- 3.13 Citizen Panel members were also positive about the opportunities they had to speak up. They described a positive and supportive bond that developed within the group, which helped them to feel comfortable sharing their views. Reports produced by an independent facilitator following each meeting were the main means by which their views were shared outside the panel. Points raised during meetings were said to have been recorded accurately in the reports, but views differed on whether the level of detail captured was optimal. Some members felt the reports could have included more detail on people's experiences, whereas others were satisfied that letters and films submitted alongside the reports were a better means of conveying the 'stories' underpinning viewpoints.
- 3.14 Although the Citizen Panel was established to engage at a leadership level, their views on the effectiveness of their contribution were very different to the Leadership Group's. Some panel members felt their input was used and made some difference in making the policy more citizen-focussed. However, other members felt they were fulfilling a process expectation and that their contribution was not used optimally.
- 3.15 Citizen Panel members were unable to identify tangible contributions they made to the statutory framework. They reported that, although they were thanked for their input, they did not receive feedback on specific examples of how their contributions had changed thinking or altered policy. Feedback was said to be fundamental to developing a two-way conversation, which reportedly would have made it feel like more of a shared project. One suggestion was that policy officials could come back at a later date after receiving the reports to discuss the points made, or send feedback in writing.
- 3.16 One contribution the Citizen Panel's involvement was said to have made – by some panel members and other stakeholders – was to promote more generally the idea of involving Citizen Panels.
- 3.17 The active engagement of ministers and policy officials in Citizen Panel meetings was appreciated where it took place because it conveyed that the group's input was recognised, listened to and valued. Some members felt this could have happened more consistently in practice. Some members also reported they would have felt more valued if they had more opportunity and were trusted to share their views with other stakeholder groups directly.

The process and practicalities

- 3.18 Some stakeholders felt that meetings were too concentrated in Cardiff and could be alternated between different regions, while others felt it was more appropriate to locate them in Cardiff because the majority of group members were based there. There were some suggestions to explore the potential use of video-conferencing and online tools in future, but the limitations of these

methods were acknowledged. The Citizen Panel appeared satisfied with meetings taking place in different locations to reflect the regional diversity of its membership.

- 3.19 From the Leadership Group, the key feedback point regarding the format of meetings was that they tended to follow a traditional item by item agenda. Some members would have liked the necessary formalities to be interspersed with more interactive sessions to discuss specific topics in more detail. Another feedback point was that it would have been helpful to build reflective time into the process – for example, by revisiting some points in subsequent sessions.
- 3.20 Technical group members were generally satisfied with the format of meetings. However, some members gave feedback on activities they felt did not make the best use of time during meetings, including setting the context and establishing the different perspectives. It was suggested that members could instead be asked for position statements in advance. Technical group members' views varied on the number of meetings that were held and the timescales, which may reflect actual differences in how groups were set up. Some members felt they had ample time to complete their task. A contrasting perspective was that the two months available to one group was too short and affected the quality of the group's output.
- 3.21 In regards to the Citizen Panel, some members praised the independent facilitators for making the process work so well, while others felt the facilitators could have had a deeper understanding of the policy and more sensitivity towards panel members' situations.
- 3.22 It was important to ensure that all Citizen Panel members received the support they required to attend meetings and participate as fully as possible. Some members indicated that the support worked well. They perceived that members could raise problems at any time and that these problems would be looked at. They valued the access to personal assistants, who sat with some members to explain the topic and discussion at a suitable level. Another perspective, however, was that some of those who did not have personal assistance during meetings would have benefited from it, and that this could have been checked explicitly with members on an on-going basis. Other recommendations made to support panel members' full participation included doing more writing and less talking, and doing more work in small groups.
- 3.23 The availability of standard and easy read formats of all Citizen Panel briefing documents and reports was praised. However, it was said that some – or all – members may still have benefited from further support to understand key points. Finally, the option of using film and the informal Skype sessions arranged between sessions were popular.
- 3.24 A prominent theme across the three groups was that the contact between them was too limited. Leadership Group and Citizen Panel members indicated that they were kept very separate until a session when they came together towards the end, which they greatly valued. They perceived benefits from coming together around the table more regularly, including having opportunities to exchange ideas, discuss challenges jointly and establish common goals.

- 3.25 Technical group members also felt there could have been more citizen involvement with their groups. First, some technical group members would have liked citizens to be represented within their groups, albeit with careful consideration of how to achieve this in a meaningful and sensitive way. Second, technical group members did not know whether the Citizen Panel had seen their outputs, but they had not received any feedback and felt this would have been useful.

Benefits of co-production

- 3.26 Stakeholders widely perceived that using a co-productive approach resulted in better outcomes and products because they were informed by diverse viewpoints. Increasing stakeholder ownership and buy-in was seen as a further benefit of co-production. Leadership Group and technical group members suggested the policy was more likely to be accepted, endorsed and trusted by stakeholders if they (or their colleagues) were part of its development, even if they did not agree with all elements. It was also noted that ownership created champions for the policy change.
- 3.27 All three groups perceived that involvement in the development stages supported their understanding of the policy. Stakeholders indicated that it gave them insight into the thinking behind the changes, the policy intent, and how the policy was taking shape. It also enabled them to test their own views against those of other stakeholders. This understanding reportedly helped them to better prepare for implementation within their own organisation or sector. In addition, some technical group members and citizens reported that involvement improved their understanding of the policy-making and legislative process more generally.
- 3.28 Leadership Group and technical group members reportedly shared their learning about the policy within their networks, but the nature and extent of dissemination depended on their organisation and role. They widely reported discussing the policy with colleagues within their own organisations. Some stakeholders reported having wider conversations, where this was relevant to their role. Those working in umbrella bodies also reported sharing updates with their member organisations. In addition, stakeholders across the three groups noted benefits of their involvement in organised dissemination activities.
- 3.29 Since Leadership Group members felt their working relationships with the Welsh Government were already strong, as did some technical group members, they did not perceive a change in their relationships. Some technical group members whose previous interaction with the Welsh Government was more limited, however, felt their involvement helped to strengthen their relationships with specific policy officials. Finally, the Welsh Government's demonstration of willingness to engage with stakeholders was a theme that arose throughout, and it was seen to contribute to a more trusting and constructive relationship with greater mutual respect.

Report Authors:

Eleri Jones and Sharon Cross, Welsh Government

Full Report available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/co-productive-approach-taken-develop-statutory-framework-social-services-well-being-act-2014/?lang=en>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Eleri Jones

Social Research and Information Division

Knowledge and Analytical Services

Welsh Government, Cathays Park

Cardiff, CF10 3NQ

Email: eleri.jones061@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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