

Using Citizens' Juries to Improve Public Engagement in Mental Health Service. A Research Report.

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This research report focuses upon the experience of organisers and participants in a Citizens' Jury to assess policy options for the redesign of Mental Health and Learning Disability policy in North Cumbria. It is based upon perceptions of lay members of the public about their experience of being involved in a Citizens Jury organised by Westlakes Research Institute and the North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities NHS Trust. This Jury was organised as part of a wider public consultation into the design of mental health and learning disability services in North Cumbria. The aims of this research were firstly, to contribute to a public consultation process about the redesign of mental health services in North Cumbria, and secondly to assess the effectiveness of using Citizens' Juries for the design of health care provision.

The NHS modernisation agenda demands the involvement of not only patients but also citizens, and public consultation is an increasingly important part of healthcare policy design and implementation. However, one of the key problems of many methods of public consultation, such as opinion polls and focus groups, is their propensity to record responses formed without proper engagement with issues. This may be especially so about the emotive issue of the treatment of mental health patients in communities - the issue in question here - where the public are important stakeholders in the implementation of mental health service delivery, particularly in respect of the relationship with the community.

Citizens Juries are a powerful way of engaging ordinary citizens in the policy process, giving, through them, a clear voice and role to the public in the service design and delivery (Coote and Lenaghan 1997). Their most outstanding feature is the ability to obtain the detailed and considered views of members of the public who have acquired a level of awareness and engagement with an issue, which is unavailable to researchers using public opinion polling and quantitative techniques such as focus groups. A cornerstone of the Citizens' Jury methodology is the belief that once a small sample of the population have heard the evidence, their subsequent deliberations are a fair representation of the conscience and intelligence of the community (Wakeford, 2002). Participants in a Jury are involved as citizens rather than as consumers of a particular service and through them the general public become, in a limited way, producers of

public services. Moreover, the output of a Citizens' Jury can have a significant political power which is derived from their unbiased and rigorous nature (Coote and Lenaghan 1997) and the openness and transparency of their proceedings.

But is the faith placed in Citizens Juries justified? In particular, can lay members of the public get to grips with a complex and sensitive issue in a relatively short period of time? The question set for this Citizens' Jury was "Some people who have a mental health problem will always need to go to hospital for treatment, though some do not. Among the group of patients who do not need to go to hospital for treatment, should more support and treatment be made available in the community?" The unanimous conclusion of this group was that more support and treatment be made available in the community and the jury made a series of recommendations in support of that decision. The whole relevance of the Citizens' Jury process centres upon its ability to enable the Jurors to understand and evaluate the complex and sometimes emotional factors involved in a policy issue.

The process of Citizens' Jury includes more than just the jury meeting itself. It embraces a quite lengthy process of stakeholder engagement and professional involvement is centred upon a jury. The many parts of the process may be summarised as in Figure 1. below:

Figure 1. The Citizens Jury Design and Implementation Process.

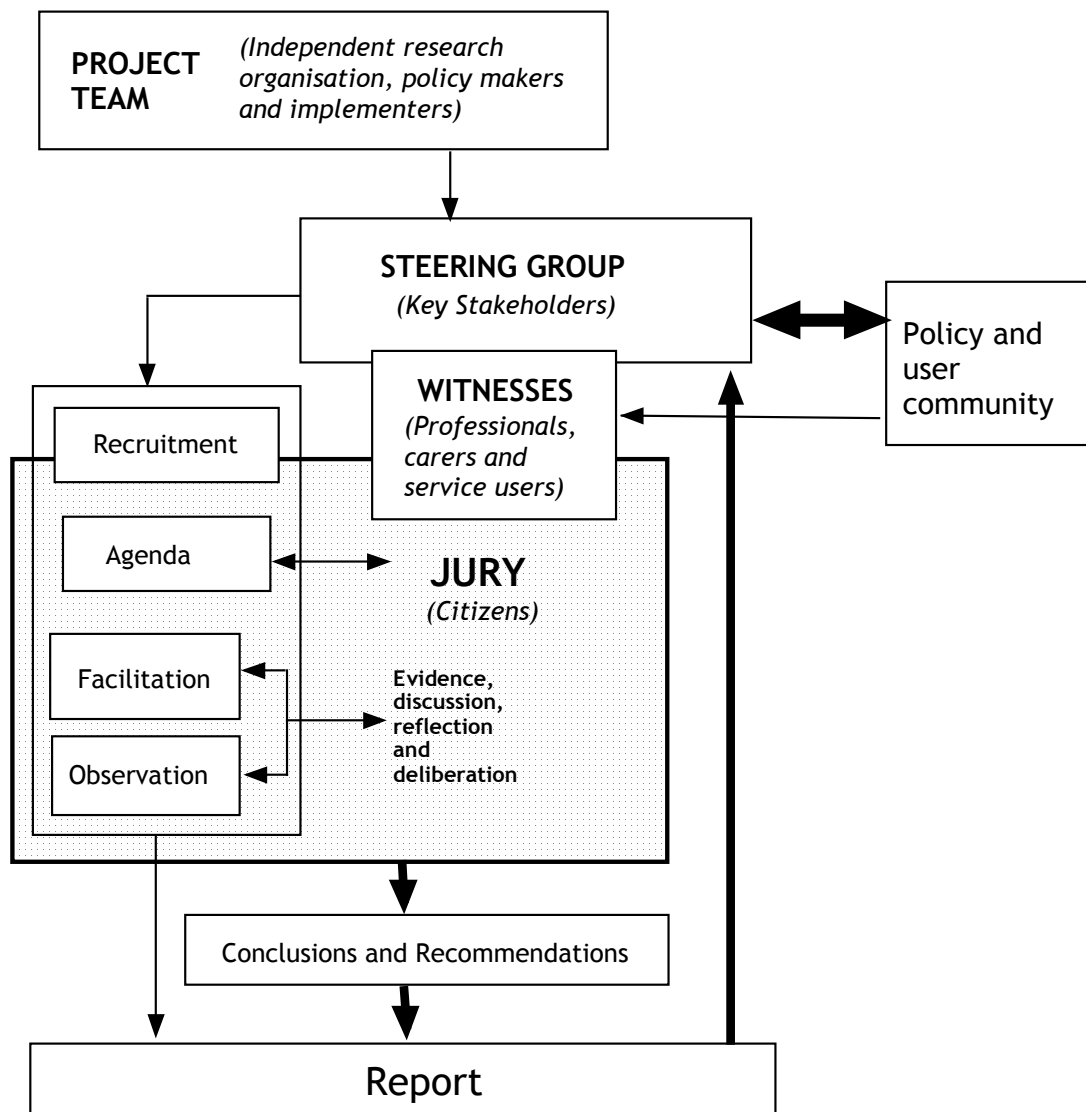


Figure one above shows the various elements of a Citizens' Jury project. It shows those shaping and supporting the jury and the jury process itself represented by the shaded area: these elements were found to be essential to the success of the Jury. Ffigure 1. above shows the range of actors and stakeholders involved, including a project team and steering group, an independent recruitment agency, an observer and a facilitator. It also shows its connection to the policy process through the involvement of key stakeholders including policy makers and implementers, service users and professional practitioners in the delivery of mental health care in North Cumbria.

The role of the stakeholders is important in that they provide not only direction to the process and input into the jury, but they also provide assistance with the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report. Thus, though a criticism of citizens juries is that only a small number of jurors represent the

community (McIver 1998), the actual representation through the process itself is, potentially, much greater than the small number of jurors who sit in the jury session. This small number of jurors (a dozen) is only part of a much wider constituency of stakeholders involved in the Jury.

The entire process, from project proposal to final report took in the region of nine months to complete, from its initial inception through the recruitment of steering and implementation groups, witnesses and jurors, to the final report prepared by the independent facilitator and cleared with the jurors before its release. The jury itself was held over three days at the neutral location of a hotel in North Cumbria in November 2002. It involved twelve jurors who heard evidence from a range of witnesses including service users, policy makers, policy implementers, researchers and carers, over a three day period. The witnesses gave evidence in the form of non-technical oral presentations which usually lasted 30 minutes: the jurors were encouraged to question the witnesses who, where possible, gave an easily digestible summary of their presentation for jurors to take away and study. These presentations were interspersed with periods for discussion in groups between the jurors, coffee and meal breaks. Structured periods for personal reflection and informal contact were also built into the programme to allow jurors to absorb the material from the presentations made to them. The jury was scheduled to run from 9am-5pm over each of the three days.

It was important, we felt, that the jury was given the opportunity to shape the process in order that the schedule set by the implementation group did not interfere or impede the jurors understanding and deliberations. This was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, the Jury was able to shape the agenda of the jury process within the meeting, changing the amount of time allocated to particular tasks for example. Secondly, the Jury was given the opportunity to appoint a chairperson to run the proceedings (which it chose not to do). Thirdly, the Jury could call on further witnesses, which it did. And fourthly, the Jury could recast the original question set or pose supplementary questions if it was felt appropriate after hearing the evidence.

The success and relevance of the Citizens' Jury is almost wholly dependent upon the ability of the Jurors to receive and understand information from expert witnesses, to assimilate it and to deliberate. To assess how effectively we achieved this in this Citizens' Jury we turn to the evidence from the written survey of the 12 jurors taken immediately after they had made their final recommendations. We acquired data from jurors in three key areas.

1. Firstly, the time available.

All jurors responded that that the time allowed for deliberation was "About right"

In response to the question "Overall, how well, would you say, all the views of the jurors were aired and considered in the discussion?" All responded "Very well".

All Jurors agreed that they "...personally had sufficient opportunity to question the witnesses",

All jurors agreed that they "...had sufficient opportunity to participate in the discussions and deliberation."

2. Secondly the body of evidence available to them.

In terms of the amount of evidence presented by the witnesses two jurors felt that it was "Too much" but ten responded that it had been "About right".

In response to the question "What did you feel about the evidence presented in the course of the proceedings?" A majority (7) responded that they "understood most of it, three understood all of it and one responded that some of it went over my head.

The survey revealed that all aspects of the jury, including, hearing from witnesses; the question and answer sessions; the full jury discussions; informal chats at break times; and opportunities given for just thinking by themselves were helpful in enabling them form their final decision.

The quality of the deliberation within the group was highlighted by the independent observer. In his jury report, this professional observer noted that "The output from the Jury group reflected a good understanding of clear expert input; a dialogue based discussion process that enabled real contribution from every participant and a 'verdict' and recommendations that incorporated the range of perspectives brought by the group members."

It was revealing that, following an initial degree of scepticism and real concern that they may not have been able to make a contribution to the debate and would find the task too daunting, none of the Jurors who attended the first briefing meeting a couple of days prior to the Jury failed to attend the whole jury proceedings. This was echoed by the survey, which revealed that all Jurors found the Citizens' Jury to be "an enjoyable experience". All of them also agreed strongly that they found the jury "interesting" and all "agreed strongly" or "agreed" that they found the Jury "informative".

3. Thirdly, the effect of the Jury experience on their opinions.

As the following table reveals, the jury clearly did have an effect upon the opinions of the Jurors towards Mental Health and Learning Disability policy issues.

In response to the question "Have you changed your views on mental health care service delivery as a result of the following..." the following responses were obtained (expressed as percentages):

"...the evidence that you have heard?"

A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all
66	16	16	0

"...the discussion with others?"

A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all
41	41	16	0

Both from the evidence they heard and in discussions with others over the course of the jury the jurors changed their mind about mental health care service delivery. This finding reveals the importance and impact of engagement with an issue and the significance of the jury process in this regard. It also suggests that using consultation processes which do not engage the respondents with the issue through evidence and deliberation may not give a clear indication of deeper levels of cognition around complex and emotive issues. Through this, it seems as though the Citizens Jury process may give the public a clearer voice in the policy process (Clarke 2002) through their deeper understanding of an issue and their deeper cognitive engagement in addressing it.

Finally, taking into account their experience of the proceedings and their perception that the jury findings would make a contribution to the wider public consultation process, all jurors agreed with the proposition "Do you feel that a citizens jury is a good way of involving the public in decision making?"

Subsequent consultation.

The formal public consultation period on the proposed new service strategy of the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities services in North Cumbria was undertaken between 1st July and 31st October 2003. During this period the Health and Well-being Committee of Cumbria County Council also undertook a separate review of proposals and their likely impact in the future of the local community.

The overriding strategic objective of the public consultation was to shift the balance of future provision of these key local services towards a more community based approach and away from the traditional current in-patient focus service. In doing so it was planned that the revised service model would ensure that the

local NHS was more able to fully comply with the national guidance on best practice as disseminated by the National Service Frameworks for Working Age Adults and Older People and White Paper on Valuing People for learning disabilities. Thereby, ensuring the provision of a more contemporary service which reflected established best practice elsewhere in the country.

The public consultation process itself generated significant interest from local communities with:

- * 165 individual detailed letters, which received individual replies. Some of these related to other matters, and were dealt with accordingly; including complaints procedure.

- * 2393 standard photocopied letters, to which respondents had added their names and addresses. These received a standard reply, on receipt of which several people contacted Eden Valley Primary Care Trust for explanation; unaware they had taken part in the consultation.

- * 96 people completed and returned the "Let us have your views" sheets, either from the summary document or from the Public Meetings.

- * Three different petitions were received, with a total of 6230 signatures:

- o Petition 1: Drawn up by Copeland Liberal Democrats – "We, the undersigned, while agreeing with the need to develop greater community care for people with mental health needs, do not wish to see this development at the expense of local in-patient provision. We therefore call upon the North Cumbria Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Trust to seriously reconsider their proposed strategic plan. Signed by 1294 people

- o Petition 2: "KEEP Mental Health Services in West Cumbria" Signed by 917 people

- o Petition 3: "More Hospital Cuts! We are against the proposed closure and reduction of in-patient facilities in adult mental health, elderly mentally infirm and learning disability services currently based at West Cumberland Hospital, Whitehaven". Signed by 4019 people.

However, despite the concern about the specific new proposals to relocate existing in-patient services the overriding consensus was to support the underlying strategic service objective of ensuring there was a significant shift from in-patient to more community based approach.

Subsequently, the three local PCT's in North Cumbria considered all responses received during the public consultation period at their respective Public Board Meetings in the last week of November 2003 and agreed the proposed new

service strategy albeit with modified specific recommendations in respect of the future provision of in-patient services.

In this respect initial conclusions reached by the Citizen's Jury before the public consultation period itself, have also been reflected by more wide ranging response from what has been in practice an extensive public consultation undertaken across the whole community. Together this has made a significant overall contribution given the focus on the inclusive approach taken by the three local PCT's during the consultation process.

Conclusion

This exercise for mental health service delivery in North Cumbria revealed the strengths and weaknesses of Citizens' Juries to engage the lay public and key stakeholders in healthcare service design. The jury process provided ordinary members of the lay public with a meaningful, insightful and enjoyable route to participating in the policy process. Through the jury process the lay public gained a clear voice in the policy process.

This Jury also revealed a willingness among members of the public to participate in the policy process, and a capacity among them to acquire, assimilate and utilise information on a complex and emotive topic from a range of sources: in this jury this evidence came from carers, policy makers, service users. Over the three days of the Jury the jurors heard sometimes moving and often complex evidence from an array of expert and involved witnesses. In this case, the jury reached a unanimous decision and produced a series of important recommendations in support of that decision which were reflected in other modes of consultation.

Our experience with this Citizens' Jury revealed the key role of the stakeholders in the process. This group made a vital contribution to the success of the project in a number of ways. Firstly, by providing quality material for deliberation; secondly by providing credibility to the process; and thirdly to assist in the the implementation of its recommendations and conclusions. However, in order to give the maximum impact to a jury it is essential that the Jury process, from recruitment and question setting to the issue of the final report, is independent and is perceived to be so by jurors, witnesses and stakeholders.

In North Cumbria, the citizens jury process provided a means to acquire the considered views of a group of ordinary citizens who, for a brief period became insiders in the policy process, engaging with the issue of mental health service delivery. This process gave ordinary persons a voice which would not normally be clearly heard in the policy consultation process. This could not be achieved either by opinion polling or focus group methodologies.

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