**Measuring the Mountain**

**Engaging the wider community to assess the impact and value of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**

BACKGROUND

The Social Services and Well-being Act is a landmark piece of legislation, demonstrating the commitment of the Welsh Government to address the needs of vulnerable people and their carers living in Wales. It shifts the focus beyond conventional transactional service delivery to recognise the importance of delivering much needed improvement in social care and wellbeing through sustainable models of provision involving the user, their support network and the provider community.

As a transformational tool, the Act itself redefines the relationship network driving delivery by recognising the complex social architecture underpinning care and personal wellbeing in Wales. This is often provided by family, friends and neighbours as part of a complex web of engagement between formal and informal providers. Creating long term service resilience in an affordable and effective way will in the future rest upon developing post-conventional models of care defined by the needs of the user and delivered by a vibrant and diverse community of providers challenging the age old oppression, that those who are dependent on others to meet their needs are without voice or power to determine what and how they need it.

Taking into account these considerations and the fact the legislation has a transformational role in affecting change to the culture and structure of the way we approach the provision of services, finding new and innovative ways to assess its impact and value will be essential. Holding provider organisations to account through existing models of accountability and good governance will be essential. However they are likely to evaluate the impact of the legislation in transactional ways – measuring the quality of provision in terms of output assessment and localised qualitative experiences.

To understand the impact of the legislation on the lived experience of those who are vulnerable and dependent within their respective communities will require an approach as iconic as the legislation itself and symbolic of the role of the citizen as an equal status partner in the delivery process. Involving the wider public in a scrutinizing and inquiring role would help to convey the spirit of the legislation, adding weight and value to the unique insight and experience of the citizen. This would also help to demonstrate the spirit and intention of the legislation in the arrangements for assessing its effectiveness and positive impact upon the people of Wales.

**Staging a Citizen’s Jury to assess the impact of the legislation**

A citizen’s jury is a way of conducting a public inquiry which optimises the participation of the community. It builds on the principles of action inquiry, focusing upon issues of key public interest to engage all parties. The reason why it’s called a citizen’s jury is because it draws upon the symbolism and some of the practices of legal trial by jury. Some of the common features include:

* A jury randomly selected from a local or national population using a recognized and transparent selection process;
* A process in which expert witnesses are called to give evidence and be questioned on a specific topic;
* An independent team to manage and facilitate the process ensuring an appropriate outcome is reached.

However it differs from conventional juridical process in a number of ways. Firstly, there is no statutory framework governing proceedings – it’s essentially a voluntaristic enterprise; secondly, the goal is not to establish guilt or innocence ; and finally there is no mandatory outcome to which all must comply.

Citizen’s juries have been used for multiple purposes. They are often used to demonstrate a commitment to collaboration and consultation where building trust is critical to making decisions supported by the wider public. Evidence suggests, on contentious or controversial matters, citizen’s juries can help to reduce the propensity for conflict and dissention. They can also help to introduce much needed insight, bringing the ‘lived experience’ of the wider community into consideration as part of the debate. This is especially valuable where balance, a diversity of views, wisdom and perspective are required to adjudicate those issues that because of their complexity, cannot be resolved through conventional binary solutions. Citizen’s juries can be used to highlight or scrutinise particular issues where it is important to make transparent those things often hidden or disguised by their complexity or technical content. In these circumstances, they can help to pare back or bring clarity to issues that become over–technicalised or politicised by offering ‘value-based’ and ‘in principle’ perspectives.

Remarkably, citizen’s juries are very effective in building consensual practice. Contrary to the mythologies surrounding crowd behaviour, they often inspire individuals to be their best and to recognise the primacy and importance of working as part of a community. The collective wisdom of the crowd inevitably over-rides and supersedes the distinctive intellectual contribution of any particular group or individual, to provide a blend of unique knoeldge and insight.

**How could this model be used to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014?**

Over the next five years, the Welsh Government, as a demonstration of its commitment to drive the implementation of the legislation, would sponsor an annual citizen’s jury. This would focus upon addressing key questions designed to expose the strengths and weaknesses of the way in which the legislation was being implemented across Wales. Using the public to evaluate its success would be within the spirit of the legislation itself and provide a critical reference point to draw upon user experience and perception.

The process would involve recruiting, either through random sampling or direct advertisement for twelve members of the public. A suitable role specification would determine the qualities and levels of experience required for participation but the process would not require formal selection. This would avoid anyone presuming the right to exclude or indeed include particular individuals although ensuring representation was demographically and geographically balanced would be a condition.

The event would be staged over a two day period and involve service providers giving evidence and being questioned on the details of implementation. The jury itself would be able to ask questions, reflect on information being offered and form a consensual view on whether the legislation was achieving the best possible outcome. At various staging of the proceedings a facilitator would provide a summation of what had been said and broadly agreed. At the end of the process the jury would reach a set of conclusions and potentially a number of recommendations for strengthening the positive impact of the legislation.

**Conclusion**

Using a citizen’s jury approach to assess the impact of the legislation is an iconic and potentially transformation step towards changing the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the provision of care and wellbeing in Wales. It lifts the evaluative process beyond the realm of transaction to focus upon the ambition and aspiration of the Welsh Government to improve the care and wellbeing of the people of Wales. At a more fundamental level, it plays to our strengths as a nation founded on democratic participation and equal treatment.