Identifying Priorities and Gap Areas in Engagement and Co-Productive Activity: A Mapping Exercise

A report to the Scottish Older People's Assembly
28 August 2013

This report briefly maps significant examples of:

- current engagement with older people (where organisations systematically listen to and talk with older people about their needs and experiences on the design and delivery of services); and
- co-productive activity (where an older person using a service and the provider of the service, work together and decide what should be done and how).

The research also includes a literature review and was conducted by the Employment Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University, on behalf of the Scottish Older People's Assembly.

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

Employment
Research
Institute

1. Aims

The aim of the mapping exercise was to identify gaps and priorities in engagement and co-productive activity for older people in Scotland, and to present conclusions that are relevant to the development of the Scottish Older People's Assembly.

The key tasks were to:

* Map out examples of engagement and co-productive activity for older people in Scotland.
* Map out examples of engagement and co-productive activity, including examples of good practice for older people across the UK and internationally.
* Identify frameworks from the UK and internationally of what constitutes good or 'improving' practice in engagement and co-productive activity for older people.
* Identify case studies which exemplify good practice in engagement and co-productive activity for older people, as well as gaps in activity in Scotland.

2. Methods

In order to accomplish these tasks, a robust desk-based review of engagement and co-productive activity for older people in Scotland was undertaken.

Both web based searches were undertaken by the authors and also members of the Scottish Older People's Assembly Committee contributed valuable information or knowledge they had of engagement and co-productive activity.

3. What do we mean by engagement and co productive activity?

Engagement and co-productive activity have risen in importance in UK policy and international policy in recent years. For example, both the UK and Scottish Governments have increasingly focused on involving service users in decisions about the design and delivery of services.

There are different levels of engagement and it can occur in both formal and informal settings. Engagement has been defined as:

"Developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group, to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences" (Communities Scotland, 2009: 4).

"Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours" (*The Challenge of Co-production*, Boyle, D. & Harris, 2009). With co-production there is meaningful service user participation and service users are treated as a knowledgeable resource.

"Co-production essentially describes a relationship between service provider and service user that draws on the knowledge, ability and resources of both to develop solutions to issues that are claimed to be successful, sustainable and cost-effective, changing the balance of power from the professional towards the service user. The approach is used in work with both individuals and communities" (Scottish Co-production Network, 2013).

When defining what we mean by engagement and co-productive activity it is important to distinguish between activities started by policy makers and those started by older people themselves. Also, participating or being engaged does not necessarily mean that older people have a voice. Older people need to feel able to express themselves and policy makers need to listen to older people's voices and take appropriate action.

4. What are the benefits of engagement and co-productive activity?

Greater engagement and co-productive activity can improve the outcomes, health and well-being of older people.

Organisations engaging more with older people can benefit from: learning from service users; improved relationship with communities; enhanced reputation; enhanced client satisfaction; and improving the sense of purpose amongst staff.

5. Best practice in engagement and co-productive activity

Literature from government, voluntary organisations and private organisations and academics highlights ways in which successful engagement and co-productive activity can be achieved.

These guidelines have been used by the authors of this report to develop a framework of indicators of best practice in engagement and co-productive activity (see Figure 1). Broadly this framework highlights the importance of: transparency; enabling attendance and broad representation; being inclusive and having inclusive communication; feeding back to older people on the outcomes; and evaluation.
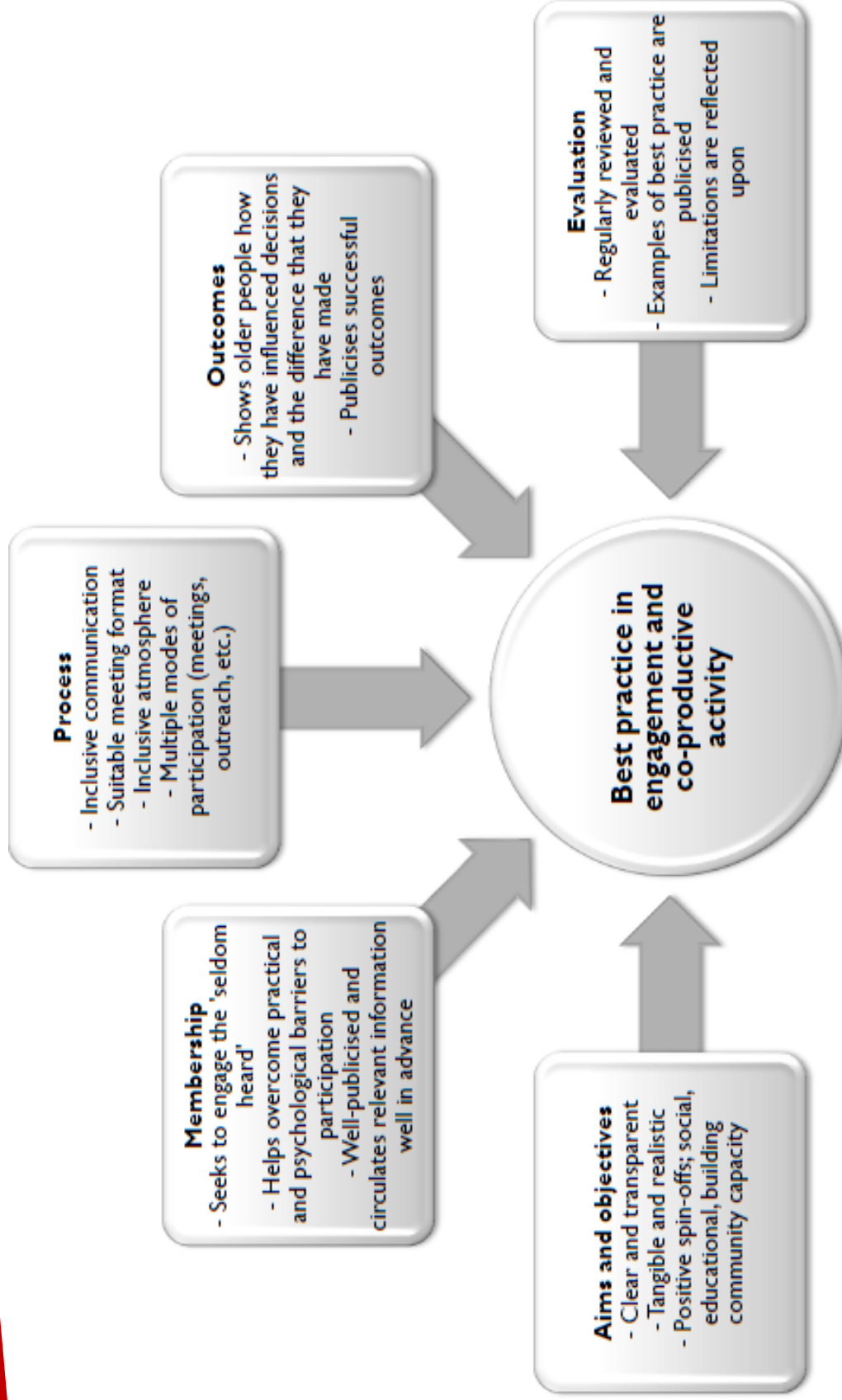
Figure 1: Indicators of best practice in engagement and co-productive activity

6. Examples of engagement and co-productive activity

This brief mapping exercise covers 90 examples of co-productive activity, primarily in Scotland.

In the main they were identified using web based searches. These examples seek to reflect current activity, but some may have become inactive. Of course, this is also only a brief mapping exercise and therefore does not cover the entire range of co-productive activity in Scotland. It must be also acknowledged that engagement and co-productive activity can occur in more informal ways or through very small groups of older people. These examples are not necessarily reflected here because the individuals involved may not engage with formal service providers, publicise their activities or have a website. This does not mean that the work that these groups are undertaking is not valuable or constitutes good practice.

The examples have been classified into seven types - there are of course overlaps between these categories but they are useful in highlighting the diversity of activity:

1. Older People's Forums: groups of older people who meet and discuss issues;
2. Group Networks: a network of representatives from organisations that work with older people;
3. Multi-level Forums: forums that involve organisations that work with older people, local government, and local service providers;
4. Older People's Champions: someone who holds local authorities or other bodies to account on behalf of older people;
5. Services: the direct involvement of older people in the commissioning of their own services;
6. Action Research: the co-production of evidence into best practice in service delivery;
7. Advisory Groups, Assemblies and Parliaments of Older People: groups that involve older people, organisations that work with older people, local and national government, and local and national service providers.

There is variation in the way in which older people themselves are involved in engagement.

The most open and direct form of engagement or co-production for the individual member of the public wishing to make their views heard is: a forum that any older person can join; or direct involvement in the commissioning of their own services. Alternatively there are initiatives in which or co-production involves groups that work with older people acting as representatives for the interests of older people, but who have not necessarily systematically consulted every older person for their views. Somewhere in between these might be a situation in which an older person is invited to respond to surveys or consultations. Such participation requires some resources to participate, but is direct and open to all.

However, this variation in openness and directness does not necessarily mean that the initiative provides greater empowerment to older people.

An open forum could hold very little political sway, or be fairly tokenistic. Whereas if organisations that work with older people can get involved at high levels they may have considerable influence on policy, even if the involvement of individual older people themselves is less direct. The impact of an engagement initiative might depend on where its output is directed (e.g. is it involved systematically in the institutional set-up of local government).

It is very difficult to say whether the examples identified represent good practice in engagement or co-production, or have achieved 'good outcomes', as there are few that have any rigorous, balanced, independent evaluation of their benefits and impact. Examples of co-production can be cited as good or successful examples, without offering much information about the criteria on which these were judged. It is also not clear whether the examples represent good practice with regards to 'inclusive communication'.

7. Conclusions

This report presents the results of a brief review of literature and mapping exercise of significant examples of current engagement and co-productive activity, including examples of good practice for older people in Scotland. From this the authors make a series of conclusions that are relevant to the development of the Scottish Older People's Assembly:

- In the literature a range of different terms are being used to describe engagement and co-productive activity. Therefore any proposed engagement and co-productive activity undertaken by the Scottish Older People's Assembly and other organisations should be clear in how they define their activity so that it can be conducted in a transparent way.
- While the value of engaging the knowledge and expertise of older people has been recognised by policy makers, participating or being engaged does not necessarily mean that older people have a clearly heard voice. The Scottish Older People's Assembly needs to ensure that older people feel able to express themselves. In turn policy makers need to be receptive to the voices and opinions of older people and to give clear justifications for policies and practices and feedback on comments.
- Government and other organisations have produced a range of guidelines for both service providers and service users on engagement and co-productive activity. These guidelines have been used to inform the framework of indicators of best practice in engagement and co-productive activity developed by the authors of this report. Broadly this framework highlights the importance of: transparency; enabling attendance and broad representation; inclusive communication; feeding back to older people outcomes; and evaluation.
- There are different mechanisms for engagement and co-productive activity (e.g. older people's forums, older people's parliaments and services) in Scotland, the UK and internationally), that the Scottish Older People's Assembly can draw on. There is variation in the way in which older people themselves are involved or want to be involved. However, differences in openness and directness are not necessarily correlated with the degree of empowerment that the initiative brings to older people.
- In order to better identify good practice, there is a need for rigorous, robust evaluations and the development of a framework to be used by those initiating engagement and co-productive activity to evaluate their work.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this report are grateful for the support and co-operation of the Scottish Older People's Assembly Committee. Members of the Scottish Older People's Assembly Committee helped the authors to identify examples of engagement and co-productive activity, and provided comments on drafts of this report.

The authors of this report would also like to thank the representatives of some of the examples of engagement and co-productive activity (listed in the Appendix) for speaking to the authors over the telephone and for providing information about their activities.

Authors

Dr Valerie Egdell, Dr Helen Graham, Professor Ronald McQuaid
Employment Research Institute
Edinburgh Napier University
Craiglockhart Campus
Edinburgh EH14 1DJ
http://www.napier.ac.uk/eri/

The Scottish Older People's Assembly is looking for examples of work by older people that have made a difference to policy and service development and its implementation.

If you have any examples, please contact Glenda Watt:
Tel: 0131 469 3806 / Email: acfaa@edinburgh.gov.uk

Thank you.