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# Engagement in the Third Sector

Exploring areas of collaboration between  
Our Voice and the Third Sector

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## 1. Introduction

The Our Voice framework aims to strengthen the voice of people who use health and social care services, carers and the public by supporting them to engage purposefully with health and social care providers in order to continuously improve these services. Our Voice was developed as a partnership involving the Scottish Government, COSLA, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, the Scottish Health Council and the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE).

One aim of Our Voice is to gather and analyse people's experience to inform national and local service design and delivery. The Our Voice framework has been working with Third Sector organisations to explore how to maximise the impact of their engagement work to ensure meaningful involvement. Third sector organisations have a long and successful history of recognising the importance of the voice of lived experience and involving people in the development of services and the support received; this is the case from large national, campaigning and information organisations to small service providers. The Our Voice framework isn't looking to add more layers of engagement but to enhance the work that is already being done. The Third Sector is a vital partner in this.

Our Voice ran [two information sessions for Third Sector organisations](#), during which the Our Voice approach was introduced and opportunities for collaboration explored. A key point emerging from the discussions was that Third Sector organisations would welcome more opportunities to join together. When members of different Third Sector organisations are raising similar issues, it can be a challenge, with each organisation competing rather than collaborating, to have their voices heard. There was a sense of fragmentation to joint working and a desire to work with Our Voice to overcome some of these barriers. Furthermore, it was felt that more needed to be done to meaningfully involve the Third Sector with Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) to ensure that their decisions are grounded in the voices of lived experience.

Our Voice has also been working with the Scottish Involvement Network, a group established to facilitate good practice sharing between staff who work in engagement and involvement. This network focuses on the principles and practical elements of engagement and involvement and is committed to improving the way people are involved in decision making. There is a high proportion of Third Sector organisations represented in this network.

A survey on Third Sector Engagement was developed to explore how different Third Sector organisations engage with the people they support, what they do with the data collected and any barriers they face. This report details the results of this survey, the key issues and challenges raised, and explores the potential for Our Voice to work together with the Third Sector.

## 2. Survey Findings

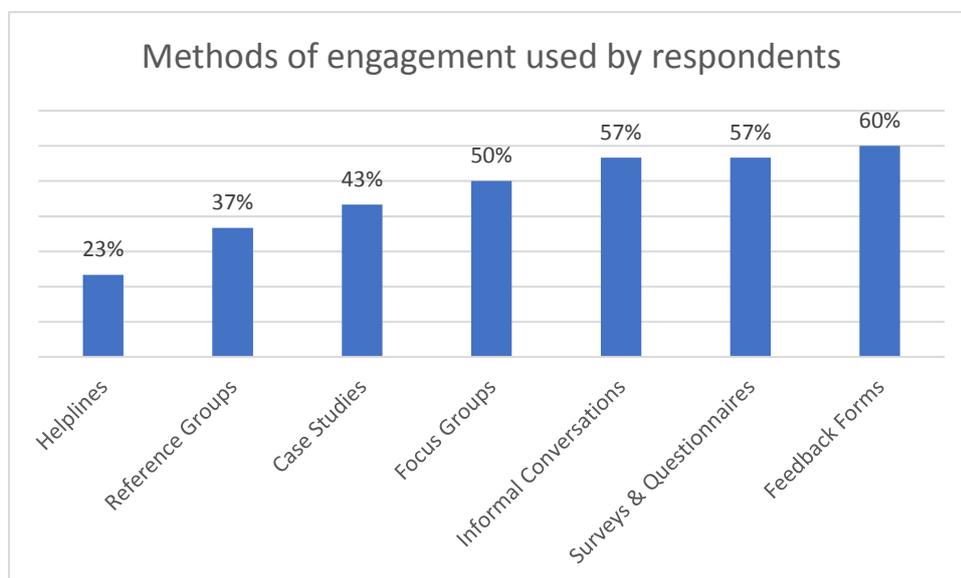
### 2.1 Introduction

The survey was open to all Third Sector organisations between 22<sup>nd</sup> May and 18<sup>th</sup> June 2017. It was distributed among the membership of the ALLIANCE, the Scottish Involvement Network and promoted on social media. Thirty organisations responded, the majority (19) of which were national, condition-specific organisations.

The questions were designed to collect information about how Third Sector organisations gather and use the voices of their membership to influence the design and delivery of services. This includes information on the type of engagement activity, how the findings are used and whether data collected is distributed externally. The survey aimed to identify the barriers to undertaking meaningful engagement in order to begin to identify possible support that the Our Voice framework could provide.

### 2.2 Types of Engagement Activity

Using different engagement tools produces different types of information and will meet different needs of participants and organisations. The organisations who participated in the survey engaged with the people they support in many different ways and using a range of tools.



The following additional tools were also identified.

- emotional touch points
- Facebook/social media commentary
- national networks for involvement, and

- seminars, training, educational visits and talks.

### 2.2.1 Barriers to conducting engagement activity

The barriers to conducting engagement activities raised in this survey can be put into two broad categories: lack of resources and lack of participants for events.

Resources:

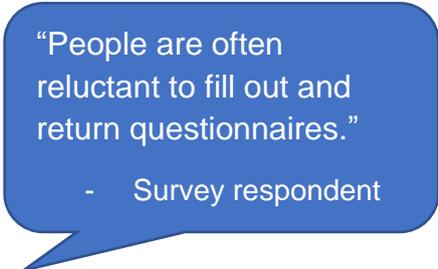
Respondents to the survey mentioned “resources” and “finance” as barriers, along with “overhead costs to the organisation”. Further to this, barriers include cost (23%); which covers paying expenses of participants, covering substitute care and the costs associated with communication support at events; increased staff workload; developments and production of tools that support meaningful engagement.

Lack of participants:

A lack of participants was seen as a result of difficulties in finding the right people, expenses covered and disinterest with engagement. One respondent outlined a pertinent issue with current and established engagement techniques:

“Often it’s people already engaged who are engaged with further, that is people already perhaps using services and often more than one service. People who don’t use services at all but are experiencing challenges need new ways for connections to be formed.”

Respondents mentioned that lack of motivation is a significant barrier to participation. “People have to want to come together to give their views” was one response, going on to say that people often ask “What’s in it for me?”.

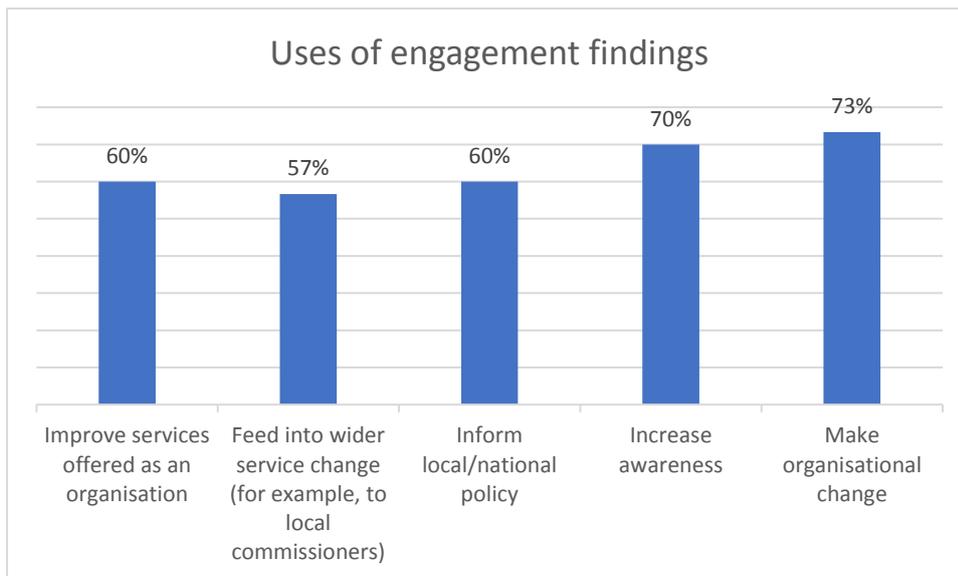


“People are often reluctant to fill out and return questionnaires.”

- Survey respondent

### 2.3 Impact of Engagement

The survey asked people how they used the information collected from their engagement activities to ensure the voice of lived experience impacts on decision making.



The most common use of engagement findings is to make organisational change (73%) showing a focus on using people’s voices to inform internal decision making. There was also an external focus with 70% using findings to increase awareness and 60% using findings to inform local/national policy.

### 2.3.1 Barriers to having an impact

Many barriers to being able to share engagement findings outwith the organisation were cited. These can be put into two broad categories: a lack of mechanisms to feed the information to wider networks and a lack of capacity to develop these mechanisms.

#### Lack of Mechanisms

37% of respondents cited difficulties in accessing decision-making structures such as IJBs, Locality Planning Groups and NHS Boards to be able to impact service delivery. Several barriers were highlighted, including the following.

- “There are seldom local forums for engagement findings to be disseminated.”
- “Understanding the structure and function of local forums is a barrier.”
- “Lack of structure to contribute via the Third Sector interface to the IJB”.

“Barriers are the recent move to IJBs. Most have not yet set up working processes for the public to be truly involved.”

- Survey respondent

Another issue raised related to restructuring and “the loss of Managed Clinical Networks in some areas” which resulted in the loss of relationships that had been built between the Third Sector and the health sector. In many cases these relationships have not been replaced and in the context of changed structures, many are finding it difficult to know where they need to connect.

## Capacity

20% of respondents talked about resources, specifically the time taken to safely and meaningfully share information in a way which can support decision making at a local or national level. There are several things to consider including:

- times taken to ensure privacy of those involved in the engagement when sharing findings
- information and material is up to date – difficult in some sectors where the landscape shifts rapidly, and
- finding the appropriate avenue for information to be shared and then making those links.

It was also noted that for organisations who can feed into decision making through the Integration Authority structures of the IJBs and LPGs the barrier is having the time to prepare for meetings.

### 3. Discussion

Three key points emerged from this survey which highlight opportunities for development and warrant further exploration. These are:

- the role of informal feedback in shaping services
- lack of resources for engagement, and
- difficulty connecting with wider decision makers/engagement mechanisms

This section will explore these key points and the potential for collaboration with Our Voice across the Third Sector in addressing these challenges and developing new, supportive relationships.

#### 3.1 The role of informal feedback in shaping services

One of the most common ways for organisations to hear the views of people they support was by having 'Informal Conversations' (57%). Third sector organisations are able to be very agile and therefore more responsive to informal feedback.

Discussion and attention is required around how we can formally gather this feedback without jeopardising its informal nature. As already discussed, formal engagement activities are extremely resource intensive which is a challenge for the Third Sector. In addition they are often focused on particular issues defined by the organisers and do not always capture the issues of most importance to participants. Therefore, Our Voice is interested in harnessing the small, day-to-day and routine pieces of feedback or involvement that can take place within organisations.

"Research fatigue" was also flagged as a reason for lack of engagement. This represents a challenge to the Third Sector as it looks to develop more engagement opportunities. However, it also highlights the importance of collecting feedback on a more ongoing and routine basis. This might reduce the need for large engagement projects that require people to take time out to attend.

Our Voice aims to facilitate the collection of issues raised with Third Sector organisations by their members and people they support. This will enable issues to come to light that might not be represented at targeted engagement events. Furthermore, it will be less resource intensive as organisations do not need to have large scale events, but rather, they can still feed in issues meaningfully that emerge in the day-to-day contact with people.

By collecting informal feedback on a more routine basis it will help reduce feelings of research fatigue and the duplication of work. The ethos of Our Voice is not to add more layers of engagement but to ensure the maximum impact with what is currently happening. In this case, conversations that are happening at a small scale across the whole of the Third Sector offer an opportunity to gain a deep insight into the needs of people.

## Next Steps

- Assemble a working group of people interested in getting involved with this.
- Discuss the types of information that would be useful to share.
- Explore different methods of collection.
- Develop a plan to test these methods.

### 3.2 Lack of resources for engagement

In order to carry out meaningful and accessible engagement, a wide variety of resources are required. This includes the following.

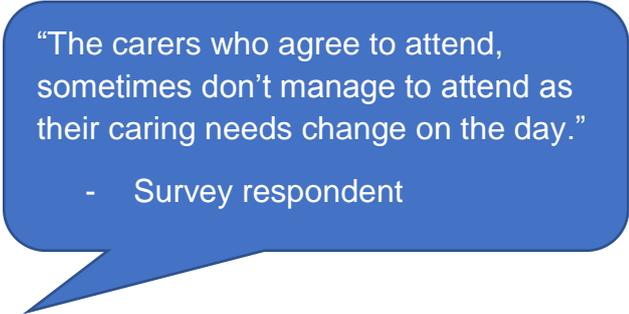
- Financial resources to cover travel, care replacement costs and accessible venue hire.
- Staffing resource required to practically administer an event which can be very labour intensive.
- Time resource to recruit people from hard-to-reach groups or to target a specific audience.

Such challenges were highlighted by respondents to this survey. These tasks are often the responsibility of a small team within a Third Sector organisation.

A core ambition of Our Voice is to increase the number of opportunities for people to have their voice heard in the design and delivery of services. To achieve this increase in opportunities for people to have their say without increasing the strain on resources for organisations, new approaches to engagement need to be tested. The fragmented nature of the Third Sector means that engagement and involvement often happen in isolation within a particular organisation or are condition specific. However, there is an opportunity for collaboration and, more importantly, the sharing of resources for engagement activities.

There is scope under the Our Voice framework to bring together a group of Third Sector organisations to explore which topics for engagement they have in common and undertake some joint work. Along with common topics there will need to be discussion around:

- resource sharing agreements
- ownership of the findings
- process for defining responsibilities
- balance of participants across the organisations, and
- possibilities for joint funding bids.



“The carers who agree to attend, sometimes don’t manage to attend as their caring needs change on the day.”

- Survey respondent

Such a project could provide a model for future collaborations. The desire for more collaboration within the sector was expressed at Our Voice discussion events with the Third Sector.<sup>1</sup>

#### Next Steps

- Canvass Third Sector organisations who might be interested in this collaboration opportunity.
- Discuss potential topics for engagement.
- Begin to map out available resources across the organisations.

### 3.3 Difficulty connecting with external decision makers

When discussing barriers to having an impact on service delivery, the importance of feeding information into external decision-making structures was recognised e.g. IJBs. Many respondents talked about challenges in making these connections. One comment suggested that the change in roles introduced with health and social care integration has resulted in the loss of relationships that facilitated the sharing of peoples' voices and views. Another challenge highlighted was a lack of understanding of the new structures that mean organisations often don't know where to take information once it has been collected. These new structures are also currently focused on internal priorities e.g. managing integrated budgets and navigating new service delivery mechanisms.

Our Voice aims to support the development of local and national connections between decision makers and people who access services. The Our Voice Integration Network is going some way to do this. The Integration Network aims to bring together staff working in engagement roles across the Integration Authorities with public representatives on the decision-making structures to share learning and best practice. At a recent [meeting of public representatives](#) discussion focused on ways that representatives could be more visible for people and groups in communities.

Our Voice can support the Third Sector to promote engagement activities and the issues identified. Reports can be collected and shared on the Our Voice website which will develop a library of engagement information on a wide range of issues; this ensures information can be more easily sourced by decision makers looking for evidence of need. Our Voice will promote this information hub with national and local stakeholders which will support Third Sector organisations to promote their findings.

#### Next Steps

- Consider the benefits/impact of having a 'library' of engagement reports.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/download/library/lib\\_58f5e2704a864/](http://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/download/library/lib_58f5e2704a864/), p6

- Identify what type of reports are appropriate for sharing on the Our Voice website.
- Promote this new 'library' among stakeholders.