

Say&Play Launch

Monday 08 December 2008

involve Lambeth



Speakers:

Baroness Morgan of Drefelin (Undersecretary of State for Children, Young People and Families)

Richard Wilson (Involve)

Cllr Rachel Heywood (London Borough of Lambeth)

Chair: Edward Andersson (Involve)



The Say&Play project was launched at a best practice seminar to a local government audience. The launch was designed to maximise interaction between attendees and to give them a feel for the Say&Play approach.

The opening address was given by Richard Wilson, Director of Involve, who reflected on the findings of the Say&Play project and stressed the need for local authorities to build relationships with the populations they serve. Lambeth councillor, Rachel Heywood, presented a video of Lambeth's recent public engagement initiative "People's First Expo" adding her reflections on the importance of community engagement.

The closing address was given by Baroness Morgan of Drefelin who emphasised the importance of creating inclusive consultation. Baroness Morgan highlighted the work going on across government departments on in changing the way that public agencies engage with local people. She also highlighted the development of Youth Advisors in Communities and Local Government (CLG), giving young people direct access to the policy making process.

The interactive element of the launch was split into two sections. Participants first discussed how local authorities could design public engagement events which fit with people's busy lives. During discussions participants wrote their thoughts down on the table cloths provided. The majority of comments centred on a number of clear themes: the need for councils to be flexible in how and when they engage; to understand the needs and interests of the different audiences they want to reach; to draw on the networks which exist as well as key people (such as community champions) in the local area; and, to bring consultation to the audience: "on their turf". Some interesting proposals included: "journey mapping", "market segmentation techniques", and "quick consults [at] supermarket queues, school gates, MacDonalDs, bus stops".

The second interactive section allowed participants to take part in two of the activities used in Say&Play events whilst networking with other participants and refreshing their coffee cups. This created an informal atmosphere for which the two activities were designed. One of the activities asked: "What challenges do councils face in designing effective consultation?". Each participant was given three dots and asked to prioritise from a list of six options. The result was:

Option	No. of dots
Complex subject matter:	12
Tickbox culture:	13
Lack of public interest:	2

Lack of public trust:	27
Limited resources:	10
Tight timeframes and deadlines:	19



The clear majority of participants in this activity prioritised “lack of public trust” over all other challenges facing councils. It is interesting that an audience largely from local government chose to prioritise this external challenge over institutional challenges (tickbox culture, limited resources, tight timeframes and deadlines). Those who champion public engagement will be pleased to note that “lack of public interest” was not seen as a significant challenge by seminar participants.

Many of the issues raised in this seminar resonate with the findings of the Say&Play report and importantly demonstrate that there is both an appetite for and widespread commitment to developing and improving local government consultation. To read the full report please visit www.involve.org.uk/sayandplay