

Articulating public values in environmental policy development

Report on the Citizens' Jury on Air Quality, prepared for Defra
October 2007

Summary

Introduction

Aims and objectives

This project had two distinct aims. Firstly, to explore public views on air quality in order to inform the development of future policies and strategies to achieve specific policy outcomes. Secondly, the project was intended to trial the use of a Citizens' Jury approach to supporting policy development.

The project

People Science & Policy Ltd (PSP) designed, managed and delivered a process based on the Citizens' Jury approach. The project was run in collaboration with Professor John Murlis, as specialist science advisor, Dr Rosemary Day, as specialist advisor on the social aspects of air quality and Midlands-on-View, a market research recruitment and venue service. It comprised a Citizens' Jury and a literature review.

The jury

Citizens' Juries® are a trade marked development from the Jefferson Center in the USA. Our Citizens' Jury was based on this model and took place in Sutton Coldfield. Twentytwo members of the public were recruited from within a 12 mile radius of Sutton Coldfield. They were recruited by telephone as a cross-section of the public but we ensured that individuals with asthma, coronary and pulmonary obstructive diseases were included, as previous research had found these groups to have specific concerns with regard to air quality, which were important to include. The jury process involved three hearings. The first lasted 2½ hours and took place on the evening of 15 December 2005. This was an introductory hearing at which the science advisor to the project provided an overview of the topic and jurors identified further information they felt they needed. The second hearing took place over the two days of 21/22 January 2006. The bulk of the time was given over to the expert witness presentations and time for the jurors to question these witnesses. The final hearing, held on 28 January, was devoted to enabling the jurors to reach conclusions, draw out their recommendations and present these to Defra.

Literature review

The project included a literature review to provide a wider context for the outcomes from the jurors' deliberations and to inform the recruitment strategy.

Jurors' Perspectives and Recommendations

Scoping the issue

An initial brainstorming session revealed that air pollution is not a 'top of mind' environmental issue. With respect to air quality there was an awareness that quality (measured by smell) varies and that this variation was most likely to be caused by traffic.

However, there was no understanding of how air quality is measured scientifically or that action can be taken by individuals to improve it. Neither was there a sense of what 'good' quality air is. Most participants admitted that they had not thought about air quality explicitly.

Information requirements

To support their deliberations the jurors wanted information on:

- the causes of poor air quality;
- the composition of air pollution;
- the role of the weather in air quality;
- the relationship, if any, of air quality to global warming; and
- the impact of poor air quality on health.

Themes

Towards the end of the project, having heard from, and questioned, the witnesses and discussed the topic with each other, the jurors highlighted a number of issues that they felt to be critical.

Education

Schools

The jurors felt that it was important to raise awareness among school students about air quality and actions they can take to improve it in their locality.

Public awareness

The jurors, aware of their own ignorance before they got involved in the project,

recommended a public awareness campaign that provided:

- information to enable individuals to better understand the cause and implications of poor air quality; and
- information on what individuals could do to make a difference and how they personally would benefit as a result.

International and local comparisons

There was considerable interest in how the UK compares with other countries and in how UK cities compare with each other. The jurors thought that there would be interest in an EU-wide 'league table' of air quality.

Technology

Motor vehicles

The jurors recognised that it would take time for the UK fleet to be renewed and that newer cars are less polluting. There was therefore, enthusiasm for retro-fitting existing technology to older vehicles. Annual emissions checks on all cars after the first year, and cars displaying emission certificates were suggested. There was also discussion about promoting the use of alternatively powered vehicles. More interestingly, it was suggested that an in-car meter should be developed to show motorists their impact on air quality.

Domestic energy use

Ways of supporting reduced energy use in homes were put forward. This included small things like switching-off TVs at night and using energy saving light bulbs but also larger things, such as cavity wall insulation. Longer-term, the jury recommended switching to renewable energy sources and investing in 'real time' meters that allowed households to see their energy use in real time, so that usage could be reduced immediately. Retrospective information on bills was said to be too late and did not stimulate energy saving behaviour because the information was too late.

Individual awareness

There was some interest in developing an individual meter that people could wear to make them aware of the air quality in the vicinity and the impact they were having. It was suggested that this would empower people to make decisions and change their behaviour.

Recycling

There was considerable discussion of the need to recycle and reduce waste as a way of reducing air pollution from industry.

Transport

Domestic traffic

The jurors had been informed by the witnesses of the impact of transport on air quality. However, they advised that it will be very difficult to get people to give-up using their cars. They emphasised not only the convenience of cars but also the quality of travelling experience. Bus travel in particular was thought to be not only unreliable but expensive, noisy, threatening and occasionally dangerous. 'Bouncers' on buses to protect passengers was suggested that could reduce costs longer term by reducing vandalism. Other alternatives to reduce pollution, such as increasing use of cycles, walk to school schemes, internet shopping were suggested.

Commercial traffic

The primary recommendations were to stop HGVs from using the roads at weekends, charging non-UK registered vehicles to enter the country and putting more freight on the railway.

Industry

The jurors were keen to stress that there are benefits from activities that cause air pollution, most notably a healthy economy and more comfortable lifestyle. Hence, as a group, the jurors appreciated the trade-off between jobs and consumer goods on the one hand and air pollution on the other. Jurors were largely opposed to taxes as a mechanism for changing behaviour and recommended that incentives for good behaviour should be used rather than penalties for bad behaviour. It was finally agreed that financial incentives would be probably be more effective than education alone.

Regulation

Some jurors believed that only regulation would bring about some of the behavioural changes in individual behaviour they saw as desirable. There was widespread awareness that regulating industry impacts on the economy and therefore a feeling that it should be minimised. It was suggested that corporate social responsibility should encourage good practice, rather than relying on regulation to curb bad practices. It was also felt that any regulation should be at the EU level and if local councils are to have responsibility for implementing policy and policing regulation, they must have the necessary tools for the task. There was a recommendation that the UK should look to Scandinavia for examples of good practice.

Waste

There was much discussion about packaging and the air pollution caused by its initial production and the subsequent need to dispose of it. This was an area where it was felt the Government should regulate if industry would not co-operate.

Recycling

The focus was on the need to reduce waste and improve domestic waste collection services. Germany was held up as an example of good practice.

Labelling

Part of making people more aware of the impact of their actions was thought to be changes in the way goods are labelled. Developing a system whereby the amount of energy used to produce a product is indicated on the packaging, for example using a traffic light system of three colours, was mentioned.

Vested interests

Some jurors suggested that an appropriate political framework is required to ensure that emerging technologies are supported and not sidelined because industry or the trade unions feel threatened.

Pollution police

There was a suggestion that local people could act as pollution police, in a system similar to community policing, to report offending individuals or households.

Lifestyle choices

The jurors agreed that individual citizens' decisions are the main drivers of air pollution. Choosing to buy a product and thereby causing it to be produced and transported, is a polluting process, as is deciding to make a journey. While the jurors appreciated that there are some technological solutions, the focus of discussion was on demand and use and whether this could, or should, be reduced and if so, how. This line of thinking linked the issue of air quality to other environmental issues such as global climate change, recycling, waste disposal and energy generation and conservation. Broadly speaking, saving energy by reducing demand/usage was seen as an action that would have positive impacts across this range of issues. Some jurors believed that demand reduction was the most important issue to be addressed, others questioned the practicality of enforcing demand reduction.

Conclusions

By the end of the jury process it was agreed that the issue of air quality was more important than any juror had originally thought. The main reason they believed it to be important was because of the serious impact of poor air quality on health.

Defra response

Defra will circulate the report widely and consider the recommendations. Some members of the jury will be invited to meet with policy officials later in 2006.

Epilogue: Changed perceptions and behaviour

During the telephone conversations to finalise the jurors' report to Defra some jurors mentioned that they had changed their behaviour as well as their attitudes as a result of taking part in the jury.

Literature review

Overall the literature provides a consistent picture of public views in the UK. The findings from the literature review are generally consistent with those from the Citizens' Jury. However, after the process, the jurors had become empowered to take action and appreciated how their actions could make an impact.

Technical report

Citizens' Jury

The final project design included the following elements:

- An advisory committee
- A literature review of public perspectives on air quality
- Telephone recruitment of jury
- Three hearings over 3½ days
- A charge for the jury to address
- Witness presentations to the jury
- Opportunities for jurors to debate the issues

- Recommendations from the jurors to Defra
- Report drafted by PSP and agreed with the jurors
- Publicity for the event and the recommendations
- Evaluation

The advisory committee

The role of the advisory committee is to ensure that the process is free, fair and balanced and to provide technical expertise and access to expert witnesses. Recruitment can take time and many senior people who will be preferred for this role can find it difficult to be involved at short notice. In order to overcome this, the committee worked by email, meeting only twice, once at the start and once to discuss the final report and its implications.

Literature review

The literature review has concentrated on UK studies that have addressed, at least to some extent, public perceptions of air quality and air pollution, some also included public views on air quality information and possible solutions to air quality problems.

The jury

Recruitment

Twenty-two jurors from a 12 mile radius of Sutton Coldfield were randomly recruited by telephone to criteria set out in a recruitment questionnaire.

The first hearing

After an introductory warm-up session, the jurors were split into two groups for an initial discussion of environmental issues. This was followed by a presentation from Professor John Murlis on air quality.

The charge

The draft charge that Defra officials proposed for the jury to consider was: *'What improvements, if any, would people like to see in air quality and how should these be achieved?'* However, the jurors were unwilling to take this charge on board for two main reasons. Firstly, they felt that they did not know enough about the options for improvement, which they thought might be dependent on the causes of air pollution. Secondly, they were uncomfortable in being asked to speak on behalf of the wider community. The jury felt that they could more readily address a series of questions:

1. Is there a continuing problem with air pollution?
2. If so what kind of problem is it?
3. What actions would be preferable?
4. At which level should decisions on actions be taken?
5. At what level should actions be taken?

These questions were taken forward to the second hearing. However, the jury never fully engaged with the concept of having a 'charge' to address.

The second hearing

The majority of this hearing was taken-up with the witness presentations and questioning. In order to maximise the opportunities for jurors to reflect on the information being provided and to exchange views with each other, the witnesses' presentations were interspersed with breakout sessions. A final feedback session enabled the breakout groups to present their thoughts to each other. This allowed a sharing of thoughts in order to stimulate ideas that might lead towards the development of recommendations in the final hearing.

The third hearing

For part of the time the jurors worked in three breakout groups. After lunch the three breakout groups presented their ideas to each other and worked together to compile a final list of recommendations for Defra. At the end of the day the jury nominated a representative to present their recommendations and conclusions to the Defra project manager, who responded briefly.

The report

In the classic Citizens' Juries® method, the report is drafted by the jurors but in this case the report was drafted by PSP and circulated to the jurors for comment. Defra wanted to gain an understanding of public values, as well as to receive the jurors' final conclusions. In addition, Defra wanted to gain an understanding of how and why views change. Hence the report includes sections that discuss these issues using a qualitative research framework. Nevertheless, the final recommendations are clearly recognisable as the jurors' and not the interpretation of the facilitators. Three written responses were received from the jurors, 15 fed back comments during the telephone follow-up. On the whole the jurors were satisfied that the report gave an accurate summary of the proceedings of the jury and that the quotes used represented the spectrum of opinions. In particular, all of the jurors thought that the descriptions of the hearings and the conversations that they contained were well summarised. There was some concern that the recommendations were somewhat isolated from the descriptions of the discussions and it was felt that this detracted from their impact. The report structure was revised to take account of this.

Evaluation

Of the 18 jurors who went through the whole jury process, none felt excluded or unable to understand the information presented. However, only 6 thought that Defra would take their views very seriously, while eight thought Defra would take their views fairly seriously and three felt that Defra would not take their views very seriously. The subsequent follow-up telephone calls confirmed these views. The importance of dividing even such a small group into smaller groups for discussion was appreciated by the less confident jurors. The jurors generally found the witnesses clear and helpful. The information they provided was highly valued. Formal feedback was not sought from the witnesses but several sent positive feedback by email after their involvement.

Conclusions

Findings

This Citizens' Jury has shown that members of the general public are quite capable of understanding and questioning information regarding air quality. Given the time to engage with the key issues, easy access to information and perhaps most importantly the incentive to access it, members of the public are able to identify what is important to them regarding air quality and come to informed conclusions about appropriate actions. Very few, if any, members of the jury would have pro-actively sought information about air quality prior to taking part in this project. So if the jurors are typical of the wider public, and the literature review suggests that they are, simply making information available, however accessible in terms of either content or media, will not lead the average member of the public to find out about the topic.

The jurors' values could be summed up as:

- a desire to minimise adverse health effects;
- support for ensuring a competitive UK economy that provides jobs; and
- a belief in the fair treatment of less well-off members of UK society.

These values underpinned the jurors' expectations. They did not expect any organisation or individual to have the freedom to pollute in a way that would seriously affect the health of others. However, the jurors did not expect controls over pollutants to be so tight that the competitiveness of UK industry was adversely affected. There was a relatively consistent UK focus to the discussions and although air quality was seen as a global issue, concern about either pollutants, or steps taken to control them, were largely driven by

- local impacts. There was a hope that society as a whole might be able to move towards a philosophy of lower consumption, which would provide knock-on benefits in terms of air quality. There was however, little expectation that this would happen to a degree that would have a profound effect on air quality. The jurors therefore recommended that Government should take the lead in improving UK air quality.
- Government was expected to take a number of actions, in particular it should:
 - continue to regulate the emission of air pollutants;
 - reward good behaviour as well as punish failure to comply with regulations;
 - raise the understanding of the impact of individual behaviour on air quality; and
 - support investment in cleaner technologies and promote their uptake.
- The jurors said that any Government expenditure should be seen as an investment, rather than a cost, largely due to the beneficial impact of better air quality on health. Information was seen as central to making

different actions acceptable and the jurors thought that it was crucial that Government take a proactive role in campaigns to provoke action.

Method

This project has shown that there is a clear role for deliberative methods in developing air quality policy. Such approaches can be used to bring new ideas to the policy mix. The impact knowledge and deliberation had on jurors' perceptions made them atypical of the wider public by the end of the process. This must be borne in mind when interpreting the findings, as the literature review shows. The greater sense of personal responsibility and empowerment embodied in the jurors by the end is a function of their greater knowledge and confidence. The method used was not a classic Citizens' Jury, although many of the principles were included. In terms of broader applicability, the project is best thought of as an example of a deliberative method rather than as a Citizens' Jury. It is not useful to think in terms of one model or another being particularly applicable to specific policy areas or issues.

Key lessons learned for future use of deliberative techniques in policy development are:

- Allow sufficient time to recruit and establish the Advisory Committee
- Consider inviting more junior people to join the Advisory Committee
- Allow sufficient time and budget to ensure the best witnesses can take part and are able to fully prepare
- Ensure resources are available to support witnesses so that they pitch their talk at the right level and cover the required material in the timescale available. Asking for draft presentations will help.
- A fairly long gap between the first and second hearing is acceptable and provides time to finalise witnesses and their presentations in response to jurors' needs. It is possible to keep the jurors engaged by sending a report on the first session.
- The final hearing should be quite soon after the second to maintain momentum
- A 'technical friend' gave the jurors confidence to ask questions and helped to articulate their questions for the witnesses.
- Breaking the group into small groups for discussion helps less confident jurors to voice their opinions and ask questions.
- Allow adequate time for jurors to deliberate and reach conclusion.