



Service user involvement with offenders in the community: A toolkit for staff



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We would like to thank the service users and staff of probation services in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire for their help in producing this toolkit

Section 1:

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1.1 About this toolkit

Service user involvement

Service user involvement is an essential part of running an effective probation service. Giving service users the opportunity to give their views and contribute to areas such as service design and monitoring has many benefits. It ensures your service is responsive to service users' needs, it gives service users a voice and develops their skills. Playing an active role in their community and taking on a measure of responsibility can assist in the journey away from crime.

This toolkit is for managers and staff of any probation service provider that wants to involve their service users in the management, design and delivery of their probation services.



For those probation services starting their service user involvement journey we recommend beginning by involving service users in a service evaluation. The toolkit incorporates guidance on how to do this using peer research. For more detail on how to conduct a peer research project see the accompanying guide **'Running a peer research project with offenders in the community'**

How can the toolkit help you develop effective service user involvement?

Between 2012 and 2014 the Revolving Doors Agency worked with probation service providers in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Norfolk & Suffolk to train and support them to develop their service user involvement systems. This toolkit is based on the learning from those pilots, and is designed to provide guidance for other probation service providers. It gives a range of

methods to involve service users in all aspects of your work. The toolkit is full of practical guidance and tools for probation staff to use.

Section 1: Gives an introduction to service user involvement and why it is beneficial to involve service users in probation services. It also looks at typical barriers to implementing service user involvement and how to overcome them.

Section 2: Takes you through a three step process to developing effective service user involvement in your probation service:

Step 1: Tells you how to get people on board including senior management, frontline staff and service users. The toolkit guides you through an effective communications strategy.

Step 2: Shows you how to involve service users in evaluating your service as a whole and reviewing your service user involvement systems, through peer research. It also tells you how to run an effective service user group and how to grow your service user involvement in all areas of the organisation.

Step 3: Gives you advice on how to embed service user involvement in your organisation through developing policies, appropriate structures and through your business planning.

Section 3: Gives you guidance on a range of consultation methods which are suitable for use on both a one-off and ongoing basis.

Section 4: Contains easy to use checklists, templates and good practice to support your service user involvement.

Section 5: Lists sources of further information and support.

1.2 What is service user involvement?

Service user involvement refers to the process by which people who are using or have used a service become involved in the planning, development and delivery of that service to make improvements.¹

Levels of involvement

Service user involvement can be seen as a ladder of involvement, from information and consultation to the highest levels of decision making. The ladder below illustrates different degrees of involvement:

The ladder of participation



1.3 Why involve offenders?

Because of their direct experiences of services and probation, service users know better than anyone what works – and what does not. Involving them in your work brings unique insights and taps into a valuable resource.¹

“What really made the project worthwhile were the group of service users who volunteered. I have learned so much from them.”

Staff member

There are many benefits to be gained for probation trusts and service users through having effective service user involvement.

Benefits for Probation Services:

Supporting desistance:

Desistance is the process by which people stop offending. Desistance theory suggests that when offenders play an active role in their community it can help the process of moving away from crime. Service user involvement provides an opportunity for offenders to become active citizens. Service user involvement provides those involved with skills and confidence, and gives offenders a sense of self-worth, which can be factors in stopping them committing crime.²

Quality feedback including from people less likely to speak to staff:

Service user involvement is a way of monitoring the quality of services in probation, and service users can highlight issues that staff are unaware of. Offenders involved in service user involvement are often viewed as more approachable than staff members and many service users may feel more comfortable engaging and raising issues with their peers. This could result in hearing perspectives from service users whose voices can often be 'unheard'.²

¹ Revolving Doors Agency and Clinks Service User Involvement Guide: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/service-user-involvement-guide/>

² Prison Reform Trust, 2011 *Time Well Spent: A Practical Guide to Active Citizenship and Volunteering in Prison* <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Time%20Well%20Spent%20report%20lo.pdf>

Service improvement:

Service user involvement offers an opportunity to improve services by getting insight from those who have firsthand experience of these services. Having this insight helps service planning, development and delivery.

Benefits for service users:**Sense of voice:**

Service user involvement gives service users a voice and an opportunity to share their concerns.²

Learning new skills:

Taking part in service user involvement activity provides service users with the opportunity to learn and develop a range of skills. This can vary from team working, empathy, listening, communication among others. Training can also be provided for those taking part in service user involvement schemes, which can increase employability, in turn reducing the likelihood of reoffending. It also gives service users confidence.

“[When asked what had been the highlight of being involved in the project] Just improving my confidence really, like sitting in groups and talking and just knowing a lot more like knowledge wise. I would never have done that before, it’s helped me a lot.” Service user

Being valued and respected:

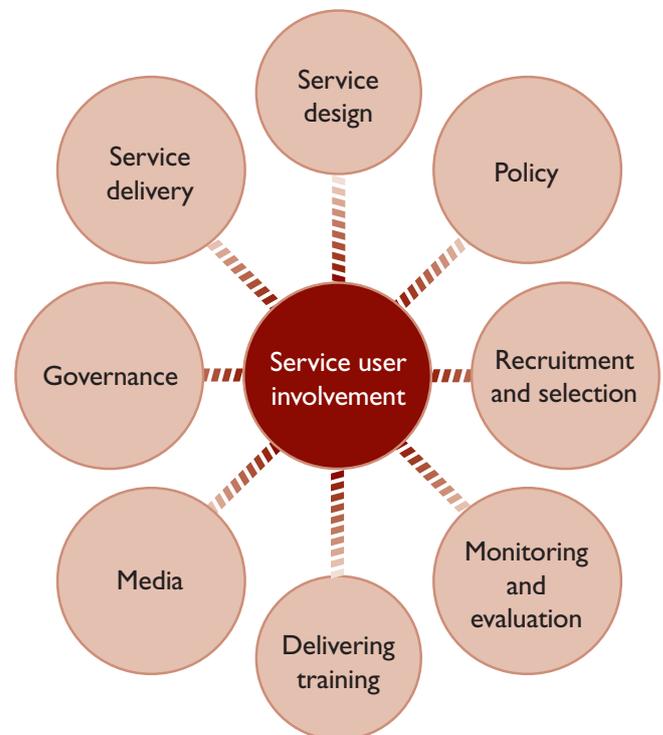
Service user involvement allows service users to gain responsibility for their part or role in the involvement system which can encourage a sense of accountability.

Empowerment:

Service user involvement empowers service users and has clear implications for rehabilitation and resettlement. It can help reverse the sense of marginalisation that many offenders feel.²

1.4 What can you involve service users in?

You can involve service users in all aspects of the work of the probation service. In Section 2 we go into more detail on how you can involve service users in all of the following:



1.5 Issues with implementing service user involvement in probation services

Barriers	Potential solutions
<p>Fear Staff may be intimidated, afraid or uncomfortable about asking service users their views and opinions, and scared of giving any power to them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognition and reward for the good work staff do. Reassurance that service user involvement is not about detracting from that or undermining it, or letting service users rant about staff or tell tales on them ● Hold open discussions about what service user involvement can offer and potential activities ● Hearing from staff from other probation services where service user involvement has worked ● Have on-going communication with staff about project aims and outcomes.
<p>Staff not seeing a need for change Staff may have a sense that things work fine the way they are and this will create more work for individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You can always do it better; service user involvement is about finding ways to improve systems and services for staff as well ● Link to inspections reports and offender surveys highlighting areas for improvement ● Showcase the benefits of service user involvement.
<p>Lack of faith in the process A common concern from staff is that nothing will change as a result of consultation. This is exacerbated if staff feel they're not listened to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hold workshops with staff to ensure their voices are heard ● Review your processes for gaining and acting on feedback from staff.
<p>Staff feel unprepared and unsupported Service user involvement projects require a time commitment and specialist skills that staff may not have, or know how to access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that your staff members have access to training if needed to facilitate service user involvement ● Discuss a staff member's service user involvement role during appraisals and supervision. Identify where further support might be needed.
<p>Lack of interest from service users Staff may have tried convening groups or meetings, and found attendance disappointing or dropped off.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assurances from senior management that views will be taken into account and acted upon ● Consider incentives.
<p>Service users feel unprepared Service users may feel that they lack the skills or support needed to participate in an SUI project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write a clear role description defining core skills and abilities needed for the SUI role ● Provide training for service users ● Match people and tasks, according to abilities.
<p>Concerns over inclusion of 'difficult voices' Some service users may not want to participate in your project if 'difficult voices' such as sex offenders or perpetrators of domestic violence are also involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be clear from the start that your project aims to attract a broad range of voices ● Where service users express real concerns about other participants, consider holding a separate event so more voices get heard.

Section 2:

Developing effective service user involvement

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This section is designed to support probation staff to implement service user involvement. It takes you through the whole process from first steps to embedding service user involvement in your organisation.

Step 1: Get people on board

Get the agreement of the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team (SMT)

You will need the backing of the Chief Executive. Service user involvement needs to be linked explicitly to mission, values and vision, and to the business planning of the organisation. We recommend that a member of the SMT leads the project group.

Set up a project team

You will want to bring together a group of people to support the project and make it happen. In our experience of working with probation services, we found the project moved much more quickly when frontline probation officers were involved. As an example – here is the attendance list of our project group in Bedfordshire Probation:

Case study

Bedfordshire Probation attendance list

Attendance list of project group in Bedfordshire:

- Assistant Chief Officer
- Communications Manager
- Performance and Information Manager
- Probation Officers x3 (1 from each LDU).

The Assistant Chief Officer was able to make decisions, show commitment and encourage staff to get involved as well as delegate authority for project work. The communications manager was invaluable in conveying messages to staff and keeping everyone updated with the work of the project group. The Performance and Information Manager was able to root the work of the project in areas of interest, for example the annual offender survey, and take forward recommendations. The probation officers were able to bring colleagues on board with the initiative, identify service users and lend practical support.

Develop a communication strategy for the project

Communication of the project's aims, objectives and plans for development is essential in developing a service user involvement strategy. Developing a communication strategy should be one of the first jobs for the project team, so it may be helpful to include people responsible for communication.

The first message you want to convey to staff and service users is that there is commitment to involvement, because it brings benefits for staff and service users alike, and for the organisation as a whole. The second message you want to convey is the way in which things will change in the near future and that you want staff and service users involved in these changes.

For example you could:

- Send a letter to staff from the Chief Executive
- Include an article in the staff newsletter
- Hold workshops and briefing sessions at for example team or Local Delivery Unit meetings.

Get staff involved

Getting staff involved and supporting the project is crucial. A good place to start is with staff who have been involved in supporting service user involvement to date in your service; they may have held service user groups or conducted surveys, or involved clients in recruitment or commissioning. It's important to find out what staff think has worked well, and where they would like support.

“Engaging staff was the biggest challenge. I should have done more of it and earlier to engage with staff, not just the ones who were enthusiastic.”

Staff member

Ensure staff feel listened to

When launching a service user involvement initiative a crucial piece of ground work is to consider the ways in which staff feedback is sought and implemented. If you have ineffective ways of consulting with staff, they may feel resistant to the idea of consulting with service users. Many probation services have excellent and innovative ways of consulting with staff – from staff surveys to away days and strategic planning days. If you can frame service user involvement as a complement to staff involvement, staff are more likely to back the initiative. Consider running a workshop/focus group/staff consultation day to discuss the service user involvement initiative, as well as seeking feedback on other issues.

Workshops

A good way of introducing the project to staff is to hold workshops about service user involvement. Topics to consider would be:

- An introduction to service user involvement: describe the benefits and explain why the service is looking to improve service user involvement now
- Asking staff about existing involvement – what works? What do they find difficult or perceive as barriers?
- Discussing how to overcome barriers – use the **table in 1.5 (page 6)**
- Ask for suggestions on new ways to improve service user involvement
- Identify people who are keen and enthusiastic – ask them to join the project group or become champions
- Explain the next steps you are planning to take and how staff can be involved/support them.



See Section 4.1 for a workshop format for getting staff on board

After the workshop, you should send out a brief note of the issues raised and how you plan to address them. Also include a summary of your next steps and remind staff how they can be involved and support the project.

Publicise the gains you have already made

Don't reinvent the wheel. Find out the current situation of service user involvement processes in the service. This is an important part of the process, as going through existing mechanisms systematically will help you a) identify relevant staff to include and b) begin to understand where improvements need to be made to make service user involvement more effective, or more transparent, or more widely recognised. Section 4.2 provides a template for auditing your current processes.



See Section 4.2 for a service user involvement audit template

Use this information to develop a 'You Said, We Did' document you can publicise to staff and service users to show the organisation listens to what service users have to say. You can update this regularly.

Recruit Service users

Why do any of us do any of the things we do? Because we're motivated, for our own personal reasons, selfish, or altruistic ones – we want to improve things for other people. These are of course the same motivating factors for people on probation. Depending on what kind of involvement you are looking for, you can publicise the benefits to individuals as being:

- Chance to 'have a say'
- To change or improve things
- Opportunity to develop new skills
- Gaining experience to put on their CV
- Training
- Opportunity to meet new people.

What might put them off?

- Negative experiences of involvement
- Not having enough information
- Concerns they are being used
- Poor feedback from previous involvement
- Uninspiring activities or facilitators
- Domineering behaviour from other service users involved.

“I'm glad I was part of the project. At first when my probation officer asked me about it I was quite apprehensive but they explained the skills I could gain and also it would give me something to do. They paid for expenses which helped.”

Service user

Payment and reimbursement for service user involvement

Expenses

You should always reimburse service users for 'out-of-pocket' expenses – i.e. the monies they have spent in the course of carrying out their role. This could include:

- Travel expenses
- Meals or refreshments
- Childcare costs
- Other costs related to role, e.g. phone card, stamps, stationery, etc.

Payments

Each organisation needs to decide whether it is going to pay service users for their involvement. If you are going to pay service users, your payment and reimbursement policy needs to take into account that many of them will be in receipt of various benefits. You should signpost them to where they can get independent advice about how receiving payment might affect their benefits and give them time to make an informed decision. The amount you pay will depend on the type of activity, the skills and experience, the complexity and responsibility that the activity demands. However you should bear in mind that you must pay at least the minimum wage hourly rate when you are deciding how much to pay for a session or day.

Payments (other than a one-off payment) will affect people's benefit entitlement. This is a very complex area and you would need to get specialist advice before putting in place your payment policy as if you do it wrong people risk losing their benefits.

Managing risk

The level of risk you are prepared to accept in your service user involvement will depend on the type of involvement. For involvement in a group, or conducting peer research you will have a lower threshold of risk. However it is important to remember to try and find ways to engage with high-risk offenders in order to make sure their voices are heard. As you know risk changes over time, and someone who committed a serious offence may no longer be a high risk, and their experiences of e.g. probation support when coming out of prison or how to maintain motivation and progress on a long licence, can be very valuable.

“The risk that offenders may pose to other group members and each other, we've had no problems so far but it does have to be managed. Managed and aware of the risk to the women in the group.”

Probation staff

Recruitment methods

Service users can be recruited in a number of ways:

- Via probation case workers
- Word of mouth recommendation by other service users
- Posters in reception and interview rooms
- Through outreach workshops.

Service users, like most of us, want to know what it is all about before agreeing to something. Always give service users the chance to find out what is required before asking them to commit to being involved. For example, you could invite them to an information workshop, where they can find out more about service user involvement without feeling obliged to get involved if they decide it's not for them. It is also important to let service users know that they can opt out or in again at any point when their lives change.



See section 4.3 for a sample recruitment leaflet

Step 2: Review and plan

Gathering service user views

The next step is to find out service user views. We have given a range of ways in which you could go about doing this:

- You can train service users in research skills to give their own views and to gather the views of other service users
- You could set up a service user group
- You could hold a consultation with service users using one of the methods detailed in Section 3.

Running a peer research project in probation

This section should be read in conjunction with the accompanying guide 'Running a peer research project with offenders in the community'. If you are not doing a peer research project in your organisation skip to page 15.

What is peer research?

Peer research involves the subject group (in this case those on probation) taking on the role of the researcher. Peer research moves away from the 'top down' research where those higher up in an organisation choose the way in which the research should be conducted, towards a 'bottom up' approach where individuals who are directly affected by the outcomes of the research play an active role in the research process.

More information on peer research is available [here](#).

Why run a peer research project?

Running a peer research project is a great way of kicking off service user involvement in a probation service. There are many benefits of running a peer research project in probation:

- It can help break down barriers in an organisation
- People on probation may be more inclined to talk to their peers rather than staff members
- It is empowering for the peer researchers
- Peer researchers can gain new skills and experiences, which could influence desistance from crime
- It is an effective way of having user involvement running through your probation trust
- It is a development opportunity for your staff.

"The peer research project was brilliant. It saw the successful engagement of a group of service users who stuck with the project and produced some concrete products. The experience of involvement was very powerful for them and for us as staff. It was a great way to start our thinking about how we can use service user involvement more widely in our probation trust."

Staff member

The following is a case study from the peer research project we ran in Bedfordshire. If you want to run a similar project we have developed a handbook for staff: 'Running a peer research project with offenders in the community'.

The handbook tells you all you need to know from theory to practice, to be able to train and support service users in conducting peer research.

"The peer research training was really helpful. I found it something that I really enjoyed doing and it's something that I never even would've thought of before. I've got a lot of skills from it and I think it's a great way to include service users."

Service user

Case study

Conducting the peer research: Case study from Bedfordshire probation

Methodology

This example is from the work we did in Bedfordshire Probation Trust. It will give you an idea of how a peer research project could work.

Scope of the research

Ideas for research questions were established by the peer researchers and also from results of the annual offender surveys. We discussed in the project group what areas from this survey were of interest to senior managers at the trust, and from a shortlist the group voted for the following areas of research:

- Service user and worker perceptions of what makes a good Offender Manager/probation officer and a good working relationship
- Service user understanding of and involvement in, sentence planning
- Service user experiences of Reception and its impact on their probation experience.

The programme

In total we had 4 days training, 4 days data gathering, 2 days on analysis, one day preparing the report and half a day filming (the peer researchers also chose to produce a film – this is not something that has to be done).

In between these days peer researchers were involved in editing the film, piloting and transcribing interviews. The 4 days covered introductory exercises, skills inventories and sessions on: the nature of research, methodologies, the difference between quantitative and qualitative research, research ethics, methods, data analysis, sampling etc. During this time the group also met with the Assistant Chief Officer, and with two probation officers to help the group develop and hone their questions for Offender Managers.

Continued over...

Case study

Methods

Questions	Service user methods	Worker methods
Perceptions of what made for a good offender manager and a working relationship	Stick person – people were asked to write attributes of good probation officer onto a stick person Semi-structured interviews Focus group (client role in making relationship work)	Stick person and structured interview Focus group
Client understanding of, and involvement in, sentence planning	Semi-structured interviews	Structured interviews Focus group
Client experiences in Reception and its impact on their probation experience	Semi-structured interviews	Structured interviews Focus group

All interview questions were piloted. We also recorded all interviews and then transcribed them (half by the peer researchers and half outsourced). All clients were given the option of not being recorded but all agreed. All participants were interviewed by two peer researchers, one taking notes and one leading the discussion. We interviewed 20 clients, (with a mix of genders and ages) and 8 workers (again a mix). 6 people participated in the client focus group (including peer researchers) and 11 in the worker focus group. We received 12 stick person responses from workers.

See Section 4.4 for example research tools developed by peer researchers in the pilot

Analysis

With the interviews and focus groups, while transcribing the data the peer researchers were asked to make notes about possible themes. These themes were then used to go back and code, and order the data (with new themes and sub themes emerging). An initial linking of themes was done by Revolving Doors staff, which the group then discussed and revised, which then was used to go back and analyse the data again (i.e. it was an iterative process).

Stick person responses were used, and results from the question of what makes for a good probation officer were grouped and then counted. This led to the creation of 'top tens' for workers, clients and a combined list. This data was used to enhance comments coming out of the sentence planning section in the interviews on the relationship between worker and client. It was also used in the creation of the film about what makes a good

probation officer. The scenarios were scripted. They used checklist examples of what makes for a good (and bad) probation officer. Similar data from client interviews were used, as well as data from the focus group, on how clients should approach probation to get the best out of it, to inform their scripts. The data from the client focus group was also used by the peer researchers to produce a leaflet with ten top tips for clients for how to get the most out of probation.

See Section 4.5 for the 'how to get the most out of probation' leaflet created by the peer researchers in the pilot

Recommendations were created and discussed within the group and were changed and refined a number of times, again an iterative process. They also discussed a project steering group meeting and refined further.

Presenting the findings of the research

There are two stages to presenting the findings of your research. The first is to present it to the project group. This is to ensure staff are happy with and aware of the content of the findings before they are communicated more widely at a bigger event as described below. It is also to give senior staff a chance to think through some implementation possibilities which they can then announce to a wider audience.

We scheduled a project group meeting the week before the event in order to do this. Revolving Doors staff gave an overview of the methodology and findings, and peer researchers then took turns to present the various recommendations. Peer researchers found this meeting extremely positive, as several of them had not attended a formal meeting with senior staff before. They were rightly pleased to hear the praise from staff that included **“the quality and depth of information you have gathered has vastly exceeded my expectations”** – Assistant Chief Officer.

The following week we held a larger event. Its purpose was:

- To showcase the success of the project
- To give peer researchers an audience and celebrate their achievements
- To show staff and clients involved in the research what the findings are.

In Bedfordshire we decided to hold the event at an external venue and chose the University of Bedfordshire. We worked with the communications manager to draw up a list of invites that included:

- Chief Executive
- Senior managers
- Members of the board
- Project group
- Staff who had been involved in the project
- Clients who had been involved in the project.

The peer researchers also ran workshops at the annual staff conference and all staff were asked to document changes they would make to their practice as a result of the research findings. This was a great way to start changing the organisation’s culture, and the way it listened to service users.

Implementing change

It is crucial that the organisation commits to responding to the findings of the research. Each recommendation should be addressed. If it can be implemented: how and if it can't: why. It may be perfectly reasonable to say it is not possible to take forward particular recommendations at this point, but it is very important that reasons are given and fed back to service users. This is then the basis of your action plan.

We then recommend that you involve your peer researchers in implementing change. Set up a joint working group of staff and service users to jointly discuss what can be taken forward and to work together to implement. The joint working group approach has additional benefits for longer term service user involvement as they could act as a forum for future involvement opportunities.

The project group should meet regularly to check progress on the action plan.

“[The greatest success has been] the peer research done at the Watford office. This was something that the service users really took on board and made it their own. The work that has come out of this has been fed back to our senior management team and changes are starting to happen.”

Staff member

The advantages of starting your service user involvement with a peer research project:

- You will now have vital information you can incorporate into your business planning
- They can also work with staff to oversee your service user involvement strategy
- You have involved staff at all levels in the project thus avoiding one of the key pitfalls of service user involvement projects, that staff don't feel listened to
- You have a trained team of peer researchers who can continue to find out the views of other service users
- You now have a group of informed service users who you can get involved in all sorts of activity across the service.

See page 5 for areas you can involve your service user group in. We recommend you publicise the existence of the group across the service so staff know they can involve them in activity.

Set up an effective service user group

If you started your service user involvement with a peer research project you now have a core service user group in place. Alternatively you may already have a service user group but feel it could be more effective. You may have decided not to do a peer research project but have gone through Step 1 in establishing service user involvement in your probation service and want to set up a service user group as the next step.

Probation services often find it difficult to set up service user groups and where they have it can be difficult to sustain them. This section will help you to ensure your service user group is effective and a positive experience for service users.

Role descriptions

It is useful to have a role description that sets out what the service user is expected to do and what skills are needed. Your role description should cover:

- What skills are needed
- What abilities or interests are required
- What tasks are involved
- Who else is involved, e.g. if staff are involved, give their role/title

- Frequency of involvement or meetings
- Expenses/Remuneration policy.

Welcome pack

Consider putting together a service user involvement 'welcome pack' for service users who are joining a new or existing project. This could include:

- Background information about your organisation
- Role description
- Service user group terms of reference
- Glossary of terms
- Who else will be involved, e.g. staff members
- Key contacts
- Arrangements for booking travel or reimbursement of expenses
- Arrangements for payment if offered.

Accessibility

- Check that the timing and length of your meeting is appropriate to the needs and lifestyle of the service users you want to reach
- Choose a venue that offers the service user easy access, so that they don't have to rely on someone else letting them in or out
- Ensure that your venue is served by good public transport
- Have regular refreshment/rest breaks at meetings (every hour is good practice)
- Think about whether there is somewhere to smoke and whether your activity can accommodate breaks for smokers
- Offer training e.g. IT skills to make tasks more accessible to service users
- Offer to provide documents in large print or Easy Read format
- Provide a British Sign Language interpreter or induction loop facility for service users with a hearing impairment
- Use plain language for your communications
- Avoid unnecessary jargon
- Explain clearly any jargon where unavoidable.

Communication

- Make and maintain direct contact with service users. A telephone call from a key worker or chat with another service user is a good way of 'breaking the ice' about service user involvement
- Give service users a named contact who is responsible for the group, with a telephone number and/or email address
- Ensure that your communication methods suit your service user. Some might prefer a telephone call. Others might be more comfortable with a text message or email. Some may prefer to be contacted by post. Avoid alienating service users with literacy or similar issues by providing a choice of communication methods
- Offer pre-meetings so that new or difficult issues can be explained and discussed informally, in advance of a more formal meeting
- Send out meeting or consultation event papers at least two weeks in advance so that service users have sufficient time to read and digest the content. Include a glossary of terms and acronyms
- Schedule in enough meeting time so service users have sufficient time to respond to activities and take breaks when necessary. What you might discuss at a two-hour staff meeting may require double the time if you want to fully consult your service users
- Establish some ground rules for meetings.



See Section 4.6 for tips on running effective service user group meetings

Training

It is important that both service users and staff have appropriate training and support to achieve effective service user involvement. Ask people what they feel they need to enable them to participate fully. If you are a small organisation or have limited resources, you may find it helpful to contact a capacity-building body such as Clinks or Revolving Doors to access training, development and support.

For service users, ask what they need. Examples could include:

- Facilitation skills
- Committee skills
- Team working skills
- How to be a representative
- Research skills
- IT training
- Confidence building and assertiveness
- Media training.

Exit strategy

There are advantages to having service users involved in service user groups over a period of time. They can assess progress on activities; help recruit other service users; act as representatives for your organisation, become more skilled in the roles and so on.

Bear in mind that circumstances change and a service user might want – or need – to move on. For some service users their involvement could be part of their support plan and be included as a means to achieve their goals, e.g. to get employment. Your organisation should provide support when the time is right for service users to exit from their involvement for example:

- Provide a testimonial about the service user's contribution
- Help to explain involvement on their CV
- Signpost them to other volunteering opportunities.

Identify opportunities within your own organisation for different roles, including paid employment. A service user group may be the starting point for your service user involvement structure. As time goes on you will want to build on this. For example you may wish to set up service user groups in all of your delivery units that nominate members to a probation council. See [here](#) for information on probation councils, set up by the charity UserVoice.

Grow your service user involvement

You can involve service users in most areas of your work. They are experts through experience and can bring a unique insight which ensures your service is relevant to the needs of everyone on probation. Here we have detailed some areas you could consider involving service users in:

Activity by service user	Examples	Key benefits
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing questionnaires • Conducting interviews • Facilitating focus groups • Mystery shopping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings different perspectives and questions to review process • More honest and open feedback from service users when they are asked by peer reviewers.
Delivering training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading workshops • Training staff • Sharing experiences e.g. media skills, writing questionnaires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages other service users to get involved because they see their peers involved • Fosters an environment of trust • Offers unique insights into service users' perspectives on good practice.
Selection and recruitment of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing job descriptions and person specifications • Designing adverts • Short listing • Sitting on interview panels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates to service users that their views are truly respected • Improves relationships within your organisation • Gives a powerful message to candidates about the importance of service user involvement to the organisation • Increases the likelihood of employing staff with the values and interpersonal skills that service users appreciate.
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving as a committee or board member. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps service users to gain a better understanding of your organisation • Brings a unique perspective to board-level discussions • Demonstrates inclusion and equality within your organisation.
Service design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing views through consultation activities • Project team membership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harnesses direct experiences of service users to improve services • Offers opportunities for service users to develop specific skills, enhancing self-esteem and employability.
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mentoring • Developing good practice guides. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers a more personal way for service users to get involved • Provides your organisation with unique 'first hand' knowledge and experience • Helps to break down barriers through the service user acting as a 'trusted' link between peers and your organisation.
Media and publicity work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing events or attending party conferences • Speaking to the press • Featuring in your organisation's magazine or on the website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights 'real life' stories and helps external audiences to better understand issues • Offers service users the chance to develop skills e.g. public speaking.

“I have always been involved in service user groups and getting feedback from them I think it is important and interesting to hear their views. A lot of the time they don’t understand why something is done the way it is done and forums like this give you the chance to explain and discuss things and why things are done a certain way. Sometimes someone else looking in can see a better or different way to do things and this is always helpful. Hearing the experiences of service users is always a highlight – I like to know what worked well and what didn’t as well as what services they have used and what was useful and what wasn’t. There is always scope for service user involvement in probation.”

Staff member

Step 3: Embedding service user involvement in your probation service

Service user involvement should not be a ‘one off’ or ‘add on’ to your normal working. It should be an integral part of how you work. To make sure that happens you need consider areas such as business planning and supervision and appraisal of staff.

“At first I wasn’t sure about the project but I’ve been converted, this was so enjoyable and worthwhile, getting to a product and seeing service users and staff grow in confidence and commitment. The next trick is to keep it going and to really embed it into the organisation’s culture.”

Staff member

Develop a service user involvement policy

You will need to develop a service user involvement policy for your organisation. The policy should include:

- The background for the policy and the principles underlying service user involvement in your organisation
- The aims of the policy
- How service user involvement will be organised in your probation trust
- Methods for involving a wide range of service users
- How decisions will be made and change reported
- How service user involvement will fit into the business planning for your organisation.



See 4.7 for an example service user involvement policy from West Yorkshire Probation Trust

Staff roles

Responsibility for service user involvement should be incorporated into job descriptions. These responsibilities need to be monitored through supervision and appraisal processes.

Business planning

Service user involvement needs to be integrated into your business plan and monitored through your normal accountability processes. The senior management team need to retain overall responsibility for ensuring service user views shape your probation service.

Section 3:

Consultation methods

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This section includes a number of consultation methods you can use to reach more of your service users and involve them in your decision making processes. The purpose of your consultation might be for planning and development, addressing particular issues, identifying issues, giving those on probation a chance to ask for things or responding to external scrutiny. There are a number of different consultation methods you can use; each are suitable for different situations. The table below summarises these methods, before they are discussed in more detail:

Consultation Method	What is it?	When is it appropriate?
Open Space See 3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method that brings a group of people (small or large) to discuss a specific topic of interest to them – participants create and manage their own agenda • Use to explore and discover what is important to service users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To kick start a service user involvement initiative (you could use the event as a way to explore how service users might want to be involved) • To explore what is important to service users • To conduct a snapshot of service users issues.
World Café See 3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation event that brings people together to facilitate discussion and come up with ideas for solutions • Use to explore specific questions or issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you have already started looking at issues and have questions to explore • If you want to discuss sensitive issues (e.g. self-harm) • When you want a wide range of views on a particular issue(s).
Focus Groups See 3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus group brings together a number of people (usually 5-10) to discuss issues and ideas • Use to explore a range and diversity of views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When consulting on service delivery, to seek a range of people's experiences • Consulting on new policies or changes • Researching attitudes and knowledge on a topic about service delivery.

There are also a number of other research methods you can use to consult with, and involve service users (such as interviews and surveys). More information on these methods is available in our accompanying guide: 'Running a peer research project with offenders in the community'.

“The staff in the project really listened to us, our ideas which was great. It meant they actually cared about what we thought. It’s funny because we’re all trying to achieve the same outcomes. I think the project has helped staff and probation realise that they need to consult with service users more as they can learn a lot from us.”

Service user

3.1 Open Space

What is it?

Open Space is a relatively new and innovative consultation (or general meeting) method. It begins without any formal agenda beyond the overall purpose and theme; this will be prepared by the group on arrival.

When to use it?

As Open Space event doesn't have a formal agenda it doesn't necessarily work if you are looking to consult with service users about an issue with a solution already in mind (or similarly changes to policies or service delivery) or something that must be addressed. Open space is an opportunity to explore what's important to service users (in general, or around a specific topic) and it should declare issues and opportunities; it should not pre-determine outcomes.³ Additionally, open space is effective in situations where a diverse group of people must deal with complex and potentially conflicting issues.⁴

How does it work?

The group needs to be considered. Ideally, it should be an open invitation (which could be given verbally or in writing), when anyone who is interested or concerned about the issue should come. Open space events can be used in groups of 5 to 500.

You will need to consider timings, location and logistics. Open space normally occurs over a course of one to three days but this is flexible depending on the outcomes you want to see. It requires one main room that is large enough to enable the participants to sit in a circle (or smaller separate circles). Breakout areas may also be required. You will also need a wall in the main room so all participants can stand in front of it. Facilitation of the open space will involve welcoming services users and explaining the process. The facilitators will need to present on the day but aside from this their role will be minimal – it will be the service users who lead the conversations.

Checklist for Open Space Technology

- Appropriateness
- Theme
- Invitation
- Time
- Main space
- The wall
- Food and Drink
- Supplies and equipment: you will need masking tape, ink markers, flip charts, Post-its and possibly a microphone
- Facilitator(s)

At the event

The layout for the day will be relatively simple: all service users will be seated in chairs in a circular format and the wall should be accessible. Although open space does not have a pre-determined agenda, it must have an overall structure. This involves:

Opening/welcome – This is best done informally and quickly. A short introduction to open space is useful. You should also state the theme and purpose of the open space meeting. It is also a good time to outline what else is being done around this issue and what will be done after the event (the end product).

Stating the Theme – The facilitator should tell the group that in a few minutes they will be asked to (and not everyone has to) identify some issue or opportunity related to the specific workshop or theme; issues for which they have a genuine passion and for which they will take real responsibility for discussing. The facilitator should remind the group that if nothing occurs to someone, that is OK, and if someone has more than one issue or opportunity, that is OK too.

³ Open Space World, Choosing Open Space Technology [http://www.openspaceworld.org/tmnfiles/choosingopenspace\(Bolton\).html](http://www.openspaceworld.org/tmnfiles/choosingopenspace(Bolton).html)

⁴ Open Space Technology, a User's Guide <http://elementaleducation.com/wp-content/uploads/temp/OpenSpaceTechnology--UsersGuide.pdf>

The facilitator should introduce and make flipcharts for the following concepts for Open Space:

The Four Principles

- Whoever comes is the right people
- Whatever happens is all that could have
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- When it is over, it is over.

The Law of Two Feet

The Law of Two Feet implies that if you are part of a session you are no longer interested in or contributing to, you have permission to leave. The law puts responsibility for your own actions on your own shoulders.

Bumblebees and Butterflies

Bumblebees and Butterflies are for those people who wish to use their two feet and “flit” from meeting to meeting. These people can pollinate and cross-fertilize, lending richness and variety to the discussions.

Determining the Topics

The facilitator should then tell the group that once they have their issue or opportunity in mind, to come out into the centre of the circle, grab a piece of paper and marker and write down a short title and sign their name. Once done, each should stand in front of the group and say “I would like to address _____”, or “I’d like to talk with people about _____”. After each person has announced their theme, they should take the piece of paper and tape it up on the blank wall.

Creating the Agenda

Now that all the possible topics are on the wall, people need to develop an agenda by determining when and where the session/discussion will be held. Give people time to discuss together; negotiate, combine similar session topics, and move sessions around so that most people can attend the key sessions of their choice. By the time the agenda is complete, the community should have specific discussion groups determined, as well as the time and place for each group. A number of groups should run simultaneously.

Running the sessions

The person who raised the topic facilitates the session. Participants give their views and recommendations and can stay in one session or move around to other groups to discuss other topics.

The facilitator should determine if the group wants each session proceedings recorded. If so, designate the facilitator / proposer of the session to use a recording form and ask for a volunteer to record critical and important ideas and points raised during the meeting.

Deciding priorities

Either all the information generated can be taken away to be formulated into an action plan or participants can vote on the recommendations on the day to give a list of priorities to be addressed by the service.

Further information on open space technology is available in these links:

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?>

http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm



3.2 World Café



What is it?

World Café is a technique for bringing people together to facilitate discussions and come up with ideas and solutions. It is a process of iterative conversation – building on what each other says and progressing a conversation across several iterations (different groups of people).

When to use it?

This method is appropriate when you have already begun looking at an issue or issues and have specific questions you wish to explore.

Essentially it is useful for situations where you have some issues to discuss or explore and want a wide range of views on the issues. In this way, it does not generate topics; it discusses topics that are set by the organisers. It is useful because it helps create a positive atmosphere, and this may be helpful in a probation environment particularly when starting out with involvement initiatives.

How does it work?

People sit at a table, on which there is one question to discuss. There is a facilitator at each table to help participants think about the question, to record and write down what people say, and to encourage people to doodle, draw and make notes (either on paper tablecloths, flip charts or post-it notes). After say 20 minutes, you rotate people round the tables, and the facilitator recaps what the group before said about the topic. Everyone visits each table.

The key feature of this method for consultation is ensuring a pleasant, relaxed, café like atmosphere. You could do this this using red chequered paper tablecloths, fresh flowers on the tables, bunting, and lots of nice refreshments. There are resources available from www.theworldcafe.com such as posters and guidelines that you can put up around the walls.

Choosing questions

World Café enables people to build on other people's ideas. Because of the nice setting, it can also be used to ask more sensitive questions than you might be able to in ordinary circumstances.

Ideally you should have around three questions to ask. These could be based on findings from inspections, feedback reports or any other issues you wish to explore.

The first question could be a 'quick fix' practical type question requiring practical solutions. For example, this could be regarding a reception area, where it could be easy to evidence that you have listened to and acted upon service user feedback by for example painting the rooms.

The second question could be sensitive, but suited to an environment like world café because it is relaxing and putting some effort into having a nice atmosphere shows people that you care and people are more likely to open up.

The third question could be quite broad and gives a lot of scope for suggestions and so needs to be managed carefully in terms of being able to feed back to service users the impact of their input.

3.3 Focus group

What is it?

Focus groups are a form of group interviewing. A focus group brings together a number of people (5-12) and a facilitator; who will lead and manage the discussion. Ideally the focus group will be representative of the range of people affected by the issue you are discussing.

Consider how to get a range of views at your focus group. Try and select people who are on different sentences, or from different backgrounds. Focus groups should last about one hour.

When to use it?

Use focus groups when seeking a range and diversity of views. When you want to find out in detail the issues or ideas of individuals other research methods may be more appropriate. Situations in which you may want to conduct focus groups include:

- Consulting on service delivery – seeking a range of people's experiences (positive and negative)
- Consulting on new policies or changes in regime
- Researching knowledge and attitudes around a topic to improve service delivery – for example, involvement in sentence planning or resettlement.

The subject area needs to be suitable for group discussion, that is to say one that does not require divulging very personal details, or may arouse very strong and or inappropriate responses. The topic should also be one where a group dynamic will help generate difference of opinion, ideas and creative thinking. If the participants know very little about the proposed topic they will likely feel less inclined to put forward their views or opinions.

How does it work?

Once the size of the group (normally between 5-12) and the participants have been decided a focus group can take place. You can conduct more than one focus group with different offenders if you want a wider range of views.

The role of the facilitator is to be responsible for the discussion and the group dynamic.

In the first instance he or she should be able to keep the conversation relevant to the topic, and elicit the information needed to answer the aims of the focus group. In the second instance, he or she needs to manage the group to obtain this information in a balanced way from as many participants as possible – giving each person a fair chance to speak and creating a respectful and participatory atmosphere.

How the focus group runs:

- A focus group should take place in a quiet and comfortable room with no distractions. Make sure the temperature is comfortable, and there are plenty of refreshments
- Ideally you should have a second member of staff to take note, or you could ask an offender as well as a member of staff to both take notes. You can also record the session, but you must get consent to do this. Ensure any results are kept securely and details of participants are not published
- Choose whether to set ground rules. These may include things such as not talking over each-other; listening to each other and being respectful. Set these before starting the focus group
- The facilitator should give a brief introduction to the purpose of the focus group. The focus group can then begin. The facilitator should follow the topic/ interview guide (see below)
- The moderator must attempt to build rapport in the group. It is a good idea to have group members introduce themselves and tell a little about themselves. This method can help “break the ice”.

Questions

When deciding the questions for the interview guide:

1. Questions should be ordered from the more general to the more specific;
2. Questions of greater importance should be placed early, near the top of the guide, while those of a lesser significance should be placed near the end.

You should aim to have less than 12 questions. These should normally be unstructured, open-ended questions as they allow respondents to answer from a variety of dimensions. Questions must be carefully selected and phrased in advance to elicit maximum responses by all participants.

Some examples of general open-ended questions include:

“What did you think about the programme?”

“How did you feel about the conference?”

“Where do you get new information?”

“What did you like best about the proposed program?”

Follow up and analysis

Depending on the purpose and nature of the research, what you do with the information will vary widely. What you are looking for is areas where participants concur or differ in opinion, themes and trends, ideas and criticisms. You may be looking for direct quotes to include in a report, or particular areas for focus for service or accessibility improvement.

It is very important to feed back to participants what happened as a result of their participation in the focus group. A common pitfall is to give feedback that covers only the points raised in the focus group, not what happened with the information gathered and what decisions or changes were made as a result.

Section 4:

Resources

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4.1 Getting staff on board – workshop format (1.5 hours)

Time	Questions	Format
10.00	Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask each member of staff to introduce themselves and say whether they've been involved in service user involvement before.
10.10	What do we understand by 'service user involvement'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short Q&A Go through PowerPoint slides.
10.20	What are the barriers to involving service users in probation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Split into 4 groups Each group to record ideas on flipchart.
10.30	How could these be overcome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same groups Record on flipchart.
10.40	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group to talk through their answers.
10.50	<p>What incentives could we use to involve service users?</p> <p>What incentives are there for frontline staff to involve service users?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change groups Record on flipchart.
11.05	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each group to feedback ideas.
11.15	What potential opportunities are there for service user involvement in this organisation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole group discussion Facilitator to record on flip chart.
11.25	Who needs to be involved in taking the project forward?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whole group discussion.
11.30	Review session and decide next steps	

4.3 Sample recruitment leaflet:

Can you help us understand our
next survey results?



In return, you'll get **FREE TRAINING**
in research and problem solving
- great skills to add to your CV!

Contact your Probation worker
by Fri 28 Feb for more details

Bedfordshire
Probation Trust



4.4 Sample research tools developed by the peer researchers in Bedfordshire



- Introduce yourself
- Confidentiality – no names
- Trying to find out what people on probation think about services and how we can improve your experience of coming to probation
- Peer Research project
- Can we tape record? No staff will hear recordings, and they won't be linked to you.

Reception questionnaire

1. What do you think of reception? *On a scale of 1 - 4?*

1 Very poor	2 Poor	3 Good	4 Very good
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2. Can you tell us about a time reception have been helpful to you?

.....

.....

How helpful do you think reception staff are?

1 Very unhelpful	2 Quite unhelpful	3 Quite helpful	4 Very helpful
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3. What one thing would you change about reception?

.....

.....

4. Which of these do you most agree with?

- a) My confidentiality is respected
- b) As far as they can, staff maintain confidentiality but of course it's difficult in a waiting room
- c) Staff make no attempt to protect confidentiality

5. Communication between reception staff and probation officers is:

1 Dreadful, messages never get through	2 Leaves a lot to be desired, patchy	3 Very good, no complaints	4 Excellent – like telling probation officers yourself
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Stick person exercise on what makes a good probation officer

Hand over the Stick Person and ask your interviewee to write on things that make a good probation officer:

Prompts

- How do they encourage you to get involved?
- Attitude & body language
- Understanding of you and your situation
- Supporting and promoting your independence?
- How do they help you take responsibility?
- Is a good Probation Officer someone who will challenge you? If so, how?
- How do they show respect?
- How do they make you feel like an individual?
- Do they look at the paperwork?
- How do they communicate with you?
- What knowledge do you want them to have?
- What does a good environment look like?
- How long do your appointments last? Do you get enough time?

Sentence Planning questionnaire

1. Have you heard of your sentence plan?

2. What do you think it is?

***Sentence plan: The plan of action that you draw up with your probation officer based on what the court recommends for example meetings with your probation officer; programmes and activities including unpaid work, courses and education. ***

3. Were you involved in planning it?

4. Was it reviewed with you?

5. How could this process have been better?

6. What can you remember about your first few appointments at Probation?

4.5 How to get the most out of your time on probation leaflet

Jargon Buster!

Offender Manager/Probation Officer You'll have a named worker who you meet with, and work with, this is your Probation Officer. You might hear Offender Manager too, but it's all the same thing really.

Sentence Plan Sentence Planning is the process whereby you work with your Probation Officer to develop a plan of what you both want to achieve during the course of the supervision period. A series of objectives are set which specify how the identified risks and needs are going to be addressed and by whom. These objectives should be regularly reviewed with you.

OASys is the Offender Assessment System—the computer system that Probation Services use to do an assessment of your needs and risks and to record information about your supervision.

Risk assessment is about how likely you are to re-offend, how serious your offences are or were, and what things you need in place to make you less likely to re-offend. Your sentence plan will include things to reduce your risk of re-offending.

Citizenship is the name of the supervision programme used at Bedfordshire Probation. It includes risk assessment (looking at the factors that led to you committing crime) and planning ways to address these factors such as drug therapy, anger-management or help with finding a home.

Licence If you're attending probation after release from prison, you are 'on licence' while you serve the end of your sentence in the community.

Recall If you have been in prison and are now attending probation on licence from prison, you can be sent back to prison if you don't comply with the conditions of your licence. This is called being recalled to prison.

Breach If you don't stick to the agreement about your community sentence and supervision, including attending appointments on time, the Probation Service consider that you breached the terms of your agreement (like a contract) and you can be called back to court and you may have additional requirements put on you or you may be recalled or sent to prison. To avoid 'being breached' you must not:

- Miss any appointments or sessions without a valid reason (such as a doctors note)
- Attend under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Commit further offences.
- Be offensive, threatening, violent or uncooperative.

Community Payback/Unpaid Work means doing things like removing graffiti, litter picking, painting a community centre. It may form part of sentence i.e. 50 hours of community payback. You are to wear a high-vis orange vest while you do it.

Programmes are courses that are designed to tackle the root causes of offending. Depending on your offence, it may be a requirement of your community order that you complete a certain programme. Our Peer Researchers got a lot out of the programmes they did at Probation, so go into it with an open mind and good luck!

Brought to you by the Peer Research Team,
Bedfordshire Probation Trust, 2013.

How to...



Get the most out of your time on probation

A guide for service users, written by service users.

1. Engage- Probation is an opportunity

So you didn't go to prison, or maybe you're on licence. Probation can help you make positive changes and gain new opportunities but you have to come at it with the right attitude. Read on...

**2. Be willing to change – have an idea of what you want to change in your life**

Our research showed Probation Officers find it easiest to work with someone who has their own ideas about what needs to change. You can talk about these things when you're making a plan for your sentence with your Probation Officer.

**3. Give it a chance to work – be honest and talk**

Talking to your Probation Officer about what matters will make it easier for the time you spend on probation to be worthwhile to you. Don't waste any more of your time that you have to—make it count.

**4. Settling in**

The first few appointments include a lot of information to take in. It's ok to ask for a recap when you've settled in. Our research showed that people forget a lot of what's said at the beginning, so don't be afraid to ask again!

**5. Do it your way**

You're the most important person in the equation. Get involved in your sentence plan—the aims and objectives you'll set with your Probation Officer. The sentence plan or aims and objectives are yours, make sure you get things on it that you think are important too!

**6. Don't get discouraged -**

If things go wrong, be honest and ask for help. It's better to say things are difficult than pretend everything's ok and then mess it up anyway...

**7. Remember they're only human**

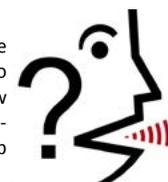
Probation officers are human too! In our research, we found that people often become Probation Officers because they really want to help people make a change and improve things in their lives. If you're willing to do that too, you can get a lot out of probation.

**8. Be patient**

Probation offices are busy places, with lots of demands on everyone's time. You shouldn't have to wait too long, and remember the receptionists have a difficult job to do too.

**9. Ask about services**

There's lots of services available, sometimes you have to do some asking to find out what. Our research also showed that people on probation often don't know about what's on offer. We're trying to improve the information you get, but if you think you should get help with something—ask!

**10. Be yourself - focus on you – don't worry what others think**

Peer pressure is difficult to handle when you're on probation. But don't let other people's negativity affect you getting the most out of it. It's a second chance and it can really help you out.



4.6 Tips for running effective service user group meetings



Tips for Meetings

- Provide as much information as possible – dates, times (including approximate length of meeting), commitment, who else will attend, purpose. Involve the whole staff team by asking them to publicise the meeting to individual service users during keyworking sessions and provide support if service users want to attend, e.g. help work out transport (if necessary), remind them the day before, etc. – whatever approach helps the individual person
- Try to get a nice venue (if not in the service) that can be easily accessed by public transport
- Don't start the meeting too early – 10.30 at earliest, but preferably later (ask members). Have refreshments/lunch available on arrival
- Documents should be checked for ease of reading. Where there is jargon a glossary should be provided
- Paperwork should be kept to a minimum and provided in advance of the meetings. Do the minutes in bullet-point form summing up the main points. Use colour to make them look more attractive and larger print, e.g. Arial 12 point. Alternatively minutes could be presented in a 'newsletter' format
- Plan in something else as well as the business of the meeting, e.g. speaker, Q&A session, social opportunity, talent/skills exchange
- Keep the agenda manageable. If agenda is full, prioritise things that have a timescale deadline and defer others to another meeting. Present the agenda in an attractive way e.g. colour, graphics or a border; use larger print
- Encourage willing service users to take on roles. Describe the roles and the commitment. Provide development opportunities if they want to learn new skills
- Do an icebreaker at beginning of each meeting and a closing exercise, e.g. around asking how they feel, what they liked/disliked etc. Choose ones that are fun and allow people to get to know a bit about each other
- Plan for regular breaks
- Do some discussion in groups or pairs rather than everyone always sitting around a table, particularly if there are more than 8 people present
- Use a flipchart to record main points/decisions throughout the meeting so everyone can keep track.
- Sum up decisions/actions at end of the meeting and help people prepare their feedback if they are expected to give it to other service users/their service
- Ask service users what they want on the next agenda.
- Get more confident service users to mentor/buddy others and/or publicise/talk about meetings etc.
- For those people interested give them a task to do between meetings
- Keep an eye out for service users feeling excluded. Find out why they feel that way and ask them what would help them feel included
- Always provide feedback/progress about any issues/ideas/suggestions/changes at the following meeting. Even when nothing has happened, say so and why.
- Evaluate the meetings – what worked, what didn't, what could be improved. Ask service users for their opinions.

4.7 Sample service user involvement policy: West Yorkshire Probation Trust

West Yorkshire Probation Trust

Service User Engagement and Involvement Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy sets out how the West Yorkshire Probation Trust will improve outcomes for Service Users and achieve a range of wider Society benefits through the development and deployment of a Service User Engagement and Involvement policy and resultant infrastructure.
- 1.2 Supporting offenders to live better lives to reduce the likelihood of further offending enables West Yorkshire Probation Trust to achieve its mission.⁵ Ultimately only those engaged in offending can prevent reoffending. Therefore, Service Users must be at the heart of West Yorkshire Probation Trust's work. The purpose of this policy is to involve service users so they can help shape and improve the effectiveness of our service delivery.
- 1.3 For the purposes of this policy, the term 'service user' refers to a person who is either currently under the supervision of West Yorkshire Probation Trust or who has had previous personal experience of the Criminal Justice System. It is recognised that there are other key stakeholder groups who could be classed as Service Users, most notably victims and partners/families of those subject to supervision as well as sentencers and Community Payback beneficiaries. Whilst this policy fully acknowledges how important it is that the voice of these groups is heard when planning and delivering services, it is not the intention to encompass these groups within this policy.
- 1.4 Whilst there is a degree of overlap, there is a distinction to be made between Service User *involvement* and Service User *engagement*.

Service User engagement refers to activities

which seek to create better levels of *understanding and information sharing* between Service Users and the Probation Trust either on an individual, team or service wide level.

- 1.5 **Service User involvement**, however, involves a deeper level of engagement, which not only improves the sharing of information and different perspectives, but also requires a degree of *sharing of power and influence*. This results in Service Users actively and collectively shaping the delivery of service, as experienced by Service Users as a whole rather than just by themselves. In order to be fully effective both activities are needed and both will require the development of new infrastructures at both the LDU and the Area level.

2. Results

- 2.1 West Yorkshire Probation Trust develops a sustained competitive advantage through the development and deployment of an effective Service User engagement and involvement infrastructure which is broadly consistent across all delivery units. The ideal model is illustrated in Appendix 1.
- 2.3 Improved trust, better communication, enhanced levels of compliance and reduced reoffending are a result of more effective, personalised and more responsive Service Delivery.
- 2.4 Service User involvement is promoted as an ongoing and integrated core component of the Trust's organisational activity.
- 2.5 Service Users are enabled to have a greater role in terms of positively influencing policy and practice.
- 2.6 That we model our expectations regarding SU engagement and involvement in the anticipation that we may become a "commissioning" Trust and that the specifications and requirements of a range of commissioners, who are increasingly interested in how providers engage with service users and build "recovery capital", are met or exceeded.

⁵ We will be an enterprising, influential and thriving organisation, positioned at the heart of the Criminal Justice System ... a 'can do' excellent organisation with strong internal capability, continuously innovating to improve our value".

3. Approach

- 3.1 The expected results will be achieved through the development of a “bottom up” Service User engagement and involvement infrastructure, as outlined in Appendix 1. This will include team or office based Service User forums in every LDU. Sitting above this will be LDU based Service User Boards and above those, an Area Strategic Service User Forum, with nominated Service User representatives from each LDU.
- 3.2 Through this infrastructure Service Users will eventually be involved and engaged in the following Trust wide activities.
- 3.3 Induction and training of Trust staff – Each delivery unit will invite a representative from a local Service User forum to contribute to the induction programme for new staff. Service Users participating in engagement and involvement activity will be given access to training packages to increase their skills for involvement where required.
- 3.4 **Consultation** – The Chief Executive and Director of Operations (and/or other senior managers as required) will attend the Area Strategic Service User Forum at least twice per year. Heads of Service will also regularly attend their own local Service User Boards and invite representatives of the Board to their District Management Meetings. As a result WYPT will invite comment and contribution to the development of the 3 year business plan and Service User facing policies. LDUs should ensure that local Service Users are involved in accountability meetings.
- 3.5 **Complaints** – A regular report of Service User complaints and outcomes prepared for the Probation Board will also be reported to the Area Strategic Service User Forum and made available to Service User Boards for consultation.
- 3.6 **Service User Feedback** – WYPT will systematically canvass at least bi-annually the views of Service Users through the use of generic and thematic service user questionnaires. The detailed analysis from the exercise will be shared with the local and the area forums for contribution to recommendations and action. In addition, all delivery unit heads will be required to demonstrate how Service User feedback has influenced service design (both at Team and District Management levels). Managers and Senior Managers will demonstrate how they have engaged with Service Users through involvement with the strategic forums. Clear lines of communication will be required to evidence how Service Users’ views have been listened to and acted upon (e.g. “you say we did”).
- 3.7 **Networking** – Service Users and Service User Supporters actively engaged in Service User Involvement and each delivery unit will be given opportunities to network and share best practice across the WYPT. West Yorkshire Probation Trust will seek to link representatives from the Area Strategic Service User Forum with representatives from other Probation Trusts, to increase the capacity to influence collectively at the national level. The Chief Executive will also promote this as an issue through the Probation Chiefs Association.
- 3.8 **Resourcing** – Service User Involvement is not a cost neutral enterprise. Resourcing of Service User involvement groups will include probation staff time to facilitate meetings (initially at least) and support Service Users. There will also be additional travel costs for Service Users who participate and access to training for both Service Users and staff that are supporting their development.
- 3.9 **Reward and Recognition** – Service User Involvement will need to be recognised and rewarded so that Service Users who contribute their knowledge and time at no cost to WYPT feel appropriately valued.
- 3.10 WYPT will promote **Co-production approaches** to service design and delivery. Such approaches:-
- Recognises people as assets.** It sees people as partners in the design and delivery of services, not passive recipients of public services.
 - Builds on people’s existing capabilities.** Rather than starting with people’s needs (the traditional deficit model), co-produced services start with people’s capabilities and look for opportunities to help make these flourish.

Encourages mutuality and reciprocity.

Co-production is about a mutual and reciprocal partnership, where professionals and people who use services come together in an interdependent relationship recognising that each are invaluable to producing effective services and improving outcomes.

Blurs distinctions. It blurs the distinction between professionals and recipients, and between producers and consumers of services, by reconfiguring the way services are developed and delivered.

Promotes facilitating rather than delivering. It does this by enabling professionals to become facilitators and catalysts of change rather than providers of services.

4. Deployment

- 4.1 The approach outlined above will be deployed:-
- 4.1.1 Through the development of bottom up service user engagement and involvement infrastructure at team, LDU and Area level.
 - 4.1.2 Through effective links with other organisations and Trusts, from whom we can learn.
 - 4.1.3 Through the sharing of good practice resources and expertise amongst Delivery Units.

5. Assessment and review

- 5.1 This Policy will be reviewed no later than 31 March 2013.
- 5.2 The responsible senior manager, currently the Head of Leeds Probation, will:
 - 5.2.1 Produce further guidance and regularly update that guidance to ensure that the requirements of this policy are implemented;
 - 5.2.2 Ensure that the Service User engagement and involvement arrangements put in place in WYPT continually add value to our work and provide the Trust with both a competitive advantage and commissioning expertise.
 - 5.2.3 Develop a Stakeholder Management Policy to help shape senior management engagement with different stakeholders, in line with the emergence of a competitive environment.

6. Equality impact

- 6.1 An initial assessment for Equality Impact, conducted through consultation with service users, indicates that only an initial assessment is required at this stage.

**Head of Leeds Probation
March 2012**

With thanks to West Yorkshire Probation Trust

Section 5:

Further information and support

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5.1 Organisations

The Revolving Doors Agency

Revolving Doors is a charity working across England to change systems and improve services for people with multiple problems, including poor mental health, who are in contact with the criminal justice system.

<http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/home/>

The Probation Institute

The Probation Institute is an independent organisation that aims to be recognised as a centre for excellent on probation practice.

<http://probation-institute.org/>

Clinks

Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the voluntary sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the sector and all those with whom they work, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders.

<http://www.clinks.org/>

User Voice

UserVoice's mission is to engage those who have experience of the criminal justice system in bringing about its reform and to reduce offending. UserVoice is a charity led and delivered by ex-offenders.

<http://www.uservoice.org/>

5.2 Publications

Service user involvement: A review of service user involvement in prisons and probation trusts (Clinks, 2011)

The Clinks review (commissioned by NOMS) investigated the extent and nature of service user involvement in prisons and probation trusts in England and Wales. The final report aims to fill the gap in knowledge related to service user involvement across NOMS.

The report is available **here**.

Best practice examples are available **here**.

Service user involvement: A volunteering and mentoring guide (Revolving Doors and Clinks, 2010)

This guide provides an in-depth introduction to involving offenders and ex-offenders in voluntary and community organisations, statutory agencies and other groups. It includes examples of good practice, checklists and other resources.

The guide is available **here**.

Race in probation toolkit: BAME user involvement in probation services (IARS, 2014)

This toolkit (commissioned by Clinks) follows up on a piece of research IARS did focusing on BAME user involvement in the planning and delivery of probation services. It contains practical recommendations for the direct involvement of BAME service users.

The toolkit is available **here**.

Shaping the criminal justice system: the role of those supported by criminal justice services (IRISS, 2012)

This short insight gives examples of user involvement in the criminal justice system. It also sets out the benefits of involving people who have offended.

The insight is available **here**.

Clinks and Revolving Doors (2016) A guide to service user involvement and co-production. London: Clinks.

A structured and accessible introduction to involving people with lived experience of criminal justice in your work, including examples of good practice, checklists, top tips and signposting to further information and support.

The guide is available **here**.

National Involvement Standards

These standards for good practice in service user involvement have been developed by NSUN.

The standards are available **here**.

5.3 Websites



Service user involvement

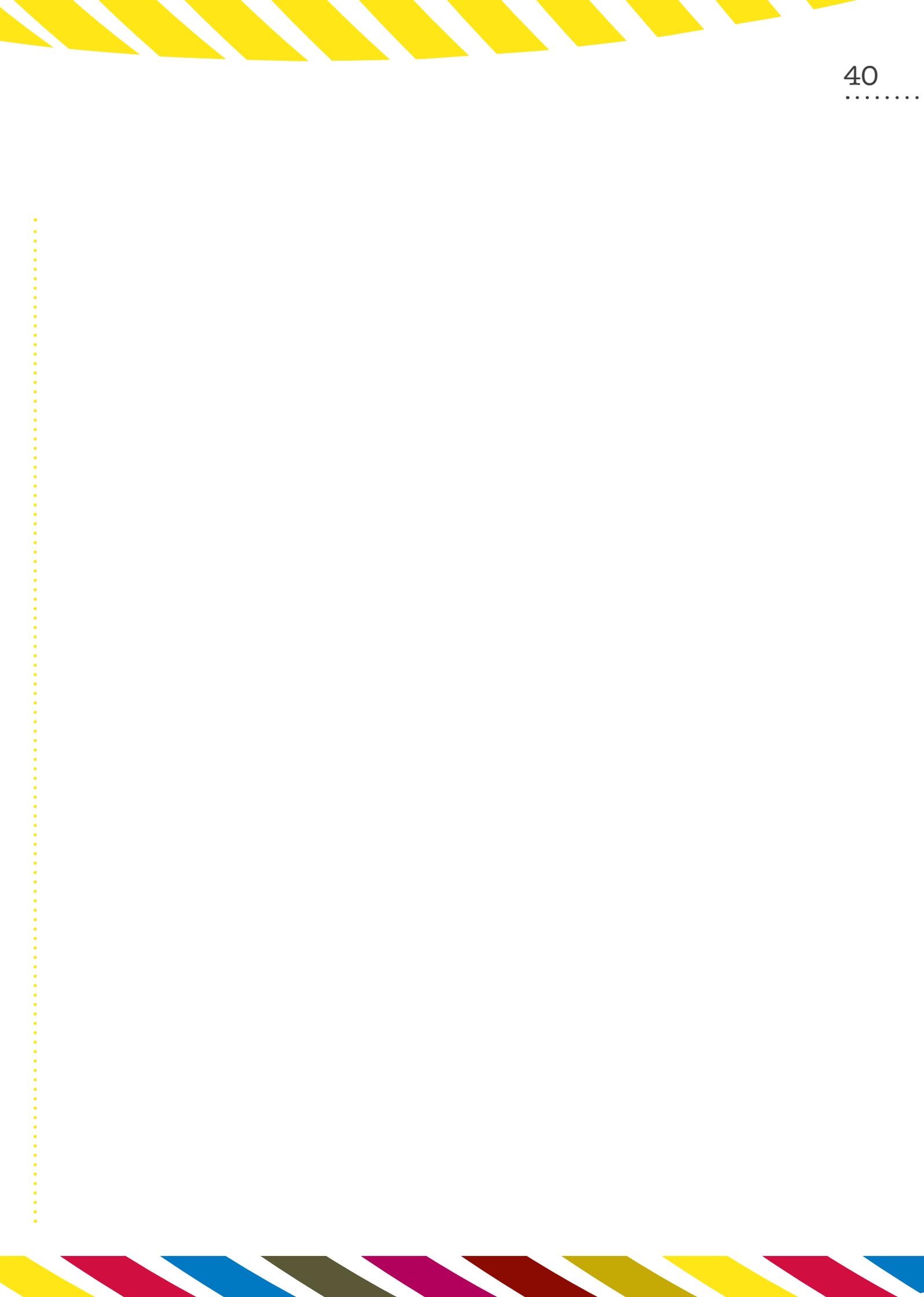
This website provides an online best practice guide to service user involvement. It includes examples and case studies from around the UK.

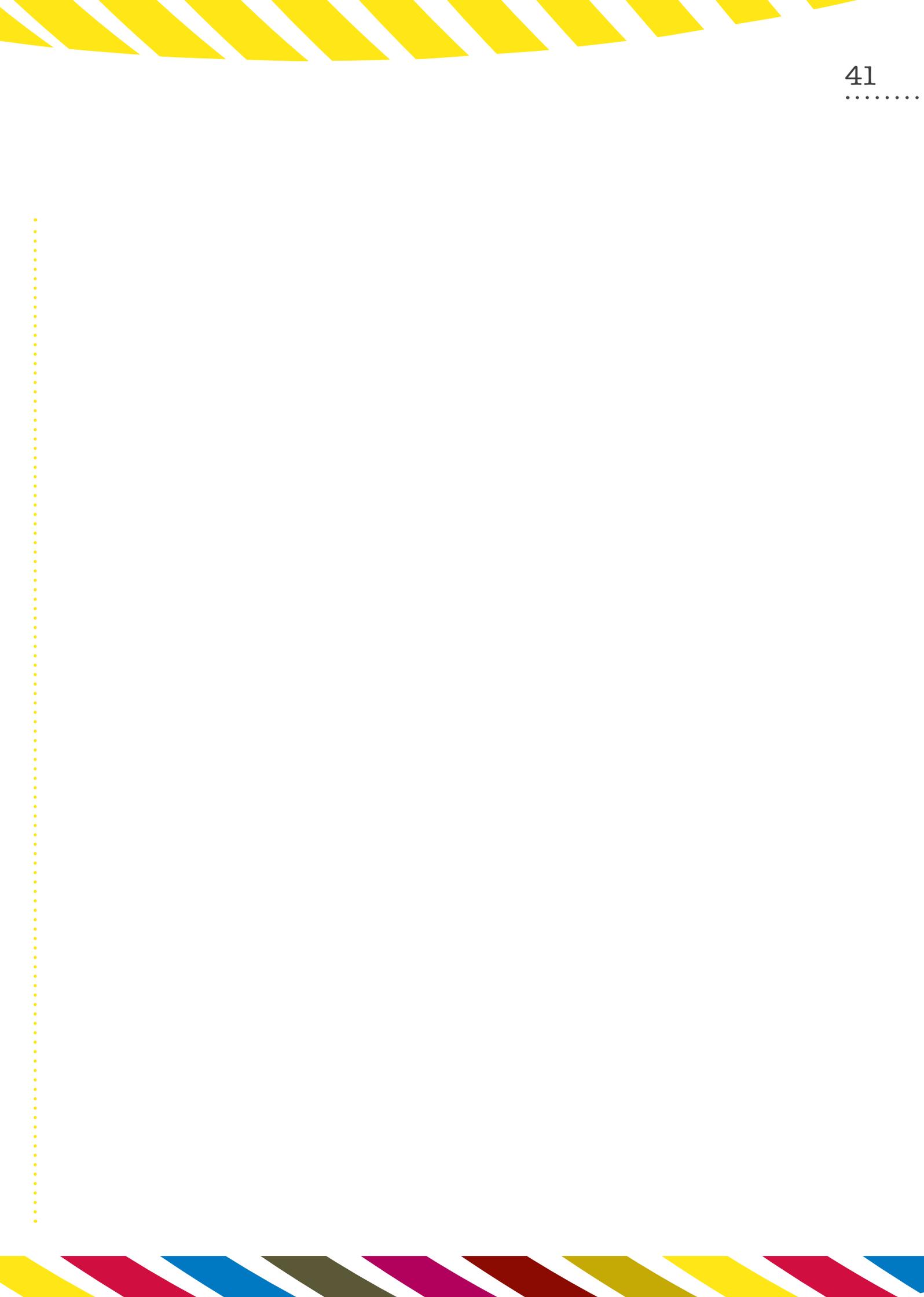
<http://www.serviceuserinvolvement.co.uk/>

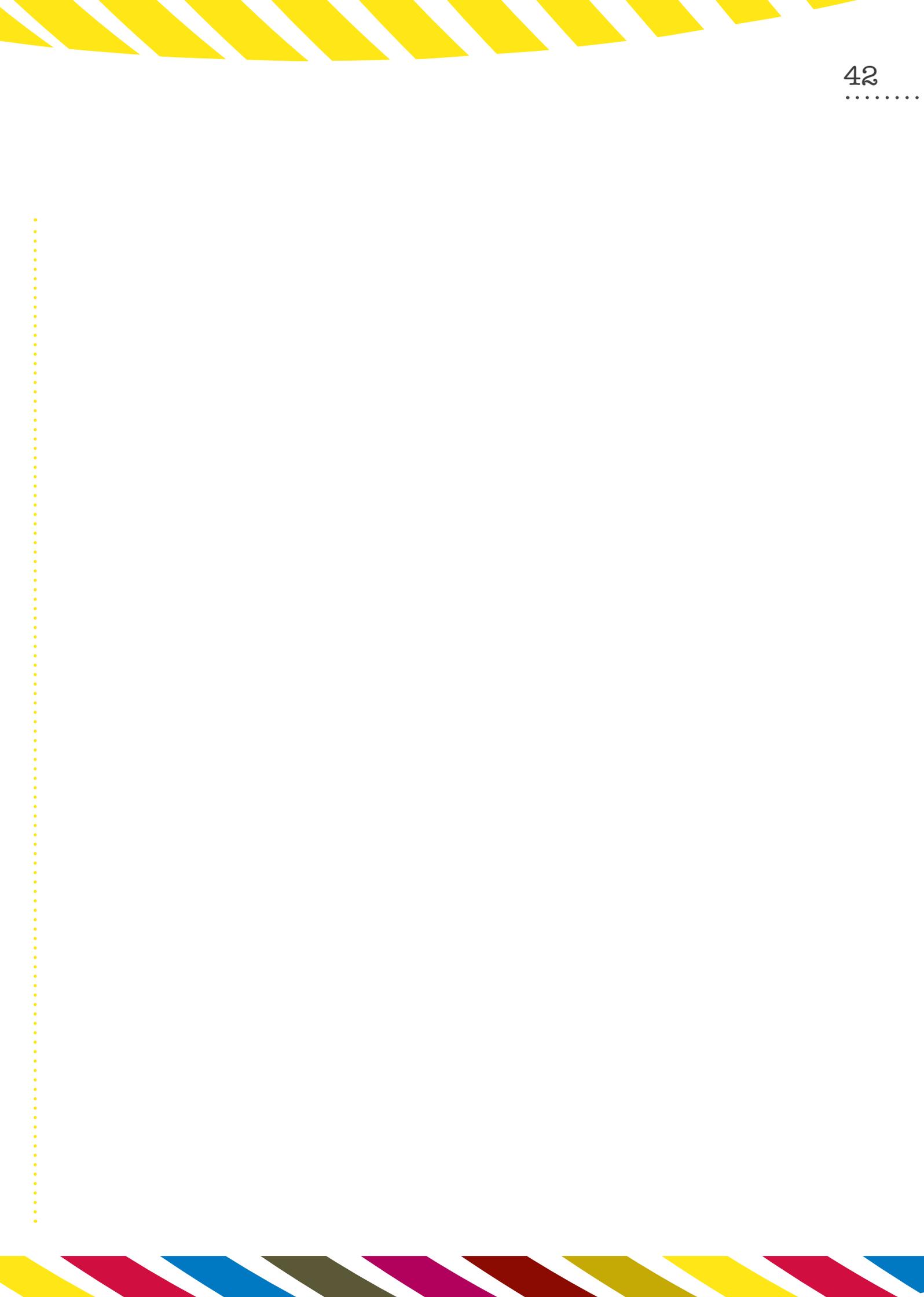
User involvement

Website of the User Involvement in Voluntary Organisations Shared Learning Group, which includes case studies and an extensive resource section.

<http://www.user-involvement.org.uk/>









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