

Six Slices, Better Decisions: The Story of the Evidence Pie

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Speakers: Lauren Cox, Zoe Lancelott, Rhianydd Davies

00:00:07 Lauren Cox

Hi there, thanks for joining this episode of Gerrin' On With It, hosted on the Research Innovation Podcast at Leeds University Business School. I'm Lauren Cox, the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership, YPIP, Comms and Engagement Manager. I'll be speaking to Zoe Lancelott and Rhianydd Davies from Rhondda Cynon Taf Health Determinants Research Collaboration, which is embedded in the County Borough Council.

Their work, along with the rest of their team, is crucial in driving evidence-based decision making at all levels within the council, aiming to break the cycle of poverty and improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged residents. We've invited Zoe and Rhianydd to share with our Yorkshire and Humber audience, The Evidence Pie, a practical tool which has developed a common language within the local authority, which demystified the use of evidence.

Welcome, Zoe and Rhianydd. Thanks for joining me on this episode.

00:00:58 Zoe Lancelott

Hi, Lauren. Thanks for having us.

00:01:00 Rhianydd Davies

Hi, Lauren.

00:01:01 Lauren Cox

Would you just like to give a bit of background in a summary of the Health Determinant Research Collaboration for anyone that's not aware of this work and the kind of context that you're working in your local area?

00:01:12 Zoe Lancelott

Yeah, no problem at all. We are the Rhondda Cynon Taf Health Determinants Research Collaboration, which is a bit of a mouthful. So HDRC is what we know ourselves as. And we quite often use RCT to try and explain where we work. But we're one of 30 across the UK. We're funded by the National Institute of Healthcare Research, or the NIHR. We were the first HDRC in Wales to be fully funded. There are now two of us, so it's really nice to have some company in Wales as well.

In terms of the area in which we work, in RCT, we are the third largest local authority in Wales. It's around about 241,000 population. We are fiercely proud of our industrial coal mining heritage. We employ around about 10,500 staff within the council. And interestingly, 83% of those actually live in RCT as well as work there as well.

Unfortunately, we do have some pretty poor statistics when we look at health inequalities. We've got some of the highest rates of alcohol related hospital admissions, low birth weight babies. We've got

high rates of respiratory disease, poor quality housing, obesity, low educational attainment and child poverty across Wales. I think what's most frightening is that you can expect to live almost 10 years less in RCT than you can in other parts of the UK.

So, the opportunity really for us to have NIHR funding was a once-in-a-generation opportunity and it's definitely one that us as a collaboration have gone all out to make the most of. Our mission really is to embed evidence-informed decision-making across all aspects of the council because being in the area in which we are, we would argue that every single part of council business is to do with health inequalities and also the wider determinants of health.

We are a multidisciplinary team. We are a collaboration of council staff and also university staff that are coming together to upskill staff not only within the council but within partner organisations and members of the public about how we can get more evidence-based decision-making across the board.

00:03:13 Lauren Cox

Amazing, thank you. Yeah, I heard about the work that you're doing actually through the kind of network of the HDRCs, as we've got four ourselves in Yorkshire. It was really interesting to hear about the work that you're doing, including The Evidence Pie, which I was introduced to at an event that North Yorkshire Council were hosting and it seemed like a really interesting resource and tool to kind of embed and value those different elements of evidence.

So, it'd be great if you could just summarise, as those who have kind of worked on it and created it, what is The Evidence Pie and what's it all about?

00:03:51 Rhianydd Davies

It's based on the early intervention model. It has six equal types of evidence that need to be sought then, if you like, in terms of to be able to make those best decisions. Each segment has a sentence about it.

So professional knowledge is what we see, hear and learn whilst we're doing our day-to-day jobs in work. The academic evidence is findings from studies undertaken by university researchers. Impact measurement is information on how well something is working and the difference it's making to people. Organisational data is the information an organisation holds about the services that they offer, such as how many bins were collected or school attendance.

Population data is information on people who live in a particular area, and it looks at things such as demographics, gender, ethnicity. A lived experience is that first-hand knowledge of a topic or a theme that people may have used in their day-to-day lives. So, an example of that is residents of RCT will have had lived experience of council services.

00:04:56 Lauren Cox

Amazing. And how did this all come about and who was involved in sort of creating this?

00:05:02 Zoe Lancelott

It started really early on because I think both Rhianydd and myself, we won't give away our age, but we spent quite many years between us working for the council. So we don't really come from a research background. We come very much from a council background and we brought our own professional lived experience to that in terms of being able to translate some key terminology. We desperately needed to find a way to translate the word research into council lingo. Research is always, from a council point of view, something that clever people do somewhere else in a different room and then council staff will apply bits as and when they can. We needed to actually make this a fundamental part of council-speak really.

And I think early on we realised that in order to do that, if we focused on the use of the word evidence instead of research, that was going to be far more powerful, it was far more realistic, it was practical and it was something that could be applied quite easily. I think what we also found as well is that different definitions of research led to a lot of inconsistency in terms of what people expected research to do, what they expected it to be, how hard or easy they thought it was to get hold of.

So, with "evidence", it was something that was far more used as a term. We needed to also translate the purpose and the work of the HDRC into practice. So, we needed to be able to find a way of making that tangible for staff, relevant and also helpful.

We also needed to find a non-threatening way of encouraging council services and staff to talk about strengths and gaps, not only in the evidence base, but also in their own skill base about how confident or how well equipped they were, and also to be able to get them to self-assess their baseline honestly and confidently.

So, we had found the model that had been originally put together by the Early Intervention Foundation, and that looked very much like our pie. But the academic evidence slice of our pie was sort of sat above the other five pieces of the pie. And I think the first thing we did was to take one look at it and say, actually, if we put that in and we make that equal, that is going to have a lot more resonance for council staff.

So, we like to think really that we are the custodians of this reincarnation of the pie. We'll go on to talk about it, but a lot of people have taken it and developed it for their own use, which is great. But I mean, for us, it was very much about making sure that we could tweak it in a way that gave over a very clear message that this pie is non-hierarchical, that everybody is an expert in at least one area of that pie and everybody has something to learn. So, it about having a really clear visual that you could not avoid, no matter how hard you tried, you could not avoid The Evidence Pie, that we could use that almost as a framework to shape the wider work of the HDRC from capacity building to making sure the right people were around the table, as well as making sure that we were opening up access routes for staff to get hold of the evidence they need to make the most informed decisions that they could. So, it needed to be accessible as well as visible.

00:08:06 Lauren Cox

Great. So you mentioned that this was kind of driven, I guess, by having the HDRC embedded into the council, but was there anything else happening like more widely in the organisation that you felt this tool was needed or it came about organically of "we've now got this extra facility, I guess, or initiative resource within the council through the HDRC and we actually need to find something to make that work"?

00:08:31 Rhianydd Davies

Yeah, I suppose as Zoe said, it's so easy to use and everyone can engage with it. It's become that common language. It doesn't need that much explanation, as in it's such a simple thing. I think some people think there's more to it, but actually it's not. It's just a simple tool that can be used. It's because everyone can relate to it.

We're all an expert, as Zoe said, in terms of at least one type of that evidence. So even if we're out talking to residents, we can talk to them about their expert in their lived experience potentially if they live and work in RCT.

For staff that live and work in RCT they may be an expert in professional knowledge because from their role they're gathering that evidence, but they may also have that lived experience by accessing those council services because a large proportion of our staff live and work within RCT.

For us, the tool provides a format or a structure or a number of things, a communication tool that you can talk around. So, for managers within the council, they can use it to review their services.

They can manage a project through the structure, identifies where we have evidence and where we have gaps. It's as important as identifying the evidence as well as identifying the gaps and then we can do something about it.

All that information then can be brought into that discussion. You can sometimes have that conflict in the discussion. Maybe some evidence types are conflicting against each other, but that's okay. It's okay to have that. It can be messy. Sometimes they always fit neatly in a slice into something, but that's still okay. What it is, it's about having all those evidence types to form part of the discussion.

What we're using it for, as Zoe said, is almost everything that we're doing. It increases capacity and confidence of staff to use the evidence. So, we're using it in training, our training structured around it because it is so simple, it is easy to use. We've introduced it with our elected members, so our councillors, we've got a members reference group, and that's really helped us to work out what it is that they need, in terms of being able to use evidence informed decision making as part of their roles.

So again, those members have gone on to develop or support, co-produce training with us around The Evidence Pie and being able then to want more information about those different types of evidence, things like the lived experience. It's really important to them to make sure that voice is used as part of decisions.

00:11:02 Lauren Cox

Thank you. Like you said, sort of with that element around conflict, that two things can exist at the same time. So, when making a decision that can be quite difficult of balancing those two or multiple realities in order to find the best solution. With that in mind, I guess what challenges did you face in embedding this way of working into your organisation and how did you overcome those?

00:11:27 Rhianydd Davies

Well, I think we've been blown away from the fact that everybody loves the pie, in terms of it seems to have been adopted right across a number of organisations, other councils, public organisations, which is brilliant.

We call it our golden nugget. But I guess there was some concerns early days in terms of if we're going to capture too much evidence, will that slow down any decision making process? What's the impact on larger financial decisions likely to be unpopular or sometimes the evidence types may conflict, as I said, which is okay. And that's what it's about. It's about just having all that evidence being heard as part of that decision-making.

For me, it's part of it is about normalising the use of evidence as well. Zoe mentioned at the beginning, if you mention the word research, evidence, some people just switch off to that because they think it's not for me, I didn't go to uni, that kind of thing.

But actually, we all use that evidence in our day-to-day lives, whether we're looking to book a holiday, catch the next bus time. It's just appreciating that there may be conflict, but showing how it can be used.

Breaking down the language has also been key in terms of the work that we're doing with the Evidence Pie, making it relate to real work, making it fun. We've developed The Evidence Pie Bingo, which has become very popular and very competitive. So, everybody wants to win at Bingo. What that does is it's a bit of fun, but it embeds the learning in a way everyone relates to it and they can encompass the different types of learning styles as well to be able to get that message across.

00:13:01 Lauren Cox

That's great that you've had such a positive embrace of it. You mentioned that obviously it's been well received kind of in your own context but also others have kind of heard about it and used it in their own ways. Could you share any examples of where the Evidence Pie has kind of supported or improved that informed decision making in your own organisation or elsewhere?

00:13:23 Zoe Lancelott

So, we have many examples of how we've used The Evidence Pie to support decision making at lots of different levels within the council. Operationally, we use it in terms of performance management frameworks, in self-assessments, in delivery planning. But I think one example that's really nice is the example of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who were keen to do a piece of work on child poverty.

It was right at the start of the HDRC and we really wanted to support a different way of that scrutiny group working. So, they pulled together a working group, it was cross party, it was also cross scrutiny committee. There were 12 members of the working group and one of those is a member of the public. So, for the first time we see a member of the public with full voting rights sat on a scrutiny working group, which was fantastic. Again, using The Evidence Pie to shape the terms of reference for that group, enabled them to see a process elected members will traditionally look for lived experience, they'll traditionally look for practitioner knowledge, and actually this brought in the academic evidence, it brought in more of the organisational data, but it also enabled us to open the door to voluntary sector organisations to be able to bring in their professional expertise, to be able to get a very well-rounded and collaborative approach to looking into child poverty.

What we did manage to do as part of that as well was to have recommendations at the end that were linked to a really clear evidence base. The output of that work was 18 recommendations, which is a huge amount of recommendations to come out of a working group, but every single one of them has

been agreed by Cabinet and every single one of those is currently in the process of going into delivery plans for next year.

So, because that evidence base is there when the recommendations need to be translated into action, the staff are able to pick that up, they can see where the evidence is from, they can start their own bits of research about how best to apply some of those recommendations. So, I think that's definitely one that shows how The Evidence Pie has been used to decision making right at the heart of the democratic element of the council, which again is fantastic for us. It was definitely something we hoped to do at some point. But to have done it really early on, I don't think we could have done it without the pie.

00:15:39 Lauren Cox

That's a great example. And I guess you've just, for that being so early on, you've just been able to build on that and kind of go from strength to strength with it. I think more in a broader term, given all the work that you've done, with this podcast being all about kind of collaboration in Yorkshire, but obviously we've invited you along to kind of share your learning from elsewhere to hopefully help those in our region and beyond to kind of implement the work that you're doing.

What would you say to the question of how can collaboration become business as usual rather than ad hoc? It's something that everybody wants to do, there's great intentions around it, but it's hard work. So, from your perspective, how do you just make that business as usual?

00:16:23 Zoe Lancelott

Funding has definitely helped. We can't sit here and say, "oh, it would have happened without", because I think funding is one thing that really helps to consolidate people's commitment, so it definitely has helped. But I think the strength in our collaboration is about having that shared vision and a commitment to make change. And I think the vision we have in RCT of that fully accessible and inclusive approach to having the transparency about this is the reason why decisions are made, this is what the basis of those decisions are.

I think we're starting to change some of the processes in the council in terms of the use of lived experience as a council. We've always been very good at consultation, but that's usually after we've made a decision which we believe is in the best interest of residents, and it's quite likely that we have used evidence in making that decision. The problem is we haven't involved people at the right time. We haven't started that conversation with them. There's always been a lot of talk about co-production, but I think what the HDRC has definitely enabled us to do is to really focus on how we go about bringing in lived experience, how we focus on ensuring that people are able to provide the evidence that they're experts in. And I think that's very much what we've done is to go and speak to members of the public about them as experts by experience, and to ensure that the council sees that as equally valid as any other part of the pie. So, I think it's definitely about taking some of that cultural change, because then collaboration comes naturally. It's not something you have to pay for. But it definitely, I think The Evidence Pie plays a more fundamental role for us in setting that standard approach. And a standard approach that the council will take, that voluntary sector partners will take, that the university community will take as well, the research community. And it also holds everyone to account.

So, it's a really simple thing to be able to say, well, we'll take a report to cabinet and have cabinet members say, "well, can you tell us where the academic evidence is here, because we can't see it in this report". So again, it holds everybody to account in quite a safe, non-hierarchical way as well.

And I think as well, it's about for a collaboration, it's about communicating those benefits and wherever possible, no matter how small they are. Sometimes we always wait till we've got something that's really big and impactful and then we miss all the small things. In the HDRC we call them our victories.

So, it could just be that we managed to get somebody around a table to sit in a workshop that we weren't expecting to, but I think it's about communicating the benefits and celebrating those victories as they come and finding a way to do that as a collective of people that are there because they believe in a shared vision and they're working towards putting mechanisms in place that make that more natural.

00:19:11 Lauren Cox

Oh, brilliant. Thank you both so much for joining us to share the great work that you're doing. If any of our listeners wanted to get in touch to sort of understand this work a bit more or to try and see how they could utilise it in their context, what would be the best way for them to get in touch?

00:19:28 Zoe Lancelott

There are two ways you can get in touch with us. You could either e-mail us at HDRC@RCTCBC.gov.uk. which is a bit of a mouthful, or you can get us on the website which is MakeAChangeRCT. Everything that we do there is there, you can have a look at some of the projects we do, you can have a bit more of a look at The Evidence Pie, we've got some videos on there, we've got some training materials on there, and there's also an opportunity for you to sign up at the website and to stay up to date with everything that we're up to.

00:20:00 Lauren Cox

Amazing. Zoe and Rhianydd, thank you so much for your time and for sharing the great work that you're doing and kind of how it's all been developed with our listeners in the Yorkshire and Humber region and hopefully beyond. So yeah, thank you so much and really hope that we can start seeing this tool being used in our local context.

00:20:19 Rhianydd Davies

Thanks, Lauren, for having us.

00:20:21 Zoe Lancelott

Thank you, Lauren, it's been fab.