

# Strategy and Planning Team

## Policy Briefing: Co-Production



### Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of co-production, including a definition of it within the context of consultation and engagement, an introduction to co-production principles and methods, and analysis of case studies to identify potential lessons from good practice. It is intended to inform and support colleagues to use co-production to develop services with stakeholders. It is requested that colleagues consider if there may be opportunities for co-production to be applied to their service developments or initiatives and highlight these to the Strategy and Planning Team ([a&c-strategy@leics.gov.uk](mailto:a&c-strategy@leics.gov.uk)).

### Background

Co-production is the process of working with stakeholders to design and develop decisions. It can be applied to anything from a major service development to individual case work (e.g. ensuring service users are considered equal partners in the development of their care and support plans).

Co-production is defined by Skills for Care as “A way of working whereby, citizens and decision makers, or people who use services, family carers and service providers work together to create a decision or service which works for them all. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who use a service are best placed to help design it”.

It is well-documented that co-production activities provide numerous benefits for residents, service users, professionals, and organisations. Research has shown that participants can experience increased self-confidence, enhanced health and wellbeing and a sense of empowerment<sup>1</sup>. For professionals, facilitating co-production activities can support job satisfaction, motivation, and improved practice<sup>2</sup>. Whilst fewer studies have explored the benefits of co-production for organisations, case studies suggest that it can enhance relationships with stakeholders and help to ensure that services better meet local needs<sup>3</sup>. There is also evidence that in the NHS it has led to improved practice, increased uptake of services by those in need and reduced non-attendance rates and hospital admissions<sup>4</sup>. Further, research by Think Local Act Personal has highlighted the value of co-production during the Covid-19 pandemic as a mechanism for organisations to rapidly ascertain and respond to the challenges experienced by those receiving care and support<sup>5</sup>.

Local authorities are encouraged nationally to embed co-production in service design. The statutory guidance for the Care Act (2014) promotes co-production in its sections on prevention; developing universal information, advice, and guidance; market shaping and strengths-based approaches. Co-production also features strongly throughout the Care Quality Commission’s Framework for the

<sup>1</sup> Callanan, S., Able, L. and Wood, P. (2020) Co-production in adult social care: evaluation report, London: SCIE.

<sup>2</sup> Hannibal, C. and Martikke, S. (2019) Critical success factors for co-production in VCSE organisations, Manchester: Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation.

<sup>3</sup> SCIE, ‘Developing our understanding of the difference co-production makes in social care’ (2022)

<sup>4</sup> Grindell, C., Coates, E., Croot, L. and O’Cathain, A. (2022) ‘The use of co-production, co-design and co-creation to mobilise knowledge in the management of health conditions: a systematic review’, BMC Health Services Research

<sup>5</sup> Think Local Act Personal, ‘The 3Rs of Social Care Reform’ (2021)

inspection of Local Authorities, for example one of the best practice standards includes 'co-production is embedded throughout the local authority's work'.

The Adults and Communities Department is committed to embedding co-production throughout its service design; its Strategy for 2020-24, 'Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity for Leicestershire: Adults and Communities Department Ambitions and Strategy' sets out an aspiration to increase its 'co-production, co-design and engagement with service users, carers, providers, professionals, and other stakeholders'. Similarly, the Department's Engagement Framework highlights the importance of involving those with lived experience in service design and ensuring that even when the community has limited decision-making power, the Department nevertheless seeks and listens to its feedback.

The Department has well-established engagement forums such as the Learning Disability Partnership Board and Autism Board which aim to identify and address the needs of those with lived experience, including by facilitating interactions and collaboration with service providers. The Department also has an Engagement Panel, consisting of individuals who represent the key adult social care service user groups and/or have lived experience of accessing social care services, as well as representatives from the Department's senior leadership. The Panel's roles are to:

- Encourage and support the Department to increase the extent to which it co-produces its service design with residents and service users
- Provide advice to shape the Department's engagement plans and activities, and approve its final engagement plans for delivery
- Review and make recommendations on the Department's draft proposals around service design and policy and strategy development

The Department is adopting a range of measures to further embed co-production throughout its service design activities, including enhancing the Engagement Panel's role and undertaking a recruitment drive to increase its membership, procuring co-production consultancy support to review/challenge our engagement processes and committing to Think Local Act Personal's 'Making it Real' Framework (a set of statements which describe what good, personalised care and support looks like from the point of view of people themselves). Services are encouraged to identify, with the support of the Strategy and Planning Team, opportunities for service developments and initiatives to be co-produced with relevant stakeholders (e.g. residents, service users/carers, partners and providers).

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## Co-Production Principles

Implementing co-production can be challenging and complex. The concept must run through the culture of the organisation, with an emphasis of being 'risk aware' rather than 'risk adverse'.

### Valuing Assets

Co-production starts from the idea that no one group or person is more important than any other group or person. So, everyone is equal and everyone has assets to bring to the process. Assets refer to skills, abilities, time, and other qualities that people have. There is respect for the assets that everyone brings to the process and an emphasis on all the outcomes that people value, rather than just those that the organisation values. Much of the writing on co-production focuses on the need to recognise the assets of people who draw on care and support and others in the community. However, the assets that practitioners, managers, and other professionals bring to the process also need to be recognised.

### Diversity

Co-production should be as inclusive as possible. Research has [shown](#) that certain groups are likely to be underrepresented or excluded from co-production activities. The main groups likely to experience exclusion are those from BAME and/or LGBT communities, those with dementia, and older people who require a high level of support. Where a person lives can also be a barrier to

participation: people living in residential homes, homeless people, Gypsy and Traveller communities and people in prison may experience exclusion on this basis. Prior to starting any type of co-production work should be undertaken to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to be involved.

## Accessibility

To ensure that everyone can take part, accessibility is fundamental. As well as physical access, making sure that information is accessible and that it is provided in appropriate formats is a key part of making sure that everyone can take part in co-production. This should start right at the beginning by ensuring that everyone understands what co-production is. There is also a broader issue about ensuring that everyone has enough information to take part in co-production and decision making.

## Facilitation

Co-production requires a shift from delivering services to facilitating services. This means avoiding a one-way process of providing care and deciding what is best for the individual and instead working with residents and service users to better understand their needs and co-design solutions. This reflects that professionals require resident and service user feedback to understand local needs. For example, research into the needs of people with visual impairments [found](#) that whilst 64% of public managers thought that peoples' most significant need was for more information on public services, 91% of people with visual impairments stated that it was to get to know more people and make friends.

## Evaluation

Regular reviews during the co-production process are essential to ensure that the agreed principles are being followed and are making a real difference. They can also help to continuously improve co-production practice by identifying what worked well and not so well and considering implications for future co-production activities. Reviews may focus on co-production of a specific service or project, developing programmes of co-production, or the annual performance of the organisation in relation to its ongoing commitment to co-production. The evaluation criteria should also be co-produced to help ensure that success is measured against the desired outcomes of all participants.

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## Delivering Co-Production

The following case studies set out how local authorities have facilitated co-production.

- [Birmingham City Council](#) – established two citizen-led quality boards (one for assessment and support planning and another for commissioning) which are now integral to the Council's Quality Assurance Programme. which include service users and carers who quality assure services based on their experiences. The groups identify areas of concern, make recommendations for improvement, co-produce new minimum service standards and highlight areas of good practice. Examples of their co-produced work include:
  - Developing new minimum standards for the Council's Access service and the way in which social care workers carry out social care assessments and reviews
  - Introducing a new Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire enabling direct feedback from service users and carers
  - Citizen-led Quality Board involvement in the development of a Care Home Quality Rating system which will help the citizens and the Council choose the best care
  - Creating a 'Good Practice Award' for residential care providers delivering personalised service - short-listed by Council staff with final decision by Quality Board members
  - Organising an Opportunities Fair to showcase opportunities available to the citizens of Birmingham who have learning disabilities; physical disabilities; mental ill health; sensory impairments or are older adults

- [City and County of Swansea](#) – Worked alongside user led group NAUWU (Nothing About Us Without Us) C&C of Swansea to develop a supported living framework. Initial thoughts were discussed with NAUWU who then engaged 160 people with learning disabilities about what mattered to them and carried out a survey. This identified two key areas of service provision requiring improvement, which informed the procurement criteria for new supported living providers. Public workshops were held to define what good would look like for the two method statements and co-produce evaluation tools. Subsequently, evaluation sessions were delivered in which NAUWU representatives, Council staff and those with lived experience evaluated each bid and shared their recommendations with commissioning staff. This process provided those with lived experience with a strong voice over how services would be delivered and led to co-production of a provider quality monitoring framework.
- [Oxfordshire County Council's Co-production Programme](#) Oxfordshire County Council took the approach of instigating a programme which embedded co-production in the way in which the Council works. With support from SCIE, workshops were undertaken with internal staff and people who use services to determine how the organisation needed to change their ways of working to ensure a more co-productive attitude. Four workshops were facilitated with Council staff and people who use services. These led to the agreement of seven key shifts which the Council would need to implement to make it a more co-productive place to work:
  - senior level commitment to co-production
  - a co-produced training programme
  - establishing a co-production board
  - resourcing (e.g. by establishing a co-production team)
  - having a written agreement or concordat (e.g. setting out terms of reference)
  - evaluation of the whole programme.

All seven shifts were adopted, including development of a co-production team. Further factors were also shown to be crucial in increasing the level of co-production throughout the Council, such as a visible organisation-wide commitment (with co-production written into its corporate plan), the shift in national guidance and expectation via the Care Quality Commission, events and marketing (e.g. holding Oxfordshire's first Co-Production Festival which was attended by over 160 people), and supporting staff knowledge and confidence (e.g. by providing advice and guidance such as the 'Co-Production Handbook', briefing team meetings, coaching, facilitating co-production events and showcasing good practice).

As a result of the Programme, the number of people involved in co-production in Oxfordshire is over 30 times what it was at the start of the programme and the number of co-produced projects in adult social care increased from a target of 5-7% per year to over 20%. 85–89% of staff members in adult social care reported that co-production has improved relationships between people using services and the Council.

## Themes from Good Practice

Many successful co-production projects involve local authorities working with user-led organisations, which provide a strong link to those who represent different service user groups and/or have lived experience of accessing social care services. These organisations can assist by not only advocating for service users and carers and supporting them to participate in co-production activities, but also by advising local authorities on how best to engage different service user groups.

Co-production may not be suitable in all situations; however, it is often possible to co-produce elements of a project. For example, whilst the Council may have limited control over some changes (e.g. those being imposed on it by Government), it may nevertheless be possible for people to co-produce the information, advice and guidance which the Council will share to explain these changes. Recruitment is another area in which people with lived experience can make a real contribution, such as by co-designing job specifications to ensure those appointed have the necessary skills and values.



Cultural change within the organisation will likely be needed to fully embed co-production throughout service design processes. This can be supported both by revising internal strategies and policies to promote the usage of co-production throughout care and support (including co-production of specific projects and programmes as well as more ‘granular’ co-production of care and support plans during frontline service delivery). It also requires significant internal communication and engagement with staff to enhance co-production knowledge and confidence – such as by continuously sharing advice and guidance, highlighting the benefits and outcomes of co-production and showcasing good practice. It is particularly important that there is visible senior leader endorsement of co-production, such as by senior leader participation in co-production groups and events.

External events and marketing can also support increase public participation in co-production activities; this can be supported by hosting public events and utilising existing community resources such as connectors and social prescribers (i.e., those who have strong networks within their local community and can therefore encourage a wide range of people to engage in co-production activities).

It is important that local authorities develop and maintain an open and transparent relationship with the public, service users and carers and acknowledge that it will take time to build relationships and trust with these stakeholders. This will be supported by highlighting how peoples’ participation in co-production activities is valued by the local authority and has helped to achieve something tangible.

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## Summary and Next Steps

The Department is committed to increasing the extent to which it co-produces its service developments and initiatives with members of the public, service users and carers. Achieving this would help to ensure that services are reflect and address service users’ needs and may therefore support increased service user and carer satisfaction. It may also help to improve the accessibility of information and advice (e.g. if website design and factsheets on service changes are co-produced and/or those with lived experience are involved in reviews of information accessibility).

The Department has well-established existing and developing engagement groups (e.g. the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board) and has recently approved significant enhancements of the role of the Adults and Communities Engagement Panel – with the Panel for example to support development of and formally sign-off all of the Department’s consultation and engagement plans. The engagement groups provide ideal forums for facilitating co-production of service developments, programmes, and initiatives with those with lived experience across all adult social care service user groups.

It will also however be important to ensure that residents, service users and carers outside of these groups are invited and encouraged to participate in co-production; as such there will be a need to promote co-production opportunities through communications channels and through face-to-face engagement via Local Area Coordinators, Social Prescribers, and frontline staff.

It would be much appreciated if services could consider if there are any opportunities for co-production to be applied to their current or planned service developments, initiatives and programmes (or specific aspects of them) and highlight these to the Strategy and Planning Team ([a&c-strategy@leics.gov.uk](mailto:a&c-strategy@leics.gov.uk)). The Team will help to identify opportunities for co-production and support the planning and facilitation of co-production activities. It will also collate examples of good practice in co-production for dissemination across the Department to help continuously improve our co-production practices.

### Are you planning or delivering any consultation or engagement activities?

If so, please review and update the Department’s [Engagement Forward Plan](#), which aims to support effective oversight and coordination of engagement activities and prevent duplication.

