

Transcript of video – Making it Real: I/we statements helped us rebuild after a devastating judicial review

Debbie Bartlett, Director, strategy & transformation, ASC, Norfolk CC: We had taken a decision to lower our minimum income guarantee to the statutory minimum and there were some particular local circumstances that led to an enormous backlash resulting in a judicial review and the outcome was we lost it.

Out of that using the principles of 'I and we statements' and the whole principle of 'no decisions without me' and all of that stuff, I guess I wanted to begin to try and build back, you know, some trust and confidence and build a better dialogue.

Everybody was so angry, and I think what we were seeing was something that had been building up for many, many years, that we hadn't been listening properly. We had lost our ability to be able to sit down and have a dialogue with, particularly, disabled people and the people who care for them.

We worked particularly with the one pressure group which had brought the legal case. We set up a what we called a reference group which was about all matters charging and alongside the pressure group we also invited and had other key voices in there.

We felt we needed to bring in some external support because we simply weren't trusted so we brought in a third party, ThePublicOffice, who were incredibly skilled at doing this sort of work and we settled on the first initial piece of work which was to look at our Disability Related Expenditure.

People said it's absolutely awful, you know we have to fill in all these forms, it's not fair, you know that person over there gets this this person over here doesn't get this, it doesn't work you know no one understands, there's no one ever rings us back, you know it's just awful.

So we decided that we would we would start with that as a way of jointly working in a different, more collaborative, coproductive way. All this was done, of course, during Covid, so all had to be online, a series of workshops.

Here are the sorts of things that people told us (refers to visuals). One of the things that I took from all of this work was the emotional energy and the little bit of peoples' souls that they give when they tell their story yet again, in this, and I found that quite sobering actually, and you know we need to be respectful of that.

People felt unable to plan because they couldn't take a risk in buying a big piece of... something, because they didn't know whether or not that was going to be allowed as a DRE and this this trust issue that they were worried if they even came to us then we'd find a reason somehow to stop them having anything.

And I think then we followed through in some more workshops and I guess I just wanted to highlight these two (refers to visual) out of many issues that came through. That one about trust that was really at the heart of so much of what we were hearing. You know we've been

explaining ourselves for ages and nothing changes and you know a real healthy degree of, quite rightly, absolutely quite rightly, scepticism when we said: 'we want to do this with you, this is true coproduction'. And actually why would they trust us to do that, you know? So just to sort of illustrate, I suppose the rawness of some of the stuff we were dealing with.

There is a slightly happier ending. Amanda's going to talk through what we actually did to focus on DRE.

Amanda Johnson, Business Lead - Promoting Independence Programme Team: Thank you, Debbie. We had a series of engagement sessions very much focusing on how can we make the process easier to understand. What is our information like? How accessible is it? What can we do to improve it? And again, asking them what are the top three, five, things that you think are really unfair about DRE and then also looking at our training for frontline staff and also for the supported living providers and day services.

One of the things we were able to do quite quickly, was that Finance set up a new disability related expenses team. People can ring directly, they can e-mail the team and somebody will get back to them. And that team will actually also help them fill in a form go and see them face to face to fill in a form if they need that, and also link them up with other money support services.

So that that's been a very positive thing we also set up some further engagement sessions to look at those four main action points from there (refers to visuals) we have actually co-designed a new DRE application form which is on our website, and as part the engagement, people said can we have some actual examples of people applying for a DRE, so we've included examples and the completed form and frequently asked questions.

And we've also had a research analyst who has actually met with eight people about their experience of applying for DRE. In the past year we've updated the operational guidance for social care staff, so very much as part of your care and support you do need to have conversations with people about disability related expenses, and linking them to the DRE team.

We also had a real commitment and desire from people around can we co-produce, can we do things from the start, and that real focus on equal partners, and so we worked with our Making it Real board, who help us advise us on coproduction, to very much look at two areas we wanted to co-produce.

So the first would be about what information should be on our website about disability related expenses. Another area we wanted to co-produce was around training for social care providers, so supported living providers, day services, because they are the ones seeing individuals and families on a day-to-day basis and they could be prompting them about 'have you heard about disability related expenses?' 'Do you know what you can do?' Really there's a lot of misinformation, people don't always understand.

We had our first coproduction session, a virtual one again. We had about 20 to 25 people in that but again we went into smaller groups to design information that would go on the

website. Now we are at the stage of having a smaller working group, including Making it Real board members, who are going to actually draft the information, and then we'll have five people who will actually try it out for us to make sure that's right before we go live.

In partnership with ThePublicOffice we contacted people who were willing to talk about what it means to have a disability. So they completed diaries, or they shared their accounts in a video or in other ways, and from that we were then given some materials. Then we decided we would have a face to face event.

Debbie Bartlett: One of the things that, going back to the original judicial review, was this sense that elected members were just so distant from any of the decisions they were making, completely disconnected from the impact of those decisions.

We tried to move away from just having a public meeting where members sort of lined up and they were shouted out. We said that's not going to work, you really need to have a different way of doing it so this. The 'This is my Life' session was a way of bringing together members and officers and people with lived experiences using those materials, and it was a very powerful day and we're now looking at how else we want to roll that out.

Amanda Johnson: part the planning for that, again, was with the reference group who actually said, as well as the This is my Life materials we want to see experts by experience sit on the tables, so each table was facilitated, and there was an expert by experience and members, in particular, said how powerful it was.

We have still got work to do but hopefully we're on a better footing. This was the commitment that we made to the reference group (refers to visual) that we do very much see the value of having this forum as our advisors and they're very much going to be part of helping us and consulting on the social care reform but also they are also still keeping us to account for the disability related expenses. One of the big things is establishing an Engagement in Coproduction Board within adult services so Debbie will be chairing that.

Debbie Bartlett: Before all this happened, I was dealing with probably, between, you know 5 to 10 emails to senior counsellors, copied to all 84 county councillors, about people's experiences, and you know since we've done this work there aren't any.

So actually what we have is a dialogue, in a way, where people will bring them to us first. It doesn't mean the issues have gone away by any means at all, and we have very robust meetings where everybody gets very cross, but then you know we come back the next time and yes, okay, they've got cross but they understand that actually we've tried this, so the openness and transparency is much better.

I think if you were to ask the most challenging sort voices in there they would say: 'Well, you know, okay, so it's alright so far, but you know we've still got a way to go'. But we haven't lost them, we haven't fallen out, and actually we've done some, I think, some really good work.