

Putting People at the Heart of Care and Support

Emerging approaches to co-production



Foreword



Stuart Mitchelmore, Assistant Director of Adult Social Care in Central Bedfordshire and Chair of the Putting People at the Heart of Care and Support Working Group, is delighted to be writing the foreword for this publication.

Stuart said, 'At its core co-production is value driven and built on the principle that those affected by a service are best placed to help design it.

It was so refreshing to read the emerging approaches to co-production report and particularly the breadth of areas covered. I have said before that we need to light beacons of good practice relating to co-production so others can see what good practice looks like and ensure the positive messages spread. I think this document highlights some of the beacons we have within the East of England ADASS region, and I am sure this is only the start and there will be many more to follow. If we get co-production embedded in all we do, it cannot but not provide better outcomes for people. Afterall, this is what we are here to do, working alongside people with lived experience to achieve this.'

Stuart Mitchelmore

Assistant Director of Adult Social Care in Central Bedfordshire and Chair of the Putting People at the Heart of Care and Support Working Group

CURATORS OF CHANGE

Curators of Change who ADASS East of England works alongside to deliver the 'Over a Brew' co-production sessions for the region have also provided some quotes on the emergent work they are seeing:



Mark Dale

'The process of co-production is like a beautiful flowing stream in a village when it is flowing right and is calm – it creates an at-one environment. This is the same as co-production; it is a remarkable achievement as we are starting all to flow in the right direction. We need to still sign up or at least have an “open mind” from all to invest in the thinking on co-producing, creating and designing services for the future.'



Nathaniel Clarkson

'We have all known for a very long time what issues people face and what's not working. Finally, we are starting to look at why and doing something about it. Co-production is the tool that is bringing the context to the process and the ripples of change because of this are already starting to become evident.'

The evidence shows that it is the co-produced projects that stand the test of time and serve people better with better outcomes. Granted sometimes it takes longer to conceive but at the cost of getting it “right”, I feel that's a sacrifice worth making.'

For further information about the East of England ADASS 'Over a Brew' and how to get involved, please see the following web-page: [Over a Brew virtual coffee sessions – latest – Association of Directors of Adult Social Services Eastern Region](https://adasseast.org.uk/over-a-brew-virtual-coffee-sessions-latest-association-of-directors-of-adult-social-services-eastern-region) (adasseast.org.uk)

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Co-production with carers in the development of a carers' strategy

A series of meetings with carer-based organisations to find out what carers wish to see and prioritise within a carers' strategy.

People who access care and support and care involvement in service development through engagement and feedback has been in place in Bedford for many years. This has included Partnership Boards for Learning Disabilities and for Older People and has led to the involvement of people who access care and support with lived experience and the involvement of core organisations. As well as inviting people into the department to share their expertise, there has been an emerging trend to go out to community-based groups to build relationships and achieve close partnerships in service improvement and meeting need.

Bedford Borough Council commissions many voluntary agencies with a social care focus and is working with groups using a community development methodology to support and co-produce service developments. The approach is still emerging, and at present is low-key, and the council recognises that there is further to go to co-produce with people who have lived experience and partners.

The council intends to move towards a fully co-produced model of working as people who access care and support, including carers, become more confident and comfortable in the application of this way of working.

The carers' strategy for Bedford Borough Council is out of date and needs to be updated to reflect changes in the local context and the changing needs of carers. The local carer organisation, Carers in Bedfordshire, has undertaken a series of surveys of carers to feed into the strategy, and a co-production event with eight carers was held in late 2021. However, further work is needed.

The council decided to attend carer groups on their terms to ask about their experience of caring. Carers were engaged as a group to talk about their lived experience. The conversations started by saying that the council needed to update the strategy to make it more relevant to carers, and to ask carers about their day-to-day lives. This was possible because all the carers were familiar with each other and used the carer groups as main sources of support. They were in a familiar environment and felt comfortable sharing information and experiences. If themes emerged in the conversation, such as carers' assessments or respite, this was explored further.

At the end of the meeting, the council fed back what the group had discussed with them, to check that there was nothing missed or incorrect. This was important as the meetings were not recorded. The meetings were then written up and sent to the groups for further verification. In total, the council involved 30 people across three different carer groups, which were Carers in Bedfordshire, Tibbs Dementia and Mencap. The strategy will be produced by Adult Social Care and the groups will have further involvement in agreeing the contents. In the future, monitoring the progress of implementation will take place between the local authority and carers.

The need to update the strategy emerged from discussions between the commissioning function of the authority and Adult Social Care, which are based in separate parts of the local authority. The council needed to be realistic about the resource available for co-production, as this is limited. They also needed to be realistic about the time available to produce the strategy, which is currently in draft format.

The changes are twofold, in that the inclusion of people with lived experience on their terms is established as part of service development, and the time that this takes is being built into transformation programmes.

The feedback from carers has been positive. Not every carer is in touch with the local authority, and attendance at carers groups was the first time that they had discussed their experiences. The groups are ready to be involved in future developments and reported that they felt listened to and valued.

What was the learning that supported success?

- No specific training took place beforehand but both commissioning and adult social care colleagues are experienced in working with groups.
- Before attending groups, research into carers' needs on a national and local basis was undertaken.

What were the conditions for success?

- Willingness by carer organisations to invite council staff to their groups.
- Willingness of carers to take part in co-production.
- Council staff approach that went to carers on their own terms.
- Prior positive relationships with the carer groups by commissioning and adult social care.

What were the barriers?

- Time that needs to be given to co-production slows down progress.
- Competing priorities also slows down the production of the end result.

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Transitions work and development of a charter

The development of a charter to enable all future policies to be measured against to ensure input is provided across the area and across agencies.

Measures are already in place such as a well-established Partnership Board for Older people and for Learning Disabilities. Feedback from groups has led to a change of focus and agendas are driven entirely by the boards themselves, rather than being set by the local authority. The council has also seen an increase in the use of social media to engage with people and built on experiences during the pandemic to make greater use of technology to bridge the gap between some services, the organisations, and people accessing services.

The legacy of the pandemic has also left the council in a strong position with external providers and engagement with them. This has amplified the voice of people accessing services throughout the external market, including, but not limited to, increased input in tender and the commissioning process.

Going forward, the council is also looking to strengthen existing input into recruitment processes. A recent audit of existing policies and practices within adult services also places the council in an excellent position to prioritise this work and to increase co-production in the development of future policies, etc.

The council have a very engaged parent carer forum for young people who are going through transition from children's to adult services within the borough. The forum is a joint forum between cares and staff from the local authority. It is chaired by a parent and the parents set the agenda.

The forum identified that there were multiple policies developed by different agencies within Bedford Borough concerning transitions. The policies were reviewed by the forum who found that co-production was good in some areas and poor in others. A snapshot of the position was that some agencies had completed recent reviews of this policy without high levels of co-production and others were looking to develop theirs. As a result, the Parent Carer Forum developed a charter that existing policies could be measured against whilst also providing a model for future policies to be developed from.

This work is in development and has already benefited a policy the local mental health trust developed before the start of this work. Agencies are engaging with this process and see the approval of their policies through the Charter as a positive thing to strive to.

Work is at an early stage, but positive feedback has already been provided and reflects the fact people feel more in control of the way forward, and that their views are a central focus within the work.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Closer work was needed between agencies before policies were developed.
- Agencies need to share positive forums where engagement is high.
- External providers could look to the council as experts.

What were the barriers and conditions for success?

- Available resources across the patch.
- Previous experience of co-production.
- Silo working in some areas.
- Previous 'tokenistic' attempts at co-production

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Self-assessment and co-production

Digital assessment forms for self-assessment, carers' assessment and financial assessment.

People who access care and support including carer involvement in service development has been in place in Bedford for many years. This has included Partnership Boards for Learning Disability and Older People. Over the past 12 months, there has been an emerging trend to go out to already established community-based groups to build relationships and achieve closer partnerships in service improvement and meeting need.

Bedford commissions many voluntary agencies with a social care focus and is working with groups using a community development methodology to support and co-produce service developments. The approach is still emerging, and at present, is low-key and piecemeal.

The council will move towards a fully co-produced model of working as they and people who access care and support (including carers) become more confident and comfortable in the application of this way of working.

A digital assessment for self-assessment and for carers' assessment has been available for several years via the council website. As part of the council transformation plan, the digital self-assessments are in the process of being updated. It is important to ensure that the assessment questions are designed so that people find them easy to complete. An initial meeting was held with Healthwatch to go through the assessments and gain feedback on the proposed questions. The self-assessments are currently with Autism in Bedfordshire to agree the form and type of questions asked.

A financial self-assessment has been developed as part of the Fair Cost of Care exercise. Healthwatch Bedford took part in a co-production exercise, at which they found that most members of the public are unfamiliar with the mechanics of charging for social care, although there is a vague knowledge that services are charged for and a belief that to access social care, a person must sell their home. Healthwatch have worked with a local day centre to go through the financial self-assessment and refine relevant questions.

Once all co-production has been completed the self-assessments will be available on the council website.

There have been two main elements of positive change with the process:

1. Staff involved in the process have been outside of Adult Social Care. Co-production and the involvement of people who access care and support, including carers, is a new area of work for them, and it has been a positive learning exercise. Any area of their work that has an impact on the public will now become an integral part of the process of developing new approaches and services. There is an appreciation that the additional time taken to co-produce and amend work accordingly is well spent and that the product is more likely to meet the needs of those who access care and support.
2. People have been able to directly influence the outcome of their involvement by going through the process and feeling they are listened to. The result of self-assessments on the council website are a testament to the time and effort they have given.

What was the learning that supported success?

- No formal training.
- All staff taking part in the process were fully briefed beforehand and adapted the contents of the self-assessment as needed.
- The Chief Officer leading the process has been trained in qualitative research methods and worked with staff on how to gather information.

What were the some of the conditions for success?

- Willingness to try a new method of working and acceptance that this will inevitably lead to change in the initial proposals.
- Voluntary agencies who were open to co-production and wished to be involved in the process.

What were some of the barriers?

- The additional time that is needed to implement a development when co-production is integral to the process.
- There are limited resources to devote to co-production.
- The council recognises that it is in the early stages of co-production and still has more to learn about the methodology.

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Co-production of a council recognition policy

How a co-production group has written a policy for Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council to recognise the contribution of members of the public (people with lived experience) who take part in co-production and involvement activities with the councils.

Stakeholders across the health and social care system within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough wanted to embed co-production into their everyday practice and commissioning. This was because everyone understood that working together on an equal basis in a co-productive way would lead to better outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

In 2022, this led to a task and finish group being set up to develop a joint approach to co-production, adopting the locally co-produced SUN Network Co-production and Involvement Best Practice Guidance as the basis of its co-production approach: [The-SUN-Network-Co-production-and-Involvement-Best-Practice-Guidance-April-2021.pdf](#) (sunnetwork.org.uk)

The outcome of the task and finish group work was that the following were co-produced and agreed:

- A Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Shared Commitment to Co-production.
- A Co-production Standards Checklist, using the SUN Network Co-production and Involvement Best Practice Guidance 'Steps to Success: A Commissioner and Service Co-production Plan for Achieving Success'.

In addition, the SUN network co-production training offer was adopted to support the new co-production approach: [Training – The SUN Network](#)

The Shared Commitment to Co-production was then included in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System People and Communities Engagement Strategy (approved in September 2022): [ICB meeting papers | CPICS Website](#)

In 2023, a co-production group wrote a policy for how Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council should recognise the contribution of members of the public (people with lived experience) who take part in co-production and involvement activities with the councils.

The co-production group was made up of:

- experts by experience representatives
- voluntary and community sector representatives
- council representatives from Adult Social Care practice and commissioning and Public Health.

The creation of this policy was an agreed action for the councils following the co-production of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Shared Commitment to Co-production and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Co-production Standards Checklist in 2022.

To do this, the co-production group:

- looked at what the councils do now
- discussed the reasons why people want to take part in co-production activities
- discussed the challenges and barriers to offering payments to people for their time and contributions
- discussed suggestions for possible solutions to these problems
- considered alternative ways to recognise and reward people with lived experience who take part in co-production activities
- identified what the policy needed to cover
- looked at what similar organisations do.

The policy covers:

- purpose of the policy
- scope of the policy – who is covered, what type of activities are covered
- what should happen before a co-production or involvement activity starts
- ways that the council can recognise people's contributions – reimbursement of reasonable expenses; involvement payments for specific types of activities; alternatives to financial payments
- how payments are made
- further guidance and support.

This policy is important because at its heart co-production is a process of sharing power. To co-produce effectively, everybody's contribution should be treated equally, and everybody needs to feel equally valued.

Co-production activities may be organised and attended by people as part of their job. Because of this, people with lived experience can feel like their contribution is less valuable than those who are paid to attend. This can result in people believing that their contribution will have less value in the decision-making process. Many organisations understand this and seek to recognise and reward people's contribution and to say thank you for their time, skills and experience. This can be through offering the reimbursement of reasonable expenses and involvement payments or by showing appreciation through alternatives to financial payments.

The purpose of this policy is to give clear guidance and procedures for how the councils will recognise the contribution of members of the public (people with lived experience) who take part in co-production and involvement activities with the councils.

It is intended that this policy will:

- encourage members of the public to take part in co-production and involvement activities with the councils
- ensure that involvement in co-production activities is open and accessible to everyone and that members of the public will not be left out of pocket or be put at risk of being financially worse off because of their involvement.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Similar policies developed by local partner organisations.
- Similar policies developed by organisations in other parts of the country.
- National best practice guidance, for example, the National Institute for Health and Care Research Guidance for members of the public, Coalition for Personalised Care, Think Local Act Personal.
- Locally co-produced SUN Network Co-production and Involvement Best Practice Guidance.
- Feedback from participants in other co-production activities undertaken by the councils.
- Feedback from participants in the original task and finish group work to develop a shared approach to co-production that took place 2022.

What were the barriers for success?

- Obtaining agreement on processes for offering involvement payments for specific types of activities due to concerns about Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs rules on benefits and tax.
- Agreeing an annual budget for co-production activities for Adult Social Care.

What are the conditions for success?

- Training and guidance will be given to council staff on how to use the policy, and how to process the reimbursement of reasonable expenses and payments for involvement in co-production and involvement activities.
- The policy is publicised as widely as possible to partner organisations and groups.
- The process for members of the public to complete claim forms for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses and/or involvement payments is as straightforward as possible.

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Bedfordshire Autism Voice Partnership Arrangement – hearing the voice of autistic adults in Bedfordshire

The Bedfordshire Autism Voice (BAV) Arrangement was set up to replace the previous Think Autism Partnership Board.

Central Bedfordshire Council was keen to create a truly person-centred approach to service delivery with local autistic adults. Such a service should give people choice and control and not feel like the local organisations were dictating to people about how they should live and feel.

Central Bedfordshire Council really values the involvement of local people in service design and delivery, recognising the huge importance of using the contribution of local people who access services. It is recognised that an equal partnership between local people and local services is beneficial for all. The council collaborates with the local autistic community, empowering people to feel they are not just ‘ticking the box’ or feeling that their contribution is tokenistic.

The council has always ensured that it includes a mechanism for review and adaptability of the services in-year, again with local people at the very centre of the process. This enables the council to work together with local groups and adapt to local needs and deliver the right services at the right time.

The council has:

- taken a step back from ‘running the show’ and instead encourages local people to take the lead with the council facilitating that process
- recognised local people as assets to successful service delivery
- built on local people’s experiences and knowledge, combining that with professional expertise and resources
- encouraged peer support, empowering people to take the lead in their own lives
- tried to develop an ongoing equal relationship with local people by listening and working together throughout the term of the service delivery/arrangement and making reasonable adjustments where possible.

In the past, the local authority Partnership boards have been a mechanism to try and meet the needs of local people. However, with the current national autism strategy in mind, the council felt it was time to review the local Autism Partnership board to see if it still meets the needs of local autistic people. The council held a review group workshop with local autistic adults, parents/carers and professionals and also conducted online engagement to try and reach as many people as possible. The results of the review were clear: the Partnership Board, in its current format, was not meeting people’s needs and people wanted a change. People felt their voices were not being heard. They wanted a more person-centred approach, discussing issues that are important to them and a process that puts local autistic people at the heart of the arrangements.

Using these results and further consultation with local people around design and working together, a new partnership arrangement called the Bedfordshire Autism Voice (BAV) was created. The new BAV centres around BAV Local Groups which are led, chaired and run by autistic people (and facilitated by a local autism charity). They meet quarterly to discuss local issues and things that are important to them. These groups have been set up to empower autistic people to discuss and resolve their local issues at group level wherever possible. If the issue persists or requires further intervention it may then be referred to the BAV Alliance for further discussion about resolution.

The BAV Alliance is a team of professionals who support the BAV Local Groups in making positive changes for local autistic people. The BAV Alliance is chaired independently by Health Watch and facilitated by a local autism charity. It meets twice a year and is attended by senior decision-making professionals. The BAV Local Groups set the agenda for the Alliance meetings to help develop and improve local services for autistic people. The membership of the Alliance was carefully considered and includes members of the Integrated Care Board, other health colleagues, Adult Social Care and other local authority colleagues, police, voluntary and community sector services, the Probation Service and many other professionals. The new format is reviewed annually by local people with the support of local professionals and is very flexible to change as required.

The new partnership design was very positively received by the local autistic community and professionals alike. To meet the diverse needs of the local autistic community, the council has a system where people can engage with the BAV Local Groups either face to face, online or submit questions/comments prior to the meetings to be communicated via the meeting facilitator. Subsequently the number of local people engaging with the new partnership arrangements more than quadrupled in the first year!

Some examples of the incredibly positive results for local people are described below:

- Local gyms agreeing to pilot quiet sessions allowing for sensory comfort and making their space more accessible, including turning off music and turning off bright lights.
- The local bus company revisiting their bus timetables as they recognised that they may not be as user-friendly as anticipated.
- Creation of a new online benefits guide.
- The Central Bedfordshire Council community assessment team has created a new questionnaire to be shared with the groups to capture their feedback to ensure that the new care assessment questions are fit for purpose.
- Concerns were raised about accessing dentists. This was then raised at the Health Inequalities Board and concerns highlighted to dental surgeries. Subsequently, a video was commissioned to explain what happens at a dentist examination.
- People felt not enough employers understood autism to support autistic people. In response a local autism charity held a free 'autism in the workplace' training session for local employers which was attended by 28 local professionals.

Central Bedfordshire Council also invited another local authority, Bedford Borough Council, to join the new partnership arrangement. This has meant local people can discuss cross-border issues and better ways of working together and this has also reduced costs to the council in commissioning the facilitation of the partnership process.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Public and professional engagement in a variety of formats/settings was key to the success of understanding what people wanted and the future design of a successful partnership arrangement.
- Really listening to local people and understanding what people want. Often small reasonable adjustments can make huge differences to people and this in turn can have an incredibly positive impact on the running of individuals' services/arrangements.
- Taking time and building up trust.
- Having senior decision-making professionals attend the Alliance Group who can instruct change and make decisions for their services.
- Clearly demonstrating to professionals how this partnership could be beneficial to their local organisation to obtain full sign-up.

What were the barriers to success?

- There was no financial incentive for local professionals to engage. The council had to explain how the process could be beneficial to their service.
- In the past, it has been difficult to engage with some organisations. The council offered professionals an opt out rather than opt in approach.
- Initially it was difficult to engage with the autistic community. The council used a variety of opportunities to engage with people including face-to-face gatherings, online activities and through local voluntary and community sector services. The council also had to build up trust with the local autistic community over time, demonstrating a genuine desire to listen and collaborate with people to really hear local autistic voices.

What were the conditions for success?

- The council had to provide an environment where people felt safe and able to be open and honest. It listened to people and created a platform where autistic people could choose where they wanted to meet (café, park, library, etc.). People can attend online so they have the freedom to choose whether to have their camera and microphone on or off.
- The council engaged with local people throughout the entire process. This built-up trust and one year on from start up, the council has more than quadrupled local engagement on an ongoing basis.

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Further information:

For information on the Central Bedfordshire Council website: [Autism | Central Bedfordshire Council](#)

For future groups and past meeting information: [Bedfordshire Autism Voice » Autism Bedfordshire](#)

Supporting people and recruitment

Although it is obvious when you think about it, the staff that are recruited to work in care and support will be expected to support (in this case) individuals with learning disabilities in the majority if not all aspects of their lives.

Linked to this is the fact that those with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), who may or may not have capacity, will be supported in all aspects of their lives including intimate personal care. The council therefore thinks it is imperative that there is co-production across all recruitment of care and support staff, and the start of giving progressive control to individuals who are going to be supported by the recruits.

Currently, prior to recruitment across the service, conversations will be held with service user groups. This is likely to be on a one-to-one basis with those who live in supported living, whereas within day centres it will be discussed with representatives from the people's council. It will be explained that the council is going out to formal recruitment and will ask who would like to be involved in the interview process.

Once a supported people panel has been established one of the staff team will support them to draw up questions for the candidates, and on the day of the interview they will be one of the panels that interviews the candidates. At the end of the process their views will be sought, and equal weighting will be given to their views.

In respect of the residential service for people with PLMD, those with capacity will peer advocate for those without, and due to the nature of the service the interview process will include interactive sessions with the people so they can gauge how each candidate presents while involved in the given activity.

The head of service recently asked for volunteers to support interviews for three new roles that were being created. This was imperative as one post related to evaluation of service quality and the others supported participation and co-production. This also sets a standard that involvement is an expectation not a token gesture. Involvement in recruitment and selection also extends to older people's settings with the same expectation of giving choice in who the council recruits to support people.

The feedback from people is that they enjoy and feel valued by being involved in the recruitment of staff at all levels, which in turn feeds into their sense of belonging and having some control over the service that should be answerable to them.

As a service it immediately demonstrates the council's values regarding co-production to all potential recruits. Anecdotally, the staff the council has spoken with who were recruited via this co-production approach said that it was the people's panel of which they were most nervous, and this was the panel that they wished to impress the most.

What was the learning that supported success?

Initially having a staff facilitator involved with the panel to support them through the process.

Trial runs with 'dummy' interviewees so that people on the panel could experience the interview process in a safe and supportive way.

Learning from each interview experience to understand what works best in terms of question order and the number of people involved.

As described above, the council is running co-production recruitment in some of the recruitment stages. However, more work needs to be done and the council is aiming to facilitate co-production:

- as part of the six-month probation period for staff
- at annual staff reviews.

The council may also, where appropriate, extend co-production to staff capability and disciplinary processes, reviewing their impact and people's feelings about example situations.

What were the barriers and conditions for success?

- The ongoing development as set out above will require changes to the organisation's policies and procedures.
- More time required for the actual interview process.
- Logistics of running and facilitating the panel and activities on the day.
- The logistics of paying for people's time and contributions.

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Making the carer's assessment more accessible to people with autism

Feedback from Bedfordshire Autism Voice Alliance showed that the council's carer's assessment was not autism friendly. Therefore, work commenced to understand what needed to change to make this document more accessible.

A group of autistic adults from the Bedfordshire Autism Voice Local Groups met to discuss the existing carer's assessment and provided feedback on how questions were phrased, making suggestions for amendments that would make this document more accessible for people with autism.

These suggestions have been discussed within Adult Social Care and Commissioning and the council is eager to ensure that amendments are implemented as suggested.

Commissioning colleagues will be discussing the proposed changes with carers in Bedfordshire to gain their views and, once a final draft is confirmed, these changes will be put forward for approval at the Practice Governance Board before implementation.

The Bedfordshire Autism Voice Local Groups have offered to review other templates such as the Care Act Assessment, Review and Support plan moving forwards.

The council is in the process of change because of this piece of work, however, there is no doubt that the suggested rewording of questions will make the carer's assessment far clearer and more accessible for everyone supported, not just those with autism.

What was the learning that supported success?

This piece of work came about because of an autistic adult who tried to complete a carer's self-assessment online. The person fed back through the Bedfordshire Autism Voice partnership arrangement that the questions were confusing and unclear, and this led to further discussions with the council.

What were the conditions for success?

- Honesty.
- Clear and open communication.
- The ability to recognise where improvements were needed.
- Empathy – understanding how language is subjective, and the possible implications different words and phrases have for different people.

What were the barriers?

- The fact that templates are used to support a wide range of people with different needs.
- Recognition that although people with autism felt that some 'pleasantries' were not required in the form, other people may appreciate these.
- Local authority processes can be lengthy and so co-produced templates and information, etc., can take a long time to be implemented.

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Getting input from SNAP (Special Needs Action Panel) Parent and Carer Forum to develop a Preparing for Adulthood Transition Operational Policy

Sharing the draft Preparing for Adulthood Transitions Operational Policy with SNAP for feedback, comments and suggestions to ensure the policy is clear and keeps young people and their families at the heart of transitions.

A draft Preparing for Adulthood Transitions Operational Policy was drafted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic but was not completed or signed off. It was acknowledged that this policy needed to be finalised and signed off to ensure that the pathways for transitions were clear and that both professionals and families knew what to expect.

The draft policy was updated to reflect a recent restructure and then, during quarterly meetings with SNAP, it was discussed that it would be beneficial to gain feedback, comments and suggestions from parents and carers of young people who have or who will be transitioning.

SNAP distributed the policy for comment and feedback. The council then arranged a meeting between the Operations Manager and the Young Adult and Independent Living Team Manager, the SNAP director, and a parent to examine the policy.

There was a lot of feedback from parents and carers in terms of making the policy clear for them as well as professionals. This session led to some changes in language and elaboration on some aspects to make the process explicit for parents.

Once amendments were made, this policy was shared with SNAP and distributed once again. Once all parties were happy, it was submitted to the Head of Service/Assistant Director and has been put to Practice Governance Board for sign off.

The work will ensure that all young people, families and professionals are clear on the process of young people transitioning into Adult Social Care.

The council is confident that with SNAPs input, the policy is written in a way that young people and their carers will understand, and this will hopefully provide assurance during a very unsettling time in their lives. It will also enable young people and their families to hold professionals to account where due process is not being followed.

What was the learning that supported success?

It was invaluable to get the opinions of parents and carers in terms of the language used in this policy. Professionals can use language which is unclear to those accessing services and phrases that are not necessarily commonly used in everyday life.

What were the conditions for success?

- Honesty.
- Clear and open communication.
- The ability to recognise where improvements were needed.
- Empathy – understanding how language is subjective, and the possible implications different words and phrases have for different people.

What were the barriers?

- Time limitations meant that parents and carers were given limited time to provide feedback.
- The meeting held with SNAP only included the director and one parent. Although the parent brought feedback to represent all members of the forum, it would have been better to have included more people.

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Co-production of an Adult Carers' Strategy using the Working Together for Change process

The Working Together for Change process enabled commissioners, frontline workers, community providers and carers to come together to develop priorities for the carer strategy to be developed.

The process was truly co-produced, allowing for all voices to be heard equally and all feedback from carers to be considered. The group who worked on the strategy have been invited to meet annually to review progress and hold the council to account on progress against the strategy.

Carers are invited to quarterly workshops which are used to:

- provide information on services available and their eligibility
- listen to carers about issues they have been having and work through how these could be resolved
- discuss ideas for future support and transformation for carers
- improve relationships between carers and social workers.

In producing the strategy, feedback from carers on three questions were analysed by the group:

1. What is working well?
2. What is not working well?
3. What is important to the future?

The responses to this were reviewed by the group of carers, commissioners, frontline workers and services working with carers. Themes were established from the responses, root causes established and action plans for change were drawn up. As a result of this the carers' strategy was developed.

Following the co-production of the carers' strategy the workshops were used to discuss the priorities from the strategy for the work programme, and how these might work. This has resulted in a 5-year programme prioritised according to carer needs. The work programme continues to be shared with carers along with updates on progress, allowing for continual co-production and feedback.

The Adult Carers' Strategy now has a five-year work programme attached to it, with changes including additional support services, reviews of information and advice and reviews of carers' assessments in progress now.

As it is a five-year programme the full outcomes are yet to be seen, however, there have already been some positive changes:

- A new digital carer support service has been commissioned that sits alongside the existing carers' support offer, enabling carers to access low level support when it suits them and in a way that suits them. This includes a carers' allowance eligibility checker.
- A review of carers' assessments is underway with carers.
- The council's carers web pages are being reviewed with input from carers.

What was the learning that supported success?

Staff were trained in the 'Working Together for Change' process prior to the group workshops being held. As a result, carers have now been trained and have been involved in leading similar co-production processes in other areas of work across the council. The training and learning informed the process to ensure the continued co-production. The carers' workshops were an outcome of the Working Together for Change process.

What were the barriers and conditions for success?

- Ensuring the balance of people attending the workshops included carers, staff and other agencies as well as groups that are less likely to engage.
- Ensuring decision makers are involved and, in the workshops, making sure they are supportive of the outcomes following the process.

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[Working Together for Change \(imagineactandsucceed.co.uk\)](http://imagineactandsucceed.co.uk)

incLOOsive – collaborative development of ‘Changing Places’ toilets with local people

The Social Care, Health and Housing directorate at the council have adopted a co-production framework relating to adults. This charter defines what the council interprets as co-production, including defining why co-production is important, what the council wants to achieve and how it is intended to make it real.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic disrupting activity, the first meaningfully co-produced strategy focused on unpaid carers was successfully completed in 2022, giving the council the confidence to continue to embed good practice across the directorate.

Whilst the approach to co-production is embryonic, the commitment includes investing in training and success is determined by a consistent application of ‘I’ and ‘We’ statements:

‘I’ statements – how people feel when co-production is working well:

- I am valued for the contribution I make to my community.
- I am supported by people who see me as a unique person with strengths, abilities and aspirations.
- I am treated with respect and dignity.
- I have opportunities to help share the services the council provides.

‘We’ statements – what organisations and their people need to do to make sure actual experience lives up to the ‘I’ statements:

- We work with people as equal partners and combine our respective knowledge and experience to support joint decision making.
- We work in partnership with others.
- We look for ways to involve people in their communities, so they feel included and valued for their contribution.
- We have a ‘can do’ approach which focuses on what matters to people.

The council identified a deficit in the provision of Changing Places toilets locally while developing a Market Position Statement (unpublished) with a group of people with lived experience of physical disability. Conversations highlighted the limitations and inequalities imposed on people attempting to live an ordinary life, who do not have access to the basic universal need to use a toilet when, for example, out for a meal, shopping or enjoying a day out.

Initially, the council specified Changing Places toilets in new capital construction projects and, drawing on adult and children’s social services, reached out to local people to invite identification of priority locations and key criteria to steer development of new changing places facilities. The council has collaborated closely with local people to ensure facilities meet their requirements, incorporating lived experience directly within projects.

Successful bids to central government funding to install three Changing Places toilets has also unlocked the council's own capital funding to develop additional facilities, with a vision inspired by lived experience, to never be more than ten-minutes' drive from a Changing Places toilet in Central Bedfordshire. The core group of 'activists' is small but growing and is connected to a wider network of parents, families, groups and individuals exerting influence across the council to make visible the people often absent from the spaces and places that contribute to living a full life. Co-production in this area has built cohesion, trust and confidence, enabling the council collectively to raise its game in the fields of equality, diversity and inclusion.

It is fair to say that the council has not always enjoyed entirely productive relationships with local groups established to hold them to account. The simple act of reaching out and initiating a conversation was met positively by a key, local, family-focused network; any initial scepticism quickly evaporated as a way of working was established with mutual trust and confidence.

Immediate benefits include those venues previously considered 'out of bounds' are now accessible, spawning opportunities, for example, such as volunteering and work experience for adults with learning disabilities (drawing on council day opportunity services) at venues with newly installed Changing Places toilets. These are small but life-changing improvements.

Most significantly, lived experience is driving the approach in a relational more equal manner than previously. The lived experience is enabling collective development and family networks are now involved in shaping the design and delivery of a building-based short breaks service for adults with profound, multiple learning and physical disabilities.

What was the learning that supported success?

- National research, based on the priorities of people with lived experience, was influential in facilitating initial conversation with local people.
- Learning from initial conversations coupled with training relating to accessibility including specifications and requirements of Changing Places.
- Training and mentoring in techniques of co-production, commissioned from specialists in the sector, provided the council with a simple roadmap to embark on positive risk taking to initiate activity.

What were the barriers?

- Historically, limited opportunity/infrastructure for the voice of lived experience to influence policy and practice.
- Lack of policy, practice and specialist knowledge to prioritise accessibility other than to minimum standards.
- Multiple competing priorities offering limited capacity for meaningful engagement.
- Fear of activity becoming adversarial.

What were the enablers?

- Ability to hear and act on local people's priorities.
- Deep commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion from key individuals.
- Leadership commitment to co-production.
- Culture of positive risk taking.
- Ability to mitigate power inequalities to seed conditions, enabling trust and confidence to grow.

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Home from Home using Working Together for Change

A co-produced programme to continuously improve and enhance services directed by the people that use them.

A Home from Home peer advocate group assists in appraising the quality and strengths of the support provided within care settings and services (Learning Disabilities and Older People). The group consists of current residents, tenants and people who have lived experience of in-house services.

Periodically throughout the year people have the opportunity and are supported to visit other Central Bedfordshire Council services (care settings/day ops and short-term support) to meet with those who either reside there or access services to gain insights into what works and what could be done better.

Those that participate are in effect peer advocates raising the voice of people and supporting inclusion and control over how their care home community operates.

The council captures the feedback from both the visitors and the residents and uses this to deliver improvements. Peer-to-peer conversations are key to the success of the programme as genuine independent feedback is received and people are often more open with their peers. This process negates the need for traditional surveys which can often be influenced by the staff member supporting completion.

Working Together for Change is about professionals supporting change, not just the delivery of it. The council, for example, has co-produced initial trials within learning disability services led by a resident who has also completed peer advocacy training and has attended a local university to coach student social workers on how people want to be supported. This has led to an in-person 'talking survey' whereby this individual met people in supported living tenancies to capture their views on where they live, the support they receive, their goals, outcomes and achievements. This led to improved conversations with people, better support planning and support for gaining transparent feedback to improve services.

A natural extension of the pilot was to re-create a similar process within the older persons' residential settings. This is in its infancy stage but is already providing rich information about what people want and the improvements that can be made. The benefits of these visits are two-fold as the peer advocates report they enjoy seeing other services and talking to new people and similarly the receiving home residents look forward to meeting the people and often have tea and cake ready for their chats with new friends and peers.

An unexpected positive of the home from home visits was creating new friendships and social experiences for all parties. What people tell the council is imperative to instigate change and service improvements that people want, not what the council thinks people want.

The council has recently advertised and recruited to two people participation posts and a key aim for these people is to roll out the co-production strategy and create a wider network of peer advocates and carers/families. The council is excited about the future in terms of people being at the heart of all that is done and the commitment to shared decision-making.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Peer advocates – the in-person survey experience. A person who lives in a residential service for people with PMLD volunteered to meet with tenants from supported living services to gain their views as opposed to the traditional paper survey. This led to the Home from Home expansion project in older people's services.
- Basing the approach on models such as creating person-centred teams and person-centred planning .
- Influenced by TLAP 'I' and 'We' statements.

What were the conditions for success?

- Bringing together those involved in delivering support with those who are being supported, and fostering dialogue, openness and transparency to build better relationships and trust.
- Creating an environment where people are made to feel comfortable in expressing themselves honestly.
- Day opportunities – developing an offer that is based on what individuals are telling the council and what the council observes from their interactions. At the same time, offering activities and experiences which will broaden and enrich lives.
- Independent support for Home to Home – Participation Lead and Officer appointed.
- Home from Home extended to other service areas and providers including the external market.

What were the barriers?

- Co-ordination of engagement activities across the services including how they feed into wider government activities.
- 'You said, we did ...' is achievable at a local level but the council may struggle with how to use this to shape the wider system to embed outcomes for people and communities.
- Hearing the voice of the individual with PMLD.
- Hearing the voice of the individual on their dementia journey.
- Changing culture embracing the power swap.

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Virtual day offer

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions necessitated the temporary suspension of the council-run day centres for older people and for individuals with learning disabilities.

Central Bedfordshire were concerned that vulnerable individuals would become isolated and lonely, so discussions were held with people about how they would like to be supported during this time.

One of the suggestions was a day offer that they could receive in their own home. Working with this group of people the idea of the virtual day offer came to fruition.

What started in 2020 and continues today, is a popular virtual offer that individuals can join in from the comfort of their own home either on their own, with a family carer or as a group. The virtual offer runs three sessions a day, five days a week, and the sessions range from show to tell, music and song to activities such as cookery, arts and crafts as well as live streaming for one-off events.

Originally when set up it was the staff team who set the agenda with the idea that this would evolve into being people-led, and this is what has happened. Through feedback sessions the council have learnt what sessions individuals would like and are very proud to say that people with lived experience are delivering a number of the weekly sessions on the platform.

From a co-production perspective delivery of the virtual day service has evolved over time with continuous involvement and participation of the supported people who initiated the idea leading the development and service achievements. What was planned to support a small group of people to avoid isolation is now a network that often has well over one hundred participants each week.

The idea was led by supported people from the start. Individuals were encouraged to give their views, ideas and feedback in relation to what was good and what could be done differently and supported to develop the service to meet their needs and aspirations. These conversations are ongoing, and a measure of success of this element of co-production is growing the number of individuals who attend, which demonstrates that the offer is on the right track.

The virtual day offer has become a conduit for positive change in the following areas:

- Development of friendships – evidence shows that one of the concerns of both older people and individuals with learning disabilities is social isolation. Having this offer five days a week means that they have the opportunity for social interaction with others in a supportive and life-affirming space. The council regularly receives feedback from people who say that they attend sessions that they would not normally be interested in for social interaction and a chance to see their new friendship group.
- Supporting individuals to develop their self-belief and confidence when they have started to plan and implement the sessions they run.

- Developing information technology skills.
- Vastly accelerated modernised day offer beyond the original planned transformation timescales.

What was the learning that supported this?

- Learning a new digital approach to service delivery was an initial learning curve.
- Enhanced information technology and communication skills
- Reaching out to volunteers to facilitate sessions, for example, one social worker regularly does a sing-along session.
- Everyone's skills contributed to a wide variety of session content being offered.
- The team started with a clear mindset of empowering people to determine what the content and delivery of the service should look like.

What were the barriers and conditions for success?

- The ability to think outside the box to create new opportunities.
- Willing volunteers and participants working together for better outcomes for people.
- Listening and in turn feeling heard.
- No idea is a bad idea and together we can work it out.

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Increasing employment opportunities for adults with a disability

As part of the transformation programme, Meaningful Lives Matter (MLM), the council has worked together in partnership on a number of initiatives to support adults with a learning disability or who are autistic to gain and sustain meaningful employment.

Essex County Council are currently developing their framework for co-production to ensure consistency in their approach. They are focusing on how co-production shapes the service design and delivery but also how co-production and lived experience forms the key tenet of front-line practice. This framework will include the following:

- A clear position on reward and recognition for people involved in co-production.
- A consistent set of tools and expectations of how and when to co-produce work.
- Training for all on co-production and implementation of the framework.
- Ensuring governance decisions ask about how the service or policy was co-produced.
- Exploring how co-production and lived experience feeds into the quality assurance framework.
- Ensuring people feel that assessments and reviews are co-produced and regularly seeking feedback on interactions with the council.

It should be noted that this is to provide consistency in the approach across adult social care, and what follows is just one example of an approach taken by disabilities commissioning.

Essex Council had begun to engage with young people and adults around the things that made their life meaningful, what they hoped for and what was missing (Great Expectations report and visits to adults accessing day centres).

Following on from this, Essex County Council hosted the 100-day challenge, supported by Nesta. This was an opportunity to bring together a group of people with an interest in doing things differently to test ideas to support the aspirations of adults with disability. This included adults with disabilities, family members, Essex County Council colleagues, health colleagues, local provider organisations and support teams.

Teams explored ideas, co-designed solutions and prototyped things in the real world. There were 35 active team members and 36 organisations involved; 26 people with lived experience helped design and test ideas; 300 people with learning disabilities and autism and family members engaged in workshops and events. One of the key themes from this process was access to meaningful, paid employment in a sector that an individual was interested in working in.

Throughout the 100-day challenge, a number of adults obtained paid roles and this acted as evidence that adults accessing day centres could do more with the right support. Essex Cares Limited, the council's strategic partner, were part of the 100-day challenge and worked together on co-designing a radical new system and contracting arrangement that actively promoted employment, independence, positive outcomes – all the things that people told the council were important to them. The contract was a radical move towards supporting people to progress out of traditional day centres towards employment opportunities where possible. Adults were also involved in the specification design, key performance indicators development and the tender process to ensure their voice was consistently heard and they had equal influence. As a result, 288 people have gained employment through the contract with Essex Carers Limited.

Since the inception of this new way of working between Essex County Council and Essex Cares Limited, follow-up insight has been gathered by undertaking research on the impact of employment for those who have successfully obtained employment. The council has also worked with the Collaborative Essex Forum (peer group) to check and challenge ideas. This has allowed the council to understand from people the remaining barriers to employment and develop an additional contract which will seek to fill these gaps. People told the council their employers needed more support and families told the council they needed support to work through the wider implications of the world of employment. The new contract will deliver a one-stop shop for local businesses and a family support model. Adults and families are supported with all stages of the tender process and this new contract commenced on 1 August 2023.

What was the learning that supported success?

Since the end of the 100-day challenge, Revealing Reality and Healthwatch Essex have completed employment-focused research studies that have supported the council in developing the new contract.

What were the conditions for success?

- Support from Nesta and the whole 100 Day Challenge team
- Early endorsement from senior leadership.
- Partnership with Essex Cares Limited on taking concept to delivery.

What were the barriers?

- Maintaining momentum after the 100-day challenge.
- Timescales and governance are always tricky.

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Redesign of Direct Payment Support offer

Essex County Council worked with a broad range of people to co-produce the vision and principles for personalisation and then redesign the Direct Payment Support offer to ensure people were given the right information and support to get the maximum benefits of taking a Direct Payment.

Essex County Council are currently developing their framework for co-production to ensure consistency in approach. They are focusing on how co-production shapes the service design and delivery but also how co-production and lived experience forms the key tenet of front line practice. This framework will include:

- a clear position on reward and recognition for people involved in co-production
- a consistent set of tools and expectations of how and when to co-produce work
- training for all on co-production and the implementation of the framework
- ensuring governance decisions ask about how the service or policy was co-produced
- exploring how co-production and lived experience feeds into the quality assurance framework.
- ensuring people feel that assessments and reviews are co-produced and regularly seeking feedback on interactions with the council.

Much of this is already in place and the council have their existing model, Collaborate Essex.

Collaborate Essex supports the council approach to co-production through four key elements:

- Essex Residents Panel – this is a database of residents who are interested in specific topics and services and who are willing to be part of engagement and co-production activity.
- A county-wide pan-disability forum facilitated by Healthwatch Essex. Forum members liaise with people in their communities, undertaking surveys and focus groups on specific topics and then collating and feeding the information back to senior stakeholders across health and social care. The group has implemented improvements in accessible information across health and social care, created a marketing campaign to highlight the hidden impacts of Covid-19 on people with sensory impairments and created a training package for bus drivers highlighting the needs of people with different disabilities.
- Local peer support groups for people with learning disabilities facilitated by Summit and Batias. There are over 50 groups across Essex that meet monthly and have over 500 regular members. The group has covered topics such as staying safe online, learning disabilities health checks and cervical screening. They have also helped individuals into employment, to access benefits and increase their friendships within their community.

- Task and Finish Group focusing on specific services or policies – this is where the bulk of co-production takes place as part of the service redesign and commissioning process.

For the Direct Support Service Redesign, Essex Council were aware that support offered to people who received a direct payment could be improved. The council regularly received complaints that the support was not sufficient nor of a high enough quality; the frontline teams had lost confidence in direct payments as they were not convinced people would get the correct support and the council had received a poor internal audit highlighting failings in how they were administering direct payments. The council, therefore, took the time to listen to people to really understand what the issues were and work with direct payment recipients and other stakeholders including the Direct Payment Support Service provider, care and support providers, frontline practitioners, health colleagues and other commissioners. Essex Council commissioned Think Local Act Personal to host a series of workshops to help the council understand what good self-directed support looked like. The participants agreed the topics and agendas to put co-production at the heart of the sessions. In total five initial workshops were held throughout 2020. The first workshop was an initial workshop to build relationships between the participants. The other four workshops focused on:

- 1 developing a shared vision for personalisation, values and principles that would need to be observed to deliver the vision. This created a set of 'I'/'We' Statements that people should be able to observe, and that practitioners, commissioners and providers should implement
- 2 what support was needed to manage a direct payment effectively
- 3 Self-Directed Support – reducing process, improving communication and increasing choice and control
- 4 what a new Direct Payment Support Service (DPSS) could look like and how the council could develop the market for personal assistants (PAs) in Essex.

The attendance for these sessions ranged between 25 and 40 people and there was usually an even split of people with lived experience and professionals. The council wrote out to all direct payment recipients to offer them the opportunity to be part of the workshops. These workshops were incredibly insightful and provided useful feedback and areas for improvement. To consolidate this learning the council held a co-production week where they invited all participants and other key stakeholders to go through the findings and develop areas for improvement. The key messages that arose from this work were:

- people wanted more support and more consistent support
- people wanted real choice
- people wanted support throughout the lifetime of their direct payment rather than at the start
- there was a real need for independent advice and guidance on benefits and responsibilities around taking a direct payment.

From this work, the council created a co-production group to initially help redesign and recommission a new Direct Payment Support offer, and again they wrote to direct payment recipients to invite them to join at this point. The group was made up of ten people with lived experience of disability, representative groups, direct payment support providers and frontline practitioners. This group spent the next 12 months designing the support offer and developing the specifications for the main service to deliver the offer. The group were also involved in evaluating the tenders and supporting the mobilisation of the new service. The council have been able to deliver on the core requirements highlighted throughout the process within the new suite of support commissioned. The council believe this work has made the service design process stronger and it is leading to improvements in the support offered to people who receive a direct payment.

The new service went live on 1 July 2023, so it is too early to fully quantify the benefits. However, the planned benefits are:

- people using social care support and their front-line practitioners have greater confidence in direct payments and the support available to maximise their use
- increased uptake of direct payments
- people finding it easier to recruit and retain a PA
- people having greater choice of support and services available to them
- people being given the right support, at the right time, to ensure they get the maximum benefit from their direct payment.

What was the learning that supported success?

- The facilitation, support and challenge provided by Think Local Act Personal and the National Co-production Advisory Group helped to keep the council on track and ensure they had a strong set of principles to work from.
- The benefits resulting from investing time in building trust and relationships with the participants. This meant everyone had the confidence to raise their point of view in the knowledge that this would be listened to and respected.

What were the barriers?

- Timescales and governance – the timescales for decision making and procurement processes add additional time pressure which impacts upon the time to build relationships and discuss ideas and options.
- Maintaining consistent engagement throughout the process – it was hard to keep everyone engaged throughout the process to ensure the council was able to make progress and not have to keep going over the same ground.

What were the conditions for success?

- Take time to build relationships – this was particularly important. When the council found that they could not achieve their original vision, they were able to continue and redesign the service model to achieve the aims because there was sufficient trust. Participants knew that this was not about ignoring the feedback but due to issues that were outside of the council's control.
- Willingness to listen and accept criticism – the council deliberately sought people who had negative experiences as they felt they had the biggest desire to see the service improve.
- Be open and honest about what can be changed. Discussions regarding co-production often refer to a 'blank page' but there is never a blank page as councils have statutory duties, financial and legal responsibilities and policy positions. It is important to be clear about this from the outset so everyone can spend time focusing on the things that can be changed and achieved.
- External facilitation – the council found having the initial phase externally facilitated built trust in the process because the council was there as an equal partner rather than leading the conversation. It also freed up the councils' commissioners to genuinely listen and engage rather than focusing on the process.

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Holding up a mirror to the Integrated Community Equipment Services (ICELS)

Engagement with people with lived experience and prescribers to shape a new ICELS service and continuously improve it over the contract lifetime.

The council has embedded a lived experience forum in the ICELS service specification and contract. There is an expectation that these volunteers will act as a mirror and will be an integral part of continuously improving the service offer. The council has five equipment ambassadors who will be having their first meeting with the services provider and defining some terms of reference in the Autumn of 2023. The first 'knotty' problem to work through is from a person who accesses care and support who has asked why she cannot order her own like-for-like shower chair seat replacement directly on the equipment ordering system. The council has included a lived experience item quarterly on the contract review governance board agenda to ensure they regularly hear the lived experience voice. They have conducted a prescriber satisfaction survey in month one of the new services and this will be repeated in month three. They have used the themes to help prioritise capacity such as focusing resources on the speed that adaptations are fitted.

One example of work is faster collection of equipment, especially when there is a bereavement. In preparing to tender for a new outsourced ICELS service the council conducted a range of engagement countywide with people with lived experience, their carers/families and with prescribers across the system to help shape the new service.

The council heard repeatedly that collection of equipment, especially when there is a bereavement, was too slow. The council heard from religious communities who stressed the importance of fast funeral services, and they helped the council to understand why they needed equipment to be removed quickly. The council also heard that sometimes families wanted to have the choice and control over returning smaller items themselves. The council often received complaints that it was taking too long.

Following feedback, the collection key performance indicator timescale was changed from 15 service days to collect, clean and put the item back on the shelf for reuse to 7 service days and the council added an option for the family or the prescriber to be able to further expedite and make the collection same or next day if required. There is also a drop-off facility at the new depot.

What was the learning that supported success?

The council used a key performance indicator of the average activity timescale which told them they were often taking longer than 15 service days. By extending the service operating days from 5 to 6 days and by more than halving the collection timescale, they have significantly improved the user experience. Complaints about overdue collections have also reduced.

What were some of the barriers?

- Having to wait for a new service provider to be able to improve timescales.
- Outdated ways of working and lack of appetite to change from incumbent.

What were some of the conditions for success?

- Researching and benchmarking other services to understand industry norms.
- Being ambitious in the ask of the new provider.
- Digital technology investment in a live and transparent ordering system.

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Refresh of the Essex All Age Autism Partnership

Using the Working Together for Change approach, Essex County Council and partners improved the delivery of the All-Age Autism Strategy via the All-Age Autism Partnership.

Essex County Council are currently developing their framework for co-production to ensure consistency in approach. They are focusing on how co-production shapes the service design and delivery but also how co-production and lived experience forms the key tenet of front line practice. This framework will include:

- a clear position on reward and recognition for people involved in co-production
- a consistent set of tools and expectations of how and when to co-produce work
- training for all on co-production and the implementation of the framework
- ensuring governance decisions ask about how the service or policy was co-produced
- exploring how co-production and lived experience feeds into the quality assurance framework
- ensuring people feel that assessments and reviews are co-produced and regularly seeking feedback on interactions with the council.

For this piece of work, Essex County Council adapted the Working Together for Change approach. This was part funded by Essex County Council and part funded by ADASS East of England to increase co-production capacity and activity. This was one of two rounds delivered. A number of Essex County Council staff and adults with lived experience undertook the training and co-facilitated the sessions. Since the original sessions, the Working Together for Change-trained commissioning staff have led a further Working Together for Change process internally for the wider commissioning team to better understand what works well, what is challenging in terms of commissioning team roles and how we can change positively together.

One example of the approach was refreshing the delivery approach of the Essex All Age Autism Partnership. Essex County Council co-hosted the Working Together for Change workshops and invited adults with lived experience, families, wider circles of support, local organisations, colleagues from Integrated Care Partnerships and internal teams. The council asked what is working well within the partnership, what is not working so well, and how could we work together to improve things? A clear wish list emerged to support with planning for the future. The council also asked people if they had seen any impact of the work of the partnership.

The Working Together for Change process has eight steps:

1. Prepare
2. Collect
3. Theme
4. Understand
5. Identify success
6. Plan
7. Implement
8. Review

One of the key areas that came out of the process for the partnership to consider was a lack of independently facilitated co-production. This meant lots of activity was reliant on Essex County Council leading and facilitating, which was making progress slow and leading to an imbalance of dynamics. Essex County Council took forward this recommendation to release a mini-tender opportunity for a co-production partner to take forward some of the other priorities following the Working Together for Change processes, including communication, bureaucracy and transitions.

The provider was appointed in summer 2023 and is in the process of employing autistic people to co-deliver this contract. The contract focuses on building co-production task and finish groups to help deliver on the other priorities identified by the original Working Together for Change process. The council is looking forward to seeing the ideas develop further and is already seeing real opportunities for engagement (and employment) to be created.

What was the learning that supported success?

- The council learnt a lot going through the working together for change process. It has found it difficult to drive forward all the actions in the partnership because the balance wasn't quite right. The council knew that this should not be driven by the council alone, so it was reassuring to hear that others also felt a different approach was needed.
- The Working Together for Change facilitation training that some of the team undertook.
- All the insights gained through the initial steps of the Working Together for Change process have been considered when mobilising the co-production partner and will feed into the development of working groups.

What are some of the barriers and conditions for success?

- Focusing with the Working Together for Change process on a slightly more strategic/abstract concept such as partnerships lead to some challenges in adapting the approach slightly. Initially this slowed the work down, but the team overcame this.
- Recognising the need to support wellbeing throughout the process, the council created a safe space where people could dial into if they needed to throughout the workshops. The facilitators knew there were lots of different opinions and competing priorities. The safe space meant the council could stay on topic, support everyone to feel heard and produce solutions together which are representative of a range of experience.

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Co-production of Mental Health Supported Accommodation using Working Together for Change

Current plans to recommission and expand the mental health supported accommodation provision has started with using 'Working Together for Change' methodology.

Milton Keynes City Council is at the start of its journey using the Working Together for Change methodology to co-produce its mental health supported accommodation. The council has completed face-to-face interviews with people in the current commissioned service and engaged with staff and families to understand what works well, what does not work so well and what the vision is for the future accommodation. Workshops for the next stage will take place in September. People with lived experience will be involved in the future, whether this is to give feedback on the new specification, contribute to market engagement or evaluation of tender responses. The council will look for feedback on newly commissioned provision ongoing.

As stated, the council is at the beginning of the co-production for this project, but the approach has been adapted to suit the people being interacted with, using both individual and group face-to-face sessions.

Feedback received so far will help to shape the type of accommodation and support commissioned. The council is now aware of what is important to people who access services and support, for example, the type of accommodation and where it is located.

What was the learning that supported success?

Working Together for Change training and facilitation training to be completed at the end of August 2023.

What were the barriers?

- The relationship between Milton Keynes City Council and the people who access care and support in terms of trust.

What were the conditions for success?

- Clear communication of providers to support and encourage people in their service.
- Offering remuneration to those taking part in workshops.
- Adapting the approach to suit people's requirements.

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Improving support to carers

The pilot is an ongoing one started in December 2021 to review how Milton Keynes City Council supports carers, starting with in-house provision. The project began with the carers' assessment (now called the carers' conversation). It then moved to the support on offer to carers who have had a carers' conversation and then to working with carers in relation to commissioned services.

The following approaches have been utilised:

- Face-to-face meetings – the first consultation was held in October 2022 and focused on carers' conversations (assessment) and a new offer for carers including a £240 direct payment, support from Mobilise and MyTime.
- Online survey.
- Attending carers' group meetings.
- An event page, where details of new events are publicised as well as feedback relating to past events.

In 2021, Sortified began a review of carers' assessments in Milton Keynes. The review included consultation with carers, practitioners and other stakeholders. The report included recommendations on improving the pathway, making carers' assessments more person centred and improving the Milton Keynes City carers offer.

A survey in December 2022 helped to determine the Milton Keynes City Council priorities. At the consultation events in October and November 2022, carers agreed on the following:

- Carers' conversation – a simple discussion with carers. The notes were in free text and just a few pages. The pilot was launched in December 2022.
- Carers agreed to provide feedback on their experience directly to Milton Keynes City Council or via Carers Milton Keynes (the commissioned service). Most feedback was via Carers Milton Keynes and three carers contacted commissioning directly.

As a result of the consultation, the council introduced a direct payment of £240. The council also held a pilot with Mobilise to provide online support. Carers' conversations has helped to make the offer to carers more relevant. The direct payment of £240 means carers can determine what they spend it on.

What was the learning that supported success?

Kirklees came to the ADASS East Carers Network to present on their work in relation to carers' assessments which was helpful.

What were the conditions for success?

- Allowing sufficient time.
- Agreeing the best approach to ensure different representation.
- Offering remuneration.
- Providing feedback.
- Honesty about what the project can deliver including any challenges.

What were the challenges?

- Engaging with carers who were not known to services.
- Building trust.
- Managing so everyone has an equal voice.

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Overview of Norfolk's approach to co-production and its principles for all case studies provided.

The Norfolk County Council approach to co-production is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Clear** – be clear about engagement and the nature of engagement.
- **Open** – be open and transparent about engagement. Publish a rolling programme of engagement, highlighting key activities and being honest about any constraints.
- **Feedback** – communicate the outcomes of engagement to those who took part and more widely. Respect the privacy of people who may have shared their lived experience with the council.
- **Ongoing dialogue** – aim to have an ongoing dialogue with people who access services, partners and stakeholders, rather than one-off events or discussions.
- **Valuing people's time** – reimburse people for their time in a fair way when engaging with the council.

The value of co-production has been heavily promoted within the Adult Social Services Department. During co-production week, all staff were invited to attend two in-person sessions. These sessions provided information about what successful co-production entails and highlighted important resources.

The resources included the co-production checklist, training (accessible to all staff) created by the Making It Real Board (Independent User Reference Group) as well as a forward plan charting the main activities in this field. They detail the importance of co-production, emphasise how it can be undertaken successfully and champion existing knowledge and examples of good practice. These resources have been repeatedly highlighted in departmental communication.

The Engagement and Co-production Officer Group, comprising of council officers, monitors and supports the delivery of effective co-production within the department.

It is the council's ambition to collaborate with people to design and deliver services which understand and invest in what matters to them. In doing so, the council hopes that this approach will help people in Norfolk to live the lives they want to lead.

Further information:

[Celebration of co-production week in Norfolk](#)

Designing an Early Help Adult Autism Social Care Service

On designing an Early Help Autism Social Care Services, the work identified what early help support autistic adults would benefit from to prevent, reduce and delay longer-term social care needs. Moreover, by recognising what is most important to autistic adults, this will inform the design and implementation of the service from September 2023 onwards.

Engagement and co-production were essential to the work and entailed the following:

- Co-producing the design of a survey with autistic people, parents and carers. The survey aimed to gauge people's (16 years and older) ideas for the design of a new social care support service for autistic adults.
- Wide launch of the co-produced survey. It was available online and there were face-to-face events held around Norfolk to enable people to share their ideas.
- Once the feedback from the survey was collated and analysed, this was shared with the Norfolk Autism Partnership who were then able to provide information about this on their website. Information was also shared on the Norfolk County Council website.
- Feedback from the survey was used to design the specification for the new service.
- The procurement for the new service is due to start in August 2023 and people with autism will take part in the interview process.
- It is planned that the new service will start from September 2023. Engagement with autistic people will continue to review the implementation of the service.

Co-producing with autistic people, their families and carers from the beginning ensured they were heavily engaged throughout the process of planning a new social care support service. The feedback received was central to the design of the new service. This service will then reflect the views of those who may come to use it which will have a beneficial effect on its utility and people's experiences of it.

The Autism Partnership has been involved throughout the process. An ongoing dialogue has been maintained through the continuous sharing of feedback and information. Next year, the council will work with the Partnership to review the new autism strategy.

Learning from this approach will be overseen by the Engagement and Co-production Officer Group. This learning will inform future co-production undertaken within the Adult Social Services Department.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Commitment to the 'Think Local Act Personal' ladder of participation and an understanding that true co-production starts from the beginning of the planning process.
- Learning from feedback received from the Norfolk Autism Partnership in relation to the Norfolk All Age Autism Strategy informed planning for how this engagement should be undertaken.

What were the conditions and for success?

- Staff awareness of the concept of co-production and how to apply it.

What were the challenges?

- Limited Adult Social Services Department resources to execute better co-production.
- Difficulty in identifying and reaching the people to co-produce with.
- Issues surrounding involvement fees (the rate and nature of reimbursement).
- Siloed and duplication of working with the department.
- Reliance on providers for feedback on their services.
- Information was sometimes not shared or was disseminated in inaccessible ways.
- Boards and alliance were not always fully representative. Accountability could also be unclear.

Contact: assd.engagement&coproduction@norfolk.gov.uk

Further information:

[Co-production and engagement – Norfolk County Council](#)

[Ladder-of-co-production.pdf \(thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk\)](#)

[Making it Real – Think Local Act Personal](#)

Developing an ethical framework

An ethical framework sets out the standards and principles that will determine how Norfolk County Council does business. This is a system-wide project which will initially focus on delivering against the recommendations from the Safeguarding Adults Review into the deaths at Cawston Park Hospital.

The framework will be co-produced to ensure that experts by experience play a central role in its design and commissioning. To support co-production, a series of in-person and virtual workshops and events have been held. These have included learning disability, autism, carers and provider forums. The engagement sessions have been led by Curators of Change who are experts in creating organisational change from the perspective of what matters to people. This led to an enhanced awareness of experts by experience views regarding the commissioning of services.

It is anticipated that the new ethical framework will be a guiding vision, rooted in ethical considerations of promoting good lives well lived, protecting the wider economic, social and environmental wellbeing of a local area. This will help shape actions for the council to embed these principles through commissioning approaches, contracts and operations.

Although the initial focus will be on people with learning disabilities and/or autism, much of what emanates from this work will be applicable to other sectors.

What was the learning that supported success?

- The recommendations of the Safeguarding Adults Review into the deaths at Cawston Park Hospital.
- The expertise of Curators of Change.
- Previous co-production work undertaken by the department.

What were the conditions and for success?

- Staff awareness of the concept of co-production and how to apply it.

What were the challenges?

- Limited Adult Social Services Department resources to execute better co-production.
- Difficulty in identifying and reaching the people to co-produce with.
- Issues surrounding involvement fees (the rate and nature of reimbursement).
- Siloed and duplication of working within the department.
- Reliance on providers for feedback on their services.
- Information is sometimes not shared or gets disseminated in inaccessible ways.
- Boards and alliance are not always fully representative; accountability can also be unclear.

Contact: assd.engagement&coproduction@norfolk.gov.uk

Further information:

[Co-production and engagement – Norfolk County Council](#)

Developing a learning disability strategy

As part of the feedback received from the previous strategy, it was identified that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding about what had been achieved and what still needed to be put in place.

With the involvement of Making It Real Board (Independent User Reference Group), an engagement approach was agreed. At five Learning Disability Locality Groups across Norfolk, people were asked about what they thought should be included in the new strategy. These meetings were facilitated by autism spectrum disorder (ASD) Helping Hands, a charity with over 30 years' experience of supporting autistic children and adults, which will be involved in assimilating the feedback from the meetings to influence the strategy. A further survey, distributed electronically and physically, has been distributed to a wider audience.

A draft plan drawn up in collaboration with the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board to support people with learning disabilities and their families will be reviewed by the Learning Disability Partnership Board which includes experts by experience. Once agreed, the strategy will be published on the Partnership Board website.

Through this work there has been a greater understanding of what people expect and desire from services and this will enable these to be more reflective of people's needs and wishes. This will have a beneficial effect for service delivery and design and could lead to significant improvements in people's experiences of services.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Ethical framework engagement in relation to learning disabilities and autism.
- Safeguarding Adults Review into the deaths at Cawston Park Hospital.
- Peer review.
- Previous engagement and co-production work undertaken by the department.

What were the conditions for success?

- Staff awareness of the concept of co-production and how to apply it.

What were the challenges?

- Limited Adult Social Services Department resources to execute better co-production.
- Difficulty in identifying and reaching the people to co-produce with.
- Issues surrounding involvement fees (the rate and nature of reimbursement).
- Siloed and duplication of working within the department.
- Reliance on providers for feedback on their services.
- Information is sometimes not shared or gets disseminated in inaccessible ways.
- Boards and alliance are not always fully representative and accountability can also be unclear.

Contact: assd.engagement&coproduction@norfolk.gov.uk

Further information:

[Co-production and engagement – Norfolk County Council](#)

Improving access to Disability Related Expenses (DRE)

External consultants led the initial engagement, The Public Office (TPO), from July to November 2021. They also set up an independent Charging Reference Group involving the various disability forums Norfolk County Council works with and facilitated meetings with the Reference Group until a new independent facilitator and chair were recruited (June to October 2022).

The areas identified for improvement revolved around several important questions:

- What can we do to improve the process of applying for DRE and make it fairer?
- How can we improve and make the information around DRE more accessible?
- Could training for frontline teams be improved so that they possess a greater understanding of the process and assist people to apply?
- How could supported living providers be engaged with to ensure they understand the process better and support people?
- What could be done to enhance the learning and development for Norfolk County Council members and staff so that they gain a greater understanding of the lives of disabled people in Norfolk?

Norfolk County Council-led engagement began in November 2021 with the establishment of a new Disability Related Expenses Team. Co-production has been undertaken to:

- produce a new DRE webpage
- determine how best to communicate the 'go-live' of the new webpage
- review the impact of the webpage.

Numerous improvements have been made to the DRE process. These have included:

- a new DRE team in Finance which enables individuals to call or email someone directly
- individuals can now receive face-to-face support at home to complete a DRE application
- engagement sessions that enabled the co-design of the new frequently-asked questions about DRE and re-design of the DRE application form
- a co-produced DRE webpage which went live during February 2023 after six co-production sessions
- feedback from a survey regarding the DRE webpage which received positive replies and commitments to being a part of future engagement.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Engagement started in April 2021 in response to the Minimum Income Guarantee Judicial Review and changes to charging for working-age adults.
- Previous engagement and co-production undertaken by the department.

What were the conditions for success?

- Staff awareness of the concept of co-production and how to apply it.

What were the challenges?

- Limited Adult Social Services Department resources to execute better co-production.
- Difficulty in identifying and reaching the people to co-produce with.
- Issues surrounding involvement fees (the rate and nature of reimbursement).
- Siloed and duplication of working within the department.
- Reliance on providers for feedback on their services.
- Information is sometimes not shared or gets disseminated in inaccessible ways.
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Contact: assd.engagement&coproduction@norfolk.gov.uk

Further information:

[Co-production and engagement – Norfolk County Council](#)

Conversations Matter – Developing a New Social Services Strategy

An overarching strategy for Adult Social Services, intended as an overview of key principles for the next five years and an outline of how social care might operate, will be produced.

Core to this work is getting feedback from the people that the council does and does not yet support. To gather this feedback, members of staff have been engaging with members of the public at various events including the Royal Norfolk Show, Norwich Pride and library drop-in sessions (open to anyone to attend).

A discussion pack has also been created which can be used to support self-facilitated workshops and conversations by partners, families and colleagues. To complement and reinforce this, the Norfolk Community Foundation, Healthwatch Norfolk and Norfolk & Waveney Carers Voice have run workshop-style discussions with their communities, specifically with seldom heard and vulnerable groups.

By the end of the engagement, the council hopes to have received feedback from 50–75 discussion groups or workshops both externally commissioned and internally with colleagues. The council also wants to hear about the experiences and views of staff, care providers, partners and voluntary organisations.

Feedback has been received via an online form which has been widely distributed. For those without access to the internet, there has been the option of completing a physical form. Freepost envelopes have been provided for this purpose. For those lacking the time to complete either, people have been given the opportunity to fill out postcards listing their key priorities.

Once the engagement finishes at the end of August 2023, the council will review the feedback and, alongside the Making It Real Board (User Reference Group), co-produce an updated strategy.

This has been an excellent opportunity to get people's thoughts on social care, prevention and independence more widely. Staff that have participated in this engagement have reported this to be informative and revelatory. Gauging opinions on these key areas will enable a strategy to be formulated which reflects people's priorities. This has the potential to improve an array of services with beneficial effects for those that use them.

The engagement undertaken will also form a model for similar activities undertaken by the department in the future.

What was the learning that supported success?

- The engagement has been informed by previous large-scale engagement undertaken by the Adult Social Services Department.
- Co-producing the strategy with the Making It Real Group will ensure that the group's expertise (the group contains numerous experts by experience) is used with beneficial effects for the strategy.

What were the conditions for success?

- Staff awareness of the concept of co-production and how to apply it.

What were the challenges?

- Limited Adult Social Services Department resources to execute better co-production.
- Difficulty in identifying and reaching the people to co-produce with.
- Issues surrounding involvement fees (the rate and nature of reimbursement).
- Siloed and duplication of working within the department.
- Reliance on providers for feedback on their services.
- Information is sometimes not shared or gets disseminated in inaccessible ways.
- Boards and alliance are not always fully representative and accountability can also be unclear.

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Further information:

[Co-production and engagement – Norfolk County Council](#)

Peterborough guide for parent carers of children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

A printed guide in the form of a directory of services and organisations available locally for parents and carers of children with SEND to navigate the support available for children and young people in Peterborough.

Family Voice is Peterborough's local parent participation group and has been involved from the start of the project. The council met with the organisation regularly and actioned their feedback appropriately.

The council has also collaborated closely with other teams within the council, local voluntary organisations, commissioned services and third-sector organisations, by requesting their feedback on the information in the guide. The guide will also include a feedback section so that parents/carers can offer their feedback directly and this can be considered for next year's edition.

Regular meetings were held with Family Voice to discuss the progress of the project and address any issues. Some members of the organisation were also granted access to the master copy of the document and were able to make changes as needed.

The guide was also discussed at multiple groups within the council, including the SEND communications group, SEND Operations Group and Public Information Group. All individual teams and organisations that offer SEND/family support were contacted individually to provide feedback. A copy of the guide was also provided to all contributors so they could feed back on the document.

The guide is due to become available in summer 2023. Following feedback from distributors this guide is something parents and carers have been looking for and this also corresponds to feedback received on the Peterborough SEND Information Hub (Peterborough's local offer website).

What was the learning that supported success?

The team involved in the production of this project attended a co-production workshop with the SUN Network in 2022.

What were the barriers?

- Due to the number of contributors to this project, the council sometimes received conflicting feedback.
- Being able to find time for everyone to meet could sometimes be challenging due to everyone's busy schedules.
- Due to contributors' busy schedules, it was sometimes difficult to stick to deadlines.
- As this guide is being produced by Care Choices at no cost, there were restrictions on editorial and structure. Regular feedback between the team and Care Choices was important to ensure an agreement could be met.

What were the conditions for success?

- Regular contact with contributors, organising meetings and dealing with requests from all parties was especially important to ensure everyone was on the same page.
- Taking notes of what was discussed in meetings to distribute to others who were not able to attend and requesting feedback from those who were not able to attend.
- Ensuring an approach timeline was given to contributors to allow for late submissions.
- Involving Care Choices in meetings with contributors to allow other parties to be aware of editorial restrictions and to be able to work out any issues.
- Engaging with the parent and family voice groups from the point of conception throughout the project. It was the enthusiasm of these groups that ensured the project remained a priority throughout until successful delivery.

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Further information:

www.myfamilyyourneeds.co.uk/publications

Co-production of the Suffolk 'All age carers strategy'

Co-production development and increased involvement of carers to give carers and partners a voice across Suffolk.

Co-production has been key to working with family carers and having their voices heard across Suffolk. This includes development of the adult carers' contract, development and review of the Family Carers Emergency Plan, the current development of the dementia strategy and the opportunity to influence national surveys such as the Survey of Adult Carers in England. Suffolk also has a Suffolk Carers Fund panel to help develop services for carers, and carers are very much part of this panel.

Suffolk has a Family Carers Partnership Board (FCPB) and this consists of a chair who is a family carer with lived experience, family carers, Suffolk County Council (SCC) Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children and Young People's Services (CYP), Suffolk Family Carers (SFC), Healthwatch, Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and a number of voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations. This enables co-production to take place on policy and procedures regarding carers both directly and indirectly. A key example of this was the co-production of the Suffolk All Age Carers' Strategy 2022–2027.

It is essential that carers are seen as equal partners and part of co-production. This also means that consideration needs to be taken for equality, diversity and inclusion, with the understanding that not all carers want to be identified as a carer. To support this, equality impact assessments are also completed.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it was again identified how valuable carers are and Suffolk had an adult carers strategy which was due for review. This led to an opportunity to develop a new strategy and funding was initially made available by public health and a carers development manager was recruited to focus solely on co-producing the new strategy.

Discussing the opportunity with the FCPB and other counties, it appeared the correct direction of travel was an All Age Carers' Strategy and that this needed to be co-produced. A governance structure was put in place and the strategy is overseen by the FCPB and Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB). The timeframe was one year, and we were often told this was not sufficient to fully co-produce the strategy. Although this was a tight time frame, having a dedicated person to lead the co-production and buy-in from all partners and carers due to building positive relationships, the strategy was launched a year later in November 2022.

The journey was not always easy as there was a lot of learning and attending carers' groups both in person and virtually and getting sign off at each stage from all the key organisations and partners was a challenge. Another challenge was education, because it was clear that when the word 'carer' was used, sometimes this was interpreted as a paid carer. After much research, options were given of the format from various other counties and a 25-page magazine-style strategy became the aim. Co-production continued throughout the whole process. After the draft was complete, it went to formal consultation and the final forewords of the strategy were not from organisation leaders,

but from a young carer and an adult carer as it was their co-produced strategy. An easy to read version was also co-produced. Now we are at the stage of co-producing the living action plan with co-production events happening, and these have been requested annually by carers themselves.

The co-production of the All Age Carers' Strategy 2022–2027 has seen many positive changes for carers across Suffolk, although there is still a long way to go to sustain this. Along with the Suffolk HWBB taking overall accountability for the strategy and action plan, a separate HWBB Oversight Group has been developed to make sure this is kept on track by all partners. This was also the result of the HWBB now having a councilor as a young carers' champion and a councilor as an adult carers' champion. Along with this both ASC and CYP now have assistant directors who lead on carers. The FCPB also has a steering group that has been meeting monthly to keep the development of the action plan on track with actions taking place.

Following the launch of the strategy and continued co-production, strategies across Suffolk (including the two ICBs) are being aligned, so there is less of a postcode lottery for carers who are seeking support. Suffolk County Council has also been making changes to the way it supports carers: a staff carers' network is in place and growing and SCC also has a Human Resources carers' leave policy, both contributing to SCC becoming a carer confident employer.

Following a co-production action planning day, a carers event was able to take place during carers' week in Ipswich Town shopping centre on market day which led to positive relationships being built and aligned agendas. Further events are being considered moving forward across Suffolk. As co-production continues, it has been suggested that rather than use the word 'priorities' which can be confusing if they are given a number or hierarchy, the word 'pillars' should be used, as if any of the five pillars fall, the whole strategy could fall.

What was the learning that supported success?

- Co-production takes time – carers are busy caring, so flexibility is required.
- Set realistic goals and expectations (SMART).
- Seek advice and work with partners as there is a lot of experience out there nationally, as well as research from Carers UK, Carers Trust, etc.
- The language used such as acronyms, labels (e.g. informal/unpaid carers) and terminology such as eligibility, assessment, one-off payment/direct payment/individual budgets, needs to be clear and in a language all can understand. Easy-to-read and accessible options are needed, as well as virtual and face-to-face meetings across the localities.
- Co-production is not a 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday option; it needs to be available at other times too, as many carers work and have other commitments.
- Do not presume carers' groups know about the support available, such as carers' assessments, personal budgets/direct payments, benefits or carers' emergency plans.
- Training for staff to carry out co-production may be required as this is very different from internal meetings.

What were some of the barriers?

- Carers feeling they have shared their ideas before and nothing has changed.
- Time needed to complete co-production; this needs to be continuous and available in different geographical areas, different formats and times of the day.
- When contacting carers to be part of co-production, awareness that they may no longer be caring, and this can cause distress.
- Some carers/organisations may want to use co-production as an opportunity to share their personal caring role and so need a place to do this alongside co-production.
- Co-production may initially involve a larger cost; however, it could save money and time later as co-production can produce the support needed, not what people may think is needed.

What were some of the conditions for success?

- Provide time and resources, with clear roles, to complete co-production.
- Provide training to all involved.
- Make co-production accessible and across organisations.
- Co-production needs to be a continuous process and needs to reward people taking part, even if this means expenses, and personalised support at the right place at the right time.
- Build positive relationships and expand these across all areas.

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Further information:

[Suffolk All Age Carers' Strategy 2022-2027 – Suffolk County Council](#)

[Suffolk Carers Fund – Suffolk Community Foundation \(\[suffolkcf.org.uk\]\(http://suffolkcf.org.uk\)\)](#)

[Family Carers Partnership Board – Suffolk Family Carers](#)

Good commissioning is dependent on co-production

A direct payment allows the council to let go of control, enabling individuals to take responsibility in choosing what they feel is best and reflects what they need, when they need it. Thurrock wanted to commission a new support service for direct payments so turned to the Thurrock Centre for Independent Living.

Talking to people is the simplest way of understanding each other. However, starting the conversation can be the hardest and most intimidating step.

To enjoy a productive conversation, the council identified the need to start from a position of mutual respect, to speak the same language, to listen and hear each other and to check in to clarify uncertainties. Labels and acronyms should be avoided and everyone should be equal.

Early on, Thurrock Borough Council engaged with the Thurrock Centre for Independent Living (a user-led organisation) to help it speak the same language. The world around Thurrock had changed significantly since direct payments were looked at last. The introduction of community-led support (where the council places Adult Social Care in the heart of the community to help tailor solutions for people) alongside a market bristling with micro-providers meant that change and renewable relationships were needed. This included building relationships with people with lived experience of the local social care system. Enabling local people to have more trust and confidence in the council generated a significant increase in demand for support. This was a positive outcome enabling the council and people to work together much earlier than at crisis stage, where activity is likely to be less well planned, less well negotiated and costlier in both human and financial terms.

The focus was on intervening earlier to help people sooner and prevent a deterioration in their health and wellbeing. Co-production has helped to unlock the mutual benefits of prevention.

Thurrock collaborated with the disabled people's organisation over six months, talking with individuals and groups about changes in practice and things to do differently. In return the council were told about the things that worked well, not so well, and what people really wanted. The council found that if it listened more, people were willing to give up their time and share their experiences to help make positive change happen.

These simple conversations amongst equals, and a few cups of tea and biscuits, defined and tailored the support service commissioned. It enabled individuals to have a meaningful say in the services sought, reflected their requirements and empowered people to interview prospective providers of the support service. This influenced the outcome of the tender, ensuring that the voice of lived experience secured the personalisation support service collectively desired for all local people interested in taking a direct payment.

The conversation did not stop when Thurrock awarded the direct payment support contract and nor should it; as a result the support service joined the conversations.

What were the conditions for success?

- A co-produced direct payment policy that has collective ownership and is reviewed and updated by all.
- A sharing of ideas and issues that shapes places.
- Opportunities to resolve issues.
- Building bridges and understanding between parties

It was recognised that small conversations really can tackle the big issues, building trust, confidence and shared benefit.

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Further information:

[Supporting and informing the refresh of the Thurrock Council Direct Payments Policy – Thurrock Coalition](#)

