

# Northumberland Adult Care Services Engagement & Co-production Strategy



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# 1. Introduction

Co-production in Adult Social Care is moving towards a more equal relationship where people with care and support needs and those responsible for services share the discussion and decision-making to plan and deliver support together.

Northumberland County Council and Adult Social Care (ASC) are working hard to make sure that we live in a place where everyone matters. A place where its citizens come first and where people live safe, healthy and independent lives. It's a big ambition. To make this work, we need the help and support of the people we serve.

We know that we will need to work alongside each other, talking and listening to each other. sharing resources and expertise and we believe that together, we can make Northumberland a great place to live.

# 2. Engagement, co-production and participation

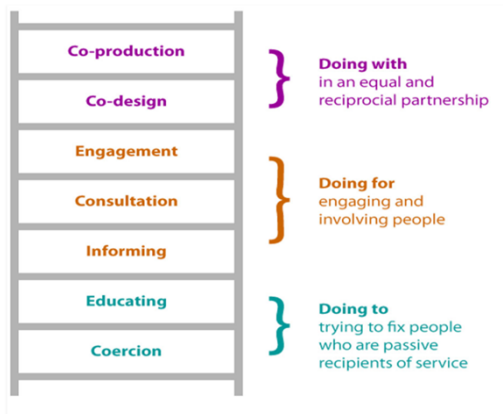
That phrase 'working alongside each other' is easy to say, but not an easy thing to do. For one thing it's probably true to say that traditionally Adult Social Care has tended to take a paternalistic approach to the people we serve.

This sometimes is seen as 'doing to' the person, rather than 'doing with' the person. In other words, there's been the sense that 'we' know what's best for communities and the people who use our services, so 'we' will make the decisions that matter.

This is not something that should continue, because if we do want help and support to make our ambitions a reality, then we will be relying on people and communities having an equal say. An equal say on how Adult Social Care services are designed and provided. It'll only be by working in partnership like this might we begin to feel that services truly make a difference.

The will is there, and there are some good examples of engagement and co-production happening currently, but we need to go further.

We can draw on a model to help us. It sets out three stages of participation moving from a stage of 'doing to' to a stage of doing for' then 'doing with' - ending 'in an equal and reciprocal partnership'.



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This strategy is a key step in that journey. The end point is clear; co-production will be embedded in our everyday practice and will become second nature when planning or developing services across Adult Social Care.

In essence 'co-production' is about seeing people who receive care and support as equals around the table. This means sharing power and decision making, with no one person or group 'more equal than others'.

This is a turnaround of culture and mindset so won't happen overnight or by chance just because we want it to. There will have to be an investment of time and energy.

We will set objectives so that we can see if progress is being made:

- To ensure Adult Social Care have a thorough understanding of what co-production is and know what 'good' co-production and engagement looks like and feels like and can put this into everyday practice.
- To build positive and enduring relationships with communities and to spend the time with people who draw on services, to understand what really matters to them.
- To build the knowledge, skills and confidence of people, families and community groups to work with us in equal partnership including the design and delivering of services.
- To work with and learn through existing networks, community groups and stakeholders' using a range of approaches to understand what their priorities, ambitions and ideas are.
- To show we have acted on what we've heard and to share progress and celebrate and publicise successes, across participants and stakeholders.
- To be open to feedback about how we can improve further.

To measure progress, we'll need to get a baseline as to where we are currently in relation to those objectives. This means we will undertake a self-assessment as a priority task. This will help us direct our focus and priorities and enable us to assess progress over time.

This strategy links clearly with the Council's Corporate Plan and the priority to tackle inequalities. Embedding co-production and the input of those with lived experience in everything we do will clearly assist in supporting inequalities for some of the most vulnerable adults in the County.

### 3. What does the law say about co-production?

One of the more significant pieces of legislation that outlines 'what' we must do in relation to providing services is the 'Care Act 2014'. The Care Act gives prominence to putting the person at the centre of decision making. It emphasises the need for professionals to work much more closely and collaboratively with those who draw on services. It recognises that people who may need care and support or have conditions that affect their independence, are often best placed to advise on what support and services will most likely make a positive difference to their lives. It uses the term 'co-production' to outline such expectations, saying that:

"Local authorities should, where possible, actively promote participation in providing interventions that are co-produced with individuals, families, friends, carers and the community".

It makes it clear that we need to move away from a mindset where professionals make decisions for people so that the support provided doesn't result in people being passive recipients of care.

### 4. Where will co-production occur?

We will create a group, an advisory body including people who draw on services/lived experience and other key players.

We recognise that panel members cannot possibly represent all adults who draw on care and support and all staff members. The panel will therefore operate on an advisory capacity to support and oversee the development of co-production activity and wider service improvement work.

Co-production in Northumberland will happen at several levels:

- 1. Co-production in assessment and care planning** - That is, how care assessments, care plans and reviews are conducted and completed.

Part of this shift will include a re-think on how we assess adults' needs and plan their support with them and alongside their wider support networks. This will be completed in a straightforward and accessible way, so that users of services are truly involved in the whole process and in all aspects of their own care assessments and care planning.

The process may result in people experiencing a blurring of roles between themselves and 'professionals', but that's OK. This helps towards the sense of feeling listened to, participating at a meaningful level and ensuring there is a shared understanding of goals and outcomes.

We will create a specific task group, including people with lived experience and other interested parties, to co-produce new assessment, care planning and reviewing processes and documentation.

- 2. Co-production at a service level** – That is, decision making about the design and delivery of services.

We will ensure services are delivered via co-production. We will do this by setting expectations in contracts with our external providers and by supporting our internal providers to develop co-productive approaches. This involves co-delivery of services, including the role of volunteers, where appropriate, in providing the service. It involves co-evaluation of services where people who draw on services and carers have an active role in the monitoring and evaluation of those services.

- 3. Co-production at a strategic level** – that is strategic direction and policy making where everyone involved feels the relationship is open, honest and transparent.

We will commission co-productively by opening up our governance and strategic commissioning arrangements to involve people who have care and support needs and carers, as active partners in the planning, design and commissioning of services. This involves co-decision making in the allocation of resources and co-design when planning services and purchasing services.

## 5. Co-production and cultural change

This will focus on principles and standards, building an environment that makes co-production flourish.

Change will take time and there is no off the shelf model we can easily put in place, but by research, listening to others, gaining feedback and learning what works, we can continuously improve our approach.

Throughout, we will keep the focus on our overall aim, and we will sign up to a set of principles:

- 1. Equality** - Everyone has assets. Co-production starts from the idea that no one group, or person is more important than any other group or person.
- 2. Diversity** - It follows from the principle of equality that diversity and inclusion are important values in co-production. Co-production should be as inclusive as possible.
- 3. Accessibility** - Access needs to be recognised as a fundamental principle of co-production as the process needs to be accessible if everyone is going to take part on an equal basis.
- 4. Reciprocity** - getting something back for putting something in. 'Reciprocity' is a key concept in co-production. It has been defined as ensuring that people

receive something back for putting something in and builds on people's desire to feel needed and valued.

And a set of values that will underpin our thoughts and actions:

- Recognising people as having assets, strengths, resources and networks.
- Recognising that all parties have expertise.
- Acknowledging that change starts from what matters most to people who use services.
- Build genuine partnerships from the very first conversation.

We will build a robust reviewing framework that is able to continually evaluate the implementation, impact and effectiveness of this strategy and its objectives.

We will devise methods to communicate and share progress across the various groups/platforms, as well as establishing how we are inviting feedback.

We will need scrutiny and governance to ensure any tasks we set ourselves are on track and in line with core aspirations and that they are making good progress. We will create a new 'Engagement and Co-production Board' reporting to Service Director/Executive Director

The remit will be to:

- Monitor the implementation of this strategy, task group progress, and have oversight of stakeholder activities.
- Ensure that all significant co-production activities are signed off in advance to ensure appropriate accountability.

## **6. When won't we co-produce?**

We will co-produce unless there are compelling reasons not to. Realistically there will be occasions where Co-production is not possible. This may be because:

- We are still growing our capacity to co-produce.
- We must consult by law (it should still be possible consider co-productive approaches within the consultation process).
- We must act in a certain way because the law tells us to.
- In matters of safeguarding and keeping people safe where decisions need to be made in someone's best interest.

- We are working to timeframes set by external partners which make a co-productive approach unlikely.
- We must make decisions in an emergency or crisis, and we do not have the necessary arrangements in place to co-produce.

We will have a process in place to make decisions about when co-production will not occur. This will also require honesty about limitations and boundaries. We also need to ensure that co-productive practice is built upon solid communication, engagement and participation practice so that we do not end up in a situation of all or nothing if a co-productive approach is not taken for one of the reasons above.

## **7. Training**

We will invest in and develop a formal training programme to ensure all staff at all levels, (including executive and cabinet level) are familiar and confident in co-production, it's principles and practice. This will include participants in the co-production steering and advisory groups or people aligned to the co-production network.

This includes advanced training for specialist roles.

## **8. How will we know whether we are co-producing?**

We will ask, through all of the various groups and forums we set up, whether our clients, providers and other stakeholders feel that we are engaging and co-producing, and we will produce an annual report of the feedback.



## 9. Action plan

Priority/Action	Responsible officer	Milestones (and review dates)
Gather a baseline measure as to where we are currently in relation to strategic objectives.	Service Director	June 2024
Create a group, an advisory body including people who draw on services/lived experience and other key players.	Co-production Lead	Complete and operating now
Create a specific task group, including people with lived experience and other interested parties, to co-produce new assessment, care planning and reviewing processes and documentation.	Co-production Lead	Sept 2024
Build a robust reviewing framework that is able to continually evaluate the implementation, impact and effectiveness of this strategy and its objectives.	Service Director	June 2024
Devise methods to communicate and share progress across the various groups/platforms, as well as establishing how we are inviting feedback.	Co-production Lead	June 2024
Create a new 'Engagement and Co-production Board' reporting to Service Director/Executive Director.	Co-production Lead	May 2024
Invest in and develop a formal training programme to ensure all staff at all levels, (including executive and cabinet level) are familiar and confident in co-production.	Co-production Lead	July 2024