

Our Commitment to Co-production in Sandwell Council

Background

My first year has been quite a whirlwind in sunny Sandwell (the people make it sunny!). I very quickly understood that we are serious about improving what we do here and “...being brilliant at the basics”.

One of my first tasks was to align to our Adult Social Care vision: **Building independence and empowering Sandwell residents**. I was tasked with reviewing and improving how ASC captures the ‘voice’ of people we work with, ensuring we use our findings to meaningfully influence and shape our work. For those of us in the know, we are talking about co-production.

We know co-production has been around for decades and, while it may have been perceived as ‘nice to do if we have time’, it is our legislative duty. So, I felt quietly confident about my new task – after all, we have staff who are younger than Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation! Most importantly, the commitment to improve was led by our ASC Director. Yet, when I delved further, the task quickly snowballed into areas beyond ASC.

Findings....

Sandwell do some things well, we have some great examples of working together, but we also have missed opportunities. I set about asking staff what their knowledge of co-production was and, as expected, **many were confident in describing the concept but explained the barriers in embedding this approach within their work and teams consistently**. What seemed a relatively simple task – write a plan – seemed contradictory for this topic. It didn’t feel right to look at the plethora of a guidance on co-production (have you ever searched online for co-production in ASC, it’s mind boggling) and write a plan in isolation. Colleagues and I also discussed **the varying levels of working with people, why we should and, of course, when is it appropriate to co-produce, especially in budget controlled and timebound environments**.

Action...

Help was required if I wanted to really promote co-production and win hearts and minds to do this properly. The ADASS West Mid’s Co-production Group accepted my request to join – thankfully! I listened attentively to the models in place – they all sounded great but had been embedded over years with dedicated leads, boards and resources. I knew I had to start at a place that was right for Sandwell to **enable a co-productive culture to grow**.

The support from the chairs was amazing, as well as the views of people with lived experience that helped to shape Sandwell’s improvement plan.

The group offered:

- ✓ Best practice/ideas
- ✓ Opportunities to hear from people with lived experience
- ✓ Opportunity to network
- ✓ Critical, always supportive friends
- ✓ Able to review the plan with immediate feedback
- ✓ Celebrate success and learning opportunities
- ✓ Feedback from WM ADASS which strengthens support for the plan

Results...

Over the past year we have launched our plan following endorsement from our Health and Wellbeing Board. Key activities in the first year separated into three areas: Education, Infrastructure and Digital.

- Our ASC plan is committed to improving how 'we' involve people in their care and support.
- The plan recognises the different ways people can get involved – individual support, reviewing services or development of new services and specifications.
- It brings partners together – to stop duplication, for promotion, to use different ways to involve people (survey, face-to-face, focus groups), all part of our 'One Council' / 'Place' approach.
- We partnered with Changing our Lives to deliver co-production in practice sessions to staff across the council – the conversation between the youth forum, community partnerships and social workers set the sessions alight – the feedback was so positive, and the networking was crucial to the ongoing learning and working efficiently.
- This approach starts at the beginning for Sandwell to enable a new culture that can be understood and embedded over time.

The wider partnership team made up of internal and external agencies, including adults, children and young people, agreed on the need for more information, standards and support in the form of a charter.

The charter has been co-produced by professionals across Sandwell, council partners, health, young people and residents. It sets out definitions, models and when to use co-production or seek another way of engaging people to build good practice. It includes the Rainbow of Participation developed by the People Hub, something I discovered at the LGA Co-production conference where I also shared our progress with others and learned from others. ADASS again provided a great opportunity to review the charter.

The council's Senior Leadership Team has endorsed the charter corporately and is asking all directorates 'how can you involve the people you support to test, improve

or change support/service'. We are hoping to launch this with partners during Co-production Week!

It has been a busy year, but a great way to join agendas in partnership to deliver better outcomes. While there is a lot to do, there is a strong commitment to enabling the 'voice' of our residents. For anyone at the start of this journey, it is incredibly rewarding, and help is always available from partners and ADASS.

What's missing?

We can't progress if staff lack confidence or belief in the principles of co-production. I have learned that co-production shouldn't be viewed as the 'best' thing to do, instead adopting a '**what can we do to involve people**' may be the best way to enable a co-productive culture and remove perceived barriers.

There are three key themes identified to deliver our aims; **Education, Infrastructure and Digital**, recognising Sandwell's strengths and areas to develop, with time given to **introduce, implement** and **embed** the new approach.

Key deliverables in Year One

Education

- **Co-production in practice sessions** delivered to staff and place-based agencies
- **Coaching** delivered by person with lived experience to Director of Adult Services
- Implement **strength-based working in care management** to promote the voice of a person during assessment and review processes- informed by SCIE
- **A co-produced charter** that describes Sandwell's principles for good co-production & engagement that all stakeholders across Sandwell can use, and co-produced with partners and residents
- **Learning from others** – including people with lived experience, best practice and data sharing

Infrastructure

- Promote and share work through the **Council's Engagement network**
- Improved connections of partnerships, representation and networks via a **one council and place based steering** group including **Sandwell residents- Collaborative working**
- Embedding **Citizenspace** across the Council
- Protected time and **resources**

Digital

- Adopt a '**One Council**' approach to support 'every contact matters' by exploring a **digital database**
- Develop a **Sandwell website** that houses all activity and enables residents to get involved across all 'place' based agencies with branding

Weblink to our co-production resources:

[A place-based co-production plan](#) | [Our commitment to co-production in Sandwell](#) | [Sandwell Council](#)