

Embedding co-production in Oxfordshire's adult services

This is a summary of the key findings from the evaluation of Oxfordshire County Council's 2017 programme to embed co-production in the development, design, delivery, and review of its adult social services.

At the centre of the programme is the Co-production Board of people who use services, carers and Oxfordshire staff. The Board provides support as well as critical challenge to co-production work across the council.

The Board is complemented by a network of Co-production Champions, and the Co-production Team who provide training, advice and support across the programme.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) supported the programme by providing advice, guidance and training, and co-produced the evaluation with two peer researchers and members of the Co-production Board and Team.

Programme aims

The four programme aims were identified by people who use services, carers, SCIE, and Oxfordshire County Council staff and senior managers.

The primary aim was to embed co-production as the default way of working in Oxfordshire County Council Adult Social Care. Additional aims were building better relationships between Oxfordshire and people who use services, carers, service providers, and the voluntary sector; improving Adult Social Care services; and spreading co-production beyond Adult Social Care. Significant progress was made against all aims:

- There is broad awareness and understanding of co-production, 84 per cent of staff who had been involved with the programme were confident in their understanding of co-production. Co-production is increasingly being put into practice in council processes and projects, - there have been over 20 co-produced projects and initiatives under the programme, which have involved more than 1,700 people.
- Eighty-eight per cent of staff thought the programme has had a positive impact on relationships between Oxfordshire County Council and people who use services, their families, carers and the voluntary sector.
- People who use services, carers, and council staff were confident that the programme was positively impacting on services in Oxfordshire, and would continue to do so.

What is co-production?

Co-production means to me that service users play a part in running services together with the people who provide services... services are not just presented to people so they can take it or leave it... they play a part in constructing it.

(User of services / carer)

- The programme has influenced work in transport, communities, children’s services, and public health; there is strong and growing collaborative work in health; outside Oxfordshire, staff from Essex, Kirklees and Slough councils have all visited to learn from Oxfordshire’s experience.

Improving services is the main thing, services will be now what people want, rather than what they think we want. So often services have not been what people want...

(User of services / carer)

Key learning and recommendations

- Commitment to co-production from senior leaders and elected members was important to the programme being taken seriously by people inside and outside Oxfordshire County Council.

- Changing to co-production as a default approach is a significant culture shift for the council, it needs to happen at all levels, and will take time to fully embed.

...it has given us a much better insight into what the council does. The people of Oxfordshire don’t always see that. They are dealing with the problems, there is a misconception about what the council does.

(User of services / carer)

- Co-production builds relationships and fosters mutual understanding. Working with the council can be a considerable culture change for people who use services and carers, but it changed their perceptions of the council.

- There is a tension between the ethos of equality and emphasis on sharing power in co-production, and the legal duties and responsibilities that councils are under; co-production provides a mechanism for collectively managing tensions like this.

People aren’t necessarily going to agree, but co-production is about having those difficult discussions.

(Oxfordshire County Council Senior leader)

- It is important that groups like the board and champions are diverse and representative of the population.
- Co-produced and co-delivered training, including examples of success, helps people see how they can use co-production in their work and supports the culture shift.
- Having co-produced ‘terms of engagement’ and modelling co-production helps set the tone and builds a shared understanding of how to put co-production into practice.
- Co-production takes time to do well, and staff need to be reassured they will be given the time.
- It is important for officers and project leads to invest time and resources into going out to engage with people in their communities.
- Having good local user-led organisations facilitates co-production and reduces the time it takes to recruit and involve people.

This is one part of my job where I really do feel I’m making a difference. It’s really great. You can’t put a price on that. I think it’s fab.

(Oxfordshire County Council staff)

Download full version of the report: [Oxfordshire County Council Co-production in adult social care: Evaluation report](#)

[Co-production Oxfordshire’s Working Together project and handbook.](#)