

date: 10 April 2013



Making co-production work - lessons from local government

a report by APSE on behalf of the TUC

Contents

5 Foreword

7 Introduction

Policy context

Research aims

Definitions

Report structure

14 Co-production in theory and practice

What is co-production?

Individual and collective co-production

Citizens' expectations

Co-production and inequality

Capacity and skills

Public appetite for participation

The role of the workforce

Building on lessons from the history of public participation

Democratic accountability and strategic responsibility

26 Local authority practice: survey results

Summary

Strategies for public participation in service design and delivery

Forms of participation

The benefits of citizen participation

Impact of budget reductions

Use of the term 'co-production'

Provider model and co-production

The role of elected members

The role of council employees

Public appetite for involvement

Barriers to engagement

33 Case studies

Darlington Borough Council – Community Engagement in Street Services

Durham County Council – Area Action Partnerships

Halton Borough Council – Community Centre Work Experience for Volunteers and People with Learning Disabilities

Milton Keynes Council – Environmental Toolkits

South Derbyshire District Council – Safer South Derbyshire

52 Ten ways to make co-production work

1) An understanding of what is meant by 'empowerment'

2) A strong public sector framework

3) Adequate resources

4) Sufficient social capital, capacity and skills

5) Participation of citizens at the level at which they want to participate

6) Democratic accountability

7) A strategic overview that balances competing interests

8) Well-valued, well-motivated staff

9) An understanding of how professionals and citizens can work together that recognises where boundaries between their roles lie

10) An understanding of the difference between individual and collective forms of co-production and encouragement of more collective participation

55 Conclusion

Foreword

Public services have become a key battle ground under the coalition. Spending cuts, top-down reform and privatisation have had a devastating impact on the people who depend on our public services and the dedicated workers who deliver them.

Nowhere is this more the case than in local government. Subject to years of cuts, restructuring and outsourcing, local authorities have long been used as a laboratory for public service reform. Yet the speed and scale of government restructuring and funding cuts are raising real fears over the future sustainability of our local services.

The government's reform agenda is clearly linked to its austerity drive. Outsourcing and competition are seen as ways to drive down costs, often at the expense of the living standards of those working to provide them. But at the same time, government policy is driven by an ideological belief in the primacy and efficiency of markets and it regards the public sector as inherently monolithic, inflexible and unresponsive. At the core of this belief is the public service user as an individual consumer, public services as commodities and choice between providers as the ultimate expression of citizen power. These are fundamentally flawed assumptions.

This approach fails to understand the collective nature of our public services – from health to criminal justice to education – which serve the wider needs of the community and not simply the individual service user. Nor does it consider the fragmentation, dislocation and lack of accountability that arises when you hive off public services to a market dominated by a small number of corporate providers.

Above all, government policy fails to understand the value that integrated, publicly owned and accountable services add. Local government provides plenty of evidence that the public sector can be a driver of innovation, value for money and improving quality.

With the stakes so high, it's crucial that debates on the future of service delivery are informed by real evidence from the ground. Policymaking should be shaped by what happens in the real world – not by blinkered ideology.

This timely report looks at the ways in which local authorities are currently working with local communities and service users to design and deliver services that meet community need, while ensuring that services remain universal, accessible and accountable. Through the use of surveys and case studies, we can get a clearer picture of both the possibilities and limitations of what we

Foreword

might call ‘co-production’ within a local authority model. In plain English, how workers and managers can work with local communities to deliver good local services.

The findings suggest that local authorities are very well placed to deliver genuine innovation. This won’t happen by accident. It requires the right leadership and investment to be in place. It demands genuine integration between services. And it needs public service workers and local communities to have a real say in the design and operation of services.

This report helps us develop a positive vision for the future that challenges the lazy market orthodoxy that dominates too much of current government thinking. With the right policies in place, local authorities can really engage citizens, deliver value for taxpayers and provide even better public services.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frances O'Grady". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Frances O’Grady
General Secretary

Introduction

The value of involving citizens in making decisions about services and tackling challenges faced by individuals and communities has become a well-recognised tenet of public sector policy and practice.

Benefits that are frequently cited include:

- greater ability to get to the root of issues and develop tailored solutions;
- increased innovation and efficiency of services when they are built around the users' needs;
- greater user satisfaction;
- creation of more cohesive communities with greater sense of local ownership;
- building confidence and capacity of individuals and communities;
- better use of public resources;
- and empowerment of citizens to take control over their lives and areas where they live, which should also be an important goal in its own right.

The reality of prolonged fiscal constraint throughout the public sector has intensified debate across the political spectrum about the future shape and delivery of services, with an increasing focus on the relationship between providers and users of public services. This has renewed interest in the concept of 'co-production' where active citizens play a greater role in the design and delivery of the services they use. Debates around co-production have traditionally placed less focus on the role of the public service workforce. Yet the promotion of worker 'voice' is crucial given the centrality of the relationship between worker and service user, not to mention the need to secure genuine support and engagement of public service workers in the delivery of successful public service reform.

This report is based on research carried out across a range of local authorities by APSE for the TUC. The report aims to explore how forms of co-production are being implemented within local government. Through a combination of survey and case studies, the report aims to identify the factors that contribute to positive outcomes and to develop a progressive model of co-production as an alternative to the government's market based approach.

Introduction

Policy context

Local authorities find themselves facing a number of significant challenges as a result of spending cuts and the implementation of public service reforms at the same time that demand for services is increasing. In addition, changing social attitudes and public expectations are forcing councils to rethink the way they deliver services to local communities.

The Big Society, Localism and Open Public Services

Through its conceptualization of the 'Big Society' and the promotion of the 'Open Public Services' and 'Localism' agendas, the coalition government has placed user voice at the forefront of its narrative on public service reform.

This is based on the assertion that delivering 'consumer' choice through market based reforms and competitive outsourcing are the only effective way of empowering service users. Services are deemed to be responsive to users acting as individual customers, choosing between different service providers competing in a market.

Prime Minister David Cameron has said his government will “create a new presumption... that public services should be open to a range of providers competing to offer a better service”¹.

A range of initiatives and legislative changes have been implemented with the aim of enabling and embedding the market for public services.

In the area of local government, the Localism Act provides new opportunities for different providers to challenge local service delivery and oblige local authorities to put services out to tender.

A stated ambition of the 'Big Society' agenda has been the increased role of charities, community and voluntary organisations, social enterprises and co-operatives in the delivery of public services, these forms of organisation being seen to be closer to communities and more adept at engaging with and empowering service users.

The government's 'Open Public Services' narrative is therefore often couched in terms of opening up opportunities to the third sector, though evidence to date suggests that private sector organisations remain the main beneficiaries of public sector outsourcing.

Critics, including the TUC point out that this market approach to public service reform will lead to fragmentation of services, distancing strategic overview from service delivery and tying councils up in contractual arrangements that reduce their flexibility to respond to citizens' needs.

1 How we will release the grip of state control, Cameron, D., Daily Telegraph, 20 February 2011

There also has been criticism that the government's focus on 'Localism' and the 'Big Society' is a way of shifting responsibility for difficult decisions about service reductions to the local level. While 'Localism' and the 'Big Society' claim to empower citizens, different people and places have different capacity and skills for participation and there is a danger that the poorest and least powerful members of society will be further disempowered. The perception remains that in a local community with competing interests, those with the power, skills and social capital to engage most effectively will prevail.

A guide to the Localism Act produced by the TUC and a range of voluntary and community organisations commented that:

“the creation of public service markets and an individualist and consumer-led approach to public service reform might lead to growing inequality within and between communities, markets that exclude community participation, competition at the expense of collaboration and localism that devolves responsibility and blame but not resources or power”.²

Austerity

The government continues to affirm its commitment to an austerity policy of dramatic public spending cuts and tax rises with the stated intention of cutting the UK's structural deficit by 2017.

Local government has been one of the hardest hit areas. The Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 set out reductions of 26% in local government funding in real terms by 2015 and subsequent announcements by the Chancellor have extended the period of austerity for a further two years, and appear to have increased the overall volume of cuts to the local government budget.

The LGA indicates that a funding crisis in local government is looming. Their modeling of future sources of council revenue, including grants, local taxes, fees and charges, reserves and investment income against future demand shows a potential funding gap of £16.5bn a year by the end of the decade, a 29% shortfall between revenue and spending pressures.³

This is having a significant impact on the local government workforce. Unprecedented budget cuts have meant massive job losses, a significant squeeze on pay and low morale. Office for National Statistics figures show that employment in local government has fallen by over 250,000⁴ since the third quarter of 2010.

Professionals with the experience and understanding to support third sector bodies and co-ordinate community development, capacity building and

2 Localism: threat or opportunity? TUC and National Coalition for Independent Action, July 2012

3 Funding outlook for councils from 2010/11 to 2019/20, LGA, May 2012

4 This figure includes staff at maintained schools who have transferred to academies, which are officially classed as central rather than local government bodies.

Introduction

volunteering are likely to be those that have been particularly vulnerable to cuts in spending, Professor Marilyn Taylor points out.⁵ Remaining employees are coping with increased demand for services against a backdrop of reduced resources.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that public sector budget cuts are hitting the most deprived areas the hardest and there is a conflict within local authorities over prioritising the needs of their most vulnerable residents. Researchers found that the most deprived authorities lost most spending power, especially in the first year of austerity measures, while some affluent areas faced only mild initial cuts.⁶

Research aims

In the context of the government's marketisation agenda and the very real challenges presented by fiscal constraint, crucial debates are taking place about the future of public service delivery. These debates focus on key questions about the nature of state provision, incorporating critiques of both the market model and top down, new public management approaches adopted under New Labour. Central to these debates is the notion of how the human relationships central to the provision of public services can be harnessed in support of progressive objectives. The TUC wants the voice of public service employees, who are working with citizens on a day to day basis, to be taken on board in such debates.

APSE's research for the TUC therefore sets out to look specifically at the way in which citizens and council employees can be empowered to work together to deliver improved outcomes for local communities. This involved a review of the current policy context and existing research publications, a survey of local government officers' activities and views and a focus on some key case studies to determine lessons learned and establish some areas of good practice.

While empowerment of citizens who are using personal services, such as social care, is an important research topic in its own right that has been explored in numerous publications, this particular study focuses predominantly on services that are delivered at the community level, rather than the individual level.

The emphasis is therefore on citizens working alongside each other and local authority staff to collectively improve the area where they live, rather than on a solitary basis to improve personal services and individual outcomes.

5 Public policy in the Community, Taylor, M., Palgrave, 2011

6 Serving deprived communities in a recession, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2012

Definitions

This is an area of policy and practice where terms are used interchangeably and whose meaning is often taken as read without being defined. Before proceeding, it is therefore important to discuss the terms used.

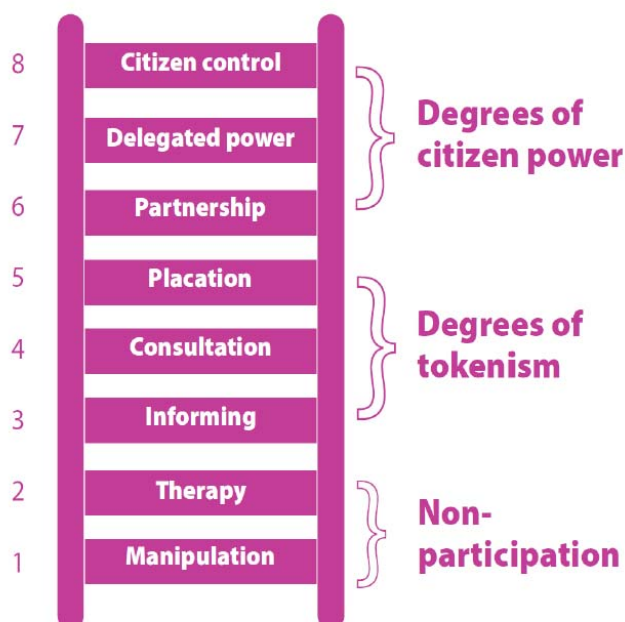
Citizens, residents, service users and community members

Citizens, residents, service users and community members are used interchangeably here to denote members of the public who live in local areas and/or use public services.

Involvement, participation, engagement and empowerment

Involvement, participation, engagement and empowerment are often used interchangeably in studies on the topic. In fact, they mean different levels of participation. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation presents an eight-step model with 'non participation' – therapy, manipulation and tokenism – at the bottom⁷. 'Placation' – consultation and informing – are the next stage. 'Citizen power' – citizen control, delegated power and partnership – are the top of the ladder.

Figure1: Diagram showing Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation



⁷ Arnstein, S., A Ladder of Citizen Participation, JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969

Introduction

While ‘empowerment’ is the ultimate goal, involvement, participation and engagement are important steps in the process. This report draws upon material covering all levels of involvement, while holding empowerment of citizens and council employees to improve outcomes in local communities up as the ultimate aim.

A MORI Social Research Institute report on empowerment says: “Despite the prominence of the ‘empowerment agenda’ in British political debate, and an increased focus on local government, a lack of clarity remains among local authorities and other public service providers as to what citizen empowerment is and how it can be used as a mechanism to improve policymaking and outcomes for local people”.⁸ The authors define it as follows: “Empowerment is when people feel they can influence the decisions that impact on their lives and are provided with meaningful opportunities to make this an actuality not a mere possibility”.⁹

Citizens and council employees working together

In this report, council employees, means staff that have direct contact with citizens. While seeking out material on both employee and community empowerment in achieving positive outcomes from public services, the majority of material that is available focuses on the role of citizens. The term 'co-production' has become increasingly common in public service management discourse in recent years. Co-production will be discussed in this report. Although the concept is about service providers and users working together, this still seems to concentrate on the citizenship aspects of the process. A piece of research that places value on citizens and council employees working together is therefore a timely addition to public service reform discourse.

Report structure

Co-production in theory and practice: examines some of the issues related to the role of service users in the design and provision of services, looking at the terminology and experience of ‘co-production’ to date.

Local authority practice – survey results: presents the results of APSE's survey of local government officers to show the current picture of local authority activity. This establishes what councils are doing and what benefits and barriers they experience.

⁸ Empowering Britain from the bottom up, MORI Social Research Institute, June 2009, p.9

⁹ Ibid, p.13

Case studies: provides some examples of good practice in Darlington, Durham, Halton, Milton Keynes and South Derbyshire. These detailed case studies discuss the background to community empowerment, activities and outcomes and lessons to be drawn from experiences in these authorities.

Ten ways to make co-production work: draws upon material in the previous sections to outline a set of principles that should govern a progressive model for public service delivery based on citizens and public service workers collaborating to deliver improved outcomes.

Conclusions: provides an outline of issues for future consideration in the development of co-production within a public sector context.

Co-production in theory and practice

What is co-production?

Co-production has become a central concept in examining citizens' participation in public service delivery. Professor Elinor Ostrom first coined the term in the 1970s to describe agencies and citizens working jointly to achieve an outcome.

Co-production is based on the insight that workers know how to deliver services at the sharp end of provision and the public cannot be passive recipients but have a decisive role to play in their co-creation. Growth in expectations from public services coupled with fiscal austerity has given impetus to co-production in the modern UK public service context. ICT advances are enabling co-production to be less localised.¹⁰

NESTA has worked with the New Economics Foundation to develop the concept of co-production. Phillip Colligan, director of NESTA's 'Public Service Lab', says the notion of passive recipients who consume services has created a culture of dependency and disempowered people'. He believes co-production "offers real transformation for services struggling with rising demands and shrinking budgets". He stresses that: "Public service professionals need to be at the heart of bringing about this change".¹¹

At the European level, co-production was the core theme of the 5th European Quality Conference in 2008 and the OECD has begun the focus on co-production as a means of promoting innovation in public services. The UK has the highest level of user involvement in environment, public health and community safety services, followed by Germany, Czech Republic, France and Denmark.¹²

¹⁰ Co-production: the new face of public services, Ovum, June 29 2011. Available at: <http://ovum.com/2011/06/29/co-production-the-new-face-of-public-services/>

¹¹ The time is right for co-production, Colligan, P., Public Service, 10 November, 2010

¹² A future research agenda for co-production, Loeffler, E., LACRI, December 2009

Bovaird, Loeffler and Hine-Hughes argue: “Quality in services often occurs during service delivery, usually in the interaction between the customer and provider, rather than just at the end of the process”¹³.

This means that:-

- Customers do not evaluate service quality based solely on the outcomes
- Customers also consider the process of delivery

Types of co-production are also described as:-

- Co-commissioning of services, which includes co-planning, co-prioritisation and co-design and
- Co-delivery, which covers co-managing, co-performing, co-assessment.

They give examples of various types of co-production including:

- Individual budgets
- Participatory budgeting
- Co-financing such as fundraising, charges and agreement to tax increases
- Co-design such as user consultation and Service Design Labs.

Co-delivery of services includes:

- Co-managing services such as community management of assets and school governors;
- Co-performing such as peer support groups including expert patients or Neighbourhood Watch schemes
- Co-assessment and co-evaluation such as tenant inspectors

Many will be familiar with these types of arrangements at a local level.

Individual and collective co-production

Co-production is a complex concept and co-production activities take many forms. Bovaird and Loeffler distinguish between ‘individualised’ and ‘collective’ forms of co-production. Empirical evidence from their survey of five EU countries suggests that co-production is dominated by individualised co-production and performance in collectivised co-production is relatively weak.¹⁴

13 From passive customers to active co-producers: The role of co-production in public services, Bovaird, T., Löffler E., and Hine-Hughes F., 2011. Available at:www.mycustomer.com/topic/customer-experience/passive-customers-active-co-producers-role-co-production-public-services/1

14 User and community co-production of public services, Briefing Paper 12, Bovaird T., Loeffler E., Third Sector Research Centre, 2009

Co-Production in Theory and Practice

Needham's definition of 'personal co-production' encompasses services that generate private value to the individual.¹⁵ These are commonly related to personalisation of services and individual budgets for adult social care, whereas collective co-production relates to activities such as volunteering, participatory budgeting and communal litter-picks. But the distinction between individual and collective co-production is obviously not a clear one and solitary actions, such as sorting refuse for recycling purposes, have a collective value. Loeffler and Watt suggest that both personal and collective co-production can produce either private value alone, public value alone or both.¹⁶

Loeffler points out that the collective approach builds trust and improves relationships between service users and providers, helps make communities more cohesive and helps create social capital.¹⁷

Bovaird says: "The imbalance between individual and collective co-production is worrying, as there is a strong suggestion in the literature that collective co-production is likely to have larger, more sustainable impacts on quality of life outcomes than individual co-production." Bovaird and Stoker are currently leading an Arts and Humanities Research Council project under the 'Connected Communities' banner, which aims to identify ways in which the public sector can influence more citizens to engage in collective co-production.¹⁸

Citizens' expectations

Citizens' expectations have changed over the past twenty years. The relationship between service providers and service users is being rapidly renegotiated in the private sector, "where users are expected to carry out many service activities on-line, only use provider personnel for those activities where technical expertise is really essential". At a slower pace, this is also happening in the public and third sectors.¹⁹

The relationship between the citizen and the state is at "a departure point and citizens are coming to expect a different relationship with the state, with many now expecting high levels of service quality and more choice and input into what they receive".²⁰ Enabling service users in the public sector to influence and tailor services helps meet rising expectations.

15 Personal co-production, Needham, C. cited in Loeffler, E, LACRI, December 2009

16 Understanding the efficiency implications of co-production, Loeffler, E., and Watt, P.A., LACRI, 2009

17 A future research agenda for co-production, Loeffler, E., LACRI, December 2009

18 Who is really creating public service outcomes, Bovaird, T., Public Service Matters, 23 December 2011 Available at: <http://publicservicematters.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/who-is-really-creating-neighbourhood.html>

19 Ibid

20 Changing Behaviours Opening a new conversation with the citizen, Keohane N., NLGN, 2011

Research around the UK has found people want greater control over the issues that affect their day-to-day experience of community life, such as crime and community safety, dirt and litter and the quality of public spaces and facilities for children and young people, along with influence over strategic services like housing, education and health.²¹

The emphasis on putting service users at the centre of service design – along with the ubiquity of the internet, latest ICT and expansion of social media – mean the general public expects the highest standard of services and to be able to access public organisations around the clock. These communication channels also present opportunities for greater citizen participation in decisions about their services.

Research published by the Community Development Foundation shows that community empowerment activities often lead to improvements in individuals' confidence and that their aspirations are raised.²² Community empowerment is also strongly linked with people believing that they are getting value for money from public services. MORI has found that people feeling they can influence decisions locally is one of the key drivers to increasing their perception that they are receiving public services that offer good value for money.²³

At the same time, service users remain sceptical about the value of outsourcing public services to private and voluntary sector providers. Recent research by the Fabian Society showed that while many participants wanted greater choice in accessing the right local school or hospital for them, they 'almost never equated this to a greater diversity of provision or an increased role for non-state providers'. 62 % of respondents thought that public services should be provided mainly or only by government and 64 % believed that 'public services should not be run like a business but rather depend on the values and ethos of the public good'.²⁴

This last point may reflect wider awareness about the role of public services as 'public goods' differentiated from consumer items in their contribution to broader social, environmental and economic objectives that affect the community as a whole. As such, collective forms of 'co-production' may prove to be a more useful focus for those engaged in the design and delivery of public services.

21 Public services and civil society working together, The Young Foundation, 2010

22 Engaging with communities; lessons from the front-line, Community Development Foundation, 2010

23 Empowering Britain from the bottom up, MORI Social Research Institute, June 2009, p.36

24 For the public good, Fabian Society, August 2012

Co-production and inequality

Implicit assumptions that public participation will fill the void left by retrenchment of the state must be challenged. The skills and capacity to engage in co-production are not evenly distributed, creating a disproportionate and often unfair disadvantage between different communities.

This is particularly the case as the fiscal, political and legislative context open up the potential for a widening of inequalities. Public spending cuts are impacting on communities in different ways. Requirements on local authorities to monitor and manage equalities impacts are being watered down and the resources to do so are being removed. New forms of public service delivery and user engagement may increasingly take forms that are remote from the most vulnerable and marginalised service users. And community and voluntary sector infrastructure is being scaled back due to funding cuts, reducing the ability for local groups to perform the advocacy and empowerment roles they have traditionally performed among excluded communities.

While ‘Localism’ and the ‘Big Society’ claim to empower citizens, Abbas, an academic examining government policy from a social justice and racial equality perspective, believes it will have the opposite impact: “the Coalition claims that by giving up some of their power, they can give it to the people. Yet the very fact that organisations and communities are having to compete for funding – funding that is premised on presenting how commercially viable your cause is – will disenfranchise those who are already disenfranchised, since such groups are less likely to have an infrastructure in place or access to resources and knowledge to make a successful case”.²⁵ She cites data from the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations showing there are more than twice as many neighbourhood organisations per head of population in the most prosperous than the least prosperous areas of the country.

Not all communities are therefore well placed to take up new Localism Act powers such as the ‘community right to challenge’ and the ‘community right to buy land’. Reduction of state power does not automatically equal citizen power; and in fact, a strong public sector framework is vital to underpin equality and empowerment.

A report from MORI Social Research Institute points out that “activists tend to be disproportionately well-off, middle aged and white... only one percent of members of minority ethnic groups are activists and, of those without qualifications, three percent are activists compared to twenty-six percent for those with postgraduate degrees”.²⁶

25 The Big Society; The big divide? Abbas, M.S. and Lachman, R. (eds), JUST West Yorkshire, 2012, p.89

26 Empowering Britain from the bottom up, MORI Social Research Institute, June 2009, p.20

Simply providing new opportunities for empowerment (e.g. a local authority using participatory budgeting for the first time) risks increasing the empowerment gap because those included/empowered groups will use the empowerment opportunity and traditionally excluded/disempowered groups will not, because they do not believe their actions can make a difference.

Thus a problem that is common to much community engagement occurs of only a small number of the ‘usual suspects’ dominating decision-making. A report on an Economic and Social Research Council Democracy and Participation programme survey describes one local authority as engaging with a small number of residents, who “became the great and the good and another level of bureaucracy as far as the community went’ and a tendency of ‘not nurturing engagement but sucking it dry’.²⁷

Public bodies “have to be aware of, and manage, the risk that these processes will accentuate power imbalances”, according to the New Local Government Network. It points out that the emergence of social media will need to be actively managed if it is to generate useful insight and allow equal opportunity for participation. “Poor moderation simply gives a greater voice to the loudest and most agile e-users, who are increasingly likely to be the increasingly web savvy over-55s with both the time and inclination to influence the democratic process” it says.²⁸

Capacity and skills

The current orthodoxy equates public participation in services with the need to cut costs. While it may lead to cost savings, the need for employees and communities to be fully equipped with the social capital, capacity and skills to participate in a meaningful way must not be underestimated. The development of such capacity and skills requires both a coherent public sector framework and sufficient funding.

Social capital has been identified as an important factor in co-production. Cummins and Miller say: “The stock of social capital that an individual has is a major influence on their ability to be effective co-producers. Services have to learn how to work with rather than do unto service users... Any attempt to redesign a system must also take into account how personal skills, knowledge and resource and the availability to access social capital vary from one person to another... We must also take into account what resources the service system requires people to draw on when they want to gain access to and use its services”.²⁹

27 Public participation and collaborative governance, Newman, J. et al, 2004, *Journal of Social Policy*, 33 (2), pp.203-223

28 Anticipating the future citizen, NLGN, February 2012

29 Co-production and social capital: The role that users and citizens play in improving local services, Cummins, J., and Miller, C., Office of Public Management, October 2007

Co-Production in Theory and Practice

Cummins and Miller point out, in an Office of Public Management report, that all public services require some level of social capital, skills or knowledge on the part of the service user. They give the example of waste management, which at the very least requires separating materials for recycling, using appropriate containers and following collection schedules.³⁰

At the same time, there are corresponding gaps in the capacity of those delivering public services. Loeffler highlights gaps in public sector professionals' understanding of the inputs and outcomes of co-production that need to be filled. Finance managers need to know the potential effects of individual and collective co-production on cashable and non-cashable savings, for example. Performance managers need to know how much of a difference co-production actually makes. Chief executives need to know what kind of partnership working is needed to scale up co-production. Council employees need to know how to harness expertise of communities, how to manage risks when things go wrong and ensure professional status and rewards are not undermined by a move to user and citizen centric services.³¹

Public appetite for participation

While central government policy assumes that citizens are keen to participate in public service design and delivery, this assumption is not backed up by research. A survey by IPPR and PWC 2010 found that although the public support the principle of having a greater say in public services, the vast majority believe the state should remain primarily responsible for delivering those services.³²

Bovaird and Loeffler, Europe's foremost experts on co-production, say: "In general, citizen's show particularly high levels of engagement when they can undertake activities which do not need much effort from them and do not require getting in touch with others".³³ Bovaird argues that willingness of citizens to become more involved in the decisions that influence their lives is only evident where citizens feel they can play a worthwhile role. "It is this latter condition that the public sector has, up to now, largely failed to deliver" he says.³⁴

30 Co-production and social capital: The role that users and citizens play in improving local services, Cummins, J., and Miller, C., Office of Public Management, October 2007

31 A future research agenda for co-production, Loeffler, E., December 2009, table pp.14-16

32 Capable Communities Towards Citizen Powered Public Services, IPPR/PWC, 2010

33 User and community co-production of public services, Bovaird T., and Loeffler E., Third Sector Research Centre, 2009, p.2

34 Who is really creating public service outcomes, Public Service Matters, Bovaird, T, 23 December 2011 Available at: <http://publicservicematters.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/who-is-really-creating-neighbourhood.html>

The role of the workforce

Community empowerment can only be as effective as the public sector framework and workforce that supports it. Public sector employees need to feel supported and motivated in order to encourage community participation, which may be a lot to ask of them at such a difficult period when morale is at an all-time low. Employees whose colleagues have lost their jobs may be reluctant to train unpaid volunteers to take on their roles under the mantle of 'co-production'. It is important to identify clearly what is appropriate activity for members of the public and where the boundaries between the roles of professionals and members of the public lie. This is especially true when there are statutory, legal and health and safety issues to consider.

Unprecedented budget cuts have meant massive job losses throughout the public sector. Remaining employees are coping with increased demand for services against a backdrop of reduced resources. The reduction of protections in place for workers providing services that have been transferred out of the public sector, such as the removal of the Two Tier Code, has led to increased insecurity and uncertainty among a workforce faced with an intensification of outsourcing.

A report on a co-production workshop at the London Borough of Lambeth found a positive response from officers who understood that meaningful input from service users could allow the council to enhance the services they deliver but that staff morale remains a problem. The author writes: "Finding the confidence and determination to work in new, innovative ways is tough enough when times are good – but the picture is even more complex today". He adds that communication must also be improved, rather than falling back on technical jargon. Confident, well-motivated and trained employees are needed who can communicate clearly with citizens.³⁵

The importance of staff engagement to public service improvement is well established.³⁶ APSE's study of trade union involvement in service improvement for Unison gives powerful examples of the importance of employees and their representatives participating in decisions over services and includes cases where the close relationship between front-line staff and service users resulted in more effective design and delivery.

Front-line workers are now charged with 'balancing the demands of the state and the needs and potential of the individual encountered' according to Professor Taylor.³⁷

Research conducted among public service workers specifically analysed strategies they use to build relationships with the community. The researcher

35 Lambeth's co-op must tackle the challenge of leadership and morale, Clark, F., Guardian Professional, 15th November 2011

36 The Putting People First Taskforce, DCLG, 2010

37 Public policy in the Community, Taylor, M., Palgrave, 2011, p.258

Co-Production in Theory and Practice

concluded that the 'emergent spaces at the periphery of local governance' require front-line work that is less like 'street-level bureaucracy' and more like what she terms 'civic entrepreneurship'.³⁸

However, Professor Taylor suggests that "those within the public sector who have the experience and understanding to support voluntary and community groups may be particularly vulnerable" to cuts in public spending.³⁹

A study for DCLG in 2007 highlighted the importance of perceptions of service quality and job attitudes among front-line workers to users' experiences of the service. But only a small number of the respondents in the study believed that their service was continuously searching for new ideas from staff, whilst a smaller proportion saw their service as being open to new ideas and quick to respond. Most services appeared to offer staff formal opportunities to express their ideas and opinions. However, only a minority of respondents believed that they have any influence over decisions made at a higher level. This was found to be the case particularly with long-term decisions that affect the overall direction of each council service.⁴⁰ And the Sunningdale Institute's study for the Cabinet Office stressed the need to embed the gathering of insight from employees into public policy making.⁴¹

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development says that for the reform agenda to work, managers at all levels must have people management skills to empower and engage people and employees should have a clear voice and feel their views are respected and matter. It recommends that public sector employers should focus on boosting employee engagement as a strategic priority.⁴²

The New Economics Foundation recommends changing the way professionals work by: reviewing recruitment and appraisal processes so that they better represent what really matters to people using services; ensuring that building the skills and capacities of people to do things for themselves becomes central to the role of professionals; reviewing the language used by services to provide a truer reflection of the partnership between citizens and professionals; and making personal relationships a critical aspect of a service not something to be fearful of.⁴³

However, the relationship between council staff and service users is not particularly well covered in existing literature, other than in material on 'co-

38 Revisiting Lipsky: Front-Line Work in UK Local Governance, Durose, C., *Political Studies*, 59, pp. 978–995

39 Public policy in the Community, Taylor, M., Palgrave, 2011, p.258

40 The Role of Frontline Staff in Service Innovation and Improvement, DCLG, 2007

41 Listening to the front line, Government response to Sunningdale Institute study, Cabinet Office, 2009

42 Building productive public sector workplaces, PPMA, December 2010

43 In this together :Changing the way professionals work, New Economics Foundation, 2011

production' which, as discussed above, can be a cover for withdrawal of services and minimising state responsibility.

Building on lessons from the history of public participation

A limitation of prevailing approaches to public service reform is that they fail to take on board the history of public participation in public services. Local government is founded and structured on the principle of accountability to residents. This history provides useful lessons on both good and bad practice in participation in public services as civic engagement evolves into co-production in the delivery of services.

Publicly funded community consultation, development and empowerment in the UK dates back to the 1960s.⁴⁴ While well intentioned, flaws in the implementation of public participation in decision-making were identified from the outset. The Skeffington Report in 1969 described public participation in planning as tokenistic and dominated by the most articulate members of society.⁴⁵

Involvement of council housing tenants in decisions about their homes expanded during the 1970s and the need to recognise equality of opportunity and diversity was increasingly taken on board in local authorities in the 1980s. Although property-led regeneration under the Conservative government spawned resident involvement in estate management boards, Urban Development Corporations established up to the early 1990s have been widely criticised for bypassing the views of local communities in their emphasis on private sector solutions. Office for Public Management research in 1993 found that although there were a number of user and carer involvement initiatives operational in the forty local authorities they reviewed, major changes in service provision resulting from that involvement could only be identified in a few authorities.⁴⁶

When the Labour government came to power in 1997, it promised greater public participation and community involvement. The 1998 White Paper, *Modern Local Government: In touch, with the people*, wanted to embed participation into the culture of local government. A rapid growth in consultation techniques followed.

Lowndes et al undertook a census on public participation activity in 2001, which showed commitment and enthusiasm across local government for innovation in participation and that the number and range of initiatives – including complaints forms, satisfaction surveys, public meetings, forums,

44 *Community Work and Social Change*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Longman, 1968

45 *People and Planning: Report of the Committee in Public Participation in Planning*, Skeffington A., Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1969

46 Cited in *Why doesn't the government respond to the participating public?*, Williams, M., Vanguard Online, December 2002. Available at: <http://www.vgpolitics.f9.co.uk/030101.doc>

Co-Production in Theory and Practice

consultations and citizen's panels – had expanded greatly. Lack of time and resources and public interest were the biggest factors inhibiting participation, the researchers found. Two thirds of the professional respondents indicated their experience of public participation was positive. However concerns were voiced among almost a third, who said it raised unrealistic public expectations.⁴⁷ Some council officers said there was a problem when public demand on a particular issue conflicted with broader council policy and others identified tension between real democratic enhancements and achieving efficient and effective service delivery.

The 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which took effect from April 2009, imposed a duty on all local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out 'any of its functions' by providing information, consulting or 'involving in another way'. The 2008 White Paper Communities in Control paved the way for a range of deliberative forums, such as area forums, youth forums, community or identity based participation.

Despite these efforts, ESRC research found that participation was centered around building capacity among the public to engage rather than changing the culture of organisations to engage more effectively and that questions of 'dissent, difference and conflict', remained unanswered.⁴⁸ The National Community Forum argued that inconsistency in interpretation, definition and implementation remained significant barriers to the achievement of empowered communities and improved public services.⁴⁹

Councils across the UK from the Shetland Islands to Cornwall now have strategies and staff dedicated to ensuring community involvement in decision making as part of their fundamental value system and framework.⁵⁰ There seems to be a shift from democratic participation linked to governance towards participation linked to specific services and locations. Bovaird et al state that some form of co-production is apparent in most public agencies.⁵¹

The Young Foundations reports: 'Since the mid-nineties there has been a significant increase in the number of local authorities and mainstream service

47 Trends in participation - local government perspectives, Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L., and Stoker, G., Blackwell, 2001

48 Public participation and collaborative governance, Newman, J. et al, Journal of Social Policy, 33 (2) 2004, pp.203-223

49 The Role of Frontline Staff in Service Innovation and Improvement, DCLG 2007

50 Shetland Islands Council, Community Consultation and Engagement Guide, SIC, 2011
Available at:

<http://www.shetland.gov.uk/policy/documents/CommunityConsultationEngagementGuide.pdf>

Cornwall County Council, Community Engagement Strategy, CCC, 200. Available at:

<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=20174>

51 From passive customers to active co-producers: The role of co-production in public services, Bovaird, T., Löffler E., and Hine-Hughes F., 2011. Available at:

www.mycustomer.com/topic/customer-experience/passive-customers-active-co-producers-role-co-production-public-services/1

providers using consultation methods to involve people in discussions about public services. Research indicates that 71% of local authorities now use Citizens' Panels, 92% use customer satisfaction surveys and 78% use public meetings as ways to engage voters in these discussions.⁵²

Democratic accountability and strategic responsibility

The role of democratically elected local councillors must not be overlooked. Loeffler highlights questions which need to be addressed concerning the relationship between councillors and co-production, namely: how does co-production influence accountability; how can councillors play a role in mobilising co-production; and how can the limitations and potential downsides of co-production be taken into account in council decision-making?⁵³

While public participation enables citizens in different locations with different priorities to articulate their views, elected members and officers are ultimately accountable for running all services and have a responsibility to balance competing priorities across geographic areas and services and within tight budgets.

For local government in particular, APSE's 'ensuring council' model provides a framework whereby a local authority retains a core capacity to deliver efficient services and aligns this with strategic vision, policy co-ordination, leadership, entrepreneurship and democratic accountability.⁵⁴

There are, therefore, a number of ways in which local authorities are approaching issues of service user engagement and community empowerment. In the next section, we will turn to some more findings from our own research which illustrates this further, before looking in more detail at some particular case studies which indicate how effective some local authorities have been.

52 Public services and civil society working together, The Young Foundation, 2010

53 A future research agenda for co-production, Loeffler, E., LACRI, December 2009

54 Creating an ensuring council, APSE, February 2010

Local authority practice: survey results

Summary

An online survey amongst local authorities in the UK found that most councils already take user participation in services seriously. Most councils have already adopted a user participation strategy and found that, as a result, user satisfaction in services increased showing very positive results from those users involved in services.

However, around a third of councils believe that budget reductions will make it more difficult to involve users in service design and delivery, with the vast majority (87%) of respondents, believing that retaining core service delivery is essential to greater user involvement. The role of local authority staff is also crucial to effective engagement with users. Staff are critical to supporting users who want to get involved in the design and delivery of local services; but survey respondents are concerned that, against the backdrop of budget cuts, the ability for staff to engage with users will be limited.

Against the policy backdrop and the budgetary situation outlined previously, APSE carried out a survey to determine the current picture of local government policy and activities to encourage employees and communities to work together to deliver positive outcomes.

The on-line survey received 204 responses from officers in councils across the UK. In some places, this tested strength of opinion on aspects of public involvement in decision making and delivery of services. In some places, it featured questions which enabled respondents to choose more than one answer and therefore percentages reflect strength of belief about a range of statements rather than either/or scenarios and may therefore total more than 100%.

Strategies for public participation in service design and delivery

Local authority officers were asked about strategies for public participation in design and delivery of services. The vast majority of respondents reported that their authority has in place a corporate strategy to encourage public participation in the design and delivery of public services. More than 73% of respondents report that they have a policy in place to encourage participation

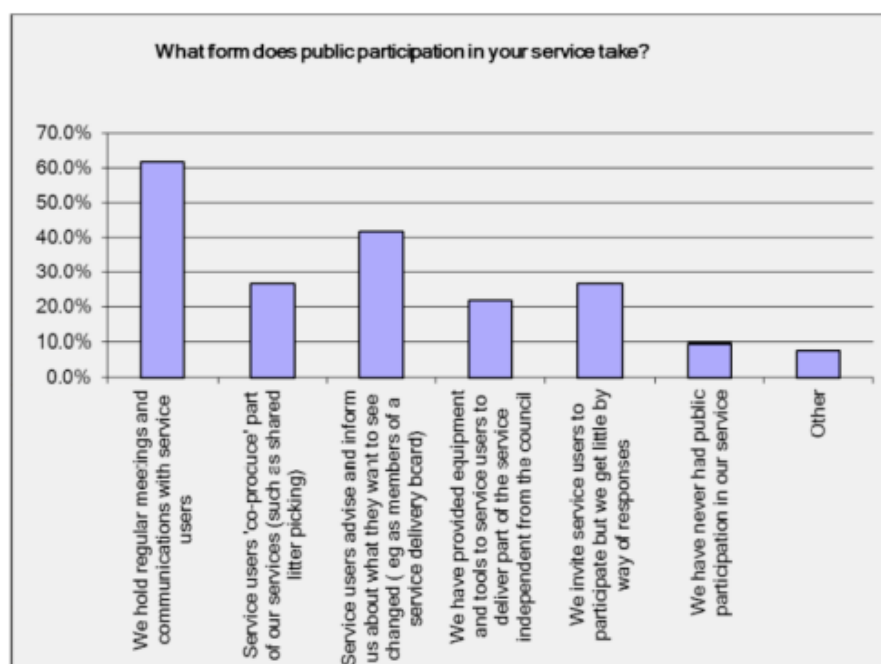
by service users. The primary purposes of such a strategy were ranked as engagement, involvement and informing residents, followed by empowerment.

Forms of participation

When asked about what form user involvement takes, regular meetings and communications with service users was most common, with almost 62% reporting that this took place in their local authority. Almost 42% said that service users 'suggest and advise upon what changes they would like to see in services'. Over a quarter of respondents report that practical activities such as litter picks take place with residents. Over 20% report that they have provided equipment and other resources to residents to assist in aspects of service delivery.

However, on a less positive note, a total of 27% of respondents report that there is a lack of engagement by residents despite efforts to ensure residents are involved in service design and delivery.

TABLE 1: FORMS OF PARTICIPATION



Comment from survey respondent:

"My experience is when communities can directly discuss what they want with the department / provider their level of satisfaction is higher e.g. improving parks where local people help to design the facility, groups that plan and deliver a service for older people or youth clubs."

What are local authorities doing: survey results

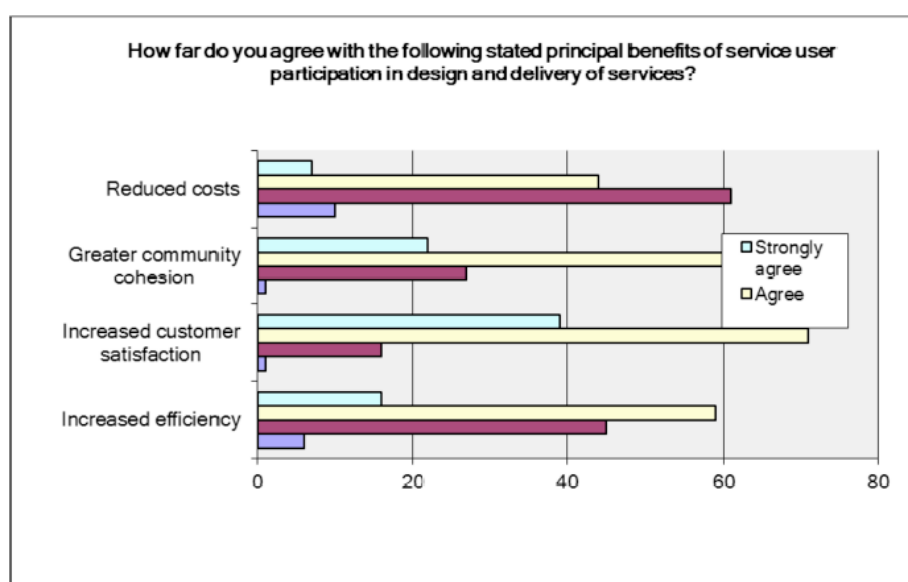
The benefits of citizen participation

When asked how far they agreed with statements as to the benefits of user participation in the design and delivery of services, 88% of respondents either agreed or agreed strongly that a benefit of user participation was increased customer satisfaction with the services.

There were 62% who agreed or agreed strongly that user participation would lead to efficiencies.

However, cutting costs does not seem to be regarded as a major benefit of service user involvement, with just under 6% of respondents strongly believing that user participation would lead to reduced costs.

TABLE 2: BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION



Comment from survey respondent:

"We hold a 100 day campaign where more than 460 events take place with nearly 15,000 volunteers involved. As part of this, more than 500 bags of litter have been collected at litter picks attended by over 650 people. During this time crime also reduced by 22%."

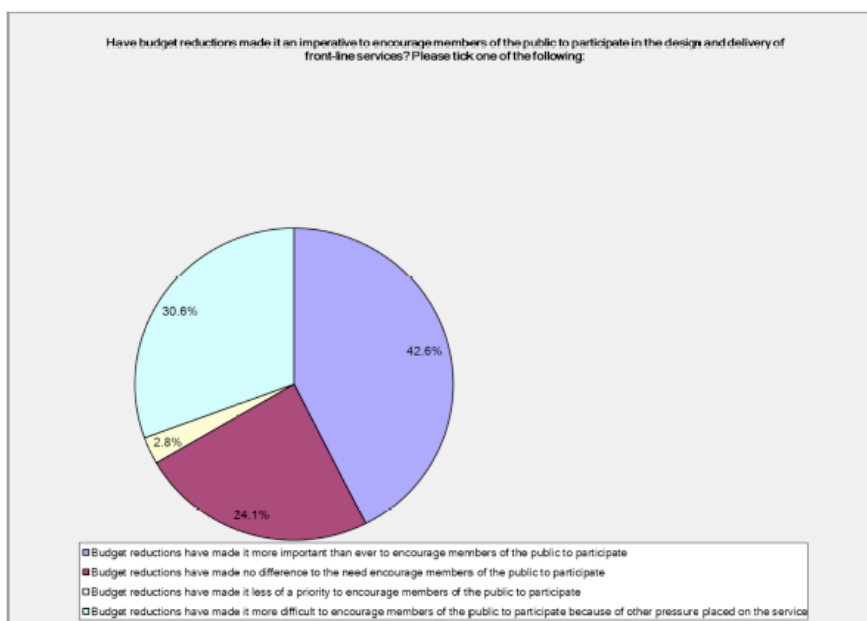
Impact of budget reductions

Budget reductions are clearly impacting upon service delivery across local government. Almost 29% of respondents face reductions of up to 10% to their service, whilst 22% face reductions up to 20%. Just 7% of respondents report a small increase in available budget.

When this is cross referenced against barriers to engagement (discussed below) the survey results show an uncomfortable relationship between a need for greater resources in order to make public engagement in service design and delivery a reality and the on-going impact of reduced budgets on the delivery on those aims.

When asked if budget reductions have made it an imperative to encourage public participation in design and delivery 43% of respondents agree that is the case but a further 31% of respondents believe that budget reductions will make it more difficult to gain user involvement in service delivery.

TABLE 3: IMPACT OF BUDGET REDUCTIONS



Use of the term 'co-production'

Whilst many survey respondents were able to identify actions and activities that could be deemed to be 'co-production', the term itself is not commonly used among local government officers. Just 15% of respondents used the term on a frequent basis and the rest rarely or never used the term. Looking at the respondent mix, drawing upon a higher proportion of service disciplines, this perhaps suggest that the term is more familiar amongst corporate policy people

What are local authorities doing: survey results

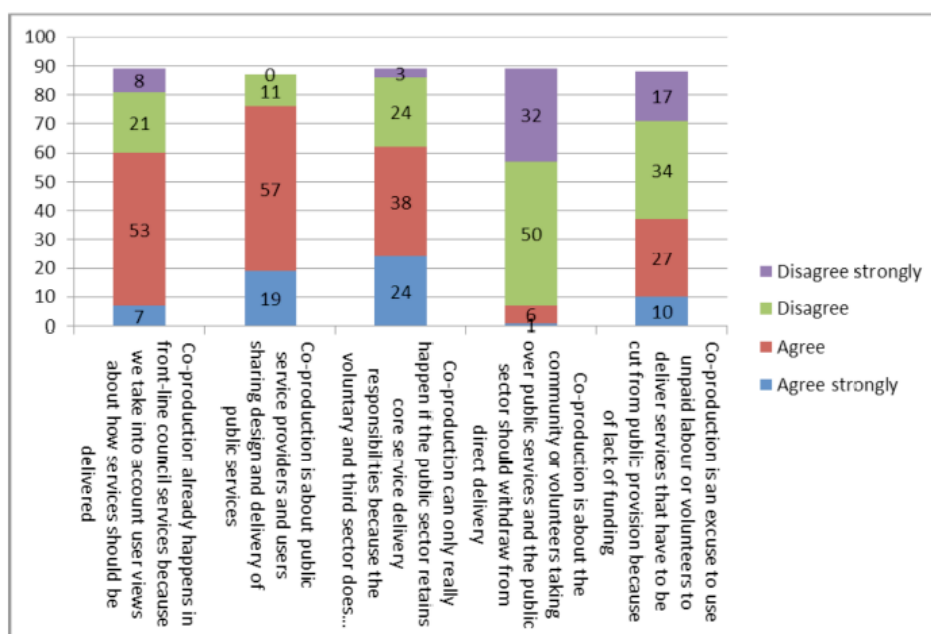
rather than frontline service providers. This could be problematic in a communications context, with the corporate centre of councils not understanding what degree of ‘co-production’ already exists in their own authorities and with front-line service managers perhaps already exceeding expectations on matters of co-production but this not being articulated back to corporate strategists.

When the term was explained as part of the survey, almost 68% of respondents agreed that councils already have a strong role in co-production through involvement of service users in consultation on service design and delivery.

Provider model and co-production

A total of 87% either agree or strongly agree that co-production can only really happen if the public sector retains core service delivery responsibilities because the voluntary and third sector does not have the capacity to deliver large-scale public services. Just 8% of respondents believe that co-production is about the community or volunteers taking over public services and the public sector should withdraw from direct delivery.

TABLE 4: PROVIDER MODEL AND CO-PRODUCTION



The role of elected members

Questions about the role of elected members showed a strong role for local councillors to ensure that the views of service users are gleaned and taken on board and delivered upon.

There was also strong recognition that councillors are uniquely placed to ensure that decisions taken on the back of co-production methods are still subject to democratic accountability within the overall strategic objectives of the authority.

Elected members are viewed as a means to ensure empowerment is not merely about the 'loudest voices', but provides fairness and democratic accountability.

The role of council employees

The role of council employees is clearly crucial, with 95% believing that staff engagement and communication needs to be effective in order to promote user involvement and engagement in services. 64% believe that employees in their service are encouraged to be active in promoting and responding to public participation however, 14% were unsure whether this happened and almost 22% said it didn't occur.

Public appetite for involvement

When asked whether there is an appetite amongst service users for greater involvement in service design and delivery of public services, less than a third of respondents felt that there was an appetite amongst service users. A total of 43% said there is little appetite amongst service users and 25% were unsure about the degree of public interest.

Comment from survey respondent:

"Forums tend to get the views of the vocal few; feedback forms are better but not if they are online as our customer group is mostly older people."

Barriers to engagement

When asked about barriers to participation, 62% reported that only a small number of people get involved and that this is not representative of the wider community.

A total of 53% of respondents reported that there is a lack of skills, knowledge and capacity to participate.

Lack of staff resources (to generate public interest) was cited by 49% and lack of public interest was cited by 48.5% of respondents.

What are local authorities doing: survey results

There are also practical barriers to address, with 71% of respondents believing that co-production can increase health and safety risks.

Comment from survey respondent:

“We face the problem that people who are housebound as they do not get the same opportunities to actively engage so when it is about carer’s issues this can present an incorrect view.”

Case studies

The following examples of best practice have been developed drawing upon APSE Best Practice Service Award entries, interviews with council officers, evidence of performance and community outcomes and comments from community members. Each case study discusses the background to the project, activities and outcomes and assesses the lessons learned as a result.

Darlington Borough Council – Community Engagement in Street Services

Comment from community recycling and waste minimization officer:

"Doing things in a new way with multi-skilled, area based teams allowed us to explain to the public what we were doing and why and to encourage them to get involved."

Background

Darlington Council has placed a strong emphasis on community engagement in street scene services ever since a service review took place in 2005.

As a result of the review, the council brought together a number of services to ensure a coherent approach to environmental management. These include; street care, street cleaning, refuse and recycling collection, street washing, environmental crime enforcement, dog wardens, highway gully cleaning, winter maintenance and emergency call out services delivered by the in-house teams. The authority also introduced generic working on a daily basis, with multi-skilled teams based in five local areas. The changes mean street scene teams go into an area after refuse and recycling collection takes place to carry out road sweeping, grass cutting and empty litter bins. This way of working gives both the employees and members of the community a greater sense of local ownership.

Because staff are in local teams, they know their area in detail and can engage with the public more closely. They have been trained to communicate with residents and listen to feedback. 'Doing things in a new way with multi-skilled, area based teams allowed us to explain to the public what we were doing and why and to encourage them to get involved. It is about giving them responsibility for their local area and pride in their environment. When we go out in neighbourhoods and speak with residents, it enables them to tell us what's going on and also to understand what challenges we face as an authority,' says waste minimisation and recycling officer, Phillippa Scrafton.

Case Studies

Activities and outcomes

Establishing a network of Street Champions has been a key strand of Darlington Council's strategy to engage residents in street scene services. The scheme draws upon the enthusiasm of environmentally minded people who care about their local neighbourhood.

Street Champions are involved in efforts to reduce litter, fly tipping, graffiti and other environmental problems. They are encouraged to report environmental issues to council staff in their area, lead local litter picks, promote good environmental practices and disseminate information. Some Street Champions have a supply of recycling bags to hand out to neighbours. Others want to be an information point for their neighbours.

The scheme, which has been running since the inception of the new street scene service, currently involves 360 residents from a range of demographic groups. Street Champions act as eyes and ears on the ground for street scene teams. If a Street Champion reports an issue, it goes to the top of their jobs schedule. So far, on average, over 40 reported environmental concerns have been raised by Street Champions each month. The council has also recently introduced 'report it' – an on-line initiative, which allows all residents to simply press a button on their computer and report fly tipping or other problems.

A regular newsletter covers street scene topics and reports when penalty notices have been handed out. 'Residents want to know when fixed penalties are issued because they want to know we are doing something to deal with the minority of people who do not respect their local environment,' says Ms Scrafton.

There are two Street Champions' get togethers each year in local parks, where they meet up with officers from street scene, countryside rangers and enforcement officers. 'It's very informal and about us listening to them and them raising issues with us, not us preaching to them', says Ms Scrafton. A large number of 'friends of the park' and other such groups have been born out of Street Champions' activities. Scene staff attend regular meetings with friends' groups, residents' associations and partnership meetings. They undertake estate walkabouts with residents, elected members and representatives from other departments.

Street Champions help mobilise wider support for community based litter campaigns. Between January and July 2012 there were 15 large, community based litter campaigns across Darlington. A month long Big Spring Clean event involved 20 litter picks. Litter picks take place throughout the year following requests by members of the public and involve community volunteers.

Area based community engagement has been important to the on-going development of street scene services in Darlington. Stronger public engagement in the continuous improvement of the service has helped to improve the

cleanliness of public spaces and deliver efficiency savings of 15%. While the service has improved, cost reduction is estimated to be around £300k per year.

A set of performance indicators are monitored on a quarterly basis. Monitoring standards, customer satisfaction and performance across the five areas enables Darlington Council to identify and address any dips in performance.

Reorganising services in a way that involves local people has led to improved resident satisfaction. A total of 79% of residents thought parks had improved in the last three years, according to data. Almost 78% of residents were satisfied with cleanliness of their local environment, 83% were satisfied with refuse collection and 75% were satisfied with kerbside recycling. Satisfaction with local neighbourhoods is high overall at 79%. The town has a Tidy Britain Group Green Flag environmental award.

Public engagement in street scene services ties in with the council's wider 'Making Waste Work' campaign. It has given the council a stronger platform on which to base awareness raising activities in primary schools to promote recycling. When a new waste contract got under way in 2010, a comprehensive communications plan was implemented to engage directly with the public in both formal and informal ways and capture opinion and ideas about the service.

Lessons

Darlington Council lost £22m funding in three years as a result of public sector budget cuts and had to make changes in the way services were organised in order to maintain standards while reducing costs. There are 110,000 residents in Darlington and authority made it clear that customer service is the responsibility of every member of staff within the authority regardless of their role. Training programmes for staff have been undertaken on customer service issues.

While the council is aware of the term co-production, it is not used in everyday work. The in-house environmental service division considers it adds value to try to encourage residents to take more responsibility in their local area and promote the Street Champions network. 'This means we will help them to help themselves. We want to empower them to do it but to make sure it's done correctly and within our framework,' says Ms Scrafton.

Ms Scrafton points out that engaging the public and recruiting Street Champions is definitely not a substitute for paid employees, but serves as a supplement to the council's service. 'Residents like where they live and there is strong support for maintaining and improving their local environment, so this isn't about replacing staff. What we are doing is telling the public what we can achieve with existing budgets. Then if they want more, as a community they can get involved and support what we do. Our staff work tirelessly at grass

Case Studies

roots work. A volunteer is precisely that. To ensure that standards are maintained, the council has to put the resources in to properly co-ordinate volunteers' support. Where volunteers are helping out, for example on litter picks, we have to ensure that everything is risk assessed. We are very directive and limit what volunteers do to ensure health and safety is addressed,' she explains.

Resources are used to raise awareness of environmental issues. This means being quite frank with residents, according to Ms Scafton. 'We will put litter bins in and communicate better but it's the public who throw litter and they need to be aware that it is not acceptable. We try to break down any communication barriers so residents know exactly where to go for information or to report problems – we also use Facebook and Twitter to engage with the community.'

Some areas require more input from the council than others to change behaviour. For example, a recent exercise on a council estate that was experiencing high levels of fly tipping and fires demonstrated the importance of socio-economic factors in raising awareness. This entailed engaging with residents on a weekly basis for nine months to improve the local environment.

The capacity and priorities of residents are different and some have more time to spare than others. 'If we can get 60% of the population to put their green recycling box out, they are doing their bit environmentally, but others want to do a lot more,' says Ms Scafton.

Durham County Council – Area Action Partnerships

Comment from Gina Underwood, Public Representative – Bishop Auckland and Shildon Area Action Partnership:

“The work of the AAP connects with and enhances the work of the County Council and I enjoy the involvement on behalf of local community and interest groups. Initiatives have been in line with the priorities decided by the forum members and I am very pleased that increasing numbers of members of the public attend the board meetings.”

Background

A culture of council employees and residents working together to decide priorities and develop solutions for neighbourhoods was built into the structure of Durham County Council when the new unitary authority was formed.

A commitment to working with local people to establish more efficient, effective and responsive ways of delivering services underpinned arrangements when the new authority was established, following local government reorganisation in 2009. Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) were set up to ensure

local residents and organisations have a say in the way services are provided to help to deliver better outcomes in communities.

AAPs bring the council, community and statutory and voluntary sector partners together to discuss priorities and take action in neighbourhoods. 'When the unitary authority started, ours was the first department to be launched,' says Lee Copeland, principal AAP co-ordinator in Durham County Council's partnerships and community engagement department. 'Frontline staff were the face of the new council and dealt with a wide range of questions from residents. The general consensus from communities was if they were going to move from districts to a unitary system, they wanted things organised in geographical areas they could relate to. The council wanted to have a dialogue with communities so they could share their views and concerns and the AAPs were developed as a means of doing that. We were clear from the outset that this was not just about informing residents; it is a full engagement and empowerment mechanism.'

As one AAP participant commented: 'The AAP has been a force for delivering real change that local residents have said they want. These are projects that would almost certainly not have been seen as a high priority by the agencies involved. What the AAP does well is facilitate local working at a local level.'

AAPs have four clear objectives: engagement; empowerment; local action; and reviewing performance. The 14 AAPs each have a board of 21 members, comprising; seven community members; seven elected members from town and parish councils; and seven senior managers from public, private and voluntary sectors organisations. Each AAP has a forum, which brings anyone who lives or works in the area together twice a year to discuss issues and determine priorities. Task and finish groups have been set up to pursue each priority.

Ensuring staff have the right skills in public engagement was important to the success of AAPs. A Kite Mark training programme has been developed to embed the community engagement culture within all departments of the council and this training is now also offered to partner organisations.

The council has a commitment to equality and inclusion and tries to reflect the broad make up of communities as much as possible in the AAPs. Ms Copeland says: 'We know from our forum evaluation sheets for example that traditionally our event attendees in the main fall into the categories of white, aged over fifty and heterosexual. We work hard though to engage with all our different communities so we're involving as diverse a range of people as possible. Our activities are as inclusive as possible and we often carry out specific targeted work with communities as well to make sure that all our residents are encouraged to be involved with the AAPs and to make sure their voices are heard. '

Case Studies

Activities and achievements

AAPs are now fully integrated into the way the council does business. The involvement of elected members has enhanced their community leadership role and their accountability to the local community. The work of AAPs is considered by Cabinet on a bi-monthly basis, shared with statutory and voluntary sector partners through update reports, and promoted through regular features in the local press. On-going commitment to the AAPs is reflected in the continuing high turnout for meetings.

AAPs have actively involved local people in major strategic issues. One of the first actions of the unitary council was to refresh the Local Strategic Partnership, the Sustainable Community Strategy and the council's vision. AAPs played a critical role in this process. Through AAPs, local people have had a major say in the development of the Local Development Framework and the council's strategic review of residential care.

AAPs now have some 5,500 members, whose level of involvement varies from keeping informed and attending forums to active participation in governance and initiatives on the ground. Considerable council resources have been allocated to AAPs including officer support to enable residents to identify and implement solutions to local issues. They each receive £120k Area Budget to enable local Action Plan delivery, complemented by Neighbourhood Budgets, which provide all 126 unitary councillors with £25,000 to support local projects and initiatives.

AAPs helped mobilise extensive community involvement in the development of the council's post-CSR medium term financial plan. Local people decided which services they wanted protected and where savings could be made in response to the cuts in the council's budget. This involved 8,000 people in 14 consultation workshops and debates across the county. Community members wanted budgets for highways and for adult services protected, so these remained intact.

Since AAPs were set up, more than 560 initiatives have been undertaken covering the environment, regeneration, enterprise, young people and community safety. Countless projects are under way where staff and local communities work alongside each other for better local outcomes, including:

- East Durham AAP works with local engineering companies and the council to remove barriers to employment for young people through 'Fit for Work' traineeships, work-based mentors and restorative justice techniques.
- Mid Durham AAP involved young people in a range of road accident prevention programmes.
- Teesdale Broadband Capital Works enables residents and businesses in a rural area to connect to the new broadband service.
- Chester-Le-Street AAP developed 'Chesterfest' in response to local young

people's aspirations for a music festival. The AAP worked with youngsters to stage the event, which brought together 16 unsigned bands before an audience of 1,000 people. A young people-led music cooperative has been formed as a result.

- Gully House, a communal hall for older people, had been identified for closure but local residents wanted to keep it open. With support from the AAP community development officer, they formed a residents' association and undertook training to develop skills and policies. They have opened up the facility to the whole community. Asset Transfer has been completed and the facility has been transformed with the support of the elected member's neighbourhood budget. The Association has now introduced a Credit Union collection point, Food Co-operative, a youth group, lunch club and a full programme of activities for older people. The groups still get support from the AAP when required, but the facility is successfully operated entirely by volunteers.

The AAP process is constantly evolving. A review established a series of sub-groups, which are making the changes and reporting back to communities as a result of this process.

Lessons

A key lesson that has emerged from the County Durham AAP experience is that community groups are operating at many different levels, which means a framework of strong community development support is still needed from the council. The council works with local voluntary sector partners and funds them through small grants, publicity, communications and training. Although AAPs work to empower communities to take on projects, the local authority remains vital as a facilitator.

The AAP Forum is open to anyone who lives, works, represents groups or provides services in the area. The AAP positively welcomes all members of the community so that the AAP represents a wide range of people and viewpoints.

The council has taken a holistic approach to funding. Ms Copeland says: 'The AAP structure is a new type of structure. Community groups in the past were maybe used to filling in a grant application and having a two or three year funding pot with professionals being parachuted in for a short time to support. This is very different and more long-term; council staff and communities work together to identify long term priorities. We are using what funding there is more cleverly and are able to look to other departments and take a council-wide approach, linking funding streams and changing delivery plans if necessary.'

To date, the AAPs have allocated £6.1m to approximately 562 projects which have levered in over £10m of additional investment. This means that for every pound invested by an AAP, and further £1.72 has come from other sources.

Case Studies

Although a non-statutory function, the AAP also has a key role in delivering community priorities through linking in with other statutory and voluntary organisations. AAP representatives are closely linked in with the police, fire, health services as well as the third sector locally.

Community engagement in Durham is now at a scale that spans the authority and is not an add-on. 'Many council departments now come to our team as a first port of call to engage with local residents. A consultation officers' group has to co-ordinate requests from service areas because we are heavily in demand from the authority and partners. We make it clear what is informing the community and what is consultation. When it's done correctly, the services realise the difference between information, consultation, so it is genuinely empowering, so it is not just ticking boxes. We want our communities to be genuinely involved in influencing service delivery and the feedback we receive from our residents is that they feel the AAPs give them the opportunity to make their voices heard and to affect real change in their communities.'

Halton Borough Council – Community Centre Work Experience for Volunteers and People with Learning Disabilities

Comment from a community centre volunteer:

“Being involved in the community centre means so much to me because it's the main reason I was able to get over my depression. Working as a volunteer there, I have met so many different people and been able to manage and overcome depression.”

Background

Halton Borough Council's Community Involvement Team includes the council's community centres manager, senior officer for community development and an area forum small grants coordinator. The team is part of the authority's Community Services directorate, which is also responsible for services for the vulnerable including support for older people and people with disabilities, home care teams and commissioned services.

The borough has six community centres, five of which are run directly – the other is run by a trust and receives a grant from the council. Ian Atherton, community centres manager, says: 'We were aware that we had a low level of usage in the day time and therefore focused on increasing usage then, in contrast evening bookings were at a premium.'

When the Government's White Paper on services for adults with learning disabilities was launched it acted as a catalyst for transforming day-care and a review of provision in Halton. Service users, their parents, carers and staff were all involved in the review. While services were provided in bespoke day centres, it was found that there was a risk of social exclusion. 'It was decided that the services should be community based to make them more inclusive.

Adults with learning disabilities now take part in a range of activities at the community centres every day; this includes working at community cafés in two of the centres, which are used by local residents.

Other activities that take place at the centre include Surestart to Later Life and Community Bridge Builders, children's centres, disability user groups, youth services, corporate training as well as sports and special events. The centres provide a focal point where local groups and community members come together. Volunteers assist council employees in running the centres and working with the diverse range of people who use them.

Activities and outcomes

Mr Atherton says: 'The staff who work with people with learning disabilities were very skilled in engaging with them to find out what they wanted and needed. Robust consultation found that the benefits of moving services into community centres outweighed the negatives. Bringing the service users, carers and staff along with us was important in making changes.'

Country Garden Catering operates in two of Halton Borough Council's community centres with around a dozen adults with learning disabilities involved in each café. They are supported by employees from the day care services team who are also qualified in catering. 'Through working in the cafés, people with learning disabilities have gained life skills, confidence and are involved in meaningful activity that has a tangible outcome,' says Mr Atherton.

He adds: 'The community centres are open access buildings, which means members of the community, volunteers and people with learning disabilities regularly come into contact and it can be a very enriching experience and lead to greater cohesion and understanding. We would not necessarily run the cafés as commercial operations, but doing it this way creates a good result for the whole community. This is a valuable part of community life in our centres.'

The council has also supported groups to develop and maintain community gardens, where people with learning disabilities grow their own produce to be used in the cafes. 'This means we are providing healthy options and it also helps keep the prices low, which is beneficial for people who are on low incomes.'

At one of the centres, allotment plots are also now being used by the Stroke Association and Alzheimer's group so the two service user groups have been brought together and share ideas and resources, a gardening course has also been organised.

A number of intergenerational projects were piloted. One such example is 'IT and Biscuits', which brings together a group of older people who want to know how to use computers with young people with IT skills, who mentor them on a one to one basis. Another intergenerational event is an annual

Case Studies

Halloween gathering. 'A lot of older people had a fear of trick or treaters, so we opened up the community centres and invited youngsters, older people and families along. It has been hugely successful with more than 800 people of all ages taking part,' Mr Atherton says.

In one year alone there have been more than 280,000 attendees across the borough's community centres who were from a broad range of groups and ages.

There are currently 22 active volunteers helping out at the council's community centres. 'We make sure they get properly supported and that they get a lot out of it, so they are helping themselves while helping their community,' he says. This is especially the case when people have been unemployed or ill and volunteering helps rebuild their skills and confidence and brings them into contact with a wide range of people.

Lessons

Prior to moving day services into community centres, adults with learning disabilities came to the centres to spend time there and there were discussions with them about what they liked and didn't like. 'We made changes on the advice of service users and their carers – for example when you came in, it was a bit gloomy so we upgraded reception to make it more inviting for everyone,' says Mr Atherton.

In Mr Atherton's view, the key to building up genuine community spirit at local community centres is, 'working alongside people rather than doing things to them or for them'. Bringing different groups together has also proved fruitful in Halton. While older and younger people or those with learning disabilities and those with Alzheimer's may not, on the face of things, seem to have a great deal in common, common activities have broken down barriers and delivered mutual rewards.

The role of volunteers is seen as a valuable addition to Halton's community services, but their responsibility remains limited and staff need to know how to support them. None of the volunteers at the community centres have keys or work to a rota. They are introduced to the service via a volunteer involvement pack or 'VIP', a name Mr Atherton rather likes given the value he places on the people who give their time freely to the service. Council employees need be aware of how to go through health and safety issues and support volunteer induction, so volunteers are clear what is expected of them and what happens if there is an emergency.

Milton Keynes Council – Environmental Toolkits

Comment from a resident who is a Neighbourhood Action Group member:

“The toolkit is very useful and well equipped. On numerous occasions the Bradwell Abbey NAG has used the equipment provided to wipe away graffiti, we have swept paths with the hard bristle broom provided and used the very useful litter picker, to collect litter. We use the goggles when using the graffiti solution and the gardening gloves for litter picking etc. The high visibility vests are worn in the community when this work is being carried out and gives the neighbourhood an idea as to who we are and on many occasions local people have become engaged with us on our litter picks and tidy up sessions and ask us questions about the NAG’s activities.”

Background

There are more than 40 Neighbourhood Action Groups in Milton Keynes, which are made up of residents and representatives from Milton Keynes Council, local town and parish councils, police and fire services. Each Neighbourhood Action Group sets three priorities to focus on locally and litter is ranked in the top three in almost every group's list of priorities.

The idea of 'environmental toolkits' to enable such groups to tackle small scale problems with litter, graffiti and weeds emerged following the development of toolkits for communications, community litter picks and speed awareness by Safer MK, the community safety partnership, which involves the council, Thames Valley Police and Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Services.

Council officers worked with the authority's street cleansing contractor and community groups to determine what jobs would be suitable for residents to do and what tools and information they should have. The kits that were developed as a result enable residents to litter pick, clean graffiti (with non hazardous kits), clear weeds and scrape stickers off lampposts in between the councils scheduled street cleansing visits.

Tina Guile, project manager in Neighbourhood Services, explains: 'If there was a small litter or graffiti problem, previously residents had to wait for the council to come and deal with it. They wanted tools such as litter pickers and graffiti cleaning kits to enable them to do it themselves if they chose to. The toolkits help empower the community to take responsibility and ownership. Litter and graffiti are things that really bug people and the kits help them to quickly do something about it. When areas are looked after in this way, it sends out the right signals and prevents further problems.'

Activities and outcomes

Since September 2010, environmental toolkits have been provided to town and parish councils, Neighbourhood Action Groups, community groups and

Case Studies

residents' associations so they are equipped to deal with small local issues in between the council's scheduled visits.

The equipment includes: brooms, litter pickers and sacks, cutters and scrapers, graffiti removal wipes, gloves, eye protection and hi-visibility vests.

The council has been very clear that the toolkits are not intended to supplement or replace its services, but to work in partnership with communities to tackle problem areas and improve services across the borough.

It is usually the chair of a local group who has the kit. Members of the group are trained on how to safely use the equipment in the kits and take responsibility for passing on the information and training to anyone else who uses the kits. Any new member of the community who uses the equipment must sign a disclaimer.

The council also asks people to submit a report of any work they do. Mrs Guile says: 'This means that if someone is constantly clearing graffiti from the same area, we are aware of the problem and can do something about it. As much as we try to avoid unnecessary paperwork, it is important that we know what activities are being undertaken by the community groups so we know where the problems lie and can co-ordinate action in neighbourhoods.'

Since the toolkits were launched, they have enabled community groups to carry out environmental activities with support from council staff. Some thirty neighbourhood groups have been involved so far. Milton Keynes Council believes this has led to an improved environment and more cohesive communities across the borough.

As environmental clean-up events have grown in popularity, the council's strategy has evolved to provide two types of kit: a smaller kit for community groups to keep; and a more comprehensive kit for larger clean up events known as Enviro Days.

Although the tools are primarily for 'cleansing' activities, the council also provides equipment and advice to support other activities, generally landscape work, which the groups can undertake to improve their local environment. The toolkits contain a comprehensive list of tasks that are not suitable for community groups to undertake, including structural repairs and street lighting maintenance. They provide information on how these particular issues can be resolved through requests to Milton Keynes Council.

At least 50 kits had been given out at the time of writing and interest continues to grow. The benefits of the toolkits to the council are three fold: reduction in demand for services; quicker, more locally targeted resolution of problems; and the development of community ownership of local environments through local partners such as schools and residents' groups.

Lessons

The council keeps control over allocation of the kits and co-ordinates activities across the borough. It also sets clear boundaries between professional and volunteer roles, to both ensure that community members are kept safe when using the kits and that they do not overstep any boundaries.

The council's team of Neighbourhood Engagement Officers have all received training on the correct use of the tools and equipment in the kits, as well as manual handling issues, which is passed on to users through training sessions before community work begins.

Community groups are encouraged to record meaningful data, including photographs, to provide useful intelligence that contributes to the development of community and environmental strategies. The toolkit is accompanied by an information pack that provides useful contacts, council response times to problems/issues reported, health and safety information and training guidance on the tools/equipment provided, a mini-guide on what enforcement powers the council has to assist with tackling breaches of environmental law, fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles, trade waste and untidy gardens.

The design and supply of the toolkits has not been aimed at replacing the council's street cleansing services 'on the cheap' but to work in real partnership with communities to enable them to take responsibility for their neighbourhood and tackle areas that are of concern to local people. The council has taken great care to communicate the finite level of resources for cleansing and community maintenance, working with partners in the communities and local businesses to develop community strategies that enable citizens of Milton Keynes to contribute in a meaningful way to their local neighbourhoods.

When large scale community events take place, the council makes sure staff are on hand to maintain health and safety and do any heavy lifting or particularly dirty jobs.

In some ways, the project has become a victim of its own success, which has required careful management. For example, the empowerment of local residents brings an enthusiasm to resolve issues close to their heart and this must be handled carefully by council officers, taking account of the local authority's Duty of Care following risk assessment procedures.

Hazardous activities and those with particular risks need managing carefully, with skill and expertise. Where appropriate training and instruction is provided including guidance of when and how to 'send for the experts'. An example of how this is the importance of managing fly-tip sites carefully. Very often, fly-tipped rubbish contains nasty items that shouldn't be touched by members of the public, who don't understand the risks or how to manage the hazards. Not only does the council need to protect these individuals, but it also

Case Studies

needs to preserve the fly-tip evidence for the councils' enforcement officers so they can take action.

The authority is continuing promoting the kits. Neighbourhood manager, Chris Carvell, says: 'Whenever we present at stakeholder groups, such as gardening groups, we always discuss the kits. As a lot of new properties are still being built in the borough, which is a designated growth area, we are trying to widen the range of people who use the kits, so newer as well as older established communities get involved. We are building up social capital in those newer areas and the toolkit is a tangible way of involving people who want to do something for their community.'

This case study demonstrates that the core services are still provided by the local authority and are necessary to facilitate the community based approach. While the work to supplement and improve services at a local level is provided through a co-production route, the local authority role in providing the means to assist in local environmental matters (through the supply of the kits) allows the community volunteers to take action. If the local authority core services could not be provided then the environmental quality would be much poorer. By co-production supporting communities rather than the community replacing the local authority services it has been possible to improve environmental quality beyond that which budgets would allow. Potentially services linked to local environmental quality could be restricted in an economic downturn to statutory minimum levels.

South Derbyshire District Council – Safer South Derbyshire

Comment from Teresa Croft, a resident who set up the Youth of Hatton group:

“The team at the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership has been essential in the on-going success of the group. Their wholehearted support, including advice and guidance with everything from filling in forms to working with young people, has been second to none. Being able to work together is the key to success in running such groups.”

Background

The Safer South Derbyshire Partnership is a statutory partnership made up of a range of agencies including South Derbyshire District Council, Derbyshire County Council, the Police, Fire Service, Probation, Community Voluntary Service and NHS Derbyshire. The Partnership works together to combat all types of crime and disorder occurring across the district.

The Safer Communities Team co-ordinate the work of the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership and is based in the District Council. Safer Communities Manager, Chris Smith, leads a team of four staff. An anti-social behaviour

officer, Community Engagement Officer and a Partnership sergeant from Derbyshire Constabulary complete the team.

The Safer Communities Team pulls together the work of the Partnership and ensures that the community and partner agencies combine to tackle crime and disorder issues in hotspot locations. It runs the Safer Neighbourhoods scheme, which identifies what is impacting on the quality of life in communities and then works with residents and members of the Partnership to find a sustainable solution. The aims are: to get residents involved in their own community; to improve relationships between them and partner agencies; to increase confidence; and to reduce fear of crime.

South Derbyshire is divided into six Safer Neighbourhood areas. Each of these has a police Safer Neighbourhood Team consisting of a dedicated police officer and at least one police community support officer.

Activities and outcomes

Safer Neighbourhood meetings are arranged for the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership by the Safer Communities Team. Members of the public and representatives of statutory and voluntary agencies are invited to quarterly meetings in each of the six areas. The meetings are well advertised. They give the community the opportunity to speak to police and council officers, along with representatives of other agencies, regarding crime and disorder issues in their area. Together everyone involved in the meetings agrees on three priority issues to be tackled in that area. These priorities become the main focus for everyone in the Partnership in that area for the next three months. This allows the community to set the agenda for crime-reduction agencies. Community members are encouraged to get involved and set up projects to help prevent and combat problems, with support from the Partnership.

Meeting agendas and minutes are sent out by post and emailed to anyone who wants them. The local press usually features an article on each meeting. Some members of the public only come along with a specific issue, while others turn up to every meeting.

Mr Smith says: 'Local people feel more empowered because they can bring their issues to the table.'

Over the last two years there have been a number of successful examples of the community working with the Police and the Partnership to tackle problems in their community. One example is work carried out in Aston On Trent. Residents had become concerned about persistent problems including young people drinking and entering an old hospital site, and minor incidents of criminal damage and noise nuisance around the area. After the problems were identified as a priority at a Safer Neighbourhood meeting, the Safer Communities Team worked with the Police Safer Neighbourhoods team to target the area.

Case Studies

Leaflets were distributed asking the community for relevant information regarding the problems and possible offenders. Police surgeries were carried out giving residents the opportunity to raise issues with the local Safer Communities Team. A number of multi-agency meetings were held and an action plan was drawn up. This included seizing alcohol, high visibility patrols, an Acceptable Behaviour Contract being issued to one young person identified as a ringleader and group of young people receiving Restorative Justice for graffiti. South Derbyshire's Building Control Surveyor also made recommendations to its owner to safely maintain the former hospital site. As a result, a fence was erected and entry points are regularly secured.

As well as tackling 'priority areas' through regular patrols and using enforcement action, the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership looks at ways of preventing issues from occurring using community engagement, education and communication. Local partners develop diversionary activities and carry out environmental work such as putting in place trees, landscaping and fencing to help prevent crime and anti-social behaviour.

Safer Neighbourhood's work is coordinated with that of Neighbourhood Watch groups and parish councils. The district council works with local branches of the national volunteering body, CSV. This includes a Safer Homes project, whereby CVS is given funding to employ a handyman to fit security measures for elderly and vulnerable people. Liberation Day is organised each year to provide elderly people with information about how to keep themselves and their homes safe and secure. Last year's event attracted some 400 residents.

A central part of the Partnership's community engagement work is a funding stream for local groups in each of the six areas to bid for grants of up to £2,500 for community based projects. The funding is flexible so local people can do whatever they wish with the resources, so long as it impacts positively on tackling community safety, crime and disorder. Over seven years, the council has funded some 120 projects. These have been very varied, from improving the security of community buildings and providing anti-speeding signs, to supporting Neighbourhood Watch groups and starting up diversionary activities for young people.

For example, Teresa Croft, a resident of Hatton, secured an initial grant of £500 Safer Neighbourhoods funding three years ago. Like other residents in her village, she was concerned with the amount of anti-social behaviour in the area, so approached the Partnership to help set up a local youth club. The Youth of Hatton (YOH) group now has 98 members aged between six and 18 and meets twice a week.

Figures from Partnership Analysts at the Safer Derbyshire Research and Information Team at Derbyshire County Council show a very clear improvement across the district since the Safer Neighbourhoods scheme was introduced. There were 5,899 calls to the police about anti-social behaviour in

2006/7 and this was reduced to 3,666 in 2011/12. There were 1,376 incidents of criminal damage in 2006/7 and this was reduced to 807 in 2011/12.

Lessons

The South Derbyshire experience shows how important it is for statutory and voluntary agencies to come together with members of communities to develop localised solutions for specific problems in individual neighbourhoods. The district council and the other statutory bodies in the Safer South Derbyshire Partnership all have a role that is clearly defined in law and can work together on that footing to share resources and information. Voluntary support can be drawn in to work alongside statutory agencies.

'You need to have the right professionals in place to guide and support volunteers. Then you can work with residents to deliver solutions,' says Mr Smith.

His team has used its skill and resources to communicate and work with various members of communities, including young people who may be coming to the attention of the police. 'Through working with our partners, we are identifying young people at an earlier stage and supporting them and their parents or getting them involved in youth inclusion projects or providing mentoring. In this way, we hope to reduce anti-social behaviour and prevent them from further offending which is obviously a benefit for all,' he says.

Liaison with the district council's highly proactive sports development team has also been important in helping prevent youth anti-social behaviour through providing activities every afternoon in the summer holidays. 'It is important to ask them what sort of activities will keep them interested. For example a lot of the kids involved in anti-social behaviour aren't sporty and so we divert them into art, dance, or music activities. A ten year old skatepark is being redeveloped following consultation with youngsters, who were shown pictures of different skate parks to identify what facilities they wanted,' he says.

Training has been organised for those who chair the Safer Neighbourhoods meetings to help them maintain focus and to guide community members wishing to make applications for Safer Neighbourhoods funding. A booklet has been produced providing details of community projects that have been funded using the Safer Neighbourhoods fund. It is hoped that when people see what can be achieved, they will be encouraged to get involved themselves.

Ten ways to make co-production work

Drawing on the survey data and case studies in this research and reflecting on the extensive literature on co-production, as well as the history of its implementation in the UK, we are able to distil a number of key themes and lessons.

While it will be for local authorities with their communities, the workforce and their trade unions to develop their own local approaches to co-production, it is pertinent to consider some of the factors that contribute to success. These are summarised below to act as the basis for an informed debate on the development of co-production in a public sector context:-

1) An understanding of what is meant by 'empowerment'

While current policy mechanisms including the Localism Act and 'Big Society' concept use the language of 'empowerment', as this report shows, there is a contradiction between the rhetoric of empowerment and reductions in state safeguards and funding. In order to develop a progressive model, it is necessary to begin to unpick what is meant by empowerment of employees and communities and the relationship between consultation, involvement, engagement and empowerment.

2) A strong public sector framework

The government's market-led approach, resulting in widespread outsourcing, can lead to fragmentation of services and a breakdown of the very support system that underpins community involvement in delivery. A positive model for empowerment therefore recognises that a strong public sector framework is vital to ensure collaboration between providers and sectors, rather than stark competition. This is also vital for inclusion of the least advantaged members of society as well as integrated and co-ordinated service provision, providing greater flexibility and responsiveness to changing local circumstances.

3) Adequate resources

There is an assumption that involving service users in design and delivery of services is synonymous with saving money. While public service staff and communities working together might improve efficiency and save resources,

this is not automatically the case. Investment is required to enable participation to flourish and solutions to be developed collectively, not least of which is the investment in training and skills development among the public service workforce. A progressive model for empowering employees and communities to work together to create positive outcomes should not be automatically premised on the idea of ‘more for less’, but may mean ‘more for more’.

4) Sufficient social capital, capacity and skills

Following on from this, the development of social capital, capacity and skills is necessary for members of the public to be involved in service design and delivery. A progressive model recognises that these factors will vary between communities and should put measures in place to level the playing field to enable everyone to participate in decision-making should they wish. This may well mean that it is necessary to identify resources to actively support the local community and voluntary sector. It will be necessary to ensure that resources are fairly distributed and targeted to safeguard against simply the ‘loudest voices’ or most organised communities gaining form co-production strategies at the expense of other groups or communities.

5) Participation of citizens at the level at which they want to participate

The current emphasis on ‘Big Society’ and ‘co-production’ assumes that citizens are keen to participate in decision-making and service development, when evidence shows this is not necessarily the case. A progressive model should allow citizens to participate as much or as little as they want to, while recognising the need to build capacity and encourage participation where appropriate. Citizen engagement needs to be meaningful and manageable, appropriately reflected in the decision making processes and located in a recognisable spatial dimension, e.g. neighbourhood, that makes it relevant.

6) Democratic accountability

Models advocated by the current government promote the benefits of private companies and third sector bodies providing services and favour extending such provision, assuming that they are better placed to involve service users and enhance efficiency. This ignores the crucial fact that local authorities are democratically elected and accountable bodies. This link between democratic accountability and service provision is of utmost. Co-production should be developed alongside locally elected members who represent all of their constituents. Co-production ought not to be about developing alternative lines of accountability which exclude those elected members who have a legitimate role in the governance and accountability of local public services.

Issues for further consideration

7) A strategic overview that balances competing interests

Following on from the need to ensure democratic accountability, is the strategic role of local authorities to balance resources within a context of competing needs among specific localities and interest groups. A progressive model recognises that councils are responsible for services and resources across their entire geographic area and population and are therefore better placed to balance competing interests and join up strategic objectives with specific services and locations than private and third sector providers.

8) Well-valued, well-motivated staff

Co-production requires a highly skilled and motivated workforce. A progressive model therefore hinges upon valuing public sector employees. It also requires employees to be appropriately trained, supported and encouraged to identify opportunities for collaboration with service users. Mechanisms need to be in place that promote the voice of the workforce in the design and operation of services.

9) An understanding of how professionals and citizens can work together that recognises where boundaries between their roles lie

For the public to be kept safe, for staff to be respected and for a range of practical reasons, it is important that there are clear boundaries between the staff member and citizen role. This is especially important where staffing levels have been reduced and volunteering has been encouraged. A progressive model needs to ensure a clear line between roles is understood and implemented.

10) An understanding of the difference between individual and collective forms of co-production and encouragement of more collective participation

Researchers identify two forms of co-production and argue that collective forms of co-production seem less popular and widespread than individual co-production. It is also recognised that this collective form of co-production delivers greater public advantage in terms of social cohesion and relationships between service users and service providers. A progressive model would therefore distinguish between the two forms and encourage more collective co-production.

Conclusion

This study has involved a review of current policy and literature, a survey of local authorities and detailed case studies.

The search underlines the importance of a strong public sector framework for empowering citizens and council employees to design and deliver efficient, innovative services at the community level.

It shows that employees and local communities can work together to improve outcomes in local communities given the right conditions, but that there are limitations in current central government policy perspectives.

It offers a positive model that empowers employees and communities to work together within a strong public sector framework. This is the most effective way to achieve positive outcomes in local service delivery.

Factors contributing to success in empowering employees and communities to work together to deliver public service reform can be summarised as follows.

- An understanding of what is meant by 'empowerment'
- A strong public sector framework
- Adequate resources
- Sufficient social capital, capacity and skills both within the workforce and the local community
- Participation of citizens at the level at which they want to participate
- Democratic accountability
- A strategic overview that balances competing interests within defined resources
- Well-valued, well-motivated and trained staff with a voice in the decision making process
- Understanding how professionals and citizens can work together and where boundaries lie
- Encouraging more collective forms of participation



Trades Union Congress
Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS

www.tuc.org.uk

contact:

Author name

Telephone

e-mail address

© 2013 Trades Union Congress

£ free

ISBN 978 1 85006 ISBN

For more copies of this title contact our ordering point on 020 7467 1294 or smills@tuc.org.uk. Bulk discounts may be offered.

All TUC publications can be provided for dyslexic or visually impaired readers in an agreed accessible format, on request, at no extra cost.