

# **Southend on Sea City Council Co Production Framework – October 2023**

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**We recognise that it is not possible to co-produce everything. This framework aims to support co-production work that is possible in both statutory and non-statutory areas. In some instances, co-design, engagement and/or consultation may be relevant instead of or as part of a co-production exercise. It will be the responsibility of the individual service area/directorate to decide if or when co-production is or is not necessary, possible or statutory.**

# What is Co-production?

*'Co-production is not just a word, it is not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find shared solutions. In practice, co-production involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them. When co-production works best, people who use services and carers are valued by organisations as equal partners, can share power and have influence over decisions made'. ([What is coproduction | In more detail | TLAP \(thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk\)](http://thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk))*

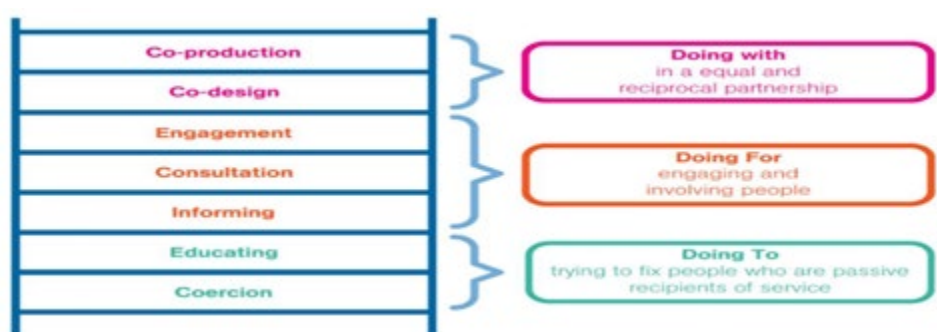
We believe that working with residents will help Southend-on-Sea City Council (SCC) ensure that services are not only tailored to the needs of residents but are future proofed and have the greatest impact possible, whilst delivering the best value for money.

Co-production and activity relating to engagement or consultation has many definitions in the local government landscape, this can lead to confusion and miscommunication about expectation. However, different approaches to co-production often interact well together and can also work in tandem. To aid a clear and common understanding, SCC will use the ladder approach to illustrate the level of interaction and expected outcome.

The ladder illustrates a shift in the way councils work with residents in order to develop effective policies and strategies, jointly understanding which impacts can make the biggest and most meaningful difference to people's lives.

Co-production sits at the top of the ladder and is the most constructive method for ensuring stronger relationships and trust between the council, residents, partners and stakeholders.

However, it is important to note, depending on the work being undertaken, that resident engagement may fall into a number of the rungs. Whilst full co-production is our ambition, many decisions will be shaped by local and national policy, statutory duties and political process. The ladder demonstrates that at times it may only be possible to reach the lower rungs. Ideally we would want to move to the higher rungs and the elements of engagement, consultation and co-design may be possible even when co-production is not.



It is important to note that co-production is also key when making difficult decisions that may shape or change policy that some may not agree with. For example if services are to change or reduce in light of new approaches.

## What do we want to achieve?

This framework sets out our vision and commitment for co-production at Southend-on-Sea City Council.

Our aim is for strategies, policies, and services, to be co-designed and developed by people with lived experience, as well as employees and partners to work together as equals.

The framework is also a commitment to inclusion and to improve relationships, to enable us to proactively serve the community.

***“Co-production cannot be done in isolation...”***

A core component for success will be for co-production to be embedded into all Council business. As a result, we plan to use this framework to enhance future services, policies, strategies and decisions.

## How will we co-produce?

**Proportionality is a key consideration.** Southend-on-Sea City Council recognises its legal duties and the many benefits of co-production as well as its importance in improving the lives of its residents. However, it is also recognised that a proportionate response should balance need against the duty to act effectively, efficiently and economically.

When considering potential changes to a service including new initiatives, consideration must also be given to the scale of resulting impact on the community and therefore what action is proportionate. As a rule, the greater the extent of changes and number of people affected, the greater the level of activity that is likely to be necessary. However, the nature and extent of public involvement required will always depend on the specific circumstances of an individual commissioning process.

Staff should also consider the potential impact on other services which they may not commission, and issues for residents beyond the services themselves, such as accessibility, transport links and ambulance availability. Co-production may also involve more traditional forms of engagement and consultation such as surveys and questionnaires.

Our Council Members at Southend-on-Sea City Council are Councillors that are democratically elected. Our constituted rules mean that Councillors take the final decision on services and policy.

Where co-production has taken place to form a strategy or policy development this will be shared with Council/Cabinet/Scrutiny so that Councillors are aware of the work and how it shaped the recommendations within.

It is vital that as a council we are clear on the decision making and democratic processes that govern how we run. Good communication of these points will ensure effective co-production and management of expectations.

When considering co-production, we will take the following steps:

- **Having support from senior leaders to champion co-production**
- **Use an open and unbiased approach to engaging people to represent as many sections of the community as possible, particularly focussing on taking positive steps to engage with underrepresented groups.**
- **Put systems in place that remunerates and recognises the contributions people make**
- **Identify areas of work where co-production can have a genuine impact and involve residents at the very earliest stages of project design**
- **Build co-production into our work programmes until it becomes business as usual**
- **Train and develop staff and residents so that everyone understands what co-production is and how to make it happen using every opportunity to promote co-production as part of the decision-making process.**
- **Regularly review and report back on progress, aim to move from You Said/We did to We said/We did.**
- **Going to where the people are (community groups, work places, partners and public places) and not expecting residents to conform to Council working cultures.**
- **Manage expectations throughout the process and ensure that everyone understands what their role is**
- **Publish our Co-Production Framework along with a toolkit and training available for staff, delivered by the Co-Production Lead.**

## **Community Voice, Voluntary Sector and Partners**

When considering how we co-produce, it is also important to consider existing resources, including our well-established community and voluntary sector. Southend City Council has a strong history of working with community partners on a strategic and operational level. These partners may be able to help support, facilitate and/or contribute to co-production activities with groups already in existence, and therefore it will be beneficial to engage with them from the start, before the co-production work even begins. Co-production in this way will strengthen existing relationships, improve communication, and create new networking opportunities.

## **Co-production Principles and Values**

It is evident from extensive research that effective co-production is governed by the embedding of a key set of overarching principles and values. Below are the Council's values:

- **Inclusive** – we put people at the heart.
- **Collaborative** – we work together
- **Honest** – we are honest, fair and accountable.
- **Proud** – we are proud to make lives better.

Based on these values, and those of the Co-Production Collective (human, inclusive, transparent, challenging - [Co-Production Collective](#)) we have developed our values for co-production at Southend City Council.

- **Inclusive** - We celebrate diversity and will endeavour to ensure that under represented groups are represented
- **Collaborative** - We have a 'can do' approach to work, to ensure collectively we continue to persevere, even when conversations are difficult.
- **Honest** - Everyone taking part is honest and has the available information and knowledge to understand the co-production activity
- **Proud** - We are creative and look at different ways of designing and delivering services

**Our Co-production principles, developed in line with the SCIE principles** ([Social Care Institute for Excellence](#) - Equality, Diversity, Accessibility, Reciprocity) provide guidelines for how we will approach co-production at Southend-on-Sea City Council:

- Co-production is a continuous process and there is flexibility; meaning that previous topics can be revisited if required.
- Everyone has an equal voice
- Communication is accessible, so everyone involved has the relevant information in the way that they need it, and when they need it (for example, following Plain English guidelines, providing Easy Read versions of documents)
- Everyone has a right to be heard and respected
- We will promote mutually reciprocal relationships
- Processes are safe, non-judgemental, demonstrate transparency, integrity and follow through with accountability, including feedback
- We keep opportunities open to co-produce, and people can join at later stages too.
- We ensure that we share insights and findings from workshops or other engagement methods, to avoid duplication.
- We will be clear about which voices we represent.
- We will be clear about when and how remuneration is offered.

# The benefits and challenges of co-production

## What are the benefits of co-production?

Co-production recognises people with lived experience have the skills, knowledge and experience that can help make services better, with more meaningful and constructive outcomes.

Co-production is rewarding, participants feel valued, respected, empowered, and better connected.

Employees also report that co-production activities create services and processes that are simplified and work better, thus saving time, energy and can also be more cost effective.

Simply, done well, co-production works for everyone.

## The benefits:

- Enables residents and professionals to work together as equals and learn from each-other.
- Helps to create more sustainable and effective services because those services are tailored to the actual needs
- Involving everyone from the start leads to diverse conversations and solutions that are much more likely to work the first time around.
- Builds confidence in individuals and services
- Creates opportunities to learn new skills.
- People feel empowered
- Opportunity to gain insights, perspectives and expertise of those who are accessing services.
- Promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Increases social participation and aspiration among participants.
- Strengthens trust between service providers and service users

## How to manage the challenges of co-production

Co-production can be seen as a time-consuming exercise, even if it may save time later down the line.

Service areas and local organisations may already be bearing the weight of cost-reductions and a lack of resources, meaning that co-production feels like a burden. Likewise, residents may perceive changes to services and may be less inclined to engage with the local authority. They might view the process as a “tick box exercise”.

People may feel that they don't have the budget or resource to facilitate co-production. Residents may feel that they cannot afford the process (e.g. travel costs).

Staff may not feel equipped to manage large groups, particularly when conversations might be difficult. If not facilitated correctly, and if expectations are not managed, the process could become a “wish list” activity.

However, we can take steps to tackle these challenges:

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution</b>
Co-production is a time-consuming process	It can take time, but you can minimise the impact by using existing resources and planning ahead. Contact the Co-Production Lead and they can support with engagement, promotion, setting up new user groups etc
Lack of resources/budget	Costs can be minimised by using existing resources (e.g. Tickfield Centre, Committee Rooms, online sessions and engagement, potentially sponsorship from partners).
Lack of trust in the process	Being honest and inclusive from the start, as well as managing expectations, including who is the ultimate decision maker, will help to build trust. Regular feedback, communication, and “closing the loop” on projects will also build stronger relationships.
Under-representation	Colleagues and other organisations have strong networks with many groups within the community. You can also minimise the risk of under-representation by making sure the work is planned in a timely way to ensure you have capacity for whatever level of engagement you may need to do.
Risk of becoming a “wish list” exercise	Co-production can have many different formats. It is important that any co-production exercises are planned with the right format and focus to avoid losing sight of the aims, and parties are realistic and honest about what can be achieved.  Throughout the process it is important to remain realistic, manage expectations, and be transparent about the limitations.
Difficulties for staff managing a large or challenging group	Some co-production activities may involve larger and/or challenging groups.. It’s important that there are enough facilitators at these meetings that can help guide them in running smoothly, taking smaller group activity work. It will also be beneficial to ensure the right individuals are in attendance,

	<p>in terms of knowledge and expertise. Participants will be more likely to trust in the process if the right people are involved (e.g. senior leaders, decision makers etc).</p>
<p>Members of the public cannot afford to attend sessions/workshops etc</p>	<p>It might be possible to reimburse people for travel costs or to consider other options. Could sessions be delivered online? Or at a premises closer to your group? If you're working in partnership with an organisation they might be able to support with sponsoring funds. It is also important to be very clear about any reimbursement or expenses that will be paid and to whom. Please also see the <b>Expenses</b> section below.</p>
<p>Lack of interest from the public to get involved</p>	<p>If you follow the advice covered so far such as planning co-production in a timely way, communicating regularly, engaging with under-represented and pre-existing groups etc then it is likely you will have success in attendance from the public as there are many people that are interested in co-production work. Ensuring that language and facilities are accessible will also help, and understanding your cohort. For example, do they have additional needs/requirements to consider?</p>



<b>Co-Production Activities</b>			
<b>Co-Planning</b>	<b>Co-Design</b>	<b>Co-Delivery</b>	<b>Co-Evaluation</b>
<p>To get a co-production project started, it's important to co-plan. The sooner the different people interested in a project get together to do this the better.</p> <p>Planning helps to develop the project's aims. As part of planning the group might talk about resources needed, whose voices are missing and what needs to happen next.</p>	<p>Co-design is the process where a diverse range of people work together to decide the what, where and when of the project.</p> <p>The group should include experts by lived experience and experts by profession. Working together as co-designers allows the group to co-create innovative and inclusive solutions.</p>	<p>Co-delivery is when the project can only operate by actively involving the community, either as staff or volunteers.</p> <p>Not every service will be co-delivered but it's important to be clear about that as part of the co-design process.</p>	<p>Co-evaluation reflects on how well the project has gone. It measures whether the project has met its aim, what has been learnt and think about the impact on people's lives.</p> <p>Co-evaluation is critical to future service development and improvement. It also helps to maintain co-productive relationships</p>
	<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>Honest</b>	<b>Shared Understanding</b>

## Reimbursement of expenses

We aim to ensure that there is consistency regarding reimbursement of expenses to those residents that support our co-production work with their skill and time. In recognising the contribution that residents bring to our work, we should aim to minimise financial barriers that can prevent them from taking part.

It is therefore our intention that we reimburse expenses of residents taking part in formal co-production work, where possible, to ensure that they are not financially disadvantaged by their active involvement.

Reimbursement will also depend on each project and the individual service areas.

## Southend Co-Production Collective

We understand that co-production cannot happen in isolation. As a result, we have created the Southend co-production collective group. This is a community group with partners from different sectors who share the same passion for co-production.

To date, members of the collective include representatives from health (including the NHS and the Alliance), social care, SEND colleagues and parent carer forum representation, and colleagues from different areas of the council.

Anyone undertaking co-production work at SCC is encouraged to join the collective by contacting the Co-Production Lead.

## How will we evaluate the impact?

This framework has been embedded in the Commissioning Service area for a period of 12 months on a test and learn basis. We have monitored and evaluated those co-production exercises, and this updated framework reflects the lessons learnt.

We will also actively seek the views of SCC Staff, partners and those involved with the co-production activities to gain their valuable feedback and insight, which we will use as evidence to evaluate the impact of this approach and where there are potentially improvements to be made.

We aim for this framework to be adopted across the council, alongside a co-production toolkit, training and resources, to ensure that co-production is embedded in all council business where appropriate. We will arrange for quarterly meetings to take place in order to continue monitoring and evaluating the co-production work being undertaken.

### **Tackling Poverty Strategy**

We launched an online consultation called "Help shape our new Tackling Poverty Strategy", with a household survey. The survey had 643 responses, We also held an engagement week, where we visited food provision settings to engage with the public face-to-face.

Southend-on-Sea City Council volunteered to trial a process called 'Working Together for Change', as a way of building local capacity for co-production, to help understand what matters most to people experiencing poverty in Southend and to use that understanding to improve lives.

'Working Together for Change' has a simple eight stage recommended process for co-producing change. Working with local foodbanks and voluntary sector partners, the team collected information from interviews and questionnaires; with 30 people being asked what was:

- Working well in their lives
- What wasn't working well
- What was important to them in the future

26 people attended the workshops which were held at a local community venue. The mix of people included 15 local people with lived experience of poverty from a diverse range of backgrounds which included single parents, young families, pensioners, people with no recourse to public funds, people from ethnic minorities, mental health, and homelessness backgrounds. Alongside them working as equals, were staff from Southend-on-Sea City Council, local health services and local voluntary sector groups.

### **Impact**

- The useful community intelligence helped form the foundations of the council's Tackling Poverty Strategy. This opportunity allowed us to gather honest feedback, and highlighted areas of concern or anything that may have been missed in the workshops
- We are training all staff supporting residents across the city to be trauma informed.
- We will run media campaigns to combat stigma.

- We will continue to work with residents as equal partners to review our actions and take new actions.  
We set up and promoted warm places over the city during the winter months
- We distributed £25,000 worth of slow cookers and electric blankets to residents most in need through our partners in the community and voluntary sector.
- We supported 8,523 residents through the Household Support and Emergency support fund in 2022/23 with fuel costs.  
We continue to support a range of pathway to work programmes that has supported 523 Southend residents to upskill such as run by HALO and ABSS parent programmes. 172 of the 523 people supported are now in work.
- Southend Action for Volunteering Services (SAVS) have set up a volunteering bureau for the city.

### **Autism and Neurodiversity Strategy and Forum**

We used the same Working Together for Change process that had been used for the Tackling Poverty Strategy. An initial survey went out to parents, carers, adults, organisations and other partners to promote, with 3 main questions: “What is working well for you?” / “What isn’t working well for you?” / “What is important to you in the future?”.

Over 120 people responded to the survey and 2 in-person workshops took place in July 2023, both with around 34 attendees which included parents, carers and autistic and/or neurodiverse adults, relevant staff from SCC including commissioners and SEND team representatives, reps from local organisations and charities.

The group split into 4 tables with a facilitator and looked at the emerging themes from the survey. We looked at potential root causes, and what success might look like in terms of looking at what needed to be improved. We thought about existing assets and various different approaches (traditional, community and radical). We are now developing 4 smaller groups to take 4 action plans forward.

#### **Impact:**

We are still in the early stages of developing the forum and strategy. However, the process so far has been an opportunity for learning, and has helped to shape the co-production framework. Our main “lessons learnt” include:

- Communication and language - We received feedback that the standard 3 questions were far too open and that for this particular cohort we should have included some guidance as autistic and neurodiverse individuals may have been uncomfortable with such broad questions.
- Accessibility – due to the usual challenges we often face with time scales, we ended up booking the workshops at very short notice. We wanted to get them in before the summer holidays. This didn't allow a lot of time for people to make arrangements and we received feedback that most people that couldn't attend was due to this reason. Co-production exercises should be booked in a timely manner.
- Under-representation – In an ideal world we might have had more adults or separated the two cohorts. This came down to the time constraint and if we had more time we would likely have had greater representation. This is being rectified in the 4 future action plan meetings which will give people much more notice to attend.
- Lack of trust –We learnt how important it is at public meetings to have the right staff involved.

-Understanding the cohort. Autistic and neurodiverse people have different needs of course to neurotypical individuals. The format was forced to be more flexible as the linear approach was not the most comfortable or effective for the group. They also preferred smaller group work so we changed some of the wider group work to allow for this. Co-production should be flexible, even when there are specific aims and a focus.

-Remuneration – supermarket vouchers were intended to be provided to residents that attended but there was some confusion about whether they should also have been provided to volunteers representing organisations. Reciprocity is an essential part of successful co-production. We have added specific guidelines within the co-production framework about this.

### **Case Studies – Co-design**

Co-design is high up on the ladder of co-production and while it can be part of a co-production activity, it can also be an effective one-off standalone activity. It uses stakeholder involvement to support the design of documents, policies, services etc. For example:

#### **Disability Related Expenditure leaflet redesign**

The team wanted residents feedback when updating the leaflet to ensure that it was fit for purpose. Co-production was not relevant because the document already exists and therefore the most appropriate approach was engagement work with relevant groups, and co-design in order to produce a final version. The Co-Production Lead met with focus groups at South Essex Home schemes to look at the leaflet and gather ideas and comments.

### **Case Studies – Consultation**

Consultation is a key tool to involving stakeholders with decision-making. Whether statutory or non-statutory it can take various forms and supports residents and partners to be involved in the process. Like co-design, consultation can be a standalone activity or part of a wider co-production activity.

For example:

- Your Say Southend is the council's platform for online consultations. They usually consist of an online survey, but some consultations will also include public meetings or focus groups
- In the Tackling Poverty and Autism and Neurodiversity case studies illustrated, consultation work was conducted in the early stages, consisting of a survey that went out to residents, partners and other stakeholders, gathering important insights which would then be "themed" and used as part of the co-production workshop activities.
- It is down to individual service areas/directorates to decide when and how consultations are delivered (often depending on whether they are statutory or non-statutory), and also whether they can be used as part of a wider co-production activity.

### **Case Studies – Engagement**

Engagement is the foundation for co-production and is vital for building networks and insights within our local community. Many service areas are undertaking engagement work on a regular basis but sometimes it is necessary to undertake targeted, specific

engagement activity. Again, engagement may be a standalone activity in order to gather insights, feedback, data, or build a network, or it could be part of wider co-production work.

For example:

- In developing an Older People User Voice Group, which will feed into the Ageing Well Strategy group, the Co-Production Lead has undertaken engagement work, visiting older people at groups such as Folk Like Us (SAVS), Carers First and Southend In Sight. Visiting regularly and building a relationship with the individuals has allowed for trust to develop and therefore there is now strong interest from the older people to attend a user voice group and discuss their thoughts. The group will eventually vote for a chairperson who will become part of the Ageing Well strategy group
- Similarly, engagement work was undertaken by the Co-Production Lead at groups that support adults with Learning Disabilities, such as Project 49 and Southend Hospital's Learning Disability Partnership Board meeting. Following the engagement work, individuals have joined the Learning Disability user voice group and will vote for a chairperson who will represent them at the Living Well strategy group.

End.