

What a (co) production!

3rd – 7th July is National Coproduction Week – a time to reflect on what this is, how it works, and how you can be involved!

The word “coproduction” is frequently used – but often, people don’t know what it means, or how it differs from other forms of engagement and consultation.

Definitions of exactly what co-production means vary, but the term is used to describe partnership working and a more equal sharing of power between people who draw on care and support, carers and citizens to improve public services; and which engages groups of people at the earliest stages of service design, development and evaluation.

Coproduction is most often used in the context of health and social care – in fact The Care Act 2014 specifically includes the concept of co-production in its statutory guidance. The guidance developed by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) defines co-production and suggests that it should be a key part of implementing the Care Act. In particular, co-production should be used to develop preventative, strength-based services, support assessment, shape the local care market, and plan information and advice services.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) guide to coproduction can be found here: <https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production> along with this helpful video explanation: <https://youtu.be/nbShL4YZvZ0>

Coproduction in Hammersmith & Fulham

Much of the current coproduction in Hammersmith & Fulham emerged from the Disabled People’s Commission, which was formed to set in place a new way of doing things that would ensure that Disabled residents, councillors and officers and other organisations in the borough worked together in a way that values and respects the rights of local Disabled people.

There are now a number of coproduction groups with disabled people looking at a range of areas, including the new Civic Campus at Hammersmith Town Hall, digital accessibility, planning and design, housing and the local environment & transport.

At a fantastic event at the Irish Cultural Centre on Wednesday 5th July, disabled residents involved in these activities provided updates on progress, and also outlined how the coproduction process had been working.

Jane Wilmot OBE, Co-Chair of the Civic Campus Disabled Residents Team outlined what she feels is critical for coproduction to work well:

First of all, it’s not a quick fix – it’s a long term way of working. For me, there are a few things that need to be in place for it to work well:

- 1. Having disabled residents and senior officers co-chair the groups. You need officers that are senior enough to make things happen.*

2. *Having a shopping list of what disabled residents want to achieve. We might not be able to get all of it – but we're clear what it is we're aiming for.*
3. *Everybody's access needs must be met so that they can take part on equal terms. For the Civic Campus Group, this has means making sure we get inclusive drawings that are easy to understand.*
4. *Workshops on particular or specific issues are needed so that they can be explored in detail to allow everyone to contribute.*
5. *Paying residents for their time*
6. *Information such as documents, reports or plans must not only be accessible, but it needs to be provided well in advance of the meeting. Providing something last minute or tabled just before a meeting does not allow all members to review the information in advance.*
7. *Meetings at short notice are not acceptable!*

Coproduction and the voluntary and community sector (VCS)

Sobus is a passionate advocate of coproduction as the only real way to ensure services and decisions best meet needs of the community. Our vision is of strong and engaged communities, where residents and organisations are empowered to make a positive difference to the causes they believe in, and our mission is to achieve this through providing voice, representation and support to residents through the organisations that support them.

Whilst coproduction has a focus on service users and citizens being engaged and involved – it is also vital that the VCS is a key partner in coproduction activities. Often, it is local VCS organisations to whom local residents turn to for advice and support – establishing high value trust relationships over time. VCS organisations support a huge number of Hammersmith & Fulham residents, and are therefore well placed to identify, understand, articulate and represent the views of local residents. This is particularly the case for excluded and isolated communities, who rely so much on local VCS organisations.

Coproduction not always done well – often with consultation presented as coproduction – where the scope, outcomes, objectives or rationale for the piece of work at hand have been predetermined. Whilst in some instances, this may be the most appropriate approach (due to legislation for example), statutory sector colleagues lack guidance and support on how to undertake coproduction effectively. Whilst officers are frequently keen to coproduce, they are at times bound by political, budgetary or other constraints which can hamper the process.

If your organisation would like to find out more about coproduction, would like some training and support to enable you to participate, or information about the coproduction opportunities in Hammersmith & Fulham, please get in touch.