

**Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) Partners' Council event  
'Co-production: Working together to build strong communities'  
18 June**

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- NCC is campaigning to put people back into public services – and that means involving them right at the beginning, not treating them as an after-thought.
- People may not use same language as professional staff or understand all the technical issues. But in my experience, people are the experts, know what is or not working and what might be done to put things right.
- They also want to be engaged in how services are run. People tell us they expect public services to work with communities & users, not just for them – a real partnership, to help shape the future.
- Around seven in ten people who use public services express views on their experience, in one way or another, at one time or another. The message for service providers is why not engage these people – who have hands-on expertise in terms of using services – to help make them better
- Our study of people's experiences of three sectors – housing, employment services and care in the home – found that communication is relatively weak area across the board. People want to be listened to – but most service providers are much better at providing information than responding to users.
- This isn't confined to public services – in the private sector, 82 per cent of customers say they would be happy to help businesses improve – but most find it easier to walk away.
- Yet the management consultancy McKinsey lists co-creation and using customers as innovators as two of the top technology trends for organisations to watch.
- Listening and engaging also has to be genuine. Users can smell "fake listening" a mile off. In some recent NCC research with people in some of the most disadvantaged communities in England, one person told us: *"They make a big deal about collaborating and*

*listening... They're communicating with us in the sense that they're getting our views, but they're not listening and responding appropriately."*

- That's why NCC is working with the participation organisation **Involve** to develop a set of best practice principles to improve the quality and impact of deliberative public engagement processes
- I want to talk briefly about three pieces of co-production that I've been involved with:
  - Shared solutions (social housing)
  - Weights and measures
  - Trains

### Shared solutions

- Nowhere was the value of talking to each other more evident than in our work with housing officers and tenants in Newcastle. The context for this was challenging – tenants and officers are often at loggerheads.
- We worked with Unison to create a dialogue between front-line staff and service users. Our 'Shared solutions' project demonstrated that in many cases service users and staff want the same thing – a well-run service – and that by listening to one another they can work together more effectively to achieve it.
- As part of the project, we held a workshop in Newcastle. The meeting got off to a pretty shocking start. When asked, for a gentle warm-up exercise, *"if you were an animal, what animal would you be"* one tenant chose a lion. The reason, he said, was *"I want to be a lion, so I can maul all these council workers to death."* One housing officer initially left the room in tears, feeling that tenants were picking on her. The response from one of her colleagues was: *"Oh well, you will learn not to care anymore. If you are sensitive and too compassionate, then you are not made for this job. You have to build a wall of stone around your heart."* Tenants in turn complained of feeling powerless in the face of what they felt to be the significant power over their lives held by housing officers.
- But after long discussion when it came to solutions, both sides were amazed to see how far the concerns of the other overlapped with their own. One officer said: *"They do seem to be the same problems, just crossing over"*. And one of the tenants remarked *"it's as if we've all been looking at each other's sheets, cos we're all saying the same thing."*
- This is a great example of one of the key characteristics of effective engagement - real dialogue and debate, with people on all sides

opening up to others' perspectives. To help other services organise a similar event and use the 'Shared solutions' model, we published a set of guidelines (a toolkit) which is available on our website.

### Weights and measures

- We brought together businesses, regulators and consumers to discuss how the system of "weights and measures" might be reformed.
- Some of the discussion focused round what's called 'prescribed quantities.' They're rules which govern the size of a loaf of bread, or bags of sugar, or packets of cornflakes. Trading Standards Officers told the consumers that these were very important. The consumers shocked them by saying that they weren't that bothered and would prefer Trading Standards to focus on other things.
- This is one of the most important things about co-production – people don't always say what you think they will, particularly once they've heard the facts and can think through issues properly.

### Trains

- My final example is some work I did for another consumer body, Passenger Focus, before I joined NCC. We got together groups of people who hated the idea of travelling by train and loved their cars, to think through what would persuade them to use the train.
- They came up with lots of interesting, creative ideas. Just one problem. Almost everything they suggested existed already.
- What we realised was that almost all the information about the railways is in stations or on trains. If you don't ever travel by trains, you won't see it – and so your beliefs about what trains are like will never be challenged.
- So the lessons here is that co-production will sometimes make providers think about whether they've even asked the right question – maybe they need to think about things totally differently.

### Conclusion

- There are lots of other examples of good practice I could have mentioned. It seems to me that there are some key messages:
  - Try to create real dialogue and discussion

- Spend time informing consumers and building their knowledge and confidence if necessary before bringing them together with the professionals
- Remember frontline staff and consumers may have common interests and can work together to create shared solutions
- Engage consumers as early as possible, and right throughout the decision-making process – from decisions about commissioning services to using them as lay inspectors
- Be prepared for the unexpected, and be open to thinking differently about the question you're trying to answer.