

Co-production with unpaid carers in Wales

**Carers Wales
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Co-production with unpaid carers in Wales:
Practice, challenges and recommendations



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Introduction – The Welsh approach to co-production

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, in force since 2016, established a renewed basis for the legal rights of unpaid carers in Wales. The Code of Practice¹ which accompanied the Act refers to co-production as “a way of working whereby practitioners and people work together as equal partners to plan and deliver care and support” explaining that this approach “supports and empowers people to get involved in the design and operation of services”. Accordingly, under the Act local authorities in Wales have a duty to practice co-production with service users, carers and others in the design and delivery of services.

The Coproduction Network for Wales states that co-production is when professionals work in partnership with people who have lived experience to develop solutions to challenges in public services and communities. They propose that effective coproduction is underpinned by 5 principles²:

1. Valuing all participants and building on their strengths.
2. Developing networks of mutual support.

¹ [Social Care Wales: Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014: Planning, Commissioning and Co-production](#)

² [Co-production Network for Wales \(2018\): The five principles of co-production illustrated](#)

3. Doing what matters for all the people involved.
4. Building relationships of trust; sharing power and responsibility.
5. People can be change makers, and organisations enable this.

The Charter for Unpaid Carers³, published by the Welsh Government in 2022, defines co-production as “encouraging individuals to become more involved in the design and delivery of services”. The co-production section of the Charter states that unpaid carers should be “equal partners in the creation of policy and services”, going on to say that this “means being given a voice in policy and service development, planning and delivery, but also in the development of research and training”. It further emphasises that organisations should ensure carers are “involved from the early stages of the process through to final decisions”. The term co-production can be used alongside, and arguably overlaps with, the Act’s principles of “voice and control” to refer to individuals working with professionals to determine their own packages of care and support, though this report focuses on co-production at the service level instead, as emphasised by the Charter above.

The legislative commitment to co-production with unpaid carers rightly recognises carers as bringing valuable insights and experiences to the design and delivery of services and decision making. When co-production operates effectively, decisions and services are much more likely to meet the needs of carers in the relevant area, ensuring services and funding are targeted effectively and are responsive to the needs and preferences of citizens.

Methodology and scope

Carers Wales was asked by the Welsh Government to research the level of co-production with carers across Wales and produce recommendations. We recognised the importance of gathering information from professionals involved in planning and delivering services for carers across Wales, and therefore sent an information-gathering survey to contacts in all 22 local authorities in Wales. Our survey was further sent to a number of connected organisations who have a role in engaging with carers, such as County Voluntary Councils and Regional Partnership Boards. The survey asked respondents to explain how co-production with carers takes place in their area, the ways in which carers are encouraged and supported to participate in co-production, the organisations they may partner with to facilitate co-production and how co-production is monitored in their organisations. A full list of the survey questions can be found in Annex 1.

41 individuals responded to the survey. Responses were received from all 22 local authorities in Wales. Additionally, responses were received from 5 County Voluntary Councils and 4 Regional Partnership Boards. In some cases, multiple individuals from the same organisation responded. 4 responses were discounted as not being relevant to the research scope. Responses were received between

³ [Welsh Government \(2022\): Charter for Unpaid Carers](#)

October 2022 and February 2023. Respondents were then asked in August 2023 whether they wished to provide any updates.

The large majority of the information set out in this report is drawn from survey responses. Desktop research, primarily consisting of analysis of local authority websites and documents such as Regional Partnership Board reports, was used to clarify or supplement information gathered through the survey when needed. Carer Representatives on Regional Partnership Boards were asked to review the information provided for their region.

It has not been possible within the scope of this research to construct a comprehensive review encompassing every instance of co-production with carers currently taking place across Wales. Nor has it been possible to make detailed judgements on the examples of co-production and their outcomes based on the information from the survey responses. This would require a comprehensive evaluation, gathering information from a range of stakeholders involved in an instance of co-production to gather different views and perspectives. Rather, this research has engaged with professionals from across Wales to map many of the ways co-production takes place with carers in service design and decision making locally and regionally. Through comparison of the information offered by survey respondents, and with consideration of general principles of co-production and relevant sources, it has been possible to offer commentary on good practice in carer co-production, as well as the challenges involved as experienced by the respondents, and for recommendations to be produced as a result.

Section 1: Co-production mechanisms, examples and partners involved

The Code of Practice⁴ which accompanies the 2014 Act says that local authorities must “put in place transparent arrangements where people are equal partners in designing and delivering services”. These local mechanisms and processes in which co-production takes place must be designed and operated in a way which gives carers a meaningful say in decision making, involving them from the early stages of a process through to final decisions. Recognising that many local authorities will commission or collaborate with other organisations to deliver services to carers, the Code of Practice states that local authorities must also “ensure that providers from whom they commission or procure services encourage and enable the involvement of all people in designing the shape of services”. Regional Partnership Boards, which bring together local authorities and the NHS to plan care services at a regional level, are required to include at least one person to represent the interests of carers in the region.

Based on survey responses and desktop research, the following section gives an overview of the arrangements, structures and mechanisms through which local and regional co-production with carers in Wales operates, and the organisations

⁴ [Social Care Wales: Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014: Planning, Commissioning and Co-production](#)

involved in facilitating them, both statutory and third sector, along with some recent examples.

As with the information contained in sections 2 and 3, the majority of information in this section has been provided by local authorities and is taken at face value as examples of co-production. It is possible that other local stakeholders, including carers, may describe or view these examples in a different way.

Cardiff and the Vale Region

County

In September 2022 Cardiff Council established an ‘Unpaid Carers Impact Group’ which meets every 8 weeks to support a co-production approach to service review and development. The group consists of unpaid carers and representatives from Cardiff Council and the health board. It has discussed a range of topics of concern to carers and has recently reviewed the feedback from carers who attended focus groups jointly delivered by Cardiff Council and Carers Wales to improve Carers Needs Assessments in the county.

Cardiff Council’s Ageing Well Strategy 2022-2027⁵ commits to working with unpaid carers to ensure their voices are heard. The Care Collective, with the support of the Cardiff and Vale Regional Partnership Board, organises meetings of carers Expert Panels where carers can discuss their experiences with services.

Cardiff and Vale Action for Mental Health, funded by the two local authorities, and Cardiff and Vale UHB’s Mental Health Clinical Board, facilitates service user and carer involvement in shaping mental health services in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Vale of Glamorgan Council has invited carers to participate in procurement processes and contract monitoring. For example, a panel of residents, including carers, has recently been convened to evaluate proposals as part of the Extra Care domiciliary contract.

The Young Carers Project, commissioned from Cardiff YMCA, has used focus groups and surveys to gather the views of young carers on local provision.

Regional

In addition to sitting on the RPB Board, unpaid carers are members of the RPB’s Programme Board for Dementia, and Unpaid Carers Board. The RPB also works with third sector organisations such as The Care Collective and YMCA who have their own engagement mechanisms with carers.

The RPB’s Unpaid Carers Charter⁶ pledges to “listen to the voice of unpaid carers to inform the development of services and support”. The RPB worked with Tempo in

⁵ [Cardiff Council \(2022\): Cardiff Ageing Well Strategy 2022 - 2027](#)

⁶ [Cardiff and Vale Regional Partnership Board: Cardiff and Vale Unpaid Carers Charter](#)

formulating the regional Unpaid Carer's Strategy. Tempo facilitates forums and time credits for unpaid carers.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region

County

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council use a Community of Enquiry approach for co-production in adult social care. The model is felt to provide a clear guide to staff on how co-production can be commenced, and the model has been used in a number of areas including the development of staff guidance on Direct Payments and Carers Needs Assessments. RCT Council further have co-production groups within their learning disability services with carer involvement.

Bridgend Council's Building Resilient Communities Cross Sector Partnership includes carer representation. Additionally, their Carer Wellbeing Service specification contains a commitment to co-production.

Bridgend Council have worked with Nick Andrews (Swansea University) and others to use the Developing Evidence Enriched Practice (DEEP) methodology to engage with carers.

Bridgend are currently working with Practice Solutions to engage with carers to reform policy on direct payments.

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil has an ongoing project around the reward and recognition of mental health service users and carers who have become involved sharing their experiences and ideas with local mental health services. VAMT is also working on developing a Co-production pathway.

Carer representatives are involved in learning disability service planning in Merthyr Tydfil.

Regional

The Cwm Taf Regional Partnership Board commissioned Our Voice Matters to review co-production in the region. The project⁷ made 6 recommendations in 2021 to enhance co-production throughout the region. A co-produced regional co-production definition was launched in 2023 following engagement with service users and carers, including a 'Co-producing co-production hackathon' event in September 2022. It is hoped that the definition will help partner organisations in the region to understand and embed co-production in their work. The RPB has organised engagement events for unpaid carers to inform its Population Needs Assessments and Regional Area Plan.

In the coming years, Cwm Taf RPB intends to co-produce a Co-production Charter and a Co-production Strategy which, it is hoped, will create a regional community of practice around co-production.

⁷ [Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board: At its heart, co-production is about building relationships and developing trust](#)

In addition to carer representation on the Board of the RPB, there is a Carer Representative on the RPB's Dementia Steering Group.

Gwent Region

County

The Newport Carers Café meets monthly and enables carers to speak to council staff. The Newport Carers Network meets three times a year and brings together carers and stakeholders to share information and discuss services. Newport Council also holds focus groups with carers and gathers feedback from carers at community engagement events.

Blaenau Gwent commissions third sector partners with a focus on carers, to engage with carers in the county and encourage them to take part in group sessions where they can express their views on services and activities they would like to see in the area. They have primarily engaged with Blaenau Gwent Age Cymru Carers Community Service and The Care Collective who both deliver information and advice and social activities for carers, informed by carer feedback.

In Monmouthshire, the Young Carers and Carers Strategy Group brings together various local stakeholders and includes unpaid carers.

Torfaen Council highlighted the work of Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA) and Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) in promoting opportunities to carers to participate in co-production.

Caerphilly Council explained they ask carers to be involved when they commission services, and they engage with carers through community events and Facebook polls on the activities carers would like to see.

Regional

The Gwent Citizens' Panel brings together people who live in Gwent who are asked to provide their views and are consulted on health and social care services. Though the Panel is not primarily focused on carers, its membership includes carers. Councils in the region have promoted opportunities to join the Panel to carers. The Panel meets monthly in a hybrid format.

Carers sit on the Gwent Carers Strategic Partnership Board⁸ (one of six strategic integrated partnerships established by the RPB) and provide a voice for carers across the region. The Carers Strategic Partnership Board also links to established carers groups and coordinators in each of the 5 local authority areas and the health board.

The RPB supports the work of carers Expert Panels which are run in collaboration with The Care Collective. 12 meetings were held in 2021/22 to input the carer voice into service planning.

⁸ [Gwent Regional Partnership Board: Regional Partnership Board Annual Report](#)

People with Dementia and their carers sit on 5 local groups coordinating delivery of Dementia Friendly Communities and Dementia Friends awareness⁹.

North Wales Region

County

Flintshire Council operates a Carer's Consultation Group who meet to give feedback on services and initiatives. Additionally, they hold regular drop-in sessions to gather feedback in a less formal setting.

Flintshire Council supports separate Young Carer groups, with a Young Carer from Flintshire sitting on the regional Young Carer's Committee.

Additionally, Flintshire Council works with various third sector partners, all of whom the council says facilitate the carer voice to in varying ways, including: Newcis, The Neuro Therapy Centre, Daffodils, Outside Lives, Adferiad, Carers Trust.

Ynys Mon Council has a Carers Group which meets quarterly. It contains third sector and local authority representation. Ynys Mon Council works with Medrwn Mon, the Carers Outreach Service and Carers Trust to facilitate co-production.

Denbighshire Council's Carers Strategy Group brings together a range of third sector organisations along with local authority and health board representatives. Carers are not members of this group, though the group receives information from networks of community groups.

Conwy Council consults carers as part of commissioning activities and their Participation Officer supports general citizen engagement. Conwy receives insights into the experiences of carers through the third sector organisations it delivers services collaboratively with, including The Carers Outreach Service, Carers Trust Crossroads, Hafal (Adferiad) and Alzheimer's Society.

Wrexham Council commissions Newcis to deliver an unpaid carers service across Wrexham. Newcis holds regular groups and forums to obtain unpaid carer feedback. Annual unpaid carer surveys are also conducted.

Cyngor Gwynedd contacts carers individually or through groups either run by council staff or by partners in the third sector such as the Carers Outreach Service.

Regional

A group of unpaid carers are working with the North Wales Dementia Strategy Steering Group to help shape services in North Wales.¹⁰

The RPB's future plans include encouraging and supporting carers to become involved in forums and opportunities where their voices can be heard at the local and regional level.¹¹

⁹ [Gwent Regional Partnership Board: Regional Partnership Board Annual Report](#)

¹⁰ [North Wales RPB \(2022\): North Wales Carers and Young Carers Operational Group Action Plan Progress Update – July 2022](#)

¹¹ [ibid](#)

Powys

Powys Council's Regional Integration Funding for carers' projects have been co-produced and evaluated by a Carers Steering Group¹², which reports into the Regional Partnership Board. There are Carer Representatives on the Carers Steering Group, supported by Ceredigion. There is a rotating chair between the Health Board, Local Authority and a Carer Representative.

RIF funding has been used to enable carers to attend meetings of the Start, Live and Age Well partnerships that feed into the Regional Partnership Board. There are two Carer Representatives on the RPB Board.

A Powys Engagement and Insight Group was established in 2022 to discuss best practice and join up work across the partnership regarding citizen involvement in service design and decision making.

West Glamorgan Region

County

Swansea Council commissioned Swansea County Voluntary Service to establish the Swansea Parent Carer Forum. The Swansea Parent Carer Forum is now a registered charity and supports parent carers to feed into the work of the local authority and the Regional Partnership Board. It has recently worked to reform Carers Needs Assessments and Direct Payments in Swansea.

Swansea Council commissions YMCA to facilitate a Young Carers Council.

There is a Swansea Co-production Network supported by the local authority. It brings together individuals who are interested in working co-productively across health and social care in Swansea.

Swansea Carers Centre and Swansea Dementia Hwb both assist in helping to identify carers to participate in co-production activities.

Neath Port Talbot Council and NPT Carers Service encourage carers in the county to engage with the regional Carers Liaison Forum. NPT Council is however reviewing ongoing mechanisms for carer engagement and co-production as part of a recently commenced review of carer services in the county.

Regional

All of the partner organisations within the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board have signed up to a West Glamorgan Regional Co-production Charter¹³.

The West Glamorgan Carers Liaison Forum gives carers a collective voice in the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership. It meets regularly and receives staff support from the RPB. The Carers Liaison Forum supports carers to become more

¹² [Powys County Council: Carers Steering Group](#)

¹³ [West Glamorgan Regional Partnership \(2021\): West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Co-production Charter](#)

involved in regional co-production and has invited carers to take part in decision making in relation to the allocation of carers funding.

In September 2023, the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board invited carer members of the Carers Liaison Forum to join a number of boards within the RPB including Neurodiverse Conditions, Wellbeing and Learning Disabilities, Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health and Carers Partnership

West Wales Region

County

The Pembrokeshire Carers Voice Forum gives unpaid carers the opportunity to participate in co-production exercises in Pembrokeshire and the wider West Wales region. It is jointly facilitated by Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and the Pembrokeshire Carers Information & Support Service with support from the County Council.

Carmarthenshire Carers Forum aims to provide carers with a voice so they can contribute to the planning and development of services.

Ceredigion Council organises numerous small events throughout the year to engage with carers, including tea and cake events and events to celebrate Carers Week.

Regional

West Wales RPB involved carers in the production of their West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025¹⁴, which was informed by a survey responded to by over 500 carers in the region in 2020.

The West Wales Carers Development Group is a formal sub-group of the West Wales Regional Partnership Board. It includes representatives of Hywel Dda University Health Board, the three local authorities in the region, as well as third sector organisations and representatives of service users and carers in West Wales.

Section 2: Experiences of facilitating co-production

The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales¹⁵ state that organisations should make it easy for people to take part in decision making with barriers to participation identified and addressed, including by providing appropriate training and support to “enable all participants to effectively engage”. The Welsh Government commissioned independent evaluation of the Social Services Act 2014¹⁶ found that “particularly from the point of view of carers”, good co-production required “attention to the costs and practical challenges of being involved”, with one unpaid carer commenting “it should be easy for people to sit on

¹⁴ [West Wales Care Partnership \(2020\): West Wales Carers Strategy 2020-2025](#)

¹⁵ [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#)

¹⁶ [Welsh Government \(2023\): Co-production: research to support the final report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

these groups and represent, but there's got to be structured supported, which is often missing”.

If meaningful co-production with carers is to operate effectively, organisations must proactively reach out to carers and inform them about co-production opportunities. They must also provide support to facilitate their full involvement in co-production processes, recognising that without support carers may find engaging to be a daunting prospect, they may struggle to find the time required and their contribution may be minimised if the power dynamics in the process are weighted towards often well-resourced professionals around the table.

This section covers the ways in which carers are invited to participate in co-production and the support organisations put in place to facilitate carer involvement. This section further explores the challenges as seen by professionals in realising effective co-production in practice.

Inviting carers to engage in co-production

The vast majority of survey respondents said they used social media to inform carers in their area about opportunities to be involved in co-production. General local authority or organisational accounts are used most commonly, though in some areas they are able to utilise dedicated carer social media pages or groups.

Most respondents also mentioned email newsletters to local carers as being useful ways to promote co-production opportunities, with some mentioning that physical newsletters or letters are also posted to local carers. Some organisations explained council staff will attend meetings or social groups where carers congregate to promote opportunities to them directly.

Many local authorities relied on local carers organisations and third sector partners to promote co-production opportunities to local carers, finding them to have important links to the local carer community.

Support to facilitate carer involvement

Responses to the survey indicated that a large proportion of co-production meetings or events take place online. Respondents felt this was useful in enabling carers to participate by eliminating the need for carers to travel. Where physical meetings or events were taking place, many areas said they pay for travel for the carer through expenses or by paying for taxis.

Many carers struggle to find the time to engage in co-production and several areas mentioned that they will fund or provide respite opportunities or replacement care to free up the carer's time to enable them to take part in co-production.

A handful of areas mentioned that they found using Time Credits to be a useful mechanism to reward carers for taking part in co-production, though a respondent

from Swansea voiced some concerns about the scheme, believing that in some cases they may interfere with benefits claimed by the carer and that carers can struggle to use them due to the availability of services. Some local authorities said they provided gifts or other tokens of appreciation for carers, including flowers, goody bags and amazon vouchers. A respondent from Merthyr Tydfil explained that a barrier to achieving meaningful co-production was “not being able to offer carers appropriate and meaningful rewards for the time they give up to be involved”.

Good practice can be observed in the West Glamorgan region where the RPB has a dedicated staff member who supports volunteer representatives in the RPB, including carers, by providing these reps with practical support and opportunities to engage. The West Glamorgan Carers Partnership Board has also established a Task and Finish group to co-produce a policy to help carers get the support they need to participate in the Carers Liaison Forum or to become a Carer Representative within the RPB.

In February 2023, the Welsh Government published a Charter for service user, carer, third sector and provider members of Regional Partnership Boards¹⁷, following a task and finish group prompted by a letter submitted to Welsh Government by Carers Wales in 2022, on behalf of the RPB Carer Representatives. The charter sets out how RPBs can enable all members to have a meaningful role on the board, suggesting numerous ways they can support their Carer Representatives. Though focused on RPBs, it serves as a useful resource for carer representation at all levels.

Challenges in carer co-production

Many respondents reported that it can be difficult to find enough carers with the time to participate in co-production. A respondent from Torfaen explained “Carers are often so busy with their caring role that they have little time or opportunity to engage with coproduction”, while a response from the Vale of Glamorgan noted that “unpaid carers often have demanding care giving roles and their availability [is] liable to change at short notice”. Respondents also spoke of the challenge of engaging with carers who are more difficult to reach, such as those with very intense caring responsibilities who may have very limited time free to participate in co-production.

Several respondents explained that co-production processes can often overload carers due to the time commitment requested, as carers may be asked to engage with a process for an extended period of time or sit on multiple groups and committees. In situations where only a small number of carers are involved, this can result in a small number of carers being asked to volunteer a significant amount of time to a co-production process, impeding the effectiveness of the process.

¹⁷ [Welsh Government \(2023\): Regional Partnership Boards: charter for service user, carer, third sector and provider members](#)

Many respondents said the quality of co-production may be limited if the organisation is not able to gather the right balance of perspectives and caring experience from the carers who are able or willing to engage in co-production. Some spoke of the potential that it is the same people continually engaging, with a respondent from Conwy saying “There can be some selection bias (generally, not just within carer groups) in terms of those who self-select to take part in such activities, as they may be generally more confident and outgoing”. Other factors such as the intensity of the caring role and language and cultural factors may also lead to some carers being less likely to engage than others.

Time-limited funding and short timeframes for spend and delivery of externally-funded projects was suggested as a barrier to achieving meaningful co-production. A respondent from Pembrokeshire said that “Good co-production takes time and resource which is often not available at the right points in time to allow for carers to be involved in a fully meaningful way”. Another respondent noted that for co-production to thrive, there needs to be “freedom to experiment, fail, learn.... without fear of repercussions”. Therefore it can be argued that strict requirements from funders may unintentionally serve to limit the space needed for meaningful co-production.

Some respondents raised the importance of organisational culture to delivering effective co-production, emphasising that staff at all levels need to understand and buy-in to co-production. When this does not happen, practice was felt to vary with one third sector organisation saying of their engagement with local authority departments, “until staff are measured on how they are co-producing it can be very hit and miss”. Indeed, the independent evaluation of the 2014 Act¹⁸ found that a factor impacting on the operation of co-production was “the cultures of relevant organisations and the need to change culture to accommodate co-production”.

Section 3: How is co-production monitored?

The Welsh Government’s Charter for Unpaid Carers¹⁹ says that public bodies should “make sure a culture of co-production is embedded within the organisation” and understood among staff at all levels. This is vital in ensuring that co-production with carers is on a solid foundation and can be expected to operate effectively on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales²⁰ states “People’s experience of the process of engagement should be monitored and evaluated to measure its success”, rightly establishing that citizens should be able to evaluate the co-production they are involved in, in keeping with widely held expectation that good co-production means citizens are involved from the beginning to the end of the process. Additionally, a common complaint among

¹⁸ [Welsh Government \(2023\): Co-production: research to support the final report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

¹⁹ [Welsh Government \(2022\): Charter for Unpaid Carers](#)

²⁰ [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#)

carers in the evaluation of the 2014 Act²¹ was “the lack of substantive feedback and follow-up information following co-production activities”. The evaluation further emphasised the importance of ensuring co-production is firmly embedded within an organisation’s culture and practices.

Therefore, we asked respondents whether their organisation had a specific co-production policy as a means of considering whether co-production was well-embedded within the organisation. The Code of Practice²² for the 2014 Act recommends “that providers involve people in evaluation”, so we further asked how they evaluate their co-production with carers and whether carers are involved in evaluation and monitoring.

Good practice in embedding co-production within organisational practice can be seen in the West Glamorgan region. The Council’s Co-Production Strategic Framework²³ provides a holistic framework to apply co-production to all Council services by suggesting when to use co-production and the benefits of doing so. The Framework also includes a series of steps through which it hoped a culture of co-production and co-design will be spread within the Council. The Co-Production Strategy for Social Care in Swansea²⁴ outlines formal aspirations for the development of co-production within Swansea social services. All the partner organisations within the West Glamorgan RPB have signed up to a West Glamorgan Regional Co-production Charter²⁵. The Charter pledges to “place people and carers at the centre of decision-making” and calls on partners to “take meaningful action to embed co-production principles throughout their organisation”. It sets out a number of commitments, including for the board members and member organisations to undertake co-production training.

Many respondents said co-production featured in some of their organisational strategies, and some said it featured in commissioning documents. Many respondents however said they were not aware of co-production having a formal basis in their organisational policies. Without a firm foundation for co-production there is a greater likelihood that co-production will either not happen, will happen on an occasional basis or will vary in quality.

Respondents were asked how they evaluated and monitored their co-production with carers, and if carers were involved in any such evaluation. Unfortunately, very few examples of focused evaluation of co-production could be found among the responses. A respondent from Powys said they evaluate projects which have been co-produced but “not necessarily the co-production itself”. Another respondent said they did not believe their mechanisms were “highly evolved or as well-resourced to enable such monitoring” of co-production. Some answers to this question referred to collating social media comments or event feedback forms,

²¹ [Welsh Government \(2023\): Co-production: research to support the final report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

²² [Social Care Wales: Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014: Planning, Commissioning and Co-production](#)

²³ [Swansea Council: Co-production Strategic Framework](#)

²⁴ [Swansea Council: Co-production strategy for social care in Swansea](#)

²⁵ [West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board \(2021\): West Glamorgan Regional Co-production Charter](#)

further suggesting the evaluation and monitoring stages of co-production are likely to be under-developed.

However, some good practice could be identified. A respondent from Swansea explained how the Swansea Parent Carer Forum reports quarterly to the local authority on what is and what isn't working with regards to co-production. A respondent from Neath Port Talbot explained how evaluation interviews, conducted by an independent panel of members from the West Glamorgan Co-production Group, had been held with those who had participated in co-production, including Carer Representatives. The regional co-production charter²⁶ contains a commitment among partner organisations to "co-productively develop and evaluate specific milestones for all programs to identify future co-production work".

It is generally accepted that good co-production involves citizens from the start to the finish of the process and it appears more needs to be done to ensure carers are being invited to comment on co-production at the evaluation stage.

Section 4: Conclusions

How widespread is co-production with carers across Wales?

Responses to this research indicate that good co-production with unpaid carers is taking place in many parts of Wales. A respondent from Bridgend explained how carers were involved in the creation of the Carers Wellbeing Service from the conception of the idea in 2017 through to commissioning, with carers having been asked for their involvement again now that the local authority is retendering the contract. A respondent from Rhondda Cynon Taf explained how a Community of Enquiry approach had made co-production easier to implement and provides a model to follow for staff who are less confident with co-production, while in Powys RIF-funded projects were co-produced and evaluated with carers. The West Glamorgan Carers Strategy²⁷ was co-produced with carers, with a Carers Liaison Forum of carers then set up to support its implementation. Carers across the region were then involved in shaping the action plan for the strategy through 'Carers Come and Plan' engagement events.

The first section of this report explored the mechanisms through which co-production is practiced with carers across Wales. It set out that many local authorities have set up or support groups or forums to give carers a regular opportunity to come together and discuss issues, such as the Carmarthenshire Carers Forum, Flintshire's Carers Consultation Group, Monmouthshire's Carers Strategy Group and Newport's Carers Café. It is also apparent that the third sector is playing a role, whether they are commissioned to provide services to carers themselves (such as Newcis who are commissioned by Wrexham Council among others), or not as is the case for the forums run by Pembrokeshire Association of

²⁶ [ibid](#)

²⁷ [West Glamorgan Regional Partnership \(2023\): West Glamorgan Regional Carers Strategy](#)

Voluntary Organisations. This research suggests that around half of the counties in Wales have county-level groups for carers to come together and comment on services.

It is commendable that many local authorities often directly, and sometimes through partners, facilitate this involvement. However, meaningful co-production is typified by citizens having a real chance to influence decisions from an early stage and at every stage of the process. This separates co-production from consultation, and while it appears all these groups may represent consultation with carers, it is unclear whether they are set up to give carers a meaningful say at every stage in decision making and service design. It is not clear whether they have a formal role in the decision-making process. Many counties also do not appear to support a forum or panel which seeks the views of carers. Publicly available information and that provided through the survey, suggests that the existing groups are unlikely to meet the standards of effective co-production. This suggests that there are real limitations on the extent co-production actually operates at this level of decision making, though these groups represent foundations which could be built on, as their ongoing, standing nature is more conducive to regular involvement than occasional, as and when engagement events.

Alongside considerations of structures of co-production and whether they have sufficient power and autonomy, differing levels of understanding of co-production also plays a role. The report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being Act on co-production²⁸, explained that a recurring concern among “both service-users and practitioners was that often, co-production is misunderstood” and that co-production is often “not appreciated for its distinctiveness...compared to existing ways of working (such as consultation)”. One unpaid carer remarked that “co-production is kind of flung around when actually, most of the stuff is consultation”, while another said of an experience of theirs “it felt more like consultation than co-production”. Our research chimes with this, with many of the examples of co-production offered by survey respondents appearing to be of consultation, rather than co-production as they lacked evidence of important aspects of co-production (such as involvement at every stage of a process, including the early stages). A number of examples offered were omitted from the report on this basis. However, in the evaluation of the Act both practitioners and service users spoke of the “perceived vagueness in the requirements and provisions of the Act regarding co-production” and this is likely to be unhelpful for practitioners in terms of understanding and implementing co-production.

At the regional level, some good practice can be observed with several RPBs operating dedicated committees or groups focused on carers with carer involvement. Despite positive structures of co-production in RPBs, it should be noted that the RPB Representatives Charter Task and Finish Group which met throughout 2022, was created in response to concerns raised by Carer Representatives at what they felt to be failings in the operation of co-production in their RPBs.

²⁸ [Welsh Government \(2023\): Co-production: research to support the final report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

Nevertheless, good practice can be observed in many places, including Swansea where the local authority funds an active Parent Carer Forum and a Young Carers Council. Swansea County Voluntary Service has also facilitated a local Co-production Network of those working in co-production in the county. In Powys, the Carers Steering Group has influenced Regional Integration Funding for Carers' Projects and Cwm Taf RPB appears to have gone to significant lengths to build understanding of, and organisational commitment to, co-production in the region.

Facilitating and embedding co-production in practice

The National Principles for Public Engagement²⁹ state that organisations should acknowledge barriers to participation and provide appropriate support to enable involvement. Section 2 of this report considered how carers are supported to engage in co-production and any challenges therein.

It was apparent that a lack of time on the part of carers is a leading reason why it can be difficult to engage, especially among those with high-intensity caring responsibilities. This underscores the usefulness of providing respite or replacement care, which some organisations said they did, to free up carers to participate. Some respondents said that Carer Representatives can have a lot asked of them in their volunteer roles, so it is important to provide support to free up their time while also engaging additional carers and involving them at different levels of decision making to share the work of co-production. Organisations should also consider whether they can provide remuneration to carers for their time. It appears most co-production meetings take place online. While more accessible for many, organisations should aim to provide some in-person opportunities to reach those digitally excluded and to foster positive relationships between carers and professionals.

Some respondents told us that funding requirements seriously limit the time and options for co-production. In keeping with the Act, publicly funded projects should have sufficient flexibility to enable regular and meaningful co-production, and this should be seen as a necessary down payment in the future success of the project or service it seeks to deliver. It was also raised that senior staff in organisations need to fully understand and buy-in to co-production, suggesting a need for training for professionals as much as carers. This reflects sentiments shared by an unpaid carer in the evaluation of the 2014 Act³⁰ who said “they have got an officer at a very senior level, who is responsible for co-production within the organization and therefore, it seems to be taken far more seriously”.

Section 3 explored how robustly co-production is anchored in organisational practice, considering how it is embedded within organisations and evaluated. Answers from the majority of respondents indicated that their organisation did not have a specific co-production policy to codify their commitment to co-production

²⁹ [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#)

³⁰ [Welsh Government \(2023\): Co-production: research to support the final report of the evaluation of the Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

and set out how it should operate. While it may be preferable that there is an unambiguous and identifiable foundation to co-production in organisational policies, it is possible that a similar foundational basis could be achieved through inclusion of co-production in other policies or strategies, such as those related to public engagement or scrutiny. Whatever the approach, organisations should be able to clearly evidence that a commitment to co-production is formally embedded in their operations.

Responses suggest that there are very few examples of targeted evaluation of carer involvement in co-production, though some good practice can be identified such as evaluation interviews being held with Carer Representatives. If carers who are involved in co-production are not being routinely involved in evaluating and monitoring the projects they have contributed to, it would suggest that co-production may be stronger in earlier stages of the process and weaker in later stages. If carers are also not being asked to reflect on what went well and what went less well with regards to their own involvement, then organisations may be missing out on opportunities to review and strengthen their approaches to co-production.

Section 5: Recommendations

1. Local authorities, if they do not already have one, should establish a well-publicised forum, panel or similar mechanism, to give a wide pool of carers an opportunity to meet together on an ongoing basis to co-produce service design and delivery.
2. Local authorities should review where opportunities could be created for additional Carer Representative positions on committees or groups within the authority, which do not already have Carer Representatives but consider matters relevant to carers.
3. Regional Partnership Boards should ensure they have a dedicated standing committee or sub-group which considers the needs, feedback and suggestions of unpaid carers. These committees or groups should have a minimum of two places for unpaid carers as full-members, and carers should be offered the chance to be a rotating or co-chair.
4. Local authorities, RPBs and relevant partner organisations should aim to provide replacement/respite care and remuneration to carers who engage in co-productive processes. Using the Charter for service user, carer, third sector and provider members of Regional Partnership Boards as a starting point, they should ensure they have a policy on how they will enable carers to participate fully and meaningfully in co-production.
5. Welsh Government should explore how greater flexibility can be introduced into relevant Welsh Government-funded programmes to allow sufficient time and opportunities for meaningful co-production to be carried out.
6. Local authorities should demonstrate that co-production, in particular with regards to carers, has a strong basis in their organisational policies/strategies and that relevant members of staff have undertaken appropriate training on co-production.

7. Local authorities should review and strengthen the involvement of carers in the evaluation and monitoring stages of the projects and processes they have been involved in.
8. All RPBs and local authorities should demonstrate through appropriate public reporting how they are coproducing with carers and what the outcomes of this have been.

Annex 1

Questions asked in the Co-production with carers in Wales questionnaire for professionals

- Does your organisation have a specific co-production policy?
- How can carers participate in co-production in your area? Please tell us about any co-production mechanisms, processes, groups, commissioning or partnerships etc.
- How are carers informed about/invited to opportunities to participate in co-production?
- Is any assistance provided to carers to encourage them to get involved with co-production? eg. Online meetings/surveys, expenses, time credits, respite?
- Are any external organisations involved in supporting you to encourage co-production? If so, which organisations and what support do they provide?
- Please tell us about what you are most proud of in terms of co-production with carers.
- What would you say the challenges are in achieving meaningful co-production with carers?
- How do you evaluate and monitor any co-production you undertake with carers and are carers involved in this process?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?