

East Sussex Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Co-production Handbook

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1. SEND Strategy in East Sussex

The SEND Strategy in East Sussex sets out our shared ambition:

Our ambition is that every child and young person with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in East Sussex receives an inclusive education, and accesses opportunities and support that enables them to achieve their full potential at home, in school, educational settings, and in their communities. This includes being well-prepared for adult life.

Our aspiration is to develop a culture of collaboration that brings together all relevant partners and stakeholders to deliver this ambition. This approach has been reflected in our strategy development process. Our five priorities are our shared outcomes with our partners, articulated from the perspective of children and young people. These outcomes are ambitious, and we want to work with young people, parents and carers, and colleagues across the whole of the education, health and care system in East Sussex to achieve these as well as we can for each child and young person in East Sussex.

- My voice is heard and acted upon (participation)
- My optimum health and well-being are supported (physical and mental health)
- I feel confident and secure (safety and security)
- I belong and feel valued for who I am (inclusion and belonging)
- I am supported to develop and achieve my goals (progress, achievement and Preparation for Adulthood)

About this Handbook

This Handbook expands upon the collective expectations and commitment of ESCC, NHS Sussex and ESPCF, to work together with families to review, design and develop Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in East Sussex. It evidences our shared approach to listening to each other and valuing the voice of families with lived experience.

This Handbook is everyone's business and all partners have the same responsibilities to it. It is set within the context and principles laid out in the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It recognises that all Children and Young People have the right to participate in decision-making, as enshrined in law (Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice 2014, the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Care Act 2015). It also recognises the integral part parent carer voice plays in decision-making. Parent carers often navigate systems, processes, and procedures on behalf of their child or young person with SEND, thereby gaining invaluable knowledge and expertise which can support, complement, and add to the experiences shared by their child or young person.

The aims of this handbook are to:

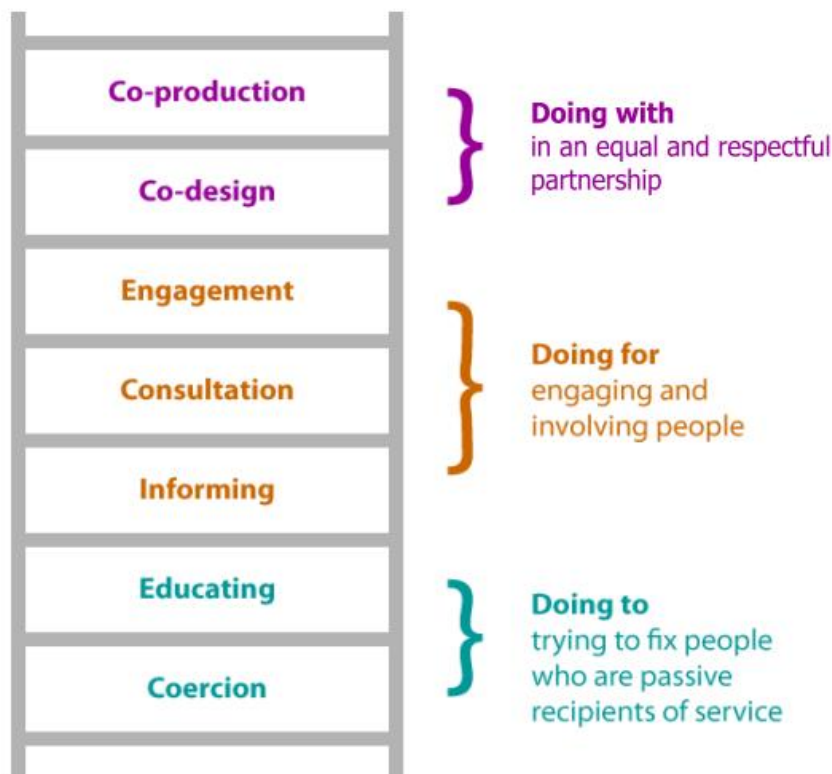
- Raise awareness and understanding of what co-production is and how to go about it in East Sussex
- Provide tools and resources for those working in co-production to use.
- Help ensure co-production is woven into the fabric of SEND services.

Listen to, discuss, do together

2. What is Co-production?

Co-production is about developing equal partnerships between the people who use services and those who commission and run them. By engaging closely with families with children and young people with SEND from the beginning, on the basis of mutual respect, co-production can be used to overcome barriers, build understanding and solve complex problems. And when successful, co-production leads to improved outcomes for both families and service providers - by getting it right first time.

Co-production can be described on a 'Ladder of Participation' depending upon how children, young people, their families and partners work together. The Co-production Ladder shows what is and isn't co-production when we work together.



3. Who is involved:

- ESPCF representing parent carers of CYP with SEND
- East Sussex County Council (ESCC)
- NHS Sussex
- Children and young people with SEND (although this handbook doesn't detail East Sussex approaches to co-production with CYP)
- Other SEND service providers, including statutory, VCS, private sector.

The 3 core partners (ESPCF, ESCC and NHS) meet monthly in a co-production meeting. See the 'Terms of Reference' for the meeting in appx.

4. Co-production is:

- Working together from the very start to identify and achieve an end result which is equally and collaboratively agreed on.
- Working as equals to design new projects or services, improve existing services or write new policies/strategies.
- A way of doing things together that sees families of children and young people with SEND as having the skills and knowledge to create opportunities and resolve problems.
- Partners respecting each other and valuing each other's perspective and contribution, with a power shift that sees families with children and young people with SEND as equal partners.
- Valuing, learning from and building on the diversity of assets held by the those with lived experience: skills, knowledge, time and networks.
- Achieving positive outcomes that improve the lives of families with children and young people with SEND.
- Respecting the limitations that may affect a co-productive process, these may be for example finance or resourcing or statutory regulations.
- Sharing ownership of problems that arise and being committed to collaboratively developing solutions that are evidence based, work and are deliverable.

Co-production isn't:

- The same as consultation i.e. having a plan and then going out and about to tell people about it OR even having a plan, asking people their view of the proposals and then incorporating their thoughts into the revised plan.
- Just about talking and not listening.
- Asking for opinions on something after a decision has already been made or asking for peoples' views and then not taking them into account.
- One party persistently insisting another comes around to their way of thinking with the implied threat of withdrawing from the process. 'Drawing lines in the sand'.
- A quick fix. By its evolving nature it requires the investment of time and resources.
- Identifying, classifying and listing problems with the expectation that solutions will be found by someone else.

5. Key ingredients for successful co-production:

- **Skills and knowledge.** Working in an inclusive and co-productive way requires a range of abilities. Facilitation training is a good example of learning and development which might be needed.
- **Honest, transparent, clear communication** - including plain English - no jargon. The way we communicate with others is important. It is all too easy to slip into our own way of saying things, or to assume prior knowledge.
- **Learning, reflecting and improving.** Co-production can feel uncomfortable - it is an ongoing process of assessing how we can work ever better. Partners need to handle challenges, different needs and opinions constructively.
- **Involving the right people at the right time.** It can take time to build trust and give meaningful opportunities to participate. Planning for this is important to ensure that a wide range of relevant people can get involved in co-producing services.
- **Being patient and listening well.** We need to respect, value and truly listen to the contributions of others. Everyone involved should feel their voice is heard and views are taken into account throughout the process.
- **Awareness of people's needs and meeting them.** Knowing your unconscious biases and being sensitive to other people's differences, and needs, and how to meet them is important. This means that people can be involved equally, at the right time.
- **Ability to share power.** This means developing an equal partnership, in so far as possible, and sometimes letting go. It can involve sharing resources, decisions and is rooted in a deep appreciation of the particular assets that all participants can contribute.
- **Holding or developing the belief that everyone is equal.**
- **Reciprocity.** Recognising that if people are putting something in, they should be getting something out (e.g. paying people for their time, providing essential training).
- **Supporting each other;** it's okay to make mistakes.

6. Partnership commitments (in summary)

To continue to improve services and support to children and young people with SEND and their families through co-production, we will:

- a) Build trust and respect through good quality co-production and genuine partnership working.
- b) Commit to open and transparent dialogue, respectfully listen to different views/voices.
- c) Build relationships e.g. have opportunities for introductory meetings to get to know each other and review meetings to reflect on our co-production journey and learning.
- d) Ensure that everyone is treated with fairness and respect, and that any barriers to participation are identified, and every effort is made to find positive solutions.
- e) Support co-production to ensure it's accessible, e.g. be mindful that partners may have disabilities, some hidden, caring responsibilities and access arrangements and adjustments will be made as required.
- f) Respect confidentiality.
- g) Constructively challenge one another whilst working together to provide effective and innovative solutions using available resources creatively.
- h) Discuss and reach agreement around broad shared strategic goals, which are prioritised and form co-production workstreams. These are typically linked to the East Sussex JSNA and SEND Strategy.
- i) Ensure that all partners including parent carer reps, the local authority, NHS Sussex, and strategic leads work together on the co-production of these key strategies and policies and when making significant changes to services, or the way they are provided.
- j) Work together to gather feedback on services to improve quality or responsiveness, better understanding needs and identifying and responding to gaps in provision.
- k) Continuously strengthen how partners work together on making key decisions relating to ongoing service improvement. Partners share an aspiration to embed co-production across the system but recognise there can be barriers to achieving this in practice in some service areas, e.g. when change is required at pace or where co-production skills and capacity might be lacking. Where (potential) barriers exist, these will be discussed and solutions and learning identified.
- l) As well as providing parent voice, champion children and young people's voice to be involved in their own decision-making, offering help and support where appropriate to make this happen.
- m) Commit to regular reflective meetings, where progress with planned work and potential new developments can be reviewed and discussed.
- n) Build upon and not duplicate or seek to replicate existing work completed by wider stakeholders both nationally and locally.
- o) Ensure co-production is monitored and evaluated, to demonstrate that it has brought about positive change.

These are detailed further in Appendix A: The East Sussex Co-production Charter.

7. Planning effective co-production

Partners are encouraged to use the planning form in Appendix C to ensure co-production is effectively planned and co-ordinated.

a. Project scope and plan

- Define the scope of a co-produced project together: be clear on aims of project, where it sits on ladder of participation and parameters for influencing.
- Map out the project timeframe and resources needed/available, roles and responsibilities.
- Capture as much info as possible in co-production planning form (appendix).
- Be clear on what the end goal looks like from the outset (e.g. how the co-produced project will be completed and signed-off) and how problems will be handled.

b. Share the knowledge

- Consider what information parent carer reps will need and provide this.
- Make sure that parent carer reps have everything they need such as adding them to distribution lists.
- Offer pre-meeting briefings.
- Provide a jargon buster.

c. Build relationships and understanding

- Co-production works to ensure all experience, knowledge and skills are used to create better outcomes. For this to be possible it is necessary to build and invest in relationships and understanding.
- Respect parent carers as volunteers whilst also recognising their unique and expert knowledge.
- Respect service providers as committed practitioners motivated by shared goals to support CYP and their families.

d. Meetings

- Times of meetings need to match parent carer representative availability wherever possible i.e. in school hours and not in school holidays.
- Meetings need to be accessible, either in safe venues or virtual, with travel time to/from venues taken into consideration as necessary. If online, support with necessary technology should be provided to parent carers.
- Ensure meeting aims are clear, including where relevant that terms of reference are in place to define the membership and purpose.
- Ensure meetings are welcoming, participants are introduced and roles are made clear. Support parent carers to feel comfortable and speak openly.
- All partners will adhere to best practice principles for meetings including:
 - Notice for meetings will ideally not have less than two weeks' notice, except for occasions when this is not possible due to an urgent deadline; and
 - Agendas will be coproduced as much as possible and be distributed with papers in sufficient time (e.g. one week ahead of meeting).
- Papers will be jargon free and written in plain English and recognise that parent carers may come to meetings with varying levels of background knowledge, so technical information may need to be explained in advance and appropriate support provided.

- Be aware that parent carer reps may need to liaise with ESPCF before agreeing to key decisions in the meeting, for example decisions about future involvement in a piece of work, or decisions which have an impact on strategic goals, or processes, or in order to collect the views of the wider ESPCF membership

e. Confidentiality

- At times, meetings/projects/groups may discuss confidential matters. ESPCF has a confidentiality policy which parent carer reps operate within. You can help by clearly identifying confidential information that is not to be shared widely and the reasons for this.
- Parent carer reps are subject to the same confidentiality rules as all other members of the working group.
- Parent carers hold multiple roles (e.g. individual parent carer, expert by experience, and ESPCF representative). We would expect that partner staff respect confidentiality relating to those other roles; personal experiences will form part of parent carer reps' feedback, but reps are aware that their role is also to represent the wider parent carer community.

f. Monitoring and evaluation

- Take time to thank parent carers for their involvement.
- Parent carer reps provide their knowledge and expertise to support positive change, so it's important they get timely feedback on the outcomes of the projects and meetings they've been involved in.
- Keep parent carer reps updated about project timescales (implementation / review). If specific feedback could not be implemented, be clear and transparent about the reasons why, and how this impacts on the next steps (e.g. do other options need to be considered or alternative solutions to an issue explored?)
- Monitor how co-production is working through the life of the project - e.g. this could be seeking feedback at the end of a meeting and having a wash-up type discussion or information conversations ongoing.
- Complete the feedback and reflection form on completion of the co-production process (see appendix E).

8. Funding arrangements

- ESPCF is funded by ESCC and NHS Sussex, with a core grant also provided by DfE (via Contact)
- Partners uphold the principles of the SEND Code of Practice and to work in partnership to improve local services for children and young people with SEND.
- In line with the DfE MoU, partners recognise the independence of ESPCF and value its role in representing the needs, experiences and views of parent carers of children and young people with SEND including their role in raising issues, providing constructive feedback through open dialogue, and challenging partners when necessary.

Appendix A: Co-Production Charter

You can view the most recent version of the Co-Production Charter on our Local Offer:

- [Additional Strategies, Statements and Projects | East Sussex Local Offer](#)

Appendix B: Co-production Group Terms of Reference

Purpose of the Group

The purpose of the group is:

- To champion co-production of education, health and care services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) with parent carers in East Sussex. This includes all co-production at all levels, however the focus of the group and its workplan is strategic co-production.
- To provide a vision and strategic direction for co-production in East Sussex ensuring our shared commitment and momentum are maintained, that we review progress together and set goals for further development.
- To liaise with relevant groups and individuals within the membership's sphere of influence to advance co-production, e.g. to gather intelligence, evidence and information, to bring challenge where necessary and to help overcome any blockages to achieving successful co-production. To escalate concerns or issues presenting barriers to co-production, as necessary.
- To facilitate and support ongoing communication about co-production at a strategic level between East Sussex Parent Carer Forum, ESCC and NHS Sussex.
- To support securing parent carer representation at a strategic level in key workstreams, linked to priorities identified in the JSNA and ensure that this is guided by the principles of the Coproduction Charter.
- To produce information and resources on co-production as needed to support staff in developing good practice approaches.

Operational organisation of the meeting

Agendas will be informed by the following:

- Service improvement driven by the SEND Strategy, recommendations as a result of the Ofsted/CQC Joint Area Inspection and/or Local Area Inclusion Plan.
- Matters arising from other strategic meetings.
- Coproduction projects / workstreams.
- Priorities for each organisation.

Chair

The role of chair will rotate between ESPCF and ESCC for every meeting.

Meeting commitments

- All stakeholders will provide agenda items and accompanying papers no later than 3 working days before a scheduled meeting.
- Group members will be expected to complete assigned actions and read papers ahead of the meeting.

Administrative tasks

Invitations, agendas, room bookings and preparation of materials and presentations will be coordinated by ESCC Admin support.

Notes

Notes of actions and decisions will be recorded, notes produced and signed-off by ESCC, NHS Sussex and ESPCF. Responsibility for this will alternate between ESCC and ESPCF and will mirror the chairing rotation.

Meeting duration

Meetings will last no longer than an hour and a half, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Membership

Membership will be made up of representatives from:

- ESPCF
- ESCC Education
- ESCC Children's Social Care
- NHS Sussex
- Amaze

The numbers of representatives may vary as needed and additional guests may be invited as per the agenda.

Quoracy

The group will be quorate when a minimum of 4 members meet, with at least two each of ESCC and ESPCF, and one from health.

Links with other strategic governance groups and bodies

The group will identify and liaise with others including:

- SEND Strategy Governance Group, Implementation Group, and Commissioning and Monitoring Group
- SEND LAIP Board
- CYP Health Board
- And many more

Appendix C: Co-production planning form

Name of work stream: (Name of project/group)	
Lead contacts:	
Contact information: (email/phone)	
Organisations:	
Departments/teams:	
Description of work stream: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What will the co-production focus on? - What is the aim/end goal? - Where does this sit on ladder of participation? - What will success look like 	
Timeframe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is this input ongoing or one-off? - What is the expected timeframe if not ongoing? 	
Expected number of meetings per year?	
Any known/planned dates/times/location of meetings?	
Any other important information about this work	

Appendix D: Co-production monitoring form

Name of work stream: (Name of project/group)	
Lead contacts:	
Contact information: (email/phone)	
Organisations:	
Departments/teams:	
Reflections on progress in the work stream: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is going well? - What is going less well? - What are you hoping will happen next? - Are there any barriers preventing progress or risks that need flagging? 	
Timeframe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is this input ongoing or one-off? - How will it be embedded / sustained in future? 	
Does anyone else need to be involved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the process missing anyone's input? - Does anything need escalating? - Is there any further action to take at this stage which could strengthen the impact of co-production? 	
Is there any learning that needs capturing before it's lost?	

Appendix E: Co-production feedback form

Name of work stream: (Name of project/group)	
Lead contacts:	
Contact information: (email/phone)	
Organisations:	
Departments/teams:	
Was there adequate information about the project available from outset i.e. was the remit, focus and scope clear	
Were co-pro meetings effective? Were the aims clear and the environment welcoming?	
Was there effective communication?	
What was the impact? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were voices listened to? • Were voices heard? • Did anything change? • What was the learning? (challenges/barriers/successes) • Did the project accomplish what it set out to do? • Were there any unexpected outcomes? 	
Rate the process and the co-production outcome, measured against the ladder	Rate the quality of the collaboration (circle your answer) 0 (very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (perfection) Where did this collaboration sit on the ladder of participation? Information Consultation Engagement Co-design Co-production
Share any top tips for others.	

Appendix F: Who is ESPCF and what do they do (information for services)

TBC - please see ESPCF website:

www.espcf.org.uk

Appendix G: Glossary

CYP	Children and young people
DfE	Department for Education
ESCC	East Sussex County Council
ESPCF	East Sussex Parent Carer Forum
LA	Local Authority
NHS	National Health Service
NNPCF	National Network of Parent Carer Forums
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Service

Definitions:

Parent carer participation: parent carers and professionals working together, recognising each other's expert knowledge, to design, develop and improve services for CYP with SEND in East Sussex.

Co-production: an equal and reciprocal relationship where everyone's knowledge and skills are used to create better outcomes. In East Sussex, strategic co-production is where ESPCF parent carers play an integral and equal part in strategic decision-making processes and are fully engaged in shaping, developing, implementing, and evaluating SEND services and systems.

Parent carer representation: in East Sussex, a trained team of parent carer representatives are supported by ESPCF to sit on, for example, strategic boards, committees, task and finish groups across ESCC and health partners. They feed in parent carers' views and experiences, so that parent carers' voices are heard and acted upon when decisions are being made about services affecting their children. ESPCF and partners agree co-production priorities and proactively identify opportunities for parent carer representation.

ESPCF strives to have a diverse membership, ensuring a broad range of different interests, special educational needs and disabilities are represented. ESPCF engages with parent carers to hear their views through a range of activities, (e.g., through events, social media and connections with other local groups and organisations) and parent carers can input in different ways to ESPCF in addition to attending strategic meetings, e.g., joining focus groups, co-designing materials and resources, joining interview panels, being a member of the ESPCF steering group. ESPCF's representation is underpinned by clear roles and responsibilities and policies and procedures which inform how staff and volunteers' work.