



One team

Lived and learned experience in
co-producing public services

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Introduction

“The challenges faced by government have been around for a long time and trying to make progress is really, really tough. When you work with people with lived experience, you really cut through to the core of what matters to the people who use and rely on those services.”

Caroline

Getting the design of public services right is more important than ever. After a decade of disruption – from austerity to COVID to a cost of living crisis – significant parts of the public sector are in distress. Budgets are not expected to rise in the short to medium term, making productivity and value for money essential. And increased use of technology like artificial intelligence¹ means that designing services with accessibility and equity in mind is vital if we want to live in a fair society.

Recent years have seen public services use co-production in their design. It's a collaborative process that brings together professionals – generally from the organisations that deliver services – alongside people with experience of using them. Co-production works best when it is embedded in a programme from its initial design through to launch and beyond. That contrasts with consultation, in which organisations just ask people for their views.

But while the rise of co-production should be applauded, it's not used consistently and there is too little understanding of how best to engage

the most vital voices in service design: the people who have faced multiple disadvantages and need public services the most.

That's why Deloitte and the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) came together. We wanted to achieve two goals. First, we wanted to identify best practice in co-production so we could share lessons in engaging people with lived experience of disadvantage. Second, we wanted to explore what the advent of artificial intelligence means from their perspective.

To achieve these goals, we worked with a group of NECG members who have faced some of life's toughest challenges including homelessness, substance misuse, domestic violence, contact with the criminal justice system, neurodiversity, and mental ill health.

Over eight sessions, we worked with that group – as one team – to co-produce a model of AI-driven services, principles for the public sector and more. This report shares our lessons in co-production that came from those sessions as well as our findings on AI.

¹ Deloitte definition of AI: Artificial Intelligence is the field of computing where intelligent machines ethically augment, simulate or duplicate human cognitive capabilities.

About Deloitte

Deloitte is a leading professional services provider. In our work with the public sector, we think about its complex issues and develop timely solutions to help governments and public services stay connected, resilient and sustainable.

We have the broadest range of professional services under one roof. This matters, because we bring a co-ordinated, cross-discipline response to every brief. We don't just advise on the right solution, we also create, implement and operate it. We are digital specialists, harnessing a treasure trove of lessons learned from our public sector clients around the world, and our pioneering collaborations with businesses and charities.



About the National Expert Citizens Group

The National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) acts as a forum for people facing multiple disadvantage. It aims to ensure people with lived and learned experience shape system change, helping create public services that are co-produced, accessible and designed for people who have experienced multiple disadvantage; people who need them most.

The NECG is co-ordinated and supported by Revolving Doors, a charity that works with people who have lived experience of the criminal justice system to empower and amplify their voice in public sector reform.



Methodology

Our research explored how best to harness the power of lived and learned experience in the design of public services, so that they are fit-for-purpose for everyone, including people who face multiple disadvantages. We achieved that through a series of workshops with light-touch facilitation, both online and in-person. They took place from May to June 2024.

Participants comprised NECG members who have faced disadvantages including homelessness, substance misuse, domestic violence, contact with the criminal justice system, neurodiversity, and mental ill health; Revolving Doors professionals who guide and support the NECG; and a Deloitte research team with a background in supporting

public sector clients. Each session engaged between ten and fifteen participants from the same group.

During the workshops, the group conducted exercises that included creating a model of artificial intelligence, writing letters to government departments and defining principles of public services.

At the end of the research period, this report was drafted to reflect the group's findings and has been agreed by all the participants. The views of interviewees quoted in this report from our workshop sessions are their own and not the views of Deloitte, Revolving Doors or the NECG collectively.



One team: lived and learned experience in co-producing public services explores lessons in co-production with people who have lived experience of disadvantage.

In the spring of 2024, Deloitte and the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) came together to explore co-production. The NECG formed a group of people who have faced some of life's most difficult challenges including homelessness, substance misuse, domestic violence, contact with the criminal justice system, neurodiversity,

and mental ill health. Working as one team with Deloitte, the group met over a series of workshops with two aims. First, we wanted to identify best lessons in co-production. Second, we wanted to explore how the group felt about the public sector's growing use of artificial intelligence.



We identified ten lessons for co-production:

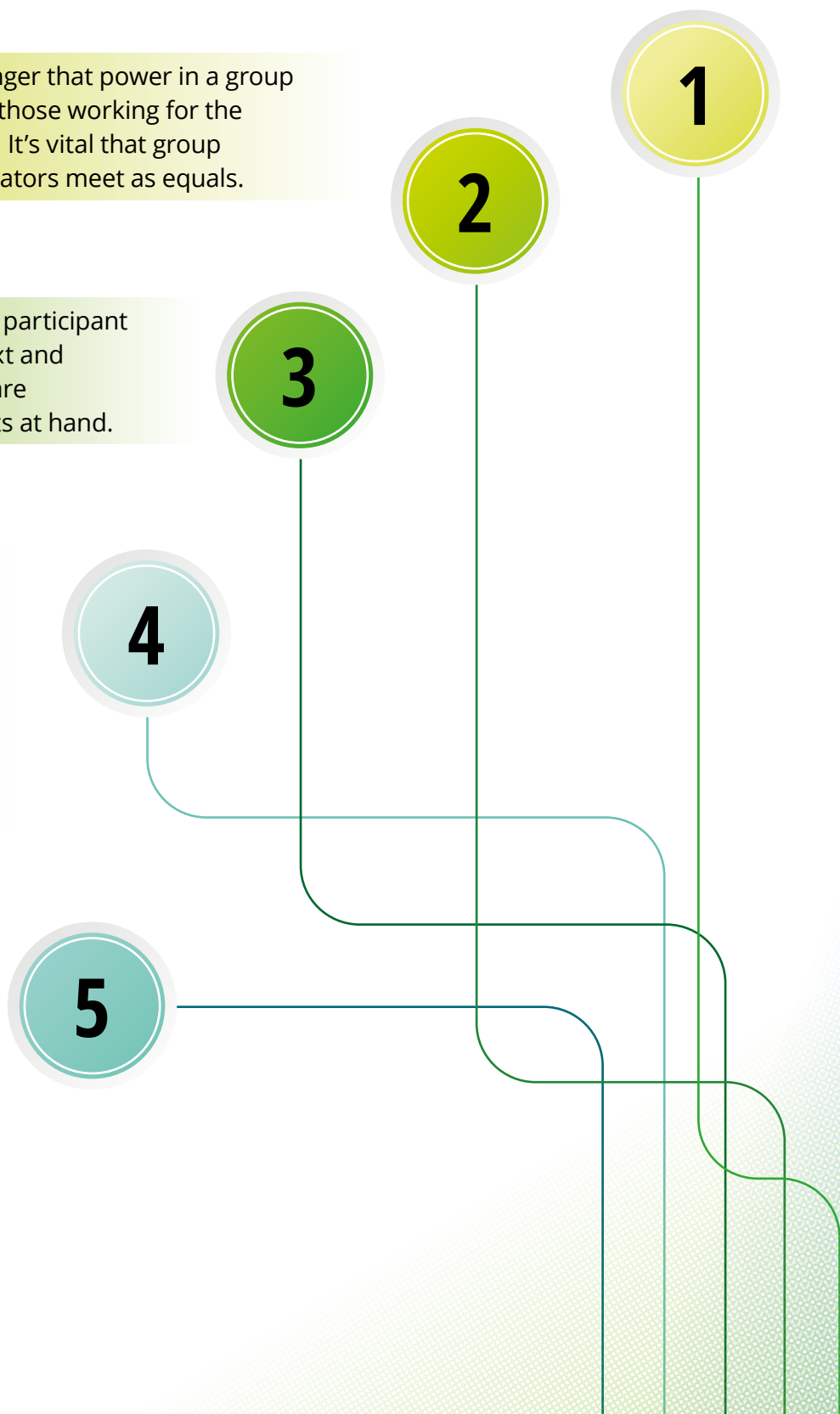
Invest in the group – a team that feels comfortable with each other will have livelier, richer and more honest conversations.

Pool the power – there is a danger that power in a group setting can be monopolised by those working for the institution that has convened it. It's vital that group members, convenors and facilitators meet as equals.

See the bigger picture – every participant should be briefed on the context and background of the issues they are discussing, not just the elements at hand.

Make time and space – doing co-production well takes time. It's not a linear process, and its conversations will take detours as part of its journey. Participants prefer in-person meetings for its richer connection.

Keep language grounded – jargon can be a real barrier to inclusion. Co-production needs to be inclusive, meaningful and straightforward in its language.



We identified ten lessons for co-production:

Capture the magic – co-production provides colour and nuance. The process needs to record those moments, stories and insights.

6

7

Assumptions will be wrong – co-production surfaces truths from people with lived and learnt experience that often fly in the face of accepted practice.

8

Make a difference – participants can become disengaged if co-production is tokenistic or unlikely to lead to meaningful change.

9

Focus on the solution – co-production sessions need to have purpose and direction, with light-touch facilitation, to keep everyone on track towards a clear goal.

10

Enjoy the ride – co-production is an energising and mind-expanding – everyone is a winner.

The group also identified a set of principles to guide the use of artificial intelligence in public services, from the perspective of people with lived and learnt experience:

Make AI for users and frontline workers –

Government should not shy away from seizing the potential of AI, focusing on benefits for the service users and the frontline workers that support them.

AI should be trauma informed –

Public services using AI should be able to retrieve a person's data so that they don't have to re-tell traumatic experiences.

AI should help eliminate, not amplify bias –

AI should help eliminate, not amplify bias – people should have confidence that AI will remove and not replicate human assumptions.

AI should deliver faster, more accurate outcomes –

A defining factor of AI's success should be that it makes decisions at greater speed with fewer errors than humans alone.

Data should be shared for citizen benefit –

Government should share its data on citizens within, as long as it's for the benefit or services and their users.

Data matters –

If citizen data is being used to make decisions, citizens should be able to see, and where appropriate, challenge what data points are being used.

Lived and learnt experience needs to inform AI –

As AI is designed, people with experience of disadvantage need to be engaged to make sure it works for all.

Caseworkers in the loop –

If AI is proposing solutions or decisions, caseworkers with an understanding of client issues need to be able to adjust or overturn them.

Governance for the citizen –

AI governance needs to be crafted to protect the citizen, not only the institution.

Accountability must be human –

The accountability for AI needs to be linked to a human so that people, not technology, are ultimately responsible.

Recommendations

- co-production should become standard practice in the public sector when it designs services or interventions that need to support people who face disadvantage.
- co-production needs to have an explicit objective, understood by everyone involved, so that it is never tokenistic.
- best practice in coproduction, including sharing power, should be widely understood across the sector to ensure high standards.



Lessons in co-production with lived and learned experience

Co-production is essential. Some well-educated person in a silo has no idea.

In the spring of 2024, Deloitte and the National Expert Citizens Group (NECG) came together to explore how lived and learned experience is used in co-production of public services. The NECG shared their deep expertise in bringing together groups of people who have faced multiple disadvantages, and Deloitte brought their experience of serving clients in government and across public services.

Deloitte and the NECG shared the same views on three important issues. First, we agreed that people with lived and learnt experience of multiple disadvantages bring powerful voices to the design of public services. We recognised they represented some of the heaviest users of those services, but some of the least engaged in their design.

Second, we agreed that co-production, done well, helps the public sector shape services that work

for the people who use them. We felt that services that work for the people who need them most will work for everyone.

Third, we agreed that the advent of artificial intelligence is taking the public sector's design in a new direction – and that has implications for equity and accessibility.

Against that backdrop, Deloitte and the NECG agreed to examine the role of lived and learnt experience in co-production, with a special focus on the role of artificial intelligence. To do that, the NECG put together a group of its members who have faced some of life's toughest challenges including addiction, homelessness, prison and family breakdown. The group – NECG members, support staff and Deloitte researchers – met for six workshops over eight weeks.

We know exactly what we're talking about. If you're not in somebody's shoes, you won't know exactly what it means to be them.

Edwige

Those workshops identified ten lessons for any organisations bringing lived and learned experience into co-production of public services.

1

Invest in the group

From the outset, we invested time to make sure the group felt comfortable with each other. That included ice-breakers at the start of every session and discussions to make sure every participant was welcome and knew each other. Facilitators from Revolving Doors, the NECG and Deloitte made sure that the workshops were positive, stimulating and inclusive, allowing everyone in the room to be heard.

When the group looked back at the end of our workshop series, we recognised that this investment was vital. Not only did it mean that the team felt comfortable with each other and had lively, rich and honest conversations, it was also about being a person in the room, not just a representative of an organisation. This approach encouraged vulnerability, valued diverse experiences and voices, and built trust among the group.

“I think the dynamic is brilliant. It's a very, very, very level respecting playing field. And that's what makes it such a pleasure, because we can be honest, we can share and there's no judgment.”

Edwidge

2

Pool the power

A significant danger in co-production is that power and authority can be retained by the people who convened it – and that can skew the process. In other words, staff from any organisation who run a co-production process might inadvertently dominate the discussion or try to nudge the outcomes. Our group exercises and deliberately open approach meant that no individual or organisation held power over others. Everybody in the group met as equals with their own insight to bring, pooling our power.

“I felt that my voice was level to everybody concerned and we've all been on the same page which for me, with my lack of trust in services and being homeless from the age of fifteen, is a massive thing.”

Nick

3

See the bigger picture

During our workshops, we discovered that participants were able to contribute more effectively if they knew the wider context behind the issues under discussion. So we took the time to talk about the big picture – pressures on public spending for example – to allow for a broader debate in the room.

We also took the time to learn as a group, to help inform the conversation and provide us with a shared understanding. That included a mini briefing on artificial intelligence and its emerging use in the public sector.

Government and lived experience is like chemistry – you've got to mix the two and you need both to get the right result.

Nick

4

Make time and space

Some of our group's richest conversations came from going off-topic, coming up with scenarios and debating hypothetical situations. Those detours often surfaced useful insight and contributed to our goals. So we recognised that co-production isn't a linear process and it needs time and space to reach its potential. Co-production needs to be properly resourced as a valued part of any change or new service. In the long run it will save taxpayers' money.

Our workshops were a blend of in-person and on-line meetings. That worked effectively but the group preferred in-person meetings as it allowed us all to feel more connected.

It's about actually taking off your professional hat or your organisational label and getting around the table and just listening to people, together, just relating, listening, understanding and being open to different ways of thinking about how we might solve some of the challenges.

Caroline

5

Keep language grounded

The group consistently used clear and straightforward language throughout our workshops. We discussed how words like 'strategic' may be commonplace in public sector discussions but can very often be meaningless. We all agreed the importance of language within our discussions and the need to be inclusive, meaningful and straightforward at all times.

“We need to get rid of words like, 'third party' and 'implementation' because they are not very friendly. If we're going to co-produce we don't need to dumb it down – just use plain English.”

Robin

6

Capture the magic

Co-production with lived and learnt experience is about the insight that other user research can't reach: it's about perceptions, reactions and emotions. It's about what happens when human beings meet institutions, systems and processes. That means it provides colour and nuance, stories and anecdotes. Our workshops showed that co-production needs to record all of those moments to make the most of the insight it brings.

“I love this. People with lived experience could help agree the performance indicators. Not necessarily how long he's been sober, or when he switches to Universal Credit, but how this (service) has impacted actual quality of life.”

Robin

7

Assumptions will be wrong

Our workshops surfaced a number of surprising comments that often flew in the face of accepted wisdom. In discussions on data, for example, many of the group said they wanted government departments to share data on them as they recognised that could make services work better for them. Contrary to much academic and public debate, they had few concerns about issues such as security.

We concluded that co-production with lived and learnt experience is a particularly useful way of testing assumptions and that everyone in the group needs to be open to learning from each other.

“There’s a woman in our recovery community whose son gave her an old Alexa. It’s made a huge difference – she checks the weather, gets the time, she orders taxis with it.”

H

8

Make a difference

Some participants in the group had previous experience of co-production. When we discussed those experiences, they agreed that bad co-production tends to feel tokenistic. We concluded that co-production must always feel authentic and that its outputs will be taken into account. Participants are likely to become disengaged if they sense that the process is unlikely to lead to meaningful change or if it is being conducted to simply tick a box.

“There’s a real danger that co-production becomes tokenistic. We see examples of that all over the place, and at the same time, it can also become stuck on the edges of the transformation process.”

Emma

9

Focus on the solution

Co-production should allow for the time and space needed for rich, free-flowing discussions – but it also needs purpose and direction. Facilitators within the group should use their judgement to make sure the conversations stay on track towards a clear goal. Our group found that flexible agendas, designed to move us towards weekly goals, helped keep us all on track.

I learn from my peers, so I bring my lived experience and my learnt experience to the table. And we're all here to be solution focused, to bring positive change. It was important to hear people's difficult experiences - where they felt let down - and then we kept moving forwards with positive energy.

”

H

10

Enjoy the ride

Co-production is an energising and mind-expanding process, so get the environment right, bring drinks and snacks, build a positive group dynamic and have fun.

I've loved this. We've all loved this.

”

Charlotte

Principles of public services: a lived and learned experience view

As part of our workshops, we produced a set of principles on how people with lived and learnt experience of multiple disadvantage would like public services to be. These principles can help guide public services as they digitise and incorporate AI into their design. This is what the group agreed.

Works for the citizen or community outcome (not the institution)

A good public service would help me navigate its system and have the advocacy of a caseworker built in as standard. It would feel like it's on my side, working with not against me. We would be part of the same team, and the service wouldn't deliberately hold resources back.

“It's got to be followed up and you've got to measure impact – if people are using services before and after, what difference did lived experience make?”

”

Julian

Is easy to access and use, and that is consistent

Accessing public services should be simple, so it wouldn't need hundreds of passwords and I wouldn't have to re-tell my story every time.

“Keeping it simple is really important so everybody can understand, especially people with complex mental health or other conditions they're living with.”

”

H



Asks me for information in a way that is easy to provide and trustworthy

I shouldn't feel like there will be negative consequences if I supply information. I want to know that the data I provide is safe and will help make the best decision for me.

“Every time my friend goes to get any help with mental health issues, she has to go through all the information she's given before and it can be quite traumatic. Couldn't the technology know your history, know the questions you've been asked and how you answered?”

Steve

Does what it says it's going to do and takes responsibility

Public services should stick to their word. So if it says it's going to help me get a job, it should do that, not just monitor me.

“There are services holding our lives together but not communicating with each other.”

Charlotte

Is not biased against me

Good public services should be built on integrity and honesty. They should never be biased and should work to remove unconscious bias.

“If you think about life, we're all in the same storm – just in different boats.”

H

Respects me and allows me to respect them

I want services to consider my experience of disadvantage and make reasonable adjustments. They should respect my time and honesty should be two-way.

“If you've got a support worker who knows the system, it's like they've got a skeleton key and they can open all the doors.”

Nick

Is transparent and clear about how and why a decision will be made

Good public services should help me understand the grounds on which I am being turned down and how I could improve the outcome. They should let me review and comment on the data held about me.

I know someone who picked up a food parcel and a welfare rights lady worked out they were entitled to an extra payment of about seventy quid a week. The system should tell you what you're entitled to.

”

Steve

Allows humans to be human (compassionate and empathetic)

I'm happy for technology to take care of paperwork and number crunching, especially if it gives human workers the time and space to be compassionate and have empathy with me.

It needs more compassion. What you're entitled to feels like a hidden secret.

”

Robin

Where public sector workers are happy and enjoy their work

Good public services will be good employers and their people will be supported. They will have the right people in the right roles and they will be trained to use their systems appropriately, including AI.

People are the face of the government department's brand, and it needs to invest in them. It's not a good look when their office is run down, and it can't be good for morale either.

”

Robin

Helps me make progress, doesn't make me feel like a burden

I want services that don't write me off but share my aspirations. They should help me move forward.

I'd like a service that doesn't make me feel like a burden or writes me off.

”

Des

Meet Lynsey: the lived experience model of artificial intelligence

I'm definitely a fan of technology. But I've got friends in different circumstances – they might be adults who can't read or write, and so they've got a lack of confidence about using technology. I want AI to close the gap, not exaggerate it.

H

Our co-production process took the principles of public services and then applied this to and explored the role of AI in public services to better understand the needs, concerns and aspirations of people with lived and learnt experience of disadvantage. The group was open to AI being used in public services, particularly if it can help with speed, accuracy and fairness in the decision-making process.

We want anyone in the government who is thinking about AI to think: I can't do this without lived experience.

Andy

In AI there are many statements that are easy to say but hard to define, like “we will ensure there is a human in the loop” or “the models will be ethically governed”. In our sessions, we shared stories and created hypothetical scenarios that brought examples to life and would be essential in designing solutions and effective public services.

The group decided to focus on creating our own model of what AI should be – and we called her Lynsey. She blends the power of AI with clear input from a human caseworker, and features these attributes:

Make AI for users and frontline workers

Our group had an enormous amount of empathy for the pressure that frontline public sector workers face and recognised that AI could bring benefits both to them and to the people they serve. As a result, we agreed that government should seize the potential of AI, focusing on benefits for both citizens and public sector workers alike.

AI should help eliminate, not amplify bias

While many commentators fear that AI could lead to bias in decision-making, many of our group argued that it could do the opposite. They felt that human prejudices could be removed using AI. Ultimately, we agreed that the public need to have confidence that AI will not replicate human biases and assumptions.

AI should deliver faster, more accurate outcomes

When we discussed what a good outcome for AI would look like, much of the group said that it should provide quicker decisions, with fewer errors, than humans alone.

Data should be shared for citizen benefit

Many applications for AI will involve processing citizen data and sharing data between parts of the public sector. Our group was very comfortable with that, as long as it was done ethnically and with citizen benefit in mind. Some participants argued that the public sector seems able to share data to catch people out – but rarely to help them.

Data matters

Although comfortable that their data should be shared across government, the group wanted to see a system in which they could access their own data and check to see what data points are used to make decisions and have the opportunity to challenge any of their data.

Lived and learnt experience needs to inform AI

Our conversations were clear that the development of AI needs to engage people with lived and learnt experience of disadvantage. The group felt that it was an important tool for government to make sure that it works, not just for the majority, but for everyone with equity.

Caseworkers in the loop

Our group were comfortable with the idea that AI would make decisions about eligibility based on criteria. However, they felt this elevates the importance of having a consistent caseworker in public services who know the people they are working with. That would allow them to intervene and amend decisions as needed based on their knowledge of the person's history. Data is only part of the answer, and understanding people's lived experience helps to complete this picture.

Governance for the citizen

Our workshops explored the need for governance to be in place so that AI was used users ethically, fairly and equitably in the public sector. Importantly, the group felt that governance should be crafted to protect the citizen, not just to mitigate risks for the institution.

Accountability must be human

We discussed the accountability issues that AI raises. The group argued that accountability need to be tracked from every AI decision and system back to a public sector leader who should bear responsibility for the algorithms it uses and the choices it makes.

AI should be trauma informed – public services using AI should be able to retrieve a person's data so that they don't have to re-tell traumatic experiences when accessing support.

Conclusion and recommendations

Our project concluded that there is no substitute for lived and learnt experience as a source of insight in the design or transformation of public services. But we recognised that harnessing its power requires substantial planning and investment in the process – it does not happen by accident. The lessons in this report are intended as a starting point for anyone in the public sector and its partners who want to run a successful, authentic co-production programme.

We'd like to see co-production in the boardroom, co-production in commissioning, co-production at every level with the people who are affected by the system.

Sean

Our recommendations are:

- co-production should become standard practice in the public sector when it designs services or interventions that need to support people who face disadvantage.
- co-production needs to have an explicit objective, understood by everyone involved, so that it is never tokenistic.
- best practice in coproduction, including sharing power, should be widely understood across the sector to ensure high standards.

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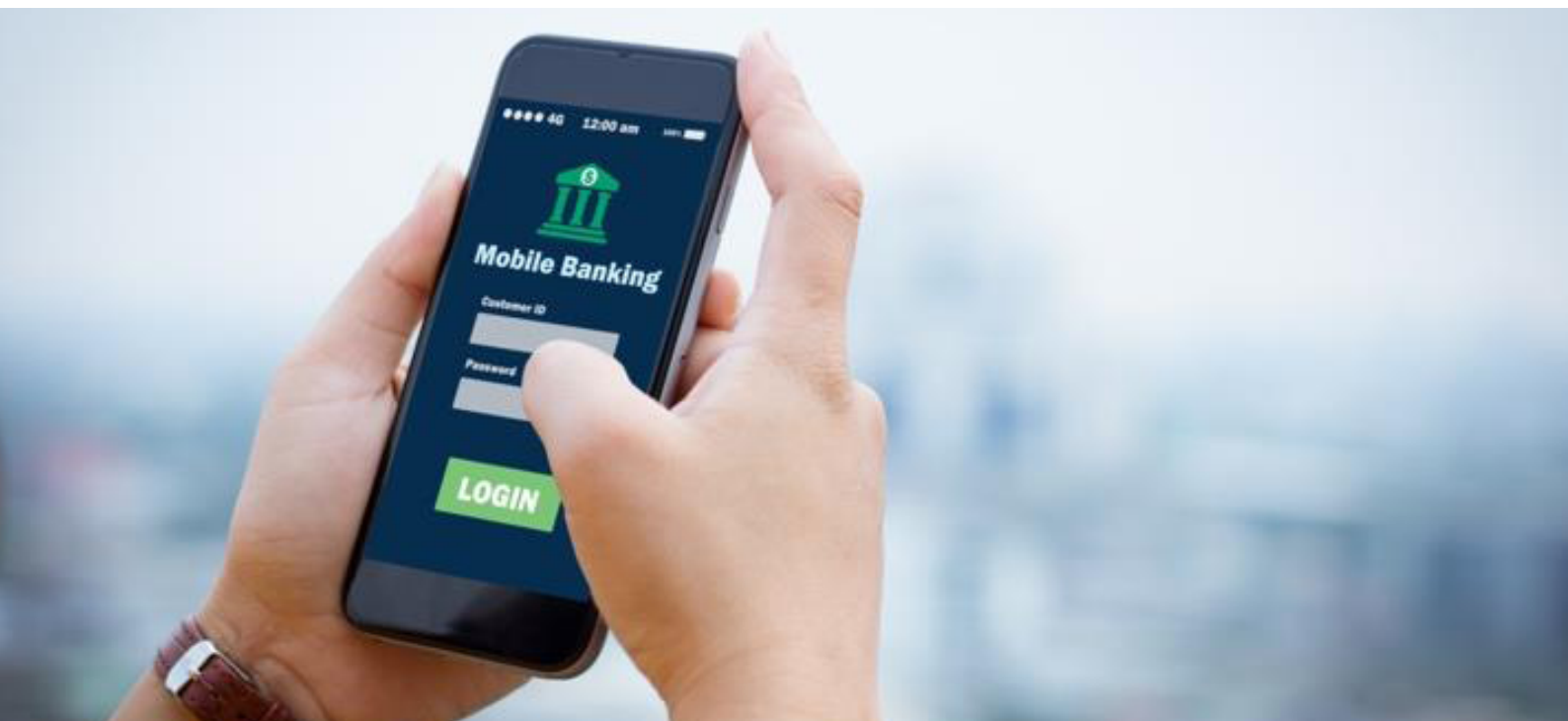
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