



Strategic Commissioning Events Feedback

The following notes summarise the feedback and discussion at the four events held in Birmingham, Ipswich, Rochdale (SPORTA) and London

The key strategic issues emerging

1. Working effectively within LSPs to define need and influence decision making on priority outcomes and commissioning is important to raising the profile of culture and sport. Pooling information & expertise at the planning stage is critical to successfully engaging with strategic commissioning processes. Councils have shown that by investing in shared need assessments at the outset the contribution of culture and sport has been better recognised.
2. By exploring new ways of working and building new relationships that support cross cutting themes and outcomes also raises the profile of the sector and generates activity and involvement for the sector. Engagement in commissioning has been most successful where there has been strong leadership.
3. Where possible comprehensive information on culture and sport needs should be incorporated into overall needs assessment for a place along with evidence of the contribution the service can make to meeting identified needs. However, data availability and evidence remains weak and many councils particularly district councils lack of capacity and capability to collect and analyse data and information to feed into these processes.
4. Language and understanding are barriers across the sector to better engagement with the commissioning process. Understanding and engagement vary considerably between types of council, different services type of provider and third sector partners.

5. There are tensions between a “needs led” service planning and delivery approach that can be seen to ration services to particular client groups and the desire to provide universal services to the whole community. These tensions are enhanced as the result of the increasing need to generate direct income from users. Many councils feel locked in old contract technology and relationships with contractors and trusts that are not responsive to outcome or needs driven service delivery as required by the LAA. Redesigning services to meet new needs and priorities can also be difficult and there can be further tensions develop between a commissioning led resource prioritisation process and a more traditional political led prioritisation process.
6. Trusts and contractors are often the main or only delivery mechanism for culture and sport particularly in small districts. They feel disempowered and isolated from this new agenda with limited or no capacity in the contract to effectively respond to new opportunities provided through commissioning. This is particularly true in small districts with small trusts or small contracts and where “client “capacity no longer exists in the council. Many providers are too small and resort to just running facilities. Where they could potentially commission voluntary and community organisations such as sport clubs or arts organizations to assist in the delivery they lack the capacity to engage and build their capacity first.
7. Investing in 3rd sector capability will pay dividends in long run. However there are capacity problems both within the third sector and councils. Attitude, understanding and commitment are all key factors in changing this relationship. Sport and culture voluntary organisations do not necessarily see themselves as being part of the Third Sector and therefore excluding themselves from capacity building support more generally available in the health and community care sectors. Many voluntary and community organisations may still see themselves as being “entitled to “ or “in need of “grant aid rather than see themselves as providers of public services.

What more could be done to support the sector:

- Run follow up events as work unfolds and develops
- Provide further help to build capacity in the third sector
- Provide a list of consultants and people who could support councils
- Develop a toolkit of practical guidance
- Provide more case studies
- Provide guidance on how to collect, interpret and analyse information on needs
- Clarify the rules about procurement particularly EU requirements

- Provide guidance on performance monitoring particularly how to measure and evaluate softer outcomes
- Look at non financial procurement (service trading)
- Look at using the academic sector to support making the case.
- Develop more practical workshops that bring health and adult care together with culture and sport.
- Facilitate client / provider workshops particularly where relationships are poor.
- Help define what the balance of acceptable risk is when commissioning third sector bodies.
- Engage r with elected members so they can advocate better in the commissioning process
- Help trusts develop their ability to “capacity build” in the voluntary and community sector.
- Develop guidance and support on “outcome measuring”

Feedback on the workshop format:

The overall feed back from the participant was very good and the discussion based approach to the workshops was generally warmly welcomed. Other suggestions included:-

- More case studies from councils
- Longer workshops
- Podcast the events

Detail responses on key topics.

Needs assessment

1. Common language between partners is necessary before a common definition of need can emerge. This takes time to develop but critical before agreed action can follow on meeting need.
2. Sharing data is critical to developing a shared definition of need. Knowsley created a shared definition of need by collating different perspectives.
 - views of existing users
 - views of wider community
 - views of partners
 - views from service providers

3. Whilst the availability of data is growing, the skills and capacity to use data to inform need assessment and decision making remains an issue particularly in small district councils and where services have been totally externalised.
4. Culture and sport services are often universal rather than being focused on addressing particular need. Focusing on need can become a form of service rationing and can generate tension with income generation particularly in externalised relationships e.g. trust or contractor.
5. Services still continue to be delivered on an historical basis, continuing to deliver what has always been delivered. Key drivers for service managers are often satisfaction of existing users and maintaining income streams.
6. Barriers to a needs based approach to service planning are;
 - Lack of political and managerial leadership
 - Data overload
 - Skills and competency
 - Lack of capacity
7. Sometimes it is simpler to start from the political ambition and find the evidence to justify what members want to do.
8. In working with LSPs we need to be mindful of their needs. Key drivers of effective engagement with LSPs are:-
 - Leadership
 - Clarity about the benefits of culture and sport
 - Good evidence and information
 - Other advocates in the group (not a loan voice)
9. In working with LSPs culture and sport need to bring to the table views on the culture and sport need as well as evidence of what it can contribute to wider community needs. This evidence is generally not readily available. Shropshire developed a leadership role within the LSP wider than culture and sport, took evidence of how the service could contribute to other needs and some ideas to solve problems.
10. Partnership behaviour is not always constructive and built on achieving “win win” outcomes.
11. The third sector lack capacity to inform and use a data driven system of service planning and monitoring. Demonstrating impact is difficult even where projects are very successful. Expectations of them being able to measure and evidence need must be realistic. The priority should be perhaps to measure only :-
 - Quantity of provision (use)
 - Satisfaction with provision
 - The difference made

Option appraisal & procurement

1. There is a need to balance the level of rigor with the level of risk and capacity available. Should there be a sliding scale of guidance, specifications, contract documentation for differing types of commissioning. How can we keep procurement simple?
2. Clearer guidance needed on legality / flexibility of procuring services. Some authorities are extremely risk adverse in their approach.
3. What is an acceptable level of risk sharing in different situations. For example between a small district council and a big leisure contractor. Between a trust and a small voluntary or community project. Is it realistic to provide guidance on this?
4. Must reconcile exploring and planning for need with political 'want'. A political desire to provide universal services to all communities can rub against a desire to meet the needs of particular communities and individuals. The process of option appraisal needs to reconcile political priorities ahead of procurement.
5. How do you actually translate procurement into delivering the right outcomes? Issues emerging included:-
 - how to analyse and 'use' the evidence base / needs analysis as a basis for procurement?
 - how to explore re-engineering contracts that are no longer effective?
 - what alternative delivery vehicles are there for libraries?
 - does the size / scale of the delivery vehicle really matter?
 - achieving buy in from Health, Adult and Social care and Children's Services is key to progressing
6. For trusts wishing to bid for contracts outside their current area there are a range of issues to consider included:-
 - The legal position and whether the Trust's terms of reference allow for it.
 - Trust/private sector "partnering" as well as direct competition
 - How much is determined by price and how much is quality related?
 - What if an external contract loses money and needs to be subsidised?
 - What is the optimum size for a Trust in the future? The sector is likely to reconfigure in the next 5 years.

7. People were looking for :-

- practical tips' on Strategic Commissioning
- case studies and guidance
- to have myths dispelled on procurement processes – eg 'everything through OJEU'
- information on supplier capability
- tips on exploiting internal partnerships
- innovative approaches
- guidance on being a commissioner and being commissioned
- simpler language and removal of jargon particularly for the third sector and parts of the culture and sport sector currently not involved in commissioning
- ways of changing the behavior of officers and members

Building Capacity in the Third Sector.

1. *Where are we now in terms of working with the Third Sector?*

- Doing very little because we are operating in a vacuum regarding needs. There is generally a weak infrastructure to support the voluntary sector.
- Councils do not particularly understand the voluntary sector. There are often negative attitudes and perceptions about what the Voluntary and Community Sector is. Some people regard it as a 'drain' on resources
- "Often if we get some money to undertake some work, our first thought is 'let's employ someone'. Occasionally we think of partnerships and rarely think of the Third Sector".
- There is a difference between funding core infrastructure and buying services. "We are not using Third Sector expertise. We are not allowing the Third Sector time and space to be innovative. We need to invest in that time."
- In general there is a lack of a strategic approach to the Third Sector and although there are some good initiatives these are often ad hoc. Councils are not always clear who the organisations are. Sports organisations are often 'dislocated' from the rest of the Third Sector.
Arts and culture do not always see themselves as part of the Third Sector and in some cases regard the sector as 'amateur'. Generally there is a whole section of provision that is 'below the radar' (and want to stay there!) including amateur dramatic groups, voluntary and independent museums etc who have no understanding of the broader agenda but are a key part of provision. "It is important for arts organisations to see themselves as part of the Third Sector."

- There are different levels of professionalism in the sector and a culture in local government of 'not letting go'. There is a need for a cultural shift.
- Experience of commissioning can be quite divisive. An arts organisation winning a commission through a straight competitive tender found it challenging and found a lot of the documentation required to be inappropriate. They would have like to have time and the opportunity to develop a more collaborative approach.

'We have both core funding and commissioning and these work together well. We approach people with needs that we want organisations help us to address. But there are gaps and there is a need to grow provision to do the things that need to be done. Local authorities have a responsibility in this – 'to create a Third Sector that's buzzy and responsive, especially in the weakest areas of the county'

- Leisure trusts see themselves as part of the third sector and social enterprises. They are often commissioned and commissioners at the same time. They themselves often feel excluded from the strategic planning and service commissioning process for a range of reason.
 - Politics and relationships particularly between county and district councils.
 - Lack of relationships with the major commissioning bodies: their value and worth is not recognised.
 - Their own understanding and knowledge of the system and processes is not good.
 - There is a lack of data and evidence to substantiate their potential contribution: "we are currently measuring the wrong things".
 - There is inbuilt tension between generating income through universal service and a greater focus on need. There is a fear that engagement with the new agenda will increase cost or risk that they cannot manage.
 - A lack of skills and general capacity to engage with the new agenda.
 - Complacency and reluctance to adapt: Some trusts may be comfortable just running facilities and feel secure in the fact they have a contract.

2. Some of the reasons why people wanted to work with the third sector in the Commissioning process?

- We are a large rural area and need to reach people.
- To build community cohesion.
- Because it is inspired by local people and is close to communities.
- To support work with new communities.
- They might be better at it. They have networks.
- Arts organisations have the skills, knowledge, expertise and contacts.
- Working together could unleash a whole wealth of opportunities. This takes time – it is not a quick win.
- At its best, it is 'lean, mean and light on its feet' and we need to keep it 'young and anarchic'!

- It is non-bureaucratic.
- It is the main provider of opportunities for NI8 and NI11.
- They are the biggest deliverer of physical activity and critical to the delivery of NI8. For example, local authority leisure centre visits amount to approx 6% of participation in active sport and recreation (in one of the authorities in the group) – 1.2m visits, but many are repeat visits of a much smaller group of the population and in this example, the leisure centre subsidy is £2m.
- As council leisure facilities are more about universal provision and providing as low as possible cost per head, there are issues about hard to reach groups and concerns that this provision can be in danger of reinforcing health inequalities.
- They can help with needs assessment.
- It is from the community. They know the issues. They have huge reach'.

BUT.....

- Some voluntary organisations feel 'we should have money by right – 'you owe us'. That needs to change.
- Some concerns about the term 'Third Sector' – sounds like 'gifted amateur'?
- 'There are problems with core funding.
- If you don't nurture it, it won't be there when you need it'.

3. *How can we actually build capacity?*

- Start with needs. Concern that the 'hard to reach ' may remain so – this can't be allowed to happen.
- Build consortia of groups
 - to inform/build understanding
 - bid together
 - inform about LAA
 - networking
 - avoid duplication
 - mapping provision
- Gain greater understanding of the funding of the Third sector infrastructure and the funding of services.
- Provide capacity building funding, organise joint events and shared training on commissioning.
- Give information about what is happening.
- Interpreting data so that Third Sector can use it for commissioning but also for their own funding approaches.
- Have a 'one stop shop' for Third Sector sports groups to make communications simple and accessible.
- Build 'area relationship' models where directors and senior managers relate to areas and the organisations have a senior point of contact. Have 'informal but systematic' contact with organisations to break down barriers, build awareness of what they do, build relationships and then build consortia.

- Know who's doing this well and use it to tackle the negative perception issues within councils.
- Develop our skills for 'spotting opportunities' to bring organisations together around commissioning work and needs.
- Incentivise their involvement – Third sector should have money, influence to participate in decision making. E.g. LAA performance reward money shared with Third Sector and put to innovative use.
- Be 'Light touch ' in the commissioning process. Make the process more accessible. Be specific and 'real' about needs and commission in an open manner to allow for creative solutions.
- Join up the commissioners within the local authority and partnership. There is a very wide range of commissions and these are not understood by the Third Sector. Build that understanding and build the linkages with partners early in the process. This is the first principle of Good Commissioning.
- Break down language barriers, help everyone understand the overview and bigger picture and, specifically, work from **needs** – 'this is the difference we want to make'.
- Simplify commissions and forms.
- Commissioners need to work together and have quality standards. They need to recognise what Third sector organisations are good at.
- The LSP has the key role in all of these processes.
- Sport and leisure facilities need to understand the Third Sector better and work with them to build the approach to physical activity.
- The impact of the CAA with the emphasis on needs, partnerships and outcomes will trigger a change in mindsets.
- Engaging on the Third Sector's agenda as well as the Council's.
- NI7 – building a thriving Third Sector.

Leisure Trusts.....

- Leisure trusts themselves need capacity building support to operate in this way particularly smaller trusts. Solutions to this may rest the trusts themselves, with the client council, with organizations such as SPORTA by forming networks of self support. Support is required to understand the system better, build better relationships, engage with strategic service planning, improve evidence and data.
- For Trusts extending into commissioned work presents a range of opportunities. Examples include:-
 - Growth opportunities in BSF - some examples of Trusts being involved at formative stages but it has been difficult for Trusts to get involved. Important to make contact early with schools.
 - Social care through 'Sure Start' centres.
 - Access to health budgets.
 - Contribution to mental health.
 - Innovative schemes e.g. four-week "quitters" given free gym memberships.
 - Worklessness – West Cumbria/Copeland have good examples of projects to "get people out of the house".
 - 14/18 and to engage with the 14-19 diploma.

- Link to “Township” agendas and localised commissioning will be increasingly important.
- Trusts have developed opportunities to collaborate across council and sub regional boundaries. Examples include:-
 - Olympic Boroughs
 - Library book purchasing in Greater Manchester and the South-west
 - 4 Districts in Somerset
 - Hertfordshire Trusts
 - Working together on “fitness cards” etc. should be explored and “library cards” have been developed across the south-west
 - MAA targets may encourage Trusts to combine to provide the necessary scale of resource to deliver them.
- Key issues for trust management going forward are:-
 - Moving to “service-based” programmes rather than just managing buildings.
 - Responding to CAA effectively.
 - Need for case studies to explain contribution and impact of our service.
 - Building better political links and relationships.
 - Keeping Trust “Boards” fully informed and tied in to commissioning agenda.
- Trusts have an opportunity to utilize the voluntary and community sector to better define need, bid for commissions and deliver them. But they lack the capacity to work more effectively with them. Many trusts are not aware of the voluntary and community organizations in their area, what they can do, how good they are or how they could partner with them. Expanding this will take resources and these are not available within the contract.

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Appendix. Some examples third sector activity identified in discussion included:-

- 'young and Safe in Gainsborough ' is an example of a facility providing services funded through schools
- In Kirby, the 'Find your Talent ' scheme is used to support work with NEETs – arts organisations mentor young people and build skills
- 'Find your Talent' is a good model for bringing people to the table and has involved some good commissioning processes e.g. in Telford it is in its 4th year and has involved commissioning across portfolios, especially with children's services
- Worcester City – set up charitable organisations to run community centres. It was financially driven and is leading to potential partnerships with the Youth Service. The PCT has had a 'Healthy Trainers' commission – now being operated by the YMCA.
- Shropshire – Sports development works with the Third Sector – there is a wealth of organisations, though some overlap. They work with networks of voluntary sports clubs, provide general assistance and guidance, work with them in applying for funding, set standards and criteria/accreditation. However, there is a broader Voluntary Sector Assembly and Sports are not involved
- Wigan – the Leisure Trust facilitates the Cultural partnership. There is a dedicated officer for funding and capacity building in the Third Sector (currently £2m worth of applications out and being considered). They are fully engaged with the LSP across all parts of the Cultural Sector. The LSP is strong with the Third Sector generally and they all work on finding solutions together to community issues.
- Telford and Wrekin – has a social enterprise 'Telford Sport, Learning and Enterprise Community' providing co-ordination in parts of the Voluntary sector, though there is some fragmentation outside this
- Coventry is looking at 'life beyond public funding' with the Voluntary sector. There is a Cultural Strategy Partnership which is trying to build shared understanding
- Case study from Laura Pottinger, Director, Bedford Creative Arts and BCA Gallery. Laura's story is of the journey as a community education service with a gallery, operating as part of the Third sector and forming a consortium with different organisations, not just arts organisations, to develop 'new answers' to needs in the community. They had found that commissioners were 'over-specifying' and trying to buy what they'd always had, rather than against a defined need. The new consortium is well placed to work effectively with the new unitary authorities in the area.

- Suffolk – seeking creative and effective ways of improving services and quality of life, starting with needs, what meets those needs and the gaps – and are seeking to develop a more strategic relationship with the Third Sector
- Artslink (voluntary sector organisation) – has sought to change the relationship from grant funding to identifying what the authority wants
- Gainsborough House (independent museum) – have sought to identify the value of the resource they have and how it can be best used to meet needs and benefit the community
- Anglia Community Leisure is seeking to move from a narrow focus on leisure centres towards being a broad based community trust and are seeking to educate themselves to work with the Third Sector with a community focus
- North Yorks – re: NI11 – most people's engagement with arts is through the Third Sector. So, the approach is build capacity through
 - Setting standards
 - Developing skills
 - Improving access
 - Improving quality