

Social Care Voluntary Sector Contracts

Strategic Review Consultation

Cheshire East Council, Children's Families and Adults give financial support for services to a number of different organisations. Examples of the types of provision are support to carers, provision of advice and information and early intervention and prevention services.

A consultation was held in order to gain the views of organisations, service users, and the general public on proposed changes to the way this funding is allocated. This focussed on the themes which contracts and grants will be focussed around and the tendering process for contracts from 01 April 2013. The consultation ran from 7 November - 4 December 2012.

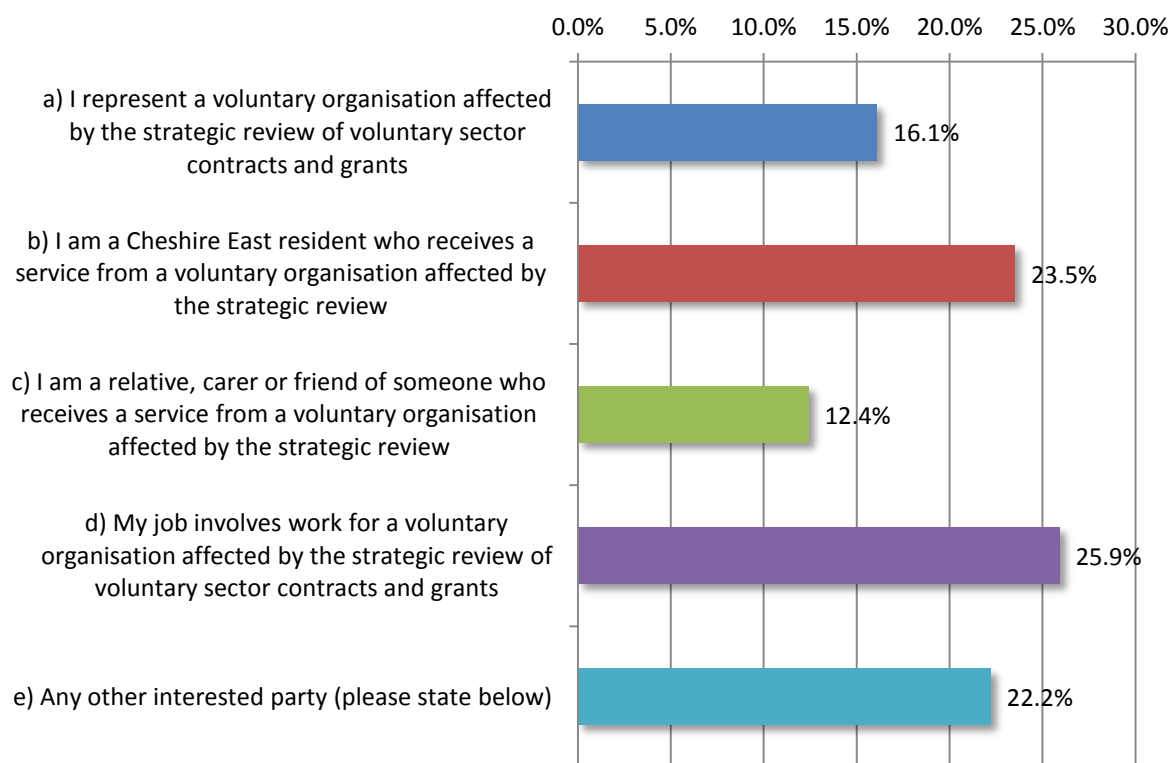
Consultation Methods

A number of methods were used in order to gather feedback from this consultation. These included:

- Two meetings were held (on the 21st November in Macclesfield and the 23rd November in Crewe) with organisations to provide them with information about the proposals and to answer questions
- A booklet was made available in key locations across Cheshire East including main Council Offices and libraries
- Letters were circulated by email to voluntary sector organisations about the consultation. A booklet was also circulated by post.
- An online questionnaire was available on the Council's website
- Voluntary sector organisations were asked to inform and involve their service users in the consultation

Respondents

A total of 88 questionnaires were received from the consultation, these can be categorised as follows: -



Themes for Future Contracts and Grants

The proposed themes and lots were discussed. Of the general comments received a number of arguments were raised about the themes.

- i) Concern was raised that the configuration of the themes by client groups might handicap an organisation which offered 'generic' type services.
- ii) It was felt by one respondent, that it would be harder for a smaller organisation to satisfy the different requirements in order to win a contract.
- iii) Two individuals stated they agreed with the themes, with one commenting the following:

"The selected priorities would seem appropriate, in these difficult economic times it is essential that they are delivered efficiently. The bureaucracy has to go."

- iv) A large number of responses (27) raised concerns about the potential direct impact on individual organisations. 20 of these related to the Citizens Advice Bureau. Typical comments were:

"The CAB provides an essential service of expert advice to people who are unable to understand and gather the legal information for themselves. And that is the majority of the population."

- v) Thirteen respondents (all in support of the Citizens Advice Bureau) put forward the argument that funding was too oriented towards people from social care client groups with a lack of concern for individuals with other needs who did not fit into these categories.

"A lot of our work is preventative and has outcomes that improve the health and wellbeing of our clients, reducing

stress/helping to people to cope etc. But majority of clients do not fit in Adult Social Care defined groups.”

Cheshire East’s Response

Organisations which offer generic services can still bid for contracts for client groups which they feel they can support. There is no restriction on organisations bidding for more than one lot.

It is acknowledged that the universal services provided by the Citizen Advice Bureaus do not necessarily fit into adult social care defined groups, and that this will be given further consideration.

Tendering Process

The greatest number of responses highlighted the potentially time-consuming nature of the tendering process for organisations and the cost it would force them to incur as a result.

It was stated that opening up the market would make it more likely that local voluntary organisations would lose funding. Another response, leading on from this, suggested that its outcome could be a destabilisation of the voluntary sector.

It was stated that the timescales on the procurement process were too short in order for organisations to manage their affairs effectively.

Another respondent stated that making contracts cover all of Cheshire East would penalise smaller organisations that were not able to cover these wide geographic areas.

Two respondents reflected the importance of procurement assessment taking into account an organisation's past performance. As such, they argued criteria should not just focus on price and quality.

One respondent agreed with the greater concentration on targets and outcomes suggested in the proposals. However, they felt it was not always easy to measure the support provided to individuals because help was often transitory.

Cheshire East's Response

It is essential that the tax payer can be assured of receiving value for money in all areas of Council services. Therefore, it is a requirement to ensure that services are contracted for using a formal process.

The Council acknowledges that the timescales for arranging contracts are short, and as such are undertaking a "Request for Quote" process, rather than a tender process for the majority of service areas. The benefit of this reduces the level of documentation required from bidders.

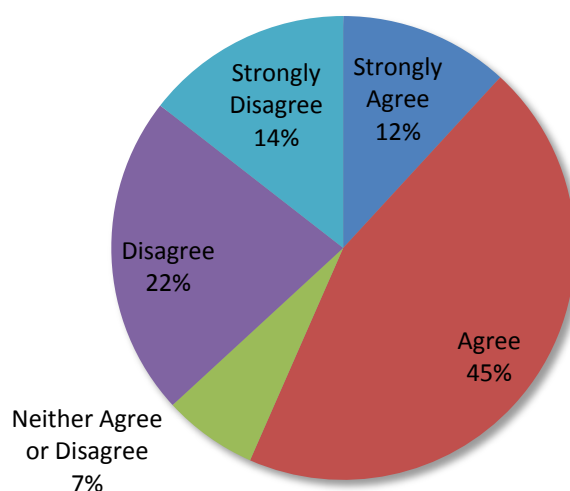
Lots have been broken down into North or South or the whole of Cheshire East and the Innovation Grant Fund will be available and should be attractive to specialist or localised services.

The evaluation criteria against which bids will be assessed is included in the quotation / offer documentation.

Funding Arrangements

The Council asked if it was right to review and prioritise social care related contracts in order to find savings (in the context of a need to make overall savings to its budget).

The majority of respondents did feel that the Council was right to review contracts, with 57%, either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, see chart 1 below.



Opinion was put forward that the Local Authority should be more joined-up in its decision making and that the Local Authority should look at making savings in the way in which it is providing services.

Ten responses were received that argued that the voluntary sector provided value for money in the services that they delivered, for instance, because they often depended on volunteers who were not paid. It was also felt that they offered preventative services which helped to reduce costs incurred by the local authority and health services in the long-run. Representative comments were:

“Funding is clearly an issue, but funding for health groups is essential to minimise cost in the future - spend a little now to prevent needing to spend lots in the future.”

Six responses were received which were broadly in favour of reviewing contracts to look for efficiencies. However, many of these commented that there was a need to focus resources on organisations which delivered real outcomes for people (for instance, care and support services were flagged up as significant for one individual).

“Inevitably you will have no choice but to review and prioritise such things, the trick is how you ensure that those with the greatest need and least ability to help themselves are not adversely affected”

One respondent offered a related argument that there was duplication in some of the services that voluntary organisations were providing in Cheshire East.

One comment put forward was that some contracted voluntary organisations charged for services where others didn’t. As such, it was suggested that those that did charge should not continue to receive funding.

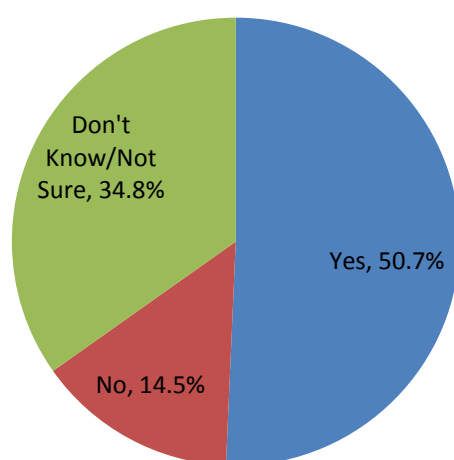
Cheshire East’s Response

We are committed to the purchase of services which will enable people to retain their independence for a longer period, and will contribute to a better quality of life for individuals and carers, thus reducing care costs relating to health and social care.

The Innovation Grant

As part of the consultation, a proposal was put forward to introduce a new grant, which organisations could apply for at any time of the year known as the Innovation Grant. This would look at helping social care and health related organisations get novel new projects off the ground in Cheshire East.

Chart 2: Do you agree that Cheshire East Council should introduce the Innovation Grant?



The next sets of questions related to how the Innovation Grant would work if introduced. The charts summarises the results below.

Chart 3: What should be the maximum given for a single application for an Innovation Grant?

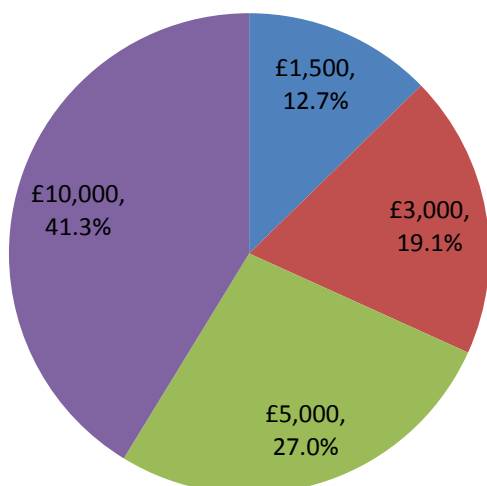


Chart 4: Do you agree that a project should only be allowed to receive an Innovation Grant once?

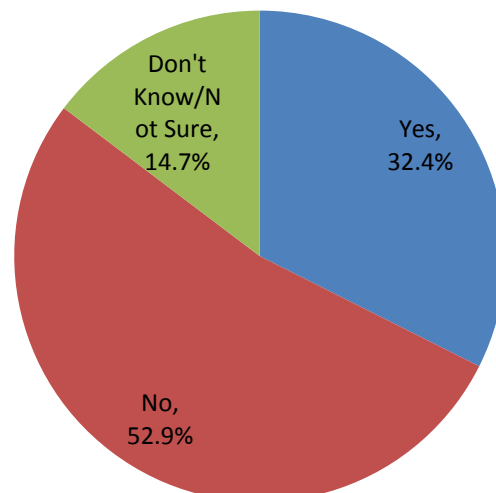


Chart 5: Should we limit the number of Innovation Grants that an organisation can obtain?

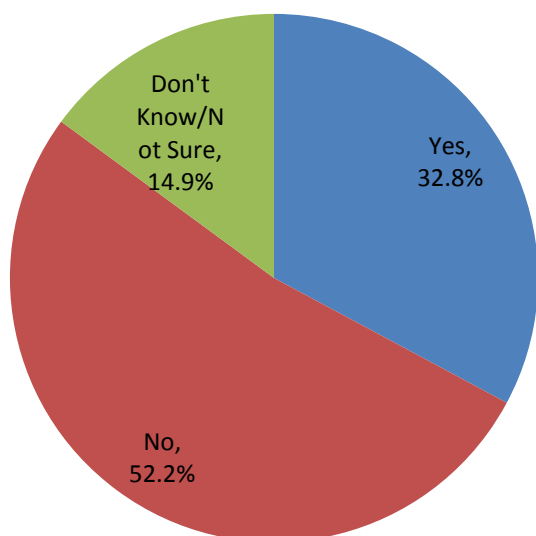
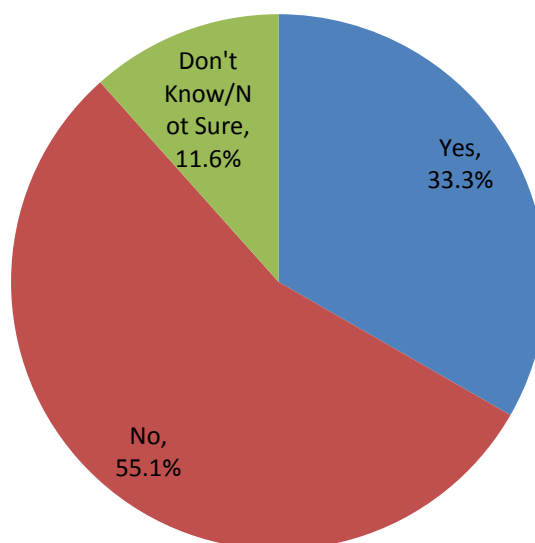


Chart 6: Do you think the grant should take the form of a loan, to be re-paid if the project successfully generates income?



Cheshire East's Response

Cheshire East Council will introduce an innovation grant with a maximum limit of £10,000, allowing multiple applications, on more than one occasion without repayment criteria.

Equality

A question was posed specifically to pick up the impact of the proposals on people of different equality groups. A number of potential groups were listed relating to; age, disability, race, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy or having children, marriage/civil partnership, being transgender, a carer or having limited means/income.

A wide range of responses were received for this question. Many of the responses again focussed on two particular organisations that might be affected: the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Body Positive. Many people stated that CAB assisted with welfare benefit advice which was important to the groups of people listed. This would become even more important following the changes to the welfare system that are due to come into effect in 2013. Respondents put forward that if this support was not there it could mean worse health (including mental health), as well as increased levels of debt, homelessness and relationship breakdowns. CAB's work supporting vulnerable people with form filling and paperwork was also noted. There were also a number of similar statements to do with welfare benefit advice which did not refer to the CAB organisation directly.

Respondents stated that the support provided by Body Positive was important to people with HIV/Aids. Comments were also received in support of other organisations such as the Deafness Support Network and the Disability Information Bureau etc.

Issues to do with funding for rural areas was flagged up on a couple of occasions.

Comments also included; that if cuts were applied equally then there would be no disproportionate equality impacts, the assertion that by allowing a greater range of providers to apply for funding a greater range of services could be offered to minority groups and that conducting an Equality Impact Assessment properly should mean a proper risk assessment would take place. Seven responses were received stating that there were no impacts they perceived as a result of the changes.

Cheshire East's Response

As stated previously, the universal services provided by the Citizens Advice Bureaus, will be further considered.

A consultation was also held on voluntary sector contracts from 22 May-31 July 2012. A copy of the consultation report and its associated Equality Impact Assessment, can be found at:

www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/social_care_and_health/adult_social_care/consultation_and_participation/voluntary_sector_grants.aspx

Additional Comments

A number of people took the opportunity to make comments about the consultation process itself.

“I don’t understand this consultation - use the funds for proper causes that are in need rather than this. Not everyone has access to a computer and some of the questions are not exactly straight forward.”

It was also indicated that the consultation followed one held in the same calendar year on voluntary sector funding for 2012/13.

Cheshire East’s Response

These comments have been noted, and will inform future consultation exercises.