

Report from Children Matter East's Spring Forum

February 9th 2009 Eastern Leadership Centre, Pampisford, Cambridge

Children Matter East's second regional forum was held in early February, despite the inclement weather very few members were unable to attend, the day focused on 'Developing the Forum's national links and influence'. In addition the Forum;

- Discussed the early themes and messages from the commissioning research it has sponsored
- Explored the detail of the proposed regional commissioning framework for the VCS
- Confirmed the membership of Children Matter East's executive
- Previewed its forthcoming Website

Session 1:

The day began with a presentation from Maggie Jones, Chief Executive of Children England. Maggie covered some of the key areas for the sector. This included exploring the environment in which it finds itself operating and the challenges and opportunities this presents. Maggie also outlined the key areas of agreement within the sector, in essence – its vision.



The Vision; where do we want to be?

- ✓ **Increase in mutual respect between sectors based on common aims and a shared skill base**
- ✓ **A breaking down of outmoded professional barriers and "protectionist" behaviours**
- ✓ **A common base for workforce development and integrated practice**
- ✓ **A range of cost effective flexible services meeting need and preventing problems**
- ✓ **A thriving VCS able to contribute to the wider agendas of place shaping, empowerment and civic engagement**
- ✓ **No child, young person or family falling through the net.**

The Forum then discussed how the vision related to Children Matter East priorities and their own organisational or service driven perspectives.

Capacity: A thriving VCS able to contribute to the wider agendas of place shaping, empowerment and civic engagement

- Some Local Authorities (and their Children's Trusts) are beginning the journey toward a commissioning only structure that is enabling and provides community leadership, but there are barriers.
- Transfer of Employment (TUPE) is not practicable for the foreseeable future, without work to align terms and conditions across all potential partners.

Engagement: Are we seeing a breaking down of outmoded professional barriers and "protectionist" behaviours

- There is a definite correlation between good relationships and impact.
- Local authorities appear to have different arrangements, who is evaluating/monitoring the effectiveness of communication between them and the VCS?

Safeguarding: Is the preventative approach working for us – yet?

The Forum has identified Safeguarding as a crucial issue for the sector and with existing regional work and an emergent National Third Sector Safeguarding Unit the key messages are included as a special focus section.

Workforce: Is there mutual respect emerging between sectors based on common aims and a shared skill base?

- WSPP networks are a good example of bringing groups together to focus on issues, but they are only a start and more needs to be done.
- However, this is a real opportunity for the VCS to build relationships and establish a mutual respect with Children's Trusts.

Integration: What does 'integrated practice' look like for the VCS?

- There is patchy delivery and co-operation and new ways of working are having a disproportionate impact on very small, very local activities.
- A statutory 'arrogance' continues to exist, viewing the VCS as less important and failing to recognise the professionalism, expertise and knowledge of the sector.
- Multi-disciplinary teams throw up issues around terms and conditions, annual leave, etc. Common expectations and practice need to be more firmly developed before integrated working can really begin to work.
- There are examples of good practice, but an unwillingness to intervene where it is not working.

Where should we be focusing our efforts? – Maggie Jones response to the discussion

- The VCS reach into communities is very good and together with their contacts this is a source of power.
- Organisations should try to build a good relationship with their Councillors and use all political and Children's Trust contacts for lobbying.
- There is a strong message emerging that there is an opportunity for the VCS, with its ability to engage hard to reach service users, to extend its contribution to the business of safeguarding given partners relative overall failure.

Session 2:

Matt Buttery, Chief Executive of Family Matters Institute presented the initial findings of Clear Expectations, the Forums research into the progress Children's Trusts in the region are making with commissioning and its impact on the sector.

Key messages from the research

1. New commissioning units & sub-groups are forming with strong VCS representation; some conflicts of interest
 2. Engagement & training for VCS widespread
- Some Trusts are only making slow and limited progress and there is 'substantial local variation'
 - Only 2/10 Children's Trusts can identify investment in VCS and there is only limited evidence of pooled budgets; alignment favoured
1. Increase in income for sector and a feeling that progress is being made with joint commissioning
 2. Generally good relationships with commissioners
- Little change around 1 year (roll over) funding and the burden of reporting remains high
 - Lack of full cost recovery aggravated by inconsistent payments

The group were then asked via workshop to;

Reflect on the reports messages and ground them in their experience, confirm the key issues and consider whether there are key factors that determine successful commissioning from a sector perspective.

Questions

- Does this stack with your experience?
- What are the key issues you see for the sector?
- Area by area what is working well and what are the major issues?
- Case studies have demonstrated success where :
 - Excellent data & information management systems
 - Strong Performance Management Framework
 - Thorough needs analysis
 - Boldness to shift resources
 - Skilled commissioning function
 - Shared understanding of commissioning

In addition the workshops were asked to explore what the proposed regional commissioning framework for the VCS and its partners might look like. The first Forum meeting identified the need, and in the interim the forum's Executive had piloted its shape to include; safeguarding, workforce development, performance support, integrated working. The intention is to produce guidance based on the sectors diversity but targeted so it meets need and adds value to local offers.

The Forum suggestions included, that;

- There were real difficulties emerging with 'commissioning intentions' linked to Local Government reorganisation such as neighbourhood commissioning, and continuing uncertainty was in itself problematic.
- The sector needs the regional framework to support the identification of key issues.
- The proposed work should encourage Children's Trust to ensure that all in house providers are required to cost in the same way as the VCS, and to include office and administrative and management functions in their costings.
- There needs to be specific provision to support the CYPVCS' ability to tender skill set, at arms length from any process.
- Members also identified that the framework needed to address;

Public indemnity insurance requirements their variability and proportionality,

That the sectors ability to Safeguard is being put at risk by the relative inability to get it (commissioning) right.

The groups identified that the framework should also provide guidance to partners on the best practice in developing specification i.e. level of and depth of interaction with the sector on needs analysis and design of service.

The Forum also agreed that the framework should be formed around existing tender or procurement processes using the questions that get asked as its backdrop, it should have a solid Quality Assurance base and be clear that it is targeting organisations that which to pursue a contractual relationship with the local Children's Trust. The Framework should have an accreditation and accommodate local determination and ownership.

Session 3

Kevin Garrod (Regional Manager) introduced the website, its functionality and focus, the website Childrenmattereast.org.uk will be live from the 1st March and complete from 30th April

Session 4

The day was brought to an end with a closed session that supported the democratic process of Children Matter East by populating the Executive through its college;

Voluntary Youth Services: Mary Sanders (VYSER) David Springett (Clubs for Young People) Brenda Towle (Essex CVYS)

Regional providers: Leigh Vallance (BREAK) Catherine McLaughlin (Family Action) Diana Read (Ormiston)

Networks and Forums : Andy Cogan (COVER) Linda Bulled (VOC, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire)

Kevin Garrod , 12th March 2009