



Clear Expectations

Commissioned by Children Matter East
from Matt Buttery, Chief Executive, FMI

Following Lord Laming's enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, Every Child Matters called for 'a whole-system reform of the delivery of children's services', a focus on joint working and a positive role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in strategic planning, commissioning and delivery of services. Effective joint planning and commissioning is at the heart of implementing these changes necessitating new partnerships, redistribution of power towards the user, strategic understanding of how all outcomes in the local area are met, and a more commercially minded approach to procurement - all focussed on the child and young person. Clear Expectations explores the progress the Eastern Region's Children's Trusts are making in developing and implementing their joint commissioning approaches, and the impact on the children and young people's voluntary and community sector (VCS). The report explores the statutory sector and VCS perspectives, levels of and changes in funding for the sector across the region, and makes a number of recommendations.

Children Matter East

East of England Children and Young Peoples VCS Forum



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following Lord Laming's enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, Every Child Matters called for 'a whole-system reform of the delivery of children's services', a focus on joint working and a positive role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in strategic planning, commissioning and delivery of services. Joint Commissioning is at the heart of these changes:

'Effective joint planning and commissioning is at the heart of improving outcomes for children and young people. The transition to joint planning and commissioning is a step change that requires clear leadership. Effective joint planning and commissioning necessitates new partnerships, redistribution of power towards the user, strategic understanding of how all outcomes in the local area are met, and a more commercially minded approach to procurement - all focussed on the child and young person.'

Clear Expectations explores the progress the Eastern Region's Children's Trusts are making in developing and implementing their joint commissioning approaches, and the impact on the children and young people's voluntary and community sector. The report explores the statutory sector and VCS perspectives, levels of and changes in funding for the sector across the region.

The following recommendations are made:

1. Trusts need to clarify their wider strategic plans with regards to Commissioning, the sector is increasingly confused about the direction of travel i.e. will all funding be subject to the commissioning process, when and how.
2. Whilst clear progress is being made the VCS are not universally engaged in the needs assessment phases. Whilst the position is improving more needs to be done to support the sectors engagement at point in the process.
3. Simple issues, such as stability of funding; timing of payments / balance of risk; full cost recovery; and reducing the burden of bureaucracy - are still not fully resolved and serve to undermine progress in other areas.
4. The continuing high prevalence of 1 year funding needs addressing
5. The difference in the mechanisms of commissioning and procurement across the region presents a confusing and challenging scenario to the VCS. The development and adoption of a regional commissioning framework should be explored to support the progress of all partners. This should be supported by a regional activity to enable Commissioners and the VCS to support cross-sector and cross-regional learning.
6. Governance arrangements need to be addressed robustly in order to ensure impartial and effective decision making, including robust arrangements to manage the commissioner / provider split in many Trust areas.
7. There also need to be a strengthening in the engagement of VCS providers in some areas, to support the strong engagement of infrastructure organisations. **This should encompass support for commissioners and their colleagues with clear revised VCS supported guidance on what constitutes good sector engagement across Children Trusts.**

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Following Lord Laming's enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, Every Child Matters called for 'a whole-system reform of the delivery of children's services', a focus on joint working and a positive role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in strategic planning, commissioning and delivery of services. The Children Act (2004) provided the legal underpinning for this whole system reform, with Section 10 placing a 'duty to cooperate' on local statutory agencies. Revised Children's Trust guidance published on 18 November 2008, placed on identified statutory agencies a 'duty to cooperate in the making of arrangements to improve well-being' and gives 'power to pool budgets and share other resources'. The requirement to form local Children's Trusts arrangements across all authorities by April 2008, provides a formal body through joint working is coordinated and governed.

Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework

'Effective joint planning and commissioning is at the heart of improving outcomes for children and young people. The transition to joint planning and commissioning is a step change that requires clear leadership. Effective joint planning and commissioning necessitates new partnerships, redistribution of power towards the user, strategic understanding of how all outcomes in the local area are met, and a more commercially minded approach to procurement - all focussed on the child and young person.'

The Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework for Children Young People and Maternity Services (March 2006, DfES / DoH)

In 2006 the publication of the Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework¹ set out key steps towards developing a comprehensive and integrated system of support for children, young people and their families. The commitment to effective commissioning of services, a diverse range of provision and drawing on expertise of a variety of providers were stated as central to building services around the needs of children and young people.

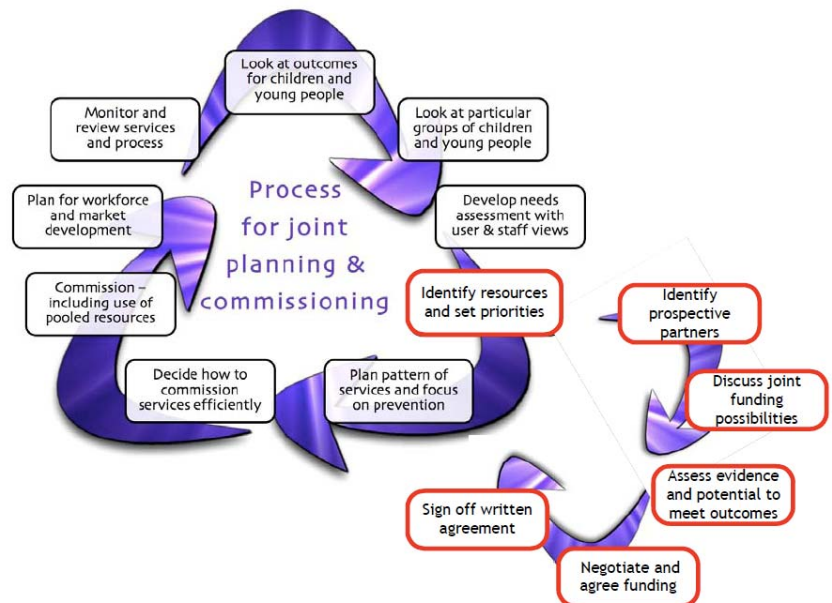


Figure 1 Process for Joint Planning and Commissioning²

¹ The Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework for Children Young People and Maternity Services. March 2006. DfES / DoH

² Better Outcomes for Children's Services Through Joint Funding: A best practice guide. August 2007. DCSF / DoH.

The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

The role of the VCS in design and provision of commissioned services is clearly articulated^{3,4}. However, the involvement of the VCS at both national and local levels is largely built on trust and mutual goodwill, with guidance from the Compact³ agreement on how parties should work together. Sir Peter Gershon laid out four key principles⁴ to making Compact work, when commissioning from the VCS:

1. Stability of Funding – the need to move to stable, longer term funding cycles wherever appropriate
2. Timing of Payments and Balance of Risk
3. Full Cost Recovery
4. Reducing the Burden of Bureaucracy

Guidance and Progress on Joint Commissioning

'The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures' (2007)⁵, 'Better Outcomes for Children's services through joint funding' (2007)⁶, 'Debates and Dilemmas' (2007)⁷, 'Delivering the Children's Plan' (2008)⁸, plus various guidance and good/emerging practise case studies⁹ have supported the joint commissioning journey. However in October 2008, the Audit Commission published a critical report on the progress that had been made, entitled 'Are we there yet?'¹⁰. The report not concluded that 5 years after the Laming report, there was little evidence that Children's Trusts have improved outcomes for children. Amongst the other conclusions were the following:

- Little evidence that mainstream funding has been redirected or that performance has been managed across services
- Substantial local variation
- Collaborative working has improved, but the new arrangements have yet to settle down
- VCS are less engaged, despite their large contribution
- Most areas have a joint commissioning strategy by 2008, but these lack impact because there is little experience or knowledge of joint commissioning
- Many representatives on children's trust boards lack a mandate for committing their organisation's resources, and systems for reporting back are rarely systematic

³ Compact is an agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for how both parties should work together. See www.thecompact.org.uk

⁴ Third Sector Strategy Action Plan. 2007. DfES.

⁵ The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures. 2007. DCSF.

⁶ Better Outcomes for Children's Services Through Joint Funding: A best practice guide. August 2007. DCSF / DoH.

⁷ Debates and dilemmas: commissioning children's and young peoples services. 2007. landDeA,

⁸ Delivering the Children's Plan. Strengthening Children's Trusts: legislative options. 2008. DCSF

⁹ See www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning/casestudies/ last accessed 20/4/09

¹⁰ 'Are we there yet?': Improving Governance and resource management in Children's Trusts. October 2008. Audit Commission.

- Areas prefer to align resources rather than pool budgets
- Governing partnerships is complex, but mandatory change could cause further confusion

“Commissioning is making things happen by working with and through others. It is developing an overall picture of children’s needs within an area and developing provision through public, private, voluntary and community providers to respond to those needs.” (ECM: Sept 2005 DfES Guidance)

OBJECTIVES OF CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Frontline Hopscotch (2007)¹¹ found children's services provided by local voluntary and community sector organisations were being cut, preventative services being the hardest hit. It also found vital VCS services being taken in house by local public bodies and that current commissioning practice was discouraging voluntary and community organisations from applying.

Destinations Unknown (2007)¹² was commissioned by Children Matter East to explore the implications these findings in the Eastern region. Concentrating on services that have been funded through the Children’s Fund, Sure Start Local Programme and the Local Network Fund, the study identified that in excess of £10m per annum was invested in VCS delivery of services through these three funds alone across the Eastern Region. Concluding the loss or significant reduction in this investment could have irreversible consequences,

Destinations Unknown made a series of recommendations to Children’s Trusts in the East and stimulated a national debate through a *Children and Young People Now* article and subsequent national survey.

Clear Expectations was commissioned late in 2008 by Children Matter East to build on understanding gained through ‘Destinations Unknown’, the recent messages from ‘Are we there yet?’ and specifically explore the progress with Joint Commissioning arrangements across the East: Ministerial comment on the Audit Commissions report suggested it was presenting an out of date picture.

The aim of Clear Expectations is to explore the progress the region’s Children’s Trusts are making in developing and implementing their commissioning approaches and the impact on the children and young people VCS. The objectives being: -

1. To establish the position of each Children’s Trust, and where possible expenditure in the sector
2. Survey the experience of the VCS
3. Draw out and reflect common issues, to support cross sector learning.

¹¹ Frontline hopscotch: VCS engagement in delivering change for children and young people: a jumpy start or a step back?. 2007. Sheffield Hallam University / NAVCA

¹² Destinations Unknown. 2007. Family Matters Institute / Children Matter East

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the following methodology:

1. An online survey tool was used between November 2008 and January 2009 to gather the views of VCS organisations, following piloting with a handful of the Children Matter East Executive. Completion of the survey was incentivised with a laptop prize, and links to the survey were disseminated both through local VCS infrastructure partners across the region and directly to frontline organisations. 93 responses were received with 86 usable surveys from organisations with direct experience of the commissioning process. The sample size gives a good illustrative picture, but further work would be needed to give sound statistical results.
2. Approval was secured through the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to distribute an online survey to key leads on Joint Commissioning across the 10 Children's Trust areas in the East. The survey was developed with input from Officers in Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership and supported/supplemented by face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Officers from Essex, Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Southend-on-Sea and telephone interviews with Officers from Suffolk and Thurrock. Norfolk had a further process of approving research beyond the ASCS approval system, which declined the request to complete the survey but responded to our enquiry by signposting us to online documents detailing their approach.
3. A pre-final version of this report was distributed to each of the leads on Joint Commissioning across the 9 contributing Children's Trust areas in the East for confirmation.
4. Early findings were presented to members of the Children Matter East's Regional Forum in February 2009. VCS and Statutory sector colleagues discussed the early findings, and provided additional evidence, context, anecdotal experience and understanding.

STATUTORY SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

Bedfordshire

Current Context: Bedfordshire is in the middle of transitioning from a two-tier authority to two new unitary authorities; the focus of the research was on Bedfordshire County Council and not the emerging unitary strategies.

Bedfordshire Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) had a 'Joint Local Authority and Child Health Commissioning Unit', composed of a multidisciplinary team of senior managers responsible for the procurement of all services for children and young people, particularly those who are vulnerable, underachieving or who face considerable social disadvantage. The Unit was responsible for all aspects of the commissioning cycle, accountable to the 'Joint Commissioning Board' and 'Strategic Partnership'.

Bedfordshire had mapped a 'resource envelope' of its spending, which identified £2.5million per annum investment in preventative services delivered by the VCS between 2007 and 2009. The progress in Bedfordshire followed a process of reshaping the portfolio of services during the early part of the CYPSPs activities in response to identified poor performance and included the de-commissioning and re-commissioning of various VCS projects.

Children's Centres in Bedfordshire have been a particular focus of the Commissioning Strategy with the majority of the 18 Phase 1 and 2 Centre's being delivered by the VCS. Bedfordshire was awarded 'Excellence in Commissioning' award in July 2008 at the National Health and Social Care Awards.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: The VCS is well represented in Bedfordshire through a forum called 'VOC' (Voluntary Organisations Consortium¹³). Funding supports a full time and part time officer, one through a commissioned contract hosted by the local Centre for Voluntary Services (CVS), and the other through secondment from Connexions/Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS). The Chair and VOC officers represent the VCS in governance arrangements relating to commissioning, supported by a strong Executive drawn from across the sector.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: VOC has representatives at all levels of the Strategic Partnership, and has supported needs analysis with quantitative and qualitative data. However, the engagement of the sector in service specification and development stage of the commissioning process appears less well defined.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: Engagement has also occurred through a Commissioning Conference in 2007, Joint Commissioning and Workforce Conference in 2008 (organised and delivered in partnership with VOC), and local authority officers attending quarterly VOC meetings.

Next Steps: Bedfordshire County Council ceased to exist on 1st April. The new authorities have agreed a 1-year extension to current contracts with VCS providers in

¹³ 'VOC' has adapted its name to 'VOC-yfp' during the writing of this report. The adapted name stands for 'Voluntary Organisations for Children, young people and families'

order to maintain stability. The new Directors of Children's Services appear to have different views on how to progress, with at least one seeking to move towards a more commissioning based model with 'clear water' between commissioning and providers (internal and external).

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: £2.5m pa

Cambridgeshire

Current Context : Cambridgeshire County Council Children and Young People's Services (CCC CYP) has no centralised commissioning unit, instead commissioning is undertaken by individual services or more often through Project Boards, which include representatives of partners organisations and usually the VCS. In respect of commissioning by the CYPSP for its new priorities in the new Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYP Plan), Action Planning groups, combining representatives from partner agencies, schools and the VCS, have been engaged in developing action plans to meet the priorities. This work feeds into the 3 area partnerships in the county.

Project Boards are formed to focus on Commissioning e.g. Extended Services Board, Parenting Strategy Board, Youth Offer Board. These Project Boards commission, both in the sense of providing structural and cultural changes, and in terms of procurement of services.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: Underpinning the work of the CYPSP is a Joint Commissioning Group. This groups includes reps from CCC, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and 2 VCS elected reps. The role of this group is "to oversee the effective joint planning and commissioning of services for children and young people aged from 0-19 (or 25 for young people with Learning Disabilities or Difficulties) on behalf of the CYPSP in order to improve outcomes." CCC CYP services funds a local infrastructure group to support the strategic representation and engagement of the VCS in CYPSP and wider activities, communication - through thee 'Voices Workers' who, as part of their role, run 3 area VCS Forums, training and capacity building.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: A 'Joint Strategic Needs Assessment' (JSNA) was compiled in 2008 and was overseen by the Joint Commissioning Group. The JSNA has been used to inform the development of the children's priorities in the Local Area Agreement and the CYP Plan, and has informed funding. The Area VCS Forums where engaged in the development of priorities emerging from the JSNA and participation activities with children and young people and parents and carers in order to agree the priorities for the CYPP.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: Commissioning and Procurement Workshops have been provided by the CYPSP working with CCC Procurement Team and a social enterprise organisation providing one-to-one business development support. On going training and development is provided through the VCS infrastructure support contract.

Next Steps: The CYPSP is currently reviewing its arrangements in light of the statutory guidance on Children's Trust Boards which will include reviewing its joint commissioning arrangements. VCS partners, as part of the Joint Commissioning Group and CYPSP, are involved in this review.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Not currently reported on.

Essex

Current Context : April 2008 saw a significant move of the commissioning and planning cycle to 11 local CYPSP's across Essex. The monies involved in these arrangements come primarily from the Local Authority, with health having its own governance and commissioning arrangements across the five Primary Care Trust (PCT) areas. A number of bespoke Commissioner Roles exist e.g. Parenting, Substance Misuse, Teenage Pregnancy, 14-19 Commissioners; c.£6million of services are currently commissioned from the VCS, from the Local Priority Fund and Extended Services Grants. IYSS, Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) also commission individually across the county. Contracts with the Voluntary Sector are paid up to 6 months in advance following a risk assessment. There is strong support from the Corporate Procurement unit within the Council focused on Category Management and Supplier Relationship Management. This is predominantly applied to high end spend (> £5 million) but offers opportunities for learning.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: The VCS are represented on the Children's Trust Board and Local CYPSPs by Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services, with two seats on County Board and Executive, and the CVS. Local CYPSPs commission and monitor and have VCS representation from infrastructure and delivery organisations on each. Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services sits on the Commissioning Project Planning Group, support the development of the commissioning strategy, as the voluntary sector advisor. IDeA have been commissioned to review governance arrangements across the Strategic Partnerships.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: The LA has undertaken a 7 month mapping process, supply, locality priorities and needs.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: CYPSP members have attended IPC Accredited Commissioning Courses which were made available to all members of the 11 CYPSPs. Training sessions have been held with the wider voluntary sector to support the 2009 - 2012 commissioning programme.

Next Steps : Essex have just appointed to a new role of Director of Commissioning, with remit to undertake a strategic review of PCT / LA agendas and develop Joint Commissioning arrangements. Internally the LA is developing IT systems to map services for internal staff to improve awareness and referrals.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Not currently reported on, in excess of c.£6million per annum 2009/10.

Hertfordshire

Current Context: Hertfordshire Children's Trust Partnership (HCTP) has an agreed commissioning framework. There is evidence of some 'collaborative commissioning' through aligning strategies with the PCT and others. There has also been some joint commissioning activity e.g. Substance Misuse and CAMHS.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: The VCS is not represented on HCTP Core Executive, but has six representatives on the HCTP Strategic Stakeholder Group. The VCS was part of the multi-agency group that agreed the HCTP commissioning Framework. Various Commissioning Subgroups of the Trust exist that oversee particular service areas; the VCS represented in all of them.

The engagement and representation of the VCS across the trust has been strengthened over the last 12 months with the development of a 3 year 'VCS Engage Action Plan'. A multi-agency 'HCTP VCS Strategy Group' takes forward the commissioning actions of the 'VCS Engage Action Plan', which helps to ensure commissioning processes across statutory agencies that make up HCTP are as transparent and consistent as possible.

The VCS are represented on assessment panels where commissioning decisions are made. The VCS are also engaged in the trust's CYP Plan writing days.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment : Commissioning is needs led, using locally collected data and feedback from service users, and monitoring from existing commissioned services to inform commissioning plans.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: HCTP have run a number of workshops and training events over the last two years to support the VCS. When introducing district-based commissioning in Autumn 2007 a number of Commissioning Workshops were run across the county. A similar model is used to support the VCS when a new commissioning process is launched – e.g. Children's Centres, Prevention 513, Children's Targeted Services Fund. The model has been developed using feedback from VCS providers and the standard format includes an overview of the commissioning process, an explanation of the tender documents or application forms, what a model contract would look like and examples of monitoring forms that would be used once services are actually commissioned. Existing VCS providers are invited to give their perspective of the commissioning process.

Commissioners actively seek feedback on the commissioning process and input to the design of new processes. The level of VCS applicants in all commissioning processes is reported on. These feedback and intelligence used to target the advertising of new tendering and application processes. Where applications from the VCS have been low in a particular area, Commissioners have worked closely with the local CVS's to raise awareness. This activity has yielded a demonstrable increase in funding allocation to the VCS since the implementation of the framework.

Next Steps: The key priority for HCTP is widening the use of its 'commissioning framework' across all statutory funding streams. The multi-agency 'HCTP VCS Strategy Group' and VCS Engage Action Plan have a key role in this. A further key challenge identified by HCTP is to develop the 'Cost Benefit Tool' and support the VCS in evidencing

the impact of their services, in particular demonstrating the impact of preventative services, where the VCS are a key provider. The hope is that this will help support the long-term sustainability of those services. HCTP is also intending to use the DCSF/DoH Commissioning Support Programme to further improve on commissioning processes; including VCS involvement in the self-analysis stage of the support programme and linking it to the VCS Engage Action Plan.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector : 2007/08 – £3.5m; 2008/09 - £4.5m; 2009/10 - £5.5m

Luton

Current Context: A Joint Commissioning Unit was established in 2007. It is led by the Head of Children's Commissioning (NHS Luton). The unit has four Partnership Commissioning Managers, 2 are NHS appointments and 2 are Local Authority appointments. Each has a specific focus: a Commissioner for Social Care; a CAMHS and Disabilities Commissioner; an Acute and Community Child Health Commissioner with the fourth taking the lead on the CYP Plan, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Partnership Support, Engagement of the VCS and Children's Workforce Reform. The unit manages a number of joint and aligned budgets.

The Children's Trust arrangements were strengthened in October 2008 with a new Terms of Reference and governance arrangement, with all partners signing a memorandum of agreement to support the joint working. In the autumn of 2008 a 'Joint Strategic Commissioning Strategy Group' was established and its membership included a range of commissioners from across children's services and others to look at the development of joint commissioning arrangements. The group is currently mapping activities against the commissioning cycle for priority areas e.g. CAMHS, children with disabilities, obesity and NEET. At the same time the current spend is being mapped across the system for these priorities.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: Governance exists through Children's Trust arrangements: with all agencies, statutory and VCS, represented at the Children's Trust level and at other groups within the Children's Trust arrangements. Partners from Luton's Community Empowerment Network known as the Luton Assembly have traditionally sat on the key groups.

During 2008 a new network (linked to the Assembly) was established, with VCS partners at Voluntary Action Luton and with funding from CWDC through the WSPP programme. The network known as 'Vision4CYP' provides a mechanism for regular communication opportunities with the sector through an e-newsletter, improved opportunities for networking and consultation with the sector, as well as providing training opportunities and a means to have open processes for tendering for new services, for example the recent Targeted Mental Health in Schools pilot.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: The VCS was involved in the key stakeholder events for the development of the 'Joint Strategic Needs Assessment' in 2008. This JSNA will feed into the development of the next CYP Plan 2009-2011, and a large consultation event is planned at which the VCS are key stakeholders.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: No training has been specifically organised for the sector but a major event is planned for April 2009 in which a session is planned to update the sector on the developments the Children's Trust is making on its Commissioning arrangements.

Next Steps: Luton agreed a joint Commissioning Framework in 2007 and the Children's Trust Board will be having developmental training through the Commissioning Support Programme (DCSF) in the summer to support the development of a Commissioning Strategy.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Luton Borough Council is currently reviewing its relationship with the VCS sector in Luton. As part of this activity the spend from across the Council has been mapped to provide a baseline of spend with the sector. This has provided a useful overview of all services commissioned with the sector, including the terms, the type of monitoring arrangements etc. For the year 2007/2008 the spend by the Local Authority on Children's Services with the sector was c. £2 million.

Norfolk

Current Context: The structure articulated in a presentation given to Board on the 26/2/09¹⁴ showed a Commissioning Executive with Specialist Advisors e.g. CAMHS, Disabled Children, Special Educational Needs (SEN), Safeguarding, and Parenting. The Executive is supported by subgroups covering different age ranges: 0-6, 5-12, 11-19, 18-25. This appeared to describe the new structures for commissioning. Norfolk has a joint commissioning framework commissioning policy, however there is little evidence that the sector as been part of the co-production of this.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: *"The Voluntary Sector Forum – Norfolk has been established as an inclusive structure for the Third Sector to enable it to be fully engaged in the Partnership Trust arrangements and thereby assist in the development, investment and delivery of services to meet the needs of children, young people and their families arising from 'Every Child Matters'. The voluntary and community sector has a vital role in supporting the development and delivery of Norfolk's 19 priorities. Its elected members present the sector's point of view at Partnership Trust meetings and are influential in sub-groups developing the Trust, including those focusing on joint commissioning and workforce development. The voluntary and community sector also has a wider influence across associated partnerships. The relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors in Norfolk is regarded as a model of good practice nationally and we will continue to build on this in the coming years."* Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009 : Year 3¹⁵

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: The contribution to needs assessment appears to be good, with the whole afternoon of a conference in November 2008 given over to gaining VCS input to the CYP Plan.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: Information had been produced but it was generic to the whole of the VCS and felt to be of little value in supporting Norfolk's

¹⁴ <http://www.everynorfolkchildmatters.org/consumption/groups/public/documents/article/ncc064402.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.everynorfolkchildmatters.org/consumption/groups/public/documents/article/ncc061320.pdf>

substantial provider base to be able to successfully participate in any tendering process. Our research indicated substantial problems in terms of the quality of the commissioning training that was available, whilst having elements of a CYP based approach, it was felt to be at too low a level to have any meaningful benefit to developed organisations. It would appear that this may be the result of the children and young peoples VCS being excluded from the top-table of VCS planning in Norfolk.

Next Steps: Norfolk County Council have proposed 5 commissioning regions across the county. Plans currently appear to be on hold, whilst the Unitary decisions made by central Government.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Substantial but not clear at this time.

Peterborough

Current Context : A Children's Trust 'Memorandum of Agreement' was signed in Spring 2008 by all partners in the newly established Trust (developed from the former Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership). The document outlines the scope for alignment / pooling of budgets, joint commissioning by the Trust and development of a Joint Commissioning Team hosted by the local authority. New commissioning processes were piloted during 2008/9 to re-commission family support and preventative services, which were previously funded by Peterborough City Council and the Children's Fund. The new processes use outcomes based specifications derived from a combination of CYP Plan needs assessment, a 'Vulnerability Matrix', 'Customer Segmentation Methodology', 'Predictive Risk modelling' and agreed Joint Commissioning Standards developed locally by Peterborough (all available via Peterborough City Council's website).

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance : The VCS are represented on the Children's Trust Partnership Board (3 reps) and Executive Group (2 reps). VCS Reps act as Co-chairs of the 'Make a Positive Contribution Partnership' and the 'Infrastructure Partnership'. The Infrastructure Partnership addresses 'service management' key judgements within Ofsted's Annual Performance Assessment framework including workforce development and commissioning. In addition there is good wider membership of partnership and task groups. New structures are coming into place with 'contracts' and work-plans agreed by the Children's Trust Board specifying each partnership's responsibilities and accountabilities.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment : An Infrastructure Support contract with Peterborough Voluntary Sector Forum (VSF) and Young Lives includes supporting the wider sector to engage in needs assessment, planning and service evaluation. This contract is about to be re-tendered with a specific emphasis representation within the Children's Trust structure and in all aspects of the commissioning cycle, including needs assessment, planning and support for the sector to meet Joint Commissioning Standards.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: Awareness raising sessions were facilitated by VSF and Young Lives with a focus on the new commissioning processes piloted during 2008/9. The Strategic Joint Commissioning Framework (agreed by the Children's Trust Board in February 2009) will be the basis for a round of seminars and workshops during 2009/10.

Next Steps: The Children's Trust Board has approved its Framework for Strategic Joint Commissioning and the capacity, structure and timescales for the development of the Peterborough City Council-hosted Commissioning Team (in place from April 2009). The budget for the Commissioning Team has been agreed and a specific action plan is in place to deliver the transfer of elements of children's health commissioning to the Commissioning Team by September 2009. A new 'Commissioning Enabling Group' sits beneath the Infrastructure Partnership with a focus on the legal, financial, HR and technical aspects of commissioning and joint commissioning via aligned / pooled funds.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Currently not being reported, estimated at £3million. A current piece of work is scoping the use of the 'resource envelope' approach. Payment terms with the sector are individually negotiated: in line with the Peterborough Compact, on a 3-year cycle.

Southend-On-Sea

Current Context: Southend does not have a specific Commissioning Unit at this stage, but is jointly commissioning four contracts. A pooled budget of £600k is made up of about £400k from the Area Based Grant (mainstreaming of the Children's Fund grant), Schools Budgets (c. £100k), Southend Education Trust (c. £40k) and Early Years and Extended Services (c. £60k). Contracts are outcomes based, and expect a contribution of resources from the provider themselves. A jointly funded post exists between Southend and Essex Local Authorities and the PCT to support the development of commissioning: this post has worked closely with the VCS. From the four jointly commissioned services the VCS deliver two; one is delivered by the Youth Offending Team, and one by CAMHS.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: Governance occurs through a 'Commissioning Forum' and 'Joint Commissioning Sub Group'. The Forum is mainly commissioners, but does have a SAVS (VCS infrastructure organisation) representative, and has the authority to award contracts or de-commission services. The Sub-Group has both commissioning and provider representatives. The VCS also have reps on quarterly Board meetings, and Monthly Executive meetings the Children's Partnership.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: Currently the VCS have not been involved in needs assessment.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: The sector has been engaged through the 'Children's and Young People's Forum' to discuss plans, changes and infrastructure.

Next Steps: Southend is using the commissioning these four services to inform and develop its joint commissioning infrastructure. There is planning in progress for a half-day seminar to move the strategy forward.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Not currently reported on beyond the four projects.

Suffolk

Current Context: Suffolk is in the process of strengthening its joint commissioning arrangements. It has a newly formed Joint Commissioning Unit consisting of lead commissioners e.g. Health, Children with Additional Needs, Parenting. In addition, a CYP Commissioning Group exists; this group consists of both commissioners and providers, with representation from Young Suffolk. The Group has recently reviewed services, including the Children's Fund.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in Commissioning Governance: VCS engagement is facilitated through Young Suffolk and their Children and Families Forum. Head of Commissioning and Partnerships attends the quarterly VCS Children and Families Forum. A representative from Young Suffolk sits on the CYP Commissioning Group as well as the Executive Commissioning Group of the Children's Trust. Young Suffolk also have two representatives sitting on the Children's Trust Partnership Board.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: Suffolk is in the process of agreeing priorities for its next Children and Young People's plan. In order to decide the priorities a detailed needs analysis has been provided by the Partnership. As part of this process, this was discussed at the Children and Families Forum, sent out to the Young Suffolk network as part of a formal consultation process and was discussed at both the Executive Commissioning Group and at the Board where the VCS are represented. The VCS are encouraged to submit evidence of needs assessments. In addition there is work underway through the 18 Community Clusters to assess local need and link this to local commissioning.

Commissioning Training and Awareness: There have been awareness raising sessions at Area Management Team meetings and Community Clusters, with a presentation and workshop also held at the Young Suffolk AGM 2008. Further work is intended in 2009 as a follow up to these activities to increase understanding of the VCS and to provide market opportunity.

Next Steps: The formation of the new Executive Commissioning Group provides an opportunity to focus on planning, commissioning and performance. Although the VCS are providers, Young Suffolk attends in the capacity of a VCS infrastructure organisation. This group will have input from a Performance Improvement Group (VCS representation) and the Aligned and Budgets Advisory Group. Plans are being developed to pool resources in 2009, and training and procurement support to the VCS will also be explored. As part of local arrangements, Local Children's Trust Partnerships are being piloted this year; VCS representation on these should support the sectors influence on commissioning at the local level.

Total Level of Investment in the Sector: Not currently reported on.

Thurrock

Current Context: Thurrock Council has developed a Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework with a delivery Action Plan and, having recruited a Head of Commissioning, is exploring resource options to set up Joint Commissioning. The Joint Planning and Commissioning Group (JPCG) has a strategic overview of all joint and single agency commissioning activity within the Children's Trust. The JPCG group reports into the Children's Trust Board which has representation from the voluntary sector and who are fundamental to the planning and strategic overview of how services are commissioned. It is the aim that once the Joint Strategic Commissioning Unit is set up; they will report into the JPCG and be responsible for delivering the Joint Planning and Commissioning Action Plan. They shall also work closely with the locality cluster groups who will retain commissioning at a local level to meet local needs. The Commissioning Unit will be responsible for collating all need and trend, outcome and performance management data and produce regular reports to the JPCG to ensure the right services are being commissioned and that outcomes are being achieved for children and young people.

Thurrock's Children's Trust has recently undertaken a rather challenging commissioning process under the Thurrock Thinking Families initiative to develop a wide reaching framework of Early Intervention and Preventive services. This framework of provision is to meet the needs of Parents/Carers, children and young people across tier 1, 2 and 3 services. It will provide: intensive intervention for families who are risk of having their children accommodated, short break services, parenting support programmes, young carers support services, healthy eating and exercise programmes, behavioural support programmes etc. These services are aimed at reaching a wide target need group and include specialist services for BME families and families affected by domestic violence and substance misuse. Contracts have been issued for three years with a further two-year extension which will depend on a review of these services, further funding being available, performance management and needs analysis.

VCS Engagement and Involvement in commissioning Governance: The Children's Trust Board and the Joint Planning and Commissioning Group have VCS representation. The Thinking Families commissioning process engaged the VCS sector at key stages of the commissioning process. Two provider forums were held prior to going to advert to seek feedback from the sector as to the design of the commissioning process, the service specification and contract documentation. A number of issues were fed back at the provider forum such as the need for Quality and Performance Standards, the need for a Provider Directory to support integrated working, increased timescales for the tender process and the need for clear instructions and support during the tender process.

All feedback received from these forums was addressed including developing a set of quality standards and hosting a providers forum during the tender process, to support the voluntary sector's understanding of the requirements and expectations. An experienced consultant from the sector was commissioned to represent the Voluntary Sector on the Commissioning Project Steering Group and to ensure that independent support was made available to help VCS organisations submit their bids. In terms of pricing for services, Thurrock adopted a full cost recovery approach and encouraged providers to submit their pricing proposals accordingly.

VCS Contribution to Needs Assessment: The VCS has contributed to the development of the CYPP.

Commissioning and Training Awareness: Although the VCS were provided with support during the tender process for Thurrock Thinking Families, it was identified that further commissioning and training support is required. There is also the need for more integrated working between the Children's Trust and In-house procurement service to raise awareness of the needs and requirements of the VCS when tendering and for processes to be more streamlined and simplified.

Next Steps: Having successfully completed the tender process for Thurrock Thinking Families Initiative the next stage is to engage with the VCS in developing outcomes, performance management and monitoring process and procedures. The aim is to establish regular two-way feedback forums to share information on needs, trends and outcomes, share best practice and capture lesson's learnt. Thurrock is also working to establish a website to promote communication with the sector and will post regular updates, best practice, promote integrated working and signposting to other services, and provide the Joint Commissioning Unit with systems to collate need and outcome data.

Total level of Investment: There will be a total of £3 million invested into the Voluntary and Community sector through the Thinking Families Initiative over the next three years. Across the Children's Trust there is approximately a further £700,000 per annum invested with the VCS to provide services for High Risk Behaviours including substance misuse, domestic violence, Supported Living services and intervention for children with challenging and complex needs and parenting support programmes.

SUMMARY OF STATUTORY SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

- There is significant structural and cultural change in the commissioning and procurement of services by Children's Trusts and their constituent agencies. During the timeframe of this report there have been a number of significant developments across the East. Many of the Trusts have provided training and engagement events for the VCS to support their understanding of new processes, gain understanding of the sectors perspective and reach. Most of those that haven't done have plans to do so. **This sort of activity appears crucial to the success of the Joint Commissioning.**
- Joint Commissioning currently has a number of different expressions. There is substantial regional variation in the mechanisms, scope, and the breadth statutory partners involved. In general joint commissioning only includes the Local Authorities and PCTs. This variation presents significant challenges to cross sector learning, and those organisations working across county borders.
- There is a challenge for Trusts in how to manage the Commissioner / Provider split. Children's Trust arrangements must use the understanding and expertise of all agencies to help shape the commissioning both at the strategic and process levels. However, a number of the structural arrangements give rise to potential conflicts of interest between provider and commissioner, with both often steering commissioning decisions. The concern is that these conflicts of interest either lead to 'charmed circles' or 'automatic in-house commissioning'. Those authorities with more 'independent' Commissioning Units appear to have a more level playing field. The tendency to automatically commission in-house, and understanding of true service provision costs appear reduced where there is 'clear water' between commissioner and provider.
- Beds, Herts and Thurrock appear to have made the most progress regionally. Peterborough and Luton's model based on the Trust Agreement would appear to give a strong foundation for involvement of the whole Trust in Joint Commissioning, and therefore is also worthy of note. There is clearly cross-regional learning in the East, with a number of Commissioners mentioning Bedfordshire's 'resource envelope' model. However, the variation across the Trusts still presents a significant barrier to the VCS, and the development of one cross-regional approach to Joint Commissioning could support both Commissioners and the CYPVCS.
- Engagement is generally strong, but there is a challenge in all Trusts to ensure the whole sector is communicated and engaged with at all levels: Governance, strategy processes, as well as front line delivery. In some areas there felt to be a lack of engagement of the more experienced VCS provider organisations in the governance processes, supporting and broadening the generally strong engagement of the VCS infrastructure organisations. The development of a 'VCS Engage Action Plan' in Hertfordshire and the elected representation in Cambridgeshire both appear to provide examples of good practice in developing representation and engagement.

- Engagement of the VCS with Joint Commissioning itself did not appear to be as strong, with a number of areas not appearing to robustly involve the VCS, especially in the Needs Analysis phase. The risk therein is of returning to a 'command and control' rather than partnership approach to service specification development and delivery, not to mention missing the valuable intelligence the VCS can often provide to inform the Needs Assessment.
- In some areas like Norfolk and Cambridgeshire, the children, young people and families (CYPF) agenda felt lost within wider Local Area Agreement and generic voluntary sector issues. With the CYPVCS representing roughly half of the VCS nationally, there is a strong argument to further develop specialist support and engagement for this part of the sector.
- Only four of the 10 Trusts are currently reporting on the level of investment in the VCS. With many Trusts beginning to adopt the 'NI7 Healthy Third Sector' LAA target, monitoring the value of direct investment in the VCS seems foundational.

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

The level of response from the VCS across is only sufficient to give an illustrative picture. The general challenge of getting the sector to respond to surveys in addition to other demands, including delivery of their services, is noted. This piece of work also coincided with the *N17 Health Third Sector*, Office of the Third Sector baseline survey which has affected response levels. The language of ‘commissioning’ was also acknowledged as a challenge, with different areas using different terms and different levels of engagement of the sector. Figures below use the whole un-weighted data set.

Level of response across the region

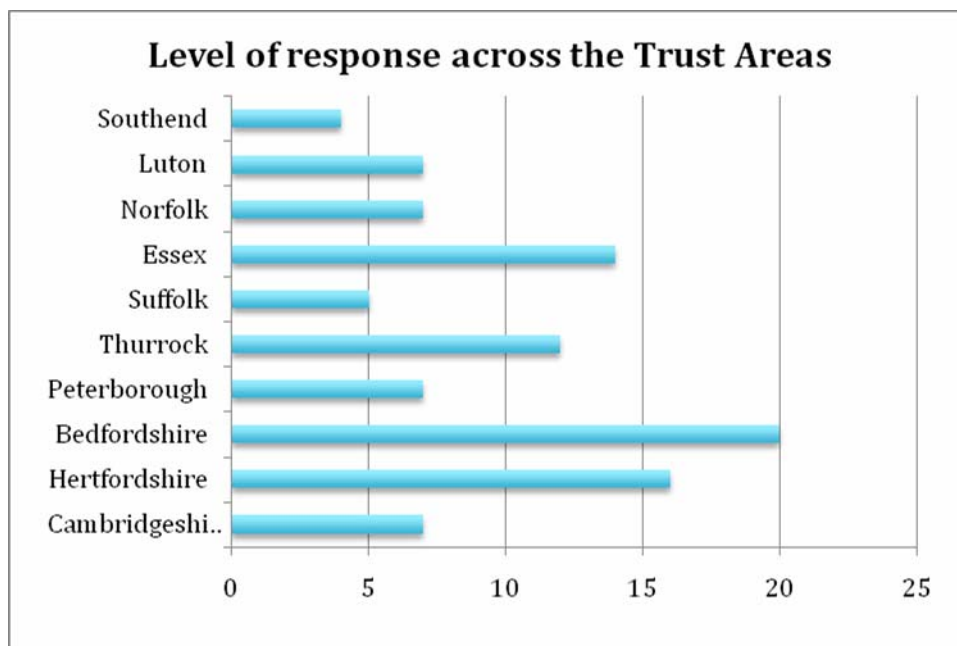


Figure 2 Level of response from each Children's Trust area across the East

Strong response levels from Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Thurrock perhaps reflect the focussed progress these areas have made with Joint Commissioning. At the time of the survey there was also a review being conducted by Essex on how long to award contracts for, which may have accounted for a high response from that area.

The main service delivery areas of the responding organisations were:

- Children's Centre's
- Parenting
- Counselling and family support
- Infrastructure support.

Application of “Gershon Principles”

Underpinning effective commissioning from the VCS are four key principles of: stability of funding, timing of payments / balance of risk, full cost recovery, and reducing the burden of bureaucracy. The graphs in Figure 3 illustrate respondents’ experiences in these areas.

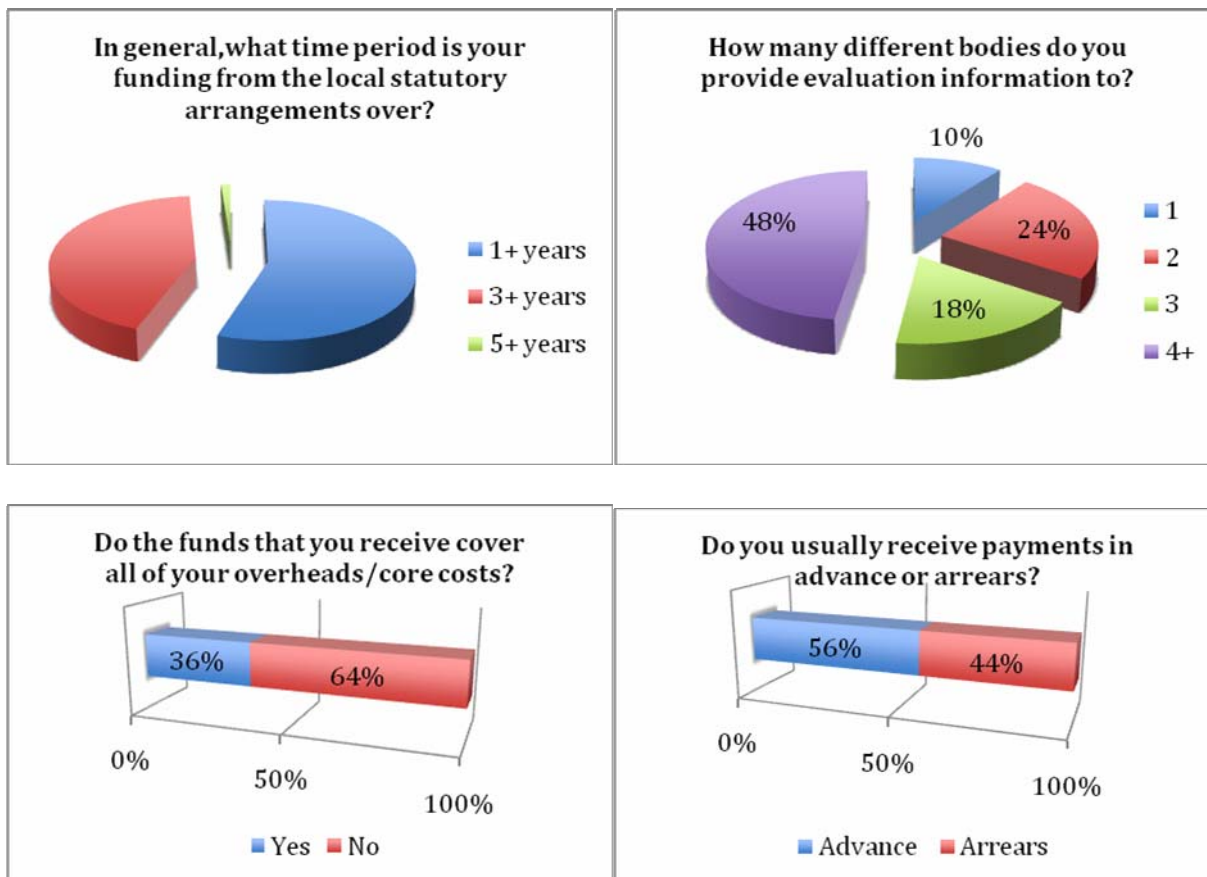


Figure 3. VCS Response to questions addressing Gershon principles

Stability of Funding

The majority of organisations responding were still in receipt of 1 year funding. This may be a spike caused by roll-overs of existing funding contracts while joint commissioning processes take shape across the region. However, respondents illustrated the difficulties one year funding arrangements can cause:

“This type of funding has led to difficulty at the end of each quarter as the funding does not always come through on time. Twice notice of possible redundancy has been issued because of the need for charities to have sustainability for three months wages. Three years should be the norm.”

“Our organisation receives funds each year from Beds CC and Luton Council to run. We have to apply for these each year and are never sure if the amount we need will be granted. We only ask for a proportion of the money that is needed to run the setting and the short fall is made up for by other trusts and funds we apply to. This means that we are never sure that we will be able to give the

service we want to, to our clients: who are all very vulnerable children, or give us the security of planning the future. Whilst funding is dealt with in this way, settings such as ours find it hard to progress to giving the service they would like to and clients deserve”.

A respondent from Bedfordshire also highlighted the impact of local government re-organisation on the stability of funding:

“Bedfordshire was moving to 3+ years but the move to two new unitaries has thrown this progress out and contracts have been rolled over (no formal confirmation as yet...) for a further year pending review, so the voluntary sector remains in an unstable position despite having some significant contracts such as children’s centres.”

Reducing the burden of bureaucracy

90% of responding organisations state they are providing evaluation data to more than one body. Respondents commented that evaluation forms are different for each local body they report to, as well as varying across the region. This causes extra complexity for organisations in collecting evidence and providing monitoring information, and consumes time not spent on service delivery.

Many organisations also commented on the need to report internally e.g. to trustees. Those organisations that are branches of regional or national charities can also be required to provide reporting to their central offices e.g. :

“The evaluation required is different in every case plus we work to three different business plans” (Essex, Southend and national organisation)

Full cost recovery

The VCS clearly feel there is insufficient understanding of the true costs of services, and highlighted the variation of full cost recovery from contract-to-contract.

“Counselling meets less than 50% costs. Transitions meets the full costs. YIP funding has remained same for a number of years (comes from YJB through to YOS) and doesn’t meet full costs. We have to go to other funders/donors to make up shortfalls”

However, one organisation belonging to a national network stated:

“We ensure full cost recovery for all contracts”

The current downturn also appears to be having an impact on recovery of costs:

“Although Cambridgeshire have been very supportive in many ways the pressure to absorb cost of living increases is concerning”

With the increased national focus on commissioning from the VCS and Private Sectors, understanding the full cost of services is ever more important. The challenge for the VCS

is to ensure it highlights how the services they deliver add value, given that the costs of staffing, supervision and overheads can become increasingly similar to statutory or private provision.

The timing of payments and the balance of risk

- The majority of respondents reported payment of contracts in advance showing the good understanding of issues faced by charities in funding cash flow.
- Respondents were asked about the payment terms: 38% said they received payment within 30 days of invoice, 26% indicating payment was received between 30 – 45 days, and 32% stating payment terms were inconsistent.
- The respondents also highlighted the level of liability insurance cover required by procurement contracts can sometimes be prohibitively high, and is not always commensurate with the service in question.
- The challenge of maintaining pensions and benefits where staff are TUPE'd from statutory to VCS employers as services were commissioned out, was also raised.

Engagement and Progress in the Commissioning Journey

A series of questions addressed the progress of commissioning, awareness and engagement in the sector and the overall level of year-on-year income. The graphs in Figure 4 illustrate the VCS's response.

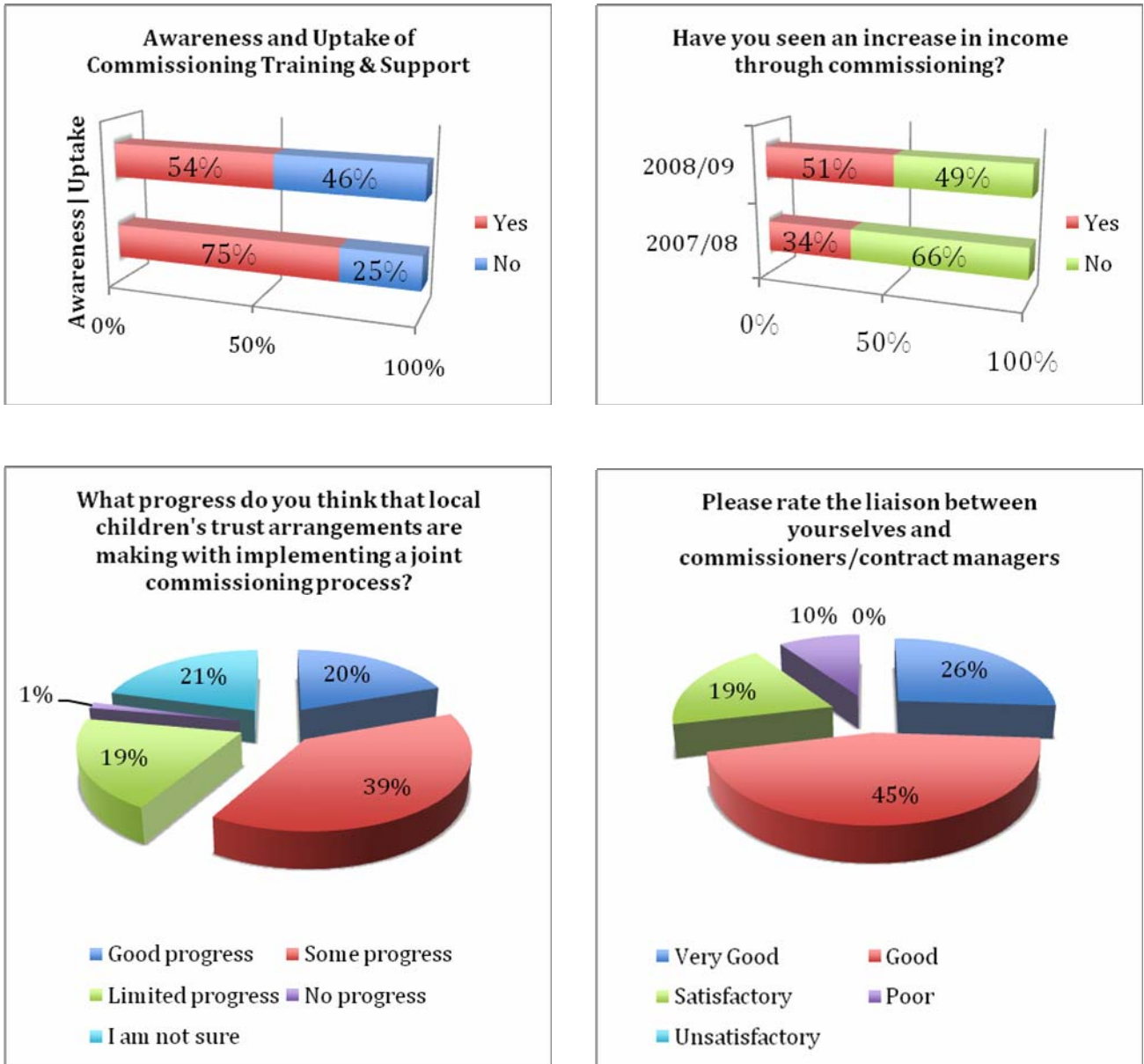


Figure 4. VCS response to questions probing the progress and engagement with commissioning.

Increases in funding

Overall the respondents indicated that income through commissioning had increased during the last year. This paints a picture of positive progress for the sector in the region.

Relationships

- Overall the relationship with Commissioners and Contract Managers appears good. There has been significant effort across the region in ensuring partnership in the development of commissioning and monitoring processes, which appears to be paying dividends.
- Comments from the VCS clearly acknowledge the challenges of moving to Joint Commissioning processes both for statutory sector, and the VCS itself.
- Anecdotal observation during the research was that Commissioners with a background in the VCS had both a better awareness of the issues of the sector, but were also able to be robust in pushing through changes. The observation could point toward an idea of Commissioners spending some time within each of the sectors they commission from, in order to bring that first-hand understanding of the culture and challenges. As Children's Trusts are increasingly seen as one workforce, this idea of spending orientation time in each 'department' of the Trust could help improve understanding, engagement and speed change.

Awareness and uptake of training

- 75% of the VCS indicated they were aware of training and support being offered around commissioning, with over 50% up taking this offer.
- In a changing policy and funding environment, the challenge for the VCS, especially smaller VCS organisations, is to keep up with thinking and progress. Commissioning and procurement processes adopt a more business like model, and therefore there is ongoing need to support the sector's growth and development to meet the challenges of this changing environment.

Progress

- 59% felt progress was being made in the Joint Commissioning process giving grounds for optimism.
- However, a number of comments were made about organisations not understanding when other funding streams were going to be 'commissioned', posing a challenge for Commissioners to more clearly highlight their strategy and chart progress, or risk damaging relationships with the VCS :

"There is no clear timetable of what will be commissioned and when. Unclear whether counselling will be commissioned or not. It has taken a year to get our first project through commissioning. Too many staff changes within Commissioning Team"

“A good deal of trust and joint working seems threatened and there is a lot of confusion about what should be commissioned and how. There is a lot of competition from the LA's own provider services and the playing field is still less than even”

“Further information on commissioning of services would be beneficial - who and where”

- Another respondent pointed to the early stage of development many Trusts are at, therefore reserving judgment on progress.

“I don't think that there is enough knowledge on this subject for us all to be completely comfortable with it”

“The tender process in Thurrock was an obvious learning curve for the council. We would like to express our concerns about this process at some point as some of the tender questions were aimed at the business and statutory sector.”

General Comment from Respondents

A number of other general comments were made by respondents:

“We are looking into finding out more about commissioning and growing our organisation. We can see that if we do not go down the commissioning route we could have less funding from the local councils. Our greatest difficulty is finding the additional manpower resources and expertise within our organisation to do this. Everyone is overloaded with their current workload and we would need to appoint someone to learn how to commission and price up services, know the legal obligations etc. Even with commissioned services I am sure we will still need to apply for funding and report to funders from other sources.”

“We have concerns that as we rely totally on money coming from trusts and fundraising initiatives that we will lose money due to the fact that we are not able to engage with the commissioning process. We also have the impression that child bereavement is being included by some organisations in the wider remit of counselling to enable them to receive funding. This is not giving a specified or quality service to bereaved children.”

“The Suffolk County Council Commissioning Strategy Group on which I sit is just beginning to formulate a framework of mixed funding for the voluntary sector that all comes under the heading of Commissioning although I am not sure that groups who are currently receiving funding from the CYP will necessarily recognise some aspects of this survey. Personally I am happy with progress because we are not rushing into a procurement led process.”

Children Matters East Members Forum

Discussions at Children Matter East's member's forum identified a number other issues not addressed elsewhere:

- The Joint Commissioning process is a cultural change, which should be learnt from and therefore should be further resourced.
- An internal call from the VCS to take a proactive approach in producing regional "good commissioning guidance" but an acknowledgement of limited resources.
- A suggestion of providing a focus group forum between senior VCS leaders and Commissioners regionally.
- A lack of legal confidence of the sector.
- Anecdotal feelings that Children's Trusts are trying to force partnership and consortia working on the VCS, without providing any support, funding or the development of models and understanding of the process.

The area of Partnership working in particular needs further exploration and resourcing. VCS organisations are being increasingly challenged to form partnerships and consortia in order to bid for funding, and meet needs. There are significant longer-term ramifications to any partnership and there are few resources and even guidance to help organisations navigate this process successfully.

SUMMARY OF VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

- There is a lack of clarity about if, how and when Children's Trusts intend to implement the Commissioning process across all sources of funding going into the VCS from Trusts.
- The need for increased engagement of the VCS in the 'needs analysis' phase, identified in the Statutory Sector section of the report was again highlighted.
- A number of the responses indicate there is still a lack of clarity in the sector around what joint commissioning is. There is still confusion about the meaning of words like 'commissioning', often just interpreted as a euphemism for 'funding', without a real understanding and engagement in the underlying processes.
- Whilst there is a clear feeling of progress in the implementation of Joint Commissioning strategies across the region, and recognition of the need to engage, concerns were highlighted regarding VCS organisations being able to 'keep pace' with the changes.
- The awareness and uptake of Commissioning training opportunities show the success of this approach in engaging the sector. **The need to continue to commit specialist resources to these sorts of programmes would appear clearly justified as part of a package of resourcing the change processes.**
- There are still challenges around the stability of funding arrangements, with over half the organisations reporting 1 year funding arrangements.
- The burden of reporting, full cost recovery for the sector and prompt payment of invoices are also all identified as simple issues that undermine progress, and need to be addressed robustly.
- Further investigation is needed into the apparent pressure, yet lack of resources for partnership working.
- This research indicates an increase in funding for the sector, but has not been able to quantify this increase in real terms.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clear Expectations was a small piece of work funded by the VCS Engage programme in the Eastern region. However, as well as mapping the progress of each Children's Trust area the study has highlighted a number of key issues for the region to consider :

- Trusts need to clarify their wider strategic plans with regards to Commissioning, the sector is increasingly confused about the direction of travel i.e. will all funding be subject to the commissioning process, when and how.
- Whilst clear progress is being made the VCS are not universally engaged in the needs assessment phases. Whilst the position is improving more needs to be done to support the sectors engagement at point in the process.
- Simple issues, such as stability of funding; timing of payments / balance of risk; full cost recovery; and reducing the burden of bureaucracy - are still not fully resolved and serve to undermine progress in other areas.
- The continuing high prevalence of 1 year funding needs addressing
- The difference in the mechanisms of commissioning and procurement across the region presents a confusing and challenging scenario to the VCS. The development and adoption of a regional commissioning framework should be explored to support the progress of all partners. This should be supported by a regional activity to enable Commissioners and the VCS to support cross-sector and cross-regional learning.
- Governance arrangements need to be addressed robustly in order to ensure impartial and effective decision making, including robust arrangements to manage the commissioner / provider split in many Trust areas.
- There also need to be a strengthening in the engagement of VCS providers in some areas, to support the strong engagement of infrastructure organisations. **This should encompass support for commissioners and their colleagues with clear revised VCS supported guidance on what constitutes good sector engagement across Children Trusts.**