

Commissioning public-funded culture, sport and leisure services in South West England

BRIEFING PAPER

FEBRUARY 2014

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of commissioning public services, and in particular strategic commissioning relevant to those who outsource culture, sport and leisure services. Policy context and definitions are introduced and an 'eight step' framework that is widely used by local councils and agencies. Practical resources are cited throughout the paper, including toolkits, advice and guidance documents, useful websites of specialist support organisations, case studies and major reports. The briefing raises some key challenges and opportunities for commissioning bodies who face a rapidly changing public sector landscape and new conditions for 'faster, cheaper and more effective' service delivery.

Introduction

Commissioning is broadly defined as an activity that involves a series of actions, from needs assessment, through resource allocation, to the procurement of goods and/ or service that best meet those needs within available means. Variations to definition and conceptualisation of this activity are prevalent, but at their core are notions of cost-savings, effectiveness and efficiency in pursuit of best possible outcomes.

The principle rationale for outsourcing (and de-commissioning) of public services and assets is twofold. First, a policy of decentralisation and empowering the local citizen and local community, voluntary and charity groups (a.k.a. 'the third sector'); and second, a policy of maximising public value (monetary and social). Over the past decade, commissioning has become a familiar practice in some parts of the public sector, and notably in health and social care services. Under Coalition Government, the Localism Act 2011, Public Service (Social Value) Act, 2012 and Community Right to Bid legislation have accelerated the shift towards greater procurement

from, and contracting with, external organisations.¹ In particular, charities, voluntary and community groups and social enterprise organisations have acquired new rights to deliver public services as well as take control of ‘assets of community value’ (DCLG, October 2012, p.7).² Discussion of community assets lies outside the scope of this paper but suffice to say ‘third sector’ organisations are playing a central role in the transfer and transformation of public assets and services.³

A key element of new commissioning practices is a ‘bottom up’ approach that engages local community groups and citizens (including young people) from the outset.⁴ De-centralisation of powers away from Whitehall departments, and devolution of public service delivery to private and third sector organisations across England began under Labour administrations during the 2000s. Since 2008, economic crisis, a new administration, and major cuts to public spending budgets have dramatically changed the commissioning landscape. Political and economic circumstances have triggered new and innovative ways of thinking about service delivery and the nature of ‘public value’. Critically, national and local public bodies have prioritised the development of transparent, accountable and effective commissioning processes, whilst maximising ‘value for money’ and ensuring social benefit. Achievement of these objectives is proving a challenge for commissioners whose decisions must take account of commercial alongside not-for-profit interests.

An evaluation of a Local Government Improvement and Development (previously known as iDeA) pilot of strategic commissioning found that numerical project outputs (number of contracts, monetary savings etcetera) are not necessarily compatible with longer term societal outcomes (for example, healthier, happier, safer citizens). The latter may take time to evaluate

¹ For further legal guidance on procurement, see Procurement policy note 10/12: Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/79273/Public_Services_Social_Value_Act_2012_PPN.pdf.

² Cabinet Office (Office for Civil Society) and DCLG websites provide official information and guidance on the implications of the Localism Act 2011 to procurement and contracting with, for example, charities, voluntary groups and social enterprises - see <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-people-more-power-over-what-happens-in-their-neighbourhood/supporting-pages/community-right-to-bid>. For an example of how the ‘Community Right to Bid’ legislation is applied, see East Devon District Council website that offers guidance, application form and a short list of successful and unsuccessful applications for an ‘asset of community value’ - see http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/plg_commassetsreg.pdf.

³ An introduction to social enterprise in relation to the cultural sector and government policy is given in *Social Enterprise in relation to developing and delivering culture, media and sport governmental policy – Briefing Paper* (November 2013) – see <http://www.juleschannerassociates.co.uk/resources/Briefing+Paper+on+Culture++Social+Enterprise+Nov+13+PDF.pdf>.

⁴ A case study of engaging young people in the commissioning process is provided by Dorset County Council. Starting with children’s services and health education services, the council is implementing an 8-step model which has been recognised by Ofsted as an ‘outstanding’ example of engaging young people. Available at <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/youth/vlpdetails.aspx?lpeid=453>.

(LGID, March 2011a). Notwithstanding, Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) encourages a positive approach to *modernising commissioning* and observes:

[] it is important to regard this not simply as a transfer of services but an opportunity to transform services (LGID, January 2011, p.9).

Setting aside the practicalities of small scale and one-off commissioning, this paper focuses on 'strategic commissioning' whereby a public body (such as local council or Department for Culture, Media and Sport/DCMS sponsored body) procures goods and services from an external organisation, in order to deliver outputs and outcomes as set out in a departmental service agreement and/ or corporate business plan. In other words, strategic commissioning requires high level leadership and a longer term vision than that of a one-off, short-term commissioned project. This shift to bigger public commissioning and a business-orientated approach is explained in, for example, the *Modernising Commissioning Green Paper* (Cabinet Office, December 2010) and - in terms of culture, sport and leisure services - work undertaken by Local Government Association (LGA) and Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) (Allison, May 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; LGID, January 2011; LGA *et al*, July 2012).

Most recently, government has set up the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) to help implement the policy of Buying and managing government goods and services more efficiently and effectively (Cabinet Office, January 2014). With a staff rising to 1,000, CCS aims to make procurement in the public sector 'faster, cheaper and more effective'.

A cycle of commissioning processes

Strategic commissioning is widely understood as a cycle of processes (Eventus, 2012; LGID, June 2011; Thomas, July 2013) and involves four main stages of implementation:

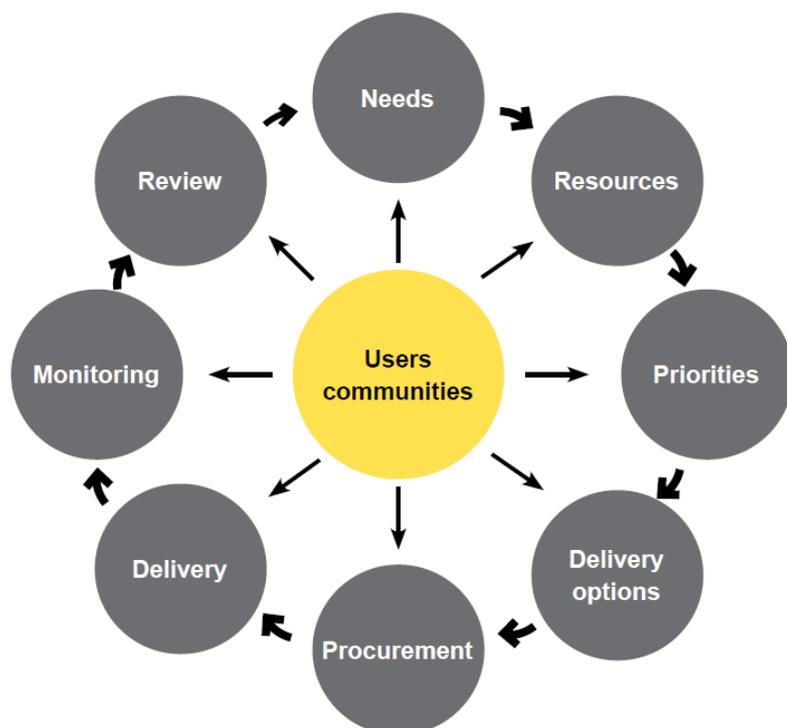
- Understand: assessing and analysing the needs of people in a geographic or policy area;
- Plan: designing and planning services on the basis of the needs assessment;
- Do: procuring the appropriate services (that may involve the award of public funds/grants);
- Review: reviewing progress of the service delivery, evaluating the impact of intervention and then informing future commissioning.

A cyclical approach is conceptualised as one of eight key steps: initiate, investigate, incubate, collaborate, negotiate, activate, consolidate and evaluate.

An 'eight principles' framework and practical guidance are described in a series of documents and guidance papers targeted at a local government readership (Allison, May 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; LGID, June 2011; Local Government Group, August 2013). While there are variations to how the framework is explained, it is viewed as a systematic and cyclical approach (see Figure 1 below and also Footnote 4).

Figure 1: Schematic of the commissioning cycle

The commissioning cycle



Source: Local Government Group (June 2011) *Understanding Commissioning: a practical guide for the culture and sport sector*, LGA.

Based on a pilot of the 8-step cyclical approach to culture, sport and leisure services (LGID, March 2011b, p.98), research found commissioning is most effective when:

- applying a model of integrated commissioning that follows a cycle of needs assessment, shared priorities and allocation of resources, monitoring and evaluation
- putting residents at the heart of the commissioning process: the idea being that key players direct a cycle of cultural activity **with** residents that develops to the stage that allows the more strategic roles to withdraw and still leave the cycle of activity growing and developing but much more within the control of the community
- positioning culture within the customer journey through alignment with the integrated neighbourhood management work, for example ensuring that information about cultural opportunities is included in information provided to residents and that frontline service

providers are aware of the potential benefits of cultural participation and able to signpost residents to opportunities

- building long-term sustainable relationships between residents and cultural providers: the activities can and should develop according to the preferences of the participants but will also depend on what the cultural organisation are programming
- including voluntary and community sector partners – both large and small scale local community based groups and voluntary sector organisations to deliver services
- building a network for information sharing and joint delivery across cultural organisations who work in the area.

Culture, sport and leisure policy and the commissioning process

Nationally, Government's culture, sport and leisure policies are primarily the responsibility of the DCMS, with some shared by other departments including Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Department of Education (DoE). DCMS' departmental priorities (DCMS, 2012) are to increase adult and child participation and engagement in cultural and creative activities – covering: performance and visual arts, crafts, creative media (e.g. design, film and television, publishing, games and interactive media), heritage, libraries and archives, museums and galleries, sports and recreation. Alongside cultural goals,

DCMS policies cover: growth of the UK's creative and visitor economy; cultural education of children and young people; broadband connectivity; social goals of a fair and equal Britain; citizens' wellbeing and quality of life including cultural and sport participation, and the protection, conservation and access to Britain's cultural heritage and landscape. Thus, the process of commissioning public-funded culture, sport and leisure services by national and local public bodies often involves a complex mesh of different service areas, policies, user groups, resources and multiple outcomes. This complexity poses considerable challenges to commissioners, but equally opens up opportunities for new and innovative procurement models, diverse public-private partnerships and direct input from local community organisations.

Useful sources of advice, guidance, toolkits and resources

The following list (alphabetical) identifies some useful sources of advice, guidance, toolkits and other resources that relate to (de)commissioning culture, sport and leisure services.

Arts Council England

see Cultural Commissioning Programme below and also at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-funding/funding-programmes/cultural-commissioning-grant/>. An Advocacy Toolkit provides facts and figures on the value of culture, and rationale for public investment in arts and culture at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/advocacy/>.

Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA)

A membership organisation for senior managers and leaders working in the public sector, CLOA offers support through collaborative working with strategic partners, and a website. Projects include practical guidance, toolkits and an annual conference with the Local Government Association (see below) that tackles policy issues. For example, the 2014 conference (3-4 March 2014) is titled 'Leading Places: making the most of your cultural and sport assets'. Specific to commissioning is a publication produced with the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA):

- *Improving Culture, Arts and Sporting Opportunities through Planning: A Good Practice Guide* (June 2013) at http://www.cloa.org.uk/images/stories/2013-06-18_TCPA_GUIDE_FINAL_DRAFT.pdf

Compact Voice

Compact Voice represents large and small voluntary and community sector organisations, producing resources for engagement with local councils, and lobbying Government on behalf of 'third sector' interests. Of relevance here are two publications:

- The Compact (2011) provides the basic principles of an agreement, and effective working relationship, between a national or local government body and a voluntary and community sector (VCO) organisation, Compact Voice, online http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_compact.pdf
- *Understanding Commissioning and Procurement: A guide for local Compacts* (July 2013) Compact Voice, online <http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/resources/publications/commissioning>

Cultural Commissioning Programme, NCVO

Launched in January 2014 and funded by Arts Council England, the Cultural Commissioning Programme is led by National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). The programme is aimed at cultural sector organizations and activity aims to help build organisations' capacity to

engage in public contracts and commissions. Based on research, the programme is framed around three themes of: older people, mental health, and place-based commissions. More information at <http://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/public-services/cultural-commissioning-programme?highlight=WyJjdWx0dXJhbClmNvbW1pc3Npb25pbmciLCJjdWx0dXJhbCBjb21taXNzaW9uaW5nIl0>.

Local Government Association (LGA)

LGA is a dedicated source of support and information for local government officers and elected members, and offers various downloadable briefing notes, toolkits and practical guidance papers on commissioning public services including 'culture, sport and leisure'. Many of the publications are jointly produced with other public bodies. Examples are:

- *Buying into Communities*

This guide introduces EU Regulations on procurement and contracting, with case studies to show how local councils have used them to advantage. Annexes cover the relationship between government legislation and EU regulations. LGA, online at http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=a50a32e6-0caf-44a1-9682-7c3373ac0d1f&groupId=10180

- *Engaging in Commissioning Resource Pack* (2010)

Put together by LGA, Sport England, Arts Council England and Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA), this resource pack goes through the '8 principles' framework for commissioning with practical information on who commissioners are and how to find them. Online at <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11443/L12-577+Overview+fulla/cc947a14-0dea-46c2-a97a-27be1a00b088>

- *Our Place!*

Published by LGA and DCLG, the Our Place! approach is introduced which aims to give communities and neighbourhoods the opportunity to take control of 'community assets of value' and tackle local issues. Online at <http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/11529/Our+Place+-+version+2/f2c22713-ea54-4729132-b9b4cb5c76e8>

- *Our Place! Community Engagement: A guide to what we learnt* (July 2013)

This publication guides local authorities through different methods for engaging communities with the Our Place! approach to community budgets and decision-making.

Online at http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6df0cfa9-0445-4b2a-9d29-ca898eeb81f4&groupId=1018

- *Putting culture and sport at the heart of strategic commissioning: Councillor briefing note*
Key information about commissioning is provided for local councillors who are either responsible for culture, leisure and sport services, or are responsible for health, children's services and adult care and are considering the role of culture, leisure and sport in addressing local needs. online at http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/culture-and-sport-improvement/-/journal_content/56/10171/3691752/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

- *Social Value Publications*: a short listing of publications on social value impact and statutory requirements vis-à-vis economic, social and environmental well-being in relation to public service contracts. Online at http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=eb5970a2-9b26-41a0-9a4e-0d7b5ec1d5a4&groupId=1018

- *Understanding commissioning: a practical guide for the culture and sport sector* (June 2011)
This publication is designed to help those in the culture and sport sector understand the process of strategic commissioning. It provides information on how to engage in commissioning and produce better outcomes for communities, and how to develop a greater understanding of strategic commissioning, opportunities and challenges, and some tools to help the commissioning process. Online at http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/culture-tourism-and-sport/-/journal_content/56/10171/3510882/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE and http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/culture-tourism-and-sport/-/journal_content/56/10171/3510882/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE

Sport England Procurement Toolkit (May 2013)

Sport England's website contains extensive resources for the strategic planning of sport services including a procurement toolkit. Advice and guidance on contracting and procurement includes a code of practice, template contract documents and information on outcomes and available at <http://www.sportengland.org/media/143024/a-procurement-toolkit-final-130513.pdf>.

The National Archives

Information about selecting and transferring public archive material (for example, public records and collections) is available on The National Archives website, including advice and guidance at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/our-services/selection-and-transfer.htm>.

Examples of commissioning practice in South West England

The following examples illustrate a range of practices and procedures developed by local councils in South West England:

Bath and North East Somerset Council

B&NES *Arts Development Strategy 2011-2014* online at

<http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/Executive/WL/2010/100611/01E2009zAppx1ArtsDevelopmentStrategy.pdf> highlights the role of voluntary sector arts organisations in delivering local services. A key partner in B&NES commissioning process is the Cultural Forum for the Bath Area (<http://cfba.org.uk/>) who advise on local cultural service needs and how best to respond to cultural development in the local area and new place-shaping strategy.

Bristol City Council

Bristol City Council sets out its strategic commissioning plans in *Commissioning and Procurement Intentions 2012 to 2013* (<http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/business-bristol/enabling-commissioning#jump-link-9>). Emphasis is placed on inter-departmental strategic thinking on, for example, children's services, housing and planning, arts and culture, highways, and waste.

Cornwall Council

A main priority for Cornwall Council that is articulated in the 'green paper' for active lifestyles (<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=28300>) and 'white paper on culture' (<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=17634>) is the development of a joined up approach to improve communications between organisations and different service areas. See also the *Economy and Culture Strategy 2013-2020* (September 2013) (<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=21961>).

Creative Gloucestershire

A practical guide is available for cultural commissioning in Gloucestershire that is aimed at the voluntary and community sector and available at

http://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/public_services/cultural-commissioning/Create%20Gloucestershire.pdf.

Devon County Council

Devon County Council published a strategic plan 2011-15 online at <http://new.devon.gov.uk/strategicplan/files/2011/11/dcc-strategic-plan.pdf> that prioritises the commissioning of services from external organisations. Activity focuses on improvements to health and well being, as well as to learning, cultural participation and volunteering. In terms of cultural participation, Beaford Arts and Daisi have been commissioned to provide (in partnership with other arts organisations) a programme of participatory projects that increase engagement (http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/cultureheritage/culture/arts-culture/arts-dcc_and_arts/commissionsforartsactivity.htm). Commissions over three-years - April 2013 to March 2016 – each receive an award of £300,000. Further information about procurement opportunities in the Devon Procurement Partnership area (including Torbay and Plymouth) are available via the Devon Contract Portal at <https://www.supplyingthesouthwest.org.uk/systems/devoncms.nsf/vLiveDocs/59020D1CF421499B8025781600553DB4?OpenDocument>.

Dorset Cultural Partnership

Dorset County Council's leadership of the Dorset Cultural Partnership provides an example of cross-artform, cross-service area collaboration on strategic thinking on culture, sport and leisure issues including new projects, investments and the new Cultural Strategy 2015-2020. The partnership's work can be followed via meeting minutes at <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/393172>

Plymouth City Council

Working with the Plymouth Culture Board (<http://www.plymouthculture.org/pcb>), University of Plymouth and local colleges, the council's approach to service delivery and cultural enhancement is based on partnership. The council is a member of the Devon Procurement Partnership (see above).

Poole Borough Council

A strong connection is made by Poole Borough Council between cultural development and community learning. For example, *Culture and Community Learning Service Unit Business Plan 2013/14* (<http://www.boroughofpoole.com/your-council/how-the-council-works/strategies-plans-and-policies/culture-and-community-learning-business-plan/>). Council partnership with local cultural organisations is a critical element of how commissioning is undertaken.

Torbay Council

Torbay Council's 10-year strategy for arts and culture set out in *Arts Strategy 2006-2016*, (<http://www.torbay.gov.uk/arts-strategy.pdf>) articulates a multi-partnership approach, including local community groups, developers and planners, and public agencies.

Key challenges and opportunities

Through review of literature on strategic commissioning in relation to culture, sport and leisure services, the following challenges and opportunities are suggested.

- a better understanding and closer integration of practices and procedures used by national and local commissioning bodies: 'faster, cheaper and more effective' commissioning relies on a good understanding and connection between those working in the commissioning landscape;
- commissioning models and practices must be 'fit for purpose': while public bodies have scope to choose a model that best suits their user communities, they can also learn from each others' experiences as well as develop new and innovative models (for example, bigger commissions across service areas, collaborative commissioning between local councils and public-funded agencies).
- local cultural partnerships: multi-organisation groups (of local councils, cultural organisations, universities, colleges, development agencies *et al*) provide commissioning bodies with an effective means of engaging and assessing local needs (see Examples section and Bibliography);
- attention to the legalities of statutory obligations and EU procurement regulations: commissioning bodies have legal and regulatory responsibilities that carry over into (de)commissioned service contracts and agreements;
- a balance between social outcomes and cost-savings: maximisation of social return on public investment may sometimes prove challenging to both commissioner and commissioned, and particularly when budgets are fixed;
- evidence of public (social) value: long term (longitudinal) evaluation studies and measurement methodologies are not yet fully developed for the new commissioning models; also, notions of 'public value' may differ between parties involved in a commission (such as different service areas, partner bodies, new suppliers);
- skills and professional development needs of commissioning bodies: a new multi-service area 'joined up' approach requires new skills and understanding by staff involved in the

various commissioning processes; findings of a pilot study (LGID, March 2011, p. 13) found the language used by different service areas posed a barrier to good working relationships and shared understanding of tasks;

- and training seminars for external organisations: applicants and commissioned organisations need to learn, for example, new procedures and policy thinking, what constitutes 'social value', reporting and evaluation requirements.

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AUTHOR Dr Jules Channer
DATE February 2014
PUBLISHER Jules Channer Associates
WEBSITE <http://www.juleschannerassociates.co.uk/4.html>