



2007-2008
*Increasing Voluntary
and Community Sector
Service Delivery*



Case Study No. 10 – Croydon’s Commissioning Framework

INTRODUCTION

Croydon is committed to increasing voluntary and community sector (VCS) service delivery and building on the best practice that has secured its Beacon Status. A key component of this success has been developing a new and robust Commissioning Framework in partnership with the VCS that will lead to a common approach to commissioning across all agencies in the Local Strategic Partnership.

The main purpose of this case study is to show how Croydon has developed its work around commissioning, using a number of tried and tested critical success factors as the basis for the new framework. They are:

- trust and openness;
- involvement of the VCS as equal partners;
- compact way of working;
- partnership mechanisms;
- regular dialogue with VCS;
- senior accountability;
- commitment to capacity building;
- accessing external funding, and
- a shared commitment to improving commissioning at the highest level in all partner agencies.

Building on this best practice, the Commissioning Framework is designed to help all commissioning agencies within Croydon’s Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to take a more considered and consistent approach to funding and contracting with the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Main VCS providers are in health, social care, education, vocational education services, recreation, culture and sporting activities.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

A template for good practice in commissioning VCS

An initial report on commissioning from the VCS perspective was produced by Croydon Voluntary Action. This report identified the following points as the key

components for developing a successful and transparent commissioning process in Croydon. The Chief Executives of all Croydon LSP agencies have signed up to these good practice points. Organisations seeking to develop a robust Commissioning Framework for the VCS can use this template as a foundation for good practice.

Steps which need to be addressed at a strategic level:

1. Compact principles are mainstreamed into the commissioning process.
2. Barriers to VCS involvement in service delivery are identified and removed.
3. The contribution of VCS is maximised throughout the procurement/ commissioning cycle.
4. A focus on outcomes.
5. Move towards increasing service delivery by VCS.
6. The VCS becomes a major contributor to the reform of the delivery of public services.

Practical steps which can be incorporated into commissioning plans:

1. The principle of Full Cost Recovery is understood and accepted.
2. Voluntary Sector Organisation (VCO) stability is improved by moving to multi-year funding arrangements.
3. There is appropriate assignment of risk between the commissioning body and the VCO when contracting for service provision.
4. Monitoring, regulatory and reporting requirements are streamlined and rationalised.

Commissioning Framework

The framework draws on existing best practice in commissioning that has been implemented by the Children and Young People's Partnership; Children's Fund; Healthy Croydon Partnership; Croydon Primary Care Trust (PCT) Compact Commissioning Group; Voluntary Sector Provider Strategy - Older People, People with Physical Disabilities and Sensory Impairment; Supporting People Programme and Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI).

The framework was developed in partnership with the VCS, who have strong links with Croydon's diverse communities. Feedback from service users and communities is an essential part of the process; involvement at the outset helps to improve effectiveness further down the line by ensuring that the services being commissioned are ones which address genuine needs in ways that are tailored appropriately to the range of potential service users.

There are numerous benefits to using the new framework:

- A streamlined commissioning process enables VCS providers to compete equally for contracts and is designed for use by all LSP partners
- Clarifies and formalises practices which helps reduce barriers and increase opportunities for VCS service delivery
- Ensures consistency is applied across all themed partnerships
- Gives the VCS equal access to resources for the delivery of aspects of Croydon's Local Area Agreement

The framework further strengthens the relationship between commissioners and service providers, building a strong foundation on which to build greater VCS involvement in the delivery of public services. Local commissioners can also work more effectively in developing joint commissioning opportunities using a common framework. This will ultimately lead to better, more cost effective and more user oriented services for the community, aiding the ultimate objective of better outcomes for service users.

A copy of the Framework is available at:

<http://www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/performance/beaconawards/ivcs>.

Implementation

The implementation of the Commissioning Framework is overseen by the Strengthening Communities Partnership officer group, comprising senior officers from the council, PCT, police and VCS. All commissioners are invited to participate in the Commissioning Framework Group, which also includes senior managers from commissioning departments and representatives of the VCS.

A key element of the implementation plan is a structured assessment of current practice in each commissioning area and the development of individual action plans to address areas of improvement. These individual action plans become the basis for a corporate action plan.

Full implementation of the new commissioning regime is planned for 2008/09. It has therefore been important to sustain momentum and maintain interest through identifying 'quick wins'. These have included the development of a corporate database and funding management system and the introduction of a new corporate monitoring and evaluation scheme.

GOOD PRACTICE POINTS

VCS Involvement

Croydon has a good track record of involvement of the VCS through its Local Strategic Partnership structure. The development of the Commissioning Framework built on this. A key element of VCS involvement was the decision to commission a report from the sector on commissioning at the beginning of the process. This report provided a valuable VCS perspective on the existing good (and not so good) practice which already existed. It also provided a set of key principles which LSP agencies signed up to before the substantive work on the framework commenced.

VCS involvement has continued with representation on key groups, such as the Strengthening Communities Partnership and the Commissioning Framework Group. The Voluntary Sector Senior Managers' Group has also acted as a reference group.

Build on existing good practice

Identifying and building on existing good practice is more likely to have a successful outcome than parachuting in the perfect model. Detailed work was carried out with commissioners to identify existing good practice and this, together with best practice examples found elsewhere, formed the core of the framework. While this was a consuming and resource intensive method, it achieved a high level of 'buy in' from commissioners in the final framework.

Senior management involvement

The demonstration of commitment of senior managers has had a significant influence on the participation of commissioners. There has been a very good level of engagement by commissioners. However, engagement has been lowest in services where there has been no demonstrable commitment from senior managers.

The commitment of Members of the Council to a consistent approach to commissioning has also been a powerful driver, particularly from the Deputy Leader and the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care.

The endorsement of the LSP has also give weight to the process.

Commitment to capacity building

Croydon has a good track record in supporting capacity building for small and medium sized VCOs, particularly from BME communities. Supporting organisations to make them 'fit for purpose' is acknowledged as an integral part of the Commissioning Framework, helping to prevent the exclusion of smaller, more specialist VCOs from the commissioning process and developing new organisations to meet emerging needs.

More details of the capacity building programme are in a separate case study.

FURTHER INFORMATION

David Freeman, Policy Manager (Community Partnerships)
Policy and Corporate Services
Croydon Council
7th Floor South
Taberner House, Park Lane
Croydon CR9 3JS

Tel: 020 8604 7042 (internal 47042)
Fax: 020 8633 9438
E-mail: david.freeman@croydon.gov.uk

www.croydon.gov.uk/voluntarysector
www.croydon.gov.uk/democracy/performance/beaconawards/Comsectservs/