

## **Camden Community Empowerment Network: Response to 'Modernising Commissioning' Green Paper. 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011.**

- **In which public service areas could Government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?**

Organisations found it difficult to respond to this question in terms of 'new areas' in light of massive cuts to existing public services. Local groups are anticipating and in some cases already experiencing pressures to fill gaps left by service reduction.

Personalisation services were cited as an area that has been developing with input from civil society organisations, and one where there is potential for much more significant involvement. Work here should include awareness raising and building the skills base amongst civil society organisations.

Cuts in Camden appear to so far target preventative services and this should be reconsidered. Civil society organisations should not just be expected to shift their focus in order to compensate for loss of mainstream generic services. Areas identified where civil society organisations should continue to provide effective services include: employment and training for young people, day centres, youth activities, organisational development and capacity building, and a range of advice, information and advocacy services.

There is particular concern about the impact of cuts to free legal aid on the most vulnerable such as refugees and victims of domestic violence.

- **What are the implications of payment by results for civil society organisations?**

Many organisations cannot operate in this way – in the past payment by results has deterred SMEs from pursuing such contracts. Organisations also expressed concerns that the approach would lead to demands that cannot be met.

- **Which public service areas could be opened up to more civil society providers? What are the barriers to more civil society organisations being involved?**

Civil society organisations need to be involved in the strategic development and decision making processes that guide change in public service delivery. Real involvement through co- designed and produced services will help to achieve appropriate approaches and address barriers. This could happen through developing existing local strategic partnerships and similar cross sector forums at local level. At the moment many organisations feel that there are high expectations for them to step in and fill the breach left by spending cuts, but without really including them in the processes of change.

Huge contracts are a barrier – some very capable organisations are too small to carry that kind of administrative burden. Smaller organisations often have good local knowledge and strong relationships with communities they work with. Organisations working over large areas with dispersed communities e.g. disabled people, can also be put off by huge contracts. The ‘fewer and larger’ contracts approach opens doors for big business not civil society.

Contract length can also be a disincentive for civil society organisations e.g. working with vulnerable people needs time to see results – a 1 – 3 year contract would seem pointless or unsustainable in this context.

- **How can we encourage more existing civil society organisations to team up with new employee-led mutuals?**

By encouraging local councils to open up constructive dialogue (not just ‘consultation’), and supporting a partnership environment. See first part of answer above.

- **How could Government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?**

Ensure that local authorities and other statutory commissioners widely publicise tendering opportunities to civil society organisations, giving enough time to submit tenders, understanding and implementing principles of full cost recovery, accepting bids from consortia – particularly small BMER organisations and other niche providers.

Public sector changes mean that capacity building support will be needed about and for civil society e.g. resources need to be put into capacity building GPs and civil society service providers in relation to GP commissioning.

Non – market methods like grant funding suit many organisations better than commissioning and procurement. The commissioning process and information required does not often enable organisations to demonstrate their work and its added value, or enable flexibility and maximum value for money in service delivery.

Avoid burdening organisations with disproportionate monitoring etc – civil society providers of services can be subject to requirements that would never be made of private sector contractors.

- **What issues should commissioners take into account in order to increase civil society organisations’ involvement in existing public service markets?**

Commissioners need to be less risk averse, and more open minded about service delivery methods and in relation to consortia of small organisations. Commissioners need to have a thorough understanding of communities, civil society and potential for different types of service provision within the locality and service area they are commissioning. To date commissioning of public services has rarely been based on thorough market knowledge.

- **How could commissioners use assessments of full social, environmental and economic value to inform their commissioning decisions?**

This is best achieved by developing methods for undertaking and using assessments *in collaboration with* civil society and ensuring community needs are taken into account. Real involvement not just lip service or consulting with 'community leaders'. The value that local communities put on a service or organisation should be recognised – local opinion and endorsement rather than government assumption.

Commissioners do not take account of the funding that civil society organisations can lever into an area – various pieces of research have been carried out on value as part of the Change Up programme, and explain leverage.

- **How could civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?**

Civil society organisations already promote and support community involvement in all sorts of things. The localism agenda makes it even more important that all people are able to engage if they want to – not just the most vocal / those with time / those with the skills and resources. Civil society organisations often provide gateways to communities that are considered hard to reach. Encouraging ever greater levels of involvement in public sector business requires investment in good community development work – outreach work and a range of methods to engage different people etc. This is always an area of work that civil society organisations find it hard to resource because it is labour and time intensive, and can be difficult to connect directly to outcomes.

Like partnership, or using local contractors, citizen involvement could be written into commissioning intentions to ensure involvement for part of the process. There has already been some work undertaken in Camden with community / individual involvement in commissioning e.g involving parents in commissioning services for children with disabilities. This was supported by civil society organisations delivering training, mentoring and coproducing with service users and commissioners. Untokenistic involvement of individual citizens or civil society organisations needs the full commitment of local councils and other public sector bodies to succeed.

