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**Strategic Director's Office**  
**Department of Business Support**  
Room 145, City Hall, Bradford  
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Your Ref:  
Date: 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Modernising Commissioning Green Paper – Consultation Response**

Please find below, comments from Bradford Council in relation to the Modernising Commissioning Green Paper consultation.

**QUESTION 1) IN WHICH PUBLIC SERVICE AREAS COULD GOVERNMENT  
CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO  
DELIVER?**

The Council and our partners have long regarded Voluntary & Community Sector Organisations (VCSO) organisations as key partners that help realise the ambitions of our District. Many key areas of service delivery are undertaken by VCSOs but in considering VCSO suitability as a delivery vehicle, we need to be clear about what added value they bring. The introduction of greater competition is likely to increase the VCS provider landscape.

VCSO will be able to play a much greater role in providing universal / targeted / personalised services for children, adults, vulnerable people and communities of interests. This could be in the fields of health and social care, community safety and other activities at very local, neighbourhood levels.

Partnership working with VCSO and amongst VCSOs will be crucial in the current economic climate.

Bradford District recognises the need to build the capacity and resilience of the VCS. To achieve this, consortia working arrangements will need to be supported further and bid competitively. Any benefits of delivery by VCSO must be assured through independent performance monitoring / contract / partnership management. Without this, there is a major risk that services do not deliver improved outcomes.

- **Sub-Question [SQ] 1) What are the implications of payment by results for civil society organisations?**

Paying for agreed outcomes appears a good principle. However, without the security of a larger organisation capable of absorbing reduced payments from under performance or cash flow issues related to the length of time between delivery and payment, small organisations will be unlikely to take the risks payment by results would entail.

There is a need for more work to be done on the best way to allocate risk.

- **SQ2) Which public services areas could be opened up to more civil society providers? What are the barriers to more civil society organisations being involved?**

Many frontline public services can potentially be opened up to the VCS although there are clearly restrictions required in some areas such as regulatory functions, security and defence.

It is unrealistic to imagine every organisation having discreet legal, environmental, HR, performance management, finance, safeguarding vulnerable people, quality assurance, etc. expertise.

- **SQ3) Should Government explore extending the right to challenge to other local state-run services? If so, which areas and what benefits could civil; society organisations bring to these public service areas?**

Delivery is not the only consideration when shaping public services. Strategic commissioning involves shaping public services to meet the identified needs of entire populations not just delivering services effectively in a particular locality. The VCS may be motivated by things other than identified local needs (profit, prestige, survival, competition, employment, etc.) and this needs to be recognised in any commissioning framework. The state should aim to enable rather than always deliver but it should be able to hold delivery to account on behalf of citizens.

- **SQ6) What other methods could the Government consider in order to create more opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver public services?**

Greater use of personalised budgeting to allow individual citizens to make choices about how to receive their public services. this could support the development of new markets to provide these services.

Enabling commissioners to make strategic commissioning decisions on the basis of full understanding of the social, environmental and economic impact. Public authorities should consider moving away from fixed priced contracts and develop a range of options to achieve the best possible value from public funding; this should also include developing more sophisticated Service Level Agreements to ensure direct provision to focus services on the social, environmental and economic priorities of the people they serve. This would require the "appropriate amount" of

community involvement and the development of skills and resources to help determine this.

## **QUESTION 2) HOW COULD GOVERNMENT MAKE EXISTING PUBLIC SERVICE MARKETS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS?**

There is an established body of best practice for working/commissioning with the VCS that includes wide advertisement of opportunities, fit for purpose/transparent procurement and decision making, stakeholder involvement, etc. If these practices were to be universally adopted then the market would be much more accessible.

- **SQ1) What issues should commissioners take into account in order to increase civil society organisations' involvement in existing public service markets?**

VCSOs often need support in order to be able to compete. Commissioners may need to work with VCSOs to cultivate their ability to bid for commissions. Risk must be "fairly" owned. Simply transferring all risk to the supplier is excluding of organisations without substantial reserves. If risk is to be transferred then compensation must be agreed with the supplier. Many public bodies are used to operating within substantial bureaucracies that are only sustainable because of high infrastructure costs (lots of back office staff). Commissioners should not presume to impose these requirements on supplying organisations.

- **SQ3) What issues should the civil society red tape task force consider in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden of commissioning?**

There needs to be agreement within Central Government about what measures will be used to assess performance. Currently it is often the case that the same supplier has to collect the same information in several different ways in order to satisfy different funding criteria imposed by different parts of Government.

## **QUESTION 3) HOW COULD COMMISSIONERS USE ASSESSMENTS OF FULL SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC VALUE TO INFORM THEIR COMMISSIONING DECISIONS?**

This needs ownership and backing at every level if it is to happen. The culture of defining everything by a target has now been seen as flawed and it is likely that this will give commissioners the confidence to think more broadly again, but they will need encouragement to do so. Value for money, efficiency gains and effective services are what is crucial in achieving improved outcomes.

## **QUESTION 4) HOW COULD CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT GREATER CITIZEN AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN ALL STAGES OF COMMISSIONING?**

Involving stakeholders is an example of proven success where better outcomes have been achieved. Out Total Place pilot has shown that involving stakeholders in the commissioning process had led to better outcomes. Success of the Total Place Pilot and approaches to Community Based budgeting (Bradford District is a prototype

area) will further involve stakeholders and increase citizen and community engagement in all stages of commissioning.

- **SQ2) What issues relating to civil society organisations should the Government consider when refreshing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Guidance?**

Instead of a purely deficit approach that focuses on the problems of an area, an asset-based or capability-based approach values the capacity, networks and connections. Social capital in communities, seeks to harness the effectiveness of local community and voluntary associations, and marshals the resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available in a different way. It suggests a radically different balance of services and support being commissioned rather than directly delivered by the public sector.

- **SQ5) What issues should the government consider in the development of the future programme of training public service commissioners?**

Better understanding of impact assessments, especially for smaller VCS providers.

- **SQ6) What can civil society organisations contribute to the roll out of community budgets? What barriers exist to realising this contribution? How can these barriers be removed?**

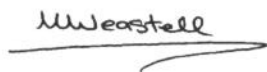
Community budgeting should reduce duplication and effort and ensure greater efficiencies and savings with improved service delivery plans. VCSOs will be crucial in ensuring that commissioning decisions reflect need at every level and are well placed to be partners in the process.

- **SQ7) What can civil society organisations contribute to the roll out of Local Integrated Services? What barriers exist to realising this contribution? How can these barriers be removed?**

Similar to Community Budgets, local integrated services need to be explored further, say with community health services

I trust you will find the comments useful and these will help shape wider public service reforms.

Yours faithfully



**Mary Weastell**  
**Strategic Director, Business Support**