

Modernising Commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery

Consultation Response from Solihull SUSTAIN
(Local Infrastructure Organisation for Solihull Borough)

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

In just about any area.

As an example, Solihull Council has a contract with a private sector company to cut the grass in the cemeteries. This could be done by (Social Enterprise) Community Garden Services.

Similarly, the Council/Care Trust and other members of the Solihull Partnership use private sector companies to design printed materials, websites & videos. These could be done by a social enterprise such as Colebridge Communications.

Private sector companies manage the car parks. A CSO could do this and use profits to fund its community projects. There are also all the obvious areas such as health, social care, youth services, etc.

There are examples all around the country in all manner of public sector services delivered successfully by CSO's (inc Social Enterprises). There is no limit on the public services that could be delivered by CSO's

2. What are the implications of payment by results for civil society organisations?

In principle none – BUT – most CSO's have limited reserves and working capital and so some upfront investment or funding would be necessary. This need is supported by the Compact and it would be possible to do this (if need be in tranches) as there are examples where this has been done successfully.

3. Which Public Services areas could be opened up to more civil society providers? What are the barriers to more civil society organisation being involved?

See answers to 1 & 2

4. Should Government explore extending the right to challenge to other local state-run services?

Yes. There should be no exceptions

5. Are there types of assets whose viability, when transferred to civil society management or ownership, would be particularly dependent on a continuing income stream from service contracts?

If the asset had income potential – such as car parks – then no.

If the asset was a community facility with limited income potential, e.g. free schools, libraries, community halls, then yes.

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

Hard to answer in a generic way but the benefits will need to be evidenced or incentives provided. There also needs to be a catalyst or change agent who can encourage cooperation and sell the benefits - a role for an infrastructure organisation.

7. How could Government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?

Local government should work with the CSO Infrastructure organisation to make sure that public service contracts were visible to CSO's and provide the infrastructure organisation with the resources to support CSO's through the tendering process. Even as far as equipping the Infrastructure organisation with the resources to act as a lead or accountable body. Tendering processes need to be user friendly and reflect the size of the contract in terms of information and policies to be evidenced. Commissioning processes need to be in the spirit of Compact e.g. realistic timescales for consultations and tenders. The Social Value clause in public sector contracts would help.

8. What issues should commissioners take into account in order to increase civil society organisations' involvement in existing public service markets?

Making the process accessible, clear and understandable

Ensure timescale are realistic

Inclusion of the social value that CSO's add

The limits on working capital and need sometimes for upfront payment or investment

That CSO involvement is not necessarily or only the cheapest option. It could be the one that offers best quality and a triple bottom line

9. What issues should the Govt consider in order to ensure that they are fully inclusive of civil society?

Language

Accessible Formats

Keeping it Simple – stop talking 'public sector' jargon - use plain English

10. What issues should Govt consider in the development of Big Society Bank in order to enable civil society orgs to take advantage of public service opps?

Community Investment at low or zero interest that does not rely on collateral

11. What barriers prevent civil society orgs from forming consortia? How could they be removed?

There is a lack of understanding of consortia and their benefits, both with CSOs and public sector commissioners. This means that CSOs don't know how to set them up and need support locally to enable effective consortia to be developed. Commissioners also need to have a clear understanding as to how they evaluate the tender bids received from consortia..

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

By attaching a value to things such as local employment, volunteering, local spending, reduction in welfare needs, etc. It is only then that commissioners will be able to consider a true value to the services provided by CSOs.

There needs to be a greater understanding and use of Social Return on Investment (SROI) for both CSOs and Commissioners.

Commissioning plans need to consider wider implications of decisions made. By way of an example if a commissioner decided to decommission one service to save on costs, they should not look at that one service alone but also any other linked or associated service delivered so that full impact can be truly established e.g. stopping a drug rehab programme may save funds but will increase costs for hospital admittance, policing and prison/probation. These considerations will need to be cross agency.

13. How could Civil Society Orgs (CSO) support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?

If local government followed the Commissioning Framework instead of just going straight to competitive tender, then CSOs could inform commissioners of local needs either directly or through their service users.

CSOs are in a position to understand what service users really need and to reach communities that would otherwise not be engaged with the public sector.

CSOs could use reach out to far reaching communities and marginalised groups to inform commissioning decisions, but they need the resources to allow for this engagement.

14. What forms of support will best enable statutory partners to strengthen their working relationship?

A strong Infrastructure organisation that's committed to partnership working

A good local compact and commissioning framework that is understood and implemented by CSOs and public agencies.