

**FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
&
KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

**FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMISSIONING
PROCESS EVALUATION**

FEBRUARY 2009



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

CL/47/2008

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has an ongoing commitment to improving services for children, young people and families.
- 1.2 As part of this commitment, in 2008 Family and Children's Services changed the way in which they fund services provided by the voluntary sector. Previously, organisations were awarded grants which were based on historical funding arrangements. In 2008 Family and Children's Services moved to a commissioning process. The aims of the commissioning process are:
 - Longer term funding arrangements
 - More formal contracts
 - Outcomes based commissioning of services
- 1.3 There are a number of national drivers for moving towards a commissioning based model for local authorities. The Every Child Matters commissioning guidance states that *'effective joint planning and commissioning is at the heart of improving outcomes for children and young people through children's Trusts'*. To enable this move to commissioning, the government has developed a number of programmes to support the Voluntary Sector and local authorities ('Change Up', 'future Builders' and a £25 million national programme to assist local authorities to develop commissioning locally).
- 1.4 For Kensington and Chelsea further impetus for a change from grants funding to a commissioning based approach was given by the recommendations of the Joint Area Review of children's services published in February 2007. This inspection found that services were outstanding overall but recommended that plans to establish joint commissioning be accelerated. This recommendation was not just about commissioning from voluntary sector organisations but it underlined the need to replace the fragmented set of funding arrangements.

The Evaluation

- 1.5 Family and Children's services worked in partnership with the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC) to evaluate the commissioning process carried out in 2008 with the voluntary sector. As a part of the evaluation, a number of focus groups were conducted and a survey was sent out. A total of 10 organisations took part in the focus groups and one submitted their comments by email. Two of the organisations did not apply for funding through the commissioning process. Of the 9 organisations that did apply for funding, one was unsuccessful and two were still in negotiation at the time of the focus group but were aware their funding was being reduced.

- 1.6 In addition a focus group was carried out with four staff from 3 organisations that provided some support to voluntary organisations through the process and one staff member submitted comments by email.

- 1.7 The evaluation survey was designed by Policy and Performance and KCSC and distributed to all voluntary organisations that had requested an application pack for the commissioning process (a total of 148 organisations) (copy in Appendix I). A total of 15 respondents completed and returned the survey.

- 1.8 This report contains the results and analysis of both the focus groups and the survey, presented under the following headings;
 - Understanding and awareness
 - Change from grants to commissioning
 - Changes for organisation/sector
 - Changes for service users
 - Application process
 - Diverse needs and Consultation
 - Support
 - Funding and negotiation
 - Satisfaction
 - How can the process be improved?

- 1.9 This evaluation will be followed up in 12 months time, at which point there will be a more in depth evaluation of the longer term impact commissioning has had on outcomes for children, young people and their families. Service users and organisations will be asked to participate in the follow up evaluation.

Acknowledgements

1.10 This report has been produced by the Policy and Performance (Family and Children's Services) and KCSC. We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation of all the participating voluntary organisations and support organisations. Policy and Performance welcomes your comments on this and other reports, and any other future research.

Further Information

1.11 Further information can be obtained from Policy and Performance, Family and Children's Services, Room 228, The Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8 7NX, or direct from:

Katie Johnstone on 020 7361 3147 or Katie.johnstone@rbkc.gov.uk
Siobhán Sollis at KCSC on 020 7243 9807 or Siobhan@kcsc.org.uk

2 MAIN FINDINGS

Understanding and awareness

- 2.1 The majority of respondents (87%) were aware that Family and Children's Services had introduced commissioning based funding at the beginning of 2008 for voluntary sector services.
- 2.2 Over half of survey respondents (53%) rated their understanding of 'commissioning' services in the public sector as either 'good' or 'excellent'.
- 2.3 53% of respondents found out about the commissioning process from regular voluntary sector meetings and from the Social Council respectively. 40% found out from workshops facilitated by Family and Children's Services. Respondents could choose more than one option for this question.
- 2.4 Focus groups were asked if they could describe what commissioning means. There was a level of understanding of what commissioning is from the organisations that were successful and also from organisations that had not applied but had been through the process with the PCT. For example:

'Purchasing of services and entering formal agreement of contract'

- 2.5 Those organisations that did not receive funding or were given reduced funding as a result of the commissioning process had a different view of commissioning. For example:

'Can't see any difference between the grant's process and commissioning'.

Change from grants to commissioning

- 2.6 Both survey respondents and focus group participants were asked how they felt about the change from grants to commissioning. A number of survey respondents thought that the change to longer term funding was beneficial and enabled better planning.

However, respondents were concerned about the following;

- The process is time consuming and more complicated, using scarce resources
- Not confident the process fully took into account need
- Unclear about how small voluntary organisations would 'fit' into the process.

2.7 These themes were reiterated by the focus groups. Other comments included;

'it will make organisations think more about outcomes'

'It works really well with the PCT'

'contracting is more risky than grant funding'

'Very chaotic process'

'Big delays in RBKC decision making'

'organisations are being expected to be more business like however RBKC is not prepared to pay more for this'

'the process raised expectations but these were not followed through'.

2.8 Survey respondents were asked how they would compare the commissioning process to the previous grants process. There was a fairly even distribution with four organisations preferring the grants process, 3 the commissioning process and 3 organisations who were undecided.

Changes for organisation/sector

2.9 Both survey respondents and focus group participants were asked what changes commissioning will bring for the organisation /sector. Themes that were common across both survey responses and the focus groups included;

- Initially a period of instability but in the long term, consistency and security for organisations
- Damaging for small specialist services
- Too target driven and level of monitoring and model not suited to the service.

Changes for service users

2.10 Some survey respondents were positive about how the change to commissioning would affect their service users. They felt there would be a more consistent better service. For example:

'A service that actually reflects their needs and aspirations with regard to appropriate service'

However other respondents had concerns such as:

'can mean the service user notices a lack of flexibility in the service and may be required to provide a lot more personal data'.

- 2.11 Many focus group participants were not positive about the impact commissioning would have on service users. They thought commissioning would lead to less responsive services and a reduction in the range of services on offer. Comments included:

'some service users have already gone to another service as they got fed up waiting for confirmation that our service will run'

'They will experience an increase in bureaucracy'.

There was also a feeling that the monitoring requirements would mean organisations would have less time to spend on delivering services to users.

Application process

- 2.12 Eleven of the 15 organisations who completed the survey had applied for funding through the commissioning process. The four organisations who did not apply cited lack of time, resources, information and understanding as reasons for not applying. Of those who did apply, 50% rated the application pack as 'good', 33% as 'average' and the remaining 17% as either 'poor' or 'very poor'. Reasons cited for choosing these ratings included:

'It was a well explained and informative pack but the forms were difficult'

'It would have been useful to have some guidance notes'.

- 2.13 Focus group participants were asked if they thought the application pack was easy to understand and what they did and didn't like about it. The general perception was that the pack was too long and not user friendly. Many participants thought the unit costs were very difficult for organisations to work out. Comments included;

'The electronic application form was extremely difficult to use. It was poorly formatted and this made getting an overview of your application difficult'

'Too much was expected around the policies and it was not made clear what organisations were required to do'.

Diverse needs and Consultation

2.14 Survey respondents were asked if they thought the application pack took into account the diverse range of needs in the borough. Only 25% of respondents answered 'yes', with 50% 'No' and 25% 'not sure'. Respondents thought the process was too complicated for people with English as a second language and that the approach was too generic. For example:

'Some groups have the commitment and the dedication to support their communities however do not necessarily have the language skills and such a form would certainly have been impossible for them to complete'.

2.15 The focus group attended by support organisations felt that they had not been properly consulted and that their suggestions were not taken on board. For example:

'I did have a meeting with the commissioners early in the process, and was unable to exert any influence on the form of the application pack because of their lack of knowledge about and understanding of the community sub-sector of the voluntary sector'.

2.16 Many participants also felt they had been consulted too late in the process.

Support

2.17 82% of survey respondents thought the support they received from the Social Council was either 'excellent' or 'good'. 18% thought the support was 'poor'. Respondents were particularly happy with the workshops facilitated by the Social Council.

2.18 Survey respondents stated that they thought the seminars were well advertised and that the Social Council were available throughout the process. They particularly valued the feedback sessions.

2.19 Focus group participants were also very happy with the support they received from the Social Council.

2.20 Participants in the 'successful' focus group were frustrated by the change in their relationship with the council, comments included:

'Disappointed that their past relationship had been cut'

'Very frustrating not being able to go to RBKC directly'

'The sealed bid approach feels unvoluntary sector'.

- 2.21 The focus group of participants from the support organisations were asked if there was anything that would have made their role as advisors easier. They thought that there had been too many technical problems with the electronic application and too many mistakes and a lack of clarity with the application pack. Other responses included:

'It was hard to advise groups when some questions put to RBKC were very slow to be answered'

'Lack of straight answers to straight questions was the biggest issue'.

- 2.22 Survey respondents were asked to rate the support they received from Community Accounting Self Help (CASH). Most of the respondents rated the support as either 'average' or 'good', however, when asked to give reasons for their rating, the majority of organisations either did not require assistance or did not receive assistance from CASH.

Funding and Negotiation

- 2.23 Eleven out of 15 survey respondents indicated that their organisation had received funding through the commissioning process. Respondents were asked to describe their experience of the negotiation process. Many organisations felt positive about this stage of the commissioning process. For example:

'It was fine. There was an opportunity to be frank and every attempt was made to resolve issues'

'Still ongoing, but I think the commissioning team have been very helpful and supportive'.

- 2.24 Some respondents thought the process was too long, that there was no actual negotiation involved, a lack of communication and many organisations were still waiting on a funding decision. Comments included:

'This was the most appalling part of the process as it has not yet been concluded with our organisation'

'We have been informed that as our contract will be so late due to the overwhelming number of contracts being issued there will be no time for negotiation once we receive the actual document'.

- 2.25 Focus group participants were also asked their views on the negotiation process. They all agreed that they were not given enough notice or information at meetings and felt there was an inflexible approach to times and dates of meetings. Overall they felt that it was not truly a

negotiation as they had little 'voice' throughout the process and that they were under pressure to sign agreements which they hadn't yet discussed or agreed.

Satisfaction

2.26 The largest proportion of survey respondents was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the terms of their contract (46%). The majority of organisations stated that they either hadn't received their contract yet or had not received the level of funding they had originally applied for.

2.27 Focus groups were asked if they were happy with the terms of their contract, responses included;

'No, the payment schedule does not suit our project and requires us to shoulder unacceptable risk'

'Not given an explanation as to why they did not get the full amount of money'.

How can the process be improved

2.28 Both survey respondents and focus group participants were asked for suggestions as to how the process could be improved in the future. Their views are presented below:

'More clarity about what services were needed to be commissioned so that organisations can tailor their application and if necessary form partnerships'

'Clearer more frequent communication from the council, minus the jargon, with a department at the council to liaise directly with'

'Stick to agreed timescale, with those organisations who do not receive funding or receive reduced funding being given enough notice to apply for funding from elsewhere'

'Feedback given by the council so that organisations that did not receive funding or received reduced funding can find out why and change their application accordingly for the next round'

'Council officers need more understanding of both the organisations and what services they provide and of the voluntary sector in general'

'Organisations should not be told to refer service users to other organisations or told to work in partnership with other organisations'

'By involving a genuine negotiation process.'

3 REFLECTION

- 3.1 The move to commissioning for Family and Children's Services signalled a substantial change both for local voluntary organisations and for the council. It was one that brought many challenges and much debate to the local sector. This evaluation report has aimed to listen to feedback from organisations and highlight learning points in order that future commissioning processes can be improved where needed.
- 3.2 Overall, the commissioning process has brought more stability to organisations by offering two year contracts. Organisations were previously offered funding for one year at a time under the grants programme. This stability is welcomed and appreciated by the sector. The process has also provided an opportunity to challenge long standing funding arrangements that have been in place for historical reasons rather than the genuine needs of the community.
- 3.3 For the first time, the process has pooled funding across the whole of family and Children's Services into one place. Having the funding in one place will reduce duplication and provide a more integrated service across the voluntary sector.
- 3.4 Commissioning has also led to a much greater focus in outcomes which is seen as a positive move by both voluntary organisations and the Council. By identifying and measuring outcomes, organisations will be able to demonstrate the difference they make to local children, young people and their families more effectively.
- 3.5 There are, however, some lessons that can be learnt from this year's commissioning process. The feedback shows that one of the main difficulties for organisations progressing through the process was uncertainty caused by delays and, at times, a lack of clear communication from the council. In some cases expectations were raised that were not followed through. It is recognised that these problems were to a large extent caused by the implementation of a process that was new and untested. Nevertheless it is important to recognise that such difficulties have caused anxiety for organisations and should be minimised in future processes.
- 3.6 The main cause of delay was the fact that far more money was bid for services than the funding available. A prolonged process of negotiation was necessary to close this gap and to ensure a good match between needs and the spread of funded services. The Council explains that it could have stuck to the original timetable by simply allocating all the funding to the highest scoring bids without challenging or negotiating the

amounts, however it was decided that it was better to delay decisions than to misallocate the limited resources.

- 3.7 Some groups were also concerned that the monitoring requirements would be burdensome and would mean groups would have less time to spend on work meeting their users' needs. Monitoring requirements, however, will be monitored closely over the coming year and revised where necessary.
- 3.8 There was also a feeling among some organisations that the model of commissioning does not sit well with the voluntary sector. Comments were made, for example, on the difficulty of fitting services into unit costs and that the model can lead to a lack of flexibility in service delivery.
- 3.9 Some organisations also felt that the Council's negotiation processes did not always lead to a genuine two-way dialogue. In KCSC's opinion this goes against the Compact principles of respecting the independence of the voluntary sector and of working in a partnership of equals.
- 3.10 Another worry was that the commissioning process might discourage small groups with limited capacity from applying. The fieldwork indicated that this was the case for some groups. On the other hand, almost all the bids received were from small local organisations, rather than big regional or national groups. Nevertheless the voluntary sector remain concerned that some of the funding conditions – such as payment in arrears- are not appropriate for small groups.
- 3.11 Both Family and Children's Services and KCSC are committed to working together to improve outcomes for local children and their families. The next phase of evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of services in achieving this. Services need to be running for a year or so before this can begin to be meaningfully evaluated.

Kensington and Chelsea Social Council Recommendations:

- 3.12 To ease the process in future KCSC would like to make a number of suggestions. Firstly it would be a positive move for the Council to look into other models of commissioning or consider returning to a grants process. For small groups in particular a small grants process (for example for applications of under £20,000) would be very useful.
- 3.13 KCSC would also recommend that the Council have a strategic discussion with support providers at the beginning of the process and ensure that they are part of the process of developing the application pack. In addition it would be beneficial for support providers to be provided with adequate resources in order to offer timely and effective support to organisations.

- 3.14 KCSC recommends that in future the process should be more suitable for small groups and recognise their capacity.
- 3.15 Another recommendation is for the Council to ensure that future application forms are piloted and have guidance notes. KCSC would also like to suggest that all negotiation meetings are conducted as a 'two way process'.
- 3.16 It would also be helpful for organisations not to be paid in arrears and for the monitoring requirements to be reviewed to ensure they are not overly burdensome.

APPENDIX I – Copy of survey

Voluntary Sector Commissioning

The Council has an ongoing commitment to improving services for children, young people and families. You may know that Family and Children's Services has recently changed the way they fund services provided by the voluntary sector. Previously, organisations were awarded grants which were based on historical funding arrangements.

The commissioning process within Family and Children's Services has the following three aims:

a) longer term funding arrangements

b) more formal contracts

c) outcomes based commissioning of services.

Kensington and Chelsea Social Council in partnership with Family and Children's Services are conducting a review of the voluntary sector commissioning process so far. Please complete the survey below. Your responses will remain anonymous and will be invaluable in helping us improve the commissioning process in the future.

Q1 Please rate your understanding of 'commissioning' services in the public sector.

- Excellent*
- Good*
- Average*
- Limited*
- Very limited*

Q2 Were you aware that Family and Children's Services introduced commissioning based funding earlier this year for voluntary sector services?

- Yes (go to q.3)*
- No (please only answer q. 4,5,6)*

Q3 How did you find out about the voluntary sector commissioning process?

- At regular voluntary sector meetings*

Through the Social Council

Through the voluntary sector commissioning workshops facilitated by Family and Children's Services

From a poster

At a specialist forum

Other (please state)

Q4 Can you please describe how you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC Family and Children's Services?

Q5 What changes do you think commissioning will bring for the sector?

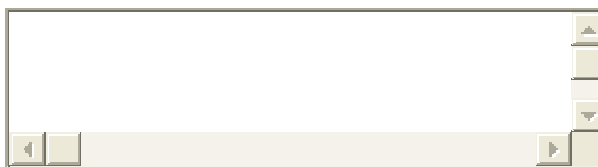
Q6 What changes do you think it will bring to the users of services?

Q7 Did your organisation put an application in for funding through the commissioning process?

Yes (go to q.9)

No (go to q.8)

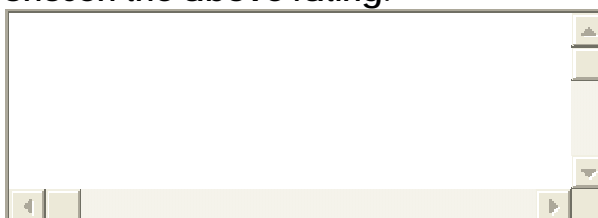
Q8 Can you please state your reasons for not putting in an application (please go to q. 22 when you have completed this question).



Q9 Can you please rate the application pack you received.

- Excellent*
- Good*
- Average*
- Poor*
- Very poor*

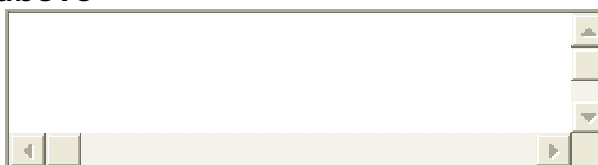
Q10 Please explain why you have chosen the above rating.



Q11 Do you feel the application pack took into account the diverse range of needs in the borough?

- Yes*
- No*
- Not sure*

Q12 Please describe your answer above



Q13 Please describe the support you were given by the Social Council during the process.

- Excellent*
- Good*
- Average*
- Poor*
- Very poor*

Q14 Please explain why you have chosen the above answer.

Q15 Please describe the support you were given by the CASH during the process.

- Excellent*
- Good*
- Average*
- Poor*
- Very poor*

Q16 Please explain why you have chosen the above answer.

Q17 Was your organisation awarded funding through the commissioning process?

- Yes (please go to q.18)*
- No (please go to q.23)*

Q18 Can you please describe your experience of the negotiation process.

Q19 What changes do you think moving to commissioning will bring for your organisation?

Q20 From your experience so far, how would you compare the commissioning process to the previous grants process.

- The grants process is better than the commissioning process*
- The commissioning process is better than the grants process*

Don't know



Q21 How satisfied are you with the terms of your contract?

Very satisfied



Satisfied



Neither satisfied or dissatisfied



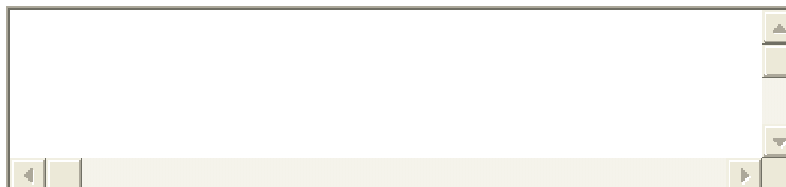
Dissatisfied



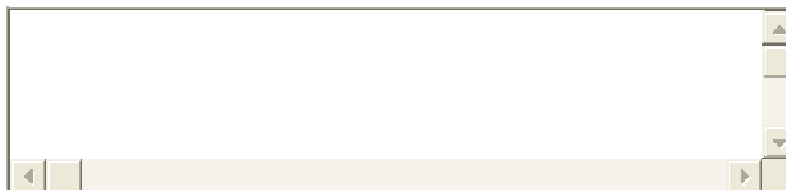
Very dissatisfied



Q22 Please explain your answer above.

A large rectangular text input field with a light beige background and a thin grey border. It contains no text. On the right side, there are three small square buttons: a top one with an upward-pointing triangle, a middle one with a horizontal line, and a bottom one with a downward-pointing triangle. On the left side, there are two small square buttons: one with a left-pointing triangle and one with a right-pointing triangle.

Q23 Please add any additional comments about how commissioning within Family and Children's Services could be improved in the future.

A large rectangular text input field with a light beige background and a thin grey border. It contains no text. On the right side, there are three small square buttons: a top one with an upward-pointing triangle, a middle one with a horizontal line, and a bottom one with a downward-pointing triangle. On the left side, there are two small square buttons: one with a left-pointing triangle and one with a right-pointing triangle.

Thank you for your time!

The information that you provide will be handled by RBKC in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Your information will be used only for statistical purposes. No individual will be identifiable from the results and no data will be passed to other organisations. Your responses will not be linked with any other data about you that we may hold.

APPENDIX II – Survey responses- open questions

Q4 - Can you please describe how you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC Family and Children's Services?
It is a more complicated process, grants were much easier and accessible.
I'm feeling a little apprehensive, but it's early days!
Positive about the move to commissioning. Negative with the way it was managed by the council.
Did not apply for the commissioning process so can't really comment. However in general experience commissioning loses flexibility.
Happy that funding is longer term.
Insecure. Unprepared.
this change would have been more welcome if the voluntary sector had received more information regarding the change.
A great idea, but health authorities' actual commitment to working with the voluntary/community sectors appears to be limited to talk -- no one's actually putting the money where their mouths are.
Commissioning can help LAs to maximise scarce resources if based on a comprehensive needs assessment that includes all partners - health, council and vol. sector. Having established needs and decided commissioning priorities, a more varied set of funding arrangements needs to be in place - not just contracts.
I welcome the opportunity for 2/3 year funding regimes rather than year on year grants. I know it hasn't been an easy process for many people, but this is the way forward and we have to do our best to work with it. We have been working to outcomes & impact assessments for sometime so it has not been so difficult to adjust to. However the KCSC were absolutely right to work with the solicitor and ensure compact compliance in as much as has been possible.
better
it has been an extremely protracted and complicated process and not as well thought through as it could have been, ie the unit cost being so central and then being abandoned as it was not workable. It was also a lot more work than a grant application which affects our resources. I think that RBKC has seen the move from grants to commissioning as a way of treating the voluntary sector a business and applying that thinking to the process which is not appropriate at all. There should have been much more thought about partnership and how that relationship would be developed with services to deliver on RBKC priorities.
We were really enthusiastic about the move at first, as we felt that this would be an opportunity to more effectively fund organisations who were successfully addressing real needs within the Borough.
Not confident that they fully take into account the needs of the communities served by the voluntary sector or indeed the needs of the sector itself. the changes do not seem to be necessary or if they are for the council, the way in which the changes have been implemented and explained has not been clear enough. small groups in particular have been effected through this process as the requirements to make an application are too high.
The advantage is the commitment is for 2-3 years so enables us to deliver a better quality service through better planning and releasing time.

Q5 -What changes do you think commissioning will bring for the sector?
Certain groups will close, the forms are very difficult and important organisations will not get funding due to this and also the fact that larger organisations are getting more money.
I understand that it will enable the borough to take a more proactive stance in delivering services and be more strategic by targeting areas of greatest need. I'm not sure if it will drive up standards of delivery and professionalise services but I do believe that change is good!
I am hopeful it will lead to a bit more clarity and security for the voluntary sector.
Close small charities and force others to build partnerships and consortiums that can soon become cartels.
More consistency, security.
Possibly short-term upheaval. Hopefully, long term stability and new or differently delivered services
It will restrict the voluntary sector provision to those who understand commissioning and have time to put together bids, smaller voluntary sector organisations may be excluded.
Hopefully, more responsiveness to the service users' needs.
Commissioning is good at looking at current and most immediate needs but this can be at the expense of innovation and flexibility. It also can reinforce a top-down approach. Negotiation and frank discussion over time is needed to give a rounded picture.
My fear is that larger organisations will increasingly be expected to take on more and smaller organisations will not be able to compete as has happened in many other sectors. I do not agree with that at all and I believe it is very damaging in the long run.
independence
There may be some new opportunities but so far it will exclude those services that work with the most excluded and disadvantaged who often have least resources and therefore may not have managed this process. I don't think an Equalities Impact Assessment was part of the process so all the BME issues were overlooked. The commitments of a contract may also result in defaults and legal action against charities who can ill afford this. It will reduce the independence of the sector also due to the change of the relationship and I think ultimately will make it more difficult for services to respond to real need or challenge bad practice.
We had hoped that the pooling of Children & Family services funds would enable organisations who were meeting real need to be funded, rather than falling under particular Borough departments such as Study Support or Youth services.
based on the current experience of the process the sector will change for the worse. funds have been cut for many groups who provide vital services to the communities they serve, specialist services in particular seem to have suffered with users being encouraged to use more mainstream services. whilst this would be ideal in theory it is impractical due to language and other barriers. thus contradicting the ethos of the borough of making services for their residents easier to access.
It might bring new organisations in.

Q6 - What changes do you think it will bring to the users of services?
Users trust and know smaller organisations, if these organisations close due to lack of funds it will be hard for service users to find another good service in their language.
I'm not sure how much users will notice the change. I'm not even sure if it matters, but I hope, with time, users will receive relevant services without needing to travel too far.
It will create more consistency and certainty for service users.
Unsure. Possibly fewer services and less choice and versatility
As above.
As Q5
It is difficult to predict at this early stage, it is hoped the users will get a better service.
A service that actually reflects their needs and aspirations with regard to appropriate service.
The interpretation of commissioning that results in very constrained contracts can mean the service user notices a lack of flexibility in the service and may be required to provide a lot more personal data.
Hopefully there will be some positive changes as well as some negatives eg services will improve and possibly more joined up not segregated
better service
I think they could feel less like the centre of services and more like a product to fulfill the requirements of contracts. There seems little room for their voice to be heard or for there to be good consultation on needs. It may improve some services but I feel hard pressed to think how at this stage.
Hopefully organisations and individuals being aware of what provision is available within the Borough to address their particular needs.
users of services where funding has been cut will lose out on services that have been vital to their lives. those that have enough knowledge and confidence MAY access services elsewhere however overall the minority communities who are hard enough to reach by their own community groups will suffer in the long run. unless this is taken into account for the next round and specialist services that provide a direct service to users are provided with adequate <u>resources to continue their work.</u>
I don't think users will notice unless a service has been cut because the organisation did not receive a bid.

Q8 - Can you please state your reasons for not putting in an application
Far too complex for the anticipated return. There did not appear to be much for the children of Homeless families.
Lack of time and expertise to put in an effective bid
Lack of understanding, time and resources
Unaware of the application process

Q10 - Please explain why you have chosen the above rating.
It was a well explained and informative pack but the forms were difficult.
It would have been useful to have had some guidance notes. I also think other commmissioning packs I've seen have been easier to read.
There was a miss match between information required and how to note this on the form. It was not as user friendly as it first appeared.
Because it was good??
Nice to look at, but not user friendly. Difficult to make sense of in parts, questions didn't fit to the way services are delivered, especially around cost per service user.
The form was relatively straightforward and the accompanying guidelines seemed to be clear about what the department was seeking to commission.
The pack was comprehensive, with lots of information and there was plenty of back-up support from KCSC and others for those who required it
the form did not allow enough space to write on and it looked like quite a bit had been spent on producing it. There can't have been any consultation with the sector as otherwise they would have known it was a problem, the electronic version was difficult to print.
The application form gave a clear completed example and clear areas of priority.
the application pack was to complicated to understand, the form was not available online and had to be hand written. the content of the pack was overlooked and more focus given to the colour and packaging.
I felt it was easy to read. It was clear. The application for was not too onerous. It did not get excellemt as there was no guidance for consortium applications

Q12 - Please describe your answer above
It was too complicated for people with English as a second language.
From conversation's I've had with other voluntary sector orgs they did not feel they had the necessary support in filling forms.
It did not allow for non standard projects to create a beneficial description of services.
As stated we could not find any measure that matched the user group that we work with
Very much a one size fits all approach.
The information in the pack was based on current data about needs in the borough.
The pack covered numerous needs both generic and specific however smaller groups would clearly have found the pack off-putting. Those applying for smaller grants should have had a different application process
there was no equalities impact assessment or consultation about the actual process, there didn't seem to be any highlighting of the diversity of the boroughs communities and their needs
It was linked to 'Every Child Matters'
It was assumed that everybody would be able to grasp the way the form was drafted. the budget information was particularly difficult to understand. it was a very off putting form and it would seem certain that many groups didnt apply simply because of the way it was formatted and the information required. some groups have the committment and the dedication to support their communities however do not necessarily have the language skills and such a form would certainly have been impossible for them to complete.

Q14 - Please explain why you have chosen the above rating
The Social Council were very supportive and we are grateful for this.
N/a did not receive any support.
Gave clear explanations of the process and offered appropriate support on an individual basis as needed.
Because it was good??
had limited contact. Specifically told not to contact grants officer
There were well-advertised seminars. Because our bid was small and additional to our core services, we did not require any specific help.
Whilst we didn't require extensive support I know that other people were very pleased with the support given.
really good info on the process and support from the staff at kcsc
There were well publicised workshops and individual support available if required.
KCSC were available throughout the process and were ready to provide answers to questions that arose during the process. The workshops facilitated by KCSC proved very valuable and we were able to better understand the process. the feedback sessions after the process was completed were especially valuable as we were able to feedback all our concerns to KCSC who then fed back to the commissioners.

Q16 - Please explain why you have chosen the above answer
We did not receive help from cash
N/a did not receive any support
I did not use CASH but felt I could have made an approached if needed.
Not applicable.
had limited contact.
N/A We did not require assistance from CASH.
we didn't use the help from CASH
was helpful to have someone to get this feedback from
There was support available if required - as we didn't access this, it is hard to grade.
apart from the workshops at the beginning of the process we did not use CASH during this process
I thought the representative looked on the bleak side too much and this could have been off putting to some organisations

Q18 - Can you please describe your experience of the negotiation process
very slow and negative, we constantly had to chase for an answer.
Still ongoing, but i think the commissioning team have been very helpful and supportive.
This was the most appalling part of the process as it has not yet been concluded with our organisation. We were invited to meeting without agendas and asked to provide additional information outside the conditions of the tendering process. Repeated requests for agenda items for these meeting were ignored.
Difficult. Lengthy space of time between being informed of possibly having funding and having a meeting to discuss. Many ignored attempts to contact council during this time. Created high level of anxiety as previous funding officially ended before any repsonse about negotiation from council was provided.
This was poor. Having received a letter to say we were a 'preferred project', at the subsequent meeting with the officers we were told that they wanted us to deliver a different project, in a different location and with half the funding. As it was a small bid, we did adapt but time was wasted. Also, we then were unable to get the officer to sign off a revised workplan which we submitted on our own initiative.
I experienced 2 different negotiation processes, both of which were worrying just because of what was at stake. I went in with no preconceived ideas of what to expect except that there was an element of negotiation available and a bottom line figure which I didn` t know but assumed to be lower than what I wanted. I went prepared to argue value for money and to justify unit costs. I did have to do both and negotiate - but not unduly.
ok
we have been informed that as our contract will be so late due to the overwhelming number of contracts being issued there will be no time for negotiation once we receive the actual document
We felt that this was extremely misleading and wasn't initially what we would describe as a 'negotiation'. We received the most favourable of 7 different letters, which naturally led us to assume that we would be receiving the amount that we applied for or a similar amount. However, in our 'negotiation' meeting it became apparent that the Borough had arrived with a figure in mind and that figure was less than half the amount that we had applied for. We were told in the meeting that there was unlikely to be more money available and that we would have to apply in the next financial year to other pots of funding. The meeting was put back twice and at the meeting we were told that a final decision could not be made about the amount then, but that we would be informed within the next 2 weeks. We rang several times 2 weeks later and eventually spoke to someone who initially told us that there was no more money available, but a final decision had still not been made. It is now late November (the projects were originally due to start in September and then January) and though we have heard unofficially in the last 2 weeks that we have been awarded
the lack of communication was very nerve racking and the length of time taken to reach a decision to fund or otherwsie meant that we didnt and still dont know what will happen to our project next year. we did not have a negotiation meeting until Oct 08 and have had no contact since then about the definate amount of funds we will receive or when this will take effect. the decision of how much funds we would receive was already decided and there was no negotiation. as a small group we have to take what funding we can get but realistically we will not be able to carry out the work needed to support our users with the money given. because of the late response and the lack of information to date, it has made it hard to apply for funds elsewhere as funders need to know what has been secured, shortfalls etc.
It was fine. There was an opportunity to be frank and every attempt was made to resolve issues.

Q19 - What changes do you think moving to commissioning will bring for your organisation?
less money and support from the council, the closure of important and worthwhile projects and services.
I think our organisation will increasingly become more professionalise. My only worry is that we might re-focus our energy on completing forms and monitoring data and less on working with our clients.
We will begin to have a more robust platform for developing future services.
Increased security as one year longer funding than in previous years.
We are adapting to the changes but are concerned about covering core costs as we are a medium sized local organisation (full cost recovery makes our unit costs high in comparison to a regional body).
Less time will be used on annual grant applications. We will have to maintain quality services and efficient monitoring and keep a broad view on other providers who could become competition
work
so far it has taken up more resources than grant application processes
Currently lack of security about funding. Had we been led to believe earlier in the process that we were not to be awarded the full amount, we would have sought alternative funding then. If we hear now that we have not received the full amount or the contract is not acceptable, it is far too late to be seeking alternative funding for a January start date. However, we are still hopeful that commissioning will provide a level of funding that better reflects the quality and diversity of services that we provide within the Borough.
negative changes. the unit costings are very difficult to work out, as it is hard to breakdown the number of hours it takes to support a user fully especially with sensitive areas of work. monitoring of the contracts given seems to be even more stringent than grant funding and whilst we agree that public money must be accounted for, the level of monitoring required should be reflected in the grant size. also issues of confidentiality arose from these requirements which we still have concerns about. we have yet to receive confirmation of funds and still dont know where we stand with our project.
Long term planning Consolidation

Q22 - Please explain your answer above
We have not yet received a contract
We currently have a number of issues to be resolved. I am confident these will be sorted out. Also its still early days yet!
It has not yet been agreed.
Organisation not advised of application process.
We are receiving a very small amount of funding for a project which has a seasonal element but the funding is being released monthly in arrears. To date no monitoring system has been offered and as our revised workplan has not been formally approved, we are working to our own standards and what we understand to be the department's aims.
We were able to secure the amount we needed, and bearing in mind the improved contract it is reasonable
we haven't had it yet
We haven't yet been shown the contract!
haven't received it yet. still waiting for confirmation of funds and contract.

Q23 - Please add any additional comments about how commissioning within Family and Children's Services could be improved in the future
I think the commissioning team will need to understand the organisations it is commissioning and take a proactive role in supporting them. Also they need to learn from the problems experienced during this round.
Stick to agreed timetables and make it more transparent through open dialogs with providers. The meetings with the commissioning team had the feel of a battle about them rather than partnership discussion.
Break down the outcomes into smaller more palatable chunks that would encourage smaller organisations to apply
Improved communication with agencies.
Longer time between announcement and deadline
An department/organisation which liaises directly with community/voluntary sector would be helpful -- local health authorities and GPs, despite their stated commitment to practice-based commissioning, are pretty much invisible with regard to working with organisations in the sector.
A more nuanced approach would work better. From our perspective it seems that the same systems are employed whether it's for a very complex and core service or a small project.
I haven't answered Q21 as I don't agree with any of the options - too prescriptive as were some other questions. My answer to Q21 would be that that they are equally daunting but a necessary reality
more commissioned programmes
more consultation with the sector on the process right down to the actual application forms moving to commissioning should not mean that the vol sector has to become or be treated as a business by the LA- I believe its intention is to create a vehicle that could increase partnership working and showcase the best examples of this which could be quite inspiring - If both stat and vol in rbkc work towards that and develop a better understanding it would be a very positive step but rbkc need to give us this opportunity at the next round
A transparent system of letters should be introduced, where the most favourable letter means that the Borough is minded to award the amount applied for. Therefore organisations who are unlikely to receive funding or are likely to have a funding shortfall, have enough time to apply to further funding opportunities. A clear timetable, where decisions about funding are made well in advance of the project start date.
much better communication needs to take place, in a language that is understood by the vol sector, minus the jargon. it shouldn't be assumed that we all know what commissioning means. the borough needs to stick to deadlines that it imposes on the vol sector. it all seemed very one-sided this time around with the borough being in total control which has put us on the defensive. the partnerships that we are being encouraged to forge with each other by the borough need to be put in place between them and the vol sector and it must be an equal partnership because without the vol sector the bulk of the service being provided that enrich the lives of RBKC residents would not be happening.
I think there needed to be an opportunity to discuss applications with lead officers. Once the application pack was out we could not discuss with officers. I thought this was daft as these officers know what their priorities are. It prevent any development of an application that would be mutually beneficial for both sides.

APPENDIX III - Focus group comments

20th August, 2008

(2 organisations)

- both organisations did not apply through the commissioning process. Neither had been funded by Family and Children's Services in the past.

Can you describe what you think commissioning means?

- Yes – know about commissioning as they have been through the process with the PCT. They found the PCT process much more straight forward compared to what the council was asking for.
- The PCT didn't ask for unit costings and were more flexibly with targets and outputs.
- It's worrying that the commissioning process could be adopted elsewhere in the council (ie Corporate Service). It may mean the end of small organisations.

How do you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC Families and Children's Services?

- It works really well with the PCT.
- It is not good for small organizations who don't have the resources put an application together.
- Commissioning requires too much monitoring and administration – no resources to do this.
- The grants process was fairer for small organizations who don't have the capacity to be a part of the commissioning process.
- For those organizations that applied and were successful it is good because they have a contract for 2 years so they are able to plan their service more effectively.

Why did you decide not to apply for funding through the commissioning process?

- Being a 'one person department' - didn't have the capacity to complete the application.
- Didn't feel they were able to meet the monitoring requirements because of the nature of the service – ie drop ins, attendance at market etc.

Do you have any other comments to add?

- The area of VAT was very confusing and there was no support or expert knowledge in this area.
- There was a great deal of uncertainty about the process. This made it impossible for the seminars to be user friendly.
- The organisations felt alienated. They felt as though they were the only ones who weren't applying.
- The organisations didn't realise that P&P would support them in their monitoring.
- There needs to be more partnership work and communication between organisations. This will lead to more confidence in applying.

17th Sept, 2008

(3 organisations)

- 2 groups were given reduced funding as a result of the commissioning process
- 1 group was not funded at all as a result of the commissioning process

Can you describe what you think commissioning means.

- Not really.
- Can't see any difference between the grants process and commissioning
- Don't understand why it has changed and what positives it will bring.

How do you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC Families and Children's Services?

- It will mean reducing our service to fit in with the funds, or not running the service at all.
- There is no obvious difference.
- It was not a smooth process
- Organizations are being expected to be more business like however RBKC is not prepared to pay more for this

What changes do you think moving to commissioning will bring for your organisation?

- We will have to reduce our service or not run it at all. We have been told to refer but our service users have got a relationship with us and may not want to go somewhere else.
- Services are now funded for 2 years which is a good thing – more stability and services are able to plan more effectively.
- This system is very risky ie if you don't deliver the numbers stipulated in the contract you will not get paid in full that month.

What changes do you think it will bring for the sector?

- There is uncertainty amongst staff (re: jobs).
- Smaller organizations will suffer and may eventually stop operating.
- It has made it harder to secure funding
- It has created a competitive environment among organizations. – a feeling of unease.
- Unsuccessful organizations will be out of the loop ie they will not be part of the partnership
- The process is suppose to create and improve partnerships which is a good thing.

What changes do you think it will bring to the users of services?

- Negative. The services they are use to may no longer be available, or will be reduced.
- Some service users have already gone to another service as they got fed up waiting for confirmation that our service will run.

Did you feel the application pack was easy to understand? What did you like about it/not like about it? How could it be improved?

- The pack should have been on-line.
- The packs were sent out late.
- The monitoring requirements were very complicated and detailed – more than what had been expected in the past.
- The monitoring requirements are inflexible.
- The detail required about unit costs was very difficult for organisations to work out.
- Too much was expected around the policies and it was not made clear what organisations were required to do. E.g which ones were mandatory and which were optional at the time of submitting the application.

- There should have been a set of guidance forms available to organisations.
- The overall process was more complicated than the grants process. The commissioning process felt was much more formal than the grants process.
- Organisations felt alienated.
- The interaction between council staff and organisations was inadequate.

How did you feel about the support you received during the application period?

- The support received from the Social Council was good.
- The support received from MRCF was good.
- The support received from the council was minimal.
- The council should have provided an example of how the application could be completed.

Were you happy with the terms in the contract? Please explain.

- Organisations have not yet seen the contract but from the meetings they have had with Collette, they are unhappy with the outcome.
- Organisations felt that the negotiation meetings were not about negotiating at all. The council had already made the decisions and they meetings were set up simply to inform organizations of the outcomes.
- Organisations felt that they were not given an explanation as to why they did not get the full amount of money they requested in their application.
- Organisations felt that the communication between the council and themselves was unsatisfactory.

Is there anything that would have made the process better for you?

- Better communication about the process.
- More time to complete the application
- More guidance
- Feedback from council about the application organizations submitted so they know exactly where they went wrong or why they did not get the funding they were hoping for.
- Council staff should visit organizations so they get a better idea of what services are provided and the nature of them.
- Organisations need to be given resources to be a part of the commissioning process. They cannot do it all on their own with their current capacity.
- The commissioning process should outline key areas where services are required so they organizations can focus on these in their application.
- More information and support around partnership work and how organizations can refer service users to each other.
- RBKC sticking to deadlines
- RBKC officers having a better understanding of the sector
- Organisations should have been given more notice of 'negotiation' meetings and there should have been more flexibility about when these could be held rather than just being told at short notice that groups had to be available at a certain date and time convenient to RBKC
- RBKC should have acted towards groups more in a spirit of partnership and of equals

Do you have any other comments to add about the process?

- Organisations stressed the importance of getting feedback from council staff about the outcome.

19th September, 2008

(5 organisations)

- all 5 organisations received funding as a result of the commissioning process

Can you describe what commissioning means?

Purchasing of services and entering formal agreement of contract

How much you knew about it at the beginning of the process.

Most participants had had some experience of tendering. However, they did not know what the process at RBKC would involve. The conversation moved onto the process itself. The main points raised were:

- Very chaotic process – there was a general perception that RBKC didn't know what they were doing.
- Confusing and conflicting information was provided by RBKC throughout the process for example, groups were not told in advance of completing the forms, how much monitoring information would be required under the new process. This would have led to difference unit costs being bid for by organisations.
- Big delays in RBKC decision-making made it very difficult for organisations to either secure other funding in this period.
- Very time consuming process particularly for smaller organisations who don't have the resources (it took almost four times the amount of time than the previous system to get the same, if not, less money).
- As voluntary organisations we work RELATIONALLY - by forcing the arms length position this is contrary to our very ethos. And whilst this was supposed to lead to great equality for all applicants to enable new players into the "market" - in fact - it didn't really change the providers that the borough use ... If the Borough is commissioning then actually they can be honest about approaching preferred providers who have proved themselves... that is the beauty of commissioning in a "market"
- Also, it seems that this may have led to some 'trust' issues. For example they weren't sure how fair the process had been internally i.e. were neutral people used in the process or were people familiar with the services used in the decision making? Also, they questioned just how 'new' the process was as most organisations received similar amounts of money as with the previous system.
- They felt that the process wasn't as transparent/fair/open as it promised to be as a lot of smaller organisations would not have had the resources to go through the complicated/time consuming process.

How do you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC families and Children's Services/service users?

They felt that the idea/concept of commissioning was good. However, there was a worry that the admin/ monitoring required was going to be so time consuming that it would take resources away from front line services. Therefore, there was some questioning as to the benefits to the families and services users.

A few examples were given where certain groups would benefit however they generally felt that this was at the cost of other groups that were no longer included in their remit/ no longer funded.

Other than the above, they felt that their users wouldn't really notice the change.

What changes do you think moving to commissioning will bring for your organisation?

Monitoring was discussed a lot here. Organisations felt that the monitoring required was going to be so time consuming that it should be reflected in the funding, they worried that it would also have a knock-on affect on the front line services they provide.

Participants generally agreed that the three year process/period was an advantage – more stability – less time having to fill out forms every year.

It was felt that it was TEMPTING for organisations to compromise their original purpose or mission statement in order to satisfy RBKC requirements for certain targets to be delivered - and for funding to be given - putting pressure / tension on organisations already under pressure! This will pull providers away from their original driving purpose which cannot be good in the long term - for the provider - or for the borough...

There was a feeling that the Compact was overlooked and the independence of the sector not recognized

They feel the process is too target driven and that in many cases the targets are not suited to the service they provide.

Participants felt that it is unfair that organizations are penalized if they do not meet the targets ie have less users one week as a user is sick (which can effect money available to pay staff) but are not rewarded if they exceed targets. The model does not work well for the voluntary sector as often there will be busier and quieter times. Also it can be hard to calculate hourly unit costs for many voluntary sector services.

Monitoring comments

The monthly deadlines and general requirements are not suited to the services.

Very rigid requirements

Participants felt that the monitoring will penalise quiet days whilst not rewarding busy days.

Participants didn't understand why we need all the information we are asking for and questioned whether it was because RBKC didn't trust their organisations.

Did you feel the application pack was easy to understand? What did you like/not like about it?

Participants felt the workshop provided by the Social Council was very good and informative.

The general perception was that the pack was too long, extravagant and not at all user friendly. In particular, they commented on the A3 spreadsheets/forms which they found inaccessible and complicated (required an A3 printer) and difficult to use (the boxes were too small whilst the form was so big that it was awkward).

It was not clear how much information is allowed to be inserted on the forms. In the example it looked like it was only a few words but the document expanded

electronically so that you could put pretty much as much as you liked. Some sort of word count would have been useful.

Structure of the form: They felt that rather than providing information by the individual services it would be better to do as a whole service. Consequently, it was noted that the form was very repetitive and furthermore they felt it did not provide a good representation of their service.

They felt there should have been some consultation with the forms.

They questioned whether the process was good value for money i.e. staff time at RBKC, printing of the very glossy documents

The sums in the example on the application form did not add up

Were you happy with the support you were given?

They were very happy with the support given to them by the Social Council. However, they found it very frustrating not being able to go to RBKC directly, particularly as they felt that RBKC took a long time to get back to the Social Council with responses to their queries.

Felt disappointed that their past relationships had been cut.

Negotiation meetings

They all agreed that they were not given enough notice or information about these meetings. Consequently, many felt they were unprepared for the important meeting. One organisation said they had tried to find out about meeting beforehand but got no response from the council. Most felt they should have been given an agenda.

They felt it was a rather "bullying approach" used by RBKC and would have liked to have had some flexibility with the times/ days of the meetings.

Overall, they felt that it was not truly a negotiation as they had very little 'voice' throughout the process. .. they felt RBKC seemed to have made decisions before the process started.

Some organisations said that they had tried to set up meetings with the council to negotiate on certain points but with no luck. At the same time they felt they were under pressure to sign agreements which they hadn't yet discussed or agreed.

In addition 1 organisation submitted comments by email as was unable to attend the above focus group:

Can you describe what you think commissioning means?

Securing the services that meet the needs of a population, based on knowledge of needs and aspirations of groups and individuals.

How much you knew about it at the beginning of the process

Aware of principles and some practice.

How do you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC Families and Children's Services?

We are getting used to commissioning. Adult Social Care has used a similar approach for the past two years - identifying priorities and inviting bids that try to address them.

What changes do you think moving to commissioning will bring for your organisation?

Unusual approaches to service delivery may struggle to fit in very narrow and prescriptive criteria.

What changes do you think it will bring for the sector?

The sector will be more tied to LA priorities so more effort will need to be placed on finding new funding to allow for development and innovation.

What changes do you think it will bring to the users of services?

Could result in a lack of flexibility in service delivery

Did you feel the application pack was easy to understand? What did you like about it/not like about it? How could it be improved?

The electronic application form was extremely difficult to use. It was poorly formatted and this made getting an overview of your application difficult. The actual questions asked and responses required were clear especially when used in conjunction with the example.

How did you feel about the support you received during the application period?

The sealed bid approach feels 'un voluntary sector' where we are used to conferring and consulting with each other to get the best result. The secrecy is counterproductive and more suited to the award of a refuse collection or catering contract.

Were you happy with the terms in the contract?

No. The payment schedule does not suit our project and requires us to shoulder unacceptable risk. Monthly payments do not seem to be economical and monthly monitoring for our project (small and seasonal) is not a good fit.

Is there anything that would have made the process better for you?

More clarity about what the department wished to commission would have saved time and energy. We put in a bid for a larger project based on arts in partnership with a nearby voluntary organization in north Kensington. We received a letter to say that we were a preferred project but when we met with the officer, we were told that they wanted an intergenerational project at Flashpoint in the south of the borough and based on gardening. If that is what was required we could have done our partnership building with that in mind.

7th Oct, 2008

(3 Support Organisations)

- attend by 4 participants (+ 1 participant gave comments by email)

How do you feel about the change from grants to commissioning for RBKC Families and Children's Services?

- Worried about small organisations that don't have the capacity to go into formal contracting arrangements.
- Contracting is more risky than grant funding and this can be a worry for groups
- This commissioning process will have a positive impact in the sense that it will make organisations think more about outcomes.
- The process has created unnecessary stress and uncertainty amongst organisations

- The process raised expectations but these were not followed through.

- It was good that some groups were able to go in as a consortium under Westway – this was beneficial to small groups
- That it is a retrograde step
- The process didn't unpick all of the 'free' work that goes on in the voluntary sector
- A positive aspect of the process is that some equality issues have been taken into account e.g. money into domestic violence and supplementary schools.

What changes do you think moving to commissioning will bring for organisations?

- It will cause added stress because organisations will be worried that if they don't meet their targets one month (eg. if fewer participants attend an activity) they may have trouble paying their staff the next month.
- For all but the largest organisations, it will increase the pressures on them, increase their costs and decrease the service they can provide to clients
- This commissioning process has strengthened some organisations
- The relationship between the voluntary sector and RBKC has weakened
- Many groups, especially small ones, will find being paid in arrears very difficult
- Some organisations are concerned about asking users for personal details in order to fulfill the monitoring requirements as some users may not want to give this information and it could go against an organisations confidentiality policy.

What changes do you think commissioning will bring for the sector?

- Because it is hard for some groups to fit their work into unit costings this model can lead to lack of flexibility in service delivery. The higher risks involved in contracting can also cause groups to play safe and be less innovative.
- It will favour the large over the small, and lead to reduced diversity and choice

What changes do you think it will bring to the users of services?

- They will experience a reduction in service, an increase in bureaucracy and a decrease in flexibility
- The needs of the community may not be met adequately through the 'forced' partnerships between organisations.

What did you think about the application pack? How could it be improved?

- The page with the list of policies was very daunting for groups as it looked like all policies may be required. It was not clear which ones groups were expected to have and which ones they were not necessarily expected to have.
- The forms should have been much simpler especially in terms of the financial information requested.
- The application required a high level of education and knowledge of the English language to complete.
- Forms needed to be electronic from the beginning
- There was an assumption that organisations had the facilities to print out the form in A3, in fact many organisations didn't.
- There were mistakes and inconsistencies in the application pack
- The one size fits all approach confused more than it clarified
- Real and realistic examples should be given, and, for smaller groups, the process simplified. A better understanding of the legal structures of voluntary organisations by the commissioners wouldn't go amiss.

- It would have been better if there were detailed guidance notes to go along with the application to help organisations complete the form.

How do you feel about how you were consulted with about the application pack?

- Participants felt that they were not properly consulted and their suggestions were not always taken on board
- One participant said 'I did have a meeting with the commissioners early in the process, and was unable to exert any influence on the form of the application pack because of their lack of knowledge about and understanding of the community sub-sector of the voluntary sector'
- Participants felt they were involved too late in the process.

Is there anything that would have made your role as advisors easier?

- If there were less technical problems with the electronic application form
- If there were less mistakes/lack of clarity in the application pack
- One attendee commented that as a support organisation a huge amount of time was spent helping groups through the process but RBKC were only willing to pay a small proportion of the cost to provide this support
- It was hard to advise groups when some questions put to RBKC were very slow to be answered
- Lack of straight answers to straight questions was the biggest issue

Do you have any more suggestions as to how this process could have been carried out differently?

- Having commissioning through grants instead of formal contracts would have worked better for the voluntary sector. Under 200k competitive tendering is not necessary.
- One participant said: 'Having the blind lead the blind was the fundamental error. The Council were clearly no more ready for commissioning than the voluntary sector. In an ideal world, the Council commissioners should have been thoroughly trained in both the ways of commissioning and the ways of the voluntary sector, the initial round at least should have led to grants rather than contracts and it should have been piloted with a few larger organisations'.
- Council officers need to understand the complexities involved in completing the application and also the requirements in the contract (e.g monitoring)
- It was felt that it was not appropriate for council officers to force organisations to work with each other as this is compromising an organisation's independence.
- It was also not right that council officers were telling some organisations to refer their service users to other organizations. There was a feeling that officers did not seem to have a full understanding of the implications of this (such as service users may not feel comfortable accessing services of a different organisation).
- There were huge delays. Deadlines have not been met by the borough, some organisations are still waiting to find out the amount of money they will be getting.
- There didn't seem to be a genuine negotiation process. Decisions were already made by the council when staff met with the organisations
- Communication from the council should have been clearer and more frequent. Some mixed messages were given for example, groups were given the impression that they could use full cost recovery but in reality RBKC is not paying full costs, this in effect means that voluntary organisations are subsidizing the state. Also a number of groups were

given the impression in letters that their project will be funded when in reality this was not the case.

- A process that's more in keeping with the spirit of the Compact would have been better
- The process needed to be more transparent and honest

Do you have any other comments to add about the process?

- Small groups need support from the council so they can work in partnership with other organisations in the borough.
- It was felt that there is sometimes a lack of understanding among some officers at RBKC about the realities of running a voluntary organisation