
Subject: Commissioning Youth Services

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To: Select Committee on Commissioning

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The commissioning of Youth Services in Kent is an example of ‘...innovative and inclusive commissioning...’ as highlighted by Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society in a report entitled ‘Making it easier for civil society to work with the state. Progress update’. (HM Government, December 2012).

Background

KCC’s Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities took a key decision to continue to meet the statutory duty for the provision of education and recreational leisure time activities (youth work) through the continuation of a core offer of open access youth work delivered by KCC, augmented by an increased level of services commissioned from local voluntary and community groups. The new model of service provision commenced in January 2013.

Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS)

Across the county, 124 organisations successfully joined the Commissioning Framework at the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire stage in June 2012. These organisations were then invited to submit tenders between 27 July and 7 September. By the deadline, 54 organisations had submitted a total of 221 bids to deliver the 47 commissioning lots that were available across Kent.

Contracts were offered to 24 different organisations to deliver Youth Services in Kent

The Dynamic Purchasing System remains ‘open’ for four years to new providers to join and for mini-competitions to be advertised when funding becomes available. In addition, if a provider is unsuccessful in joining the DPS then the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire can be re-submitted following feedback for approval.

This flexibility allows for more dynamic commissioning and a number of mini-competitions have been run since the main Youth Services commissioning described above.

Evaluation

The process of evaluating bids began on the 10th September and ran until Friday 12th October 2012. Locality Boards or local representative Member groups were involved in the process and this did, for example, involve a small number of

Members in a 'task and finish' group working with representatives from the Integrated Youth Services (Youth Service).

The views of local young people were represented in the evaluation stage through the establishment of 4 youth panels, covering the 4 youth areas and 12 Districts, and coordinated by the Area Team Managers.

Support to the Voluntary Youth Sector

In order to mitigate for any potential barriers to commissioning, a number of processes were put into place including training, two conferences in conjunction with Young Kent (formally Kent Youth), and the use of the Dynamic Purchasing System.

Nigel Baker, Head of Integrated Youth Services, spoke at the Young Kent Conference on the 10 May 2012, held at the Ashford International Hotel, to 165 delegates from the voluntary and community youth sector about the Commissioning Framework.

Training for those voluntary and community sector organisations interested in being commissioned by the Integrated Youth Service was well received; with four training days having been delivered across the County in conjunction with Young Kent.

Implication of the use of the Dynamic Purchasing System

An implication of this type of approach to commissioning is that it is labour intensive. With 22 organisations delivering across 47 lots the contract management has been possible by the engagement of the Integrated Youth Services Managers, Quality Assurance Team and Youth Workers in observations on the youth work being delivered.

Barriers

It is not felt that the costs associated with the commissioning of Youth Services by KCC were prohibitive to the voluntary youth sector.

The Kent Business Portal and previously, The South East Business Portal are not intuitive systems and many small organisations reported difficulties in using them.

The Voluntary Youth Sector is an under-developed market and therefore the Integrated Youth Services continue to help build the market through direct support to commissioned providers and the commissioning of Young Kent to support the wider voluntary youth sector in Kent, including uniformed organisations such as the Scouts and Guides.