

From: Crossroads Care East Kent
To: KCC Commissioning and Procurement Select Committee.

Background

Crossroads Care East Kent is a charitable company providing home based practical respite and support for family and friends of someone who is dependent upon them through ill health or disability. Our core service is the provision of a trained member of staff who provides regular replacement care (usually weekly) for the family Carer, thereby enabling them to have some time to themselves away from their caring role. The service does not replace a statutory care package, but care staff will carry out all necessary caring responsibilities, including personal care, during their visits. Our normal activity is provided to approximately 500 different families each week, and West Kent Crossroads Care operates at a similar level.

Last year we merged with the formerly independent charity, Volcare, in order to provide a measure of protection for this small but immensely valuable service, whilst a full review takes place of the overall provision of services for Carers.

In partnership with Macmillan, we also commenced a volunteer service to support people with cancer. This has rapidly developed into a thriving service which has now formed a formal partnership with the 3 Pilgrim's hospices in East Kent, to support people with all life ending conditions, not just cancer.

In partnership with West Kent Crossroads Care, we recently successfully tendered for a Kent wide KCC contract to provide additional support for 400 new Carers; crisis support for Carers, pre bookable replacement care to allow Carers time to attend their own health appointments, and additional support at times of particular difficulties for example, if a Carer needed extra help to care for someone if they are ill themselves, or if they need short term extra support when the person they care for is discharged from hospital.

Issues around commissioning

- Historically protracted consultation periods followed by very short notice tender processes
- Costs incurred consulting with service users to inform specifications.
- Lack of timely information around service specifications i.e. full information not available about service specifications until after expressions of interest have been made. This could lead to hasty decisions being made by staff or Trustees as to whether to apply or not, leading to significant risk of losing good potential applicants.
- Complicated process for new market entrants
- Limited information available at market events, potential for conflict between possible competitors and potential partners
- Very time consuming application process – made more difficult by character word count reducing opportunities to showcase qualities needed to successfully compete. This is often enough to put organisations off applying.
- Entry onto competitive framework has not led to any relevant funding opportunities

Barriers

- 'Encouragement' to work in partnership and the council's desire to contract with fewer providers means in reality that mergers, takeovers, or consortiums are generally the only options for some organisations in order to meet requirements of contracts.
- Lead contractor option needs to have watertight legal contracts with clear accountability for liabilities – again, takes money and time to negotiate and set up
- Process of due diligence may influence or restrict choice of partners and incur legal costs
- Charitable Aims and Objectives, as well as area of benefit are defined by constitution. To close/merge/alter these involves membership decisions and Trustee commitment, all of which takes time and has the potential for conflict and pressure on Trustees.
- Reluctance of existing Trustees to take on additional growth, risk and responsibility for additional or new services
- Organisations need to be resilient and have enough resources and the appropriate skills to support capacity for successful contract delivery
- Lack of VCS experience when pricing for tenders against commercial providers who may be able to support cheaper hourly rates subsidised from other commercial enterprises or trading arms
- TUPE – unknown quantity for many SME's – liabilities may prove too great and discourage applicants. Expert advice to manage TUPE is usually required and costly – volunteer Trustees cannot afford to take responsibility for TUPE staff without this advice.

Risks

- Over diversification of applicant in order to win the contract
- Overstretching resources, lack of capacity issues
- Lack of expertise if applying for more than areas of specialisms – dilution of skills if working on a broader contract
- Over expectations of outcomes during the life of the contract – these may take longer to evidence
- TUPE – if handled incorrectly could prove costly and risk of provider defaulting on contract

General

Of the tender processes we have been involved with to date, two have been quite prescriptive with regards to outputs. This reduces the opportunities to be creative and develop innovative outcome based services that would previously have been available under a grant.

Performance monitoring can be time consuming and counterproductive unless clear and essential outcomes are set at the outset of the contract. Collecting data for the sake of it is an unaffordable price extravagance in competitive commissioning.

Added Social Value

Crossroads has been fortunate to have benefitted from grant funding from Social Services and Health since it first commenced service delivery in Kent and Medway, over 30 years ago. During this time we have successfully applied for additional funding from various charitable organisations and trusts, and received hundreds of donations from individuals over the years bringing many extra thousands of pounds worth of support to Kent's Carers and into the Kent economy