



## **Age UK North West Kent witness submission to Kent County Council Commissioning and Procurement Select Committee**

Age UK North West Kent is primarily responsible for providing a wide portfolio of services to older people in the two Boroughs of Dartford and Gravesham. Some of our services extend into North Sevenoaks District.

Age UK North West Kent is one of the founding and leading members of the 'Age UKs in Kent Consortium'. The Consortium has already been successful in the last twelve months with recent grant or contract tenders commissioned by KCC.

Previously Age Concerns and now Age UKs have had a long history of association through the annual allocation of Day Opportunities Grants in Kent as well as a range of other service related grants including Professional Advocacy and Assisted Bathing.

### **Issues to explore**

#### **The Process of Commissioning:**

##### **Portals**

The on-line portals (SE Business and Kent) are not designed for the new emerging consortiums like 'Age UKs in Kent Consortium' and present real technical difficulty in registering appropriately.

##### **Communication**

- a) When key commissioner contacts for a particular grant or contract have changed the information on occasions has not been confirmed to stakeholders quickly enough.
- b) In the event of a major problem occurring which may or will place the grant/contract/project at risk then this must be immediately advised in writing to the principal stakeholders with a clear statement of what has happened, why and what any next step will be.
- c) Whilst KCC may be the principle commissioner, where there are third parties involved e.g. Health, that are fundamental to the chain of delivery then it is critical that those third party process stakeholders are advised at the same time as the successful bidder of any changes which impact on the eventual delivery of the service.

## **Funding commitment**

There has been a recent example where funding has been clearly identified at the point of commissioning, only for it to be removed after the whole process of bid submission and win. This can only undermine future confidence for bidders as well as cause them unnecessary frustration, expense and time. There needs to be improved clarity about the status of the funding from the outset, e.g. fully committed, committed but subject to, or allocated but not fully confirmed or similar.

## **Timescales**

At the outset timescales for bid completion are clearly set out with an indication of when the project or service is expected to be implemented. However, there has been a recent example where timelines have been extended by commissioners, with no further explanation and remaining uncertainty. In this case where a particular funding source has suddenly been withdrawn and attempts made to find an alternative have been left open ended. Strategic partners and suppliers need to understand certainty about whether the service will now go ahead as commissioned.

## **Performance Monitoring**

Quite correctly it is expected that spending public money should be held to account, particularly when enabling third party external organisations to deliver the strategic objectives of the commissioning body. The methods involved in delivering performance monitoring and measuring outputs is often majored upon within grant or contract specifications. Whilst much has been made of outcome based commissioning more is needed to identify outcome Key Performance Indicators both on a quantitative and qualitative basis.

Age UK North West Kent welcomes this process of examination and is committed to assisting its strategic partners to improve commissioning throughout the wider Kent market.

Nigel Vian

**Chief Executive Age UK North West Kent**

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