

Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge is one of six organisations that make up the Age UKs in Kent Consortium. The consortium was set up in 2013 to bid for county – wide contracts and to deliver consistency of service provision for older people in Kent.

Age UK Sevenoaks and Tonbridge has a long history of delivering day support and other associated services for older people within its area of benefit, funded largely through a KCC grant.

Issues to explore:

- Risk to services for older people
 - Transition from grants to contracts has created a great deal of uncertainty and has, to a degree, stifled innovation and development. Currently we are funded for our building based day support services. If that is lost and we have to vacate premises, we cannot guarantee continuation of services. This has stopped us from investing further until we are sure of a base from which to grow.
- Timing
 - Opportunities are advertised on the portal with very short turnaround times., This puts enormous pressure on staff within small charities who are already working to (and above) capacity. We do not have staff dedicated to writing bids.
- Consistency of commissioning
 - The approach to commissioning has been mixed in our experience. Whilst, we have been pleased to have the opportunity to co –produce what may become an Older People’s core offer, we were disappointed to discover that funding for another opportunity was withdrawn without any dialogue. Having spent time setting up the required partnerships (some with other statutory services), it was then difficult to explain to them that the funding was now not available and that the service could not be delivered.

Age UK Sevenoaks & Tonbridge

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- Cost of setting up consortium
 - In order to be ready to bid for contracts, Age UKs have set up a consortium. This has been onerous and each Age UK has incurred additional costs which may increase depending on whether the consortium in its present form can bid for a contract. We would like to have some clarity about this as soon as possible.

Recommendations

- Communication channels should be open and transparent
- Commissioners need to be clear about what they are commissioning and develop specifications with organisations that work on the front line
- Commissioners should set out a timetable of upcoming contracts or grants
- Commissioners should be mindful that small charities may incur additional costs to become tender ready and that early guidance on appropriate structures would be welcome

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Chief Officer

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