Overview:

- Commissioning still finding its feet - it's a mess!
- Commissioners finding voluntary sector providers hard to deal with.
- Commissioners prefer to deal with bigger providers.
- Decisions often led by what is currently provided.
- Established provider is often in a weak position.
- Increased and emerging competition.

“Intelligent commissioning” *versus* “Tick box procurement”

- **Intelligent commissioning**

- Outcome based
- Strategic process
- Focused on gaps and needs
- Investment led
- Challenging

- **Tick box procurement**

- System led
- Risk management
- Focus on cost and compliance
- Often short term
- Procedure led

Issues

- Cultural change for voluntary agencies from independent agency to service provider.
- Is there a danger of organisations losing their identity and ethos?
- Need to get organisations working together - sharing information and collaborating.
- Need time and resources to influence the commissioning process.

Blocks and barriers

- Gradual acceptance of full cost recovery - but no extra money.
- Inappropriate criteria - fear of procurement laws - restrictive and bureaucratic process.
- Voluntary organisations seen as “cheap options”.
- How to bring trustees, staff and volunteers into the process.
- Lack of access to useful and relevant expert advice.

Survival factors

- Strong sense of independence.
- Willingness to say “no”!
- Evidence of outcomes.
- A diverse business model.
- Sound organisational practices.
- A strong profile with commissioners.

Possible future developments

- Commissioning becoming more strategic.
- Service transfers.
- Voluntary organisations operating in a mixed economy.
- Competition or cooperation within the sector?
- “Personal” care. Users with budgets.

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