

Voluntary and Community Sector Strategic Framework:

Public and voluntary sectors working together to build resilient communities

Our Vision

Strong and resilient communities supported by a thriving voluntary and community sector.

1. Overview

What is the purpose of the Strategic Framework?

This framework aims to support effective working relationships between the public and voluntary and community sectors. It builds on the work of the Compact but aims to go further in setting out a number of actions that will help us achieve our shared aim of strong and resilient communities supported by a thriving voluntary and community sector (VCS).

The framework is being produced at a time when all organisations are facing acute financial challenges. Funding from central government will continue to fall while the cost of providing essential services and demand for these services is expected to go on rising. The need for resilient communities that can support themselves and the need for radical innovation in service design and delivery has never been greater. The VCS can play a hugely important role in meeting these challenges. The sector already supports communities in areas as diverse as health and social care, the environment, sports and the arts and is an essential component of a strong and vibrant society.

The public sector is increasingly adopting a commissioning approach to address needs and deliver services using public, private and VCS contractors. Commissioners, the VCS and the private sector need to learn how to operate effectively together in this new landscape. In producing this framework it is recognised that one size will not fit all. The VCS in Essex is large and extremely diverse with an estimated 10,000 voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. Equally the public service landscape in Essex is highly complex. There is one county council, twelve district councils, two unitary authorities, five clinical commissioning groups, police and fire services and, nearly 300 parish councils.

Public sector partners will normally work with the VCS through umbrella groups like the Essex Association of Councils for Voluntary Service and the Essex VCS Alliance, while recognising that these groups do not represent the whole sector.

The opportunities for VCS partners to help shape the future of individuals and communities in Essex in partnership with the public sector are set out below, followed by examples of ways the public sector organisations can work with a vibrant and effective VCS and enable both sectors to develop the resilience of communities in Essex.

2. The Strategic Framework

The Framework represents a new approach for public sector partners in their relationship with the VCS. Public sector partners will be asked formally to sign up to the Framework through their own organisational governance mechanisms.

The Essex Association of Councils for Voluntary Service, the Essex VCS Alliance and the Essex Compact Steering Group will be asked to sign up to the Framework as representatives of the diverse VCS sector, although individual VCS organisations may also wish to formally commit to the Framework.

Section 4 sets out the opportunities for VCS partners to help shape the future of individuals and communities in Essex in partnership with the public sector.

In signing up to this Framework public sectors partners will be agreeing to undertake an annual self-evaluation of their success in implementing the Framework. These evaluations will contribute to a “State of the Sector” report by The Compact Steering Group to the Essex Partnership Board and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

3. The Framework

3.1 Relationship with the Essex Compact

This Framework builds on the suite of Compact Documents. This suite of documents provides the basis for effective procurement and grant giving. This Framework builds on the Compact but does not replace it. Public sector partners adopting this Strategic Framework are also expected to adopt The Essex Compact and local compacts, and require their contractors to do so where appropriate.

3.2 Independence of the VCS

In adopting this Strategic Framework public sector partners will respect the independence of VCS organisations to determine their own aims and objectives.

3.3 Commissioning

Commissioning is a process that identifies the needs of the population in defined areas and develops strategies to allocate resources in the most appropriate and cost effective way to meet those needs; it encompasses procurement of services and the evaluation of the impact. It is a cycle of activity that is described in detail in Appendix C. Increasingly public sector partners are adopting a commissioning led approach to improving outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

Commissioners should:

3.3.1 Draw up and adopt a consistent approach to commissioning throughout their organisation, which addresses the issues listed in this Strategic Framework.

3.3.2 Engage with the VCS at all stages of the commissioning cycle so that the sector can shape the approach taken by commissioners including: analysing need, evaluating existing service provision, developing the strategic approach, and determining commissioning priorities.

3.3.3 Ensure that there are good and clear lines of communication so that the VCS is clear, as early as possible, about opportunities and commissioning intentions.

3.3.4 Gather and use the valuable information on need and the views of service users held by the VCS.

3.3.5 Set out a clear approach to engagement and consultation. For example, will umbrella and representative groups from the VCS be engaged, or will engagement be with individual groups?

3.3.6 State how they will communicate with and support the engagement of smaller, community based organisations.

3.3.7 Consult in such a way that enables the VCS to propose new and radical changes in approach.

3.3.8 Value the employment of local residents, use of volunteers, and partnership with local VCS organisations and aim to incorporate these factors in our commissioning strategies.

The Commissioning Cycle is explained in Appendix C below.

3.4. Procurement

Each public sector partner should:

3.4.1 Ensure that its approach to procurement enables VCS participation on a level playing field with the private and public sector and regularly ask the VCS and other sectors how they can make their procurement processes more accessible, making improvements wherever possible.

3.4.2 Seek to provide longer-term funding arrangements, ideally for periods of between 3-5 years.

3.4.3 Adopting what we know works well while innovating in areas where outcomes must be improved.

3.4.4 Explain the circumstances that will lead to extension of contracts, and give sufficient notice of the extension or cancellation of grant and contracts.

3.4.5 Encourage the tenderers to employ local residents, use local volunteers, and develop sustainable partnerships with local VCS organisations wherever possible and appropriate .

3.5 Joint commissioning

Public sector partners should:

3.5.1 Inform the public when they will be commissioning jointly and what the joint commissioning arrangements are as far as possible in advance

3.5.2 Recognise the benefits of joint commissioning and, wherever possible, seek to collaborate with other public commissioning authorities.

3.5.3 Align commissioning cycles with other public bodies to improve joint commissioning opportunities where possible.

3.5.4 Where appropriate develop lead commissioner roles to simplify the commissioning process.

3.6 Grant funding

Public sector organisations should:

3.6.1 Publish a clear statement about the principles that will guide their decision-making about when they will use grants rather than a formal procurement process.

3.6.2 Give sufficient notice of grant funding opportunities which are to be awarded through competition to allow VCS partners enough time to engage effectively and ensure a level playing field.

3.6.3 Provide longer-term funding arrangements where possible, ideally for periods of between 3-5 years, with clear evaluation arrangements.

3.6.4 Set out how they will encourage smaller, community based organisations to engage in grant programmes.

3.6.5 Be as transparent as possible about funding arrangements, including any plans end grant programmes, and communicate this in a timely and honest way.

3.7 A single point of contact

3.7.1 Public sector organisations should identify and publicise single points of contact for each policy area and each procurement process.

3.8 Social Value

Public sector partners adopting the Framework should:

3.8.1 Publish a clear statement setting out how they will apply The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

3.8.2 Include social value in procurement processes (including in pre-qualification questionnaire and award criteria) to value economic, social and environmental

wellbeing. This might include a statement setting out the impact of a tender proposal on the local VCS.

3.8.3 Build social value into the commissioning cycle, noting that local authorities are required by law to consider social value prior to procuring a service.

3.8.4 Be clear about how social value has been considered in decision making processes and demonstrate how the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of an area have been improved as a result of a procurement exercise.

3.8.5 Consult the VCS to improve service specifications and better understand the contribution of social value.

3.9 Strengthening the sector

Public sector partners adopting this Strategic Framework should:

3.9.1 State how VCS organisations will be encouraged and supported to work together, including developing consortia and supply chains.

3.9.2 Recognise the challenges faced by smaller organisations and have a clear plan to support their engagement through, for example, CVS or other umbrella groups.

3.9.3 Work with the VCS to build capacity and identify areas for market development to help VCS organisations to be 'business ready'.

3.10 Volunteering

Public sector partners adopting this Strategic Framework should:

3.10.1 Develop a strategy or policy approach to increase volunteering, including volunteering by their own employees.

3.10.2 Work to reduce barriers to volunteering by consulting the VCS on relevant policies and providing support, including through grants, for organisations with volunteers.

3.10.3 Value and publicly recognise the contribution of volunteers.

3.10.4 Work with the VCS to ensure volunteering is open to everyone.

3.10.5 Recognise that, while important, volunteering cannot fully replace the existing means for the provision of many services.”

4. Opportunities for VCS partners to help shape the future of individuals and communities in Essex in partnership with the public sector

In order to make this framework effective the VCS is asked to:

- 4.1 Actively promote the adoption of the Framework and the Compact with their local public sector partners.
- 4.2 Work positively and constructively with public sector partners to help them comply with this Framework and the Compact.
- 4.3 Engage with commissioners in thinking radically about service re-design and delivery.
- 4.4 Commit to keeping track of publicly available information about commissioning intentions of the public sector.
- 4.5 Work in partnership with private sector and other VCS organisations.
- 4.6 Seek to find ways to deliver improved outcomes, not just continue existing service provision.
- 4.7 Assist the Compact Steering Group in the writing of the an annual 'State of the Sector' report for Essex Partnership Board, evaluating, on behalf of the sector, the progress in implementing this strategic framework and other key issues the sector wishes to raise.

5. Next steps

A commitment to working together to build capacity and resilience in our communities needs to be matched by mechanisms that ensure the effective delivery of the principles outlined in this document and a process by which success can be measured and organisations held to account.

To achieve this, public sector organisations should:

- 5.1 Sign up to the framework and commit to delivering the principles outlined in this framework by 31 October 2014.
- 5.2 Develop strategies, action plans, and/or joint commissioning plans to implement the framework from 1 April 2015 (or earlier).
- 5.3 Submit an annual self-assessment report to the Essex Partnership Board by 1 April 2016.
- 5.4 Be as open and transparent as possible to allow VCS to hold them to account against the principles set out here.

To achieve this, the voluntary sector, acting together, should:

5.5 Actively promote the adoption of the Compact and the Framework with their local public sector partners.

5.6 Work positively and constructively with public sector partners to help them comply with this Framework and the Compact, including areas for improvement.

6. Appendices

Overview of appendices

Appendix A: Further reading

Appendix B: Glossary of key terms

Appendix C: Principles of good commissioning

Appendix A: Further reading

The following documents add to the context within which the Strategic Framework has been written.

- [Essex Compact including the Funding and Procurement Code of Practice](#)
- [Southend-on-Sea Compact](#)
- [Essex County Council – Supplying the Council](#)

There is also a range of national guidance and material on this subject which may be of help including:

- [Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations – Procurement and Commissioning Guidance and Support](#)
- [Communities and Local Government, Making it easier for civil society to work with the state.](#)



building-social-value
in the NHS.pdf

There have been a number of studies that examine the importance of grants to VCS and the impact on individuals and communities. Two examples are:

- <http://www.navca.org.uk/publications/sustaininggrants>
- <http://www.navca.org.uk/publications/localgrants>

Appendix B: Glossary of key terms

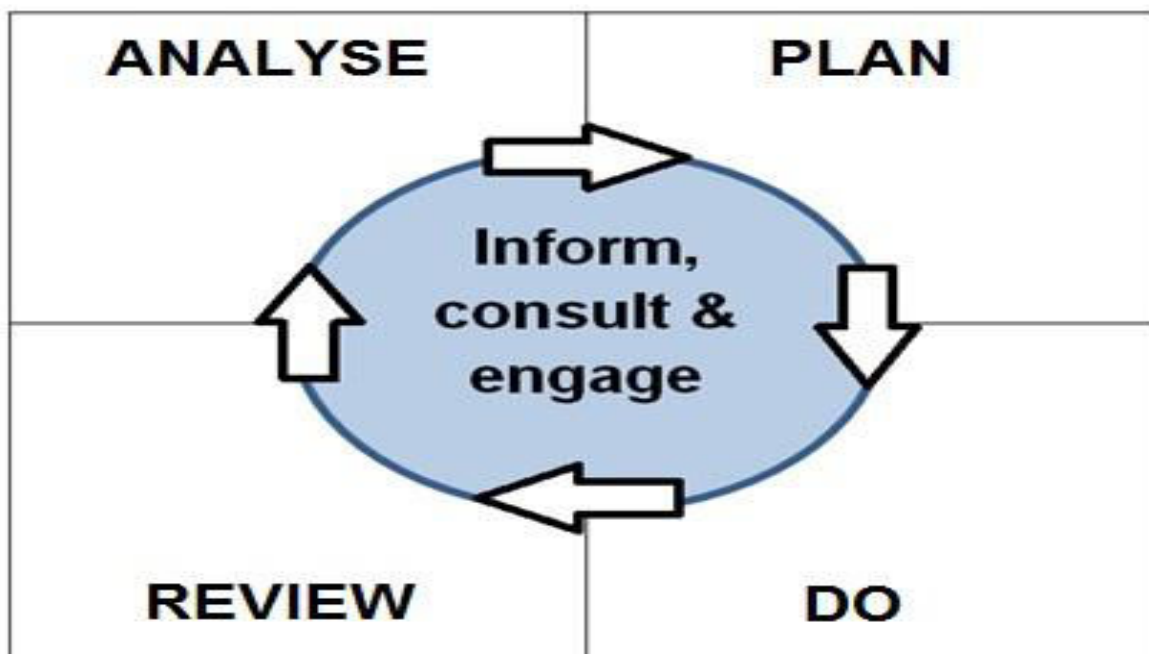
Commissioning	Commissioning is a cycle (see diagram below) that includes the process of identifying needs within the population and developing policy direction/service models and the market to meet those needs in the most appropriate and cost-effective way.
Contracts	A contract is a formal, legally enforceable agreement with another party by which each party commits to deliver something in return for something else - usually a service in return for payment.
Grants	A grant is an award of money given by an organisation (usually a public sector organisation or a grant-giving trust) to another organisation (usually a voluntary or community sector organisation) to support its work. The grant may partially or wholly support the work of the recipient organisation, or may be tied to a particular purpose such as running a project or delivering a service.
Infrastructure organisation	Civil society organisation whose main or only purpose is to support the work of other organisations in the voluntary and community sector.
Joint Commissioning	This is when two or more organisations work together and pool their resources to co-ordinate and implement a common strategy for commissioning services. An example of this could be the health and social care commissioning a place to meet a child's holistic needs.
Outcomes	The benefits or other effects that are realised as a result of services and activities provided by an organisation. Outcomes can be defined in advance of a project and measured to demonstrate the success of the activity.
Procurement	Procurement is a specific part of the commissioning cycle. It focuses on the process of buying services or goods from initial advertising through to appropriate contract or grant arrangements. The rules and process will be dependent upon the value and nature of the contract. Further details about each organisations approach to procurement can be found on the Organisations' Website
Payment by Results	Payments are made in return for outcomes delivered.
Social Value	Under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, all public bodies in England and Wales are required to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. This means that whilst value for money will be secured this will be considered alongside other benefits. Social value asks the question: 'If £1 is spent on the delivery of services, can that same £1 be used, to also produce a wider benefit to the community?'

Appendix C: Principles of good commissioning

The National Audit Office outlines eight key principles for effective commissioning¹:

- i. Understanding the needs of users and other communities by ensuring that, alongside other consultees, you engage with the third sector organisations, as advocates, to access their specialist knowledge;
- ii. Consulting potential provider organisations, including those from the third sector and local experts, well in advance of commissioning new services, working with them to set priority outcomes for that service;
- iii. Putting outcomes for users at the heart of the strategic planning process;
- iv. Mapping the fullest practical range of providers with a view to understanding the contribution that could make to delivering those outcomes;
- v. Considering investing in the capacity of the provider base, particularly those working with hard-to-reach groups;
- vi. Ensuring contracting processes are transparent and fair, facilitating the involvement of the broadest range of suppliers, including considering sub-contracting and consortia building, where appropriate;
- vii. Seeking feedback from service users, communities and providers in order to review the effectiveness of the commissioning process in meeting local needs.

The following diagram illustrates the commissioning cycle. Further details about our commitments as part of this process and those that we would expect to see from the voluntary and community sector are set out later in this document.



¹ Source: National Audit Office;

<http://www.nao.org.uk/successful-commissioning/successful-commissioning-home/general-principles/principles-of-good-commissioning/>

Expectations and commitments of the commissioning process:

Analyse

Engagement with service users and their support structures such as family and carers is more likely to result in appropriate and effective services, ensuring that they meet the requirements of communities that are supposed to benefit.

The VCS holds a wealth of local knowledge and can play a key role in engaging with service users and representing their views. Voluntary and community sector organisations across Essex can provide a valuable link to service users and communities that are often the most vulnerable and hard to reach.

Not all voluntary and community sector organisations in Essex receive public funding or would wish to directly deliver services on behalf of public services. However, we recognise that they have an important role to play in shaping and reviewing policies by representing the views of users and communities.

Plan

During this stage, work takes place to identify current providers and design how the need will be met.

This stage allows commissioners to secure the most appropriate provider to deliver those outcomes identified during the assessing need stage.

Involvement with the voluntary and community sector at this stage can help facilitate a culture of trust and partnership with the public sector and enables the sharing of knowledge and experience in planning services.

A broad pool of suppliers which includes a thriving VCS will mean greater opportunity to find the right provider and achieve the right service at the right price.

In some instances commissioners will need to consider whether the market is ready to support the service outcomes identified and work may be necessary to develop the market offer.

Do

Having identified the need for service development and understood the capacity of the market, commissioners will need to design the service.

Choosing the most appropriate provider to deliver the required outcomes is vital. It will mean that individuals and local communities receive the most appropriate services with the greatest impact. During this stage they will take account of factors

including:

- ❖ Funding availability and sustainability
- ❖ Good practice and policy guidance
- ❖ Learning from pilot/pathfinder experience
- ❖ Service user experience and aspirations
- ❖ Clarity of desired outcomes.

Increasingly services will be driven by the personalisation agenda, leaving individual service users/customers to specify the nature of the service they require. Particular services such as early intervention/prevention services may not be subject to personalisation.

Review

Having designed and secured the service to meet the initial need identified it is crucial to have a programme of evaluation - considering what is being done against what was planned. This will include the quality of the services being provided and the outcomes that this service is resulting in. Being aware of the initial needs identified and whether or not these have changed is also key.

Actively encouraging the involvement of service users and providers can provide valuable insight