



## **Submission to the Cabinet Office in response to the Modernising Commissioning Green Paper**

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## 1. An Introduction to Sitra

Sitra is the umbrella organisation committed to raising standards in the housing, care and support sector. We are a membership organisation and a registered charity with over 25 years experience of offering practitioners a range of affordable policy, training, consultancy, information, conference and capacity building services.

Our membership comprises 650 practitioner organisations in the field of housing with care and support. The membership elects the committee. Members are drawn from both providers and commissioners, and from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. We operate throughout England, and have offices in London, Bristol and Birmingham. Our work covers all aspects of supported housing, together with associated activities such as human resources and staffing issues, financial management, and community care.

We are recognised, funded and consulted by government departments and other bodies as representatives of providers of supported housing. We work with them on issues of national strategic significance for the sector. For example we have been working with DCLG on developing the transition programme which supports organisations through the changes resulting from the removal of the ring fence, and with the Department of Health on taking forward the personalisation of housing related support services. We are also part of the advisory and project board for the Right to Control, and have provided kickstart support to the Right to Control trailblazers.

The monthly Sitra *bulletin* is widely recognised as a key source of technical information and policy development news throughout the supported housing sector. With a circulation of around 3000, it is the most widely distributed specialist publication within the supported housing sector. We supplement the *bulletin* with regular briefings on matters relating to supported housing and its related fields.

Sitra is also known as a leading training provider. Each year we train over 4,000 individuals across the country, either on our general programme or on tailored made in-house courses for members and clients. We also provide a range of seminars and conferences on supported housing related themes. We estimate that over 2000 people attend such a Sitra event each year.

We are therefore in a unique position of combining a detailed knowledge of the housing with support or care sector on the ground with an understanding of and engagement with the developing national strategic agenda.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Cabinet Office green paper on Modernising Commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery.

## Consultation response

### **In which public service areas could Government create new opportunities for civil society organisations to deliver?**

The approx £1.6bn of annual funding of Supporting People funding has been used to commission services primarily from the voluntary and community sector over the last nine years. During that time the requirements and patterns to service provision have changed and responded to commissioners and client needs. Where the commissioning has worked effectively there has been a positive dialogue between commissioner and provider and real opportunities have emerged to develop innovative and ground breaking services. In many

ways this demonstrates that with appropriate support and time, it is possible for the voluntary and community sector to respond to a wide range of expanded public service areas. However, there are some clear and important messages that different case studies and focus on commissioning have demonstrated which the Government would need to think about in the move to change the pattern of provision.

The ability to respond to commissioning opportunities in new public service areas will be welcomed by many providers – both those who are civil society organisations and those who are private sector providers. The Government’s expressed desire is to ensure that some of this provision is picked up by Civil society organisations and they are able ‘to play a full and active part in public services’. There has been a lot of research into what makes effective commissioning, and time frames are very important. Housing related support providers have had to respond to commissioners changing needs, and particularly experienced the introduction of both Framework agreements and changes to contract sizes as ways of rationalising the commissioning process. Where these have been effective, they have managed to support providers through the transition and provided sufficient time for them to respond. Sitra has supported providers in understanding how to submit to a Framework, and also how to develop partnership and consortia to allow a wider group of organisations to tender for larger contracts.

Research and guidance on both these areas have been produced, and we would be very happy to work through these areas with representatives from the Cabinet Office.

Further guidance about support in Collaboration can be found at [www.hact.org.uk](http://www.hact.org.uk)  
Further guidance about support from Frameworks can be found at [www.sitra.org](http://www.sitra.org)

In order for this to be an effective opportunity, Government must provide sufficient lead in and support to enable Civil Society organisations to take up the opportunity. There has been a lot of work carried out within the DH around the management of the market for personalisation that could be utilised in thinking through the wider roll out of public services.

### **How could Government make existing public service markets more accessible to civil society organisations?**

Suggestions within the paper around standardisation of approaches including standardised PQQ’s would be welcomed by voluntary and community sector organisations. In the initial stages of the introduction of Supporting People an Accreditation process was introduced, which was utilised to determine the fitness of organisations to deliver commissioned services. In some areas of the country there was agreement between authorities to adopt an agreed accreditation process, which enabled the passporting of accreditation between commissioners. Where this was implemented it provided significant savings for providers and commissioners who could have confidence in the accredited status of providers, without having to invest their own resource in determining organisational readiness. The Government could learn from this experience in thinking through how it can support authorities in agreeing core principles for all organisations entering into competitive procurement for public services. Where provider organisations are required to invest resource into the submission of PQQs which are asking largely the same questions in multiple different formats it is reducing the time and resource available for front line services.

## **How could commissioners use assessments of full social, environmental and economic value to inform their commissioning decisions?**

In recent research carried out by Sitra, ADASS and other bodies, there has been a focus on how commissioning decisions are to be taken in the future. There has been a very strong pressure around the need to make savings, and how commissioning decisions are being squeezed around price. Whereas in the past many commissioners of housing related support were able to apply a proportional balance between quality and price in decisions, this has shifted to be a primary focus on price. The reduction in capacity for commissioning will also make it harder to enable assessment of full social, environmental and economic value more difficult to implement. However, this does not mean that this should not remain firmly on the agenda of both central and local government in the role of commissioners – and also will become increasingly important for individual commissioners through personal budgets.

There are a number of tools that have been used very effectively to support commissioner understanding of the full value of their decisions. Sitra have worked with a number of providers applying the model of SROI to housing related support services, and it provides a very effective understanding of the full impact of the investment. In addition, for the last four years, housing related support providers funded under the Supporting People programme have been measuring the outcome of their work through the Outcomes Framework. Commissioners have been increasingly utilising this information to support commissioning decisions and to help determine the most effective response to meet need. The outcomes approach begins to put a measure on the impact of services on individual recipients. This data has been collected nationally, and Sitra believe that this data is crucial in developing a real understanding the impact of commissioning decisions.

## **How could civil society organisations support greater citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning?**

Supporting People commissioning has taken a very positive and proactive approach to the involvement of service users in commissioning arrangements and decisions. Many authorities have developed and supported service user forums, who in turn have taken a role in supporting commissioning decision making at the level of contributing to strategy on needs, defining specifications, reviewing tender documents, interviewing on tender panels and inspecting and assessing services for contract compliance. There is a huge body of expertise, training and skill development in existence which could be harnessed to support this objective. Sitra have been involved in working with service user groups to support this objective, and work with many service led partner organisations who could advise the Cabinet Office and effective and supportive mechanisms for ensuring that the most vulnerable members of the community are provided with opportunities to effectively take part in the commissioning cycle.

The mechanisms for measuring ongoing quality of commissioned contracts needs to have a strong involvement of citizens and the community. Housing related support has been monitored utilising the Quality Assessment Framework(QAF). Full details of this framework can be found at [www.sitra.org.uk](http://www.sitra.org.uk) In order to achieve the highest rating under the QAF, an organisation must demonstrate that it has service users at the heart of the operational and strategic running of the organisation. As noted above, this has been very successfully measured utilising service users as peer assessors. However, there needs to be sufficient capacity within the commissioning team to ensure the measurement is real and effective. Modernising Commissioning recognises that monitoring, reviewing and learning from delivery is a crucial part of the commissioning cycle and the QAF presents an excellent

model of a monitoring tool that can be developed and applied locally to focus the assessment on the areas of relevant social, environmental and economic value.

The green paper suggests that Healthwatch would provide an opportunity to support the greater involvement of citizen and community involvement in providing a local consumer voice. Following the establishment of the LINK schemes, there was a further extension of these entitled LINK Plus. Sitra were involved in supporting the development of the governance of the LINK Plus scheme in Ealing which looked at expanding the remit of the LINK to look at supported housing, sheltered housing and housing options. Whilst the central support for the pilot did not continue, the pilot has continued, and would provide some very useful feedback as to the potential for any future configuration of Healthwatch to look effectively at a broader remit than health. As public services are delivered and commissioned by a wider group of organisations and individuals, issues around the right to scrutiny and the influence future commissioning patterns become more complex.

Commissioners and civil society organisations need to make significant changes to adapt to an environment where citizens are commissioning their own services. Sitra has been very involved in thinking through how the housing related support sector can adapt to changing commissioning patterns and has carried out work on both the provider and commissioner perspective. We have worked with a range of different providers who have particularly looked at the challenges of moving from fixed term block contracts to preparing for effective spot purchasing from individuals. We have developed training and consultancy support to help move organisations from current commissioning patterns to proposed future patterns. In addition we were commissioned by the DWP to offer Kickstart support to the Right to Control Trailblazers to think through how housing related support funding could be incorporated as part of the right to control. Key issues that arose as part of this support included market management, communication, aligning of commissioning decisions and information between differential funding streams, working with customers to understand the customer journey. We would be very happy to share our understanding of the challenges and ways forward which have been identified in our role with supporting authorities in this important test bed of Right to Control.

Sitra's response provides some headline information about particular areas focussed on within the green paper. However, we have a wide body of information that we could provide to support the Cabinet Office in thinking through this vital agenda. As the lead body representing providers of housing, care and support, we would be happy to come and talk in more detail, or to arrange for a meeting between Cabinet Office officials and providers in order that these issues can be talked through in more detail. If you would like this to be arranged, then please do not hesitate to get in touch and we can put this together very quickly.