

# Impact of Co-Commissioning: Report 17, Brightlife and Commissioning

## Introduction

This report is made up of two sections; a literature review of academic articles published as regards commissioning during the lifetime of Brightlife, and a content analysis report into Brightlife's commissioning process. The aim of this report is to review Brightlife's commissioning processes with reference to current standards, so as to identify key learning to inform future commissioning strategies and decisions. This is particularly important given Brightlife's test and learn ethos, which seeks to capture emerging findings at the earliest possible opportunity to inform the subsequent design and development of Brightlife. Equally, the discussion and recommendations reported can assist with future commissioning approaches for organisations within and outwith the Brightlife Partnership beyond the lifetime of the current project.



**COMMUNITY**  
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# Continuity vs. Change: The Theory of the Commissioning Cycle

## Key Lessons for best practice:

- Awareness of traditional and developing concepts of the commissioning cycle (theories always in flux, though practices may remain stable), with adoption of adaptable working methods
- Awareness of factors affecting commissioning 'decision space'
- Utilising different models of partnership working and joint commissioning
- Addressing conflicts between theory and practice (including decommissioning strategies)
- Essential need for active monitoring of commissioned services
- Clarity in defining roles and responsibilities of different actors within networks and/or partnerships
- Inclusion of service users in service development, (embodying the 'empowerment' discourse of joint commissioning)

## Vertical vs. Lateral: Local and National Scale

### Key lessons for best practice:

- Greatest innovations occurring on local scale (bottom up rather than top down), with opportunities for lateral working relationships

- Potential for regional level oversight to juggle needs of national and local interest groups
- Awareness of risks to sustainability, replicability and cohesive strategies from being too local-specific, and from misalignment and over-proliferation of lateral groups

## **Competition vs. Cooperation: Institutional and Organisational Issues**

Key lessons for best practice:

- Understanding positives and negatives of both competitive and collaborative working, and ability to work with both structures
- Awareness of complexity of the health and social care sector, and why it has developed in this way
- Keeping staff well informed of new procedures and strategies
- Procedures in place to monitor provider performance, with disinvestment procedures in place if decommissioning becomes necessary
- Embracing long standing relationships, but not to the detriment of new organisations or innovative practices
- Creating clear lines of responsibility and accountability, whether shared or separated

## **Clinical vs. Managerial: Governance Structures, Professional Identities and Personal Relationships**

Key lessons for best practice:

- Balanced membership of commissioning boards, with service user representation
- Awareness of potential conflicts of interest, along with development of strategies to try to limit extent of conflicts
- Strategic succession planning to counteract staff turnover rates
- Moves towards better definitions and clarity of professional identity, with attempts to establish reputation of different professionals involved in the commissioning process (potentially through marketing campaigns and utilising locally based, trusted networks)
- Building and utilising key inter-organisation relationships

## **Soft vs. Hard Evidence: Knowledge and Evidence Exchange**

Key lessons for best practice:

- Realistic evaluation strategies in place from start of contracting
- Recognition of different evidence types, evidence cultures and how best to present data to different audiences
- Mutual strategies and support between commissioners and

providers to promote knowledge exchange and capture learning

## **Brightlife's tender application to Ageing Better**

The Brightlife Partnership was formed to apply for National Lottery Community Fund funding and was successfully awarded £5 million in 2015. It developed its vision and thinking through collaboration, not only within, but also outwith the Partnership Board by engaging with the wider market. A broad network of third-sector, public and private organisations and groups helped to undertake a community asset gap analysis to explore what could be delivered.

Within the tender application the Brightlife Partnership committed to providing funding for business support, a food sharing project, and marketing and communications. Equally, social prescribing was a key element of the Brightlife project, and an asset mapping exercise was undertaken in the three designated areas to identify potential gaps in provision to support the delivery of social prescribing. Therefore, business support, food sharing, marketing and communications, and projects to deliver social prescribing formed the basis of the first rounds of commissioning.

Additionally, the work to develop the final application to the Ageing Better programme contributed to an 'Ideas Bank', which helped inform Brightlife's commissioning priorities. However, although the Ideas Bank identified potential solutions to reduce social isolation and loneliness, it also created potential conflict of interest whereby organisations involved in developing the bid would be applying for funding to deliver those solutions. Consequently, following discussions between the National Lottery Community Fund and Brightlife it was agreed that, in order to fund local projects, a formal commissioning process would be developed.

## **Developing a model for commissioning**

The initial commissioning process was developed by:

- engaging with other Ageing Better projects
- the Commissioning Manager's experience
- a Partnership Commissioning Working Group

A formal 'Commissioning and Procurement Framework' was adopted by the Brightlife Partnership Board (Brightlife, n.d.-e) and it was agreed all applications for Brightlife funding would be decided through the formal process. Initially this involved two separate approaches:

- Key Commissions – larger funding awards using a traditional competitive tendering commissioning process
- Bright Ideas – lower levels of available funding to encourage local groups and organisations to identify and develop solutions to meet a need in their local communities

A further commissioning opportunity was introduced in 2019 called 'Brighter Ideas', which was developed following the fourth round of Bright Ideas funding applications.

## **Older People's Alliance**

Working with older people to help design and commission services is embedded as one of Brightlife's core principles. Consequently, an Older People's Alliance (OPA) was

established to ensure the meaningful involvement of older people in influencing the overall project and the commissioning of its services. Members of the OPA were trained in commissioning and appointed to the panels for both Key Commissions and Bright Ideas processes. Support and advice to the OPA is provided by members of the Brightlife Team and Brightlife Partners.

## **Key Commissions**

The Commissioning and Procurement Framework established two levels of entry point, both through a Pre-Qualifying Questionnaire (PQQ) approach; one for contracts up to and including £50,000, the second for contracts over a value of £50,000. Organisations were able to apply to go onto the framework at any time and those meeting the threshold were accepted. Invitations to tender were publicised to organisations on the framework allowing a minimum of four weeks to submit bids. Received bids were assessed by a panel drawn from the Brightlife Partnership, including members of the OPA and Reference Groups (specific working groups reporting to the main partnership) using criteria included in the procurement documentation. The initial focus for projects was taken from the Brightlife tender application to the National Lottery Community Fund and the work associated with developing the bid.

## **Bright Ideas Commissions**

The Bright Ideas commissions were designed to find innovative and community-led initiatives to meet local needs. This round of commissioning was intended to work on the principle that community-based individuals and groups are often ideally placed to

identify local need and develop solutions to address those issues. To assist prospective applicants a 'Bright Ideas Guide' was published that detailed the commissioning process for applicants (Brightlife, n.d. -c).

Moreover, potential Bright Ideas providers were able to access the services of Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA) to provide additional support to applicants and help develop ideas prior to making an application.

Funding was available for Bright Ideas projects up to 2 years in length, based on four criteria as agreed by the Brightlife Partnership Board:

- Cost of project between £5,000 and £20,000
- The project broadens the reach of the organisation to new target participants
- Sustainability after Brightlife funding ceases is addressed
- Commitment was made to engage in Brightlife's evaluation process, which consists of three elements:
  - Test and Learn
  - National Evaluation
  - Local evaluation conducted by the University of Chester

Applicants needed to demonstrate the ability to satisfy all criteria in order to be successful in the funding application. However, due to ethical considerations associated with data collection it was not mandated participants had to engage the national and local elements of the evaluation process. Nevertheless, potential Bright Ideas providers did need to commit to 'test and learn', although only encourage participants to complete the CMF, and be willing to work with the University of Chester.



An application form was developed (Brightlife, n.d. -a) comprising of ten questions with accompanying explanations, and a link to the Bright Ideas Guide for prospective applicants.

## **Brighter Ideas**

Commissioning opportunities for Brighter Ideas funding was only available to existing or previous Bright Ideas providers and based on an agreed application criterion (Brightlife, n.d. -b). A total fund of £80,000 was available and applications invited up to a maximum of £10,000 via a competitive process.

Eligibility for funding stated potential providers had to meet the following criteria in order to apply:

- currently or previously delivering a project funded under Bright Ideas
- existing project is on track to deliver all contracted outcomes and key performance indicators (KPIs), including CMF targets
- the proposed project will deliver additional outcomes and KPIs, and reach new groups of socially isolated older people, incorporating learning from the existing project and generate additional test and learn evidence itself
- the Brighter Ideas project needed to start by 31st March 2019 and will be completed by 31st March 2020
- Funding could not be used to deliver the outcomes and KPIs associated with the existing Bright Ideas project.

Providers could not apply if

- the existing project had already been awarded additional funding to extend its work
- the existing project had already been given additional time to deliver current outcomes and KPIs

Applications were initially assessed by the Brightlife Commissioning Team and forwarded to the OPA who scored and ranked bids based on meeting the eligibility criteria. Funding was allocated starting with the highest scoring bid and working down the list until all available funding had been awarded.

## **Top ten tips for winning Brightlife funding for community projects**

- Ensure a focus on socially isolated older people
- Demonstrate an ability to recruit socially isolated older people
- Conduct thorough research as part of the application and verify local need
- Offer innovative projects, including targeting of previously uncatered for individuals/groups
- Provide evidence of established links with local organisations and knowledge of the local community
- Clarify the actions required to ensure sustainability

- Outline the process by which evaluation procedures will be undertaken
- Highlight working with volunteers and how training will be delivered
- Deliver an enthusiastic presentation demonstrating commitment and passion
- Ensure all the required information is provided in the application.

### Link to full report:

<http://www.brightlifecheshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/17.-Brightlife-Commissioning.pdf>

### Link to all learning reports:

<http://www.brightlifecheshire.org.uk/key-learning/>

