



SOCIAL CARE

Regional Framework to Support the Commissioning of Children's and Young Peoples Services



Summary

Children and young people's service partners across the East Midlands have signed up to the first ever regional commissioning framework designed to improve the way care services are commissioned.

An ambitious project, it involved the regional collaboration of a number of agencies, including health, social care, education, and voluntary organisations. The project was coordinated by the Regional Partnership and funded by the East Midlands Centre of Excellence, in response to the legal duty upon partners to co-operate in joint planning and commissioning.

The framework was officially launched in May 2007, and consists of a website and handbook offering resources and materials, and a step-by-step guide to support commissioning.

It is specifically designed to encourage more consistent commissioning practice across the region, establish principles and guidance to underpin the commissioning of services for children and, for particular population groups, promote greater collaboration in procurement between commissioning organisations.

Improvement through efficiency



Centre of
Excellence

East Midlands

emce.gov.uk

Project background

The need for a framework to support commissioning activity for children and young people's services was identified during Spring 2006, through a series of consultation events led by representatives of the regional group of Directors of Children's Services.

Local authorities, PCTs and other organisations across the region concerned with planning and commissioning consequently worked together to develop the framework to make sure that improvements in commissioning arrangements were made in way which promotes consistency and cost effectiveness, and minimises unnecessary overlap.

The project built on a strong record of success in collaboration across organisation boundaries, and these well established regional arrangements formed a platform for its development. The framework is unique and confirms the region is at the forefront of national developments in commissioning and the procurement of services for children and young people.

Objectives

The framework is intended to:

- build the capacity for effective commissioning within and between all partner organisations in the East Midlands
- provide the consistent language and arrangements required to underpin effective joint working between partners within the region.

The framework achieves this by providing very practical guidance and resources in the form of a unique handbook and website.

The handbook is a step-by-step guide to the stages of commissioning and details how strategic partnerships in the East Midlands are committed to improving outcomes through a commissioning approach. It contains a set of principles to inform and guide commissioning work that have been endorsed by the executive leadership of local authorities and PCTs. It also illustrates a number of the potential gains which can be derived from a regional approach to commissioning and provides links to other sources of support.

The website at www.regionalcommissioning.co.uk mirrors the handbook and provides access to a set of resources, guidance materials and tools for each stage of the commissioning cycle. It will develop as needs change and when additional resources become available.

Overall the framework seeks to:

- introduce commissioning in plain language
- support all stages of the commissioning cycle
- support all levels of commissioning activity
- show how commissioning provides a process to enact plans effectively
- be relevant to all partners who plan services for children and young people
- illustrate how some services might be improved and better value achieved
- help all partners within the East Midlands region to collaborate appropriately and to improve services.

Benefits achieved

As soon as the framework was launched it attracted massive local, regional and national interest as it provides direct, practical support for those involved in commissioning. The handbook and website are being used by the partner organisations to support training and workforce development, Children's Trusts are following the framework guidance to develop joint commissioning strategies for specific population groups, and Central government departments are considering the best ways of adopting and/or promoting the framework as a national resource.

By promoting improved effectiveness in service design, procurement and contracting the framework contributes to improvements in population outcomes across the region, and reduces the proportion of service users who experience negative outcomes from services.

Common streamlined commissioning arrangements promote effective working relationships, trust and good communication between organisations.

Common approaches encourage better use of data and analysis and promote more effective strategic decision-making, ultimately reducing the proportion of children, young people and families who receive inappropriate or ineffective services.

The framework also contributes to improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of commissioning across the region, the financial benefits of which will be seen in areas such as:

- Reductions in overlaps of commissioning activities between Local Authority and PCTs, leading to infrastructure and Gershon efficiency savings.
- Reductions in expenditure on high cost placements for small numbers of children and young people with complex needs, through more effective market management and joint negotiation with providers.
- Improved matching of needs and services for children and young people, reducing inappropriate demand and ineffective provision.

Critical success factors and lessons learned

The development of the framework itself was a significant success and a case in point where regional collaboration can add significant value. The project was initiated and sponsored by a small number of strategic partners, but the substantive development of ideas and shaping of framework structure was a team exercise by a reference group with representatives from as many partner organisations as possible.

Although creating the reference group was a major task in itself, it was critically important to draw in such wide contributions, as this has led to executive endorsement from almost every partner and has instated 'champions' within each organisation who will disseminate and embed the framework in practice and help develop the framework over time.

Another significant lesson learned has been the value of bespoke, dedicated project leadership. The project team that developed the framework contained a distinctive blend of commissioning expertise, local authority and government leadership, with a particular strength in project and partnership management. The team was able to develop the framework around the Reference Group's requirements while also maintaining a fresh, uncluttered style that makes it very accessible.

Risks

Children's organisations will be required by the government to improve their local commissioning arrangements over the next few years, even without the regional framework. Hopefully the existence of the framework will minimise or eliminate the risk that partner organisations will take an independent approach, leading to inefficiencies and overlaps in commissioning arrangements across the region.

This risk can be overcome as the key organisations, including the voluntary and independent sector commit to using the regional commissioning framework. This in turn calls into question the capacity of organisations to implement a common framework, due to different resources and starting points. It is planned to use some remaining funds to pump-prime dissemination and awareness-raising activities within each organisation to help in this regard.

Transferability

The framework is fully relevant and applicable to commissioning right across the country, and is already being used outside of the East Midlands. The style and approach of the framework makes it highly relevant to the commissioning of services for adults – although not designed specifically for this, it is hoped that further project development might adapt the framework for such benefits to be realised.

Supporters of the Regional Commissioning Framework

The following local authorities, PCTs and third sector organisations that serve children, young people and families of the East Midlands have welcomed the development of the regional framework to support commissioning.

They fully endorse the principles within the framework and expect their organisations to apply the principles of the framework throughout their commissioning activities. The list is current as of July 2007 and will shortly include virtually every partner authority, PCT and third sector organisation in the East Midlands.

Local Authorities Children and Young People's Services

- Derby City Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Leicester City Council
- Leicestershire City Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Rutland County Council

Health Service PCTs

- Bassetlaw PCT
- Derbyshire County PCT
- Leicester City Teaching PCT
- Northamptonshire PCT
- Nottingham City PCT

Third Sector and Other Partners

- Derby CVS
- Northamptonshire Connexions

Role of the RCE

This project was funded by the East Midlands Centre of Excellence, £80k of funding is estimated to produce cashable efficiency savings totalling £5.3m, non-cashable savings totalling £111k and provide a qualitative service improvement of 78%. These figures have been forecast using the RSe Brent ROI model and relate to a period of 5 years from commencement of the project.

“This is a good example of collaborative working for the benefit of service users and a model that we are keen to promote to other regions. We believe this is the first of its kind and it is predicted that the adoption of the framework will save millions of pounds across the East Midlands.”

Chris Allison,
Regional Director
East Midlands Centre of Excellence

Accessing the framework

The framework, which was officially launched in May 2007, consists of a website and a handbook. Visit: www.regionalcommissioning.co.uk

Contact

Peter Chilvers

Project Manager
School Development Support Agency (SDSA)
tel: 0116 299 5942
email: peter.chilvers@sdsa.net

Pat Graham

East Midlands Regional Partnership Co-ordinator
Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM)
tel: 0115 971 2543
email: pat.graham@goem.gsi.gov.uk

Helen Richmond

Projects Officer
East Midlands Centre of Excellence
tel: 07921 491 696
email: helen.richmond@nottscg.gov.uk