National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning: Impact evaluation

MIND YOUR HEAD

Contents

A legacy report for the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning by Consulting Inplace.

Executive summary

Background to the programme

Local Government Improvement and Development (LG Improvement and Development), formerly the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), was responsible for the delivery of phase two of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning (NPTSC) on behalf of the Office for Civil Society (OCS, previously Office of Third Sector). Based on the learning from phase one of the programme, the changing external environment, and the eight principles of good commissioning, phase two had three main objectives:

• increased awareness and understanding among commissioners of the value of commissioning services from third sector providers

• more third sector involvement throughout the commissioning cycle

• improved bidding practice from third sector organisations.

The NPTSC was delivered through three delivery strands, each of which aimed to support the achievement of one of the above objectives. Each strand comprised a number of discrete projects, which each had a set of key performance indicators (KPIs)/output targets, which are outlined in the body of the report. To ensure long-term sustainability beyond the life of the programme, LG Improvement and Development identified ten delivery partners to be responsible for the delivery of projects across the whole programme.

Evaluation methods

Building on a 'logic model' approach, Consulting Inplace[1] conducted the following evaluation activities:

• an **analysis** of project and programme documentation

• a **survey** of all participants who took part in the programme and for whom email contact details were held

• **stakeholder interviews** with members of the NPTSC advisory group to explore views on the outcomes, impact, strengths and weaknesses of the programme. These interviews also explored future priorities for third sector commissioning

• **case studies** – a small number of projects were selected for in-depth case study. These included work delivered by bassac (the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres, now part of Locality), the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

• **delivery partner interviews** with partners from each project

• interviews with **commissioners** who benefited from the programme.

1   www.consultinginplace.com

Conclusions

Phase two has been well designed and based on real identified need

Phase two was based on real, identified need. It has built upon the lessons from phase one, particularly the need for the programme to be flexible. This has stood the programme in good stead given the change of government, and the rapid change in environment for local authorities and public bodies.

Appropriate depth and breadth

The programme has managed to strike an appropriate balance between the 'breadth' of people engaged and the 'depth' of this engagement. This is always a difficult balance to achieve, especially in a programme aimed at multiple stakeholders, with differing levels of awareness.

Public sector commissioners and third sector organisations were primary beneficiaries of the programme

In line with its initial objectives, performance targets, and overall design, phase two has focused primarily on commissioners, and specifically local authority commissioners. Survey data and consultation with delivery partners suggests that a small number of NHS, police and other commissioners were also reached by the programme. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that this approach was appropriate, given the need and demand for support evidenced in phase one and the take-up of support in phase two.

Programme contributed to culture change of individuals

Through the NPTSC, individuals have been supported to understand and deliver commissioning processes that adhere to the eight principles of commissioning. There is evidence that beneficiaries have learned from their involvement, which has led to improved practice. In most cases, this has occurred at an individual level rather than on an organisational level. However, the projects undertaken by IVAR and the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), both of which were designed to deliver change to organisations, demonstrate evidence of organisational culture change. This suggests that intensive joint working contributes to successful, sustained culture change.

The programme has been successful in engaging 'high level' stakeholders who have the potential to influence decision-making and 'cascade' learning to others within their respective organisations and wider sectors.

The programme as a whole covered all elements of the commissioning cycle

The programme covered all elements of the commissioning cycle and approximately half of public sector respondents to the evaluation survey felt the programme had a positive impact on improving organisational behaviour at each of the commissioning cycle stages.

Movement across the programme

Feedback from the programme suggests that individual projects have been well received. Interviews with delivery organisations identified that some participants had a limited awareness of the wider programme (beyond their specific delivery strand/project) and are not fully aware of the activities which have been delivered by other delivery partners.

Recommendations

The programme has stayed relevant through the changing context; however there are clear lessons for any future phase of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning or similar programme. A summary of the recommendations is outlined below:

Delivery and process lessons

1. **An appropriate balance between breadth and depth** will be important for the success of any subsequent phases/programmes.

Implications of the changing policy context

2. **Supporting dialogue between sectors** – the programme was very successful at encouraging dialogue and understanding between the public and third sector, and stakeholders agree that at this point in time, this dialogue is enormously important. The role of the third sector is shifting, with increasing discourse around third sector commissioning. There is real appetite from both the public and third sectors to maintain and increase dialogue in order to improve mutual understanding, jointly solve problems and improve the commissioning process.

3. **Encouraging other government departments to buy-in** to any subsequent phase/programme would help to ensure its fit with the prevailing policy context and changes to commissioning.

4. **The commissioning agenda continues to evolve. For example, the personalisation agenda** is being implemented in some aspects of social care, and is expected to expand into other areas, such as childcare. There is appetite for a programme to deliver training and support for commissioners to implement and manage this change, and for third sector organisations that will need to understand how to manage themselves under these different circumstances.

5. **Support for NHS GP commissioning** – there has been a need identified by stakeholders to support these new consortia, which may lack experience of commissioning, and lack understanding of the third sector's role in health and social care.

More explanation on these conclusions and recommendations can be found in the full body of the report.

1. Introduction

Background to the programme

Phase two of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning (NPTSC) was tendered by the Office for Civil Society (previously Office of Third Sector). Local Government Improvement and Development (LG Improvement and Development) were the successful body responsible for delivering the programme.

The design of phase two was informed by the learning from phase one, the changing external environment, and the eight principles of good commissioning (as outlined by the Office for Civil Society), which are:

- understanding the needs of users and other communities by ensuring that, alongside other consultees, you engage with third sector organisations, as advocates, to access their specialist knowledge

- 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

- putting outcomes for users at the heart of the strategic planning process

- mapping the fullest possible range of providers with a view to understanding the contribution they could make to delivering those outcomes

- considering investing in the capacity of the provider base, particularly those working with hard-to-reach groups

- 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

- ensuring long-term contracts and risk sharing, wherever appropriate, as ways of achieving efficiency or effectiveness

- seeking feedback from service users, communities and providers in order to review the effectiveness of the commissioning process in meeting local needs.

The three objectives of phase two were:

- increased awareness and understanding among commissioners of the value of commissioning services from third sector providers

- more third sector involvement throughout the commissioning cycle

- improved bidding practice from TSOs.

The NPTSC was delivered through three delivery strands, each of which aimed to support the achievement of one of the above objectives. Each strand comprised a number of discrete projects; to ensure long-term sustainability beyond the life of the programme. LG Improvement and Development had identified ten delivery partners to be responsible for the delivery of projects across the programme as a whole – and each project had set KPI (output) targets. KPI targets for each project are outlined within the logic models for each delivery strand (figures 3.1, 4.1 and 5.1 for strands one, two and three respectively).

Impact assessment methodology

Consulting Inplace was commissioned to deliver an impact assessment of the programme. The methodology was designed around a logic model approach, and was developed in three stages:

- **stage one:** preparation and planning
- **stage two:** project consultation
- **stage three:** reporting and dissemination.

This section details the data collection aspects of stages one and two.

Stage one
This involved planning and preparation which culminated in a logic model and evaluation framework, which was submitted to LG Improvement and Development in February 2010. This included contextual interviews and a literature review to inform the logic model and framework.

Stage two
This stage involved gathering the primary data and analysing secondary information to understand the impact of the programme. Key data collection activities included:

- **survey** – all participants who took part in the programme and for whom email contact details were held were invited to take part in an e-survey about the programme. This was conducted in December 2010 – January 2011

- **stakeholder interviews** – all members of the NPTSC advisory group were invited to take part in a stakeholder interview to share views on the outcomes, impact, strengths and weaknesses of the programme. These interviews also explored priorities for third sector commissioning moving forward

- **case studies** – a small number of projects were selected for in-depth case study. These included work delivered by bassac, IVAR and NAVCA. Initially, focus groups with third sector organisations and commissioners were planned for each of these case studies. However, focus groups were logistically difficult to prepare due to time constraints of the respondents. Instead, telephone interviews were conducted with beneficiaries from each of the case study projects

- **interviews** were also conducted with partners from each delivery strand.

An interim report was submitted to LG Improvement and Development and partners in June 2010 outlining the emerging outcomes, impacts, strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

Aims and structure of this report

This final report is structured around the three programme objectives for phase two. The report opens with an overview of the programme, a chapter on each of the objectives including an analysis of outputs, outcomes and impact, and concludes with a chapter examining the conclusions and recommendations arising from the study.

2. Overview of the programme

A changing context

Since the programme started there have been major changes in the policy context regarding both the third sector and commissioning. The most important policy and legislative changes, relating to the coalition government's overall agenda, include:

- focus on 'civil society' rather than the third sector with the 'Big Society' flagship initiative

- tough fiscal environment for both local authorities and the third sector

- increased focus on commissioning as a means to deliver services, with a new White Paper on commissioning expected

- local authorities and communities to be given more power, through the Localism Bill

- changes proposed to the NHS, including GP consortia as commissioners, which are currently being debated through the Health and Social Care Bill

- the broadening of the personalisation agenda.

This meant that the programme was operating during a time of uncertainty. However, the coalition government continues to recognise the value of commissioning from the third sector (or civil society) organisations.

Programme summary

Phase two of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning comprised three delivery strands based around three objectives. Each of these strands includes projects developed and run by separate organisations and with separate KPI/output targets.

As part of the evaluation framework, Consulting Inplace developed a logic model for each delivery strand, which explains how the objectives, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts work together. The logic models for strands one, two and three can be found in figures 3.1, 4.1 and 5.1 respectively.

Outputs of the programme

The programme reached an impressive number of individuals and organisations as outlined below.

Table 2.1: programme outputs

Project	Delivery partner	Outputs (number of participants)	Outputs (number of organisations)
Training courses for commissioners	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)	880	
'Social return on investment' training	Social return on investment (SROI)	160*	
Pilot training for councillors and NHS non-executive directors	London Councils	28	
Area-based support and subsequent shared learning	IVAR	102	
Bursary scheme	Five universities	150	Not available
Adapting to individual budget seminars	ACEVO	80*	
Direct in-depth support to tendering and bidding	ACEVO	11 (21 including phase one)*	11 (21 including phase one)*
Good practice in co-design action research Bidding capacity action research	bassac	49*	36*
Direct consultancy support in tendering and bidding	NAVCA		120*
Research into stimulating new markets	SEC	n/a	n/a

Source: Phase two participant spreadsheet provided by LG Improvement and Development March 2011 *updated following interviews with delivery partners

Outcomes of the programme overall

As part of their assessment Consulting Inplace undertook an online survey open to all participants. Detailed findings are presented in Appendix 2. This section summarises the key findings.

Overview of the survey
- All participants for whom contact details were held were invited to complete the online survey between November 2010 and January 2011. Contact details were provided by LG Improvement and Development.

- Eighty-seven per cent of the 250 fully completed survey responses were submitted by public sector bodies.

- Of these, 11 per cent were from central government, 79 per cent from local authorities and 10 per cent from primary care trusts.

- The remaining 13 per cent were from third sector organisations.

- This is thought to be broadly representative of the programme's participants, with the majority coming from a local government commissioning background.

Public sector respondents
- There was a significant increase in public sector respondents rating their awareness and understanding of third sector commissioning as 'excellent' or 'very good' after the programme (as compared with before the programme).

- Virtually no respondents rated their awareness negatively after the programme.

- Approximately half of public sector respondents felt the programme had a positive impact on improving organisational behaviour at each of the four commissioning cycle stages.

- Over half of public sector respondents were either unsure about third sector involvement in the commissioning cycle, or did not rate it positively.

- On balance, public sector respondents did not feel that since the beginning of this programme, significant improvements had been made in the quality of bids from third sector organisations – the reduction in the number of procurement exercises taking place and the length of time it takes to realise outcomes may have been a contributory factor to this. However, the proportion of 'poor' or 'neither good/poor' bids was felt to have fallen.

Third sector respondents
- It should be noted that just 33 third sector respondents completed the survey and therefore the sample is too small to make concrete conclusions.

- Approximately half of third sector respondents felt the programme had a positive impact on improving their organisational behaviour during the specification and needs analysis stages of the commissioning process.

- Most third sector respondents had no strong opinion about the programme's impact, particularly with regards to planning and monitoring/evaluation stages.

- Almost two-thirds of third sector respondents now rate their involvement across the commissioning cycle as positive.

- Third sector respondents did not feel that since the beginning of this programme, significant improvements had been made in the success of bids from their organisation or in their quality. The answers may indicate it is too early for judgements to have been formed.

- Third sector respondents have a generally positive or neutral perception about the programme's impact on organisational commissioning practice with TSOs.

All respondents
Figure 2.2: this programme met my expectations
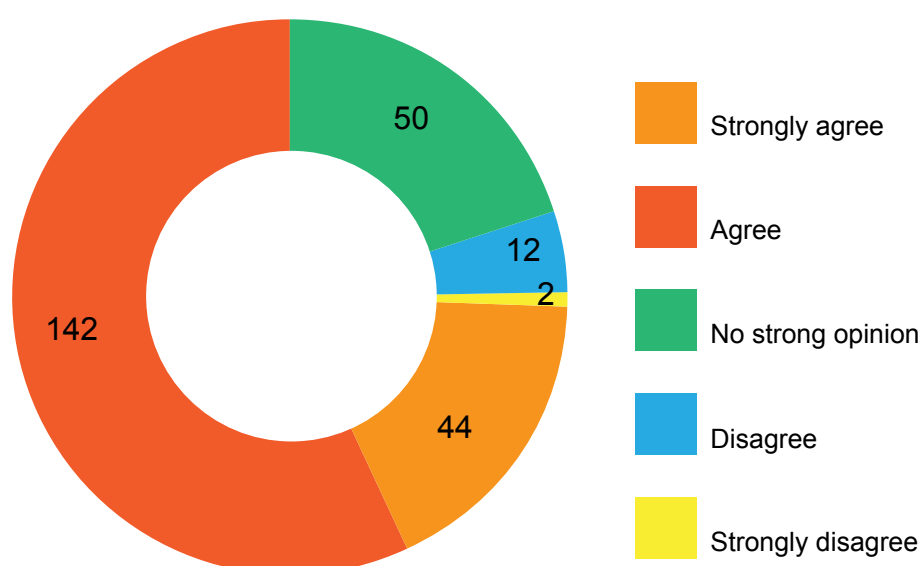
Source: Consulting Inplace survey of NPTSC participants (2011)

- There was a positive response about the programme meeting expectations.

- Additional networking and masterclasses are in-demand forms of future support from course attendees, with particularly high demand from third sector organisations.

- There is also a particularly high level of demand for additional electronic material to support organisations, although it is unclear what this material may be, for example short online courses, information, and peer-to-peer support forums.

3. Delivery strand one: increasing awareness and understanding
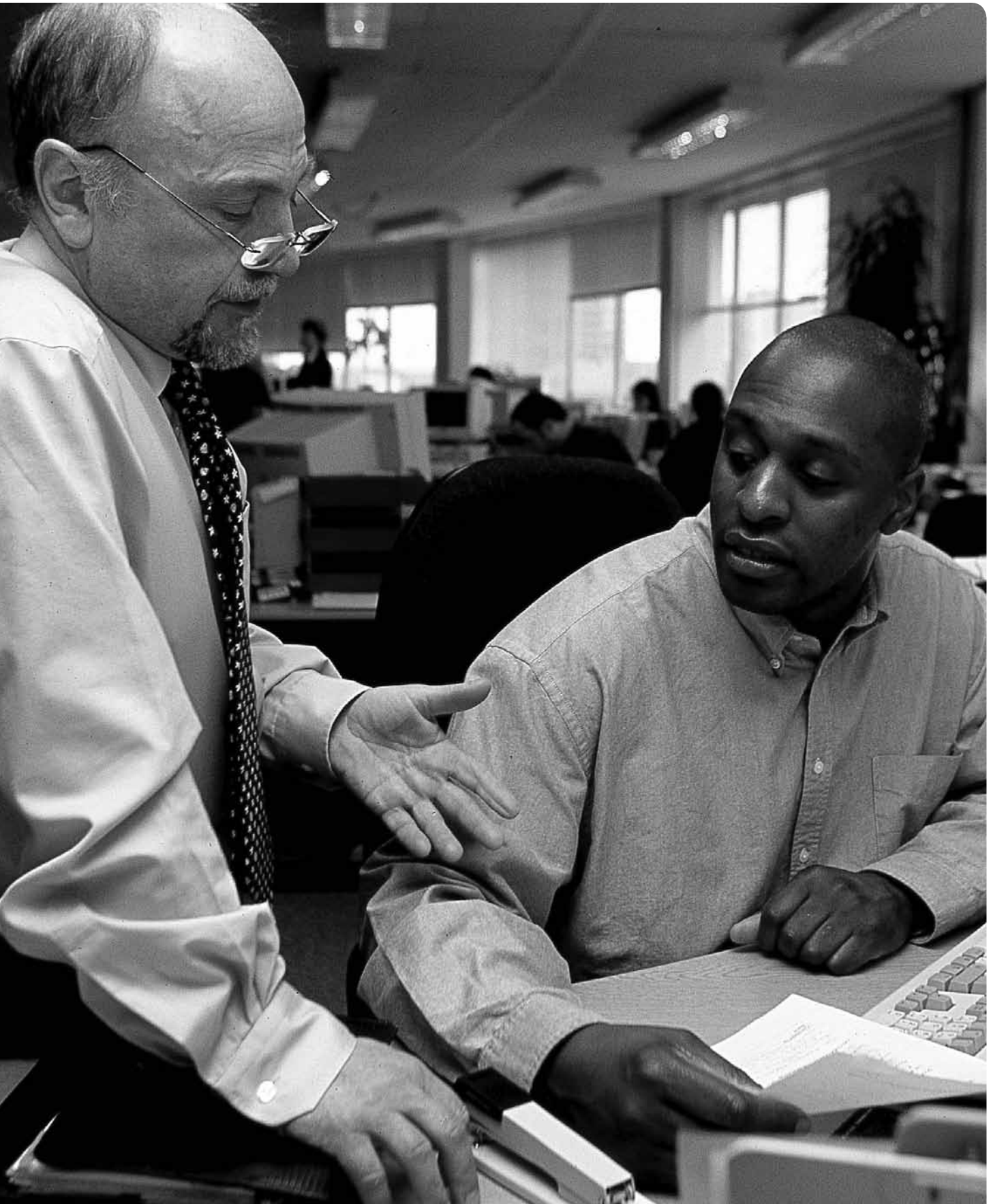
Logic model

Strand one aimed to 'increase awareness and understanding among commissioners of the value of commissioning services from third sector providers', with a v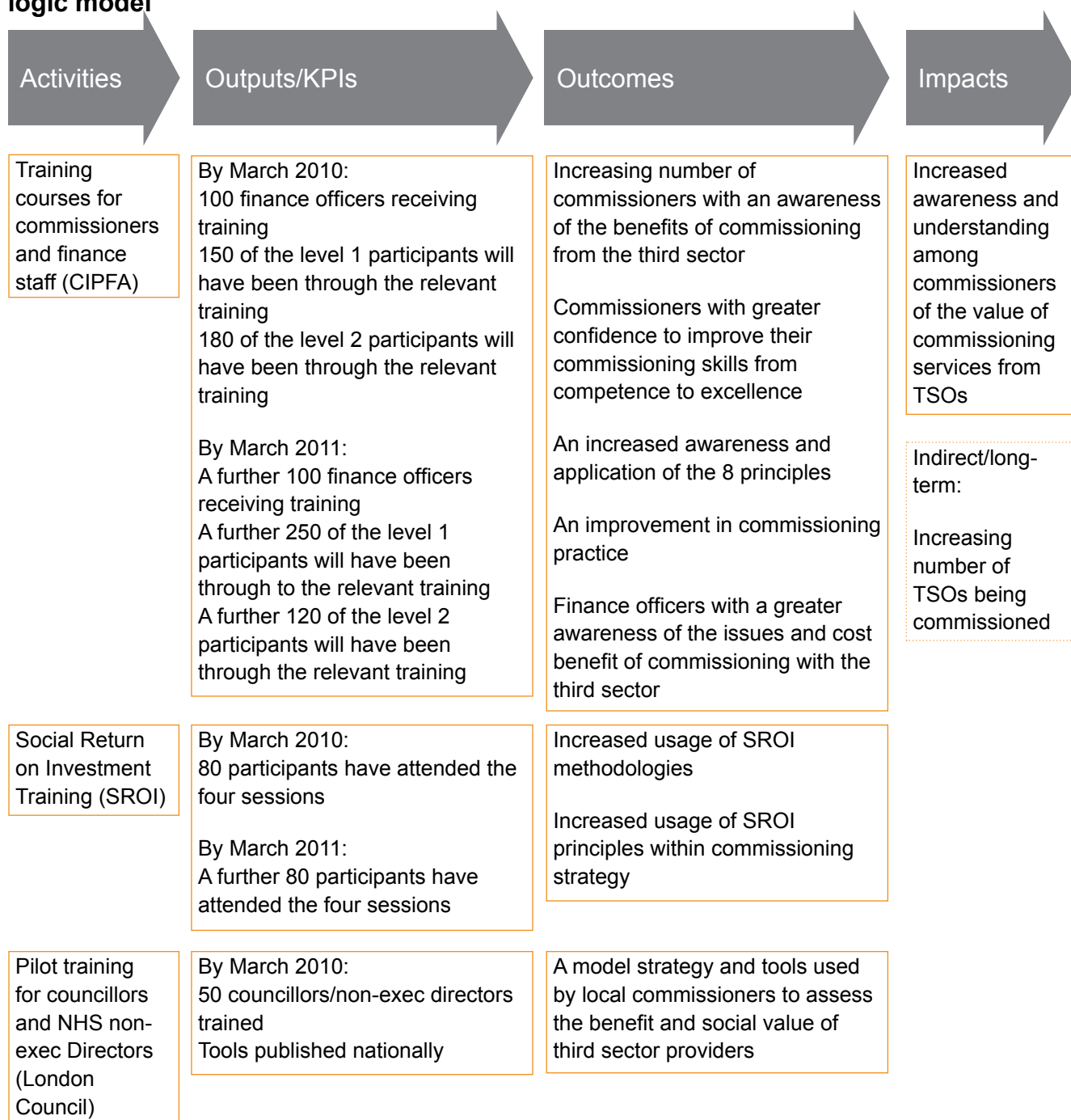iew to increasing the number of third sector organisations (TSOs) being commissioned in the long-term. It aimed to do so via the delivery of three discrete projects outlined below and reported on separately in the sections that follow.

Figure 3.1: delivery strand one – increasing awareness and understanding: outline logic model

Activities	Outputs/KPIs	Outcomes	Impacts
Training courses for commissioners and finance staff (CIPFA)	By March 2010: 100 finance officers receiving training 150 of the level 1 participants will have been through the relevant training 180 of the level 2 participants will have been through the relevant training By March 2011: A further 100 finance officers receiving training A further 250 of the level 1 participants will have been through to the relevant training A further 120 of the level 2 participants will have been through the relevant training	Increasing number of commissioners with an awareness of the benefits of commissioning from the third sector Commissioners with greater confidence to improve their commissioning skills from competence to excellence An increased awareness and application of the 8 principles An improvement in commissioning practice Finance officers with a greater awareness of the issues and cost benefit of commissioning with the third sector	Increased awareness and understanding among commissioners of the value of commissioning services from TSOs Indirect/long-term: Increasing number of TSOs being commissioned
Social Return on Investment Training (SROI)	By March 2010: 80 participants have attended the four sessions By March 2011: A further 80 participants have attended the four sessions	Increased usage of SROI methodologies Increased usage of SROI principles within commissioning strategy	
Pilot training for councillors and NHS non-exec Directors (London Council)	By March 2010: 50 councillors/non-exec directors trained Tools published nationally	A model strategy and tools used by local commissioners to assess the benefit and social value of third sector providers	

Source: Consulting Inplace (December 2009)

# Training courses for commissioners and finance staff – Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

Aims to increase understanding of the sector and access to specialist knowledge

Phase one of the programme identified a desire by many commissioners to 'move beyond competency to excellence,' the need for service-specific training, and the role of finance officers in decision-making processes.

This project aimed to address these issues through a tailored training package aimed at public sector commissioners and finance officers. Specifically, the project aims 'to improve awareness and understanding of the sector, help improve engagement, and enable greater access to specialist knowledge that will benefit the delivery of public services'.[2]

The intended outcomes of the project are summarised below:

Figure 3.2: CIPFA – intended project outcomes
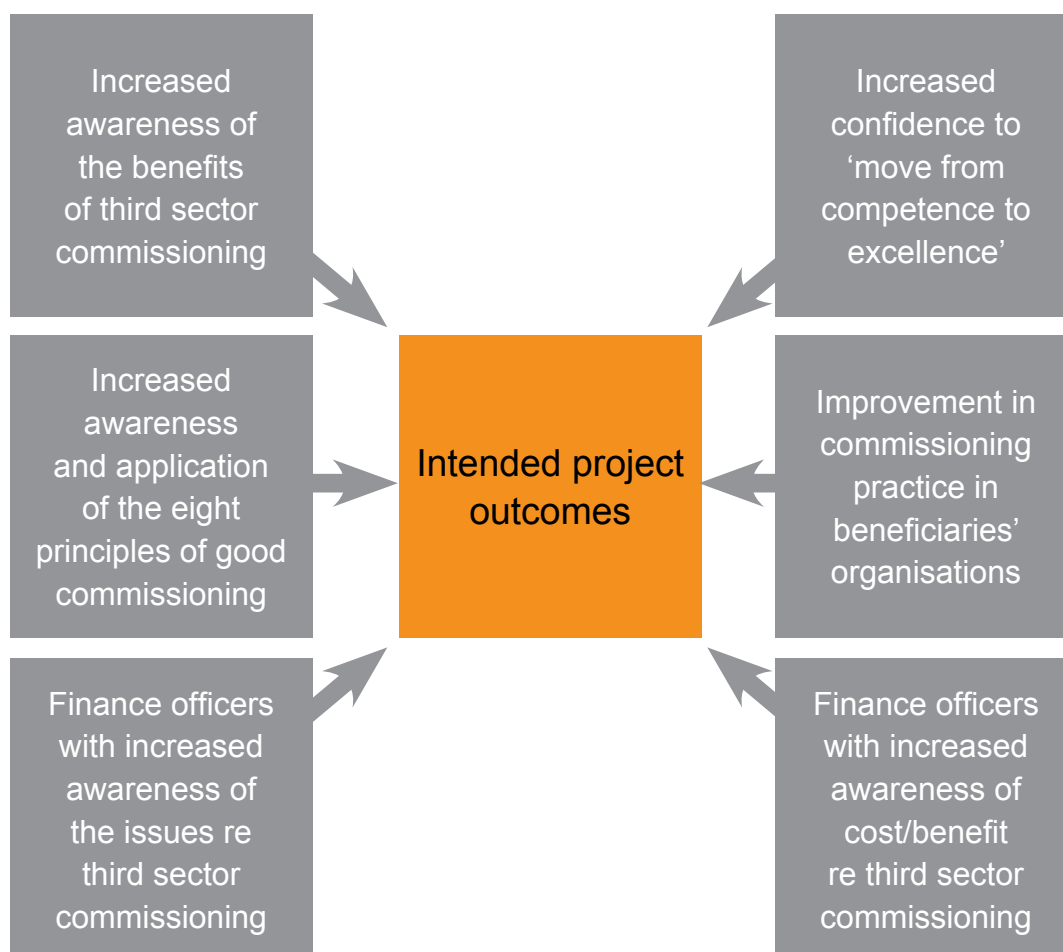
Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011) based on information contained in the initial NPTSC tender document

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2   CIPFA – presentation for level 1 training.

A successful project which has exceeded output targets

Overall, the project has been a success, delivering according to plan (in terms of the number of training sessions) and exceeding initial output targets. Demand for the provision was such that, towards the end of the project, individuals had to be turned away.

An initial training needs assessment (TNA) has added value to the project

The project provided one-day training sessions at levels one and two to meet a range of training needs:

- Level one provides third sector 'awareness training' and was targeted at public sector organisations which are new to working with the sector.

- Level two is targeted at beneficiaries who participated in phase one of the programme and/or have attended level one training sessions. The course comprises two plenary sessions – considering 'Big Society' from both a policy perspective (provided by the OCS) and a third sector perspective (provided by a sector representative) – and three masterclasses chosen from a potential six topics by the individual based on their specific training needs.

The course content was developed with LG Improvement and Development, with input from the Cabinet Office, and was based on a review of the phase one training programme and an initial training needs assessment (TNA) undertaken with 60-70 respondents, including a cross-section of commissioners (across service areas) and stakeholders with a finance background. The TNA has added value to the project by identifying additional training needs for inclusion in the level one

training programme, for example leveraged funding (the most significant), proportionality, and performance management. Moreover, the TNA has enabled CIPFA to prepare for the project and has helped to engage potential beneficiaries, with some of the respondents to the TNA attending training sessions.

A wide reach in terms of geography, type of organisation and service area

The project has reached a large number of individuals across a range of areas in terms of geography, type of organisation, and public sector service areas. However, the project has engaged more commissioners and fewer finance officers than expected, particularly as (in addition to marketing through LG Improvement and Development), CIPFA has also marketed the project through its own networks, 'hitting' finance officers directly. To address this, a shorter (two-hour) continuous professional development (CPD) event was held and aimed specifically at finance officers, achieving 30 to 40 outputs. Commissioners attending training sessions were predominantly from local government.

Beneficiaries also included commissioners from a range of other organisations across the public sector, including: government offices, central government departments, police authorities, and health sector organisations.

In each group of 30 to 40 beneficiaries, there were also usually one/two stakeholders from the third sector, which was described as 'beneficial' and a 'pleasant surprise.' This meant that third sector representatives were able to give a different perspective on commissioning and challenge the views of commissioners.

A flexible and responsive approach

A key challenge was the need to monitor the course content to reflect the change in government and the implications of emerging policy. The flexibility of the delivery model has been critical in this respect, enabling LG Improvement and Development to recommend specific masterclasses, for example on de-commissioning, to ensure that the course content has remained topical and policy-relevant. This approach has helped to ensure that the project did not 'lose momentum' and that demand for the training grew throughout the duration of the project.

Many level one beneficiaries went on to level two training, suggesting the design of the training programme has been appropriate. The project manager states that the 'natural flow has stood up to scrutiny.' There are also synergies between the project and CIPFA's core training provision, with individuals being signposted to additional training support as appropriate.

Positive relationships with a range of partners, including third sector organisations

Through the NPTSC, CIPFA has established a new relationship with the social return on investment (SROI) – UK Network, which was described by the CIPFA project manager as 'mutually beneficial and very positive.' CIPFA has included a session on SROI within its level one training for finance officers and commissioners and has signposted individuals to the full one-day training course delivered by the SROI-UK Network.

Input from the Office for Civil Society (OCS) has added value to the project, with a representative from the OCS regularly providing input into plenary sessions and providing an update from a policy perspective. The NPTSC was delighted to welcome Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society to speak at one of the level two training sessions.

Likely outcomes for commissioners

Broadly in line with the initial intended outcomes summarised in figure 3.2, it is anticipated that the main outcomes of the project will be: much better awareness of what the third sector does; increased understanding of how funding can work; a 'massive improvement' in terms of proportionality; and an increased awareness of the need to invest for a social return. Consultations undertaken with commissioners to inform the evaluation have identified some of the above outcomes, in addition to examples of where individuals have/intend to implement their learning to improve commissioning practice. These are contained in Appendix 3, however summaries are included below.

Figure 3.3: Commissioner A (central government department)

"I can't overstate how useful it was as a starting point."

Likely outcomes and impacts:
- Commissioner A has established a new relationship with a local authority. This has been really helpful in building networks and understanding how outcome-based commissioning works.

- The government department is also working with small third sector organisations to gain feedback on broad ideas around policy and commissioning and is meeting with a group of organisations every three to four months. Whilst the department previously had very good relationships with a small number of third sector organisations via attendance at events and in a sponsorship capacity, this is the first time they have worked with the third sector in relation to policy development.

Added value:
Whilst the project was not the catalyst that kick-started this work, the training has increased Commissioner A's confidence in engaging the third sector and identifying the challenges faced by third sector organisations and has also supported the department in 'getting it right.'

Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011) based on data from a semi-structured telephone consultation

Figure 3.4: Commissioner B (local authority)

"Some of it was in my mind anyway but…I found it very good - it was one of the best things I've done in a long time."

"[The training was] really worthwhile…I've clearly got quite a lot out of it... it has definitely made a difference to us here, that's for sure."

Likely outcomes and impacts:
- Over the last 12 months, Commissioner B has established a network of officers who engage with the third sector across the local authority, is developing a third sector framework incorporating the local 'compact', and is working with commissioners in adult social care to develop an action plan and a corporate approach to commissioning.

- The training has increased Commissioner B's understanding of how to involve the third sector in service design and delivery and how to interpret regulations without compromising the desired service.

- A working group has also been established to consider the barriers faced by third sector organisations when bidding for public sector contracts and the authority is working with local third sector partners to explore how third sector organisations might be supported to undertake SROI studies locally.

Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011) based on data from a semi-structured telephone consultation

Social return on investment (SROI) training – SROI-UK Network

Aims to raise the awareness, understanding, and measurement of social value

This project provided training for commissioners in the understanding and use of evaluation tools that help articulate and measure the achievement of social value through third sector delivery of public services.

Delivered according to plan and on target to meet project outputs

The project has been delivered according to plan in terms of the number of sessions and its performance against output targets. Consultation with the project manager (in late January 2011) identified that the final (eighth) session was scheduled for February 2011 and, upon completion of the session, the target of achieving 160 outputs will have been achieved.

A key deliverable of the project is a more detailed SROI guide targeted at commissioners and intended as a supplement to the main guide to SROI. It is envisaged that the guide will be completed by the end of March 2011.

The majority of primary beneficiaries are from local authorities

The SROI-UK Network has not undertaken much independent marketing/promotion activity and so the majority of those engaged have been signposted to the training through LG Improvement and Development or through the CIPFA project. The majority of commissioners attending training have come from local authorities across a range of service areas – from those responsible for transport, to those with equalities interests – and at a range of levels in terms of seniority. There has been some 'clustering' whereby a number of individuals from one local authority and a range of service areas have attended; for example, a training session delivered in January 2011 engaged five individuals from a single local authority.

The project has also engaged commissioners from national government departments. Only a small number of beneficiaries have come from a health background.

Approximately half of project beneficiaries were signposted by CIPFA

SROI-UK has benefited from a positive relationship with CIPFA, who included a session (based on input from the SROI-UK Network) on SROI – 'accounting for social return and social value' – within its level one training. CIPFA has signposted beneficiaries to the one-day SROI training course and anecdotal evidence suggests that approximately half of all beneficiaries who have undertaken the full-day SROI-UK training have done so after completing CIPFA training and being signposted in this way; indeed, 2.8 per cent of respondents to the evaluation survey had received support from both the SROI-UK and CIPFA projects. This shows the benefit of collaboration and partnership working between delivery partners, which could have benefited other strands/individual projects across the programme.

Challenges – SROI requires a culture change for increasingly busy commissioners

Undertaking SROI and engaging with learning about the measurement of social value requires a culture change for many commissioners, which continues to be a challenge. There is not yet a consensus around SROI as an approach – therefore, the project has had to initially 'work with the willing' – although increased awareness and understanding of social value facilitated by the programme can only be positive in this respect.

Explaining to participants how SROI 'fits with the direction of travel'; what commissioners are being asked to do within their day-to-day work, is a significant challenge. It is particularly challenging to convince commissioners about the use of financial proxies to value outcomes – the training currently draws on HM Treasury 'Green book' guidance, which is often perceived by local authorities as irrelevant to local government.

Some evidence that commissioners intend to implement their learning

However, despite these challenges, a number of survey respondents also stated that they intend to implement learning in relation to SROI, with some specific references to social value:

"[I] intend to work with procurement teams and develop SROI approaches."

"SROI has been highlighted to adult and children's services and will be included in the procurement manual."

"We need to do more work on social value – [the] SROI tool is far too resource intensive for local organisations to use. We also need to develop our user involvement tools."

Evaluation survey respondents

A report by the Centre for Public Scrutiny is an unintended positive outcome

A representative from the Centre for Public Scrutiny attended a project training session and was subsequently commissioned to publish a guide – 'Measuring what matters'[3] – aimed to help overview and scrutiny committees to measure social value using SROI and to demonstrate how SROI can support decision-making, particularly in challenging financial times. The guide was supported with funding from the Cabinet Office through the programme and includes examples of 'SROI in action'; instances where local authorities have been able to successfully utilise SROI to support and improve decision-making processes.

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3   Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) (Jan 2011): 'Measuring what matters – A guide for overview and scrutiny committees about using 'social return on investment' to measure social value'.

Pilot training for councillors and NHS non-executive directors – London Councils

Aiming to target elected members and NHS non-executive directors
This aspect of the programme was developed in recognition of the critical role that elected members and NHS non-executive directors play in leadership and decision-making. The project aims to emphasise the strategic role of local government and primary care trusts and consider the opportunities for the third sector.
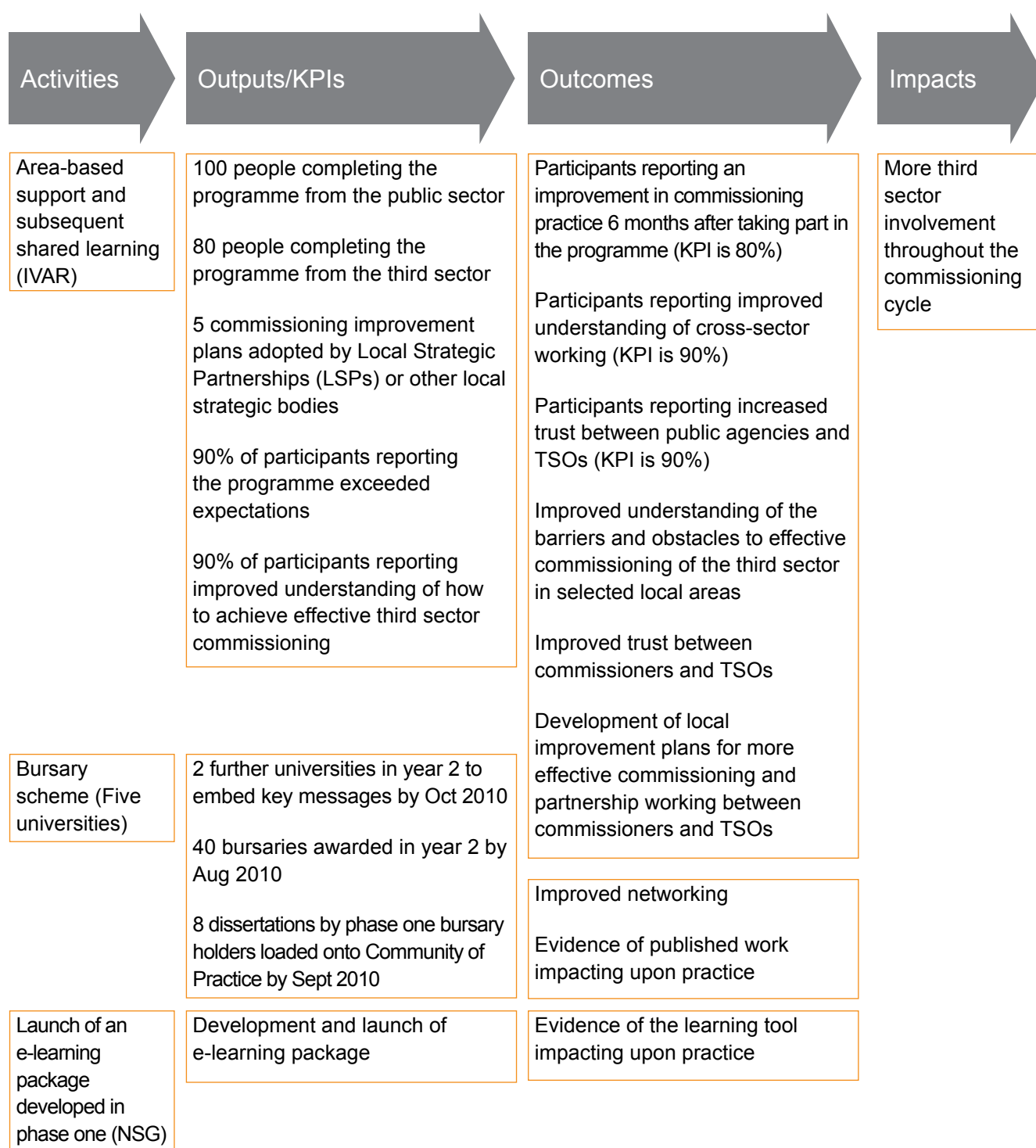
Challenge getting the messages to the target group
Attempts were made by London Councils to host an event to disseminate findings from research aimed at improving members' awareness and understanding of commissioning with third sector organisations. For a number of reasons, it did not prove possible to deliver this section of the programme as originally envisaged. Other opportunities were taken to promote the key messages to elected members through conferences and newsletters and a councillor workbook – 'Commissioning civil society organisations' – aimed at existing or new councillors has been produced. The workbook is part of a series and is available to download free of charge from the LG Group website.

4. Delivery strand two: more third sector involvement

Logic model

Figure 4.1: logic model for achieving more third sector involvement

Activities	Outputs/KPIs	Outcomes	Impacts
Area-based support and subsequent shared learning (IVAR)	100 people completing the programme from the public sector 80 people completing the programme from the third sector 5 commissioning improvement plans adopted by Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) or other local strategic bodies 90% of participants reporting the programme exceeded expectations 90% of participants reporting improved understanding of how to achieve effective third sector commissioning	Participants reporting an improvement in commissioning practice 6 months after taking part in the programme (KPI is 80%) Participants reporting improved understanding of cross-sector working (KPI is 90%) Participants reporting increased trust between public agencies and TSOs (KPI is 90%) Improved understanding of the barriers and obstacles to effective commissioning of the third sector in selected local areas Improved trust between commissioners and TSOs Development of local improvement plans for more effective commissioning and partnership working between commissioners and TSOs	More third sector involvement throughout the commissioning cycle
Bursary scheme (Five universities)	2 further universities in year 2 to embed key messages by Oct 2010 40 bursaries awarded in year 2 by Aug 2010 8 dissertations by phase one bursary holders loaded onto Community of Practice by Sept 2010	Improved networking Evidence of published work impacting upon practice	
Launch of an e-learning package developed in phase one (NSG)	Development and launch of e-learning package	Evidence of the learning tool impacting upon practice	

Source: Consulting Inplace (December 2009)

Area-based support and subsequent shared learning – Institute for Voluntary Action Research

Objectives of the project
The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) delivered a programme of five intensive area-based support programmes for local authorities and third sector organisations, supporting them to work together in their locality to improve commissioning.

The objectives of the project were to:

- improve the understanding of commissioning by public agencies and voluntary organisations at a local level
- help local partners to overcome some of the barriers to working in partnership, in order to make better and more efficient use of resources and to achieve the desired outcomes for local communities.

IVAR provided facilitators to a series of workshops with both local commissioners and third sector organisations that identify challenges with the current system, and develop solutions to make a difference on the local level.

Five action plans agreed in five areas
The project was successful in achieving five action plans in five local authority areas that were agreed between commissioners and the local voluntary sector. The project worked with 102 participants overall, as shown by table 4.2.

The project created a platform for real partnership working to grow
The project met its objectives of providing a safe space for local authority commissioners and local third sector organisations to talk.

Table 4.2: IVAR number of attendees

Local authority	Number of attendees
Dacorum	33
Gateshead	15
York	11
Devon	20
Staffordshire	23
Total	**102**

Source: Interview with IVAR project manager

The provision of an outside facilitator and a process to work through enabled the participants to listen to each other's points of view. The creation of an action plan, with agreed actions, and ways to hold each other to account made it more likely that the understanding gained by the participants will go on to effect real change in the locality.

Tailored to local context
The project design enabled each local area to work within its own context. It meant that each project could deliver at slightly different levels, and meet the individual challenges each area faced. For example, one area had a lack of basic knowledge of the commissioning process from third sector organisations, so it could concentrate on delivering that information. Another started from a position of good partnership working in the locality, so existing mechanisms could be used to meet some of the challenges.

Most focused on commissioning throughout the local authority, however, one was restricted to children and young people's services. All of the areas and participants were working in a challenging national context, and an increasing focus on commissioning as a way of delivering services.

Champion commissioner within the local authority needed

This process needed at least one 'champion' within the local authority who had the seniority and enthusiasm to push the project through, and achieve buy-in from all levels of the local authority. The process itself can enable this one champion to gather and strengthen support for third sector commissioning within the other parts of the local authority through advocacy from the sector itself, and increased education and understanding.

Challenging timing through uncertain context

It is clear that the timing of the project affected the delivery. It meant that the workshops had to spend some time explaining the local authority's current, sometimes controversial, decisions. It also meant that the action plans were designed with some uncertainty about how far they could be taken forward, and by whom.

However, the project was very successful at encouraging dialogue and understanding between the public and third sector, and it is argued that these challenging times are just when there should be more of this dialogue in order to improve commissioning processes (see recommendations).

Figure 4.3: IVAR case study – area based support

"It is a new world… I have learnt much more about it… I know the concepts and ideas now."
Chief executive of a participating TSO

Views from commissioners

- The commissioners from the council, including procurement, found the forum a useful way to work with the sector.

- The timing of the project was seen as ideal, as the council was undergoing an all-department 'PACE' review that aims to understand how it can reduce its budget, while keeping and improving key services.

- The action plan produced an idea of developing a forum that would bring together the third sector and commissioners more frequently. This was seen as potentially an exciting and efficient way of creating more effective services.

Views from the third sector

- One of the most important outcomes from the sector was to meet commissioners face-to-face.

- The key concern that third sector organisations felt was that while this process was positive, and that there should be good outcomes from it, there was a very real danger that by the time the process finished, the third sector organisations would have closed through lack of funding.

- Many of the organisations came to the workshop as a way of finding out more about commissioning. There was a low level of understanding in the room initially, but the workshop enabled them to find out about key concepts.

Bursary scheme – five universities

Five training courses delivered with the bursary

The five universities delivered training courses for primarily local authority commissioners with some third sector staff members.

These courses were designed by each delivery agent, leading to a diversity of courses available for the bursary holders. The bursaries paid for the full course from the menu and any commissioner from the public sector was eligible. The courses seemed to be successful, as they had a good rate of take-up.

University	Course title	Brief description
University of Bath	Procuring and commissioning from the third sector programme (PC3)	The PC3 course comprises a three-day, highly interactive, taught module followed by a one-day workshop to reflect on applied lessons from the participants. All course content – integrative teaching cases, guest speakers, lectures, exercises and simulations – has been designed to help participants create practical responses to the third sector procurement and commissioning challenge.
University of Birmingham	Public service commissioning MSc/Diploma certificate	Certificate participants study at least two of the core modules (including strategic commissioning) plus one further module of their choice.
University of Nottingham Business School	Modernising commissioning short courses	A two-day bespoke workshop designed to improve commissioning and procurement practice through the involvement of the third sector as both stakeholders and providers.
University of Central Lancashire	Third sector commissioning	This course is typically delivered in a series of full day workshops (30 hours total) supported by online learning materials.
University of Warwick Business School	Module of the Masters in public management	Public services and the third sector module is a three-day residential course.
Open University	Third sector commissioning	A web-based course worth 30 points. Contributes to the certificate in professional practice in public services.

Diversity of courses ensured that they suited different needs, while maintaining academic rigour

Each of the five courses was designed by a lead university. Some courses that were already running were revised to include the key messages from the programme, others were based on existing courses, with extra material, and others were designed from scratch. The length of the courses varied, and the delivery timetable also varied, with some being delivered in a four-day block and others spread over months. All consultees thought that the courses had been successful, reflecting the fact that bursary holders could choose their course based on their own needs, including time availability and geographical location.

Whole commissioning process covered

Each course was able to deliver content on the whole of the commissioning process. This meant that the participants were able to look analytically and critically at the process, and apply their theoretical understanding to their practical commissioning process. Feedback through student satisfaction forms suggests that this was useful, as was an understanding of the models that could be used to guide their practice.

Multiplier effects on the rest of the course

In one university, the course was a module that was part of their wider masters degree programme. The university modified it slightly by focusing more on the third sector, and invited sector organisations to speak during the module. This meant that not only did the bursary participants learn more about third sector commissioning, but the other students gained a perspective on the sector that they would not otherwise have accessed.

In addition, for some of the universities, the topic of 'third sector commissioning' is now embedded in several on-going academic courses, thus achieving sustainability as well as demonstrating demand for the courses.

Multiplier effect on the organisation

There is some evidence that some of the commissioners who attended the course trained other staff members using information gained, and in some cases sent more of their team for training at the same course. This means that the programme had an effect beyond simply the bursary holders and ensured that organisational change was more likely to occur.

Appetite to continue the training

The majority of the universities wished to continue the courses, following good feedback from students. This means that the course would either form part of a larger degree, such as a masters, or alternative means of funding would be sought, for example through fees charged to the students themselves.

Launch of e-learning package – National School of Government

Built on work conducted in phase one

The National School of Government, working with LG Improvement and Development, developed an e-learning tool that examines the process of commissioning and looks at ways partnerships can be used to best effect. This tool was developed as part of phase one, and launched in phase two.

A flexible tool that is easily accessible
The tool can be accessed as part of the National School of Government's 'virtual school' and its development was funded by the programme. It is aimed at delivering information to all commissioners in the public sector, and guides them through the commissioning process promoting a partnership-based approach.

Less take-up than expected
There has been less take-up than originally expected. Suggested reasons by stakeholders for this include lack of marketing to commissioners, particularly through other projects and strands, and a level of information that is too basic for much of the target audience.

5. Delivery strand three: improved bidding practice

Logic model

Figure 5.1: delivery strand three – improved bidding practice: outline logic model

Activities	Outputs/KPIs	Outcomes	Impacts
Adapting to individual budgets seminars (ACEVO)	By March 2010: 40 third sector leaders trained in the implications of the introduction of individual budgets	Improved knowledge in the third sector of individual budgeting and the impact this is likely to have on TSOs	Improved bidding practice from third sector organisations
Direct in-depth support to tendering and bidding (ACEVO)	8 organisations receive direct support in tendering for one year and learning shared	Improved knowledge and confidence of TSOs in tendering	Indirect/long-term: Increasing number of TSOs being commissioned
Good practice in co-design action research (bassac)	Bassac work with three different groups Learning (best practice guidance) shared with sector	Improved knowledge of commissioning amongst TSOs as a result of sharing good practice	Improved service delivery as a result of TSO engagement
Bidding capacity action research (bassac)	Report highlighting factors critical to the success of capacity building support	Improved knowledge amongst policy makers and infrastructure organisations of the support TSOs need to improve bidding capacity	More sustainable TSOs due to diversifying income streams
Direct consultancy support in tendering and bidding (NAVCA)	120-150 organisations receive direct support in preparing tender bids for the duration of the project Dissemination of learning report	Improved support for those who are new/previously unsuccessful in bidding for contracts	
Research into stimulating new markets (SEC)	Research published Development of training module	Improved knowledge of new markets amongst commissioners	

Adapting to individual budgets and seminars – ACEVO

On target to achieve outputs

The project delivered eight seminars and reached 80 individuals[4]. ACEVO note that the majority of participants are from the health and social care sub-sector. More than half of those who attended the seminars have reported that they have put an action plan in place, indicating that the seminars have been useful.

Appetite for more support on this agenda

The seminars have been useful in giving an 'overview' of the agenda and third sector organisations are requesting further support in understanding the myriad of potential roles that third sector organisations could play and where their own organisation might fit.

Good synergy with ACEVO's other work

In line with the rationale for the delivery partnership, this project dovetails well with ACEVO's ongoing work on the personalisation commission. ACEVO has brought together a commission of experts to look at the personalisation of public services and the implications for the third sector.

Direct in-depth support to tendering and bidding – ACEVO

Significant demand for the service

This project was designed due to demand for practical support with the tendering process. Organisations that received support were able to utilise one-to-one, bespoke support over a period of time. Support included telephone mentoring/coaching, review/ feedback on past applications, support with policies and a critical friend during the process of drafting proposals.

The phase two cohort was selected from the remaining applications from phase one. Organisations were selected based on their ability to demonstrate a willingness to learn and make a 'cultural' organisational shift to make them 'commissioning ready'.

ACEVO recruited organisations directly through front-line groups, utilising their existing contacts and networks.

Exceeded output expectations with multiplier effect

During phase two, 11 organisations benefited from the programme, exceeding the target of eight. However, benefits extend beyond this, as some of the organisations used the support to develop consortia. Therefore, some smaller organisations will have benefited indirectly as the support spreads beyond the primary recipient. For example, in Greater Manchester a number of organisations attended the 'Intensive bid writing' workshop offered as part of the service.

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4   Information provided by ACEVO (April 2011).

Figure 5.2: summary of outputs for phases one and two

- Twenty-one organisations supported (10 phase one and two).

- Eighteen organisations received tailored support over time.

- Six organisations submitted bids with support.

- Two won business.

- One tender submitted; still awaiting the outcome.

- One appeal (process challenge).

- Two pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) submitted; invited to submit a full application.

- Two tender applications prepared; not submitted.

- Two submitted without support; both unsuccessful.

Source: Nelson, D. ACEVO (March 2011)

Impacts will be realised beyond the life of the programme

At the time of writing this report, during phase two, three organisations have submitted tenders and at least one has been successful. It is expected that more organisations will submit tenders over time. It is important to note that the outcomes and impacts of this work are visible in the culture of organisations, not simply in the tenders submitted. The project has been successful as organisations can make use of the support over an appropriate duration of time, supporting this process of culture change.

Learning lessons

Although the project has worked well overall, there are a number of lessons to be observed. ACEVO noted that not all of the organisations that have been successful in gaining the support have made full use of it. There are a number of ways in which this level of commitment can be improved. For example:

- Commitment is likely to be improved if organisations were asked to contribute financially for part of the service.

- The impact of the project would have been greater if eligible organisations demonstrated a commitment to cascade and share learning with other TSOs in their area.

- As described above, the project aimed to 'pull in' the whole organisation and shift cultures. In some cases this remained a challenge and there are still steps to be taken in gaining buy-in from all members of an organisation.

Good practice in co-design and bidding capacity (action research) – bassac

Aims to improve bidding capacity through an action learning approach

This project was developed to identify, highlight and promote good practice in the commissioning of public services between TSOs and commissioners. The project has two key objectives, namely:

- to facilitate good practice in co-design based on community need

- to improve the bidding capacity of TSOs.

The project adopted an experimental 'action learning' approach shaped by the findings of phase one and including the facilitation of seven action learning sets utilising three different approaches. Though the approaches adopted are slightly different, each is designed to encourage TSOs to work together on community issues in order to be better placed to:

- influence the shape and delivery of public services to their communities

- act as a 'voice' for their communities, ensuring service users are heard

- work together to bid for services[5].

The project initially aspired to engage 35 organisations across the seven sets (an average of five organisations per set) and it was initially anticipated that a minimum of six facilitated sessions would take place with each set. Action learning sets are facilitated by Just Ideas – an independent consultancy working with bassac on the delivery of the project.

Thirty-six organisations engaged across seven action learning sets

The project has exceeded the initial aspiration of engaging 35 organisations; a total of 36 organisations and 49 individuals have been engaged across the seven action learning sets, as outlined overleaf.

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5   bassac (March 2011), 'NPTSC – Collaborating for commissioning report – How can civil society organisations engage in the design and delivery of public services?' (Draft version).

Table 5.3: good practice in co-design and bidding capacity – outline of project delivery

Objective	Approach	Number of action learning sets	Action learning set locations	Number of individuals engaged by action learning set location	Number of organisations engaged by action learning set location
To improve the bidding capacity of third sector organisations	**Community brokerage:** working with medium-sized 'community brokers' and capacity-building small organisations to a point where they can jointly bid	2	Doncaster (evaluation case study)	6	5
			Bristol	11	8
	National-local collaboration: working with national and smaller TSOs so that they can develop their model to successfully implement the bidding process	2	Plymouth	3	2
			Bristol	8	4
To facilitate good practice in co-design based on community need	**Co-design**: working with groups comprising a mixture of commissioners and community-facing TSOs	3	Northumberland and Newcastle	4	4
			Plymouth	8	8
			London Borough of Southwark	9	5
Total				**49**	**36**

Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011) based on consultation with bassac and monitoring data provided by LG Improvement and Development

Some action learning sets have engaged more organisations than others and, in general, TSOs have engaged with the project more positively than commissioners. There has been some variation in the type of TSOs engaged in terms of size of organisation and service areas – the project has engaged large national organisations and small community-based organisations, in addition to organisations with a remit for mental health, social care, supporting children and young people, and community regeneration (including employment and skills and business support). Overall, larger organisations have been easier to engage, with some difficulties in engaging smaller organisations due to the increased capacity required to undertake this work.

The majority of commissioners who have engaged with the project have come from local authorities, with at least one health commissioner engaged with co-design.

Project outcomes include more formal relationships and new collective service offerings
In order to support responses to funding and tendering opportunities, some of the action learning sets received more than six facilitated sessions. Additional activity was targeted at sub-groups tasked with responding to tendering opportunities. As a result, one organisation was successful in gaining an extension to project funding, whilst another action learning set was able to meet the requirements of a Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) for a service that none of the three individual organisations would have been able to develop in isolation.

Two of the action learning sets have developed 'memorandum of understanding' (MoU) and partnership manifestos, which have formalised relationships between individual organisations.

Organisations within several action learning sets are developing complementary partnership services and skills portfolios. These will be aimed at marketing their services as a collective and ensuring that gaps in provision are identified and filled.

Relationships established between national and local organisations have been particularly successful, whilst co-design has been more difficult to achieve due to challenges in engaging commissioners with the project.

Figure 5.4: community brokerage in Doncaster (evaluation case study)

Outcomes and impacts: the project has acted as a catalyst which has formalised partnership working between the five development trusts. Whilst some of the organisations have worked together previously on an ad hoc basis, efforts to form a more effective borough-wide partnership had not succeeded. Partners now have an increased understanding of each others' specialisms and key areas of representation within the group. Moreover, the outputs of the project have helped to reinforce the role of development trusts in the local area.

Key challenges and opportunities: the group met during a difficult period for Doncaster – part way through the process, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) was declared failing by the Audit Commission. The establishment of a more formal partnership puts the group in a better position to bid for some of these emerging contracts.

Looking to the future: partners are committed to continuing to build on the positive relationships strengthened through the project:

"One positive has been that at a CEO level we have been able to explore in more depth what collaborative working can mean in practice, and it will lead to a continuing dialogue. [We are] confident that this dialogue will lead to something... we have a greater sense of what we can achieve. We have identified what binds us more than what divides us. We are clearer about what it is we have to offer."
Project beneficiary

Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011) based on evaluation case study research (Jan-Dec 2010) and bassac (March 2011), 'NPTSC – Collaborating for commissioning report – How can civil society organisations engage in the design and delivery of public services?' (Draft version)

Figure 5.5: 'building muscle in Bristol:' testing out national-local collaboration

Outcomes and impacts: a strong partnership has been established and partners' knowledge of each other, the sector, and the strengths and challenges that they face as a collective has increased. Whilst the joint tender submission was unsuccessful in so far as winning the contract, it has resulted in 'PPP' and 'Catch 22' being accepted onto a framework agreement by Bristol City Council.

Looking to the future: all partners see the benefits of collaborative working in the future and are in the process of agreeing next steps for the partnership:

"We are sitting on a powerful partnership here ... we need to look at what we can do as a partnership to help commissioners to solve the problems they face."
Project beneficiary

Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011) adapted from bassac (March 2011), 'NPTSC – Collaborating for commissioning report – How can civil society organisations engage in the design and delivery of public services?' (Draft version)

The action learning approach has delivered some added value

Overall, feedback on the use of the action learning approach has been positive, with some organisations/groups stating that they would not be where they are now had it not been for the support provided.

However, at times some beneficiaries also reported that the action learning approach has facilitated 'positive talk but not much action' and that, though well facilitated, this has resulted in groups not 'pushing ahead' to develop collaborative approaches. Moreover, some of the project activity may have occurred without dedicated support. However, it should be noted that where beneficiary organisations had already met/ were in contact, individuals have reported an increased understanding of other organisations, strengthened partnership working, and greater potential to work together in the future. In this respect, the project has added value to existing relationships/mechanisms at the local level.

Multiplier effects – some shared learning beyond the project

Learning from the various action learning sets has been shared beyond the project by TSOs (particularly those with a remit for supporting children and young people).

There is a lot of 'cross-fertilisation' between the project and other work being developed by the delivery partners. Information has been shared with ACEVO, NCVO, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and PricewaterhouseCoopers, with a view to feed-in learning from the project into the recent Commissioning Green Paper[6].

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6   Cabinet Office (July 2010), 'Modernising commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery'.

Direct support with tendering and bidding – NAVCA

On target to achieve outputs

At the time of writing the project had engaged 120 TSOs and there are opportunities for more to engage. After a slow start, the project has boosted interest due the fact that the criteria for eligibility has been 'opened up' and organisations' take-up of the support is greater where there has been significant commissioning opportunity – this is as expected.

NAVCA has worked hard to promote the opportunities

NAVCA has worked hard to promote the opportunities using their existing networks, other partner umbrella bodies and their newsletter. This has taken up more time than anticipated. Feedback from infrastructure bodies has been positive – NAVCA are reportedly flexible and easy to work with.

Figure 5.6: case study example: Gloucestershire

Impacts on an organisation that has made use of the support

Since expressing interest in the consultancy support in March 2010, the process was very slow, mainly as it took the commissioning body several months to issue the tender documents. This delay was thought to be due to the challenges associated with the local authorities who are planning to jointly commission the work.

However, despite the challenges with this particular tender, the TSO welcomed the support. They needed practical advice and support. Since receiving the support the organisation has been proactive at contacting commissioners directly to enter into dialogue and feel that the support has improved their awareness and understanding of all stages of the commissioning cycle.

Views from the infrastructure organisation

• The consultancy support is welcome but the need for ongoing infrastructure support should not be forgotten. There is an important need for ongoing support in order to build trust and relationships.

• The third sector in Gloucestershire is willing to learn and adapt to the commissioning agenda. However, there is more work to be done with commissioners, many of whom still do not understand how to work with the sector.

Figure 5.7: case study example: Norfolk

Impacts on an organisation that has made use of the support

The organisation had significant experience of commissioning and had submitted numerous bids. However, they always welcome support and had a particular challenging tender to respond to. The organisation felt strongly they didn't want "someone else to write the bid for us". They were keen to take ownership of the proposal writing whilst receiving support from a consultant. They used face-to-face, email and phone support and found the consultant very approachable. The organisation found the individual consultant to be excellent and plan to work with her again.

The organisation found the process empowering for staff and felt that the relationship with the consultant over time enabled trust to be developed. They also found that the support enabled them to understand the concept of 'social return on investment' (even though this was not an intended outcome of the support) and as a result has improved understanding of the commissioning cycle.

The support reinforced the message to the organisation that "we are not all that bad at commissioning". They stated that there is an ongoing challenge to "remember what was learned" and suggested that a bespoke toolkit, checklist or flow chart would be welcomed, to support the organisation with forthcoming proposals.

Integration with the wider NPTSC programme

Overall the project has worked well, due to the flexibility of NAVCA and LG Improvement and Development to amend the eligibility criteria at the appropriate time. There was scope to integrate the project with other elements of the programme. For example, promoting it through the networks of ACEVO, IVAR and CIPFA would have been beneficial. NAVCA would have also welcomed the opportunity to inform other strands of the programme such as CIPFA's commissioning training.

Research into stimulating new markets – Social Enterprise Coalition (SEC)

Published research into stimulating new markets

Research was published in 2010 and was developed using case studies. The research was desk-based, reviewing literature on commissioning social enterprises and in-depth interviews with social enterprises and their commissioners.

Little research has been done on this before. This research has supported SEC in its core mission of promoting best practice through networks.

Involved in the delivery of CIPFA masterclasses

In addition to the research, SEC has been heavily involved in the delivery of the programme's 'masterclasses'. The masterclasses, with input from SEC, have been very well received. SEC has a number of reflections on the masterclass process:

- overall a very positive approach with the right level of information

- they can be challenging because often one person from an organisation attends and there is a need for 'organisations' to engage with the programme rather than 'individuals'

- the delivery of 'peer-to-peer' stories was successful and would have been valuable to have more of this delivery.

Provided two additional training days on spinning out services

During the course of the programme, the government committed to giving public service employees the right to take over and run their services as social enterprise and mutual spin-outs. Public sector employees across England are looking to social enterprise and mutuality as a way to have greater control of public services, to innovate and ultimately to deliver better solutions for the people who need them most. 'The right to run' was a one day event, which SEC ran twice, designed to provide **practical** support to public sector employees looking to create social enterprises and mutuals through spinning out existing services.

6. Conclusions

This evaluation of the LG Improvement and Development phase two of the NPTSC has reached the following conclusions:

Phase two has been well designed and based on real identified need

Phase two was based on real, identified need. It has built upon the lessons from phase one, particularly the need for the programme to be flexible. This has stood the programme in good stead given the change of government, and the rapid change in environment for local authorities and public bodies.

Appropriate depth and breadth

The programme has managed to strike an appropriate balance between the 'breadth' of people engaged and the 'depth' of this engagement. This is always a difficult balance to achieve, especially in a programme aimed at multiple stakeholders, with differing levels of awareness.

Public sector commissioners and TSOs were primary beneficiaries of the programme

In line with its initial objectives, performance targets, and overall design, phase two has focused primarily on commissioners, and specifically local authority commissioners. Survey data and consultation with delivery partners suggests that a small number of NHS, police and other commissioners were also reached by the programme. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that this approach was appropriate, given the need and demand for support evidenced in phase one and the take-up of support in phase two.

Programme contributed to culture change of individuals

Through the NPTSC, individuals have been supported to understand and deliver commissioning processes that adhere to the eight principles of commissioning. There is evidence that beneficiaries have learned from their involvement, which has led to improved practice. In most cases, this has occurred at an individual level rather than on an organisational level. However, the IVAR and ACEVO projects, both of which were designed to deliver change to organisations, demonstrate evidence of organisational culture change. This suggests that intensive joint working contributes to successful, sustained culture change. The programme has been successful in engaging 'high level' stakeholders who have the potential to influence decision-making and 'cascade' learning to others within their respective organisations and wider sectors.

The programme as a whole covered all elements of the commissioning cycle

The programme covered all elements of the commissioning cycle and approximately half of public sector respondents to the evaluation survey felt the programme had a positive impact on improving organisational behaviour at each of the commissioning cycle stages.

Movement across the programme

Feedback from the programme suggests that individual projects have been well received. Interviews with delivery organisations identified that some participants had a limited awareness of the wider programme (beyond their specific delivery strand/project) and are not fully aware of the activities which have been delivered by other delivery partners.

7. Recommendations

What next?

The programme has stayed relevant through the changing context; however there are clear lessons for any future phase of the NPTSC or similar programme. These include recommendations focused on delivery/process lessons and the implications of the changing policy context which any subsequent phase/programme would need to respond to. Based on the evaluation evidence, the recommendations are outlined below:

Delivery and process lessons

An appropriate balance between breadth and depth will be important for the success of any subsequent phases/programmes. This could include building on lessons learned from the partnership between CIPFA and the SROI-UK Network, using one-day training courses to introduce a significant number of individuals to key concepts, with further support provided to a smaller number of individuals to explore specific issues in depth. A deeper focus, working intensively with local authorities, would allow greater organisational benefits.

Implications of the changing policy context

**Supporting dialogue between sectors – ** the programme was very successful at encouraging dialogue and understanding between the public and third sectors, and stakeholders agree that at this point in time, this dialogue is enormously important. The role of the third sector is shifting, with

increasing discourse about commissioning. There is real appetite from sectors to maintain and increase dialogues in order to improve mutual understanding, jointly solve problems and improve the commissioning process.

Encouraging other government departments to buy-in to any subsequent phase/programme would help to ensure its fit with the prevailing policy context and changes to commissioning. Furthermore, this would help commissioners and TSOs to capitalise on new opportunities, for example new public, private, and third sector supply chains and partnerships emerging as a consequence of the forthcoming work programme.

The commissioning agenda continues to evolve. For example, the personalisation agenda is being implemented in some aspects of social care, and is expected to expand into other areas, such as childcare. There is appetite for a programme to deliver training and support for commissioners to implement and manage this change, and with TSOs who will need to understand how to manage themselves under these different circumstances. There is also potential for support for individuals who are increasingly commissioning their own care.

**Support for NHS GP commissioning – ** NHS GP commissioning and any qualified provider will radically affect healthcare provision. There has been a need identified by stakeholders to support these new consortia, which may lack experience of commissioning, and lack understanding of the third sector's role in health and social care.

Appendix 1: stakeholders consulted

NPTSC governance members

Name	Role	Organisation
Sarah Wood	Consultant	LG Improvement and Development
Helen Hughes	National Adviser Third Sector and Communities	LG Improvement and Development
Tina Holland	Improvement Manager	LG Improvement and Development
John Marshall	Policy Manager	OCS
Pat Samuel	Deputy Director Public Services	OCS

Advisory group members

Name	Role	Organisation
Maggie Jones	Chief Executive	Children England
Jackie Westlake	Head, Voluntary Sector and Social Enterprise Team	Communities and Local Government
Cherron Inko-Tariah	Senior Policy Advisor	Communities and Local Government
Olivia Butterworth	Third Sector Delivery Manager	Department of Health
Jane Slowey	Chief Executive	Foyer Foundation
Tina Jenkins	Voluntary Sector and Social Enterprise Team	Ministry of Justice
Jenni Northcote	Associate Director	Heart of Birmingham TPCT
Sarah Wood	Consultant	LG Improvement and Development
Helen Hughes	National Adviser Third Sector and Communities	LG Improvement and Development
Tina Holland	Improvement Manager	LG Improvement and Development
Fiona Sheil	Public Service Delivery Network Officer	NCVO
John Marshall	Policy Manager	OCS
James Illott	Policy Advisor	OCS
Pat Samuel	Deputy Director Public Services	OCS
Jemma Grieve	Policy and Parliamentary Officer	Voice4Change

Delivery partners

Name	Role	Organisation
Dionne Nelson	Head of Income Generation	ACEVO
Michelle Carrahar	Senior Regional Manager	bassac
Chris Sullivan	Consultant	CIPFA
Ann McFadyen	Head of Training and Development	CIPFA
Helen Garforth	Director	Just Ideas (working with bassac)
Pauline Kimantas	Local Commissioning and Procurement Unit Manager	NAVCA
Ceri Jones	Head of Policy	Social Enterprise Coalition (SEC)
Jennifer Inglis	Consultant	SROI-UK Network
Jon Glasby	Professor of Health and Social Care and Director, Health Services Management Centre	University of Birmingham
Gordon McCullough	Deputy Director	IVAR
Alistair Brandon-Jones	Lecturer in Operations & Supply Management	University of Bath
Sally Bate	Enterprise Manager	University of Central Lancashire
Steve Shaljean-Tilley	Procurement Lecturer	National School of Government
Ken Ingram	Head of e-Learning and Networking	National School of Government

Appendix 2: survey analysis

Survey headlines

- Eighty-seven per cent of the 250 fully completed survey responses were submitted by public sector bodies. Of these, 11 per cent were from central government, 79 per cent from local authorities and 10 per cent from primary care trusts.

- The remaining 13 per cent were submitted by TSOs.

- Most of the responses (84 per cent) were completed by participants in the CIPFA project, which was by far the biggest project in the programme in terms of numbers of participants.

Table 1.1: survey respondents by delivery partner

Delivery partner/ project	Number of survey respondents	Percentage of survey respondents
CIPFA	209	83.6
SROI-UK	13	5.2
CIPFA & SROI-UK	7	2.8
IVAR	8	3.2
bassac	6	2.4
ACEVO	5	2
NAVCA	2	0.8
TOTAL	**250**	**100**

Source: Consulting Inplace (March 2011)

Public sector respondents

How would you rate your awareness of commissioning services from TSOs?
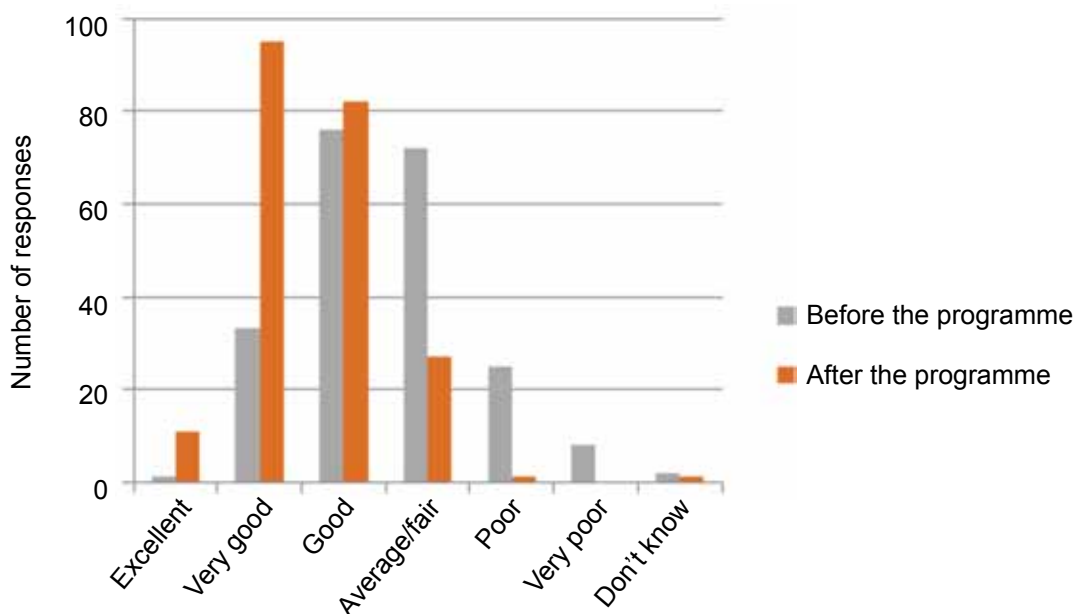
- There was a significant increase in public sector respondents rating their awareness of third sector commissioning as 'excellent' or 'very good' after the programme, compared with the situation before participating in the programme.

- Virtually none continue to rate their awareness negatively after the programme.

How would you rate your understanding of commissioning services from TSOs?
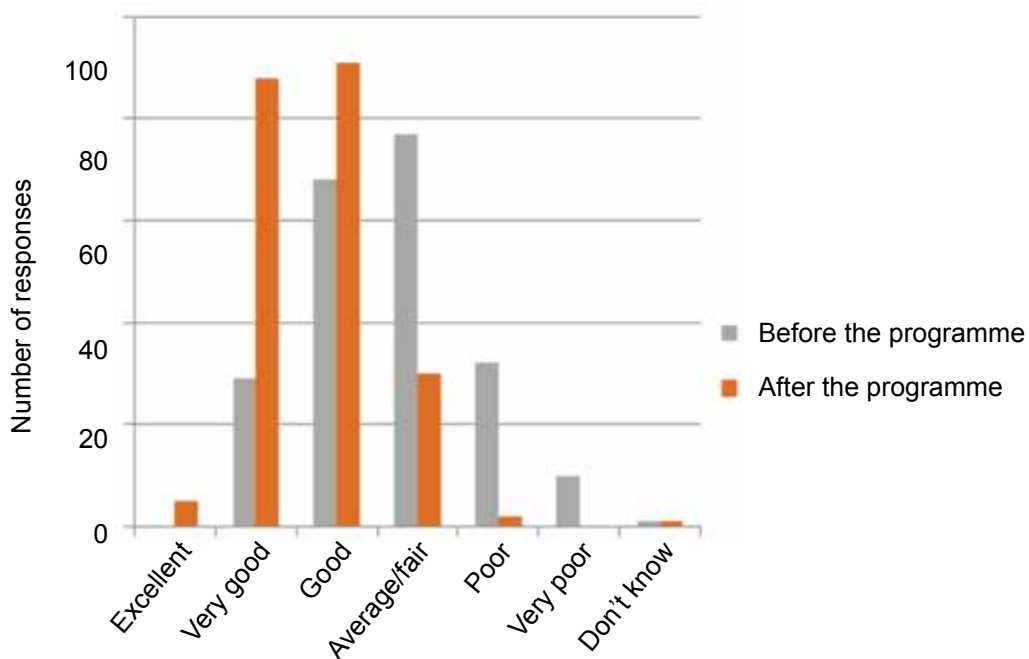
**My involvement in the programme has improved the way our organisation works at this stage of the commissioning cycle**
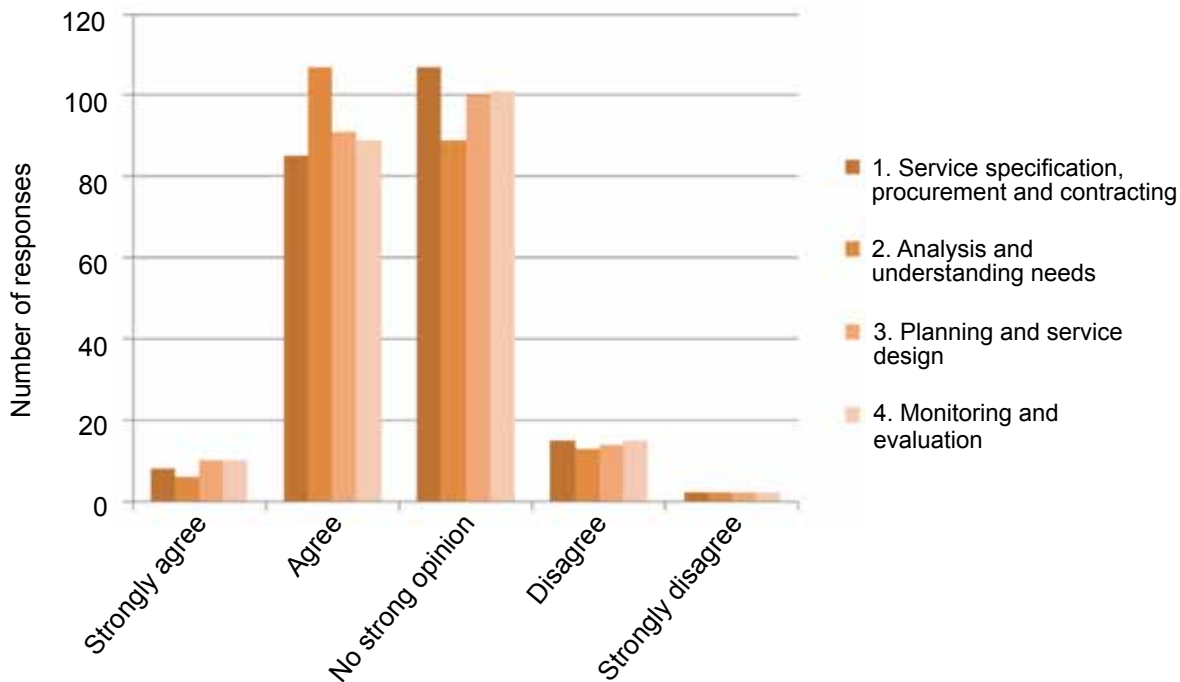
- Approximately half of public sector respondents felt the programme had a positive impact on improving organisational behaviour at each of the four commissioning cycle stages.

- Just under half of public sector respondents had no strong opinion about the programme's impact on improving organisational behaviour at each of these stages.

How would you rate third sector involvement with your organisation during these stages of the commissioning cycle?
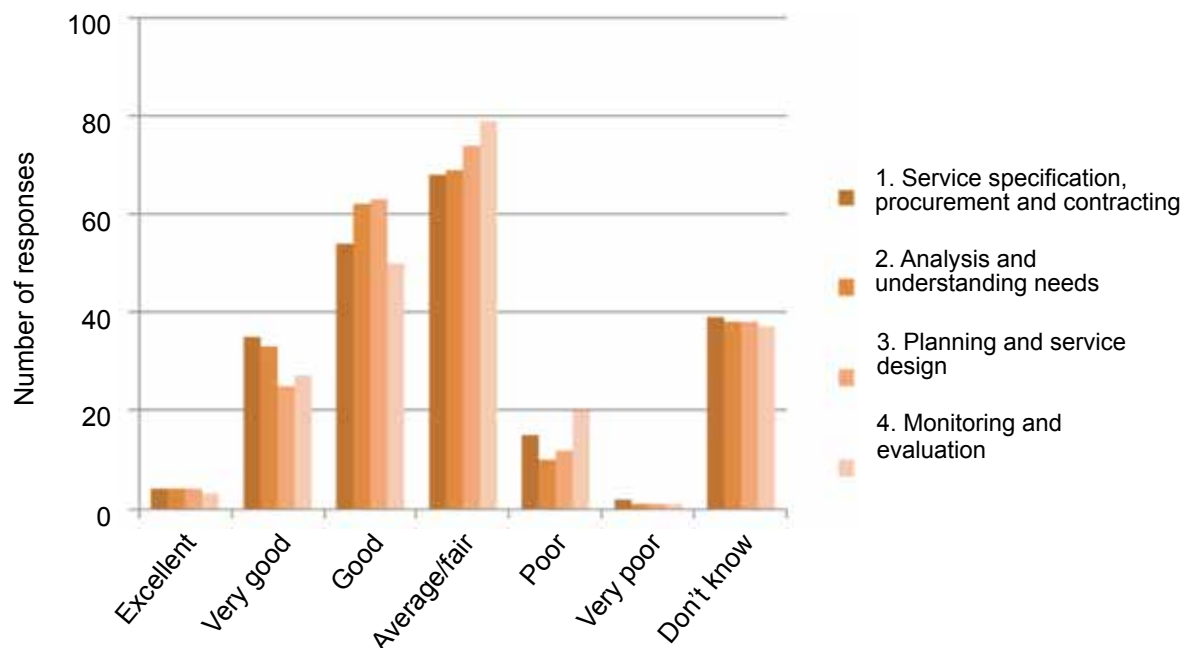
- Over half of public sector respondents were either unsure about third sector involvement in the commissioning cycle, or did not rate it positively.

- There was little difference in views concerning different stages of the commissioning cycle.

How would you rate the overall quality of bids from TSOs?
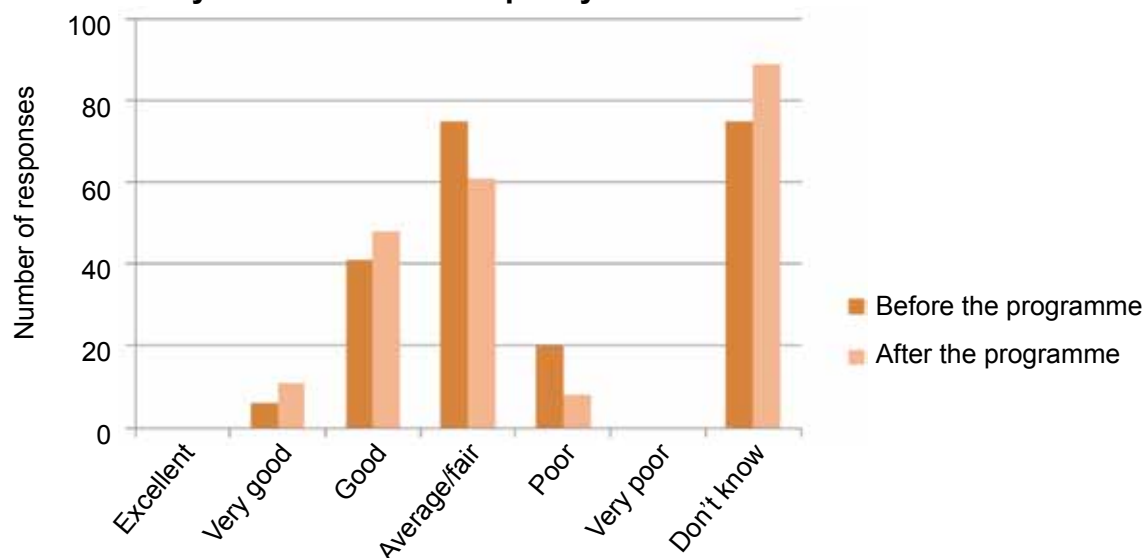
- Public sector respondents did not feel that since the beginning of this programme, significant improvements had been made in the quality of bids from TSOs.

- The increase in respondents stating 'don't know' may indicate it is too early for judgements to have been formed.

- However, the proportion of 'poor' or 'neither good/poor' bids was felt to have fallen.

My organisation's involvement in the programme has improved commissioning practice with TSOs
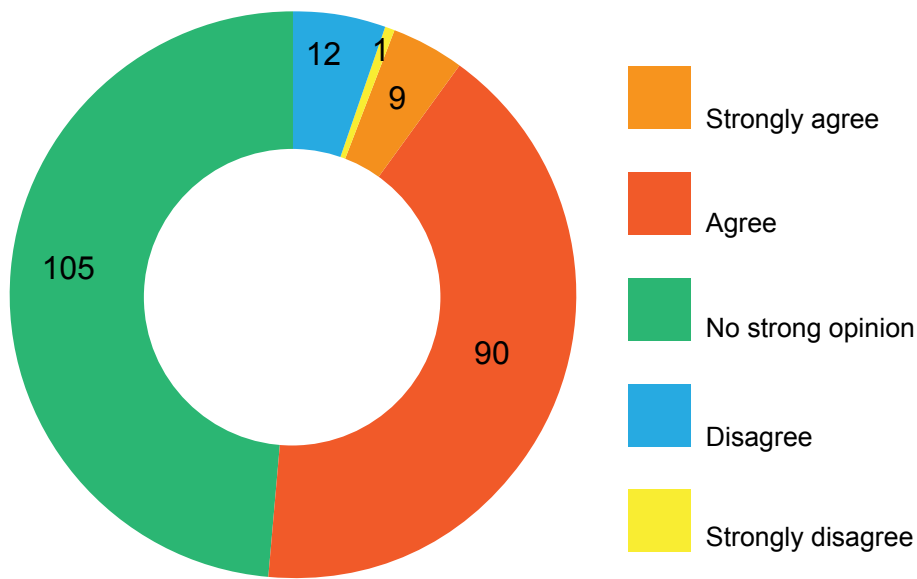
- Public sector respondents have a generally positive or neutral perception about the programme's impact on organisational commissioning practice with TSOs.

Third sector respondents

It should be noted that just 33 third sector respondents completed the survey and therefore the sample is too small to make concrete conclusions.

This programme improved my organisation's capability during this stage of the commissioning cycle
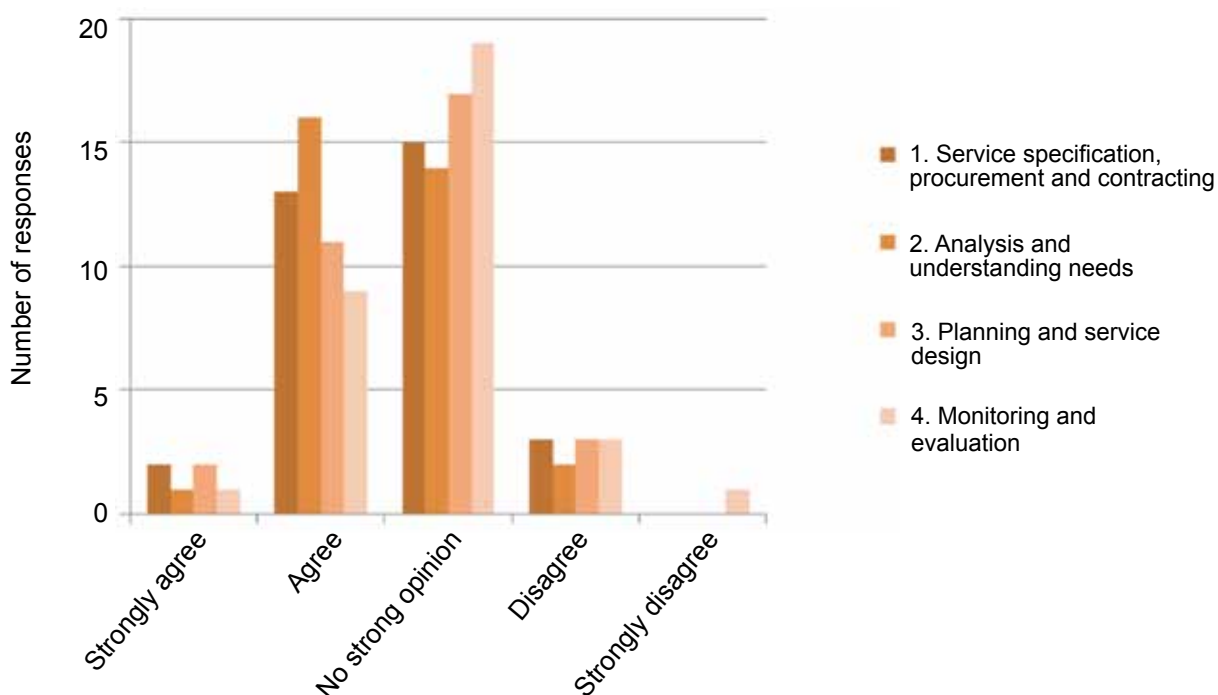
- Approximately half of third sector respondents felt the programme had a positive impact on improving organisational behaviour during the specification and needs analysis stages of the commissioning process.
- A large proportion of third sector respondents had no strong opinion about the programme's impact, increasingly so with regards to planning and monitoring/evaluation stages.

How would you now rate your organisation's involvement during these stages of the commissioning cycle?
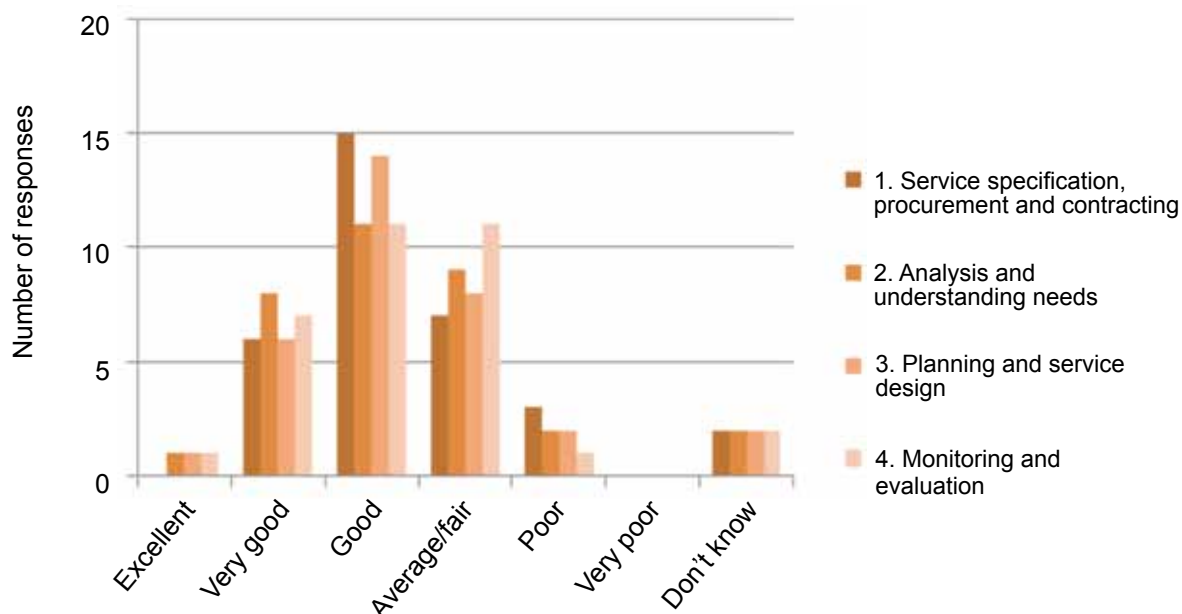
- Almost two-thirds of third sector respondents now rate their involvement across the commissioning cycle as positive.

Please indicate your organisation's success in bidding for commissioning opportunities
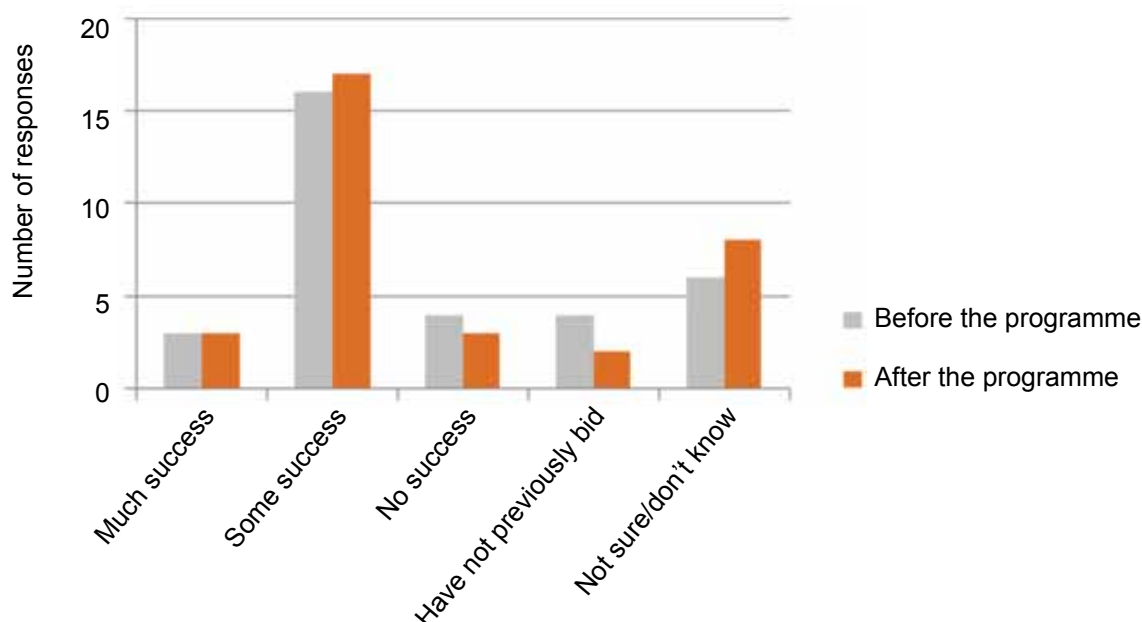
- Third sector respondents did not feel that since the beginning of this programme, significant improvements had been made in the success of bids from their organisation. The answers may indicate it is too early for judgements to have been formed.

How would you rate the quality of your organisation's bidding practice?
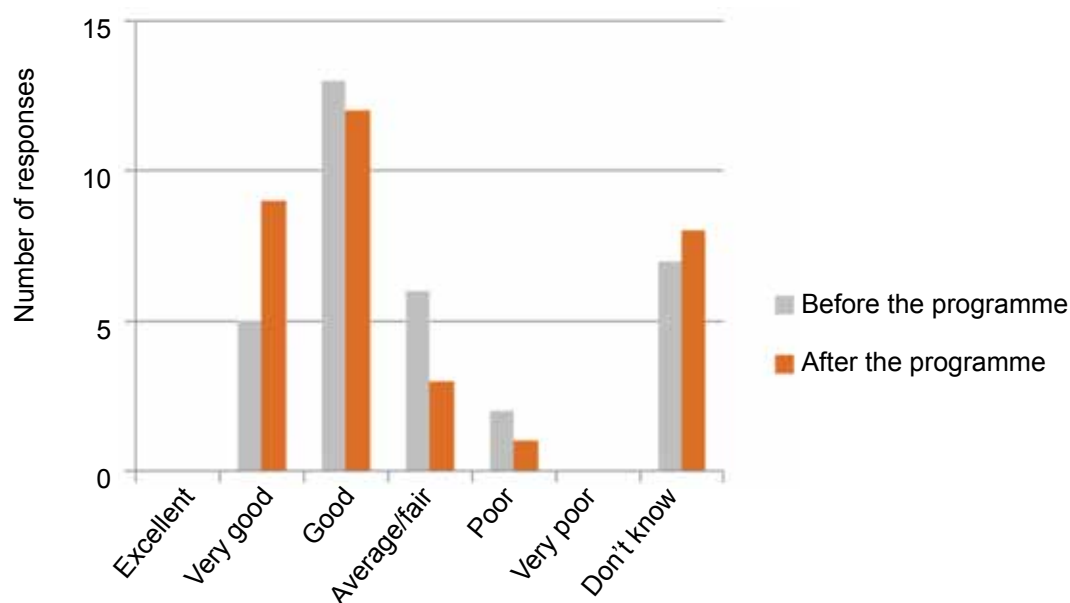
- Third sector respondents did not feel that since the beginning of this programme, significant improvements had been made in the quality of their organisation's bids. A few respondents were more positive. The answers indicate it is too early for judgements to have been formed.

Involvement in the programme helps improve the bidding practice of TSOs
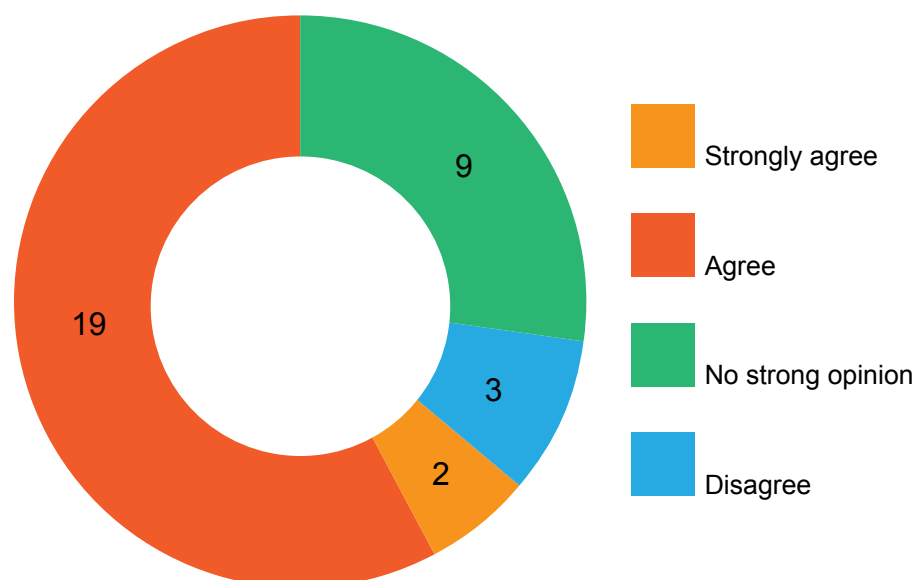
- Third sector respondents have a generally positive or neutral perception about the programme's impact on organisational commissioning practice with TSOs.

All respondents

This programme met my expectations
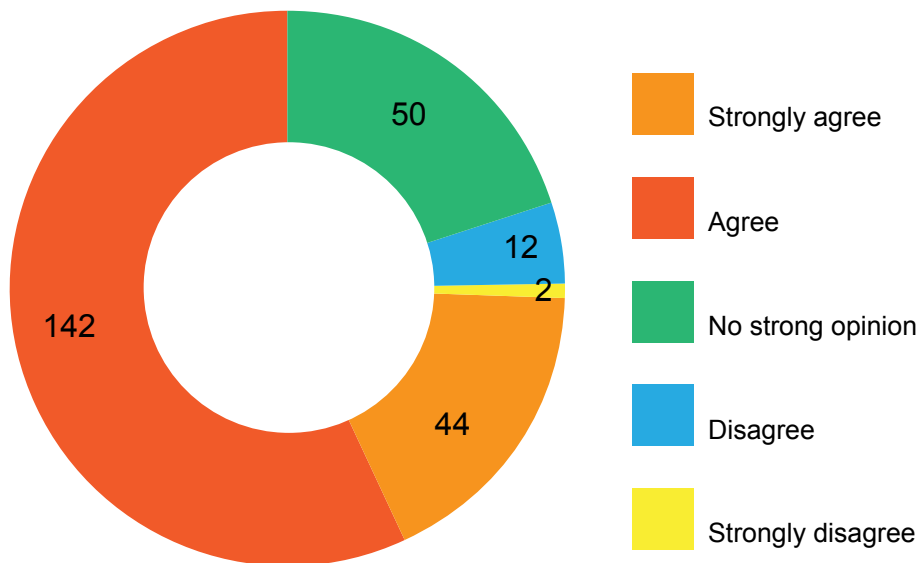
- There was a significantly positive response about the programme meeting expectations.

What sort of ongoing support mechanisms would you be interested in?
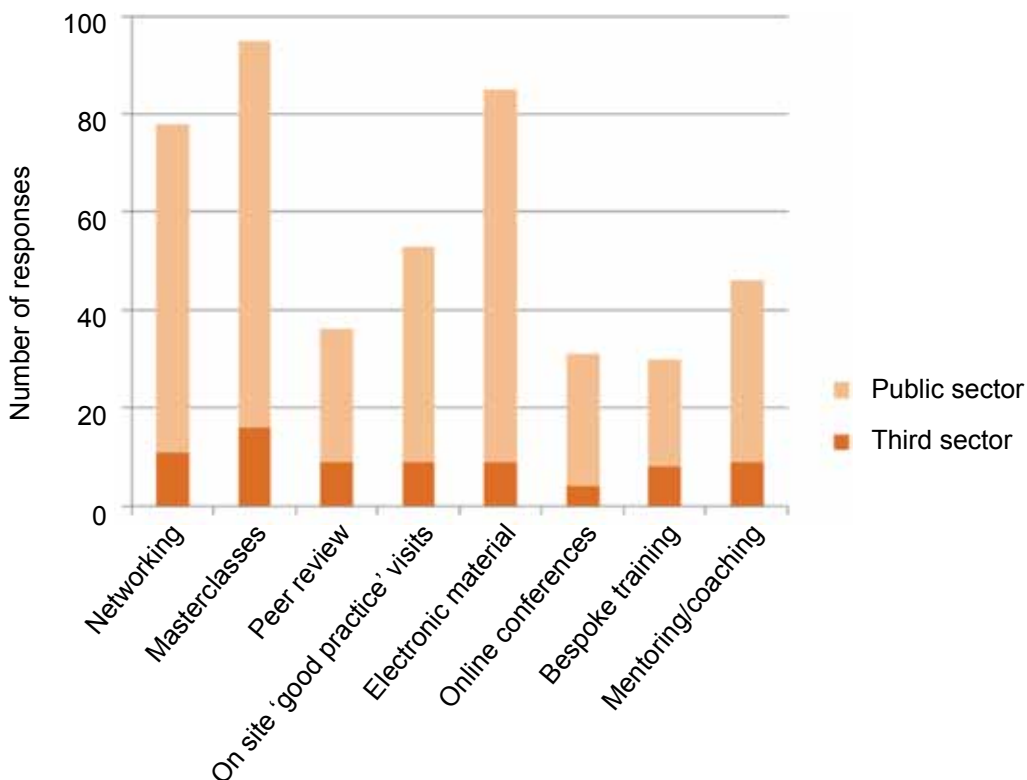
- Additional networking and masterclasses are in-demand forms of future support from course attendees, with particularly high demand from TSOs.

- There is also a particularly high level of demand for additional electronic material to support organisations.

Following the support received, have you/ your organisation already implemented what was learned?

- "Establishment of third sector children, young people and families' forum with focus on: participation and involvement (service design) workforce development (capacity building) sustainability (partnerships and consortia)."

- "Implemented full cost recovery for VCS partners. Engaged in various dialogues with VCS partners re our plans for future commissioning."

- "Moving community facilities to third sector management."

- "Our third sector engagement strategy is ongoing, we have improved our consultation processes in preparation for our regional strategic commissioning plan."

- "Some best practice models circulated to front line groups. New ideas developed around outcomes-based commissioning and evidencing outcomes."

- "The outcomes/recovery stars now included in the contract and mental health providers from third sector are now reporting on it. Many of the other ideas are buffeted by the unsettled integration of systems, methods of work and agenda of the PCT."

- "Tweaked our procurement processes to make them more accessible to smaller organisations."

- "We are currently implementing the newly gained knowledge and experiences by developing a new third sector partnership working strategy."

- "We have recently been involved in commissioning community advice services and VCS infrastructure support services within the city with VCS providers using our e-procurement system."

- "We are introducing a new intelligent commissioning model in the city and the support and learning I received is proving invaluable in helping me contribute to this change across the whole commissioning and procurement cycle involving the third sector."

Following the support received, do you/ your organisations intend to implement what was learned?

- "Biggest learning point was the issues faced by smaller organisations because of lengthy tendering processes in short time scales. This will be considered more when planning future tendering opportunities."

- "In the next 12 – 18 months when retendering drug and alcohol services."

- "Including more third sector participation in identifying needs and developing outcomes of their own."

- "Intend to work with procurement teams and develop SROI approaches."

- "Will advocate to the funders (NHS and local authority) to support and train other staff around commissioning and to adopt a strategic corporate approach to commissioning the voluntary and community sector."

- "SROI has been highlighted to adult and children's services and will be included in the procurement manual."

- "There are a number of areas – decommissioning, social enterprise work, thinking through big society implications – that require implementation and there was useful learning on."

- "We are putting in place programmes around partnership working/consortia and evidencing impact/outcomes."

- "We do intend to introduce a performance measurement framework as part of our third sector commissioning redesign."

- "We intend to incorporate pilot schemes into delivery."

- "We need to do more work on social value – SROI tool is far too resource intensive for local organisations to use. We also need to develop our user involvement tools."

- "Yes – issues relating to the Equality Act and commissioning."

- "I intend to explore implementation of sub-contracting and grant funding."

- "[Need] to better involve third sector in the design of services to be delivered and to simplify the commissioning process to better invite third sector responses."

- "This is particularly relevant to the cultural sector, as there is little info out there about this – it is usually related to the health sector."

Following the support received, have you/your organisations failed to implement what was learned?

- "No longer involved in [this work] so unfortunately unable to comment on impact/change."

- "Big Society remains opaque."

- "Internal circumstances – efficiencies programme."

- "Not failed but some of it has yet to be implemented in full – it takes time!"

- "Sadly, my regional organisation and my role does not have a long-term place in coalition government thinking, so we are developing 'exit' strategies and attempting to up-skill partners."

- "Struggling to get acceptance of the need and role of SROI measures."

Appendix 3: case studies

This section includes summaries of interviews with commissioners and TSOs that have benefited from the programme in order to illustrate the impacts upon them and their organisations.

Case studies are provided as follows:

- commissioners who participated in CIPFA's project
- TSOs who participated in IVAR's project
- example of a bassac action learning set
- TSOs who participated in NAVCA's project.

Phase one, CIPFA, commissioner

Commissioner A

"I can't understate how useful it was as a starting point."

Background: Commissioner A works in a central government department. Prior to engaging with the project, Commissioner A had no previous knowledge/experience of commissioning.

Support received: Commissioner A attended CIPFA level two training, which included a general background to commissioning and a session on outcome-based commissioning (delivered by a representative from Camden Council), which was of particular interest. Commissioner A has also attended SROI training provided

by the SROI-UK Network and may attend a more extensive course in the future as it is perceived that SROI is too complex a process to understand in one day.

Likely outcomes and impacts:

- The department is currently in the process of developing an outcome-based commissioning model, which it intends to launch in 2014 and which will represent a complete shift in the way in which commissioning occurs – this was previously based on outputs.

- Commissioner A has established a new relationship with Camden Council, with whom he has had two/three meetings since the training event. This has been really helpful in building networks and understanding how outcome-based commissioning works.

- The department is also working with small TSOs to gain feedback on broad ideas around policy and commissioning and is meeting with a group of organisations every three or four months. Whilst the department previously had very good relationships with a small number of TSOs via attendance at events and in a sponsorship capacity, this is the first time they have worked with the third sector in relation to policy development.

Added value: whilst the project was not the catalyst that kick-started this work, the training has increased Commissioner A's confidence in engaging the third sector and identifying the challenges faced by TSOs and has also supported the department in 'getting it right.' The training has also highlighted the importance of networking and provided new contacts and subsequent access to a range of commissioning practice.

Commissioner B

"Some of it was in my mind anyway but…I found it very good – it was one of the best things I've done in a long time."

"[The training was] really worthwhile…I've clearly got quite a lot out of it... it has definitely made a difference to us here, that's for sure."

Background: Commissioner B is a third sector partnerships and commissioning manager within a local authority who became aware of the training through a number of routes – she has previously attended regional seminars at LG Improvement and Development (where she has a number of contacts) and is on the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' (NCVO) public service delivery network advisory group, via which she receives newsletters.

Support received: Commissioner B attended CIPFA training at level two, which included specific detail on procurement law (provided by Eversheds), the implications of the Commissioning Green Paper (provided by the Cabinet Office), and a session on service delivery models (delivered by SEC), all of which were very useful; for example, the session delivered by SEC addressed many misconceptions that commissioners

may have about social enterprises. Commissioner B also intends to refer back to resources available via the CIPFA website as and when required.

Likely outcomes and impacts:
• Over the last 12 months, Commissioner B has established a network of officers who engage with the third sector across the local authority, is developing a third sector framework incorporating the local 'compact', and is working with commissioners in adult social care to develop an action plan and a corporate approach to commissioning.

• The training has increased Commissioner B's understanding of how to involve the third sector in service design and delivery and how to interpret regulations without compromising the desired service. Specifically, the training has been useful in developing the action plan in terms of when to use a grant/contract and the appropriateness of service level agreements (SLAs) and so on.

• A working group has also been established to consider the barriers faced by TSOs when bidding for public sector contracts and the authority is working with local third sector partners to explore how TSOs might be supported to undertake SROI studies locally.

• Once in place, these changes are likely to increase transparency and deliver a better and more coordinated commissioning approach, potentially also leading to efficiencies.

Some deadweight, though the training acted as a catalyst: whilst (the above) activities were already in progress – and are linked to the 'Partnership Improvement Programme'[7] – the training has been a useful catalyst in terms of progressing this activity.

Views on future commissioning support: Commissioner B would like to see the continuation of such provision engaging as many people as possible, with health colleagues and other key agencies on board. It would be of benefit if future provision was delivered in other locations (ie if delivery partners 'came out to the regions') and includes training on resources (such as toolkits) that can be 'pulled off the shelf and delivered locally.'

Strand two, IVAR, Gateshead IVAR area-based support

"It is a new world... I have learnt much more about it... I know the concepts and ideas now."
Chief executive of a participating TSO

Summary
Gateshead Council asked IVAR to run a two-session workshop on creating an action plan that focused on commissioning for children and young people. These sessions ran on 14 January 2010, and 1 February 2011. The council invited TSOs from the local area to attend, and aimed to work together to create a process that would support their ongoing 'PACE' review of services. Fifteen individuals attended both sessions.

Following the success of the IVAR facilitated workshops a further session was scheduled as the first meeting of the resulting children commissioning forum.

Views from commissioners
The commissioners from the council, including procurement, found the forum a useful way to work with the third sector. The plan was seen as a viable way forward for the department; it was especially appreciated that it laid the groundwork for more engagement work later on.

The timing of the project was seen as ideal, as the council was undergoing an all-department PACE review, to understand how it can reduce its budget, while keeping and improving key services. Creative commissioning is seen as key to that.

The action plan produced an idea of developing a forum that would bring together the third sector and commissioners more frequently. This was seen as potentially an exciting and efficient way of creating more effective services. It could be used to design services, as a vehicle to consult parents and children, and also to consult on ways of monitoring and evaluation that are effective and light touch.

Views from third sector
One of the most important outcomes from the sector was to meet commissioners face-to-face. Many saw this as an opportunity to explain what they do and to make links that could be followed up later. More than one invitation to visit existing provision was made with the commissioners.

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7   The Partnership Improvement Programme (PIP) was a joint initiative between LG Improvement and Development and IVAR, designed to improve cross-sector partnership working between local authorities, other statutory agencies – such as primary care trusts, police and fire – and local voluntary sector organisations.

The key concern that the TSOs felt was that while this process was positive, and that there should be good outcomes from it, there was a very real danger that by the time the process finished the TSOs would have closed through lack of funding. There was some hope that through the discussions, the commissioners were made aware of this problem, and that interim funding or short-term service level agreements could resolve the issue.

Many of the organisations came to the workshop as a way of finding out more about commissioning. There was a low level of understanding in the room initially, but the workshop enabled them to find out about key concepts.

The forum idea was seen to have potential, from the point of view of TSOs, including Gateshead CVS. However, the actions suggested would need to occur before the organisations could fully judge impact.

Lessons learnt
Originally there was only going to be two sessions. This was because Gateshead was not recruited until later in the programme, and it needed to be completed by early February. However, it was decided in the second workshop that although the action plan was populated with actions, and the main objectives were agreed, there was a need to meet again to agree responsibilities for taking the actions forward. There was also a necessary discussion regarding holding each other to account and measuring success. A third session was agreed to by all participants.

Despite the basic education about commissioning that was needed, this programme proved flexible enough to allow for this without compromising the outcomes of the programme.

The focus was strictly upon children and young people. In some ways this was helpful, as it meant that the discussion could focus on issues common to this area. However, it also meant that the action plan will need to fit into and gain the engagement of the wider local authority if it is to succeed.

Strand three, bassac, Doncaster community brokerage set

"The beauty of the project is that it puts an onus on TSOs' leaders to find solutions."
Chief executive of a participating TSO

Introduction
This group comprises TSOs (predominantly development rusts) from Doncaster from the former 'community partnership forum,' a group of organisations funded through objective one with a remit for community regeneration. The group sessions, facilitated by Just Ideas (professional facilitators), adopt the 'action learning set' model to develop ways for TSOs to work collaboratively and submit joint bids.

Rationale, aims, objectives and aspiration*s*

Initial discussions with the group identified that there are a range of barriers to collaborative working and commissioning within Doncaster, including:

- general barriers – formal consortium models are expensive

- barriers relating to commissioners – perception that Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) do not favour collaborative bids; lack of previous success with bids to the PCT

- barriers relating to TSOs themselves – individual TSOs have a strong geographical sense of place which they do not want to lose, though at the same time there is a need to work beyond their immediate locality. TSOs are safeguarding for their own sustainability within the current climate and there are circumstances where TSOs in the group will need to be competitive. It is perceived that the CVS is seen by commissioners as the lead third sector body in Doncaster.

Despite the above, it was agreed that individual bids and localised working isn't a sustainable strategy for TSOs in the long-term. Developing a formal consortium has been a 'bone of contention' in Doncaster for some time and previous attempts have failed and 'run out of steam'. TSOs therefore engaged with the project to restart positive conversations and build relationships with other TSOs with aspirations to develop a model for collaborative working in the future. Most organisations in the group have been in a transitional period from grant dependency to contracting and so have some (though not much) experience of delivering contracts.

Key achievements
Engagement, activities and outputs

To date, there have been four meetings which have focused upon:

- **introductions, context and baselining** (ie local commissioning context and possibilities for collaboration in Doncaster, previous experiences and barriers to commissioning)

- **key priorities for the group** defined as developing relationships and ways of working together in the third sector and cross-sector understanding

- **actions**, including key documents, events, communications and a nominated organisation to perform the secretariat function for the group

- **communications to raise awareness of the group** via channels such as the LSP, existing networks, meetings, presentations, papers, newsletters and so on.

The action learning set has engaged seven TSOs, although not all organisations have been represented at all meetings. Whilst the group does not/will not exclude wider TSOs, discussions regarding potential models are heavily focused upon the potential collaborative offer of the five development trusts, which collectively represent the whole of the borough of Doncaster.

Bassac has produced a draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) for consideration/editing by the group. Building on this, the group is in the process of developing a 'Prospectus,' which it aims to present to DMBC with a view to present the strengths of development trusts and convince commissioners of the role they can play in both the delivery of services (specifically

neighbourhood management) and the LSP. Now is seen as an opportune time to target weaknesses in DMBC's commissioning processes, as outlined within the recent National Audit Office report.

Emerging outcomes and impacts
The three beneficiaries tracked throughout the case study research all perceive that they already had a good knowledge of commissioning processes, though cite the following emerging outcomes/impacts:

• strengthened relationships and networks between TSOs (and particularly development trusts)

• clarity regarding thematic areas of expertise and representation.

It is perceived that there is potential for the project to:

• develop a strategy/model for joint bids

• allow further delivery of contracts in areas such as health, employment and education with the values of the trusts embedded within this

• benefit local communities

• lever funding for bigger contracts with a greater geographical reach.

Main barriers/challenges:

• the need to effect a culture change within DMBC including an appreciation of the value of commissioning from the third sector

• there are fewer contracts and available opportunities tend to be larger. There is therefore a need to look beyond the locality at regional and national opportunities.

Views on the process and delivery model
Feedback from beneficiaries indicates that the delivery model is perceived to be working well, with flexibility for group members to shape discussions. However, it is felt that this flexibility has also resulted in some flitting around and there is now a need to develop positive discussions into action.

Strand three, NAVCA, Gloucestershire

This case study example is based on an interview with Gloucestershire's third sector infrastructure organisations and a small TSO who made use of the support offered by the NAVCA project.

Impacts on an organisation that has made use of the support
This TSO (anonymous) offers support to assist people with housing-related problems. They provide repairs, adaptations, gardening, cleaning and shopping support. Much of the activity is delivered by volunteers.

The organisation is a member of the voluntary sector network in their area and received information about the consultancy support via an email bulletin. They responded to this and applied for the support in March 2010. They were interested in utilising the service because they have been expecting a significant opportunity to be commissioned and they are very keen to go for it. In particular, they wanted support with setting up a consortium organisational structure.

Since expressing interest in the consultancy support in March 2010, the process was very slow, mainly as it took the commissioning body several months to issue the tender

documents. This delay was thought to be due to the challenges associated with the local authorities who are planning to jointly commission the work.

When the invitation to tender was made available, the organisation began the tendering process with support from the consultant. However, at an early stage it became apparent that the organisation did not have adequate reserves to bid. The contract was for three years and was £800-900k and £200k was required up front – this was not feasible for the TSO. They had one week to make a decision whether to bid and described the decision-making process as 'agony' because it was a difficult decision to make.

However, despite the challenges with this particular tender, the TSO welcomed the support. They needed practical advice and support. Since receiving the support the organisation has been proactive at contacting commissioners directly to enter into dialogue and feel that the support has improved their awareness and understanding of all stages of the commissioning cycle.

Views from the infrastructure organisation

The programme has been very welcome and there has been a need for it. However, there have been fewer organisations than anticipated making use of the service. For those who have made use of it, there have been great benefits.

The consultancy support is welcome but the need for ongoing infrastructure support should not be forgotten. There is an important need for ongoing support in order to build trust and relationships.

The third sector in Gloucestershire is willing to learn and adapt to the commissioning agenda. However, there is more work to be done with commissioners, many of whom still do not understand how to work with the sector.

Learning lessons from this process

Overall, the support was welcomed although timing was an issue as TSOs had to wait until tender documentation was available before making use of the support. This indicates that some TSOs would have been unable to make use of the support if commissioners withdrew or were delayed in issuing documentation. For some, this could have been a missed opportunity.

Both the infrastructure organisation and the TSO would welcome the opportunity to 'sit down' with commissioners at local level to enter into dialogue about the commissioning processes and jointly identify needs.

Both organisations would also welcome support on the personalisation agenda as they feel the role of TSOs is currently unclear and practical advice and support would be welcome.

Strand three, bassac

Doncaster

Background: this group comprises five development trusts from Doncaster, which were formerly members of the 'community partnership forum,' a group of organisations previously funded through the South Yorkshire Objective 1 programme (2000-2006)[8] with a remit for community regeneration. Other TSOs have also been involved in initial discussions. The aspiration was to develop a flexible model for partnership working which would convince local commissioners about the viability of consortium bids and, via which, the group might be able to secure joint tendering opportunities.

Outputs: the group has attended a number of sessions facilitated by Just Ideas and attended by bassac. This has resulted in the production of a MoU, which was drafted by bassac and reviewed and edited by the group. The five development trusts have also produced a draft brochure targeted at commissioners and detailing the individual offers (of the individual development trusts) and the collective offer of the group. This was supported by a joint event and a draft statement/vision for development trusts across the borough.

Outcomes and impacts: the project has acted as a catalyst which has formalised partnership working between the five development trusts and, whilst the partnership is currently less formal than some of the partners initially envisaged, there is potential to develop this further. Whilst some of the organisations have worked together previously on an ad hoc basis, efforts to form a more effective borough-wide partnership had not succeeded. Partners now have an increased understanding of each others' specialisms and key areas of representation within the group. Moreover, the outputs of the project have helped to reinforce the role of development trusts in the local area.

Key challenges and opportunities: firstly, the group met during a difficult period for Doncaster – part way through the process DMBC was declared failing by the Audit Commission. However, this meant that the project happened at an opportune time to demonstrate how the group could address some of the issues with existing commissioning practice at the local level. Secondly, despite the current government emphasis on localism, the group highlighted challenges associated with larger contracts (both in terms of contract value and delivery at a sub-regional, regional, or national scale). However, whilst it is perceived that, individually, beneficiary organisations could 'fall between the gaps,' the establishment of a more formal partnership puts the group in a better position to bid for some of these emerging contracts.

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8   The South Yorkshire Objective 1 programme was funded through the European Union's European regional development fund (ERDF) between 2000 and 2006. The programme aimed to reduce differences in social and economic conditions within the European Union. Areas within which prosperity (measured in terms of gross domestic product) was 75 per cent or less of the European average were eligible for objective 1 funding.

Looking to the future: partners are committed to continuing to build on the positive relationships strengthened through the project:

"One positive has been that at a CEO level we have been able to explore in more depth what collaborative working can mean in practice, and it will lead to a continuing dialogue. [We are] confident that this dialogue will lead to something… we have a greater sense of what we can achieve. We have identified what binds us more than what divides us. We are clearer about what it is we have to offer."
Project beneficiary

Bristol

Background: the collaboration started with Barton Hill Settlement (a multi-purpose community resource centre in East Bristol) and Catch 22 (a national charity which supports young people in difficult situations), with 'pupil parent partnership' (PPP) joining the collaboration several months into the process. The aspiration was to develop a more proactive and effective approach to responding to tendering opportunities through collaboration.

Outputs: the group has attended a number of meetings facilitated by Just Ideas, following which a joint tender was submitted to Bristol City Council.

Outcomes and impacts: a strong partnership has been established and partners' knowledge of each other, the sector, and the strengths and challenges that they face as a collective has increased. Whilst the joint tender submission was unsuccessful in so far as winning the contract, it has resulted in PPP and Catch 22 being accepted onto a framework agreement by Bristol City Council.

Looking to the future: all partners see the benefits of collaborative working in the future and are in the process of agreeing next steps for the partnership:

"We are sitting on a powerful partnership here…we need to look at what we can do as a partnership to help commissioners to solve the problems they face."
Project beneficiary

It is also recognised that there is potential to share best practice and learn from each others' internal systems, processes, and procedures.

Further comments: one beneficiary reflected on the strengths and weaknesses national and community-based organisations, suggesting the benefits of national-local collaboration:

"We had neither the time nor the experience to respond [to the tender opportunity]… National organisations aren't necessarily more organised but they have more people who are specialist. Staff in small organisations have to be multi-skilled."
Project beneficiary

Southwark

Background: the work began as a collaboration between Cambridge House (the lead third sector organisation) and the London Borough of Southwark (the local authority). The action learning set went on to engage Community Action Southwark (the local CVS), Contact a Family (a national charity), and Bede House (a community-based organisation). The aspiration was to develop a joined-up approach to personalisation in Southwark.

Outputs: the group attended a number of meetings with Just Ideas.

Challenges: there were two key challenges: firstly, arranging meetings at mutually convenient times; secondly, engaging commissioners with the project.

Outcomes and impacts: the project has increased organisations' awareness and understanding of perspectives and experiences of service delivery.

Looking to the future: partners are looking to organise a conference on personalisation, involving: commissioners; heads of service; small and large TSOs; carers; parents; and users.

Strand three, NAVCA, Norfolk

Views from the infrastructure organisation
The infrastructure organisation, Voluntary Norfolk, was involved in phase one of the National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning as they produced a guide to commissioning which has also been utilised by LG Improvement and Development ('Third sector guide to public sector commissioning in Norfolk').

Voluntary Norfolk had a previous project aimed at supporting the VCS with commissioning but was unable to continue with it when the funding came to an end so the NAVCA consultancy project came at the right time. Voluntary Norfolk has found NAVCA very easy to work with, very helpful and flexible.

Many TSOs, particularly smaller TSOs, face a significant challenge putting together responses to tender. Therefore the NAVCA project was addressing a real need in Norfolk.

By December 2010, there had been five applications for support, all of which had been approved. The organisations applying and receiving support are typically small/medium TSOs. This is a lower number of TSOs than anticipated.

One of the barriers for TSOs accessing support was the initial fee of £250 (later reduced to £50).

Overall, it has been observed that not many commissioners have engaged in Norfolk.

At time of writing, two bids have been submitted with support from the consultancy project and at least one of these is worth over £1million. The outcome is unknown. Some multiplier effects have been reported, with organisations now recognising the need to work together.

Impacts on an organisation that has made use of the support
This TSO (anonymous) offers support to individuals within West Norfolk. They had a previous relationship with Voluntary Norfolk and found the consultancy project process to be very well managed.

The organisation had significant experience of commissioning and had submitted numerous bids. However, they always welcome support and had a particularly challenging tender to respond to. The organisation felt strongly they didn't want "someone else to write the bid for us". They were keen to take ownership of the proposal writing whilst receiving support from a consultant. They used face-to-face, email and phone support and found the consultant very approachable. The organisation found the individual consultant to be excellent and plan to work with her again.

The organisation found the process empowering for staff and felt that the relationship with the consultant over time enabled trust to be developed. They also found that the support enabled them to understand the concept of 'social return on investment' (even though this was not an intended outcome of the support) and as a result has improved understanding of the commissioning cycle.

The support reinforced the message to the organisation that "we are not all that bad at commissioning". They stated that there is an ongoing challenge to "remember what was learned" and suggested that a bespoke toolkit, checklist or flow chart would be welcomed, to support the organisation with forthcoming proposals.

Learning lessons from this process
The third sector organisation and infrastructure organisation would both welcome the opportunity to talk to the statutory sector about commissioning in an open and transparent way (this was also the case in the other case study area above).

The organisation welcomed the focus on a particular tender but would also welcome longer-term support such as an informed consultant "on the other end of the phone for £200 a day for generic advice."