



Partners for Change: West Lothian Council

Public service delivery in West Lothian are facing major challenges and has to adapt to sustain services and deliver better local outcomes. West Lothian has taken part in the Partners for Change process to increase collaborative working and help the Public and Third Sector to make the changes that are necessary. The Council and its partners are now engaging in a wide-ranging effort to increase Third Sector involvement in service planning and delivery and to improve commissioning and procurement processes.



West Lothian
Council

Background

West Lothian Council has a commitment to working with the Third Sector in the design, commissioning and delivery of public services.

West Lothian, however, is not immune from the challenges Local Authorities are facing, such as reducing budgets, increasing demands on services, the continuous calls for further budget savings as a result of the economic downturn, and an increasing focus on preventative services.

West Lothian traditionally has a strong sense of community and there is a growing number of local and national Third Sector organisations delivering services locally. The Council has a well-established Third Sector Compact in place to facilitate better working between the sectors and had developed a joint Commissioning Strategy for Health & Social Care.

About the process

West Lothian Council decided to take part in **Partners for Change (PfC)** to further build on the strengths of its existing Third Sector relationships and to improve service delivery through stronger collaborative working. This is a tried and tested process of facilitating improved collaboration between the Public and Third Sector and so achieving better local outcomes.

The Partners for Change process had a number of elements:

- Three half-day workshops that facilitated dialogue between key Council staff, including commissioning and procurement professionals and leading Third Sector providers.
- The development of a 'Commissioning Improvement Plan' for West Lothian, a targeted action plan to maximise the benefits of commissioning public services directly with the Third Sector.
- Ongoing consultancy support to take the actions from the plan forward and start improving the commissioning and procurement policy and practice.

The process has been delivered by the Ready for Business consortium as part of the national Developing Markets for the Third Sector Providers programme.

The starting point

The Partners for Change process started off with structured sessions that facilitated a meaningful dialogue between the representatives of the Public and Third Sector. These discussions highlighted a number of strengths in the area on which further action could be built, including:

- Significant examples of successful joint commissioning with Addiction Services and Offenders contracts, including a move to departmental commissioning.
- West Lothian Council holds quarterly strategic meetings with the Third Sector.
- Support for the Third Sector in place from mainstream business support agencies, such as Business Gateway.
- Senior Local Authority officers are committed to working with Third Sector organisations and there is recognition of the value, creativity and flexibility that the Third Sector can offer (in particular where the Public Sector finds it more difficult to deliver).

The process also revealed a number of challenges to be overcome, including:

- A lack of information sharing relating to best practice and successes.
- The Third Sector is perceived not ready to take part in competitive tender/procurement processes.
- A lack of understanding of the additional social value that can be secured from contracting with the Third Sector.
- A lack of cohesion in the approach to departmental commissioning.
- Concerns about the necessary capacity, expertise and management within the Third Sector to deliver public services.

Local action

During the workshop sessions a number of main priorities and actions were agreed to improve collaborative working between the Public and Third Sector. These included:

- Developing a Commissioning framework for West Lothian Council that sets out the Council's strategy and approach to outcomes-based commissioning.
- Developing and piloting the Public Social Partnership (PSP) model for the commissioning of targeted West Lothian

Council services, involving the Public Sector, Third Sector providers and service users in the co-production of services.

- Developing a Council policy for the use of Community Benefit Clauses (CBCs) to ensure social clauses are included in all relevant contracts.
- Defining a methodology to identify potential procurement opportunities for the use of a co-production approach, CBCs and Outcomes Based Specification based on the current five-year procurement plan.
- Building on established Public and Third Sector engagement structures to take forward the actions agreed in the Partners for Change process.
- Further developing Third Sector resources to support the move towards a commissioning agenda.

The Commissioning Improvement Plan builds on key local priorities, including the need to:

- Meet West Lothian Council's existing budget saving targets.
- Maintain or enhance the quality of services in the area by continuing to secure innovation in service delivery.
- Achieve additional social, economic and environmental value from commissioning services from Third Sector providers.

Overcoming obstacles

The Partners for Change process also looked at how some of the identified barriers to change could be overcome. These included:

- **Culture and People.** The Partners for Change process began to address the challenges around resistance to change, the lack of understanding between sectors and between Third Sector organisations, the lack of business acumen within the Third Sector and the difficulties in facilitating joint working.
- **Process.** Partners were aware that tender processes can be challenging and that there are a range of legal and technical complexities. The partners also

acknowledged a lack of understanding of methods of valuing social outcomes. It was felt that price is often given undue weight in purchasing decisions and there can be a lack of strategic planning.

- **Organisational.** Partners are aware of a lack of necessary scale and capacity in some organisations and a tendency to focus on short-term priorities. There is also strong competition for contracts from larger Third Sector organisations from outside West Lothian.
- **Finance/Resources.** Budgets are being squeezed, which is impacting on available resources. This means that contracts are often designed at a scale that is beyond the ability of local Third Sector providers to deliver.

Partners also identified measures to address these barriers:

- Partners recognised the importance of developing the 'Working Together: Learning Together' Compact Working Group for communication, training and networking. Additional support would be sought from Ready for Business, in particular legal advice, social outcome measurement, and training for Third sector organisations in tender writing was identified as helpful.
- Key to getting buy-in from the senior management team was presentation of the Commissioning Improvement Plan, and the establishment of an implementation forum.
- Support would be sourced for developing the capacity of social enterprises and co-operatives from various bodies, such as Co-operative Development Scotland.

Next steps

West Lothian Council is now focusing on the implementation of the proposed actions and maintaining the momentum gained from the Partners for Change process. The following are some of the proposed actions that are being taken forward:

- The development of a Commissioning Framework potentially involving other commissioners (e.g. NHS) through a Strategic Commissioning Framework Joint Working Group. This will be informed by learning from other Partners for Change processes in Scotland and the development of toolkits.
- Reviewing the current West Lothian Council procurement roadmap to identify potential PSP opportunities and working with Service Leads to identify service areas requiring a new approach/ redesign. This will be informed by learning from the Scottish PSP pilots.
- The development of a West Lothian Council CBC Policy and support materials to ensure these will be embedded in all future relevant procurement processes. This was developed with support from MacRoberts Solicitors through the Developing Markets programme. The CBC Policy will be supported by a CBC Monitoring Framework to measure the impact of the CBC policy.
- The introduction of Procurement and Commissioning as a permanent agenda item on the Compact Partnership Working Group.
- The facilitation of 'Meet the Contractor' events between Private and Third Sectors, in order to secure greater sub-contracting opportunities for the Third Sector.
- Consideration of seconding Public Sector staff to work within Third Sector organisations.
- Increasing the capacity of West Lothian's Third Sector organisations to understand procurement and to build the skills to tender effectively.

Feedback

"The Partners for Change programme allowed West Lothian Council Corporate Procurement an opportunity to understand the frustrations and limitations of the Third Sector. From this

programme, Corporate Procurement have undertaken a commitment to assist the Third Sector with obtaining public sector work through training. This commitment has been provided through an outcome of our Corporate Procurement Strategy 2013-18.”

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