**Children’s Centres**

**Voluntary and Community Sector programme**

**Final Report 2011-2013**

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**March 2013**

 **Executive summary and practice guidance**

**1 Policy and delivery background**

* The rapidly changing policy and delivery background created opportunities and challenges for the voluntary and community sector and local authorities in ensuring that children’s centres remained central to early intervention strategies.
* Three steps of the nine steps 2006 planning and commissioning framework helped shape the response of the programme to these opportunities and challenges.
* The strategy was to ensure the DfE goal of improved outcomes for all children with Sure Start children’s centres at the heart of early intervention.
1. **Programme objectives**
* These focused on building up the capacity of the VCS and moving the barriers of local authorities and children’s centres in engaging with this sector.
* Success was seen as increased positive attitudes to VCS involvement.
* This helped the programme to champion small local VCS in terms of what commissioning strategy would sustain them and what co-production methods would engage them.

**3 Programme delivery strategy**

* As changing hearts and mind was critical**,** theprogramme delivery strategywas based on a simplified five step change management programme (Engage, Establish, Enquire, Ensure and Embed Evaluation)
* The first year mainly explored six delivery models drawn from models of governance
* The second year explored ways of listening and engaging drawn from community development

**4 Partners and evidence gathering**

* Over the two years the programme worked with 15 local authorities of which three (Darlington, Kent and Poole) stayed with the programme for two years and the others a year each. The second year emphasized work with VCS partners
* Initial discussion with partners framed the themes that have helped shaped the case studies
* Five DfE key performance indicators have also been addressed in the design of the programme.
* Together this evidence base was produced for the report’s discussion

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Range of EvidenceCode: **✓ = available****🗶 = not produced****NA = not applicable** | **Barnet** | **Bexley** | **Darlington** | **Greenwich**  | **Hillingdon** | **Kent** | **Knowsley**  | **Leeds** | **Luton** | **N.E.Lincs** | **Northamptonshire** | **Poole** | **Richmond** | **Telford & Wrekin** | **Westminster** |
| Delivery Plan and notes | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** |
| Workshop 1 Materials | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** |
| Questionnaire | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** |
| Outcomes 1 Report | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** |
| Questionnaire Report | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** |
| Workshop 2 Material | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** |
| Outcomes 2 Report | **🗶** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** |
| Training resource | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** | **✓** | **NA** | **NA** | **NA** |
| Workshop Evaluations | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** |
| National Sharing | **✓** | **✓** | **✓/🗶** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **🗶** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **🗶** | **🗶** | **✓** |
| Regional Sharing | **✓** | **✓** | **🗶 /✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **🗶/✓** | **🗶** | **✓** | **🗶** | **✓** | **✓** | **🗶/✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** |
| Attitude Survey | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** | **✓** | **NA** | **✓** | **✓** |

| **Themes** | **Barnet** | **Bexley** | **Darlington** | **Greenwich** | **Hillingdon** | **Kent** | **Knowsley** | **Leeds** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Programme activity | Focus group with training session cancelled | Focus group and training session | Interviews and follow up training session with focus conversation in 2nd year | Survey and focus group | Focus group | Five focus groups and two follow up training sessions | Focus group with business skills session in 2012-13 and detailed strategy paper | Focus group |
| What attracted you to the project? | Opportunity to be part of a national programme to shape the local discussions with schools and the VCS | Opportunity to work with VCS and children’s centres in developing future children’s centres strategy | Opportunity to work with the VCS to test their appetite (and capacity) should VCS run services be a direction we went with our children’s centres | Opportunity to explore with ways of expanding the involvement of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) with children’s centres. | Opportunity to encourage the involvement of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivery of children’s centres in partnership with schools. | Opportunity for an open discussion with VCS and CC about delivery models and to engage them in shaping the future direction of travel | Opportunity to explore the commissioning and delivery issues for children’s centre services if community run | Opportunity to work with the VCS and local CCs to future proof current arrangements through judging various delivery models against three key criteria |
| What have you done so far particularly with the VCS to deal with the issues that you wanted to address? | Engaged VCS and then schools in the planning and learning from activities | Acted as a catalyst for the local VCS who are now reviewing how best to engage with children’s centres | Services have had to be re-designed due to reduced budgets and move towards targeted services and joint commissioning. The work in the first year allowed feedback and a facilitated session for partners and encouraged a positive shift to working collaboratively in a co-production model over 2012-12 | • setting up a market place event to raise awareness and understanding;• organising training on collaborative working• developing policies and local agreements to set out expectations on quality and safe practice • finding ways to share information and data about families using services in children’s centre areas. | After the Programme there was a feeling that this way of working could help provide more time and resources, more effective service delivery as well as opportunities for staff personal development. | The workshops in were well attended and showed that this was a real conversation on future direction especially when coupled with the seminar on mutuals and social enterprises in the first year and the practical work in the 2nd year | We were able to share the learning of local community groups who are ‘growing’ services with CCs and reflect on implications for services in the future | Workshop allowed for honest discussion between partners and showed that some interesting improvements were possible within the existing robust delivery framework |
| What challenges have you identified which had to be overcome? | Schools understanding of the VCS and knowledge of local VCS services can be problematic | Working out the issue that the different delivery models could help to tackle from each partner’s perspective | Local VCS concerned with LA and TUPE issues rather than VCS capacity which it questions as a barrier | Strengthen the engagement between the voluntary sector and children’s centre services, to build relationships and trust, leading to working together but not looking at changes to commissioning or at the VCS taking over the running of children’s centres | The intention was to grow the willingness of the voluntary sector to work with or deliver children’s centre services through building relationships and trust, leading to working together, and new opportunities for commissioning services from the voluntary sector. | VCS had been shaken up by pace and scope of change around early intervention so there was an element of needing to regain trust | Community services need time and support to be sustainable separate from any wider commissioning considerations | Engaging with the VCS and children’s centres around a time of change can be problematic and needs careful handling to avoid the resurfacing of historical attitudes |
| What are your plans for the future? | Use the learning to improve understanding and help the move to an enabling authority | Implement the commissioning strategy | A focus on co-production, particularly unpicking the pre conditions to effective practice in delivering services through consortia  | Identify ways to take forward the positive proposals to the workshop participants and to the VCS and children’s centres across the borough | Use the learning to contribute to the service review process | Exploring in depth practical ways of engaging the VCS in children’s centres services and commissioning | Supporting community grown services and their enrichment of children’s centres management and practices | To continue to review ways of ensuring CCs are sustainable with VCS support within a LA managed framework |

| **Themes** | **Luton** | **N. E. Lincs** | **Northamptonshire** | **Poole** | **Richmond** | **Telford & Wrekin** | **Westminster** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Programme activity | Interviews and training manual | Activity workshop | Survey and focus group | Two focus group, two training sessions and a survey | Roundtable discussion | Two focus conversation workshops | Focus group |
| What attracted you to the project? |  Opportunity to support VCS managed children’s centres as we had just completed a review of services and had quite a few anxieties about which way to go and this programme helped us  | Opportunity d to continue collaborative conversations about the future delivery arrangements of children’s centres. | Opportunity to start collaborative conversations about the future delivery arrangements of local authority services. | Opportunity to have an external, neutral organisation to engage local VCS as we reflected on commissioning direction | Opportunity to explore ways of improving commissioning, and improve services through co-design and where possible build up the local VCS to have the capacity to provide services. | Opportunity for an open discussion with Parents, VCS and CC managers about delivery models and to engage them in shaping the future direction of travel | Opportunity to build the capacity of the local VCS to be commission ready |
| What have you done so far particularly with the VCS to deal with the issues that you wanted to address? | On the point of moving towards a merged model the questionnaire/survey had very positive response and enabled us to identify training needs for VCS children’s centres.  | Developed collaborative conversations through a series of task group meetings and events. | The workshop evidenced a willingness of the local VCS to work collaboratively with NCC and NVC, with NCC taking a facilitator role rather than a provider role in the new way of working.  | Stakeholder events had a reasonable number and variety of VCS groups attending. All seem positive and pleased to be part of the process. In discussing possible models providers and parents in a focused conversation it clarified the commissioning | Major restructuring of children’s services is under discussion with a review in progress of procurement implications of working to a multi-agency delivery of children’s centres whereeach agency understands its contributions.. | The focus was to model ways of co-production practice that will help Telford in future consultations | Enriched market warming events and local VCS consortia arrangements already planned |
| What challenges have you identified which had to be overcome? | Focus workshops at a time of rapid changes in service design are not feasible and discussions have to be held within the framework of change management to be effective | It was seen that with resources and time to achieve a collaborative approach that user’s needs would be met. Also that the culture and ethos of their own organisation would continue to thrive within the new commissioning priorities. | Identifying and engaging local small to medium VCS groups to take the new ways of working forward | Getting the balance between larger VCSs who are wanting to push on quite quickly – but needing to hold back, specifically for the small to medium organisations so that they can be as fully involved as capacity allows | Developing an open and transparent pre commissioning process that leads to a preferred bidder option to help shape services. | Ensuring that the needs and aspirations of parents. staff and local providers are listened to and used to shape future plans | Ensuring that small and local VCS from across the range of services of interest to children’s centres can influence commissioning strategy and grow capacity |
| What are your plans for the future? | Build on the training developed for the VCS for the wider CC sector | Move to the role of facilitator rather than provider, while the VCS work to engage with children’s centres in a developing collaborative working model. | Work towards ascertaining what skills support the VCS sector might want for successful co production service delivery. | Work with the small and large VCS to assess what needed for partnership arrangements with a national VCS if this the commissioning decision |  Aim to ‘future proof’ a sustainable VCS through collaborative working and commission methods | Move to a facilitator role that supports and balances diverse cultural ethos, replace the corporate presence and influence and encourage and promote parental involvement with more user-friendly labelling | Continue to grow and support local VCS to build capacity  so that they are ready to face the new commissioning world and the opportunities of Tri borough working |

**6 Programmes Overall KPI performance**

* A 2011-12 national baseline survey of LA commissioners reported workshops was the preferred model of engagement. So in year one, nine focus workshops and two interview surveys for over 280 participants were a catalyst for change.
* It was found that whilst outsourcing children’s centres and services was a valid strategy, three alternative commissioning strategies were identified.
	+ Make VCS commission ready
	+ Make VCS and Children’s centres work together smarter
	+ Commission external provider of children’s centres on basis of how to make local VCS sustainable
* Keeping services in-house was also a valid strategy
* New partners in 2012-13 and lessons from the first year shifted the focus to how to engage the VCS and children’s centres in coproduction design of commissioning options, which remain broadly the same.
* During the second year the programme ran 10 workshops and undertook 3 surveys for up to 379 participants from children’s centres, local authority and the VCS.
* The key performance measures for the two years are set out in this table

|  |
| --- |
| **Key Performance Measures** |
| **Year one** | **Year two** |
|  |
| **Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities** |
| **35** reports delivered – Delivery plans/ outcome reports including surveys and workshop evaluation | **34** reports delivered – Delivery plans/ outcome reports including surveys and workshop evaluation |
| **Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction** |
| Overall evaluation - good plus = **80%** More positive about tackling key challenges = **62%**  | Overall evaluation - good plus = **81%** More positive about tackling key challenges = **70%**  |
| **Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission** **and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services** |
| Overall evaluation - good plus = **84%** More positive about tackling key challenges = **64%**  | Overall evaluation - good plus = **69%%** More positive about tackling key challenges **= 79%** |
| **Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality****to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services** |
| Dissemination through national and regional sharing  | Dissemination through national and regional sharing. (Regional sharing was weak in both years due to lack of appropriate networks or travel restrictions) |
| **Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services** |
| Overall evaluation - good plus = **76%** More positive about tackling key challenges = **52%**  | Overall evaluation - good plus = **74%** More positive about tackling key challenges = **66%**  |

**7 Programme evaluation and discussion**

* In the first year a need to ‘refocus’ and ‘rebalance’ ways of engaging the VCS was recognised. In the second year it was grappling with ways of engaging through coproduction.
* Each local authority identified different challenges and started from a diverse range of perspectives
* The programme acted as a catalyst and helped create much positive action from enabling authorities to review to helping develop VCS capacity and reaffirming the community roots of children’s centre work
* The importance of consortia for small VCS was identified and ways forward to build capacity were explored by various authorities. In the second year, interviews and surveys were used to engage providers not fully engaged with children’s centres
* In the first year VCS capacity building or community growth emerged as options but in the second year it was found that having open conversations created real attitude change.
* It was clear after the two years, that how to deliver or commission services discussion has to be matched with imaginative ways of listening if the community and VCS are to engage in changed service arrangements.
* Making procurement more user-friendly and building local leadership capacity to overcome delivery fragmentation emerged as a solution in the first year and remained an issue in the second year
* In the first year, mutuals and consortiums remained the favourite options of partners although the capacity and commitment to make them happen wasn’t so clearly stated
* In the second year, the positive effect of co-production was highlighted as positive
* The programme leaves a legacy of delivery models to inform the commissioning and community engagement process to enable co-production so that families and children can continue to access support

**Practice Guidance**

The following table takes the impact and outcomes from the case studies, and combines similar or draws out common factors to identify key common learning. These in term are linked to practical activities drawn from all the workshop activities and discussions, which are then related to the steps of commissioning relevant to this programme. These are drawn from standard commissioning and planning frameworks. Although contributions to needs analysis does arise the main emphasis in on planning and delivery. The focus themes emerged from analysis of workshop activities over the two years. The guidance reflects generalised learning rather than any one partners experience or views.

|  | **Common Learning** |
| --- | --- |
| **Focus themes** | **Key Principles** |  **Commissioning Stages** |
| **Practice Suggestions** | **develop needs assessment** | **identity resources and set priorities** | **plan pattern of services and focus** |
| **Performance management of VCS** | * Involve VCS partners in the planning and delivery of services where children’s centres are school-based, with shared language, understandings and expectations
 | * Use a market place event to raise awareness and understanding between schools, children’s centres and voluntary sector organisations
 | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| * Hold briefing and training sessions with schools on what the VCS is and does
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * Manage risk through building and sustaining local VCS capacity
 | * Support and engage VCS through networking, with a contact centre helpline to enable effective signposting to other services and resources
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * VCS partners to address governance issues such as roles and responsibilities, managing conflict, assertiveness training, confidence building, being able to challenge effectively and negotiating skills
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * More meetings, events and networking opportunities for the VCS to meet each other. Identifying and working with new and existing local VCS and promoting their services with regular newsletter and website communication
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * Assess VCS appetite and capacity to work in consortia (community or lead partner) with special attention to providing the time and resources to train (upskill).
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Address issues for the VCS of advocacy, competition, fund raising and data protection as they affect collaborative working in service delivery
 | * Work with partners (providers, users and staff) barriers through focused conversations and open space techniques to establish local barriers and solutions
 | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| * From a shared vision based on outcomes, develop a flow of information

( strategic and practical) with partners to meet need within communities identified by local groups | * Develop simple traffic light system of key data based on Results Based Accountability methodology[[1]](#footnote-1)
 |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| **Community engagement** | * Build on local VCS knowledge to identify models already working in local authority with hard data and a benefit analysis
 | * If a mixed economy of children’s centres and services develop a simple delivery model to show the differences and similarities between partners approaches
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Develop reciprocal arrangements and communications between organisations for collaboration at strategic, operational or practical levels
 | * Monitor this through regular listening activities and ensure that this is tied into service or partnership agreements
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * Encourage community engagement through commitment from volunteers, and help to recruit, support and retain them
 | * Focus on community-led services meeting needs identified by parents using generational potential and offering a wider range of activities.
 | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| * Identity and celebrate local best practice to improve understanding of the VCS sector
 | * Use award ceremonies to showcase what has been done with VCS partners already so opportunities to increase VCS involvement could emerge
 |  | ✓ |  |
| **Partnership working** | * Continue to build on the willingness of the VCS to work collaboratively and the existing strong relationship between public and voluntary sectors with respect for the VCS role as representing parents and community
 | * Use local Compact arrangements to build up a local authority rather than departmental policy for community engagement and support
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Build on existing good working relationship with VCS providers and develop the VCS as key co-providers of universal services with children’s centres, with local CVS or a national charity as lead partner, based on clear specifications about local VCS sustainability and local advisory boards engaged in commissioning
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Establish a realistic approach about what is possible given the capacity of both the VCS and children’s centres to ensure sustainability and ethos, common values and goals
 | * Create opportunities for honest and open conversations using community participation tools and processes so that all stakeholders are involved in defining needs using local knowledge and approaches
 | ✓ |  |  |
| * Develop autonomy for children’s centres to form partnerships with local VCS. And build on the willingness of smaller VCS to work with children’s centres
 | * Work with local CVS to audit and mobilise local VCS and review/refresh community development skills of Children’s centre staff
 |  | ✓ |  |
| **Vision** | * Create a shared vision where the local authority as a facilitator rather than a provider to show where and how the VCS could add value informed by local priorities and community engagement and agreement
 | * Engage with the range of small VCS that support families and adults through interviews and networking to explore how they could work with children’s centres
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * Build on the capacity of the VCS who are the voice of users and close to families, along the lines of co-production with children’s centres and parents that helps to build on the existing good record of VCS commissioning
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * Focus more on market development and ensure co-production is recognised as an option in the commissioning cycle emphasising working together rather than funding; perhaps collaborating in bids and adopt a listening and more respectful attitude to smaller VCS
 | * The LA could address the provision of help with tendering, applying for funding support, development of legal governance framework and policies and procedures
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Aim to ‘future proof’ a sustainable VCS through collaborative working and commission methods
 |  |  | ✓ |
| **Localised Commissioning** | * Ensure that VCS are able to scrutinise and challenge decisions and recognise the VCS as equal partners
 | * Work with the VCS to shape approaches using a range of community development tools
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Support and protect local VCS to provide services within a local authority managed network of children’s centres, for example by establishing ‘start-up’ or developmental commissioning.
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Allow mainstream commissioning to grow local services through commissioning that is more consistent and fair for small local VCS organisations
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * VCS sector need to become commissioning ready and pro active and the local authority strengthen localized commissioning by providing support in how things work
 | * CVS and local authority need to have a strategy and training programme that enables local groups to be engaged and supported for service and added value commissioning
 |  | ✓ |  |
| **Change Management** | * Develop a commission framework where Partners work together to build service capacity and maintain quality and quantity of services, working to VCS strengths (namely local knowledge, range of skills, specialisms and experience)
 | * Start with operational understanding and build with users, community, providers and staff a strategic framework of policies and local agreements to set out expectations on quality and safe practice when engaging with different organisations
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Challenge the appropriateness of current commissioning attitudes and processes to the sustainability of the local VCS by adopting new ways of working which are necessary if local VCS are to survive,
 | * Partners to think more outside the box ‘who can help us’ by following up contacts, visiting other organisations, as prospective partners, be more positive with partnership working and explore new avenues
 |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| * Work to grow tentative community providers into robust ones – provide help with business skills development and capacity building
 |  | ✓ |  |
| * For example ensure any national external agencies are tied into supporting and growing the local VCS
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Work to introduce change management training in co-production and collaborative working models
 |  |  | ✓ |
| * Facilitate local partners supported by bigger organisations to give economies of scale and create more sustainable services
 |  |  | ✓ |

1. **Policy and delivery background**
	1. Over the two years of the programme, public service delivery was in considerable flux. This produced significant challenges and opportunities for both the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and local authorities. For local VCS to national VCS there were challenges of dependency on public funds, overcoming fragmentation in delivery capacity and increasing leadership capability. For the local authority reduced budgets meant having to redesign services to improve early intervention, maintain quality and accountability without being the provider and ensuring a sustainable local VCS.
	2. The 2006 joint planning and commissioning framework argued for a nine step process. In its language, this programme has mainly engaged in three of those steps through either service delivery or active listening workshops. These are:
* develop needs assessment ;
* identity resources and set priorities; and
* plan pattern of services and focus.
	1. This strategy supported the Department for Education (DfE) goal of improving outcomes for all children, but particularly those from disadvantaged families. This assumes Sure Start Children’s Centres at the heart of a co-ordinated drive to intervene early, and by ensuring that every child receives high quality early education and childcare. Many local and national VCS organisations have a track record of supporting vulnerable families, and are often the bridge to otherwise excluded communities, which is why the DfE and this programme saw more VCS involvement in children’s centres, as a key way of supporting the stated policy goals.
1. **Programme objectives**
	1. These can be summarised as
* building the capacity of the VCS to take an active role in managing and delivering services in children’s centres; and
* helping move the barriers to Local Authority and Children’s Centre managers involvement, engagement and commissioning of the VCS
	1. Whilst one of the DfE’s objectives is to promote greater VCS involvement within children’s centres, the ultimate goal is to open up services to a diverse range of providers. Therefore, the success of this programme is not measured in any increased number of VCS run children’s centres or services, but in the successful creation of a more positive attitude towards exploring ways of increasing involvement of the VCS in managing or delivering services in children’s centres.
	2. Over the two years, we explored two interlocking themes. At each step, the programme championed the key role of local VCS social capital [[2]](#footnote-2) supporting and promoting community growth. As such it stressed the importance of partnership working in freeing local authorities to examine commissioning and procurement roles in terms of the principles of co-design or co-production.[[3]](#footnote-3) It equally explored the commissioning strategies open to a local authority to ensure a sustainable local VCS.
1. **Programme delivery strategy**
	1. As changing hearts and minds is the key to success, the programme tasks and interventions were designed using this simplified change programme strategy drawn from Kotter’s approach.[[4]](#footnote-4). Appendix one has an example of the delivery framework used as the starting point with all the partners.
* **Engage** - stakeholders to create awareness of the need for change. Each Local authority took part in a discussion to agree the purpose of the support, which formed the research proposal for that partner
* **Establish** - initial barriers and solutions to outline priorities and stakeholder benefits. A stakeholder group was formed that modelled partnership working to oversee the work in that local authority
* **Enquire** – into the root causes for barriers and failed solutions. An initial survey or workshop explored through commissioning models or styles of learning what these might be locally
* **Ensure** – that stakeholders identify drivers and solutions through problem-solving. This was managed in the design of the activities that worked with groups to come up with solutions from information and challenges
* **Embed Evaluation** – into new processes – as part of the exit strategy. This was supported with activity reports and follow up support for issues that the local authority and partners wanted to explore
	1. In the first year, the emphasis was on focus groups and structured interviews that explored local barriers for the VCS using one or more delivery model. These models emerged from a literature review and discussions with substantial numbers of English unitary local authorities over April and May 2011. A standard workshop programme with its support materials is shown in appendix two. The general delivery models used are listed below
* Informal Collaboration
* Formal collaboration: Cooperative Trusts
* Informal consortium partnerships
* Social Enterprises
* Formal consortium companies
* Mutuals
	1. In the second year more use was made of surveys as a way of reaching unengaged VCS groups as well as techniques that helped to build collaborative working practices. This was in response to the learning from the first year. It was commonly voiced that delivery models led to solution-thinking before the ‘problem’ was agreed upon. The two standard approaches developed are shown in appendix three and four. The common techniques used are as listed.
* De Bono six hats for scenario problem-solving
* Focused conversation
* Open Space
1. **Partners and evidence gathering**
	1. The nine partners chosen for 2011-2012 were Darlington, Knowsley, Leeds, Luton, Barnet, Bexley, Westminster, Kent and Poole. In 2012-13, Darlington, Kent and Poole continued and were eventually joined by Richmond, Hillingdon, Greenwich, Telford, Northamptonshire and N.E. Lincolnshire. This gave a representative range of local authorities and the diverse challenges they and their VCS partners faced, The second year had a greater focus on the VCS and parents so local authority and children’s centre numbers and engagement reflect this.
	2. Over the two years, each participating local authority was asked to provide detailed information on the governance arrangements for their children’s centres, e.g. VCS, local authority, school, health; the services provided by each children’s centre, for example provided by a VCS either directly or by a central commissioner and feedback on any commissioning training given to children centre managers and the VCS sector. This enabled the emergence of key themes that were used to frame each partner’s narrative. These were
* Presenting issues
* Commissioning the VCS
* Challenges and opportunities
* Impacts and outcomes
	1. In its design, the programme was also required to address DfE Key Performance Indicators (KPI). These are as follows
* Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
* Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
* Strengthening capacity and intent of Local Authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
* Strengthening  intent of  neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA  locality  to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
* Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
	1. Together, the programme over two years has produced a strong evidence base that forms the basis for the case studies and evaluation contained in this report.
1. **Case studies**[[5]](#footnote-5)
	1. London Borough of Barnet: Evaluation
	2. A workshop was held with upwards of 50 local authority professionals, schools, children’s centre managers, staff, and local VCS service providers in November 2011. The workshop stimulated challenging conversations and led to a way forward around partnership working rather than outsourcing the running of school-based children’s centres. More engagement and involvement with the VCS in any change to the governance of children’s centres was seen as an important way forward. This was to take the form of joint presentations to key decision makers and then joint working to agree future commissioning frameworks.

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|  **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 58% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 23% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 72% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Dissemination through national and regional sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation – good plus = 31% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 25%  |

 **Presenting Issues**

Barnet wanted to be part of a national programme to shape the local discussions with schools and the VCS. They also wanted to explore how social enterprises can help strengthen /develop the local market.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Barnet have 13 children’s centres, 10 are managed and run by schools and 3 by the VCS. Barnet is recommissioning its current VCS provision and is exploring how best to engage schools and the VCS in future commissioning direction.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Schools’ understanding of the VCS and knowledge of local VCS services can be problematic. There were concerns about central commissioning, the impact of a new system on partnership agreements, the impact of Payment by Results (PbR) on voluntary sector services such as befriending services for fathers, play services or benefit advice. It was suggested that building up VCS capacity through lead partner consortia and joint venture consortium could be a way of strengthening involvement with school-based children’s centres according to children’s centre managers. A clear steer the programme was about partnership working and not outsourcing was necessary. It was clear that historical commissioning decisions and current strategic direction influenced the debate.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Involve VCS partners in the planning and delivery of services where children’s centres are school-based, with shared language, understandings and expectations

Community engagement: Build on local VCS knowledge and identify models already working in Barnet with hard data and a

 benefit analysis

Barnet offer and vision: Create a shared vision to support children and families in Barnet to show where and how the VCS could add value with Barnet adopting an enabling role

Localised commissioning: Ensure that VCS are able to scrutinise and challenge decisions and recognise the VCS as equal partners

Change management: Develop a framework that is recognisable, comprehensible and consistent over the range of services with an agreed understanding among partners of what quality looks like

* 1. **London Borough of Bexley: Evaluation**
	2. Fifty participants have taken part in the programme in Bexley. One workshop was held with 25 local authority professionals, children`s centre managers and staff and local VCS service providers on 28 October 2011. A follow up training session workshop, with 25 participants in a similar mix, was held on 13 February 2012. Bexley formulated an action plan and options for future delivery of children’s centres with collaborative commissioning. Children’s centres planned to improve links with the VCS and researching more into ways of delivering children’s centres and services. The VCS planned to improve engagement and links with the children’s centres and to research more into ways of delivering children’s centres and services

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓****✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome reports/ Workshop evaluations |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 85%,100%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 84% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations –good plus = 92%,100%More positive about tackling key challenges = 41.5% (more positive about contract competition=50%)  |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Dissemination and national and regional sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations –good plus = 92%,100%More positive about tackling key challenges = 58%  |

**Presenting Issues**

Bexley wanted to work with VCS and children’s centres in developing their future delivery strategy. In line with the coalition and strategy 2014 remit, Bexley needs to make savings, so is considering outsourcing and the VCS to running local services as part of a mixed economy.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Bexley considered a number of commissioning models. The activities acted as a catalyst for the local VCS who are now reviewing how best to engage with children’s centres. Bexley has 15 local authority managed Sure Start children’s centres.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

The key barriers Bexley identified were commissioning and cultural factors. Many of these were complex issues that needed a strategic and political commitment to tackle. Top barriers were building capacity of the VCS to manage procurement requirements and building up small VCSs understanding of social enterprise. Local reasons for VCS not running more or having limited involvement with children’s centres were that the sector has not been asked, that children’s centres are a LA success( so why VCS needed?) and VCS pioneered children’s centres so why go back?

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Market place events could be arranged for children’s centres and VCS that mapped what is available and what services the VCS could offer children’s centres. Also workshops to explore and agree a local line on children’s centres

Community engagement: Partners could work with parent/forum/advisory boards to broaden awareness of community-led services

Partnership working: A workshop aimed at schools and VCS could be organised to explore partnership working

Bexley offer and vision: The local authority could develop a Question and Answer facility through web posts to make key performance criteria transparent and deal with a range of practical issues

Localised commissioning: Development of a commissioning strategy based on timetables and a co-production consultation with the VCS on what they could offer with CPD in commissioning for children’s centres for partners

Change management: Partners could collaborate in a workshop on change management for VCS and children’s centres to acknowledge and work through the emotional response to change

* 1. **Darlington Borough Council: Year one Evaluation**
	2. In November 2011, a sample of six local VCS groups took part discussing ‘solutions’, using a balance of ‘structured’ and ‘open’ conversation methods in a telephone in-depth survey interview. This lead to a facilitated session for the VCS through Evolution the local Council for Voluntary Services(CVS) with the local authority and PCT commissioning managers It is part of the Transforming Local Infrastructure programme with the Civil Society Unit. Darlington did not start its discussions with delivery models but did engage with co-production approaches. It continued exploring that while moving to address the commissioning of more children’s services on a wider families agenda with the VCS and working collaboratively with them.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Questionnaire report/ Outcome report/Workshop evaluation  |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 83% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 100%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Dissemination through national sharing |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | n.a. | Overall evaluation - good plus = n.a. More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a. |

**Presenting Issues**

An opportunity to test the appetite (and capacity) of the VCS for VCS run services if this is a strategic direction that the local authority wants to take.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Services have had to be re-designed due to reduced budgets and the move towards targeted services and joint commissioning. Darlington wants to explore how social enterprises can help strengthen/develop the local market.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

A sample of the local VCS was telephone interviewed around the models. This ensured feedback and a facilitated session for the VCS with the local authority and PCT commissioning managers. The local VCS were primarily concerned with local authority and TUPE issues rather than VCS capacity which it questioned as a barrier. Looking at what the local VCS know about the possibilities of working with children centres the main challenges identified were around -

* Leadership
* Governance
* Risk Management
* Vocabulary (inaccessible jargon)
* Commissioning Strategy

**Impacts and Outcomes**

The programme clearly opened up a conversation which needs to be built on by using other participatory approaches to build co production. Darlington wanted to explore how social enterprises can help strengthen/develop the local market. Darlington now wants to continue with a focus on co-production, particularly unpicking the pre-conditions to effective practice.

* 1. **Darlington Borough Council: Year two Evaluation**
	2. The Programme encouraged this positive shift to working collaboratively in a co-production model over 2012-12 through round table focused conversations. A

’pathfinder’ approach is being adopted as the next step in setting up a commissioning/procurement process which gives a level playing field for local providers. The VCS (Evolution) are to contribute a response to the Darlington Social Capital Network proposal.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome report |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | n.a | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n,a,More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | n.a | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n,a,More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Dissemination through national and regional sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | n.a. | Overall evaluation - good plus = n.a. More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a. |

**Presenting Issues**

The Programme clearly opened up a conversation which needed to be built on, using a range of participatory approaches to build co-production. For the second year Darlington continued with a focus on co-production, particularly unpicking the pre-conditions to effective practice.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Evolution is the local CVS and is part of the Transforming Local Infrastructure programme with the Civil Society Unit. LAs in Tees Valley are likely to explore the benefits of joint commissioning arrangements for specified client groups – e.g. Looked After Children

**Challenges and opportunities**

Given the local needs, bringing in national providers is often a challenge to match delivery methods to local circumstances. A number of resources are coming together over the next year that can contribute to building capacity within the voluntary sector to respond to opportunities within children’s services. For this reason it was apt to explore methods of collaboration that could improve children’s outcome as well as the challenges for the VCS in working collaboratively through a community consortium to deliver services.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Address issues for the VCS of advocacy, competition, fund raising and data protection as they affect collaborative working in service delivery

Community engagement: Partners might monitor Darlington Social Capital Network (DSCN) Mapping, county-wide asset based community development, and the involvement of large VCS in a new Community Interest Company

Partnership working: Continue to build on the willingness of the VCS to work collaboratively and the existing strong relationship between public and voluntary sectors with respect for the VCS role as representing parents and community

Darlington offer and vision: LA could commit to a VCS tendering process, reviewing commissioning and procurement arrangements to accommodate the local VCS and improve dialogue

Localised commissioning: VCS (Evolution) to continue the process of becoming commissioning ready; VCS moving to consortium formation for October

Change management: LA to continue to manage the change from service provider to facilitator for local partnerships providing services

* 1. **Royal Borough of Greenwich: Evaluation**
	2. The Programme worked with Royal Greenwich to identifying ways to take forward the positive proposals for improving joint working and to feedback an action plan to the workshop participants and to the VCS and children’s centres across the borough. Ten VCS took part in an online engagement survey in September 2012. More than 34 local authority professionals, VCS representatives including GAVS (Greenwich Association of Voluntary Services) and children’s centre managers took part in one workshop event in October 2012.These ways include:

• setting up a market place event to raise awareness and understanding between schools, children’s centres and voluntary sector organisations;

• organising training on collaborative working, how to work effectively with organisations from different sectors, outcomes based planning and impact assessment;

• developing policies and local agreements to set out expectations on quality and safe practice when engaging with different organisations: and

• finding ways to share information and data about families using services in children’s centre areas.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Questionnaire report/ Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 85%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 65% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 69%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 67%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 53% |

**Presenting Issues**

To explore with Greenwich ways of expanding the involvement of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) with children’s centres.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

The authority wanted to develop their collaborative conversations through a series of task group meetings and a workshop in October 2012.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

The intention of the programme was to strengthen the engagement between the voluntary sector and children’s centre services, to build relationships and trust, leading to working together but not looking at changes to commissioning or at the VCS taking over the running of children’s centres. For this reason the challenge explored was, “How children’s centres and the voluntary can and community sector work together to improve the opportunities of children and families?’’

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Develop an on-going and increasing flow of information at a strategic and local level. Information discussed included the mapping of the VCS and children’s centres; a needs analysis of services and support; and sharing impact measures

Community engagement: a) Develop arrangements and communications between organisations that are reciprocal; identify opportunities to collaborate strategically, operationally and practically and for these to be set out in partnership and service level agreements; and

 b) Model more consultation on an area basis to enable the development of shared collaborative values including setting standards and expectations for consistency in working with families.

Partnership working: Establish a realistic approach about what is possible given the capacity of both the VCS and children’s centres. Ensure there is a shared understanding of the requirements of OFSTED and the increased focus on working with targeted families and the value of community outreach to improve outcomes

* 1. **Hillingdon: Evaluation**
	2. The Programme worked with Hillingdon through a series of task group meetings, listening events and workshops. Around 25 local authority professionals, VCS representatives, Hillingdon Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS) and children’s centre managers took part in a workshop event in September 2012. After the Programme there was a feeling that this way of working could help provide more time and resources, more effective service delivery as well as opportunities for staff personal development.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 89%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 57% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 69%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 61%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 50% |

**Presenting Issues**

Hillingdon wanted to encourage the involvement of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivery of children’s centres in partnership with schools.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

The Programme worked with Hillingdon to develop their collaborative conversations. The intention was to grow the willingness of the voluntary sector to work with or deliver children’s centre services through building relationships and trust, leading to working together, and new opportunities for commissioning services from the voluntary sector.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Hillingdon was in the middle of a review process so the Programme’s input was limited to a single day workshop. Answers to VCS questions on what the LA will say children’s centres will look like in the futureare dependent on the review outcome when the VCS will be willing to look at the best way of achieving collaborative working in service delivery.. It was for this reason that a key challenge was, “Given that staying the same is not an option, how can children’s centres work with the voluntary and community sector to improve the opportunities of children and families when both are faced with less money and the need to work with a wider range of services?”

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Work to improve communication between children’s centres and the VCS, reversing the perceived lack of sharing with providers and supporting this with information from national and local data sources

Community engagement: Partners to encourage involvement of community to make choices thus allowing more flexibility, for example children’s centres to deliver services, to set their own hours, for community response to need to be timely and community areas to become hubs where people can meet

Partnership working: Partners to look at balancing accountability and bureaucracy with the objective of assuring quality is maintained in the delivery of services

LA offer and vision: Hillingdon could revisit existing practices and services on an individual basis to discover ways to maximise resources seeing the VCS as diverse organisations with a range of needs and ways of working

Localised commissioning: Evidence that there is transparency across the whole process of embedding the new way of working, with

 no hidden agenda and start the process by outlining ‘Next Steps’ clearly and with a workable time frame

Change management: The change could be managed so that the current good outcomes for children’s centres are maintained and retained, and the change is made more sustainable by ensuring that parents are engaged, through responding to their needs and those of the community

* 1. **Kent County Council: Year one Evaluation**
	2. In 2011, the Programme helped in the formation of a future commissioning strategy. In October 2011, three workshops were held with 80 local authority professionals, children centre managers and staff and local VCS service providers. A ‘Mutual’s Training Seminar’ took place in February 2012 with a similar mix of 80 attendees. At the end of the first year of the Programme there was a positive shift to developing more opportunities for partnership working, and joining forces to ensure joint delivery continues between children’s centres and the VCS. The VCS felt they had a better understanding of the issues.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Outcome reports/ Workshop evaluations |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 82%,92% More positive about tackling key challenges = 61% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = n.a.. More positive about tackling key challenges = 47% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Dissemination and national and regional sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 79%,92% More positive about tackling key challenges = 59% |

**Presenting Issues**

Opportunity for an open discussion with VCS and CC about delivery models and to engage them in shaping the future direction of travel

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Most children’s centres are local authority managed – Kent is currently looking at central, decommissioned and partly decommissioned models. Nine children's centres are run by the VCS under 8 grant agreements with the local authority. Differing models of delivery had been formed across 12 districts over time with the positive outcome that the children’s centres are firmly rooted in the localities and the disadvantage that a wide range of commissioning models and approaches have developed that hamper a strategic commissioning direction.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

The VCS in Kent had found the pace and scope of change early intervention a challenge so there was an element of needing to regain trust. The three workshops in November were well attended and showed that this was a real conversation on future direction. This was reinforced when coupled with the seminar on mutuals and social enterprises. Difficulties identified by the sectors were -

* Children’s centres - time and lack of detailed knowledge, the need to know Kent’s timetable and vision, running children’s centre traditionally focussed on Ofsted, the culture of each organisation, and aversion to risk
* VCS - timescales and vision unknown, time and capacity, fear of the unknown, lack of understanding of the legalities and who to ask

Lack of a commissioning strategy was highlighted particularly in relation to the absence of timescales and plan.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Children’s centre managers and the VCS are now willing to promote and find out more about the community mutual model and be more open to mutuals/social enterprises in business planning. There was a positive shift to developing more opportunities for partnership working and joining forces to ensure joint delivery continues between the children’s centres and the VCS. The VCS felt they had a better understanding of the issues.

* 1. **Kent County Council: Year two Evaluation**
	2. Kent CC wanted to continue collaborative conversations in 2012-13 about the future delivery arrangements of children’s centres and children’s centre services. Two ‘listening and open conversation’ events were run by the Programme in July and November 2012. In July, the mix of 60 attendees was similar to 2011 and in November 2012 the 60 attendees were predominately from the VCS. The Programme suggests these approaches engage the VCS and children’s centre workforce with the potential for a mutually supportive and creative relationship in a collaborative working model with Kent.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome reports/ Workshop evaluations |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 82% 75%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 64% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations –good plus = 69%More positive about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Dissemination and national and regional sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations –good plus = 87% 89%More positive about tackling key challenges = 67% |

**Presenting Issues**

Kent wanted to continue collaborative conversations about the future delivery arrangements of children’s centres and children’s centre services.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

To develop an understanding by KCC and VCS of the practical measures needed for co-production and commissioning for future services. The intention was to leave a clear development of collaborative working practice that will help Kent in future consultations and service delivery planning.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

The lack of a commissioning strategy was a key challenge so this question was used to produce a paper to help in the development of this strategy:*“Given that staying the same is not an option, how can children’s centres work with the voluntary and community sector to improve the opportunities of children and families when both are faced with less money and the need to integrate with a wider range of services?”* This lead to a shift in the programme’s focus . We moved from strategic concerns to working with the VCS to explore the operational implications of collaborative working in a particular area of the County. For this reason we explored this challenge: *How can adult, children and family voluntary sector services improve children’s outcomes by working collaboratively to deliver children’s centres or children’s centres services?”*

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Partners could work together to build service capacity and maintain quality and quantity of services, working to VCS strengths (namely local knowledge, range of skills, specialisms and experience)

Community engagement: VCS favour Kent continuing to develop the long term strategy on commissioning compact principles, building a community profile which reflects real local need of the Kent community

Partnership working: VCS, with the CVS, could build on the existing openness and willingness to work together by sharing good practice, resources, information, skills and expertise

Kent offer and vision: LA continuing to develop and share a clear vision of future purpose and impacts of children’s centres in Kent. This vision to be informed by local priorities and community engagement and agreement

Localised commissioning: Partners could consult to review the tendering process tailoring it to a VCS configuration by localising and down-sizing bids in terms of funding, technicality and time

Change management: VCS, with the CVS, to address the issues of managing any fear of change and accountability, and overcoming any reluctance to share family information and roles

* 1. **Knowsley Borough Council: Evaluation**
	2. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (Knowsley) welcomed the opportunity to explore commissioning and delivery issues for community run services. A workshop was held 21 October 2011 with 40 local authority professionals, children’s centre managers and staff and local VCS service providers. And a discussion paper on Mutuals was produced in November 2011. It was intended to use the learning to create a possible time frame for key stages of development in a Knowsley context to feed into a community friendly commissioning model

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|  **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Outcome reports/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 90%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 58% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation –good plus = 67% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 58% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | National dissemination and sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 77% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 64% |

**Presenting Issues**

Knowsley wanted to explore the commissioning and delivery issues for children’s centre services if they were community run.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

13 children’s centres and 5 linked children’s centres are all managed by the local authority. Homestart and Family Voices supply the children’s services. The Knowsley Scrutiny Report outlines a journey to more cooperative structures with consideration of mutual status and a mixed economy of directly provided and commissioned services.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Knowsley like the idea of stronger commissioning and co production approach but there is a dearth of providers. There are also concerns over continuing using word of mouth’ to reach the ‘hard to reach’ using parents if there is a new approach. Community services need time and support to be sustainable separate from any wider commissioning considerations. In the workshops, a mutual model was favoured by children’s centre managers. The VCS favoured a Social Enterprise model.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

 Performance management: Partners could work to establish Performance management: Partners could work to establish information flows ‘up’ and ‘down’ with regard to meeting need within communities identified by local groups

Community engagement: Partners to continue to encourage community engagement through ownership with more help and commitment from volunteers, and help to recruit, support and retain them

Partnership working: VCS to continue the good working relationship with children’s centres by maintaining quality in supplying local needs. Plan and work harder to ensure sustainability and ethos, common values and goals

Knowsley offer and vision: The LA could address the provision of help with tendering, applying for funding support, development of legal governance framework and Knowsley Foundation funding management fees, policies and procedures

Localised commissioning: Partners could plan to share future plans for the development of children’s centres in relation to commissioning

 out services quickly and in a user friendly and efficient way

Change management: Work to grow tentative community providers into robust ones – provide help with business skills development and capacity building

* 1. **Leeds City Council: Evaluation**
	2. A workshop was held on 25 November 2011 with 25 local authority professionals, children’s centre managers and staff and local VCS service providers. The workshop allowed for open and honest discussion between partners and showed that some interesting improvements were possible within the existing robust delivery framework. The local authority is building on its networking opportunities and facilitating support for more informal responses in future discussion. Children’s centre managers are sharing ideas with colleagues, shaping discussions for the future and engaging the VCS in advisory boards. And the VCS are working on networking opportunities, accessing the depth and range of information available and increasing their understanding of the commissioning framework.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 84%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 71% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation –good plus = 67% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 75% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Regional dissemination and sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 42% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 50% |

**Presenting Issues**

Leeds wanted to work with the VCS and local children’s centres to future proof current arrangements through judging various delivery models against three key criteria.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

All but one of the children’s centres is run by the local authority. It has both a city wide and local children’s centres commissioning of the VCS. The workshop worked with all partners to assess ‘what if’ children’s centres and the VCS delivered services this way to see if could improve, quality, outcomes and value for money

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Engagement with the VCS around a time of change needs careful handling to avoid the resurfacing of historical attitudes by both partners.

The workshop allowed for honest discussion between partners and showed that some interesting improvements were possible within the existing robust delivery framework. The model that gained a positive overall score was that of lead partner consortia, due in part to the support of the VCS. Children centre managers inclined to a cooperative trust model and the local authority to a mutual so there were no quick simple responses.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Allow for the sharing of knowledge and ideas and open the possibility of meeting the needs of the community in new ways based on shared visions

Community engagement: Localities showcase what has been done with VCS partners already so opportunities to increase VCS involvement could emerge

Partnership working: Allow for different organisations working together by finding the right combination for delivering a service

Leeds City Council offer and vision: A strategic commitment to build on the capacity of the VCS who are the voice of users and close

 to families, along the lines of co-production with children’s centres and parents that helps to build on the existing good record of VCS commissioning

Localised commissioning: Reviewing the commissioning and delivery strategy to widen VCS involvement

Change management: Facilitate local partners supported by bigger organisations to give economies of scale and create more sustainable services

* 1. **Luton Borough Council: Evaluation**
	2. The Programme worked with Luton on a survey with key children’s centres and a training pack. Six children’s centres identified challenges. In total more than 10 local authority professionals, VCS representatives and children centre managers took part. Luton wanted to explore how to make the local VCS partners commission-ready for a ‘hub and spoke’ children’s centre service and build on the training developed for the VCS for the wider children’s centre sector. A second planned workshop was superseded by a bespoke training manual delivered in Spring 2012. The Programme was recognized by partners as a help in working out which way to go forward.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Questionnaire report/ Training materials |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | n.a. | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n.a.More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | n.a. | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n.a.More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | n.a. | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n.a. More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a.  |

**Presenting Issues**

Luton saw the opportunity to support VCS managed children’s centres as they had just completed a review of services and had quite a few anxieties about which way to go. Luton has decided to merge a number of children’s centres to cut costs. This involved the children's centres moving to a hub and spoke arrangement

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

A questionnaire/survey had a very positive response and enabled them to identify training needs for VCS children’s centres. Luton felt that focus workshops at a time of rapid changes in service design are not feasible.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Six children’s centres identified challenges in operational issues, governance issues, creating a business mindset/culture across the piece, with a focus on problem solving, creating guidelines/how to guides and sign posting to existing supports like Business Link (or Local Enterprise Partnership).The need to move as quickly as feasible to recruit new managers across the hubs was highlighted.

**Impact and Outcomes**

Performance management: VCS partners to address governance issues such as roles and responsibilities, managing conflict, assertiveness training, confidence building, being able to challenge effectively and negotiating skills

Community engagement: Partners to enable effective parental involvement and make time to tackle local issues properly

Partnership working: Work together to address operational issues such as staff working together across a hub and spoke, needing to share knowledge and ways of working

Luton offer and vision: Luton could plan to create a business mindset or culture across all partners with a focus on problem solving

Change management: Create guidelines, how to guides and signposting to existing support such as Business Link

* 1. **NE Lincolnshire Evaluation**
	2. Following a series of task group meetings, a ‘speed dating’ event was held on 20 November 2012. More than 25 local authority professionals, VCS representatives and children centre managers took part in the Programme in meetings and the event. NE Lincs Council could move to the role of facilitator rather than provider, while the VCS work to engage with children’s centres in a developing collaborative working model..

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus =85%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 93% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 69%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 95% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges =73% |

**Presenting Issues**

N.E. Lincolnshire Council wanted to continue collaborative conversations about the future delivery arrangements of children’s centres.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

The programme worked with the local authority to develop these collaborative conversations through a series of task group meetings and events. The intention was to leave a clear development of collaborative working practice that will help the local authority in future consultations.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

It was seen that with resources and time to achieve a collaborative approach that user’s needs would be met. Also that the culture and ethos of their own organisation would continue to thrive within the new commissioning priorities. To build relationships and increase understanding the challenge they tackled was: *Given that staying the same is not an option, how can children’s centres work with the voluntary and community sector to improve the opportunities of children and families when both are faced with less money and the need to integrate with a wider range of services?”*

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: More meetings, events and networking opportunities for the VCS to meet each other. Identifying and working with new and existing local VCS and promoting their services with regular newsletter and website communication

Community engagement: Improve understanding of the sector and its services, engaging more, with a commitment to attracting more VCS representatives. Also listen to and discuss needs of each children’s centre and service provider

Partnership working: Develop autonomy for children’s centres to form partnerships, actively seek partners from local VCS. And build on the willingness of smaller VCS to start working with children’s centres

NE Lincs Council offer and vision : Focus more on market development and ensure co-production is recognised as an option in the commissioning cycle emphasising working together rather than funding; perhaps collaborating in bids

Localised commissioning: LA could adopt the role of facilitator providing high level support and engagement in practical commissioning by supporting the VCS in setting up a consortium locally, through offering match funding and knowledge to facilitate large funding applications and setting realistic timescales

Change management: VCS to think more outside the box ‘who can help us’ by following up contacts, visiting other organisations, as prospective partners, be more positive with partnership working and explore new avenues

* 1. **Northamptonshire CC: Evaluation**
	2. Ten VCS organisations took part in a survey about engaging with collaborative working before the workshop. More than 35 local authority professionals, VCS representatives (including Northampton Voluntary Council – NVC) and children’s centre managers took part in a workshop event in October 2012. The workshop evidenced a willingness of the local VCS to work collaboratively with NCC and NVC, with NCC taking a facilitator role rather than a provider role in the new way of working. Next steps will work towards a task group VCS meeting with NVC to look at information sharing between statutory and voluntary services and a drilling down to ascertain what skills support the VCS sector might want for successful co production service delivery.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Questionnaire report/ Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 67%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 78% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 69%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | n.a | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n.a.More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a. |

**Presenting Issues**

Northamptonshire County Council ( wanted to start collaborative conversations about the future delivery arrangements of local authority services.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

The programme worked with Northamptonshire County Council and Northampton Volunteer Centre to develop these collaborative conversations. The intention was to leave a clear development of co-production practice that will help NCC in future consultations.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

The challenge was how to engage local small to medium VCS providers with a proposed way of radically delivering combined adult and children services. The intention was to support them with the skills necessary to be part of wider consortia once it was known what was needed.. Hence why the need to explore these question*:“To learn more about what each of us do through practical activities to improve involvement of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the delivery of local authority services”*

*How can adult, children and family services work together with the voluntary and community sector to improve the opportunities of children and families?”* It was also planned that the tools and processes learned in the ‘pilot area could be rolled out by the partners themselves*.*

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: Support and engage VCS through networking, with a contact centre helpline to enable effective signposting to other services and resources

Community Engagement :Share information with other local voluntary services through activities such as community meetings and

 more ‘workshop’ days

Partnership working: Create and run an ‘online directory’ which everyone can contribute to and access, although at this early stage there is no clear idea of how this would be funded

NCC offer and vision: Endorse the role of Northamptonshire County Council as a facilitator rather than a provider in the co-production environment

Localised commissioning: A recognition that co-production requires investment and a commitment to a set of actions. There is a need to ensure that this is a commitment that everyone is able to make

Change management: Keep adults, children and families at the centre by involving them from the start, making people aware of what services and support are available and adopting a ‘listening’ approach

* 1. **Poole Borough Council: Year one Evaluation**
	2. The programme worked with Poole to develop engagement with local VCS through a series of events and workshops. In 2011, a workshop was held in November with 25 attendees from a mix of children’s centre managers, VCS, local authority professionals and parents. In January 2012 there was a training session on collaborative working with a similar audience in size and mix. The Programme found that the one model approach was of little interest and the need was to develop a local focus. This approach generated much interest and engaged a wide variety of groups.

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|  **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome reports/ Workshop evaluations |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 78%,92% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 56% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 78%,92% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 88% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Dissemination through national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 78%,92% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 55% |

**Presenting Issues**

Poole welcomed the opportunity to have an external, neutral organisation to engage local VCS as they reflected on their commissioning direction.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Poole has 8 local authority children’s centres and they commission. Stakeholder events have had a reasonable number and variety of VCS groups attending. All seem positive and pleased to be part of the process and in on the consultation. There is interest in a couple of models already especially around consortia.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Poole see it as a challenge to get the balance between the larger VCS who want to push on quite quickly – but needing to hold back, specifically for the small to medium organisations, so that they can be as fully involved as capacity allows. Four main issues identified were around VCS capacity building, local authority commissioning processes and strategy, ensuring consultation and participation and continuing personal development (CPD) concerns.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Poole now intends to work with both small and large VCS to assess what is needed for partnership arrangements as part of co production consultation.

Solutions arising from the workshop for each sector were that the local authority will clarify its commissioning strategy. The VCS will build capacity and support for consortia. And children’s centres will have CPD to support the changing delivery landscape.

* 1. **Poole Borough Council: Year two Evaluation**
	2. In the second year 25 VCS organisations completed a telephone survey in June 2012. Ten VCS and 10 parents took part in separate focus conversations in July. Twenty-five mixed VCS, children’s centre managers and local authority professionals took part in a final review of next steps in November 2012. In total, more than 120 local authority professionals, VCS representatives, parents and children’s centre managers took part in four workshop events and a survey over a 2 year period.

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|  **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/Questionnaire report/ Outcomes report/ Workshop evaluations |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 92%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges =89% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus =69%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = 67%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges =70% |

**Presenting Issues**

Poole continued in 2012 as it wanted to explore the issues from the first year in more depth.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Poole explored the local VCS and parents’ willingness and capacity to form either a ‘community consortium’ or to be part of a lead partner consortium to provide children’s centres and/or children’s centres services.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Because there was capacity missing among the smaller VCS, there was positive traction in the notion of larger groups mentoring smaller ones to add value. Participants adopted an overall positive attitude to co-production, accepting that the ‘right to challenge’ has introduced common priorities which have opened minds about co-production and collaboration. This was explored and developed through exploration of these key questions:

*How with reasonable support and capacity over say 18–24 months are the local VCS willing to:*

*a) manage children’s centres or provide services through consortium approaches and/or*

*b) add value to existing arrangements*

*If children’s centres and services were outsourced, what service specification outcomes would ensure that parents and local voluntary groups are engaged in the delivery and management of those centres and services?*

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Consultation in strategic engagement:

 • Sustained and improved involvement of VCS organisations in the delivery of children centre services

 • More parents might have the skills/knowledge to participate in decision making concerning the children’s centre

Co-production in strategic engagement: Stakeholders could be involved in defining needs of sector using local knowledge and approaches

Technical/legal or next steps: An ‘outcomes framework’ might form the start point in children’s centres

Building community capacity:

 • Outreach set up where there is a cluster of identified need

 • Community volunteers in each centre or service could have increased opportunities

* 1. **Richmond: Evaluation**
	2. The Programme worked with Richmond to develop collaborative conversations through discussions in May 2012. A workshop planned in June due to local authority capacity became round table and telephone discussions on the lessons emerging from the national programme.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome report/ |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | n.a | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = n.aMore positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | n.a. | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = n.aMore positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓** | Regional dissemination  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | n.a. | Overall workshop evaluations - good plus = n.aMore positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a |

**Presenting Issues**

To explore ways of improving commissioning, and improve services through co-design and where possible build up the local VCS to have the capacity to provide services.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Developing an open and transparent pre commissioning process that leads to a preferred bidder option to help shape services. This suggested a co-production solution.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Major restructuring of children’s services is under discussion in Richmond with options including an arm’s length social enterprise or consortia which would provide a clear commissioning route for schools. A review is in progress of procurement implications of working to a multi-agency delivery of children’s centres where

each agency understands its contributions.. Commissioners were moving to considering the co- design process as contributing to community growth not just sub-contracting. So the discussions are around these key questions: *How. can we work together to ensure that commissioning and procurement processes are proportionate, build a sustainable VCS sector and reflect local need. Will a change in children’s centre organisation or how services are delivered lead to improvements in terms of improved outcomes for children and families, better quality services and value for money? How can working collaboratively challenge current commissioning/ procurement processes and move local barriers while supporting a sustainable local VCS?”*

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance Management: Acknowledge local providers’ understanding of local needs. Assess VCS appetite and capacity to work in consortia (community or lead partner) with special attention to providing the time and resources to train (upskill). Grow VCS capacity to deliver services for children’s centres and to issues of confidentiality and data protection for families

Community Engagement: Develop the concept of community growth through balancing how to meet borough and locality needs whilst retaining a sustainable local VCS

Partnership Working: Build on existing good working relationship with VCS providers and develop the VCS as key co-providers of universal services with children’s centres, with local CVS or a national charity as lead partner, based on clear specifications about local VCS sustainability and local advisory boards engaged in commissioning

Richmond Offer and Vision: Work toward a commissioning strategy where the strategic lead is with the local authority and operational delivery through local partners including parents. Aim to ‘future proof’ a sustainable VCS through collaborative working and commission methods

Localised Commissioning: Support and protect the local VCS to provide services within a local authority managed network of children’s centres, for example by establishing ‘start-up’ or developmental commissioning. Allowing mainstream commissioning to grow local services through commissioning that is more consistent and fair for small local VCS organisations

Change Management: Challenge the appropriateness of current commissioning attitudes and processes to the sustainability of the local VCS by adopting new ways of working which are necessary if local VCS are to survive, for example ensure any national external agencies are tied into supporting and growing the local VCS

* 1. **Telford & Wrekin: Evaluation**
	2. The programme worked with Telford and Wrekin Council to develop collaborative conversations through two workshops More than 50 local authority professionals, VCS representatives, children centre managers and parents took part in the first workshop event in November 2012. A second workshop took place in January 2013 combining the two other children’s centre areas with a similar mix of 40 attendees.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation- good plus = 76%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 62% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 69%More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 79% |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | **✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = n.a More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = n.a. |

**Presenting Issues**

Opportunity for an open discussion with Parents, VCS and CC managers about delivery models and to engage them in shaping the future direction of travel

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

The focus of the work in Telford over 2012–13 was to develop focus conversations to model ways of co-production practice that will help Telford in future consultations

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

The authority wanted to start collaborative conversations about the future delivery arrangements of local authority services. with parents, providers and staff. The key question shaping these discussions was as follows: *To learn how voluntary sector providers could improve children’s outcomes by working collaboratively to deliver children’s centres or children’s centre services*

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance Management: All partners work together to develop a continuous and accurate flow of information potentially using an upgraded Family Connect as one point of access for information with one dedicated person

Community engagement: Focus on community-led services meeting needs identified by parents using generational potential and offering a wider range of activities. Encourage training/upskilling of volunteers by building on existing services by empowering community to increase its role

Partnership working: All partners could make time and commitment to create partnerships with collaborative planning between health, safeguarding and children’s services in an atmosphere of mutual respect

Telford offer and vision: LA could move to a facilitator role supporting and balancing diverse cultural ethos, replace the corporate presence and influence and encourage and promote parental involvement with more user-friendly labelling

Localised commissioning: Continue high level strategic thinking about how children’s services are commissioned; strengthen localized commissioning by providing support in how things work

Change Management: Manage consequences of structural change, orchestrate the balance of conflicting cultures/ethos, maintain and foster a positive and passionate outlook

* 1. **London Borough of Westminster: Evaluation**
	2. The Programme worked with Westminster City Council to develop collaborative conversations through a series of task group meetings, listening events and a workshop. The workshop was held jointly with Voluntary Action Westminster with 25 local VCS service providers on 24 November 2011. Participants adopted an overall positive attitude to co-production, accepting that the ‘right to challenge’ has introduced common priorities which have opened minds about co-production and collaboration. Next steps include a VAW meeting to take lessons forward and the collaborative preparation of a proposal for elected members in April 2012.

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| **Key Performance Measures** |  | **Quantifying the measures** |
| 1. Providing strong and effective management of DfE grant funded activities
 | **✓✓✓** | Delivery plan/ Outcome report/ Workshop evaluation |
| 1. Achieving high levels of VCS satisfaction

  | **✓✓** | Overall workshop evaluation - good plus = 90% More positive attitude about tackling key challenges = 82% |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of local authorities to commission and engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | n.a. | Overall evaluation - good plus = n.a. More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a. |
| 1. Strengthening intent of neighbouring local authorities in the partner LA locality to engage the VCS in management and delivery of children centre services
 | **✓✓** | Regional dissemination and national sharing  |
| 1. Strengthening capacity and intent of children centre managers to commission VCS services
 | n.a. | Overall evaluation - good plus = n.a. More positive about tackling key challenges = n.a. |

**Presenting Issues**

Westminster welcomed the opportunity to build the capacity of the local VCS to be commission ready.

**Addressing VCS Commissioning**

Enriched market warming events and local VCS consortia arrangements were already planned. A small scale mapping of existing capacity was in progress to check capacity against participants’ reality and the resultant report will identify major gaps in capacity.

**Challenges and opportunities identified**

Westminster are minded to commission services as a bundle, and not to commission out children’s centres as they think this will sustain the local VCS. They are looking at options from among a full outsourcing of children centre management and services, to devolved commissioning to the locality hub. A deepening of the understanding of what being in a consortium for small VCS means could be a quick ‘win win’ with a possible workshop on influence building in order to ensure that the voice of the local VCS is heard in the partnership and by the LA. Addressing this key gap will form the basis of the workshops in spring 2012 for ‘hub and spoke’ members in Westminster.

**Impacts and Outcomes**

Performance management: VCS could identify strengths and opportunities for working together and create a space for the VCS to increase knowledge of each other’s role in the locality

Community engagement: Partners could work to ensure service users views taken into account in the development of any collaborative working model

Partnership working: Address developing capacity building support with the VCS so that it can decide what opportunities to follow up, for example a consortium to build VCS capacity and added value

Westminster City Council offer and vision: Plan to share the LA’s position on commissioning for 0–19s generally and children’s centres in particular and clarify the role of Voluntary Action Westminster Localised commissioning: LA commissioning strategy review to accommodate smaller VCS with commissioners adopting a listening and more respectful attitude to smaller VCS

Change management: Work to introduce change management training in co-production and collaborative working models

1. **Programmes Overall KP1 performance**
	1. From the national survey, (see appendix five) carried out in year one practical ‘commissioning’ workshops exploring perceived barriers and potential solutions emerged as the most popular way forward to becoming commission ready. For this reason, the programme ran 9 focus workshops, undertook two surveys for up to 280 participants from children’s centres, local authority and the voluntary and community. These activities, as indicated in the case studies proved a catalyst in setting local priorities, and developing ways forward.
	2. It was clear that whilst outsourcing children’s centres and services to an outside agency was a perfectly valid approach to secure positive outcomes it holds a risk of reducing the sustainability of local VCS groups who are vital to engaging key users and communities. The broad commissioning strategies that emerged to deal with this potential risk were
* build up local capacity to ensure that the local groups and children centres were able to be part of consortium to deliver centres or services(Knowsley, Westminster, Poole );
* improve communication between children’s centres and VCS providers to help build capacity and commissioning options(Barnet, Kent, Darlington)
* commission national provider to support local VCS as part of a contract(Bexley)
	1. Leeds and Luton supported local reviews to develop and improve capacity of the VCS but not leading to any planned outsourcing.
	2. In the second year Kent, Poole and Darlington were joined by NE Lincs, Telford & Wrekin, Greenwich, Hillingdon, Richmond and Northamptonshire. The work of the first year showed that whilst one of the outlined commissioning strategy was important for securing a sustainable local VCS in delivering children’s centres services, the models suggested for delivering a service were often seen as defining a solution before the challenge had been agreed. So the focus of the second year focused on how to engage partners in a genuine discussion of the commissioning options. However, the broad commissioning strategies still underpinned the co-production developments:
* build up local capacity to ensure that the local groups and children centres were able to be part of consortium to deliver centres or services(Kent, Darlington, Northamptonshire );
* improve communication between children’s centres and VCS providers to help build capacity and commissioning options(Greenwich, Richmond, Telford& Wrekin, NE Lincs. Hillingdon)
* commission national provider to support local VCS as part of a contract(Poole),
	1. During the second year the programme ran 10 workshops and undertook 3 surveys for up to 379 participants from children’s centres, local authority and the VCS. These activities, as indicated in the case studies proved a catalyst in setting local priorities, and developing ways forward.
	2. The overall workshop evaluations and the attitude survey for both years ( see appendices six, seven, eight and nine ) provide evidence of positive changes in the level of intent within the partner local authorities for being commission ready and to engage the VCS in the management and delivery of children centre services. In the first year 64% were more positive about tackling key challenges as well as in the commentary which shows the improved commitment to action in the different local authorities. In 2012-13 this had increased overall to 79%.Similarly, a positive change in the level of intent by the VCS to engage in delivery or management of children centres has also been recorded with 62% being more positive about tackling challenges. And 72% in the second year. Children’s centre staff lag behind somewhat but still recorded 52% being more positive about tackling challenges in moving to VCS commissioning which increased in the second year to 66%.
	3. The feedback on the activities was consistent over the two years. Generally 70%/80% of all partners reporting positive levels of good to excellent. The small decreases in LA and children’s centre staff figures relate to lower numbers of staff involved in the 2nd year programme.
	4. The problematic area for both years was engagement of other local authorities in a partners region due to limited networks or restrictions on out of authority travel. In the first year only two regions (L, Y&H) held a regional sharing event. In the second year, NE Lincs and Poole shared and all the regions held a web chat hosted by a local authority and in some cases a CVS partner. This was based around distributed case studies that aroused local interest but engagement in the actual web-chat was very low.
	5. In both years, participation in the workshops heightened perception by local authority partners of the need to engage local small to medium VCS in the commissioning process (Barnet, Bexley. Poole and NE Lincs); it provided local authority partners with new and illuminating feedback from the VCS on their reactions to where the commissioning process has already got to in their local authority (Darlington, Knowsley, Leeds, Northamptonshire, Westminster and Luton); and it started a real conversation with the local VCS on future direction and possible models (Kent, Hillingdon, Poole and Telford). In the second year, we were able to build in conversations with parents on the delivery options (Poole and Telford). From the workshops and discussions local authority partners were able to identify a range of difficulties to be overcome in the journey towards involving the VCS in children’s centre and children’s services delivery. These were mostly related to managing the change to a commissioning environment and different authorities recognised different aspects depending on their own situation. It was also seen that this necessitated building up local capacity and links to children’s centres (Greenwich, Kent, Poole).
1. **Programme evaluation and discussion**
	1. The key words to emerge in the first year were ‘refocus’ and ‘rebalance’. Gaining an insight into the need for refocusing and rebalancing underpinned the strengthened intent of local authorities to manage the change to engage and support the VCS. In the second year, it was ‘listening’ as all partners grappled with what this meant from the LA having to move from empty consultations on agreed options to partners shaping those options and with providers and staff having to accept that they were part of finding solutions.
	2. As shown local authorities identified different challenges over the two years depending on their own perspective and local circumstances:
* managing change by supporting the VCS to refocus on building VCS capacity (Darlington);
* building up closer links with the children’s centres and local VCS ( Greenwich;
* wanting to engage all the stakeholders especially parents in far reaching delivery reforms (Telford)
* avoiding the resurfacing of historical attitudes (Leeds);
* rebuilding trust with the local VCS and developing partnership arrangements (Kent),
* balancing the time frame needed for VCS sustainability within overall delivery constraints (Luton and Knowsley),
* balancing the pace of the national large VCS with the slower pace of the SM VCS (Poole),
* involving small and local VCS so they can influence commissioning strategy and grow capacity (Westminster and Bexley) and;
* recognising the need for a specific tailored approach for schools (Barnet, Hillingdon)
	1. Acting as a catalyst over the two years confirmed that local authorities are intending to take some positive action as a result of the participation in the programme. Most of these include greater engagement of and involvement with the VCS in order to agree and develop capacity or a commissioning strategy These actions range from
* using the learning to improve understanding and help the move to an enabling authority (Barnet);
* developing a commissioning strategy (Bexley, Telford & Wrekin, Kent, Hillingdon);
* take stock of current challenges and opportunities (Richmond)
* looking at co production and working out how make it effective (Darlington, NE Lincs);
* supporting small and medium VCS to grow capacity and links more effectively to children’ centres (Knowsley, Greenwich, Westminster, Northamptonshire)
* looking at ways of ensuring sustainable children’s centres with VCS support (Leeds),
* training VCS children’s centre staff to ensure long term sustainability (Luton),
* engaging small and large VCS to develop a sustainable commissioning strategy (Poole)
	1. A key factor that all the partner’s identified over the two years, as suggested by the research literature, is that local VCS are vital links and support to communities and individuals in need. However, common and long standing historical barriers often stand in the way of these strategies. The National Survey, which set the baseline for the programme, found that VCS capacity and leadership were key barriers to local authorities implementing VCS commissioning. Yet local authorities were not using delivery models such as consortia as a possible solution as well as being weak in the mapping and identification of local VCS providers. In the second year we used interview in Poole, Greenwich and Northamptonshire to engage these groups. The surveys revealed that not only could these groups add value to children’s centres by widening the offer but it also increased engagement as many of these groups had failed to attend previous open meetings. (See appendix 10 for a typical report).
	2. It’s understood that a commissioning strategy has to balance local sustainability with the need to ensure that outcomes are achieved within the constraints of any financial settlement. But it is possible to build the capacity of the local VCS through consortia training and development as in Westminster and Poole, or through community growth as in Knowsley and Greenwich. In the second year, it was clear that just engaging in honest and open discussions helped the local authority, children’s centres and local VCS have a clearer understanding of each other’s needs and challenges.
	3. The national survey found that the consultation processes by local authorities can bypass small VCS as they often lack the capacity to engage with committee or paper based consultation. This can increase the challenges of engaging with hard to reach groups and lead to service design not reflecting local needs. Having strong local VCS infrastructural support or more informal events such as market place consultation could help. For this reason co-production emerged as a theme from the first year and so the programme focused more on how to engage rather than how to deliver. Those authorities such as Darlington, Kent and Poole that were in the programme for two years showed that the two approaches were really two stages of reaching commissioning strategies and decisions that balanced the needs of the partners. For example, in Poole a community consortium approach was shown to be unfeasible and that national partners if engaged have to be ‘tied-in; to sustain the local VCS when commissioned.
	4. Commissioners whether local authority or children’s centres may not know what third sector resources are available or how they could be engaged with. Working with local VCS might overcome this. Tender processes are often over complicated based on unrealistic terms and conditions for the VCS but senior leadership by the local authority can lead to simplification. Lack of VCS leadership and capacity can be overcome if there is collaboration across the sector and with the local authority through workshop support for example. VCS fragmentation can be overcome by the use of partnership and consortia arrangements. It would be feasible to write into procurement specifications that external partners provide leadership and capacity as Bexley might do or as Barnet is doing indirectly through schools from 2012-13. In practice, procurement processes continued to be a key barrier unless capacity of the local VCS could be built up or supported.
	5. The Attitude Survey in the first year confirmed that the greatest concern for the VCS and the Children’s Centre sectors was the potential drift away from VCS core values which commissioning out to the VCS would bring. Local authorities were most concerned about contract competition undermining cooperation and co-production with providers. It also confirmed the contention that models such as the Consortium or Mutual models could be effective in overcoming these and the other kinds of challenge. The Consortium model was considered by the VCS sector as potentially effective to help overcome the key challenges. The children’s centre sector felt that the Mutual model would be the most effective in achieving this. The survey suggested that local authorities preferred the Mutual model. Consortia models were framed by Local Authorities by bid processes and not when meeting other challenges such as delivering children’s services. The feedback from the workshops broadly confirmed these preferences. Although it was less clear how they were to be achieved.
	6. In the second year, the attitude survey explored what co-production could do to engage the partners and change attitudes. Doing it helps extend service reach and improve service delivery. In terms of attitudes, the VCS appreciate LA's transparency in engagement and commissioning of the VCS, and children’s centres appreciated LAs support of the VCS sector to share information and show more commitment to achieving a collaborative working environment.
	7. In conclusion. we leave a legacy of delivery models and community engagement approaches built from engagement with10% of unitary Local Authorities in England- a robust base and sufficient to create a tipping point moving the sectors to positive adoption of the commissioning approach involving the local VCS and becoming commission ready to ensure that the needs of families and children can still be met in the current financial settlement.
1. www.resultsbasedaccountabilty.com [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity ( Dekker, Paul, and Eric M. Uslaner. 2001. ‘Introduction.’ Pp. 1 – 8 in *Social Capital and Participation in Everyday Life*, edited by Eric M. Uslaner. London: Routledge. [**)**](http://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition.html#c3daf75eafd171f8f3e46b4ccebb5ddd) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Cabinet Office defines co-production as a partnership or relationship, characterised by mutual co-operation and shared responsibility for achievement of a valued goal. [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/207033/public\_services\_co-production.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/%2B/http%3A//www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/207033/public_services_co-production.pdf). However, whilst much of the literature sees co-production as a commissioner and user relationship and co-design as a commissioner-provider relationship, we have used co-production as this now seems to be used as an accepted way of describing collaborative working with a range of partners. This is the way that the programme applied the term. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kotter, J.P.(1990) A force for change: How leadership differs from management. New York: Free Press [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ticks here and in the following case studies represent number of evidence sources. See the chart on page 2.Most percentages are derived from the individual evaluation reports and the attitude surveys. In some cases in the second year LA responses but not VCS or Children’s centres are based on an overall average. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)