



# **Creating Better Outcomes for Children and Young People by improving the Commissioning of Cultural Services**

**Research findings and  
final report  
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**For: Arts Council of England and  
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***'there are tremendous opportunities for culture to push levers no-one else can and open up young people – from gifted and talented to socially disengaged. They have powerful ways of opening a window on the world, putting life through a prism and refracting it in wonderful ways'***

***'we don't make the interconnectivity between needs and what culture can offer – so they can be seen as marginal, add-ons and we don't have time to invest in them'***

*(Extract from an interview in Lancashire)*

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## Executive Summary

This project aims to improve outcomes for children and young people through improving the commissioning of cultural services.

Cultural organisations have made significant contributions which impact on children and young people's lives, their well-being and achievements. **The commissioning climate in public service delivery poses new opportunities but also challenges to cultural organisations.**

The public service reform agenda is now entering a new phase with an even greater focus on demonstrating impact and value for money in a declining resource base. The culture sector has made some progress but the research shows that it remains on the fringes of this opportunity for a range of reasons. Looking forward, **a trajectory of further gradual incremental change could see the cultural sector actually moving backwards and perhaps what is now required is "step change" that sees this opportunity grasped with both hands.**

This research, with twelve Directors of Children and Young People's Services or their representatives across four regions, indicates that cultural services are absent from the strategic commissioning process in those areas. Whilst there is some excellent joint working, partnerships, grants and 'spot purchasing' of particular services or projects, **cultural services are not routinely involved as key players in the mainstream structures or processes of commissioning.**

The research identifies a number of **opportunities** where cultural organisations can make a strong strategic contribution: communicating children's voices and needs; priority underlying themes such as raising self-esteem, aspirations and confidence, enjoying and achieving and emotional well-being; problem areas where outcomes are not improving such as teenage pregnancy, NEETs, obesity and mental health; complex areas of service delivery; locality and individually commissioned services. These opportunities require creative and innovative approaches, finding ways to bring expression and new horizons to children and young people and opening up new opportunities for them.

The research also highlights some significant **challenges** for the sector. Central to this is **how the sector is positioned and organised.** Nationally, regionally and locally there are resources, strategies and mechanisms to engage third sector organisations in commissioning, ensure their representation on key bodies and build their capacity as providers of services. Cultural organisations are not generally part of or engaged in these approaches. Other aspects of positioning relate to where cultural services sit within local authority structures, including the issue of two-tier authorities, and their representation on local strategic partnership structures. There is a lack of understanding amongst children's service commissioners about how the sector is organised and how to engage with it. Some see it as fragmented and competitive. It would appear that there is a case for more collaboration

between organisations, both between cultural organisations themselves and with other third sector organisations, if cultural organisations are to play a full strategic role and contribute to the better outcomes needed for children.

**Demonstrating evidence of how cultural activities contribute to outcomes** is a second challenge. Whilst there is appreciation of the power of cultural experiences for children and young people, commissioners need greater demonstration of the effectiveness of cultural programmes and how they are making a difference. There is a call for a more substantial research and evidence base to establish the impact on better outcomes for children and young people.

Linked to these two challenges of positioning and demonstrating outcomes is the challenge of **how the sector communicates**. Engagement with strategic commissioning may involve communicating differently and building new relationships and alliances. At a very basic level, strategic commissioners expressed an openness and willingness to engage in ‘conversations’ with cultural organisations, but this would need to happen in a manageable form, given the pressures on their time.

Commissioners are also looking for **efficiency as well as effectiveness**, with a requirement for clear and robust safeguarding policies, value for money and relevant accreditation.

The research challenges the cultural sector to address these findings, decide its’ aspiration in relation to engagement with strategic commissioning and consider the changes needed to realise the opportunities and address the challenges. These were explored in four regional workshops, designed to raise awareness, increase understanding and consider the implications of commissioning for cultural organisations. Potential actions locally, regionally and nationally were identified, particularly including the need to develop greater collaboration between organisations and consider the development of consortia.

For the Arts Council and MLA there are also real opportunities to align future work on strategic commissioning with other initiatives such as “Find Your Talent”. By bringing together the learning from this project and “Find Your Talent” there is an opportunity to sustain and embed culture in the lives of many more children through the commissioning process. It may also be equally important to seek out better alignment with other policy initiatives that have a common interface with councils such as Regular Funded Bodies and Renaissance in the Regions. Looking forward it is now clear that councils will increasingly be looking for more efficient and effective ways of delivering better places and better outcomes as public sector resources are reduced and **as public resources diminish it will be increasingly important to reduce overlap and maximise synergies**.

Whilst the project has focused on cultural services, the issues raised and learning is likely to be equally applicable to Sport and other related services and should be extrapolated across the culture and sport sector.

**The recommendation** of the report is that the Arts Council and Museums, Libraries and Archives Council address the following key questions highlighted in the report:

***Overarching key question: In considering the opportunities and challenges set out in the report, does the sector consider there is a need for step change to enable it to engage better in strategic commissioning and align this development with other initiatives and programmes that operate at the interface with councils such as “Find your Talent”, Regular Funded Bodies and Renaissance in the Regions? (Section 2)***

***Key question: Do cultural organisations want to explore and develop the opportunities to be involved in strategic commissioning described in the report to bring their unique expertise, or is there a preference for simply continuing existing partnership and project working (where possible) and responding to “spot commissions” where available? (Paragraph 2.1)***

***Key question: What will the sector do – locally, regionally and nationally – to better position and organise itself to engage in strategic commissioning? (Paragraph 2.2.1)***

***Key question: Is the sector systematically measuring and collecting evidence of impact on outcomes, and sharing the results of research, to enable a strong case to be made for the contribution of culture? (Paragraph 2.2.2)***

***Key question: How can the sector – collectively as well as locally – better communicate its’ instrumental value and raise awareness with service commissioners? (Paragraph 2.2.3)***

***Key question: Has the sector developed the tools and methods to meet the general and specific efficiency and quality requirements of commissioners of children and young people’s services, in relation to safeguarding, value for money and relevant standards? (Paragraph 2.2.4)***

## 1. Introduction and Context

Recent developments in local government, including Local Strategic Partnerships, sustainable community strategies and Local Area Agreements, are based on the delivery of better *outcomes* for local people and that the more complex and challenging outcomes can only be tackled by organisations working in partnership.

Culture and sport can have a significant impact on many outcomes, including:

- Strong communities (including community participation and cohesion?)
- Children and young people (including diversion from crime)
- Health (including reducing obesity)
- Older people (including help to live an independent life)
- Local economy (including skills development).

The sharper focus on outcomes is leading to the reorientation of public services around a “commissioning model”. In some services a commissioning model has been in place for many years, such as in adult social care and health. Its arrival in children’s services, learning and skills, offender management and other public services is more recent.

In culture and sport, reforms over the past two decades have resulted in more providers that, to varying degrees, operate at arm’s length from the council. Less attention has been paid to the *commissioning* of culture and sport and to the sector’s capacity to influence and add value to strategic developments beyond service boundaries. The IDeA has recognised that this balance needs to be redressed if the full potential of culture and sport is to be realised, and is developing a programme of activities and resources to support this.

Culture and sport services need to engage with the commissioning process by:

- Influencing strategic commissioning corporately and within the Local Strategic Partnership (and more widely still where a Multi-Area Agreement is in place) in the outcome areas where culture has a significant contribution to make
- Delivering these outcomes at the operational level.

Providers of culture and sport services (public, private or third sector) need to gear up for the commissioning model and process as much as the commissioners. In this new environment professionals in provider roles may find themselves called upon to respond to commissioners in children’s services or the PCT or to joint commissioning strategies developed between partners. While this brings with it some uncertainty, it also provides new opportunities for providers particularly for those with a capability to innovate.

As part of the wider programme of work on commissioning in the culture and sport sector, this research focuses specifically on building awareness and capacity in relation to creating better outcomes for children and young people through improving the commissioning of cultural services (Arts, Libraries, Museums and Archives).

The aims and objectives of the project are:

### **Aim**

The overall aim of the project is to improve outcomes for children and young people through improving the commissioning of cultural services

### **Objectives**

1. To increase awareness and understanding of the commissioning process in culture sector organisations in the selected areas
2. To better understand the current commissioning context in Children and Young People's Services, the priorities and processes in different authorities and partnerships and the barriers and opportunities for the cultural sector
3. To provide information and practical approaches to regional government offices to enable them to better support cultural services officers in councils to influence Children's Services commissioning; and also to influence their Children and Young People counterparts in government offices
4. To provide relevant information to ACE/MLA to support them in influencing the Department for Children and Families in relation to the Children's Plan.
5. To identify good practice and practical advice or resources
6. To evaluate the project and identify areas for future development across the culture and sport sector and in relation to other areas of the public sector service commissioning.

### **Methodology**

The research phase of the project involved working in four English regions and one-to-one interviews with Directors of Children and Young People's Services or their nominee – responsible for commissioning services – in three authorities in each of the regions.

The participating regions and authorities were:

- North West - Lancashire County Council, Halton Metropolitan Borough Council, Salford City Council
- East Midlands - Derby City Council, Nottingham City Council, Northamptonshire County Council
- South West - Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council, North Somerset Council
- West Midlands – Telford and Wrekin Council, Staffordshire County Council, Worcestershire County Council

Interviews were also held with a representative of the regional Government Office responsible for Children and Young People's Services.

The research focus was to understand the priorities and perspectives of those who commission services for children and young people. The second phase was to bring those perspectives to arts and cultural organisations through a series of seminar/workshops to further the objectives of the project.

The report provides:

- An analysis of opportunities and challenges
- Detailed Findings and evidence from the interviews
- A summary of the seminar/workshops and an indication of actions arising

## 2. Analysis of the Opportunities and Challenges

This section provides an analysis of the headline issues emerging from the findings. It represents the independent observations of the researcher, seeking to interpret the evidence from the research for the sector at all levels. It poses key questions for the sector at the end of each headline issue.

The opportunities are presented first, followed by four key challenges – positioning, outcomes, communications, efficiency.

The overarching key question, however, is whether the sector considers these issues sufficiently significant for them to be addressed by step change. The commissioning landscape is developing rapidly and whilst there will be changes and developments, this research clearly points to the need for cultural (and sporting ) organisations to be proactive within this and make some step changes if it is to realise its' potential contribution.

For the Arts Council and MLA there are also real opportunities to align future work on strategic commissioning with other initiatives such as “Find Your Talent”. By bringing together the learning from this project and “Find Your Talent” there is an opportunity to sustain and embed culture in the lives of many more children through the commissioning process. It may also be equally important to seek out better alignment with other policy initiatives that have a common interface with councils such as Regular Funded Bodies and Renaissance in the Regions. Looking forward it is now clear that councils will increasingly be looking for more efficient and effective ways of delivering better places and better outcomes as public sector resources are reduced and as public diminish it will be increasingly important to reduce overlap and maximise synergies.

***Overarching key question: In considering the opportunities and challenges set out below, does the sector consider there is a need for step change to engage in strategic commissioning and align this development with other initiatives and programmes that operate at the interface with councils such as “Find your Talent”, Regular Funded Bodies and Renaissance in the Regions?***

### 2.1 Opportunities

Participants in the research were genuinely open to creativity, innovation, new ways of doing things and to working with new potential providers, and specifically including cultural organisations. There were many examples of good partnerships with cultural organisations and some excellent project work. Partnerships with libraries and joint work in relation to the development of Children's Centres, as well as the longstanding relationships around reading and afterschool activities, were frequently mentioned.

However, generally, commissioners' relationships were in terms of 'spot purchasing' – or buying specific services for a fairly narrowly defined service, such as a music service or drama activities.

There was little, if any, evidence of cultural organisations being involved in the strategic commissioning process – the identification of needs, identifying outcomes, setting priorities, planning and reviewing. Even in those authorities with 'Find Your Talent' pilots, the activity appeared to be confined to the programme in schools and informal learning settings but the thinking had not transferred to other aspects of children and young people's services. It is early days and the pilots are relatively new so there is the scope for this to develop.

So, the opportunities summarised here are those which are about engagement at a **strategic level**, understanding and shaping the policies and bringing innovative methods to deliver the outcomes in the Children's Plan.

Opportunities include:

- **Communicating Children's voices** – This is a strong theme in all Children's Trusts and there are opportunities here to work directly with children and young people and bring their voices to commissioners – proactively from the work cultural organisations do already. This could form part of an up front contribution to the Needs Assessment, to demonstrate innovation and how they can help reach and give voice to disengaged young people.
- **Contributing to locally determined priority underlying themes -** Underlying the main five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes are a number of locally determined priorities. Most frequently mentioned were:
  - 'think family'
  - Prevention and early intervention
  - The needs of the most disadvantaged and narrowing the gap – tackling deprivation and minimising the impacts of poverty
  - Emotional well-being
  - Raising aspirations
  - Raising self-esteem and confidence
  - Enjoy – as well as achieve

These are all areas where cultural organisations have a unique offer.

- **Helping to address problem areas where outcomes for local children and young people are not improving** – many of the authorities referenced those areas which were most challenging in changing the outcomes for young people. The examples of teenage pregnancy, NEETs, obesity and mental health were most frequently mentioned.

Again, the opportunity is to gain a more in depth picture of the local challenges and consider the ways in which cultural sector organisations can develop and deliver new approaches.

- **Involvement in complex areas of service delivery** – the Commissioning Portfolio in Children and Young People’s Services is complex and diverse. For example, the portfolio will include such service areas as:
  - Emotional health and well-being, peri-natal and children’s mental health
  - Early years, Children’s Centres, childcare
  - Children in Care
  - Schools support
  - Inclusive education, special schools and hospital education
  - Aiming High for disabled children, carers, breaks, care, residential, therapy, sensory services
  - Extended schools
  - 14-19 programmes
  - Sexual health
  - Substance misuse
  - Youth offending

Added to this complexity and diversity are the layers of commissioning for individuals and localities.

Identifying the opportunities within this will require time and effort locally – and overcoming the challenges outlined earlier. An example of the potential which came out in the research (in more than one authority) was the provision of Short Breaks for children with disabilities. Cultural activity, (and sport), are key dimensions of the short break offer. Finding providers was proving a challenge. In one of the authorities involved, those coming forward were children’s disability organisations who ‘expanded’ their offer to include delivering cultural activities, without necessarily having that specialist expertise or quality of cultural offer. The opportunity is, therefore, for cultural organisations to form alliances and consortia with other agencies to deliver services in partnership with other specialists. The annual commissioning budget for short breaks in this particular authority was approximately £1.5million.

- **Locality and individual commissioning** – services such as Integrated Youth Support are often being commissioned on a locality basis, giving opportunities for cultural organisations with strong localised identities and links to work with other local organisations to add to the opportunities for young people in the area.

Similarly, individual schools or social workers are commissioning services to meet very specific individual needs, some of which could be met by cultural organisations.

***Key question: Do cultural organisations want to explore and develop these opportunities to be involved in strategic commissioning to bring their unique expertise, or is there a preference for simply continuing existing partnership and project working (where possible) and responding to “spot commissions” where available?***

## **2.2 Challenges**

### **2.2.1 Positioning, organisation and sector collaboration**

Those commissioning services for children and young people have a complex agenda and set of partnerships and structures to manage and maintain.

Whilst most of those interviewed showed great enthusiasm and appreciation of the power of cultural services in meeting young people’s needs, from direct experience, this appreciation did not necessarily translate into systematic or mainstream contact with cultural organisations in the commissioning process. From this research, it seems that the reasons for this are in part due to where cultural services are positioned within public services. The key factors are:

- **Third Sector**

All Children's Trusts and partnerships have arrangements to involve Third Sector Organisations in their policy and decision making structures including on Commissioning Boards. There are clear arrangements for **representation** in the structures and evidence to demonstrate active involvement of Third Sector representatives.

There are **measures to build the capacity** of the Third Sector locally through designated workers, programmes of events and training, support and resources. Commissioners frequently have strategies to ‘increase their provider base’ or ‘grow the market’.

Similarly there are **national programmes and policy** to support the engagement of the Third Sector in delivering public services generally and some in Children and Young People’s Services in particular.

In all the authorities interviewed, to the best knowledge of those individuals, cultural organisations were not part of those arrangements.

In relation to national policy developments for the Third Sector, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is not normally a participant in these programmes.

Cultural organisations straddle those delivered by independent organisations and those delivered directly by local authorities. This may in part account for cultural services not identifying themselves, or being identified by others, as part of the Third Sector.

The issue here is that, in terms of commissioning Children and young people's services, there are clear mechanisms and processes to engage and involve the Third Sector from developing policy through to support for them as potential providers of services. Cultural organisations do not appear to be routinely part of these.

- **Location within local authorities**

In some authorities, cultural services were located within Children and Young People's services, affording the potential for closer collaboration. In some there had been a move to location within Adult Services, which could form a temporary barrier to engagement on a Children's agenda. However there are benefits in relation to the longer experience of commissioning within adult services which can be drawn upon. In other cases, culture was located in a Regeneration or Communities directorate, affording potential opportunities for cross service working.

Wherever they are located, there may be challenges regarding how cultural services are perceived in general, but more particularly how they are represented and included in partnerships and structures for engagement in commissioning.

- **Two tier authorities**

Counties may regard the commissioning of culture and leisure (*their words*) as an activity undertaken by districts. Consequently they may not seek to build direct relationships with cultural organisations and miss out on opportunities to engage on a more strategic level.

(Example: This was the case described in Worcestershire. In the discussion, however, the Head of Commissioning agreed that cultural organisations potentially had a wider role. We had discussed a challenge he had in relation to delivering Short Breaks for children with disabilities – something mentioned by other authorities such as Telford and Wrekin. Short breaks have a strong culture and sport dimension. However the providers coming forward were children's disability organisations who were 'expanding' their level of activity to include delivering cultural activities. The budget for short breaks in the county is £1.5 million). The relationships between services in two tier areas may be a factor inhibiting the sector's potential relationships with those commissioning processes often carried out at a county level, or in the case of health, sub regionally.

- **Partnership structures**

Local Strategic Partnerships also vary in their structural arrangements with some having a dedicated cultural partnership. One authority with this arrangement spoke of needing to build links between the children and young people's partnership and cultural partnership. Others may have a representative of cultural services on some or all of their key partnerships,

usually a local authority cultural officer. This varies and in some cases representation is limited or absent.

The LSP partnerships are where policy and strategies are developed and agreed, needs assessments considered and resources allocated.

- **Organisation and sector collaboration**

One common observation is that grant aid worked with single organisations and could, to some degree be considered as competitive. Commissioning, on the other hand, invites collaboration between organisations, bringing together their individual strengths and methods to a set of needs.

There is also the need to have some efficiency in the development of strategic relationships. A Director of Children and Young People's Services, however willing, will not have the time to meet with 30 organisations to understand their work, but would be open to learning about the range of cultural offer in their area, how they are making a difference and how they might help address some of the key local challenges.

Collaborations may be amongst cultural organisations or wider – as in the example of short breaks, collaboration with children's disability organisations could offer a more exciting programme for the children and better outcomes.

There are opportunities for larger organisations to bring in smaller organisations with particular expertise and for groups of individual artists to collaborate. In some areas organisations are setting up formal consortia with legal identities to support their relationships and ability to engage as providers in the commissioning arena.

There was also reference in several areas to national organisations being better organised (and resourced) to bid in service procurement. Although there are some excellent organisations undertaking very good local programmes of activity, local councillors often express a preference (where all other things are equal) to work with local organisations, and value their investment in the local community.

All of these issues regarding where cultural services are positioned impact on their ability to engage in commissioning, particularly in the strategic context. Without consideration of what this means by cultural organisations in a local area, there is the potential that they may be considered as valid providers but more on a 'project basis'. Local authorities referred to 'spot purchasing' individual specific services rather than strategic relationships. Another said that 'as they don't fit neatly into any sector they are not on the map'.

***Key question: What will the sector do – locally, regionally and nationally – to better position and organise itself to engage in strategic commissioning?***

### 2.2.2 Outcomes

Better outcomes for children and young people is the number one priority for Children's Trusts, departments and commissioners. The five Every Child Matters outcomes are the key headlines and the Children and Young People's Plan describes the local priorities and challenges. Interviewees described some of their more entrenched problems, commonly including 'narrowing the gap' and issues such as teenage pregnancy, NEETs, obesity and mental health. They also indicated priorities in relation to emotional well-being, raising aspirations, self-esteem and confidence, the need for a greater focus on enjoyment and on prevention and early intervention.

In all of these areas, demonstrating with evidence of what works and how it contributes to better outcomes is the essential challenge.

Commissioners are at various stages on their journeys to defining outcomes but there is a great opportunity for providers of services to collect evidence to demonstrate their impact on outcomes. This will require structured and measured evidence as well as qualitative indicators for 'softer' outcomes such as increased confidence or a better self-image. One interviewee was keen to see national research, independent expertise best practice and evidence of impact as well as local evidence, so that he could bring this into thinking around the contribution of cultural organisations to some of the entrenched problems.

There are a number of models for outcome-based performance management from national organisations, specialist agencies through to local systems. Some have been adopted by the Find Your Talent pathfinders. The Centre for Excellence in Outcomes (C4EO) is a national initiative to develop expertise in this area.

Cultural organisations need to be aware of the different opportunities and existing and emerging frameworks and use these as well as contribute their own ideas and means of demonstrating outcomes. There is scope for innovation and creativity here. The ability to demonstrate better outcomes and evidence of making a difference is the top priority for organisations wanting to be involved in providing services for children and young people.

***Key question: Is the sector systematically measuring and collecting evidence of impact on outcomes, and sharing the results of research, to enable a strong case to be made for the contribution of culture?***

### 2.2.3 Communication

Awareness of cultural organisations and what they can and are doing to make a difference to children and young people's lives varies. There may be a general knowledge of an organisations existence but little knowledge of the detail of the work it does and it's impact. There may be some strong individual relationships, joint working and excellent projects. Some authorities

have had a longstanding commitment to developing programmes such as 'Artsmark' in schools and reading collaborations with library services. Find Your Talent has offered the opportunity to build on these in the pilot authorities. There are also examples of the development of Children's Centres in libraries.

However, from this series of interviews with Director's of Children and Young People's Services or their Assistant leading on commissioning, there was a clear desire to have a better understanding of what cultural organisations are offering and how they might work with them on some of their priority areas. Interviewees particularly mentioned work with the most disadvantaged, disaffected and disengaged children and young people. Some respondents expressed the view that some cultural organisations were primarily focused on the 'intrinsic value' of the services in terms of developing cultural activity for its own sake, whereas the priority for commissioners is in relation to its 'instrumental value' – that is the contribution to the outcomes for children. Although this may not be an either or situation, the different starting points for communication and discussion can very often inhibit or even prevent relationships being built and collaborations being formed. So, for example, more than one interviewee expressed frustration that the focus of Education Officers in galleries, museums and other cultural venues appeared to be to increase visits to their venue. Whilst they had no problem with this as a by-product, their starting point and focus lay elsewhere – in the outcomes for children.

It is also about two way communication. One interview advised of the need for cultural organisations 'to get a real understanding of the bespoke requirements of our Trust Board' and all stressed the need to understand the priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan. Communication is needed to help organisations understand the kind of information required to gather information on outcomes and impact. The interviewees wanted to harness creativity and innovation and were open to opportunities for 'conversations' to build the relationships and explore the agenda.

This theme links closely with the two previous ones on positioning and outcomes. Many organisations may have marketing and promotions strategies and lots of publicity materials, but this issue refers more to building longer term strategic relationships and demonstrating that 'making a difference' factor. Also, whilst a majority of people interviewed had some powerful experiences of how cultural activity had made an impact, they hadn't applied these experiences into their thinking in the commissioning context.

***Key question: How can the sector – collectively as well as locally – better communicate its' instrumental value and raise awareness with service commissioners?***

## 2.2.4 Efficiency

In addition to basic good organisational health in terms of governance, financial management, human resources and equalities, health and safety and compliance with regulations, three key aspects were highlighted:

- **Safeguarding policies**

Organisations working with Children and Young People should have developed safeguarding policies, kept these up to date and stringently operated and should demonstrate quality in this. Commissioners are looking to verify that those who deliver services to children and young people not only have the basic CRB checks but that they are trained and skilled in working with vulnerable children and can manage the implications of working with different attitudes and behaviours in ways which do not involve further risk of harm.

- **Value for money**

Commissioners are accountable and required to demonstrate Value for Money in all they do and are routinely inspected on this, so this is an essential element for providers of services. They are looking for efficiency and effectiveness. This doesn't necessarily mean the cheapest services but commissioners are looking for clarity on the return on the investment, including 'added value' which might be detailed local knowledge or experience of a particular client group, the opportunity for local employment opportunities for young people or unique skills, facilities or expertise.

There were a number of references to a commitment to full cost recovery for third sector organisations.

- **Accreditation**

A third aspect mentioned was Accreditation. Commissioners need assurance that they are legitimate organisations and have proficiency in their area of business and can deliver services and produce positive outcomes. One respondent was working on a 'Kitemarking' approach with the Third Sector. They weren't seeking a long list of 'badges', but rather some meaningful way of verifying that the organisation could deliver what it said it could. One respondent suggested a role for the regional Arts Council and MLA in this.

***Key question: Has the sector developed the tools and methods to meet the general and specific efficiency and quality requirements of commissioners of children and young people's services, in relation to safeguarding, value for money and relevant standards?***

### 3. Research Findings

This section gives further details of the one to one interviews undertaken with Directors of Children and Young People's Services or their nominees in 12 Local Authorities across 4 regions in England, together with Advisors for Children's Services in the respective Government Offices.

The purpose is understand the priorities and procedures for commissioning services from the Commissioner's perspective and to identify how cultural organisations can engage more effectively in the process of delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

The quotes extracted are the researcher's selection, chosen to illustrate a range of points made often by several authorities. They are not intended to present a limited or restricted view of any individual authority's approach but are selected to distil messages which are valuable to aid the understanding of cultural organisations as they seek greater involvement in commissioning children and young people's services.

#### 3.1 The priorities for children and young people

Every Authority has a **Children and Young People's Plan** setting out their priorities and targets for Children in their Area.

The foundation of these plans is the **Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes**: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being.

Local partnerships, organised into Children's Trusts, will have their own **locally determined priorities**, developed **in collaboration with children and young people** themselves and on a comprehensive **needs assessment**.

Examples (selected/illustrative) of these priorities from the authorities visited include:

- *ensuring young people are emotionally resilient; and provision of more positive activities for young people (North Somerset)*
- *narrowing the gap in achievement and tackling inequalities across the diversity of the authority (Devon County Council)*
- *raising aspirations, increasing enjoyment, developing confident and agile young people into adults (related to economic well-being)(Plymouth)*
- *narrowing the gap; preparation for work, education and training (and*

*avoiding NEET); health – teenage pregnancy, diet and exercise, emotional health (Halton Borough Council)*

- *enjoying and achieving – narrowing the gap in attainment (including Looked After Children and those in areas of deprivation) (Lancashire County Council)*
- *child and family poverty – developing future successful adults and minimising the impact of poverty on children, especially poverty of aspiration, through connecting people to opportunities (Salford)*
- *ensuring every young person reaches their potential and has high aspirations (Telford and Wrekin)*
- *emotional mental health, raising aspirations, healthy lifestyles. Children themselves want to feel safe, more focus on ‘enjoy’ as well as achieve, and concerns about sexual health, drugs and alcohol (Staffordshire)*
- *‘Raising attainment – we have some difficult areas in relation to mathematics and foundation stage/early years; and narrowing the gap – vulnerable groups around socio-economic circumstances, looked after children, asylum seeking children, some BME groups, disabled children and issues relating to the ‘destinations’ for those children post 16’ (Worcestershire)*
- *achievement in schools, teenage pregnancy, antisocial behaviour, drugs and alcohol, NEETs, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, obesity (Northamptonshire)*
- *families, emotional resilience reducing the impact of deprivation, teenage pregnancy (Nottingham City)*
- *narrowing the gap; building ambition, aspiration and achievement, staying safe and making safe choices (Derby City)*

These examples illustrate a mixture of outcome based priorities and some of the specific stubborn problems that are concerns in the area. These are clearly identified within individual Children and Young People’s Plans and the related Action Plans and performance management reports.

**Safeguarding** is a priority for all authorities and Children’s Trusts. In addition to the core child protection issues, this also covered risky behaviour linked to drugs, alcohol, antisocial and sexual behaviour and choices, bullying and domestic abuse, emotional well-being and self esteem.

The challenges and priorities are many, complex, dynamic but also stubborn. Some of the **most commonly expressed underlying themes** within the ECM framework of core priorities, mentioned in the interviews were:

- 'think family'
- Prevention and early intervention
- The needs of the most disadvantaged and narrowing the gap – tackling deprivation and minimising the impacts of poverty
- Emotional well-being
- Raising aspirations
- Raising self-esteem and confidence
- Enjoy – as well as achieve
- Problem areas of teenage pregnancy, NEETs, obesity and mental health

### **3.2 What are the principles which underpin the commissioning of Children and Young People's services?**

#### **3.2.1 Outcome focused – based on an analysis of need**

Commissioners are looking to buy services that are the most effective and have most impact on the needs of children and young people.

The Needs Assessment is the basis for defining desired outcomes.

*'We are hard-nosed about outcomes, even the 'softer' outcomes. We have got to have some measurement, some means of demonstrating how we are making a difference. The Education sector has been involved in this for some time. Measures such as SEAL have been used to measure social and emotional intelligence in the primary sector (DCSF website 'Tell Us) surveys have been used to measure the 'enjoy' factor – these need to be refined' (Lancashire)*

*'Outcomes based accountability approach widens our horizons in terms of tackling some of our more challenging issues in Halton and allows us the freedom and creativity to work with ambition and outcomes. We know that certain groups within our communities can get forgotten about, but we have to make sure that this approach to improving outcomes remembers that additional efforts will need to be made to reach ALL children and young people'.(Halton)*

#### **3.2.2 Children and Young People are involved in the process**

Children's Trusts have a wide range of mechanisms to ensure that the 'voice of the child', and that of parents and carers is strongly heard through the process of identifying needs, setting priorities, shaping policy, involvement in commissioning, feeding back on service quality and influencing resource allocation.

*'We're consulting and involving children all the time. We have two annual events and engage with children from diverse backgrounds to make sure*

*we've got the right priorities. The job of the Children's Commissioner is to ensure the voice of the child, parents and carers is central to everything we do'. (Staffordshire)*

*'Voices in Action' Youth Shadow Board is a representative group of young people aged 11-19 from across Derby. They are from different schools, youth groups, support groups, community and voluntary groups, or are individuals who have an interest in issues and opportunities affecting young people. The young people set their own agenda each year and agree priorities. The Executive has an agenda item at each Voices in Action meeting, which reflects the agreed strategic discussion for the next Executive. This gives the young people the chance to shape and agree their views in preparation for feedback to the formal Executive meeting.'*  
*(Derby City)*

*'The South West Leaving Care Assessment Project was set up to improve leaving care services for young people across the region and in turn increase the participation of young people in service design, delivery and improvement. Young people from a whole range of backgrounds, including those with experience of leaving care, were trained using the 'Participation in Action' Young Assessor model and supported to conduct 5 local authority assessments. The project has been extremely effective and has been celebrated by young people and professionals alike'.*  
*(Devon)*

*'We have over £300,000 in the Youth Bank, from the Youth Opportunities Fund and the Youth Capital Fund, for activities and projects which are entirely decided on by children and young people'. (Halton)*

### **3.2.3 Value for money and value added**

Commissioners are accountable and required to demonstrate Value for Money in all they do and are routinely inspected on this, so this is an essential element for providers of services. They will be looking for economies of scale and streamlining services and reducing duplication. This doesn't necessarily always mean the cheapest services but commissioners are looking for clarity on the return on the investment, including 'added value' which might be detailed local knowledge or experience of a particular client group, the opportunity for local employment opportunities for young people or unique skills, facilities or expertise.

One Children's Trust summarises this principle as

*'spend money wisely to secure effective and efficient services' (Derby City)*

An additional dimension of this is continuous evaluation of services to ensure they represent best practice and meet current and future needs

and not outdated perceptions of need.

### **3.2.4 Working in partnership and commissioning jointly**

Commissioners are increasing the range of services that they commission in partnership. This is about better targeting of resources, avoiding duplication and overlap and minimising gaps in service. As joint commissioning increases there could be a tendency towards larger commissions and therefore implications for smaller organisations.

### **3.2.5 Knowing what works and learning from experts and evidence**

Very much linked to the outcome focus, commissioners are interested in evidence from national and international research and independent experts.

*'I sought expertise from the national Teenage Pregnancy Unit and advice on 'what works'. Also, although the experience of existing providers is important, sometimes they have vested interests. For example, Children and Adult Mental Health Services have historically been designed by providers and dominated in part by psychologists and psychiatrists. There needs to be a greater focus on clients and independent evidence' (Salford)*

### **3.2.6 Innovation**

Interviewees recognise the capacity for innovation in the Third Sector and in cultural organisations and were keen to embrace this.

*'We're as creative as you like if it gets the job done' (Halton)*

### **3.2.7 Sustainability**

Interviewees referred to the need to engage children and young people in activities where there was the opportunity for ongoing engagement and development as opposed to 'one-off' events. The opportunity to work more with families to achieve outcomes – 'Think family' – was also highlighted in many interviews. 'Think family' was launched in January 2008 to support work with disadvantaged families and children in poverty.

[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social\\_exclusion\\_task\\_force/assets/think\\_families/think\\_families.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social_exclusion_task_force/assets/think_families/think_families.pdf)

### 3.2.8 Developing a plurality of providers

Most Trusts have specific policies to stimulate market development. These frequently have specific references to the Third Sector and in some cases to developing the capacity and range of commissioners such as a consortium of schools.

*'The Core commissioning Team will build capacity for commissioner and provider development by:*

- *giving communities and locally based collaborations, such as Local Learning Communities, the skills to take a mature commissioning role*
- *promoting and brokering provider solutions through open dialogue and market development*
- *supporting strong communities by its example in addressing equal opportunities' (Devon)*

### 3.2.9 Early intervention and prevention

The shift in emphasis is notable in all outcomes but perhaps especially in health outcomes. In 60 years of the NHS, children and young people have not been a priority area until recent years, with the first ever strategy on the health and well-being of children and young people (National Service Framework for children, young people and maternity services - October 2004 –Executive summary).

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4089100](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4089100)

One example of a programme of early intervention – showing innovation, learning from experience and research elsewhere and demonstrating positive outcomes was the Family Nurse Partnership.

*'We are one of six national pilots for the Family Nurse Partnership. This picks up the 100 most vulnerable young women in their 14<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy and works with them until the child is two years old. It is an American programme of very structured activities, aiming ultimately to support child health and school readiness. It has had some fantastic outcomes – 83% of fathers and involved in the children's upbringing, 85% of the mothers initiated breastfeeding, 55% of the mothers quit smoking. It is an example of very early intervention and prevention – earlier than Surestart or other programmes' (Derby City)*

In commissioning services, commissioners are seeking to look beyond the immediate circumstances of current service users and develop a long-term view of individual and community needs.

Several interviewees referred to significant changes in the economic circumstances in their locality with both opportunities and challenges in relation to future employment.

### 3.2.10 Levels of need and graduated responses

Children and Young Peoples services are working from birth to 19 years and provide universal services, different types of services to some young people and specialist services for the few. There are references to a 'personalisation' approach as in Adult services and as well as the child focus there is a move towards a family approach.

Commissioning happens at different levels:

- **Individual level:** to meet individual needs, services can be jointly commissioned by the individual, a family carer or children's services worker, by a direct payment, through a lead professional or a multiagency team
- **Locality level:** focusing at a community level, within geographic areas or vulnerable groups
- **Strategic level:** determining the best use of available resources between partners at a strategic level
- **Regional level:** more specialist and complex needs, with low volume, may be most effectively commissioned in collaboration with other regional partners

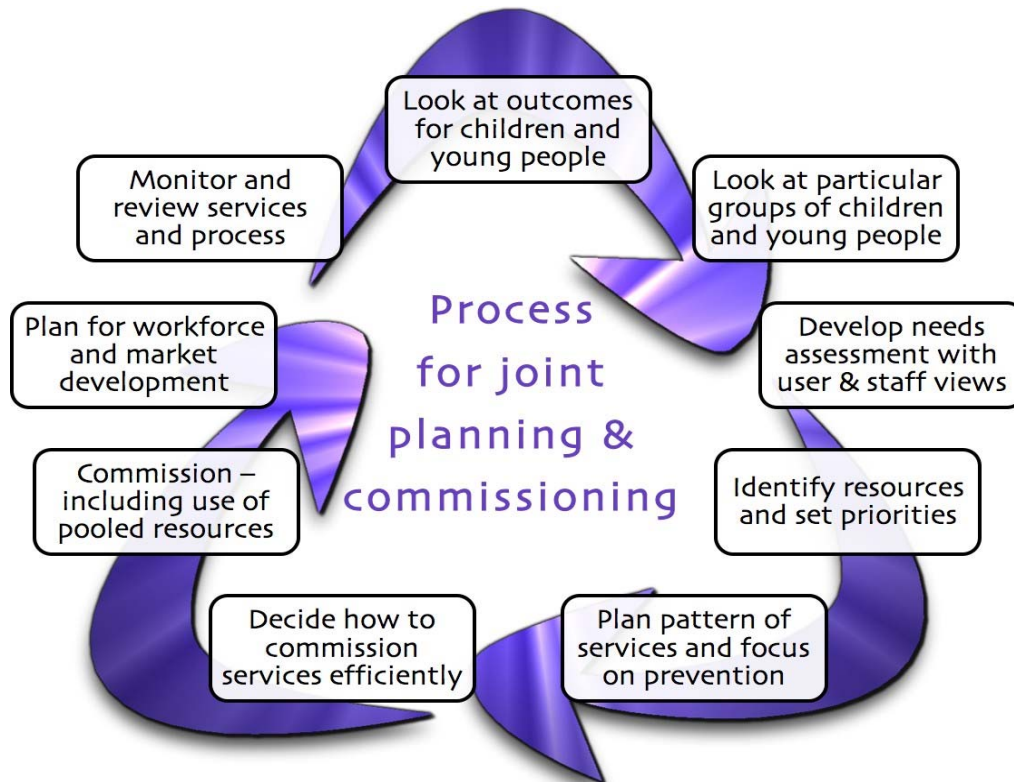
### 3.2.11 Contract compliance

Service providers need to have basic organisational competence with regard to financial and performance management and ability to comply with regulations and procedures. Specifically, organisations require robust Safeguarding Policies.

Some interviewees referred to forms of Accreditation or Kitemarking as valuable in relation to verifying the ability of the organisation to deliver to quality standards.

### 3.3 What are the commissioning procedures?

Children's Trusts have written procedures for commissioning, all at various stages of development, but essentially based on the model of the commissioning cycle as set out in the 'Joint Planning and Commissioning Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services, 2006'



The nine steps in the model are:

1. Look at the current pattern of outcomes for children and young people in their area, and recent trends, against national and relevant local comparators.
2. Look within the overall picture at outcomes for particular groups of young people.
3. Use all this data, and draw on the views of children, young people and their families, local communities and frontline staff, to develop an overall, integrated needs assessment.
4. Agree on the nature and scale of the local challenge, identify the resources available and set priorities for action.

5. Plan the pattern of service most likely to secure priority outcomes, considering carefully the ways in which resources can be increasingly focussed on prevention and early intervention.
6. Decide together how best to purchase or provide (commission) those services, including drawing in alternative providers to widen options and increase efficiency.
7. Develop and extend joint commissioning from pooled budgets and pooled resources.
8. Plan for the workforce development and other changes in local processes and ways of working necessary to support delivery.
9. Monitor and review to ensure services are working to deliver the ambitions set out for them.

Authorities have detailed procedures for **procurement** and related contract management and compliance.

### **3.4 How are Local Authorities and Children's Trusts involving the Third Sector in these processes?**

There are a range of programmes, initiatives, resources, structures and mechanisms for promoting and supporting the involvement of Third Sector organisations in delivering services for children and young people. These operate at a national, regional and local level.

**Nationally**, supporting initiatives include:

- **Youth Sector Development Fund** - The purpose of the YSDF is to promote and support growth and build capacity within third sector organisations (TSOs) who deliver effective services and activities for young people in England, particularly the most disadvantaged.

Through a mixture of grant funding and business support they want to enable good third sector youth organisations to sustain and grow their provision, including strategies to diversify their income streams. Up to £100 million from April 2008 to March 2011 is available to support third sector organisations (TSOs)

Monthly bulletins are produced by the Managing Body including information on funding streams and conferences and training events that may be of interest.

To join the mailing list, email your details to [ysdf@ecotec.com](mailto:ysdf@ecotec.com)

- **Office of the Third Sector** - As part of the Cabinet Office, the Office of the Third Sector (OTS) leads work across government to support the environment for a thriving third sector (voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals), enabling the sector to campaign for change, deliver public services, promote social enterprise and strengthen communities. The OTS was created at the centre of government in May 2006 in recognition of the increasingly important role the third sector plays in both society and the economy.

The latest announcement is: 17 June 2009

'Following discussions with the Prime Minister, the Office of the Third Sector is leading work across Government to further the third sector's involvement in the delivery of public services through the establishment of a new MISC Cabinet Committee.

The Committee will consider the blockages faced by third sector organisations to securing and delivering specific public service contracts and agree actions for the removal of these blockages.

Ministers from the following departments have been invited to join the Group:

- Communities and Local Government
- Department for Children, Schools and Families
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Department of Health
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Home Office
- HM Treasury
- Ministry of Justice

(Note: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is absent from the list).

**Regionally**, activity includes:

- **Commissioning Support Programme** – a national programme operating regionally, the Commissioning Support Programme is sponsored by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health to help Children's Trusts plan, design and implement services more effectively. The Programme will provide tailored support as and when Children's Trust partners need it, and has developed online resources and networks to help commissioners share best practice. In addition, the Programme will hold events such as national and regional conferences. Above all, the Programme aims to help Children's Trusts deliver better outcomes for children, young people and their families. The Programme will run until April 2011, working at national, regional and local levels, with a clear focus on creating sustainable capacity. It will cover the commissioning of all

services for children, young people and their families, including both health and education. This is geared to commissioners of services but supports those partners represented on Children's Trusts including Third Sector organisations.

### Locally,

- All of the authorities involved in the research had Third Sector representation on their Children's Trust structures, usually at the highest strategic level of the Trust (usually the Executive Board) and on such bodies as the Joint Strategic Commissioning Board and all of the groups leading the work on the five ECM outcomes.

*'The Children and Young People's Trust recognises the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector as a campaigner and service provider. Therefore the Trust Board has ensured that the Voluntary and Community Sector are systematically engaged in all strategic groups and are able to offer representation to the Board and the Executive of the Trust' (Plymouth Children and Young People's Trust Plan)*

- The authorities interviewed had a variety of proactive strategies to build relationships with the sector and build their capacity to participate in commissioning. Some of these are at the LSP level and others within Children and Young People's Services.

*'We have a Third Sector Partner post in our structure that helps the sector work with us, builds capacity and interfaces with the sector. We are trying to do everything to make it strong.'* (Halton Borough Council)

*'We have NI 7 (National Indicator 7 in the Local Area Agreement) of building a thriving Third Sector. This is led through the 'Safer and Stronger Communities' block within the LAA. The LSP is also developing a Third Sector Commissioning Strategy' (Staffordshire County Council)*

*'Our Third Sector infrastructure isn't strong. We have a couple of big players such as Barnardo's and Action for Children and then 4-500 very tiny operations and nothing in the middle. But they are represented on all bodies and we brought in VCS Engage to facilitate discussions to move things forward.'* (North Somerset)

*(Note: VCS Engage was a programme funded by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#) to strengthen the engagement of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivering the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda. VCS Engage ran from September 2006 until the end March 2008. During that time the programme was steered by a consortium of VCS infrastructure and delivery organisations working in the children, young people and*

*families' sector. The programme was also supported by a large number of individual agencies committed to the programme's aims).*

- Authorities are also looking at their commissioning processes and seeking to reduce barriers for the Third Sector

*'Significant work has been undertaken to ensure the commissioning processes are flexible and responsive. We have removed barriers to the Voluntary and Community Sector participating both strategically and operationally in the Trust. This has recently been recognised by Best Practice Case Study detailed on the ECM website and achieving Compact Gold Award and Compact Champion Award' (Plymouth)*

### **3.5 How are Children and Young People's Services engaging with cultural organisations?**

Following the questions about the Third Sector, respondents were asked about cultural sector organisations' involvement in these arrangements. To their knowledge, cultural organisations were not engaged in these networks.

The relationships and engagement included:

- **Cultural Strategies and partnerships** – in one authority there was awareness of some alignment of objectives between the cultural strategy and Children and Young People's Plan.

One authority had a strategic partnership for Culture as part of the LSP arrangements and identified the need to build stronger links with that partnership.

- **Find Your Talent** - has provided opportunities for joint working and building new relationships. Two of the areas involved in the research had Find Your Talent pathfinders. These are still at an early stage and whilst good relationships and activity is being developed they are, as yet, apparently confined to delivering that particular programme and the relationships are still 'underdeveloped' outside of that.
- **Artsmark** – this has been a sustained approach in one of the authorities (Halton) with 48 of their 64 schools Artsmark accredited and further announcements imminent.

*'Artsmark has taught us that schools' confidence in partnerships with external cultural and arts providers gathers momentum as a result of achieving Artsmark. For Re- accredited Artsmark schools this is doubly the case. In order for Artsmark to be sustained, the range, quality and amount of cultural provision must match schools' demands. It is the Local Authority, through Children's Services, that are pivotal advocates here, as schools look to Schools Improvement and Arts*

*Development to 'signpost' and 'advocate' to schools cultural 'best practice' and quality cultural provision – be it on a small scale or, frequently, on a grander scale'. (Halton)*

- **Grants** – still a number of grants to cultural organisations in many areas, traditional larger grants for larger cultural institutions, museums development grants, music and drama services, funding for specific projects.
- **Youth Opportunities Fund and Youth Capital Fund** – decided upon by young people locally with around at least a third being commissioned from the Third Sector
- **Partnership working** – libraries – early years, reading and afterschool programmes, Positive Activities for Young People and holiday programmes
- **Collaboration through Local Authority Cultural Services Officers** – some areas had active and respected cultural services officers who were seeking to network effectively, building links and partnerships

However, generally the picture is one of cooperation, projects and some joint working but not an involvement in the strategic commissioning process. Half of those involved in the research had little or no knowledge of the involvement of cultural services in past or current commissions of children's services. In none of these areas was there a systematic strategic involvement.

### **3.6 What are the opportunities and barriers for engaging cultural organisations in children and young people's service delivery and commissioning?**

#### **Opportunities**

Respondents were enthusiastic about the possibilities:

*'Links with Building schools for the Future. Short breaks. Mental health – targeted mental health in schools and health and well-being – work to understand young people's perceptions of their health and well-being' (Telford and Wrekin)*

*'Potential for bigger pots of money to achieve bigger outcomes. We're reorganising on a district basis to be closer to customers – district managers and a district plan . . . our cultural services are high performing, good track record, organised on a district basis so are flexible to be both strategic and local – examples of joint working include Children's Centres, aiming high for children with disabilities and early years activities in libraries . . . have had DCLG funding for innovative work . . . sit in a Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate . . . opportunities for integrated youth support' (Staffordshire)*

*'Positive activities for young people . . . . . the sector not defining itself narrowly in a box – showing innovation in niche opportunities and understanding the real priorities, eg delivering Short Breaks for children with disabilities - Short breaks have a strong culture and sport dimension. However the providers coming forward were children's disability organisations who were 'expanding' their level of activity to include delivering cultural activities. The budget for short breaks in the county is £1.5 million (Worcestershire).*

*'work with the very able and high performing . . . and the more vulnerable – find their interests to express in positive ways – find the hook to catch their interests that may not be there in mainstream school' (Northamptonshire)*

*'enrichment activities in the curriculum – we have a complete review of curriculum services and how it delivers against outcomes . . . there has been a relentless focus on the achievement and standards , we now have no schools in special measures and now want to think differently about creativity in management and in the curriculum – new ways of thinking – innovation with rigour' (Nottingham City)*

*'tremendous opportunities for culture to push levers no-one else can and open up young people – from gifted and talented to socially disengaged. They have powerful ways of opening a window on the world, putting life through a prism and refracting it in wonderful ways' (Lancashire)*

*'We're as creative as you like if it gets the job done' (Halton)*

*'Quality marks, kitemarking . . . building strong links with the Third Sector' (Salford)*

*'us seeing them as a resource and them seeing themselves as a resource . . . building the enjoy factor . . . involving different cultural groups . . . working with disadvantaged children' (Devon)*

*'huge opportunities to engage children's imaginations and interests and build a more sustained relationship with these services' (Plymouth)*

*'we want to bring fundamentally different offer of diversity and choice and raise expectations, so there is an opportunity for organisations to set up a presence. We have no preconceptions and are open to how we work. We have engaged someone to act as an ambassador to build up our knowledge base of cultural organisations' (North Somerset)*

## **Barriers**

These related to a lack of knowledge of the sector, how it is structured, awareness on the part of commissioners and a lack of relationships.

*'Knowing what's on offer. How are they represented? One off projects rather than ongoing commissioning relationship' (Telford & Wrekin)*

*Two tier authorities – who do you invest in – when seeking a corporate approach to children the two areas missing are leisure and housing, and it is difficult to have the right relationship as commissioning leisure is a district activity and the Children's agenda is shaped at County level – so whilst culture and leisure is important we perhaps don't give it as much attention (Worcestershire)*

*'commissioners being able to see beyond traditional services . . . be here knocking at the door' (Northamptonshire)*

*'there aren't any – except raising mutual awareness of what's possible . . . we've set out our arrangements – what are their arrangements?' (Derby City)*

*'too many providers are trying to promote what they want to do – they need to understand the service we are looking for and how they contribute' (Nottingham City)*

*'we don't make the interconnectivity between needs and what culture can offer – so they can be seen as marginal, add-ons and we don't have time to invest in them' (Lancashire)*

*'Accreditation – if ACE/MLA had an accredited list of providers that would be great' (Halton)*

*'operational split in Adult directorate can be a barrier. . . . Organisations need to decide whether to compete or collaborate – 'get together or die' (Salford)*

*'they are fragmented . . . can be competitive . . . there can be concerns about compliance with regulations and good practice. We are also aware that larger national organisations have big machinery to engage in commissioning which many smaller organisations don't have' (Devon)*

*'we haven't done enough of it – we need to engage with them and find out more – we've had success with the third sector and we need to go out and make ourselves accessible and vice versa' (Plymouth)*

*'a lack of business relationships . . . ' (North Somerset)*

### **3.7 Advice to cultural sector organisations seeking to better engage in commissioning of service?**

There was a strong consensus:

- Know your local Children's Plan and what outcomes we are trying to achieve

- Be clear about what is your agency has to offer and provide evidence of how you can make a difference and contribute to outcomes for children and young people
- Tell us how you are organised or link in with existing structures
- Demonstrate the inclusivity of cultural activity in terms of the hardest to reach, disaffected and disengaged
- Give assurance of the legitimacy of the organisation, that there are good quality safeguards for young people and that you will work with our priorities

### **. . . and advice to your colleagues about involving cultural organisations?**

Many said that as a result of the research interview they identified that they could encourage their commissioning colleagues to:

- Think more laterally about the opportunities to work with cultural organisations in creative and innovative ways
- Recognise that culture is a big part of people's lives and a major contributor to building self-esteem which is a key to tackling many vulnerabilities and to broadening horizons
- Open up the richness of the work that can be done and the power of cultural activities especially with those most difficult to reach

### **Finally . . .**

The quotes at the beginning of the report, taken from different parts of the same interview, highlight a dichotomy that emerged in quite a number of the interviews – an enthusiasm and passion about the power of cultural activities but some organisational or attitudinal barriers that currently stand in the way.

***'there are tremendous opportunities for culture to push levers no-one else can and open up young people – from gifted and talented to socially disengaged. They have powerful ways of opening a window on the world, putting life through a prism and refracting it in wonderful ways'***

***'we don't make the interconnectivity between needs and what culture can offer – so they can be seen as marginal, add-ons and we don't have time to invest in them'***

*(Extract from an interview in Lancashire)*

### 3.8 Additional findings from regional Government Offices

The role of the Children's Service Advisors in Government Offices is to support and challenge local authorities in delivering government policy. They work to an annual business plan which is derived from local priorities and the support needs identified in this. The priorities, therefore, mirror those outlined in 3.1 above, with respective regional variations.

Regions have different histories in terms of their work on commissioning. The East Midlands, for example, developed its commissioning framework prior to the DCSF framework and to the development of the Commissioning Support Programme (launched November 2008 – see below). The North West has a 'Commissioning Champions Group' which has a work programme which includes:

- commissioning for families and outcomes – 'Think Family' policy
- commissioning for skills gaps
- achieving efficiency through more effective commissioning
- sustainability – for example after the current funding for Children's Centres ceases
- market development – especially in relation to Early Intervention where there is a lack of providers
- locality based commissioning – devolved to meet local need
- engaging young people
- engaging the voluntary sector

Similarly, authorities within regions are developing at different paces and are at different stages. Government Offices described authorities who were seeking to develop fully integrated commissioning across Children's Services, Adults and the Primary Care Trust, those who were developing a hard commissioner /provider split and those focusing increasingly on the voluntary sector as providers.

The **Commissioning Support Programme** was launched in November 2008 to help children's trusts achieve better outcomes for children and young people through improved strategic commissioning. The programme will operate until April 2011.

In each Children's Trust, the programme has identified a senior individual already working in commissioning who will act as a 'commissioning champion'. The programme works closely with these champions to agree how the programme will respond to local priorities. With the support of the programme, each champion will lead change in their trust.

The programme recognises that all children's trusts are at different stages in achieving the best possible outcomes through strategic commissioning. The support available to each Children's Trust will reflect these differences and is made up of universal support that trusts can access as needed as well as bespoke support designed specifically for them with the programme.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/managersandleaders/planningandcommissioning/commissioningsupport/commsupport/>

In addition, the **Centre for Excellence in Outcomes (C4EO)** is a new organisation, developed for the children's sector, from the children's sector. C4EO identifies and coordinates local, regional and national evidence of 'what works', to create a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice in delivering children's services. Using this information, C4EO offers support to local authorities and their Children's Trust partners, working with them to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

In its infancy, the organisation is likely to play an important role in the future of this agenda.

<http://www.c4eo.org.uk/>

Findings from the interviews with representatives from Government Offices mirrored those from the local authorities. There were similar attitudes to the opportunities, possibilities and scope for greater engagement of cultural services in children and young people's commissioning and service delivery and similar observations on the barriers. In addition, they highlighted the fact that Children's Services had a huge agenda to address and a large number of government and local priorities and these had a high profile and considerable pressures. So, whilst they envisaged a 'warm welcome' to those who brought a contribution to achieving outcomes, there were constraints.

One Government Office representative commented that:

*'in all of the strategic planning meetings that I have held with local authorities over the years, cultural activity has never featured'.*

One GO Culture Media and Sport Adviser commented:

*'many organisations work in challenging contexts and/or work on "issues centred" concerns eg bullying, gang/gun culture, drugs, offending. These tend to be developed as a result of the organisation having a relationship with a key worker rather than this coming from a commissioning type exercise.*

*There is still a pervading view from lead professionals/commissioners that cultural and sporting experiences are merely there for young people to enjoy rather than being a part of a young person's holistic development. This can lead to very traditional or narrow commissioning approaches which excludes cultural bodies.*

*Good high value contact between cultural services and senior figures in Children's Services is often a key factor.*

*The key to strong commissioning with cultural bodies is working through partnership bodies who can act as a facilitator for access to organisations skilled at working with young people'.*

The regional Government Offices will have a key role to play in the opportunities and challenges outlined. Debate of these findings with DCMS Advisors, and together with their Children and Young People's Advisors would be a recommendation from this research.

## 4. The Seminar/Workshop Programme

### 4.1 Purpose, Participants and Programme

Four seminar/workshops were held, one in each of the participating regions.

These events were aimed at 25 representatives of arts and cultural organisations identified by the regional Arts Council and Museums, Libraries and Archives council.

**The purpose of the seminar/workshops was to raise awareness and understanding of commissioning and consider the implications for cultural organisations in the future.**

The workshops were fully subscribed and one had a waiting list. Actual numbers of attendees were:

3<sup>rd</sup> July: South West - 25

13<sup>th</sup> July: West Midlands - 28

15<sup>th</sup> July: North West - 23

16<sup>th</sup> July: East Midlands – 23

The **Programme** was as follows:

Introductions

**Session 1: Markets** – an interactive session to think about different perspectives in commissioning

**Session 2: Opportunities and Challenges** – an overview of commissioning and the findings of the research with commissioners of children and young people's services. Discussion on opportunities and challenges.

**Session 3: Meet the Commissioner** – a practical workshop challenge - based on real situations and actual desired outcomes for children and young people. A chance to devise creative solutions and demonstrate evidence of outcomes.

**Session 4: The journey ahead** – clarifying where we are going, the support we need and the first steps we will take.

## 4.2 Evaluation

62 Evaluation forms were returned. Percentages are shown in brackets.  
(Note: the percentages are rounded to the nearest decimal point).

The ratings were as follows:

	<b>Nil return</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Session 1	1 (1.6)	- (0)	7 (11.3)	34 (54.8)	20 (32.3)
Session 2	2 (3.2)	- (0)	1 (1.6)	36 (58.1)	23 (37.1)
Session 3	1 (1.6)	- (0)	5 (8.1)	35 (56.5)	21 (33.9)
Session 4	13 (21.0)	1 (1.6)	14 (22.6)	27 (43.6)	7 (11.3)
Venue	2 (3.2)	- (0)	4 (6.5)	30 (48.4)	26 (41.9)
Trainer	2 (3.2)	- (0)	2 (3.2)	22 (35.5)	36 (58.1)
Overall	- (0)	- (0)	3 (4.8)	37 (59.7)	22 (35.5)

To summarise, the levels of satisfaction of those rating the event 'Good' or 'Excellent' were:

	Percentage rating Good or Excellent
Session 1	87.1
Session 2	95.2
Session 3	90.4
Session 4	54.9
Venue	90.3
Trainer	93.6
Overall	95.2

The lower level of scoring for session 4 related in part to a shortage of time, in part to people being at very different stages and a need for more reflection back at base on the matters discussed during the day before considering the next steps.

### **4.3 Further Action**

The workshops generated a number of possible further actions for organisations at a local level and potentially for ACE/MLA regionally and nationally. These are an indication of some of the options for action to address the key challenges highlighted in section 2 of the report.

#### **Actions for organisations locally:**

- Look at the Children and Young People's Plan for the area and consider where the organisation can make a contribution to outcomes and support the Children's Trust in tackling key challenges
- Find out about the representation on the Children's Trust structures and consider where appropriate representation lies – through the Third Sector representatives or elsewhere – and how to engage through these
- Find out about the local strategies to build the capacity of the Third Sector – either through a dedicated staff member, resources, meetings and other activities and engage in these opportunities
- Discuss the implications of the commissioning of public services with the organisation's Trustees and consider the implications for how the organisation operates and future planning
- Discuss the implications of the commissioning of public services for cultural organisations with the Head of Culture and Sport (or equivalent) in the Local Authority and discuss their role in representation and communication across the partnership structures
- Consider possible collaborations or consortium approaches – either with other cultural organisations or with other third sector organisations:
  - to share resources for engagement in strategic commissioning
  - to increase the offer of skills and expertise
  - to strengthen the position of the organisation(s) for effective communication and representation in the commissioning process and the various partnership structures
- Build a strong evidence base of the contribution of arts and cultural activity to outcomes for children and young people through monitoring, evaluation and documentation

#### **Actions for ACE/MLA nationally and regionally:**

- Review their engagement with national and regional Third Sector policy, programmes and initiatives aimed at increasing the involvement of the Third Sector in the commissioning of public services and consider how cultural organisations can engage better with these programmes

- Review practice and develop practical tools to support cultural organisations in the forming of consortiums or other collaborative mechanisms
- Collate research evidence on the contribution of cultural activity to better outcomes for children and young people
- Facilitate further dialogue and collaboration between Cultural Advisors and Children and Young People’s Advisors at regional and national government level based on the starting point of better outcomes for children and young people and using the research evidence base
- Produce guidance on developing safeguarding policies which meet current standards and advise on key issues for cultural organisations in this regard
- Produce guidance on demonstrating ‘value for money’ and ‘value added’ to support local organisations in their work in relation to commissioning and the procurement element of this. This would include advice on such matters as ‘Full Cost Recovery’ and ‘Social Return on Investment’
- Consider the appropriate means of accreditation or ‘kitemarking’ which would assist organisations in demonstrating organisational legitimacy in relation to contribution to outcomes

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