

Frequently Asked Questions for Commissioners

<p>What sort of provision will we be able to buy from the consortium?</p>	<p>Indicatively, commissioners will be able to commission and procure a whole range of services spanning the full extent of local voluntary and community sector (VCS) provision. Once the consortium membership is formally in place a detailed mapping exercise will be undertaken of what services will be on offer through the consortium. The objective, through this mapping exercise, will be to create a web-based joint directory of services, which will become an easy access portal for purchasers.</p>
<p>How can I be confident that the consortium won't sub-contract to poor quality providers?</p>	<p>The Young Lives Bradford Consortium will be focused on delivering to the highest standards of quality throughout. To begin with, a thorough due diligence exercise is being undertaken as part of the membership recruitment process. Rigorous membership eligibility criteria, including the requirement to have in place an appropriate Quality Management System, have been mapped to appropriate PQQ thresholds and all applicants for membership will be vetted against these criteria. Also, any organisation bidding for a sub-contract will need to demonstrate that they can meet certain standards and thresholds. Finally, where sub contractors are under-performing, those sub contracts will be re-assigned to high performing organisations within the membership.</p> <p>Research into established VCS consortia in other parts of the country shows that consortia are an excellent mechanism for driving up standards across the piece, since they embed crucial capacity building and peer review/scrutiny processes.</p> <p>Also, the VCS collaborators are keen to work alongside the commissioners on an ongoing basis to ensure that the highest standards of service delivery are maintained through the consortium mechanism. One of the ways we want to do this is through inviting involvement of commissioners in the consortium board structure/governance arrangements.</p>
<p>Will the consortium be able to plug gaps in the local VCS supply base?</p>	<p>Yes. The service mapping exercise (see above) will enable us to identify gaps in provision in terms of geography (under-served local neighbourhoods), communities of interest (under-served social groups) and services (gaps in the overall service profile). By operating as a consortium we will be able to plug gaps through developing new services ('product innovation') and encouraging local providers to work outside of their immediate catchment areas or areas of benefit ('new ways of working').</p>

<p>What efficiency savings might you be able to generate for us?</p>	<p>Formation of the consortium creates a single point of contracting, so, instead of needing to have lots of separate contracts with a wide range of providers, commissioners will be able to have a single contract with the consortium, which can then sub-contract to its members. This should create significant efficiency savings for commissioners by reducing the 'transaction costs' associated with having to set up and manage multiple contracts.</p> <p>Also, the establishment of a consortium structure, in which contract management is co-ordinated and centralised through the creation of a jointly owned secretariat or 'hub', should help frontline VCS providers to streamline their management and back office functions, meaning, vitally, that more money can flow through to frontline services and therefore to the end user of those services.</p>
<p>The consortium in its own right doesn't have a track record – how can you assure us that any contracts will be managed efficiently and to the appropriate standards?</p>	<p>Although the consortium, as a new legal entity, doesn't have a track record, it is simply a structured mechanism for bringing together a wide range of long-established VCS providers into a unified tendering and contract management framework. As such it will simply build on the existing track records of its established constituent members.</p> <p>The consortium will be able to draw on and utilise members' considerable existing capacity and expertise to manage contracts.</p>
<p>Are we likely to get a better price if we commission through the consortium?</p>	<p>It is the ambition of the consortium to provide best value services. As well as drawing on best practice service delivery within the local sector, we will also seek to be highly competitive in terms of price. This will marry with a clear focus on outcomes and wider added value.</p>
<p>Isn't the consortium just a device to monopolise the market and won't you end up price fixing?</p>	<p>No. Although the Young Lives Bradford Consortium is about bringing lots of VCS providers together into a single bidding and fund management structure, this does not mean that we are trying to monopolise the market. It is anticipated that the consortium will not be appropriate for a number of VCS providers, so they will remain independent of it. Also, it is definitely not the intention for 100% of organisations' money to come through the consortium; instead members will be encouraged to retain some of their existing funding arrangements and relationships outside of the consortium structure.</p> <p>Ultimately, the development of the consortium is merely designed to try and safeguard (and hopefully grow) existing, high quality VCS provision in what has become a much more austere and challenging funding environment.</p>

<p>As a large scale consortium how will you adequately reflect specialist or niche approaches? Won't these specialist/niche services simply get lost within the large scale consortium structure?</p>	<p>Once we have mapped what the range of members is able to deliver, we will be in a position to define a number of what might be described as 'delivery clusters'. These clusters will be aligned to specialist or niche areas of provision.</p> <p>The clusters will develop their own co-ordinated delivery plans and will feed these into the overarching consortium strategy.</p> <p>This will mean that specialist/niche services will not only be preserved but strengthened within the consortium structure.</p>
<p>Who will we end up having to negotiate with?</p>	<p>There will be a single point of contact and negotiation for the consortium, though the actual personnel involved could vary according to the specific issues under discussion. For example, negotiations over health and wellbeing-related services would be with a nominated individual from the health and wellbeing delivery cluster.</p>
<p>Will we be able to use the consortium as a vehicle for consultation with the local VCS?</p>	<p>The Bradford will remain the main consultation vehicle for the local sector. However, Doncaster Consortium could be used to consult on specific issues relating to the local commissioning agenda.</p>
<p>Will we be able to use the consortium as a vehicle for externalising our staff?</p>	<p>The consortium will be open to exploring how public sector staff can be transferred into the voluntary sector, including into the consortium hub.</p>
<p>How do we know that the wider sector supports the consortium?</p>	<p>A lot of work has been done over the past few months to ensure that the consortium has the broad support of the local sector. The consortium model that has been chosen means that Doncaster Consortium will be member-owned and controlled through a democratic governance arrangement, which in turn means that it will inherently reflect the interests of the sector.</p> <p>Additionally, the consortium's Membership Prospectus (which sets out what the consortium is about and describes the membership offer) is being widely disseminated, linked to the consortium launch event.</p>
<p>Will we be able to refer organisations we are working with for consortium membership?</p>	<p>Yes. Young Lives Bradford Consortium is keen to work in partnership with local commissioners over the development of its membership. All organisations referred to the consortium will need to meet the stringent eligibility criteria that apply equally to all prospective members.</p>

<p>You have set your stall out as a VCS-specific consortium – how will you work with the private sector?</p>	<p>Young Lives Bradford Consortium will actively encourage all of its members to engage in cross-sectoral partnerships and to link up with the private sector. It is conceivable that the consortium could have sub-contracting arrangements with private providers outside of the consortium membership, especially where gaps in internal delivery capacity are identified. Also, the consortium may consider in the future opening up another category of consortium membership specifically targeted at private providers.</p>
<p>How will the consortium involve service users?</p>	<p>The onus will be on consortium members to demonstrate that they actively involve service users in the design, delivery and on-going management of frontline services. This is an essential part of the consortium membership vetting and wider due diligence process.</p> <p>Along side this, the consortium will establish a membership-wide service users' forum. This will meet annually and all member organisations will be encouraged to send at least one service user along to this. This forum will be an opportunity to canvass systematically service users' views and opinions concerning the services on offer across the consortium membership.</p> <p>Additionally, the forum will elect a smaller panel of service users, representation on which will be aligned with the consortium's internal delivery clusters.</p> <p>A key function of panel members will be to feed in directly to the service co-design processes that the consortium is involved in, so that service user perspectives are at the heart of the commissioning cycle.</p>
<p>Isn't the consortium just creating another layer of bureaucracy?</p>	<p>No. Although the consortium needs to allocate a proportion of any contract income to a hub mechanism to undertake essential contract management functions, this resource allocation will be based on a contract top slice rate of only 10% initially and working towards as little as 5% (and even below that, if feasible). Bearing in mind the significant savings in transaction costs that are likely to be generated within both commissioners and frontline providers, this is a very good and cost-effective use of resources.</p> <p>Furthermore, the consortium proposes to deploy, wherever possible and feasible, its member organisations to undertake these hub functions, thereby building on, rather than duplicating, existing infrastructure.</p>

<p>Why did you decide on the consortium model you have chosen?</p>	<p>The consortium working group, composed of a number of key local VCS providers, spent a good amount of time considering and appraising all of the options for how to establish the consortium. This included canvassing expert independent advice and researching existing consortia in other parts of the country. Ultimately, the group chose to set the consortium up as a member-owned and controlled company. This model best reflects the operating principles and values of the local sector, at the same time as being a fit-for-purpose business model capable of strengthening the sector's overall competitive position and commercial potential.</p>
<p>How will the consortium be managed?</p>	<p>The consortium currently has an interim board and this will convert in the near future to the full board once the full range of members is in place. The board is accountable to the wider consortium membership in line with the company's constitutional framework (Memorandum and Articles of Association).</p> <p>The board has the power to appoint staff and/or to commission member organisations and external agencies to undertake specified executive management functions.</p> <p>This governance and executive management framework will mean the consortium is effectively and efficiently managed at all times.</p>
<p>How will you bring external funding into Bradford?</p>	<p>By scaling up through the consortium structure, Young Lives Bradford Consortium should leverage a lot greater bargaining and negotiating power. This will put the sector in a stronger position to access external investment. One example is the potential to bid to Big Society Capital, when this comes on stream.</p> <p>The consortium will also be in a good position to bid for contracts and funding at a wider sub-regional, regional and national level. Examples of opportunities include DWP-related employment initiatives and Big Lottery Fund national programmes.</p>
<p>How will you be able to demonstrate wider outcomes and social added value?</p>	<p>The consortium will be in a key position to develop a common, consistent approach to measuring outcomes and social added value. Detailed work will be undertaken in the near future to design and implement a Social Return on Investment (SROI)-based system across the consortium. Indicatively, this would involve the development of a simple and straightforward management and reporting tool, integrated into the hub's contract management systems, which entails providers collecting a mixture of soft outcomes and harder, more quantitative SROI-related data. This information would be returned to the hub for collation and subsequent rationalisation, whereby (a) the soft outcomes data is converted into a qualitative consortium-wide statement of outcomes and (b) SROI-related data is converted into a monetary calculation, using appropriate and credible financial proxies.</p> <p>Young Lives Bradford Consortium is keen to consult with commissioners in the development of any consortium-wide outcomes measurement system.</p>