**CA11(VSO), Manager(F)**

Speaker Key:

CM Interviewer

IE Interviewee

CM What is your job role and experience with the commissioning for social value?

IE I’m a chief executive of (…) so before I moved here, so I was a senior manager in the council, so I was managing the child’s and social care and the (…) used to be part of the council, so these used to be part of the council. So, I was asked to come in because the manager here left. Before I go I could recognize that the council has real issues with budgets and we used to get a grant spending a 100 thousand pounds and so from the council for running the services so I proposed to the council if we separate out from the council and will be an independent company, then will be economically viable, but we would not rely on the grants. So, we worked on that, and I was going back to my old job in social service, but it gets really exciting here and I become chief exec in January 2016, so I have been in post for 2 and half years. And then we set up the company for April 2016 so, I have been running it as a social enterprise for about 2 and half years now. And we provide a range of services that supports start up for entrepreneurs, to build the business and grow it. And we do that with accommodation, we run training courses, we provide one to one business mainstream, we provide some programs to support the young entrepreneurs particularly, so that’s it in a nutshell what we do. We now got two buildings, we had one originally, so we are a much bigger organization than we were.

CM How progressed your relationships with the local council?

IE I have two local authority people on the board, because obviously in the social enterprises you got board of directors, one leads of social economic regeneration of the council, he is the chair of the boards and we have another local authority officer who is new in post to the council, director of inclusive growth and homes. And that’s in terms of the board. But in terms of day to day relationships I think we moved from us being a commissioned service of the council to a partnership. And it is a much more balanced relationship, than it was. (unclear), there is just an expectation that we continue to deliver what we deliver.

CM What about the funding relationships?

IE So, we don’t have any funding from the local authority at all. We are self-fund.

CM And in the past?

IE A grant of over 190 thousand pounds. The only think that we get is a reduced rent for the two buildings, for delivering what we do.

CM What about the commissioning relationships?

IE So we are not a commissioned service, we are in partnership with them in delivering the outcomes. But I have not got, we report on the delivery of what we do, but I have not got a commissioned contract in place. I have over the young entrepreneurs so for young entrepreneurs I have a commissioned contract with the people that do employment and skills within the council, so I got a commissioned service for young entrepreneurs and it works very well. The checks and balances are in place in terms of us providing the outputs, but I don’t feel under pressure or certainly my experience in social care, of having been a commissioner of services, were output, output, output is so high and now in the sector that I now working, those demands are high. It is more an equal understanding.

CM Could you give me any example of projects commissioned that incorporates social value?

IE Ehm, I mean, everything we do is about social value, it is the all-purpose of the (… organization) being here. But I don’t have a commissioning contract. If you say to me, pull out your commissioning document, I cannot do it. I think is just a sort of understanding that we are continuing delivering what we do.

CM How a local council social value policy will shape the commissioning and procurement process?

IE I think it will provide a level playfield. So, I’m one of the bigger local organization in the borough. So, it is about 10 of us that is got significant turnover, but I think in terms of very small voluntary sector organizations it puts them on a much better level of understanding of the expectations for them, about what are the expectations for delivery, if they are commissioned to deliver a service. And we get a lot of, I suppose the bigger organizations get a lot of challenge from the smaller organizations in, they believe that we got it all sum up, as we just grab all the money and is not available. So I think, if that’s embedded across commissioning, and then everybody is using that as a framework to delivery, than that will feel fairer to the very small voluntary sector organizations. But likewise, I have been outside of it, but I have seen local authorities in 2012 when we paid small local organizations to deliver something for a commissioning document and it has to go down to the enforcement side of that, because things it has not been delivered as we expected them to be delivered. Not because they didn’t want so, but because from inside (unclear) the infrastructure within their organization and the expectations to them weren’t very clear. For us, commissioning millions (unclear), but for very small organizations there were few times that I thought it was ok for us to deliver that, so we paid A so they deliver B and they were not understanding what we were saying, you are not delivering what we asked you to deliver, and their understanding of that commissioning process is variable.

CM Which are the top barriers for small voluntary sector organizations in commissioning?

IE The barriers are that the tenders takes a lot of time to write. So, when the council says, we want to buy x from an organization, there are organizations, bigger organizations than the small ones, national organizations who got people whose jobs is write and respond to bids and tenders and I think one of the barriers is needs to be the capacity building around supporting voluntary organizations to be fit for purpose, to deliver that delivered service, even just writing the tender takes a levelled skills, that’s some of the organizations haven’t got, I think that’s the biggest barrier. And also, the tender framework, so I think the paperwork, the tendering process, need to be relevant to the amount money that is involved. Sometimes the tendering is 20 thousand, which got very big meaningful outcomes, but is the same size document that if you are bidding for something that is 200 thousand.

CM What do you think about the small voluntary organizations and evidencing their social value?

IE Yes, this is another barrier for very small organizations, it is that most of them are using paper-based ways, and that is lengthy and time consuming in terms of counting the numbers and demonstrating the outputs. And for me, I come from kind of qualitative research background rather than quantitative, and I think is far too much emphasizes is paid on numbers, rather than the impact on someone’s live. So a really relevant example for me, is I have done some work with some young people, who were very seriously involved in gangs to the point that …. but last week one of the young people that I worked with has gone to university, miles and miles away from here and got really chance now to absolutely turn his life around. And that for me is more than delivering thousands of numbers, and our involvement with him has changed his life, he got a business plan, gone to do business studies at university, got himself a place at university…. he is now sorted, so for me is that balance between the impact on people’s life, and I don’t think they do enough of that, it is all about the numbers. …filling this template, you know, *ta da ta*, filling this template, put these numbers down, or not enough is done, do me some case studies of what the funding has meant to the individuals in the borough, that’s my fear.

CM How the transition to commissioning contracts has impacted on VSOs?

IE I think it is the best think that happened in terms of the level of fairness. Some of those organizations previously had grants and now (unclear) are still getting in groups with that. Grants used to be given to you and you basically could use it for what you liked, (unclear). And obviously now, the commissioning side of it means that they are commissioned to deliver a particular piece of work, wich impacts on very small organizations, in terms of funding to cover their core costs. So, if you look at trust and foundations outside the council, so the national lottery or children in needs or any of those, getting funding for core costs like admin, rent, (unclear) those are really difficult. Because the grant funders wants to fund the sexy (unclear) bits of the project and not the things. If you haven’t got a place (unclear) and you cannot deliver, that commissioning side (Unclear) moving to commissioning means that it (unclear) gets very difficult.

I think that they felt very hard done (unclear) by. That they felt that it wasn’t fair (?). But I think there is an historical relationship here with those that shouted loudest… (Unclear) got a grant. I was involved for few times from taking grants away from organizations delivering adults services because we were not seeing any of the outputs for the money and then they just go behind my back and write to whoever and elected member, and it will be just… give them the money. A good few years now, but ya, I still think there is an element of feeling that I don’t have no control or site in how that faced approach should happen. Obviously, we lost a few organizations as well for the no grant funding (unclear) or the organizations had to merge.

CM How this impacted on their social mission or business model?

IE I think in terms of their business model what might they do is to get a business model (unclear) because I used to, they used to believe that they were just a charitable organization and hadn’t always get their head around on the fact that this is related to run as a business. So, (unclear) I (unclear) with my organization I will make as much money as I can but it is what I do with the profits that it is important. Our savings are reinvested back into services, that’s how we operate. But we cannot be there if we are not making money. But I think for a lot of the organizations the concepts of being a charity particularly to needing to make money was something that they didn’t see married up. And of course the removal of the grants made them just look at things then go, we cannot deliver that more without charging for that, or we cannot deliver that in that way.

CM In terms of social value and economic value creation, which you feel is predominant in your organization case?

IE Well the economic value drives the social value, because without money I cannot do it. So the economic value drives the social value. The other way around will not work. If it is all about the social value and not have the economic side of it then we wouldn’t still be here. So, for me the economic value drives the social value. And higher my economic value is the more I can deliver on the social value.

CM How appeals to you the social value policy and its embedding in the commissioning process?

IE Yes, I think there are huge opportunities. I think that there are, I ‘m not sure if the infrastructure is right within the council around their engagement with the sector. So again they cannot have everybody in the room. I absolutely get that you cannot have meetings with 60 organizations. I guess for me, my personal perception is that I don’t see that the CVS here is representative of what the organizations does. So, the engagement is through them. I don’t think that they are being representative in a best way.

CM What do you think of SVP and its impact in pushing forward the agenda of the voluntary sector in delivering services?

IE I think the issue is, one of the biggest recipients of grants here and commissioning is the council for voluntary services so I’m not sure that they can be as autonomous in terms of representing the sector when they rely on the local authority to fund them. So is that old chess nut that you cannot buy the hand that feed you. (Unclear) it is a saying ‘you cannot bite the hand that is feeding you’, so you cannot be critical or objective towards an organization when you have been funded by them to deliver. Because there is the biggest elephant in the room locally, it is PC (an organization). So they got 7 million pounds funding to deliver a wonderful program around civic engagement and staff ….(…confidential deleted).

CM How do you define and articulate social value?

IE I think it has to me, the social value that the council determines has to married up with what the borough priorities are. You know, we have this borough motto, (…), and engaging residents, citizens, whoever from wherever background within the borough. I’m not sure the council is communicated its social value objectives in the same way it has its borough targets. I don’t see the correlation. I never seen the policy. If I put in google the social value policy, will something come up? I’m not sure it would. I never heard talking about the social value policy. It is 6 years on.

CM How austerity and cuts impacted the relationships?

IE I think the council did its best to communicate the messages about the cuts. I think lots of voluntary organizations, the smaller ones choose to ignore them and though that is not going to impact on them and then because they were getting little bits of money that money will stay with them. And I just think that they were not hearing the messages that things has to change and I don’t believe that the council could have done any more on that. Just that people were choosing not to realise that this will affect them.

CM What are the top barriers in their relationships?

IE I have to be honest with you, it is not an issue for me, because I used to be part of the local authority, so I got very established relationships, with key individuals within the council. So, I don’t have those barriers. Even though the staff has changed but I worked with T. which is the director of policy, M part of the CS, they are new to me, there were not there but I make a point of making very good relationships with them, so I don’t believe that I have any barriers. If I phone them and there is a problem, you know, if I phone them for any reason they will get back to me asap and I guess, weather is because of the people experience I’m not sure, because apart from running the organization I have been the chair of arts organization (unclear) for the last 11 years, and that organization has gone from a turnover of 100 thousands to near million so does a lot on culture and arts in the borough. (Unclear) so frankly I have been one of them, so is changing my dynamic quite considerably. And I’m not seen as a troublemaker but as a support whereas some people have been utterly very critical of the council and that makes the relationships building very difficult. That’s not my style, I don’t take the social media if there is a problem, I find the person who need to talk to instead.

CM Could you talk about the governance of the projects in the field of adults and social care?

IE Eh, well I mean, the council is gone really full out on projects and program planning. So, I don’t know whether those projects plans program documents are public when there is big change, I don’t know if they are published. But from an internal perspective, those projects and programs and the governance of those, have never been more controlled than they are now, so there are programs boards, to manage big change programs and that is very slick and very articulated and very well but weather that gets out to the people that are affected by those programs I’m not sure, but their internal processes are second to none (brilliant).

CM Any specific governance mechanisms that are used?

IE Yes, they have programs boards defined by the category, so there is an adult and social care program board, adult and children is called social care and health, there is health and wellbeing board which is got a range of senior stakeholders as well, were all projects and programs are reported to. So that puts an external governance in there as well, so, it involves the hospital, it involves the police, the ambulance, so the scrutiny is there. And of course, within the elected members the council has scrutiny committees and the purpose of the scrutiny committee is to pick a theme and to do a deep dive on that theme and hold officers to account on what is being delivered.

CM You mentioned previously about the projects focus on outputs, there is any vision beyond that?

IE I think there is a long term vision to looking beyond to outcomes, the reality is that most of them are cost saving projects. And new ways of delivering old things better and cheaper is the reality. But I think there is a long term vision and strategy there. But there are other variables from outside that are influencing those. So for example the ambitious change in housing is relaying on these houses being built, and you know, the developers, the market, and the external factors, I think has huge impact on delivering the outcomes and the vision which when was probably written is probably not been an issue but you know, everyone is wandering what the outcome Brexit will be. And I was just thinking if talking with (Unclear) an organization which one of the projects is delivered with the EU money and you think, well, what happens when Brexit happens, is that EU money will still be available for delivering that project or it is just remain (unclear) when the B happens, that’s the last payment and how those organizations are going to manage. So I think, they are very internally much focused, but there is a lots (unclear) on the outside, of the unknowns, it could go this way, it could go that way, and I think the impact of that is perhaps not as clear.

CM Who are main players delivering the services in the commissioning?

IE I mean the adults and children and social care has the lion share of money for commissioning, just giving a significant numbers of the boroughs, this borough has got the largest underrated population in the country. So children and social care, adults and social care, the budgets for commissioning projects and programs are huge. When I left, adults and social care were spending 72 million, I’m sure is probably reduced radically now. So I think the lion share of commissioning, I think CS and the new delivery mechanisms of CS, I’m not sure what their commissioning intentions are yet and I think they are very new, they are only set up in October last year (2017), so they are 1 year this year, so I don’t know their commissioning intentions are even clear to them yet. It just feel like everything is a bit sceptical at the moment, and it needs maybe a couple more years to embed that new infrastructure within. And they also learning about themselves which makes that out with staff. If you are still storming, (unclear) foaming internally is very hard to then go outside the organization and go, this is us and this is what we want, because I don’t think in reality they are completely known what there is that they need. What they want might be different from what they need.

CM To what extent suppliers like your organization or other voluntary organizations are able to express their voice in the local council agenda?

IE There is no opportunity. I think they use the CVS as the representative body and I just, I think is impossible for one organization to represent the diversity of all the voluntary sector organizations that are in the borough. I think is absolutely impossible.

CM Thank you.