**IP13(CB1), Senior strategy officer (charities) (M)**

Speaker Key:

CM Interviewer

IE Interviewee

CM What’s you your job role and your experience with the commissioning for social value?

IE Sure. When the social value act come in I was running a forum for people with mental health difficulties. The C., they were looking for feedback about what the people want from this. So it was a consultation group and co-production thing. I think I got quite interested in social value as a concept and I think commissioning took a while to capture, seems to me of catching up a sort of few years later, because we made radical ways in the way everything is commissioned in the voluntary sector. So, I suppose that’s the first time. My background in generally been in voluntary sector. This last job that I had is the first time I worked in the local authority. It has been quite broad ranging background. But the last job that I had I worked at CVS organization, council for voluntary services which are the umbrella body for the voluntary sector. And also they could be good people to talk to. I think what we noticed there in terms of social value there is, in the borough that we are working at, social value really actually seems to impact with the section 106 money. The section 106 is when people do some building, there is some construction work, so that really were the social value act legislation comes in– when that development work happens then they have to show the social value, and I think that in the past that’s been through apprentices, I don’t know how is like in other boroughs, but my sense is that is easier for a developer to say that they are going to do that and then in terms of the commissioning side, there isn’t much to make sure that they do. So, they offer the apprentices in some cases and maybe they don’t advertise them widely or maybe the apprentices are wont what people want and they can turn it so well- we offered them but it wasn’t demand. So is cost neutral.

CM It is about contracts monitoring?

IE Yes, it is the monitoring. What happens…if there is thoughts around what social value could be, so the generic things that might or not be appropriate, they might not reach the people, and it might not be monitored and therefore, what’s the point?

The other thing that I’m seeing with some buildings ….it is difficult for the developers to make sure that they are doing that in a way that is connected to the community and voluntary sector. And sometimes could be the wrong organizations gets the place and that would be a missive waste of resources. The local voluntary organizations could be great but sometimes are ….. and sometimes the local VSOs have a right to that because they have built on or other things are happening and sometimes cannot be the best clever decision. So my general sense with voluntary sector, without being a specialist at this, is that commissioners are not always on top of it when it comes to social value. Perhaps will be more useful to have more thought around it, about what it actually means, and to engage with the VSOs more. Now, where I have been working there is that conversation happening. There is a system happening that is, they are looking to creating a minimum of social value options. And I think that might be a better way of doing things but then the main goal, the question is where does the menu goes to, does it go to the voluntary sector, does go to the developers. That’s still section 106 money.

The other thing that I saw, which is been sort of mixed is the section 106 money is the social project, the actual commissioning. I think in those sections is useful to co-produce that with the local community, it is great when that happens. So that’s kind of thoughts about, I don’t know a massive amount about. But from the voluntary sector side I can talk pretty more.

CM What’s the maturity around social value in your local council?

IE My sense is that is not something that people paid a lot of attention about, really. People tell about it, but I think people have a lot of things to do than thinking about social value and the commissioning…. I suppose, I’m talking from the VSOs perspective, where people say, well we create social value through the actual projects so the thoughts about the act (paused).

CM What impact had SV Act on the engagement of VSOs in the commissioning?

IE Yes, I think so. I mean. (Paused) Yes, yes, social enterprises is not helped by it, I don’t think, because ya, you don’t need to be a social enterprise, why you would become a social enterprise. If you are not interested in making a profit, why would you become a social enterprise? I mean is just a layer of legislation.

CM Could you tell me more about your experiences with the commissioning process from VSOs side?

IE It depends on the scale, the voluntary sector organizations are engaging in a very small groups, and the small groups can’t really engage in the tendering process. It takes a certain amount of resources to do that. So they are mainly focused on grants. And then you get to the larger, still within the voluntary sector, you know, maybe the more established local voluntary sector organizations, like the local Age UK that ones that has over 100 thousand pounds per year, plus, they might engage more in commissioning. And then you have the kind of regional and national charities and that might be a completely different picture. The largest that I work at is regional, but a national charity if you ask them, they might have a different view, because they might have been involved in some of the large things where SVA might come in.

CM How austerity and cuts impacted the relationships between the VSOs and local council?

IE Oh Goodness! Ok! (Smiling) The VSOs have been squeezed from 2007. And 8 years down the process and it might have taken a few years to catch up to the voluntary sector, really. But we are now in a state of really being squeezed. I think where it really impacts the sector, so this is drawing my experience as a consultant, in CVS my role was to advice charities about development in the organizations, capacity building and that kind of staff, what I see that is sacrificed is training, proper recruitment and I suppose, ongoing professional development, and the time to think about what is being delivered. So within any organization, it doesn’t matter what you do, you need those things, you need to meet the people, to be able to save the time, to recruit people, and you need to have time to think and to learn. And, at the moment, and I think over past few years, most charities I have seen were trying antically to deliver services, antically trying to make a difference and slowly over the years they got less …. So you see, a reduction in quality of services, a reduction in the capacity of people who runs the services to think and cope, more and more stressed, more dramatized by trying to help people and not being able to. And also in large charities, sort of regional charities, the recruitment and all of the salaries go down, and who they are recruiting are either are unexperienced or they are not very good. Who want to work for 20 thousand pounds? Unless you are young? Is your first job. Maybe this is your best option. So that’s kind of people that are coming in. Also, at regional level I noticed that, also another thing, you try to cut from the top, so the management went down, so want that means at the front line management level, is that you got young unexperienced people who are team leaders now, who are running four- five services on a few thousand pounds more than the people in the front line, whereas in the past you had proper manager for the service. Then how that impacts the team, how that impacts the quality and support? Especially in the housing support. The quality of the support given to the person who often is with complex needs is just not as good and is not checked as well. So is possible to provide, so if you don’t have the most difficult front line working, you know, they might not be doing the best job. …you still need those checks and balances. Then I think, there is more, it pushed people to act slightly differently towards their beneficiaries, towards the people who are using services, and you cannot offer the things that used to be offered. So I think the front line could be a difficult process where you can simply provide and rethink services as well, which has positive and negative effects. So, from a service design perspective, as co-production become more important it encouraged the volunteers peer lead staff more co-production, more community based, like asset based community development approaches, and by necessity people were pushed in these areas where they might not be forced in that before. And they might not want to deliver like, you know, we deliver like this, we don’t do that. Now, most charities are really open to those ideas and I think most commissioners are as well, because obviously they are working under increased pressure to get services happening with less money. I think, I mean this has not to do with cuts, but the competitive tendering process is stressful for charity. Is not bad thing or good thing being just stressful, has good and bad points. What is potentially damaging, especially for local voluntary sector organizations, is the price value and ratio that sometimes put on tenders. So, the value is under-ratioed and prices are over-ratioed. What you will get often is large organizations underbidding everyone else, winning on the basis of that, and it can cause complications so, in the past in mental health, I know that you know the Foundation Trust, mental health trust, have been very scaling with the people who got contract on the clinical end, but because there isn’t the conversation between clinical front line and the commissioning, then you know you get a commissioner …. You know because the way that they are set up their bid, their tender, it would be given to someone who is not the best provider and then everyone has to come in and help try to make that happening, make that work. And sometime the contracts are too big to thrive, you know, 3 years, 1 million pounds, a million and half pounds contracts, you can just scrap it and start again. You might have bad providers that might not doing it in a right way so then then comes the trusts problem to bail it out; or the commissioner has to put a lot bit more money …is tricky. And some of the things is because of the way that the commissioning is set up. So when you start the procurement process you can’t talk to people in a human way, you know, there is a lot of rules which are important but sometimes can be a barrier, you know. If someone has a question has to go through the proper channel, you know, everyone has to receive a response, but sometimes that goes too far in the procurement teams, being too paranoid about talking to potential providers and market, worming exercises and things like that, before the tender process has started. And I think that then can influence and pose problems with co-design elements. So, commissioning should co-design as part of their co-production with the VSOs with the community. In different areas and different boroughs it happens in different ways. I just finished doing a bit of that. We did about 6 workshops, engaged couple of 100 people from the voluntary sector and the community too. I think is difficult. It might be ideal from the local authority to really engage the community as well, the reality is that more representational indirect, the resources that you need to do that, for smaller programs, will be very hard. I think in a way you end up trusting that the VSO will be the voice for the communities that they are working with. So anyone can come and within that, your community, volunteers, service users will turn up from voluntary sector, because they are also engaged in the co-production process. But ya, I think in some places is more than others, and coproduction is still taking off….. I mean, in 2011, when the organization I was working they put in a co-production seminar, and invited, we got like 100 people, involved in co-production, and we had about 50 commissioners there, and I think they didn’t really understand what it was back then. I mean, already there been entrenched within NHS. I think people understand it as a concept now, but they don’t understand it as a process. And my background is working in co-production and trained in, and I don’t think that people understand the process because you got different skills sets, you know, people who working in the commissioning roles, not necessarily have any experience of front line work with types of people, you know, with the issues. They might, because people come up through the voluntary sector, come up from being a social worker or understanding, but you don’t have to have that, to be a commissioner. You don’t have to have any experience of those kind of things. So, I think that would be problematic, because really co-production is a …process, so people think about it as something to achieve rather than something to work out. Is kind of emerging, is empowering and is about getting people to move from a place where they have experience that is locked up and un-vocalised and un-verbalised and often has to do with very difficult experiences, but they are lived experiences, and using that like wisdom essentially. If you got through the mental health system 3 or 4 times, you been in hospital and you have to support services and you done all of this, the experience for the person, who is had that experiences it is usually raped up in personal failure, you know, disempowerment, having your liberty taken away, you know, not being able to cope and is kind of lot a way, and is very difficult emotions and someone comes to say, actually we need to learn from that experience, we want to really hear and make things better and how could have been better, in the process, you kind of unlock some of those emotions. And is only when you unlock some of those emotions through that kind of relationships process, through the conversation process that people… they also heal, but through that process of healing that to get the voice and you get to understand what could have been done for what, how the services. Sometimes services have failed, and within that as well people become less hard on themselves about their experiences ….. You know, I have worked in the past with ex-offenders, the experience of coming out of prison, and the co-production process that we had is a very personal process so is different with commissioning is slightly different thing. Talking about the program co-produced for the people in prison. That’s co-production process from what I see it. But doing it for a grants program is very different.

CM What’s your experience with the co-production process and social value policy in commissioning for services?

IE Yes, it is useful. Coproduction it has to have value I think and there is some things that I noticed from the commissioning side that is been problematic to try doing co-production happening when it undermines the experience of the commissioners. And that’s typical, because, and co-production shouldn’t be like that, going out and talking to people, more like outside and just doing what they say, it should be a backwards and forwards process. So, the commissioning process is set out to completely opposite to co-production and I don't, and I think, because people don’t realise, both sides, when they are doing commissioning and what to co-produce something that they are doing it in a different way. From the voluntary sector organizations, a lot of people get very upset when you go out and ask what should happen and telling them, and they think you don’t know, and sometimes has the perception of the unilateral …. people what to tell them, this is what it is, because they can fight against it, that’s they used do traditionally and when you go and tell someone what you want, they don’t believe you.

But when you are talking to VSOs, they will say that everything is social value. I think, this is the thing, commissioners have a different set of skills than the voluntary organizations. But, with commissioning, the way that commissioning works and the people have been thought they wants to have everything ready, set up and thought about and then they go out and then you respond to us. That can be a very challenging thing for commissioners to be publicly themed because they are the experts. And because the VSOs are used to see in them like experts, and the ones with the money, that gave them a lot of power, and they are expecting that. And they are not going into that argument before everything is decided, this is what I realised over the last 3 months trying to do co-production.

CM How successful it was the co-production?

IE It is an ongoing process, there is need of a lot of time, there wasn’t a lot of time. Co- designing a commissioning program across the all borough for the voluntary sector organizations. A lot of work. I mean is millions of pounds that will go in lots and lots of different contracts, it is grant program. We are shaping, looking at what are the strengths and the themes for that program will be and looking to make sure that the outcomes and outputs are the ones to make a difference and yes, is complex, it is a complex process.

CM How do you articulate and define social value?

IE (paused 10 minutes, changed location) Sorry about that. So, I was thinking about that. I was thinking about what you said about your experience with commissioners and I would caution you do not, if you are new to this, don’t assume that they know what they are talking about at all, because there is a very large range of experience and understanding within commissioners. Even if they have, well paid jobs, my experience is that sometimes they know what they are talking about and sometimes don’t.

So, the commissioning I have been doing is a very broad commissioning program, you can’t with the local commissioning you can’t aim to the voluntary sector anyway, but is really, it is called C and aim what the community can deliver, and social value is an aspect of that. What we came through the co-production process was the, all the voluntary sector organizations build in what they do social value, ya, so that could be from lunch clubs to supporting kids with community languages, to volunteers to helping with the mental health problems to domestic violence, to everything. Everything has social value. So, it is important to keep the outcomes framework, if you develop an outcomes framework, really broad. But, within that strand, we didn’t asked people what's social value, we asked people what's the difference that needs to happen, and make it happen and what is needed within the borough, you know. So, what's needed within the borough, where is the evidence for that, from the perspective of voluntary sector organization within the internal process as well, where we asked commissioners what's the evidence which obviously has a more statistical evidence on the borough profiles and something like that, and what's going to make a difference to these needs, you know. What going to make the biggest difference and how we approach that. And we come out with a concept that has more to do with the local social value, as part of the outcomes framework. So how you could improve and create the local economy, how you could improve the local experience essentially within the area, within the small areas in the borough. So, that’s a generalist concept within a larger outcomes framework and then within that framework there are other cross cutting themes, so other cross cutting themes were about preventative approaches and it is how far their training could go ya, and the looking at reducing poverty, it is cross cutting theme because it is a very broad range commissioning program, so how you show that this is reducing poverty in the borough …. Those, so, preventative approaches is an approach rather than an outcome, reducing poverty is an outcome. The other approach is co-produce elements, so people came to the point that they realised that they wanted to co-produce elements within the service. So, co-production, so there are two elements of co-production, there is co-design and is co-delivery. So, co-design, you can design service users, you can design with the local people so use (…unclear) these elements around co-delivery. So, volunteers, service users that are impact by the issues, also having a part in the delivery of the service. So the social value really turns into a local value, but all of those things have social value. If you reduce poverty that has social value, if you engage people in volunteering perhaps you can add some social value, if you are looking at preventative approaches and helping people before they get into crises that has social value, everything has social value. So all of the cross cutting things you could put all under social value, but is something that place environment, people, and people local experiences, and also local economy, that kind of seems to fit into a separate category there. So that were we seen more clearly in relation to social value.

CM How would you define and articulate social value in your own words and understanding?

IE I mean, I’m not an expert, but for me it means something that is valuable to society, you know, something that impacts on society in a positive way. And particularly about the local, you know the area that you are doing the work, you need to show that impacts on the community that you are working, the people who is going to be (...) because the commissioning is a local authority commissioning so is a local thing. So you have to show social value for those people. But you can look at that in different ways, I mean, you can look at that, always back to the impact on the person and people, but that could be that community assets, that could be about inclusion, that could be about cohesion, that could be about services, that could be about how people just interact with each other or the place, or the environment and, yes, is very wide, is a broad definition, I think this is the problem. Especially when it comes to voluntary sector commissioning, this is the problem. In the commissioning program that I work on, within those underneath those cross cutting themes so you have the themes, you have more themes, so you have health and well-being, skills and employment is another theme, advice work is another theme and there are other themes that sits within that, that are more about how services sees themselves, how voluntary sector organizations services sees themselves, as an advice organization or help people going into work, or mental health organization. Another things is how local authority, CCG and also chucks on how the commissioners works, that’s important because is needed, somebody what’s something about that sector to manage that process (unclear) and the within that strand, within the theme there is employment strand, mental health complex needs. And what we need within that, we are in the process of developing is the most important outcomes, we stated with very broad outcomes, and we are in the process of narrowing them down to outcomes that really matters. So rather then what you do, we change what you make, and try to keep the commissioning framework and outcomes based frameworks as much as possible. And then ask people to have some flexibility about how they design that process. And then those outcomes has social value. So, if they don’t have social value then what good are they as an outcome? So everything is of value, for me.

Social value has more meaning when you look at the voluntary sector organizations commissioning, then is starts to have a meaning. That’s I told about that section 106 money and development projects, because when you just creating a building you just building up staff, where before were not such amount of building and then you need to impose the social value act, then you need to ask people how your development add social value. When you are going to a VSO where everything that they do has social value because is a charity that test is already been made, you know, that’s charitable objects, if you hit under one of the charitable objects by definition has social value. So, within the voluntary sector commissioning, the commissioning also aims towards social value in its very nature as well because those objects. So I think that it become less, it becomes part of all rather than something different and I think that’s the… I know the, SEUK kind of was a driving force behind the act. I have been the director of a couple of social enterprises, and they are very different, you know, social enterprises can be very different bits. So, it could be run like a charity, just is as a different structure, and lots of people go to CIC because of that, because is easier and because they need to make a backup of their job and become a trustee. The charity model is based on the victory of the idea of a great and the good, the trustees don’t need money because in the past in the charity systems, ha, if you were doing something charitable you already got, you know, more money that you really can spend in your entire life, and you just do something for deserving poor and they got the workers that kind of work but they don’t make the decisions so the local could became quite complex, that could be really complex. And a lot of people that I use to work with just wanted to do something good but they couldn’t afford not to get paid, as they put their time into it. So, those social enterprises are the obvious answer. Those social enterprise runs like charities. And then you got other social enterprises that runs more like businesses and are less grant dependent and the social value perhaps is more useful, but the idea of social enterprise was, you know, private investors, private developers, private all of those things. Those are the social enterprises that would be more interested in that. Nothing has happened really. Because there is nothing in the commissioning structure that would, there is nothing in the commissioning structure that would privilege people who make that choice, who make that ethical choice. Because companies, private companies can just say we will do social value. And then it becomes really important what does that means, but not the VSOs, not for the kind of traditional, like mental health, like peer support, like all of the support organizations and all of the thing, is not that areas where social value really could have an impact. It is the other contracts which turn much less about, it is where people aren’t thinking about and then will become difficult to find what it is. But maybe it can be supportive of, you know, if you have an outcomes framework around, what the VSO thinks about it that you can import it into the development kind of work and then weight it more than 3 percent. This is the outcome framework that we would like, that will be outcome framework that will be really useful. These are the outcome frameworks that we want to work towards as a private organization. Where the bids are already intimately around social value.

CM What’s your experience with the relationships between the VSOs and the local authority?

IE It is a very hierarchical, you know, top down from the VSO prospective. There is a capacity building problem with the VSOs in some cases where they are not good at evidencing, and partly that has to do with cuts as well. So that’s one of the things, you can’t, if you want someone to deliver something really cut price, especially if commissioners gets price ratio, then it became very difficult especially for the small voluntary sector organizations to evidence things, evidence their social value through things like SROI which …, if you are an organization with 5 people in there, together, unless that’s commissioned as part of the commissioning, as part of the tender structure, unless they say I’m going to give you 5 thousands pound to work with you, to deliver your evaluation in that year, no one is going to do it, no one is going to put that in, because is so worried of being undercut by someone else, and even if they are doing it, that is going to become the less important thing, you know, if you got someone in crises to help them, for most people in the voluntary sector, always comes first. And a lot of people in the voluntary sector just doesn’t have the skills, they don’t have the knowledge and the training and improve that level because they are nice people, there are a lot of nice people you know, and might have people skills but at that level … and things like SROI they can’t, is complex. And it doesn’t have to be that difficult, and I think from the commissioners side there is also about, there is something about, getting the outcomes clear and co-producing the outcomes framework with the VSOs. So, for example, the work I have been doing in employment and skills, there is a broad … degree (unclear) between the VSOs and commissioners, you know, were the VSOs can best provide and skills supplies, is the pre-employment side and with more complex issues. So people who won’t engage with the standards, locally authority, gets back to work schemes and all that, because there are more complex issues, metal help, social issues, and other kind of things. What in past has happened is that the specifications, the themes were very similar to the work of the council is doing, so the specifications is been about job outcomes, work based needs, volunteering, apprentices for example. Those are the areas that the VSOs are good at, what they are really good at is taking someone that says I’m never going to work in, you know, haven’t work for 30 years to the point they tell, maybe I can do something. And within that we have been looking at developing multiple barriers to employment framework where everyone from how many, how much social capital, how many people around you have got looking at, what’s your confidence level, how do you manage the mental health issues, to you know, if you got any experience of volunteering, into your realistic expectations ….and then assessing people on the journey travelled, so before and after, and if you can get someone from this point to this point, who otherwise will never engage and your local job will never get that person even to think about anything, then there is an outcome, and that’s an outcome that you can measure, which doesn’t requires SROI or something like that. But it requires time to set it up, and it requires giving the organizations enough time to either work with you beforehand and sort that out, so …, or be able to focus on things that they can do, and make a difference, rather than things that they think they shouldn’t be doing. Specially in the commissioning, lot of the time … you need the money, from the VSOs perspective, you need the money to do that, and you know that 60 percent of what the commissioners has written is going to work, and 40 percent of it, is not. You know that because you are knowledgeable about people that are working with the commissioners, some for 20 years… and they have work discussion on the work profile, what is needed or not,

When you bring those two people together, then you got a real chance to have a conversation. It takes humility on both sides, which is tricky, … especially when money is involved, …. So, it takes time to develop those kinds of things and takes humility from commissioners to say - Maybe I do not know everything, can you tell me? And it takes humility from the VSOs to forget that … 20 years they have been fighting for money … and that local contracting authority was not giving them money.

And then you think that is really not going to work. But that would be about creating social value, but then that’s going to be different in different areas, so will be co-production process, it wouldn’t be a fixed thing. The real temptation from the commissioners is that they try to make it a fix thing, because is lot less work and lot less of hassle. The temptation from the commissioner side is always to fix something than say, we got this we are doing this, this is our framework and you fit into that.

CM It is highly prescriptive?

IE Yes, yes, I will give you an example, and you will anonymise this and the borough as well. When I started my co-production process for this outcomes framework that we tried to develop, I got an internal workshop and then an external workshop. So, internally we need to understand what we were doing, with the commissioners, there were around several service leads working across the borough that we invited to the internal workshops and we talked about what we wanted to do, and then we do our first public workshop. (….)

… so I went back to separate workshops again because it takes time, for people to understand, on both sides. And over a period of time, we managed to bring the process together. So, the next step is to bring together individual discussions within each stand and theme that we developed. But it is tricky; people need to step up.

CM It is about changing behaviours?

IE Yes, yes, you have one voluntary sector who is being emerging, quite chaotic, and quite responsive, let’s just do what we need to do, creative. You know, commissioning is very much about getting it right, because if you don’t get it right legally, you know, everything go…., and I think there is an issue of commissioning per se, not commissioners but commissioning.

It is prescriptive, I mean, for every bid tender that you do, you have to go through a massive process, and you have to take it through the legal department, you have to write your terms and conditions, you have to take it to procurement, you have to make sure that is set up properly, talk to make sure you talk to people properly, it is very risk adverse. You have to be risk adverse. It is counter intuitive to co-production. And it is a tricky balance. It is not a criticism to the people. It is tricky to manage it.

CM Thank you very much.