

DECOMMISSIONING AS PART OF THE COMMISSIONING PROCESS

Councillor Richard Galloway

As part of the Scrutiny Panel review of future provision of services I have been asked to look at the Decommissioning section of the overall Commissioning process.

To assist in understanding the context of Decommissioning in the overall picture it is considered useful to look first of all at the basic principle of Commissioning. **This can be defined as the process for deciding how to use the total resources available in order to improve outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way.**

The drive to implement change to a Commissioning method of procurement comes from Government under its Localism agenda and the need to deliver better value for money, achieve efficiency savings and facilitate delivery of services more tailored to local needs.

I have studied strategy documents published on the internet by London Borough of Croydon and Bristol City Council on their commissioning process. I have also spoken to the Commissioning Team at Croydon.

The first point to make is that it is clear that for HBC to embark on the road of a comprehensive Commissioning procurement process a clear lead must be given by Councillors. The process is a new way of working for officers and members and will involve much change to existing practices.

This report is written on the assumption that Commissioning will be accepted as the way forward. Other panel members are considering alternative methods of procuring services under the Commissioning process.

So what is Decommissioning and how does it work?

I have cherry picked from the strategy documents referred to above to help explain the essential things to be considered.

The first thing to note is that Decommissioning should be an integral part of the overall commissioning process and should not be an afterthought.

Decommissioning a service is defined as the process of planning and managing a reduction in service activity or terminating a service or contract in line with commissioning objectives.

Key considerations

Is the service still required?

How effective is the current service provision

Does the current delivery model provide value for money?

Have alternative service delivery models been identified.

The process has two key stages

1. Strategic Decommissioning The business case for change and decision making
2. Operational Decommissioning. Implementing good change management.

It is clear from the strategy reports I have read that it is essential a suitably trained Commissioning Team including decommissioners is set up staffed by experienced staff with exceptional personal skills. The process needs to be carefully planned with the right degree of involvement by providers to ensure there is no alienation.

Decommissioning is part of a complete process whereby services and the provision thereof are remodelled and shaped so as to meet the key considerations outlined above.

Clearly there are resource implications to setting up a suitably trained team as such a far reaching process will have legal implications, personnel issues etc.

This report is of necessity brief as its purpose is to form part of the initial information gathering exercise to enable a decision in principle to be made as to whether we should embark down the road of Commissioning. Clearly if the decision is to consider this further there is a wealth of information available both on line and with our officers.

We find ourselves in the position of having to reshape the services we provide due to severe budget restraints and for this reason I do not think we have any alternative but to consider the Commissioning process being adopted by other authorities.

I have conducted interviews with two key members of staff to understand what our current level of activity is and what we need to do to embark on a commissioning process with particular reference to decommissioning. My first interview was with Sue Parker Business Development Manager and the second with Dawn Adey Service Manager Marketing/Customer Relations.

I asked them both the following questions and their responses are as follows

1. What is your role in HBC? The role of Business Development is effectively working on existing practices and how these can be improved across HBC and East Hants.
The role of Service Manager Marketing/Customer Relations is responsibility for Data Collection/Customer Services and Communications.
2. Our need to reduce costs How do you see this challenge and do you think we can adapt/reduce on the scale indicated. They both thought the need for review was essential due to Government grant cuts and that the challenge would be substantial. However they were both supportive of the principle of change
3. What risks do you foresee? It was agreed there would be a need to plan thoroughly to seek to eliminate risks. The identification of risks and the process of dealing with them is a major part of the commissioning process.
4. The following questions were only relevant to Dawn Adey
 - a. What is our current level of intelligence? We have data provided by Mosaic an information tool prepared by Experian. This gives a significant amount of general information on the makeup of the population of Havant ward by ward. It gives a good general background knowledge which can assist in planning.
 - b. At present each Service Manager has more detailed information about their individual service but this is not at present centrally collated. Work will need to be done to gain a more detailed picture of which services or combination of services our customers use, levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction and level and trend of demand.

SUMMARY

The key considerations for decommissioning set out above rely on a thorough knowledge of our customer base, their needs, effectiveness of current service provision and level of demand. At present apart from Mosaic which gives general data more detailed data is held by each service manager. There is a clear need for the data held by individual managers to be collated centrally.

I consider before we embark on any review of alternative methods of service delivery we must have this work undertaken so we can see what data we hold across the Council and what we need to collate to give us the most comprehensive database on our customers we can achieve.