The tender subject of tendering

Research into the effects of competitive tendering on the service delivery voluntary sector in Oxfordshire

August 2008
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Foreword

We have produced this report as part of our ongoing work to meet one of our key strategic aims: To improve joint working and collaboration within the voluntary and community sector and between the VCS and its statutory and business partners; and to raise the profile and improve public knowledge and awareness of the voluntary and community sector in Oxfordshire.

We had anecdotal evidence that Oxfordshire organisations were being required to tender for services that had previously been grant-funded, and that this process was not always a comfortable one, but the situation was far from clear. As the main umbrella body for the Oxfordshire voluntary sector, we believe it is part of our role to facilitate a dialogue between voluntary and statutory sector colleagues to help achieve better outcomes for local people. But that conversation needs to be an informed one.

We also offer this report as a contribution to the current debate about the role of the voluntary sector in delivering public services. Discussion tends inevitably to be focussed at national level and we wanted to balance that with an examination of what is happening on the ground in one local area. Local charities are starting to lose contracts to national and regional charities and consortia.

Does it matter, so long as it’s still a voluntary sector provider? We think it does. The question is not just one of local knowledge, but of local ownership and accountability. An Oxfordshire charity will have a board of trustees who live in Oxfordshire and will put the interests of Oxfordshire first. Some of them may well be local service users. A charity based in London or Manchester or Brighton, while they may be able to show attractive economies of scale, will not necessarily have the same priorities.

To put the research in context, we have concentrated on the full tendering process rather than smaller-scale competitive quotation. Formal procurement is probably not an issue for the vast majority of Oxfordshire’s voluntary and community groups. We know there are some 3,000-4,000 groups in the county but only about 35 are classified by OCVA as falling into the membership category ‘income over £250,000 pa’; we have assumed that these are the ones for whom tendering is likely to be a major concern. Our respondents were drawn mostly from the 20 people who attended a recent course on ‘Getting a fair deal from contracts’ - another indicator of how many organisations believe they are affected by this agenda. So our sample of 14 is small in comparison with the size of the local sector, but large in relation to the relevant part of that sector.

We are grateful to all those who agreed to be interviewed for the research and are pleased that they felt a sufficient degree of mutual trust to be able to speak openly about their concerns. It should be acknowledged that the picture is not entirely negative. There is evidence of strong working relationships and good practice. We hope that this piece of research will form a positive foundation for future discussions aimed at achieving a transparent and accountable system that works in the best interests of clients and service users.

Alison Baxter
Chief Executive OCVA
Overview: The main messages from this research

The interviews conducted for this report revealed a spectrum of views about competitive tendering to deliver services.

While some respondents looked forward positively, many more felt gloomy. It is also true that roughly half the respondents had yet to go through a competitive bidding process, so were voicing their views in anticipation. There was also widely-shared recognition that the changes being implemented are new for all parties and that everyone was feeling their way forward.

Positive aspects to the changes
Many respondents from both sides of the commissioner / provider divide could see value in the contracting process:

- it would build continuous change into the care system and work against complacent cosiness
- voluntary organisations were being forced to think laterally and entrepreneurially about how they might develop
- there was scope for small providers to offer very personalised care, to spot gaps unmet by larger contracts and to provide services which would otherwise be commercially unviable, for example in rural areas.

Despite the cautious optimism about the new system, this research has uncovered concern about HOW the change is being implemented in the county.

Some concerns
Some of the main concerns were:

- contracts were being awarded to out-of-county providers, with the result that accountability to the Oxfordshire public through locally-elected trustee bodies was being lost. In addition, out-of-county providers may take time to build up local knowledge and contacts and may find it hard to spot and fill micro-gaps in local need
- there have been technical flaws with some of the contracting processes used to date
- larger organisations (commercial or charitable) might find it easier to deliver services at a lower unit cost, thus disadvantaging smaller, local providers
- larger organisations were felt to have a further advantage in being more used to bidding competitively and in having both the staff and the finances to invest in making 'slick' pitches
- while experiences varied, some respondents were concerned that productive working relationships with commissioning agencies were being restricted by the new system and support was not being offered to adapt to the new environment
- there may be disruptions to vulnerable service-users when contractors change
- full cost recovery might not lead to financial savings, because cross-subsidies from charitable income might now be lost
- a narrow contracting ethos might discourage service providers from being flexible or innovating - or from doing any more than the minimum specified in the contract
• the special ethos and quality of care provision by local voluntary organisations - responsive giving and caring - may be lost if larger providers are awarded contracts.

**What can be done to ensure that the best possible services are commissioned at a fair price for residents of Oxfordshire?**

Based on the research, OCVA is highlighting the following areas for action.

*Commissioning agencies*

1) Commissioning agencies need to address the short-comings in the technical processes of contracting.

2) Commissioning agencies should involve local providers more in shaping the plans and specifications for future services. Local commissioners should think more creatively about ‘market management’ in Oxfordshire.

*Voluntary agencies*

3) There needs to continuing support and training for voluntary agencies to help them get to grips with tendering.

4) Alliance-building between local providers should be encouraged and supported, to allow them to compete more successfully with larger organisations.

5) Local voluntary organisations need to find clearer ways of explaining their unique added value, so that they can redress their perceived disadvantage compared to larger agencies. This could be both by accurately costing services and by providing evidence (perhaps through case studies, reference to best practice research, impact analysis and so on) of their fuller effect on the local scene.
1 Introduction to this research

1.1 Background to the research

OCVA commissioned Framework to carry out research into the recent changes affecting the way in which health and social care services are being commissioned. In Oxfordshire, substantial services which have previously been grant-funded by local authorities and the PCT are now subject to tendering on the open market.

There are between 3,000 and 4,000 voluntary agencies in Oxfordshire. The vast majority of these are unaffected by this development; OCVA estimates that only a small percentage are involved in delivering services commissioned through full-scale competitive tendering. However, in the context of Oxfordshire, they are some of the larger and more visible voluntary organisations, usually employing upward of ten staff and each with a financial turnover of six figures. By voluntary sector standards, these are medium to large organisations. Around 40% of OCVA’s largest member organisations were involved in this research project.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that local voluntary sector providers of services were losing out to organisations - both commercial companies and larger voluntary agencies - from outside the county. The research project was envisaged as a way of building a body of evidence about the current picture and to investigate whether any common themes were emerging from organisations’ experience.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the research

The overall aim of the research was to gather evidence about how the roll-out of competitive tendering to provide services was affecting voluntary organisations in Oxfordshire. Specifically, the research aimed to explore:

a) Process: how well respondents felt the tendering processes were organised by local authorities;

b) System: how the system for delivering services to Oxfordshire’s most vulnerable citizens was changing as a result of new ways of commissioning, and

c) Impact: what the overall impact on civil society in the county is now, and what it might be in future.

Within those objectives, respondents were asked about the following topics:

- how they experienced the application processes
- any relevant information about how the tendering process was conducted locally (including criteria, decision makers and timetables)
- the number of contracts they had won and lost
- what changes their organisation had made, or was planning to make, in how it ran (e.g. forming a consortium or changing governance arrangements)
- what percentage of their organisation’s services was now subject to tender
- what the resource implications were at the tender stage and post-tender (e.g. to comply with TUPE)
• how far they felt the added value of local voluntary organisations was recognised in the process
• the financial and other impacts of winning or losing a tender
• the impact on staff and resources (such as premises)
• their views about the future direction of the sector in the new market-based tendering regime.

1.3 Methodology

The research informing this present report was carried out by Andrew Woodgate of Framework in July and early August 2008.

Voluntary sector respondents were recruited to the research by responding to an article in OCVA’s newsletter or by being orally invited during the lunch break of a training session hosted by OCVA on preparing for tendering.

In the end, fourteen voluntary sector respondents agreed to take part. Clearly this is a small sample. However, all had either been through the process of tendering, or were about to. What is also striking about the sample is that many of the messages emerging were very similar.

The research was carried out by semi-structured phone interviews, which took between thirty minutes and one hour each.

Given the sensitive nature of relationships with commissioners in local authorities, it was felt appropriate to present the views of respondents from Oxfordshire voluntary organisations anonymously. A list of those interviewed can be found in Appendix 1.

In order to compare the approach taken in Oxfordshire with other authorities, two commissioners of services outside the county were interviewed. One was a strategic commissioner for a shire county in the southeast of England; the other was a commissioning manager with particular responsibility for the Third Sector in a PCT covering a London borough. Their views are summarised in Section 2.2 below.

1.4 What this report is NOT - a word of caution

The research carried out for this review should NOT been seen as a thorough market research exercise. Rather, it was conducted in the manner of a ‘dip-stick’ - sampling experiences of the evolving environment for care services within Oxfordshire, and thus helping to form a view of what steps might be taken to ensure that commissioners are successful in shaping the local market rather than undermining it.
2 The main messages emerging from the research

This section sets out the main messages from the research. What emerges is a range of views. Many respondents feel cautiously positive about some aspects of the changes in commissioning services. They are responding by building their internal capacity and by thinking laterally about how to grow and change. At the same time, there is concern about how the new system is being applied and about what might be lost as a result.

2.1 What voluntary sector respondents in Oxfordshire said

2.1.1 The process of contracting

The process was at times unsatisfactory: Respondents commented that the process used to tender for different services had not been satisfactory. They felt that decisions on contracts had been delayed (leading in one case to a complaint to the County Council), existing relationships and track record could not be taken into account, the tender documents were ambiguous or not easy to use (for example, information being interspersed with questions). It was not clear what could be submitted in the portfolio of information, service-users’ views were not taken into account, the commissioners were unclear how much a service would reasonably cost to provide, the responses to pre-tender questions were made public but sometimes did not answer the question asked, scoring systems were not always clear.

Feedback about unsuccessful outcomes was poor: Respondents from organisations which had not been successful in bidding for contracts were largely unhappy with the feedback they received. They felt the feedback offered was variously: vague and insufficient to understand why they had not been awarded the contract (for example, on pricing), was delayed in being given, or was based on what seemed to be irrelevant criteria. Timescales were also felt to be on the short side if major changes resulted.

The process has led to an increase in bureaucracy: Respondents report an increase in paperwork needed to engage with the process. They report on: having to fill in multiple PQQs each slightly different from the others, the time-consuming TUPE process, reporting conditions now being more onerous but still tending towards measuring outputs, not outcomes.

Commissioners seem unclear about the process themselves: Two respondents reported that the commissioning authority had changed the process midway, in one case without informing bidders. Other contracts had not been clearly specified.

There seems to be a difference of approach between commissioning and procuring services: Some respondents commented on the apparent difference in culture between Commissioners and the Procurement Team. Where there had been trust, good working relationships and confidence that Commissioners knew the field, there was some sense that Procurement Officers did not have a fundamental grasp of the specific service they were tendering out, or were less aware of the impact of their decisions on service-users. There seemed to be a tension between upholding the Compact and moving towards a market-led provision of services.
There are varied views on the level of support from Oxfordshire County Council: Some felt that the level of support received from the County as they went through the process of adjusting to competitive tendering had been good, and working relationships with individuals remained warm. Others felt that the County was not interested in helping the sector adapt or that the procurement rules were being rigidly applied. One respondent felt there was no support from the County once they had lost a contract.

The process has led to increased costs for voluntary organisations: Respondents felt that engaging with the tendering process had costs attached. Respondents reported they had invested in: staff and trustee training, new IT systems and new financial reporting systems. Many commented on the time needed to deal with the documents involved, or to respond to changes in the process imposed at short notice. For organisations choosing to set up consortia or partnerships to respond to tenders, this also required an investment of time and effort.

One respondent commented on the emotional investment needed to bid for a service which her organisation was already delivering. Others commented on the changes in practice and attitude which have been necessary for staff and trustees alike.

However, several commented that the investment was worthwhile and formed part of their on-going organisational development.

One respondent felt that a lot of investment was being applied to training voluntary sector staff and trustees to help them write better tenders. However, this effort did not necessarily help them deliver better services; there was a real danger that the new system was forcing voluntary agencies to focus on presentation to win contracts, rather than on service-users’ needs.

2.1.2 The system for commissioning services

Smaller organisations feel disadvantaged in the new system: Many interviewees felt that smaller organisations lost out to larger ones in this process - despite the promise of a ‘level playing field’. They felt that smaller organisations lacked resources to invest in costing services, in skilling staff or in writing comprehensive proposal documents. They had little experience with this style of funding and did not know how to engage with the process. Some suspected larger organisations could make ‘slick’ presentations to win contracts because they had the skills and resources. One interviewee commented that larger organisations could hide costs within their systems, thus making a mockery of full cost recovery; smaller organisations did not have this leeway.

Statutory agencies are under pressure to save money: Many respondents recognised that local authorities are under great pressure to produce continuing cost-savings. Many respondents (including commissioners) recognised the paradox that full-cost recovery meant that commissioners may actually end up paying voluntary agencies more to deliver a service, since charitable funding would no longer be directed to service provision.

Statutory agencies favour single suppliers: There was a common perception among respondents that increasingly large contracts are being awarded to single contractors, since managing a smaller number of large contracts is more cost-effective. One interviewee reported that this had been stated explicitly in the
areas of advice provision and in tendering for the Connexions service. It was felt that this preference meant there was an inherent bias against smaller organisations. One respondent reported that another organisation, whose charitable constitution limited it to working within the county, had lost a contract which extended beyond the county borders.

**Productive working relationships with local authority and PCT staff are being disrupted:** Many respondents felt that relationships between commissioners and service providers were becoming more distant. Previously, these informal and productive relationships had allowed service providers to contact their opposite numbers and undertake rapid negotiations or adjustments to their service. One respondent felt that, provided the overall price did not alter, commissioners had been happy to authorise flexibility around day-to-day service delivery. Another referred to her opposite numbers as ‘our colleagues in the County’.

The change was partly because of the involvement of Procurement Officers and partly because of turnover in personnel and changes in the organisational structure within the County Council. However, many respondents felt that the open procurement rules were mitigating against informal discussions and explorations. One commented: ‘we can’t say anything’.

**There may be an impact on vulnerable people as contractors change:** Some respondents expressed an anxiety that handing over complete services might lead to disruption for vulnerable service-users and potentially to a loss of quality.

### 2.1.3 The impact of the new system on civil society

**Local qualities risk being lost:** Many respondents worried that some of the qualities of using local providers would be lost. These included: local accountability through trustee boards made up of Oxfordshire residents, having good contacts with local authorities and with other service providers, having local knowledge, having local accountability to the public. Some of the nuances between smaller providers, which meant a service user might have some choice or variation in the service available, might be flattened out with the awarding of more monolithic contracts. One interviewee felt that local needs would not be analysed as well by larger, more distant providers. On the other hand, one interviewee felt that a specialist provider, whether local or national, might be preferable to a generic care provider, local or national. One respondent commented that local providers were more likely to ‘stick around’ even if they lose some contracts. Local providers invest a great deal of time contributing to the strategic planning of services for Oxfordshire, which providers from outside the county would not be able to do.

**The new system threatens to lose much of what was good in the old system:** Many respondents expressed anxiety that the changes in the system were potentially retrograde. There were concerns that contracts would be evaluated very mechanistically, which would add to the bureaucracy involved in monitoring. There were concerns from many that the scope for innovation and flexibility might be lost as a result, since there would be little incentive for a contractor to go beyond the strict terms of their contract. There were anxieties about the quality of services in the new system. Some doubted that that larger providers would be able to offer one-to-one tailored services. Under a contracting system, there might be little incentive (or indeed opportunity, if local services were swallowed up into large contracts) to cross-refer between services.
The voluntary sector ethos risks being lost: Many interviewees commented on the potential loss of a distinctive ‘charitable’ or ‘voluntary’ ethos. One commented that services were now being developed by planners, not by local social entrepreneurs who spotted a need and sought funding to fill it. There was a view that in the new system voluntary organisations might not take long-term needs into consideration, but would concentrate on positioning themselves for the next contract. Two interviewees highlighted the fact that their organisations had service-providing arms as well as campaigning or policy functions. If they lost their service-provision as a result of contracts being changed, their other functions might struggle to survive. One respondent commented that, for her, the charitable ethos was about giving. If that special quality were lost, and care provision became more commercial, she ‘might as well be selling double-glazing’. This applied particularly to staff being TUPEd across from a charity to a statutory provider; they had to adapt to a new culture in a different sector.

Voluntary organisations are being forced to change by the system: A striking finding from the research was the variety of ways in which local voluntary organisations are being forced to change by the contracting system. Some were forming partnerships, alliances or consortia to be able to apply for larger contracts. Often these ‘marriages’ were rushed - or the commissioners failed to understand how they would work. Other organisations were thinking about applying to run services outside their district, or outside the county, in order to diversify their funding streams. Others were considering offering new services. Some were contemplating growing smaller as a result of losing contracts. Others reported having to change their attitude. Some organisations were developing new relationships with decision-makers.

Many organisations were also being encouraged by the changes to become more entrepreneurial, professional or ‘business-like’. Most respondents saw these developments as a welcome outcome.

Workers in the sector are experiencing higher levels of anxiety: Several respondents reported a rise in anxiety prompted by insecurity. This applied to staff whose jobs were being TUPEd to another organisation or who were being made redundant. It also applied to managers who were struggling to cope with a new system at the same time as facing the possibility of large swathes of their funding disappearing at a stroke. The bundling up of funding into contracts multiplied risk - even getting on to a list of preferred suppliers was to one respondent ‘make or break’.

Less charitable funding may be brought into the county: Some respondents commented that under the previous system they had brought additional funding into the county - either because they had subsidised their contracts from charitable sources or because their service had been part-funded by charitable funders such as the Big Lottery. Moving to a contract-based full cost recovery system would mean that this additional income would be lost to the county.

2.1.4 Local providers are losing out

As part of the research, we asked organisations how many contracts they had tendered to deliver. The results are shown in the table overleaf. While this is by no means a comprehensive list of all the contracts put out for public tendering, it does provide evidence that out-of-county providers are being successful in applying to run local services in Oxfordshire.
While there may be advantages in this (for example, good quality services delivered cost effectively), there is a clear disadvantage. Local charities are governed by trustee boards which are elected largely from local service-users, stakeholders and residents. This local accountability is lost when out-of-county providers are chosen to deliver services.

As part of our research we were offered a case study from another shire county in the South East about a contract that has recently been won by a very big national charity, apparently because they had ‘larger financial resources to underpin the contract’. They have subsequently experienced considerable difficulty in meeting the contract provisions, and admit underestimating the requirements as they had no informed data or local contacts to help guide the construction of their bid.

**Record of tendering and outcomes in Oxfordshire**

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<tr>
<th>organisation</th>
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<th>successful</th>
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<td>bid for Floating Support contract - unsuccessful</td>
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<td>sub-contractor in proposal for Connexions - unsuccessful</td>
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<td>Help and Care (Bournemouth)</td>
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<td>including contracts let by LSC and PCT</td>
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<td><strong>Others known about but not interviewed</strong></td>
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<td>Guideposts</td>
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<td>Connexions Berkshire</td>
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<td>y</td>
<td></td>
<td>A4E</td>
<td>new contract for emergency support to carers</td>
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<td>z</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>Floating Support contract</td>
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Key:
y = successful
n = unsuccessful
tba = yet to be awarded
2.2 What commissioners from outside Oxfordshire said

As part of the research, we interviewed two commissioners from outside Oxfordshire. One was a commissioner of services for older people in a shire county in the southeast of England, the other was a commissioner of care services in a London PCT. Both wished to remain anonymous. Their responses demonstrated that the contracting system did not exclude the possibility of developing services in partnership with local authorities, as many of the Oxfordshire voluntary organisations feared.

The positive side of contracting: Perhaps not surprisingly, the view from commissioners about contracting was positive. The system would encourage openness and avoid cosy, lazy relationships between commissioners and suppliers. The new system built in the possibility of change and thus innovation - some voluntary organisations were resistant to new ideas. Within the criteria shaping the process there was scope for flexibility and interpretation.

How the voluntary sector should respond: Voluntary organisations should work towards full cost recovery. They should form alliances with other organisations early to build credibility as suppliers for large contracts. It was legitimate for voluntary organisations to ask their local authorities what their plans and views about the future were. It was also legitimate to ask for support from the local authorities.

How the statutory sector should respond: It was possible for commissioners to be flexible. They were able to involve service providers in preliminary discussions about future services to help test viability and should send out clear messages about what would be needed. This would also avoid overly detailed specifications for service contracts. Indeed, if local authorities failed to act in partnership with the voluntary sector, the CSCI would criticise them: the advent of the contract did not mean the end of the Compact.

The statutory sector should think about how it wants to manage the market for social care. It should work to support and grow local voluntary organisations.

What the voluntary sector has to offer: Like voluntary organisations themselves, statutory respondents valued the local knowledge and contact that smaller voluntary organisations have. The demands of Putting People First may mean that smaller voluntary organisations would be able to provide a range of local services - especially in rural areas - and they may be seen as ‘saviours’ by statutory organisations struggling to comply.
3 Conclusions

This qualitative research aimed to gather views from voluntary sector organisations within Oxfordshire about the changes. Its objective was to ‘put some flesh on the bones’ of piecemeal anecdotal evidence about what was happening in the county.

Two things in particular are noteworthy: a) how consistent the messages are between organisations and b) how much of the feedback clusters around feelings and perceptions.

In order to get a flavour of what is happening outside Oxfordshire, their views were supplemented by interviewing two commissioners from statutory agencies which were felt to be approaching the contracting regime with positive regard for their local voluntary sector.

The following conclusions are offered from the research.

**People in voluntary agencies are experiencing anxiety and unease:** It is hard to separate people’s feelings of turmoil from the natural reactions we all have during change. Are these feelings merely a result of the large structural developments happening, which will presumably settle down once people are used to the new system?

Doubtless some of the unease can be attributed to this. However, this research has uncovered an undertow of concern not about change itself, but about HOW the change is being implemented in the county. Cross-referencing with commissioners from elsewhere certainly provides weight to the proposition that there is nothing inevitable about the manner in which contracting is being applied locally.

Some of the concerns are summarised below.

**There is unhappiness with the processes being adopted:** Many respondents recognise that the changes being implemented are new for all parties. They value past and present good working relationships with statutory commissioners. For these reasons they express a degree of patience and understanding.

However, it does appear that there have been technical flaws with some of the contracting processes used to date. These include: lack of communication with commissioners, poor documentation, processes changing halfway through, lack of clarity about what is permissible evidence, delays in decision-making and inadequate feedback. These short-comings can be addressed.

**Voluntary organisations feel under-resourced:** Many respondents felt that larger organisations (whether voluntary or commercial) were advantaged in the new system. Their perception was that these organisations were more used to bidding competitively and had both the staff and the finances to invest in making ‘slick’ pitches. By contrast, smaller voluntary organisations had to divert time and energy to bidding. Although several mentioned attendance at training events (including OCVA’s), on the whole they felt unsupported by statutory authorities as they tried to engage with the new processes. Experience from elsewhere, as well as good practice guidelines and the Compact, imply that this sudden abandonment is not a necessary condition of contracting, and could be reversed. Indeed, market management and statutory - voluntary partnership were still very
Conclusions

much on the policy agenda. In order to help redress this perceived disadvantage, more could also be done to offer support and training or to encourage timely alliance-building between partner organisations.

**There are positive aspects to the changes:** Despite the criticisms and anxieties, many respondents from both sides of the commissioner / provider divide could see value in the contracting process. It would build change into the care system and work against complacency. Many respondents felt cautiously optimistic about the future. Voluntary organisations themselves were being forced to think laterally and entrepreneurially about how they might develop, and this could be further supported, for example through action learning sets for CEOs and senior managers.

**Lack of clarity about the longer-term impacts of change:** Nevertheless, there were concerns about the wider impacts of contracting. Many expressed anxiety about possible future disruptions to service-users when contractors changed. Many felt that full cost recovery might not lead to financial savings, because previously-hidden charitable subsidies might now be lost. Larger organisations from outside the county might also find it easier to deliver services at a lower unit cost, thus disadvantaging smaller, local providers. A narrow contracting ethos might discourage service providers from being flexible or innovating - or from doing any more than the minimum specified in the contract.

Some also felt that something rather intangible about voluntary agencies was at risk. This included local accountability, local knowledge and contacts, reasonable conditions for staff and the ability to spot and fill micro-gaps in need. Beyond this, respondents described a special quality to working for a charity; a qualitative difference in ethos. This was about giving and caring. However, it is clear that many smaller local voluntary organisations find it hard to articulate - quantitatively or qualitatively - just what their added value as local charitable providers is. They feel that they have ‘something’, but it is hard to pin down what.

More could be done to help local voluntary organisations crystallise this added value so that they can redress their perceived disadvantage compared to larger agencies. This could be both by accurately costing services and identifying financial charitable cross-subsidy, but also by providing evidence (perhaps through case studies, reference to best practice research, impact analysis and so on) of their fuller effect on the local scene.

**There is a future!** Nevertheless, with the continuing background of change in care provision (especially the imminent introduction of Putting People First), both providers and commissioners felt there was a future for the voluntary sector. This might be in providing very personalised care, in spotting gaps unmet by larger contracts or by providing services which would otherwise be commercially unviable, for example in rural areas. More could be done to advance statutory - voluntary partnership in planning for future needs. Local commissioners could be encouraged to think more creatively about ‘market management’ in Oxfordshire.
Appendix 1
List of those interviewed as part of this research

Voluntary Sector Respondents in Oxfordshire
Thanks are due to the following, who agreed to be interviewed for this research:

Julie Alsford  Age Concern Oxfordshire
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Statutory and Health Sector Respondents
Thanks are also due to two respondents from outside the county responsible for commissioning services, who generously shared their approach to commissioning in their areas.

Given the sensitivity of the subject, both asked to remain anonymous. The respondents were a Strategic Commissioner for Adult Services (Older People) in a shire county in the southeast of England and a Commissioning Manager with particular responsibility for the Third Sector in a PCT covering a London borough.
About OCVA

OCVA vision
OCVA looks forward to a time when Oxfordshire is a county where all communities are valued and everyone has a chance to contribute.

Our mission
Enabling a diverse voluntary and community sector to flourish in Oxfordshire.

We do this by: providing advice, information and training, acting as advocates and representatives, and building partnerships.

Our values
As an organisation, and as individuals, we value:

equality
We will work within an equal opportunities policy which is regularly reviewed. We will respect the rights, views and needs of others.

professionalism
We will be effective and reliable in our service delivery, partnership working, and relationships with funders.

empowerment
We will enable others to take responsibility for identifying and achieving their own objectives. We will support the take up of our services by individuals and groups from a diverse range of backgrounds, including the most disadvantaged.

flexibility
We will respond to a constantly changing environment with energy and creativity, in order to influence the future of our sector.

collaboration
We will build and maintain a variety of strong relationships and be open and honest in sharing information and skills.

Strategic aims of OCVA

- To enable voluntary and community groups across the county to access up-to-date information in order to increase their effectiveness.
- To support the development of voluntary and community organisations across the county so that they deliver consistently high quality activities and services to their beneficiaries, ensuring that groups at risk of exclusion are empowered to develop their own solutions.
- To increase levels of volunteering in order to maintain and improve frontline services; and to improve the skills and life chances of volunteers.
- To improve joint working and collaboration within the voluntary and community sector and between the VCS and its statutory and business partners; and to raise the profile and improve public knowledge and awareness of the voluntary and community sector in Oxfordshire.

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About Framework

A uniquely organised network
Framework is a group of self-employed consultants, based in the UK, who come together as a network and are permanently engaged in joint work and development. Members hold the same core values and are committed to working in similar ways. Framework members consider the pursuit of empowerment, equality and social justice to be central to all our endeavours. If you contract with any Framework consultant, you find the same commitment to quality, change, innovation and action.

Collaborative work since 1985
Founded in 1985, Framework has always worked collaboratively and without a hierarchy. We model ways of operating as a team that work for the clients we seek to serve and for ourselves. Regular peer supervision forms a major plank of collaborative support. In addition we meet twice yearly on retreat, where development and learning can take place in a supportive yet challenging setting.

Dedicated to public, voluntary and community organisations
Framework was one of the earliest consultancy networks to operate solely within the not-for-profit sector. The consultancy skills required by this sector are specific to their underpinning values, and our aim is to meet the needs of organisations that are serving the community, often with a brief to redress inequality, disadvantage or discrimination. The accumulated knowledge of 15 years’ practice means that we are familiar with many of the dilemmas and difficulties faced by those in this sector.

Grounded in a strategic understanding
Framework members specialise in the analysis of organisational issues from a strategic perspective. This means looking beyond the presenting issues to what may lie deeper within the organisation’s history, espoused values, personnel or structures. By taking a strategic approach — e.g. to organisational culture, meanings or relationships — we can often unlock an approach that has not been identified before.

Integrity and ethical practice
As well as taking great care to deliver high-quality consultancy, Framework members endeavour to be open and transparent about our own business practice and commitment to an ethical code of conduct. This requires all members to be clear about our terms, fees, expenses and outcomes before commencing a contract and to keep clients informed of progress. It also requires members to recognise and challenge oppressive practice wherever it occurs.

Contacting Framework
More details of how we work and how to contact us can be found at www.framework.org.uk.