

## **Together for Good: How the VCF sector, the NHS and the City Council can work together to improve Sheffield's health and social care.**

VCF Health & Wellbeing Forum, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017, chaired by Judy Robinson (Chair of Healthwatch Sheffield Advisory Board).

The topic for the final Forum of 2017 was chosen from the feedback from members of the forum that despite a number of attempts to re-think commissioning, the talents and expertise of the VCF sector still aren't being effectively harnessed.

These local concerns that small voluntary and community groups are disadvantaged by current commissioning practices are also reflected in current literature, such as the Lloyds Foundation report, 'Commissioning in Crisis' (<http://bit.ly/2hh14g3>)

The Foundation captured experiences of small and medium sized charities involved in tendering processes and made a series of pragmatic recommendations to commissioners and providers. We were pleased to welcome a contributor to the report, Josie Soutar, CEO of Sheffield Alcohol Support Service (SASS) to the panel.

We were pleased to welcome Councillor Olivia Blake, Deputy Leader of Sheffield City Council to present on the Council's approach to inclusive commissioning. Olivia's presentation described the 'Procurement and Supply Chain Partnership'. Olivia welcomed questions and comments from attendees on what works well and what could be improved.

Professor Mark Gamsu spoke to the Forum about his experience of the way that statutory commissioners engage with the voluntary sector, 'Not just contractors - the real value of the voluntary sector'.

Small group discussions were followed by a Q & A with the panel. Key points raised:

- There needs to be a greater emphasis on coproduction; true coproduction is necessary if we're going to develop the right services to meet people's needs.
- Providers appreciate a more positive attitude from commissioners.
- Commissioners need to come into communities to gain a better understanding of what's happening on the ground.
- Small organisations often do not have the capacity to access bidding.

- Support with the tendering process and applications would help smaller organisations come forward.
- Organisations are being invited to tender for work that is already being done.
- Relationships and networks between organisations need to be fostered; to increase collaboration between similar organisations.
- More joint working is needed between the council and small organisations.
- We need to think about sharing data and bottom up thinking - the voluntary sector is connected to people who are generally ignored and therefore provides a rich evidence base which often isn't utilised.
- How can voluntary organisations begin to change their image and profile, to get recognition for what they do?
- There can be a tendency for the council to favour innovation and the new, this can lead to projects and services that are already working being overlooked.
- It would be helpful for smaller organisations if contracts were longer, to deliver meaningful outcomes during the time of the contract.
- Representatives would like to see increased recognition of the unique knowledge and experience of locally based charities.
- A representative described how their organisation improved their evidence base about activity and outcomes which means they can demonstrate impact, the ambition of Sheffield CCG to focus more on prevention is very welcome.
- Organisations would welcome more opportunities for grant programs for the voluntary and community sector rather than contracts.
- There was recognition that the council needs be clear about when services need to go to full tender and when provision can be procured in a different way.