



YOUNG PEOPLE



E3M working with Leicestershire County Council

Leicestershire's Children's Innovation Partnership

In 2017/2018, Leicestershire County Council, which provides wide-ranging services to over 600,000 residents, used a creative approach to procurement and contracting to develop a Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP), the first of its kind in the UK. Julian Blake, Partner at (E3M member) Stone King, played a key role in the project's conceptualisation and success.

Key objectives of the CIP

- Share expertise and knowledge in the delivery of innovative solutions to co-design looked after children (LAC) services and contribute to transformational change through new and shared service-delivery models
- Co-deliver services that focus on outcomes and value for money
- Co-invest in reviewing and developing new ways of working
- Develop the system leadership and collaboration between different organisations, which is necessary to drive innovative systems change

Background

In 2017, Leicestershire County Council found that it needed to save £54m by 2020/21, and £3.7m of these savings needed to be achieved in children's social care. Additionally, it was predicted that the number of LAC in Leicestershire would grow, resulting in an estimated cost increase of £14.7m in 2021/22.

The council was sourcing independent fostering services and residential care through a traditional framework. Due to poor market sufficiency, there has often been a need to purchase off-framework at a much higher price, with care packages dictated by the market rather than the child's care plan.

Often, the market is inflexible in its approach to innovative care packages, and less responsive to young people with complex needs.

The council's response to the above challenges was to develop a care placement strategy, the aim of which was to more effectively manage the LAC system, from edge of care right through to leaving it. However, in order to make these whole-system changes as smoothly as possible, it was acknowledged that the expertise of an external partner was required.

Consequently, Leicestershire County Council used 'light touch' procurement and the development of bespoke solutions to commission a partner before it had complete awareness of the service and outcomes it needed to procure.

A two-tier contractual framework was created to procure a design partner with the potential to be a provider. Barnardo's was awarded the Children's Innovation Partnership contract in December 2018.

Described as a "learning partnership rather than a traditional commissioner – provider relationship," the partnership has already generated millions of pounds of new income for projects that improve outcomes for children.

The process

A range of stakeholders and specialists, including several users, were consulted during the development of the CIP. Internally, a cross-functional project group was set up with high level and specialist representation from across Leicestershire County Council. The purpose of this group was to design the CIP model, oversee development of the tender documents, and evaluate the tender responses. This meant that a variety of expert views could be taken into consideration, including those of the director, assistant director and head of commissioning from children and family services, as well as representatives from finance, transformation, commercial services, legal, and procurement.

According to Liz Perfect, Assistant Director for Strategic Partnerships at Barnardo's, the close working relationship between the children's head of commissioning, the procurement specialist and the solicitor, alongside the commitment from their teams to allocate full-time resource to the project, proved crucial in developing the CIP model.

As part of the CIP model design process, the council also shared and tested ideas with a number of external organisations, including members of [E3M's Bold Commissioners Club](#), [Social Enterprise Leaders Club](#), and Stone King Partner [Julian Blake](#).

A provider event, written submissions and dialogue meetings with a select number of interested providers comprised an extensive pre-procurement market engagement exercise.

After consultation, a competitive tender process was launched and a dialogue with the market was opened. Consequently, Barnardo's was awarded the Children's Innovation Partnership contract in December 2018, establishing Barnardo's as Leicestershire County Council's Innovation Partner. Whilst the tender was awarded under an Open Procurement regulation, it was anticipated that the programme would operate as an Innovation Partnership. The partnership term will be reviewed on a yearly basis, for up to ten years.

Early findings

The independent and extremely positive Phase One Evaluation Report (published in July 2020 and available as a [44 page pdf](#)) found the CIP and innovation programme "have to date been marked by persuasive human behaviours driving change, motivated by a shared value base and bringing openness, trust, confidence and expertise." The report noted that, in addition to establishing the partnership, in its first year "CIP activities generated some £1.9m of new income for projects that will improve outcomes for children and these represent unanticipated benefit arising from the partnership."

Closing Remarks

Julian Blake sums up the project as follows:

"The Innovation Partnership concept was introduced in 2015 to promote purpose-aligned collaboration in public service. But no one in the UK took notice. Then, gradually, notice was taken, but no public authority was willing to pursue the idea, because no public authority had pursued the idea."

"The project team recognised the purpose and potentially transformative value of relational partnership and pursued the idea tenaciously and relentlessly, addressing each, of many, barriers and obstacles, until all elements within the Council were converted, or persuaded, to the cause."

"Combining the similarly under-utilised procurement provisions of the Light Touch Regime, purpose aligned co-design, co-production and co-delivery principles were encapsulated in the appointment of an Innovation Partner, within the UK, closing down the risk averse line that it has not been done, so it cannot be done. That is true and courageous innovation, worthy of the name."

This case study was initially published by E3M, and the original can be found [here](#)

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