



South East Together Dynamic Purchasing System Evaluation Summary

Background

South East Together (SET) explored the viability of establishing a Regional Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). The Crown Commercial Service Public Contracts Regulations 2015 describe a DPS as “a procurement tool which has some similarities to an electronic framework agreement, but where new suppliers can join at any time”. The proposed DPS would support the commissioning and procurement of placements in Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) and independent children’s homes. Six main partners were involved, i.e. West Sussex (lead), Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Kent, Surrey and the South London Consortium (A SEN commissioning consortium comprising ten London Boroughs). The project aimed to build-on existing or in-progress initiatives designed to improve commissioning of specialist provision.

Aim

The project aimed to understand whether it is feasible for a regional DPS to be established. If this feasibility stage had been found to be promising, it would influence outcomes and overall value for money in future years.

Evaluation

As there was no expectation that outcomes would be influenced during this exploratory stage, the evaluation focused on process. The following questions have guided our evaluation:

1. To what extent has the regional Dynamic Purchasing System been established to time, budget and original specification? Why?
2. What worked well, what didn’t work well and what could have been improved in relation to the establishment of a regional Dynamic Purchasing System?
3. To what extent will the Dynamic Purchasing System have a potential positive impact, if implemented?
4. To what extent could a regional Dynamic Purchasing System be rolled-out or applied elsewhere?
5. How might it be best to evaluate the regional Dynamic Purchasing System once it is established and implemented?

Five methods were employed in this research:

- Project-related documentation including minutes of the project team and project board meetings was reviewed and analysed
- Semi-structured interviews with 13 people who were involved in delivering the project were undertaken
- Telephone interviews with 19 individuals who represented either individual provider organisations or provider trade associations were conducted. In addition, an evaluation consultation exercise was undertaken with providers attending the CLA (Children Looked After) provider forum meeting
- A focus group with parents/carers who had engaged with the SET development project was held attended by nine parents
- A focus group involving four young people who had engaged with the SET development project was held

Findings

Overall, the evidence suggests that the project has achieved or partially achieved all the goals it had set itself for the year. The exception to this was the revision of the national contracts, the timescales for which have slipped, although the work is due for completion in the summer of 2016. Whilst there are some challenges regarding this type of partnership working (see recommendations below), the evidence suggests that there is no technical reason why a regional (or national) DPS approach could not be implemented and expanded.

For this project, the question of sustainability hinges on whether or not the partners involved in the SET DPS development project agreed to continue its development and implementation after March 2016. The evaluation evidence suggests that it was likely that some partners will continue to engage, but unlikely that all will do so.

Recommendations

Important implications for policy and practice which would need to be considered should further collaborative commissioning approaches be developed include:

- Collaborative working needs to be promoted and effectively resourced. Partners need to properly understand the time commitment required
- Such assignments need to have clarity over their goals which need to be consistently communicated
- Stakeholders must be involved in the development of such initiatives and the approach to engagement must be flexible to ensure that all those who have a relevant view are able to share it effectively
- The work plan needs to be realistic and effectively resourced, to ensure that all tasks can be fully completed within the required timeline

The evaluation was carried out from September 2015 to March 2016 by Cordis Bright.

The DFE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme funded this project and its independent evaluation. Co-ordination of the evaluation was undertaken by the Rees Centre from the University of Oxford (www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk). A full copy of this report can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications