



Gloucestershire VCS Assembly Consultation Response :

VCS Infrastructure Contract Consultation June 2009

Context

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), amongst others, funds the work of the Gloucestershire VCS Assembly, through a contract which is currently held by GAVCA. This contract covers information (through the Gloshub website and Gloshub bulletin) and strategic voice (through the VCS Strategy Groups and VCS representation on Strategic Partnerships), and is due for renewal at the end of March 2010. The new contract will cover 2010-2013 and will be worth approximately £250,000 over three years.

GCC is consulting on what potential service users think the contract specification should include. The consultation deadline has been extended to 6 July to allow a full 12 weeks for people to respond.

A consultation meeting was held on 10 June 2009 to discuss this contract with members from the VCS Assembly, and set out below is the VCS Assembly response.

Consultation Response

All present at the consultation meeting on 10 June 2009 had read documentation on GCC website:

<http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=92495>

- The outcomes expected from this contract (as laid out in the presentation from April 2009 – see link to documents above) were clear and understood, and are a mix of what is currently being done by the Assembly Team on behalf of the VCS Assembly and the Gloucestershire Compact Group, together with some issues which are being addressed through the current Business Plan for the VCS Assembly (2009/10).
- It was noted that this contract is not subject to EU Legislation – see notes from meeting held on 9 April, which are publicly available via the website link above:

“Q4 Is it subject to European legislation?

It has been assessed as not being of interest to Europe so is not subject to European legislation”

There were a number of specific questions raised:

1. Who agreed the initiation of this project and can the Assembly Board have sight of the project initiation document?
2. What outcomes are being sought from this consultation?
3. What is the involvement of elected members in this consultation?

Answers to these questions may impact on the response below, but in the absence of answers, the following is a summary of the discussion that took place.

A. Why is this consultation taking place at all?

The general feeling was that those present were not sure why this consultation is taking place. There is no real context as to why the consultation is necessary.

There is a real – and in our opinion unnecessary - cost to the consultation process, which could have been used as a direct saving to Gloucestershire County Council or could have contributed to additional funding for some of the funding shortfalls currently being faced by the sector.

B. Why does this contract have to go through a commissioning process? Where is the added value of this process?

We are absolutely in favour of GCC having a competitive dialogue with the current provider, in order to drive down costs and improve efficiency and increase outputs, however, we would recommend that the current contract should be remodelled and/or extended rather than going through a lengthy and costly commissioning process.

The added value of the commissioning process needs to be demonstrated up front, in order to justify the cost of formal tendering. As EU legislation has been specifically excluded, a competitive dialogue with the current contract holder about the contract and its delivery over the next three years would be a better way forward.

To be effective, whoever supports the Assembly Team should be at the centre of the county (Cheltenham or Gloucester) for maximum accessibility.

The potential cost to the contract in terms of TUPE arrangements and relocation of staff, as well as disruption to the service provided while new arrangements are set up, all need to be considered, when discussing whether this contract needs to go out to tender.

Summary

1. We, the VCS Assembly, agree with the outcomes proposed for the contract in the initial presentation on 9 April.
2. The added value of going through a commissioning process needs to be demonstrated up front, to justify the cost of formal tendering.
3. We cannot see the benefit of going out to formal external tendering process and all the cost that that implies.
4. We recommend instead a competitive dialogue with the current contract holder to ensure that the outcomes are being met and to maximise the value of the contract.

Michael Heap
Chair

(on behalf of the Gloucestershire VCS Assembly 10 June 2009)

Agreed by the VCS Assembly Board on 30 June 2009 as the VCS Assembly Response.