



South Dublin Community Platform

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Commissioning – the latest addition to the lexicon used to justify the reconstruction of the community and voluntary sector

On occasion, a single term can communicate the intent of policy better than yards of text. 'Commissioning' is the latest buzz word of government in the relentless march to the privatisation of community and voluntary activity.

Commissioning used to be a word we applied to pieces of art or an architectural project: one commissioned a statue or the development of an iconic building. Not anymore. This latest government initiative aims to support the development of an over-arching framework for commissioning human, social and community services – i.e. shifting from funding community and voluntary organisations to commissioning them on the basis of the outcomes that will be delivered. This is profound, because it removes trust and belief in the fundamental virtue of reciprocity and mutuality that is the foundation of civil society. It changes the nature of our society and moves it further along the road of individualism and consumerism.

This initiative is led out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in conjunction with the Departments of Health, Children and Youth Affairs and Environment, Community and Local Government. The initiative comes on foot of a commitment in the Programme for Government to 'open up the provision of public services to a variety of providers' and an action in the Public Service Reform Plan 2014 – 2016 to 'change the funding model for the provision of human, social and community services' and to move to an outcomes oriented model of funding.

For those of you who haven't noticed that community development and voluntary activity had become 'community services' during the last round of language bending, this latest escapade is designed to bring your project or organisation into the marketplace. Community activity, social inclusion, collective action and voluntary care will now be subject to competitiveness and the invisible hand of the market. Relationships and funding will now be based on contract rather than solidarity or reciprocity: *gesellschaft* good, *gemeinschaft* bad.

In order to give this momentous shift some sort of democratic respectability, the usual well-constructed consultation process will be embarked upon. Government convened an Open Policy Debate (whatever that is) in October of 2015 to discuss the findings of a literature review on commissioning and a preliminary conference entitled Commissioning for Better Outcomes (now there's a loaded title!) was held in November 2015 with representatives from the public sector, the community & voluntary sector, intermediaries, academia and other interested parties. You didn't know about all this? Well maybe you thought the title had nothing to do with anything you are involved in? Or maybe you aren't particularly connected to the policy arena since government torpedoed your local level community forum or

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platform? Hard luck! You should be more attentive – while also carrying out your community activity on a shoestring, of course!

The final part of this carefully choreographed exercise is a call for submission from any interested party or member of the public. While the intent and process of this government initiative may be quite distasteful to those working in the community sector, especially those working at local level in areas of disadvantage or with communities of interest experiencing discrimination and marginalisation, it is important for groups to register their views by making even a short submission. A template for submissions is available on www.per.gov.ie/en/commissioning/

Submissions to: Commissioning Consultation, Reform & Delivery Office, 7-9 Merrion Row, Dublin 2 (postal code D02V223). Submission deadline is Friday 12th February 2016

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