

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

Living Street' comments on Joint review of health and care sector investment in Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Organisations

Submitted to Department of Health, NHS England and Public Health England, March 2015

Introduction

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

We started life in 1929 as the Pedestrians Association and have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30 mph speed limits. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy the benefits of walking. In our 85th anniversary year, our Walk once a Week (WoW) scheme encourages more than 300,000 children nationwide to walk to school once a week and our Walk to School Outreach project (funded by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund since 2012) has achieved an average 23 per cent increase in the number of children walking, across 532 participating primary schools.

We welcome the Department of Health, NHS England and Public Health England's consultation on this important issue. The voluntary sector has a vital role to play in everyone's future health, so it is essential that investment in the sector continues and is effectively spent.

Review theme 1: The impact and potential of the VCSE sector

(a) VCSE sector's role in preventative measures

The VCSE sector has a particularly important role to play in delivering preventative measures. This includes encouraging active travel. Such interventions require an understanding of local communities' needs and links with local decision makers, while remaining independent of both. This is something the VCSE is well placed to deliver.

Investment in health and social care interventions should reflect and support this important role.

(b) Demonstrating the impact of preventative work

We agree that preventative work is an important part of health interventions.

However, it can be difficult to demonstrate the value of our interventions, set against other service delivery. Living Streets has used a range of tools to demonstrate the effectiveness of our work, including the World Health Organisation's HEAT tool, Social Return on Investment and other quantitative and qualitative approaches.

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It is unclear which approach is most useful to public health commissioners, so deciding how to evaluate our interventions (and subsequently present it to commissioners, to best meet their needs) is difficult.

Commissioners also adopt different approaches to assessing the value of interventions, so what may be considered appropriate in one geographical area may not be useful in another.

We would welcome the introduction of simple tools that can be used by the VCSE sector to demonstrate the impact of our interventions, or a clear indication of the existing approaches that are most useful to health commissioners.

At the same time, it would be essential to promote these tools to commissioners so they understand how to use them as part of their commissioning processes.

(c) Approved lists and framework contracts

Approved lists and framework contracts are a significant barrier to smaller VCSE providers. It is also a barrier for organisations that offer expertise in specialist areas, but do not have the breadth of experience to deliver full contracts.

There needs to be more flexibility in these types of contracts, to allow for innovative work with smaller and specialist VCSE providers.

Review theme 2: Sustainability and capacity of the VCSE sector

(d) Structure of funding opportunities

Living Streets welcomes continued national investment through schemes such as the Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund, run by the Department of Health.

However, the application process is complex and success rate for this funding stream is particularly low (as against other funding opportunities for the VCSE sector). This means the funding is likely to favour larger organisations with more capacity, and those who are better resourced to make high-risk applications. We would welcome changes to the process including one or both of the following:

- Simplifying the application process, so it requires a smaller investment of resources to apply.
- More tightly drawn grant criteria, so it is easier to assess whether an application to the fund is going to be appropriate.

This would aid decision making by VCSE organisations, when considering whether to invest resources in applying for funding. It would also support smaller and less well-resourced organisations.

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