



South Dublin Community Platform

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South Dublin Community Platform: Company Registration Number: 347139

South Dublin Community Platform Submission on Commissioning of Community Services – February 2016

South Dublin Community Platform (SDCP) is a network of some 44 organisations working to combat social exclusion in the South Dublin County area. All of these organisations use community development approaches to bring about social change. Community development activity involves collective participation, an analysis of cause and consequence and the implementation of strategies to achieve the desired change, usually through research, empowerment/training and advocacy. Community development is NOT about delivering services and its expected outcomes are primarily determined by its participants, whilst acknowledging the parameters set by the funder.

Commissioning comes on foot of a government's decision to 'open up the provision of public services to a variety of providers', which is an action to further the privatisation of public services and utilities, now being extended to what is generally called the voluntary sector - i.e. those voluntary organisations delivering services on behalf of the state and its agents (health services, childcare services, services for the aged etc.).

Even though government keeps lumping them together, the community sector and the voluntary sector are quite different. The community sector is that section of civil society concerned with social change linked to social justice. Democratic theorists acknowledge the need for a solid, independent civil society to counterbalance and modify the power of the state and the market.

Commissioning, if applied to the community sector, would diminish and undermine its essential civil society function by granting the state a shadow management role that would be unduly influential on the setting of priorities and expected outcomes. In addition, it would dampen the community sector's policy critique role, and ultimately destroy its operational support base – people would simply walk away and embark on different ways to pursue their issues and needs (as they have done following the abandonment of the Community Development Programme, and are doing as the Local Development Partnerships move under the management of the local authorities).

'Commissioning' is not a term associated with the funding of community development, community activity and other collective activity embarked upon by local civil society organisations. It is a term that has been imported from the UK, where it has been applied, rather destructively, to the disaggregation of the National Health Service.

All of this marketization of activities which are outside the realm of normal commercial activity is justified by the state on the basis of European Competition Law when in fact it is a weak interpretation of the Directives which provide plenty of scope to make use of 'opt out' clauses to prevent negative impacts on areas of activity that are outside of the intended areas of remit.

SDCP believes that the benefits of applying a commissioning process to voluntary organisations delivering services on behalf of the state is debatable and requires further consultation and deliberation. Is voluntary

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care capable of surviving when it is subject to competitiveness and the invisible hand of the market? Is it possible to develop essential caring relationships based on contract rather than solidarity and reciprocity?

Whatever about the viability of commissioning being appropriate to the voluntary sector, it is totally inappropriate for the community sector and potentially destructive of its role and purpose, as outlined above. It is also erroneous to describe what the community sector does as 'providing services'. Rather than providing services, community development works with, and advocate on behalf of the marginalised and socially excluded in society - something that the state is unlikely to do without a strong input from an independent community sector.

SDCP believes it is the state's duty to fund the community sector to fulfil its civil society role as a voice for those without power or resources, not to commission it to deliver services for the state.

SDCP believes that the introduction of commissioning would have a profoundly negative impact on wider society, removing trust and belief in the fundamental virtue of mutuality that is the foundation of civil society and changing the nature of our society by moving it further along the road of individualism and consumerism.

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