

‘Commissioning for the Future’ – Shropshire Council Strategy

Introduction

This strategy has been developed at a time of significant changes in the way that public services are funded, commissioned and delivered. Local authority funding from central Government is likely to be under continued downward pressure at the same time that demographic pressures for Shropshire, such as an increasingly ageing population, are on the increase. The need to respond to permanent budget reduction has created the opportunity to do things differently to improve what we do from the customer perspective whilst simultaneously eliminating waste.

As a council we are focusing on delivering outcomes for our customers. Everything we do will work towards and fulfil one or more of these outcomes, these are:

Outcome	Which means...
Your money	Feel financially secure and believe in a positive future for myself and my family
Your health	Live a long, enjoyable and healthy life
Your life	Feel valued as an individual and to live my life, with my choices respected and with as few compromises as possible
Your environment	Live in an attractive, vibrant and safe environment, in a place that is right for me
Your council	Feel confident that the Council is doing the right thing with my money and that my needs are at the centre of any decisions taken about my life

Our priorities are :

- a) **Protecting** - Strive to keep people from harm (in a way that doesn’t compromise their choices)
- b) **Growing** - Help to manage our environment (in a way that helps Shropshire to thrive)
- c) **Helping** - Help people, communities and businesses to help themselves (in a way that helps them to make the most of the choices available to them)

Our Mission...

As soon as possible, everything is as efficient as it can be, focusing on the customer, prevention and partnership.

We want to deliver value for money for Shropshire people by commissioning outcomes, based on demand, working with our Elected Members. We want Shropshire’s communities

to be resilient, to take ownership of issues important to them and, with our support to develop their own resources to be able to flourish during this time of change and into the future.

We recognise that there are many communities, people and organisations who are as well, or better, placed to deliver the solutions and services which will help us to deliver on our vision. We also recognise that other organisations are sometimes better placed than the council to attract external funding and to deliver inward investment to Shropshire. That is why we see the council’s role as that of a **commissioner** as opposed to a direct deliverer of services. This means that the council’s relationship with our customers and communities will be to engage, listen and understand needs and demand whilst securing the best possible solution from those organisations who will be delivering services in future.

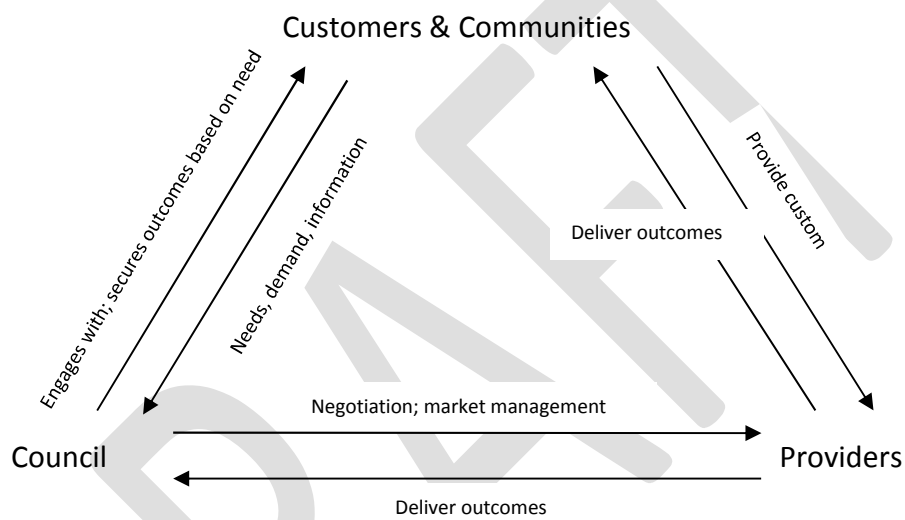


Fig. 1 – Council / Customer Influences

This Strategy...

This Strategy sets out how the Council will quickly move to its new role as a commissioning body, our strategy for achieving this and the associated guidance and tools to help. Its purpose is to provide Officers, Members, Service Providers, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations and the public with an understanding of the context of the Council’s approach to commissioning, and to set out the direction this will take over the coming three years. This strategy builds on previous work undertaken in conjunction with representatives of the VCS and has been written to take account of the council’s other strategic plans and the commissioning approaches being developed in a number of specific localities throughout the county.

This strategy complements and supports the delivery of the Council’s Business Plan and Financial Strategy 2014 – 2017.

The strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure that it continues to reflect the Council’s priorities and the changing needs of, and demand from, the residents of Shropshire.

Aims of this Strategy

This strategy and supporting guidance will:

- support all areas of the council to adopt a consistent, comprehensive and robust approach to commissioning outcomes for our customers and communities;
- ensure that good commissioning drives the transformation of the council and the services it provides and enables;
- support the council in its aim to do things better, faster, cheaper and together with its partners with a focus on prevention;
- define the principles we will adopt which support effective commissioning and decommissioning;
- ensure that when planning, designing and carrying out our activity we do things based on evidence gathered from data, local knowledge and meaningful interaction with service users or customers before we make decisions on how we deliver or contract for services; and enable us to maximise the benefits to our communities and residents through our activities.

How will we do this?

We will take a range of actions to deliver our vision.

We will work with other public sector commissioning organisations, such as Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner's Office and other local authorities to identify opportunities to work more closely together. This will drive better value for money through sharing commissioning resources and achieving economies of scale where we share the same customers, providers or outcomes.

We will build on the experiences and learning from our 'Local Commissioning' pilots where we are working with communities to explore a different way of designing and delivering services so that together we can achieve better service and better value. We recognise that we can work better with our customers and partners to shape services for each community and its particular needs and challenges and we are looking at new ways of working which better reflect what people tell us is important to them.

By making changes based on this work, we aim to ensure that services don't cost more than they should, are delivered by those best placed to do the job, are delivering the right outcomes and support local jobs and economic growth. This means that, where there is strong evidence that services are not delivering the outcomes for our customers in the most efficient or effective way, we will no longer continue to deliver or contract for them in their current form. This is called 'decommissioning' and is an integral part of the **commissioning cycle** as well as being an important element of our transformation.

We are undertaking a series of fundamental reviews and redesign of all our activity. These reviews will look at what we do, how and why we do it and the opportunities we have for doing things differently. The reviews will focus squarely on the customer, what adds value (and what doesn't), they will be based on good evidence and will cut across boundaries both within and outside of the council. The outcomes will shape the way that we operate in

future and we will develop and put in place action plans to show and monitor how we are progressing. This process of evidence-based review, redesign, prototype and roll-out will be the way we operate now and in the future as we continuously evaluate the impact of our approach.

For the council’s staff this will mean resizing the workforce to fit the size and requirements of the organisation as it moves to become a commissioning council. It will also mean that all staff will be working in a different way as we redesign and transform the way that we work.

Fig. 2 below sets out all the elements which we will address in our redesign activity which will help us to achieve our vision:

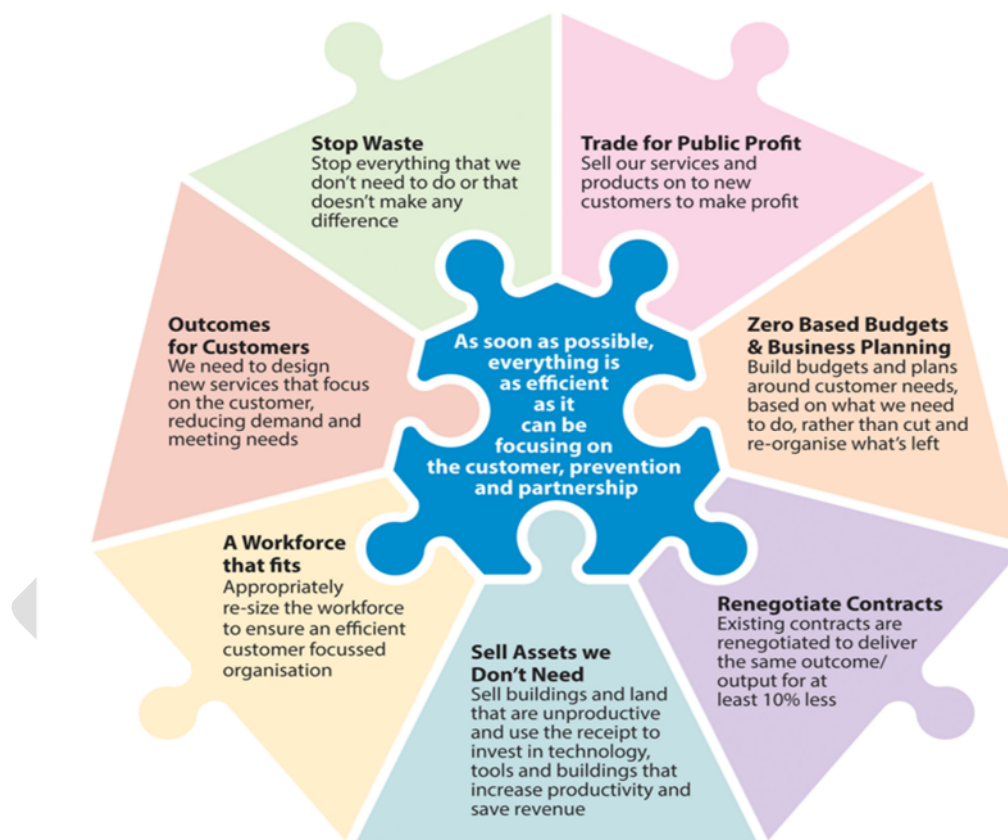


Fig. 2 – Delivering our Vision

Using this approach incorporating these interlinked elements shown above will ensure we improve outcomes for our customers. We will do this by holistically remodelling the way we do things, with a focus on driving down our net budget requirements, to work better, faster, cheaper and together. From this we aim to create:

- **Outcomes for our customers** – We will design new services that focus on meeting the needs of our customers, reducing demand by providing the most suitable services, and helping our customers to make the best choices for them.

- **A workforce that fits** – We will appropriately resize our workforce, responsively based on our customers’ needs. We will create an efficient, customer-focussed organisation by building services, budgets and plans designed around our customers’ needs.
- **Stop waste** – Stop everything that we don’t need to do or that doesn’t add value to our customers.
- **Trade for public profit** – Sell our services and products on to new customers to generate public profit for reinvestment to front line services.
- **Renegotiate contracts** – Existing contracts will be renegotiated to deliver *at least* the same outcomes/outputs for *at least* 10% less.
- **Sell assets we don’t need** – Unnecessary assets will be sold to reduce maintenance costs and encourage a more agile workforce.

What will this mean for our Customers?

Our customers are the focus of everything that we do. The diagram above illustrates the actions that we will take as an organisation to ensure that our main purpose is to, as efficiently and quickly as possible, change or eliminate any activity which isn’t helping us to achieve that focus on customer needs.

Through having this focus on meeting customer need we will engage closely with our customers to understand those things that they need the council to help them with in order to achieve the outcomes described in this strategy and those things that they are able to do for themselves as individuals, groups or communities. Therefore there should be an expectation on the customer’s part that the council will help people and communities to meet their needs; and similarly there will be an expectation that, with the right support, customers and communities will rely less on the council and more on themselves to satisfy their requirements or demands which aren’t related to need.

Principles we will adopt in our approach to Commissioning

In order that commissioning helps us to transform services in Shropshire in a way that is inclusive, based on evidence, fair and in partnership the following principles will underpin our approach:

- We will fundamentally **redesign** all services during the next three years. Moreover the majority of changes will happen soon, in the first year, recognising the importance of looking across the organisation in one go seeing and maximising synergies, rather than pulling out discrete areas one at a time, risking more silos and wastage
- We will keep a focus on, and commission, **outcomes** for communities and individuals which crosses in-house and organisational boundaries
- We will deliver on the **priorities** which have been identified through our engagement activity
- We will maximise **value for money** and maximise the benefits for our communities through the way that we commission and through making best use of all Shropshire’s assets and resources

- We will apply **Social Value** principles in all our commissioning and procurement activity by securing improvements to the **economic, social and environmental** well-being of Shropshire
- We will expect **ongoing improvement** and progress in customer outcomes and financial savings
- We will constantly **review** and **improve delivery** based on **outcomes**
- We will recognise, value and support the input that all individuals, communities and **stakeholders** can bring to the process
- We will be clear, open and transparent around our **decision-making** and **expectations** and we will base our decisions on sound evidence
- We will help customers and communities to exercise **choice and control** and to maximise their outcomes through enabling a dynamic, diverse and responsive **market** (both internal and external)
- We will ensure **accessibility** for the 'market' through being proportionate in our commissioning and procurement processes
- We will set out our **commissioning intentions** in order to give the market sufficient time to plan its responses.

Providers: What do we want from a commissioned service?

We will commission services from a range of groups and organisations, including those services delivered internally by the council. We will apply the same standards and expectations to the capabilities and behaviours of all providers that we commission. This will ensure that the customer's experience of how their outcomes are met is consistent, regardless of which organisation is providing the service.

We will expect commissioned services to demonstrate the following attributes and behaviours:

- The ability to maximise the benefits to the customer and community through the way that it goes about its business
- A partnership based on trust – a commitment from commissioner and provider to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes, requiring flexibility in contract arrangements and honest conversations. This includes agreement around acceptable levels of profit gained from commissioned work and how surpluses can be reinvested in additional or complementary outcomes
- The commitment to engage in the review of, and improvement in, delivery of outcomes and quality of data to support commissioning
- Flexibility – able to adapt its approach to individual and community need whilst retaining a focus on its core objectives and outcomes
- The ability to help manage demand so that scarce resource is targeted effectively
- Making best use of resources – able to identify and partner with others who can contribute through sharing resources etc
- The ability to clearly demonstrate how effectively it is delivering outcomes and continuous evidence of improvement
- The ability to demonstrate that it is responsive to customer feedback

- A focus first on delivering value and outcomes for the customer
- A commitment to doing things better, faster, cheaper and together with others
- The ability to demonstrate how the wider community will benefit from the provider's activities

What do we mean by 'commissioning'?

'Commissioning' is a cycle. It is the process of:

- identifying and understanding needs, future demand and those things that are important to people in an area;
- stimulating, enabling and managing a diverse local market of high quality providers;
- developing, or re-designing, approaches to best meet those needs and manage the demand in the most cost effective way. This will include 'de-commissioning' of services in their current form;
- reviewing the effectiveness of what has been commissioned – asking whether it has delivered the desired outcomes.

Commissioning is a cyclical process. It is often represented pictorially as a circle or wheel of activities:

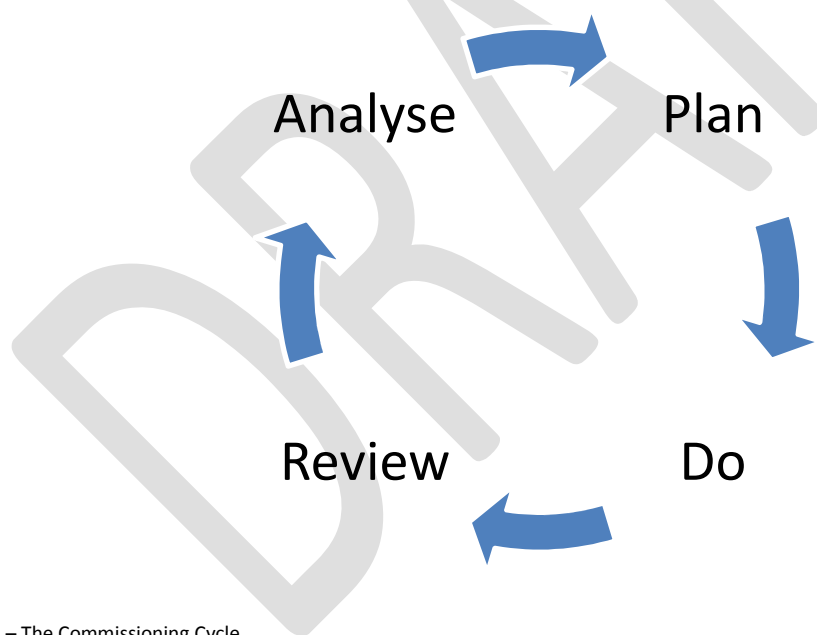


Fig. 3 – The Commissioning Cycle

When carried out effectively, good commissioning ensures that we understand:

- what Shropshire's citizens and communities need and what future demand is likely to be - the ANALYSE phase
- what our priorities should be in respect of those needs - the PLAN phase
- what approach(es) we should take to meet those needs and manage demand - the DO phase
- and how effectively that approach is working - the REVIEW phase

At each one of these stages we will engage with our customers to ensure that we maintain the focus on delivering customer outcomes.

How do we Commission?

In Shropshire we understand that there are a number of ways in which practically we carry out commissioning. Whilst the principles we adopt remain the same the nature, scale and range of the outcomes achieved may be different. In considering the most effective route to commissioning a set of outcomes we will consider the cost of achieving those outcomes to the council, providers and customers and also the opportunity to generate a financial return or profit which can then be reinvested in additional or complementary activity. We can do this through:

- Strategic Commissioning - The overarching framework for commissioning and is the reference point for all our commissioning activity.
- Joint or Co-Commissioning - Working with public sector and other partners will help us to achieve greater efficiencies for the public purse through combining commissioning resources, increased buying power and reducing the risk of duplication or unintentional consequences.
- Locality commissioning – This approach involves working with town or parish councils, voluntary and community groups, organisations providing services and everyone living and working in each area. We will use statistical data, financial information and people's real-life stories to find out what goes on in an area, how much time, effort and money is being spent and what is important to the people who live there. We will look at what it's like for customers using services in the area, where there is duplication or where services overlap, whether the way services are currently delivered is the best use of time and money and where improvements could be made. With the leadership of local Shropshire councillors, people and organisations involved in all aspects of each community will be called upon to share information and ideas on opportunities for working together in different ways which get the most out of the expertise, funds and resources in each area. Where appropriate, we will create a local governance structure to support this wide community involvement. Locality commissioning also gives us the opportunity to prototype solutions which can then be applied across the county if successful.
- Outcomes or service-based commissioning – Sometimes the commissioning of a set of similar or linked outcomes may be best carried out at countywide or even at a sub-regional level. The rationale for taking this approach will be determined at the 'analyse' and 'plan' stages of the commissioning cycle and will take into account economies of scale, the nature of the outcomes required, the organisations who may be capable of delivering the outcomes and the results of any prototyping activity. The approach will still reflect different local individual and community needs as determined through local governance structures.
- Individual commissioning – With the introduction of personal budgets individuals are making choices about how they spend funding based on their needs.

[\[Linked Resource - Document describing these approaches in more detail\]](#)

What is 'Social Value' and why is it important to Shropshire?

Social value involves thinking about how everything we commission can generate wider benefit for the community. Benefits may be social, economic and environmental. Social Enterprise UK defines social value as “the additional benefit to the community from a commissioning/procurement process over and above the direct purchasing of goods, services and outcomes”.

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires all public contracting bodies to consider Social Value in all their commissioning and procurement activity. Commissioning for Social Value ensures that maximum benefit is derived from every pound of public money spent. Our Social Value Commissioning and Procurement Framework sets out in detail the outcomes and improvements we are seeking and how we propose to secure these benefits.

[\[Linked Resource – Social Value Commissioning and Procurement Framework\]](#)

The Importance of Evidence and Engagement

The quality of the information, data and intelligence we collect throughout the commissioning process is vital in helping us to deliver the right outcomes for people and communities in the most efficient way. We collect this evidence in a variety of ways and at various points of the commissioning cycle.

We will engage with our customers and communities who are key in helping us to develop the best solutions to deliver the outcomes they need. They bring a deep knowledge of what it is like to be a 'recipient' of services; the impacts on them personally and collectively; an understanding of the customer 'journey'; and where a greater or lesser emphasis on particular outcomes would be desirable. In addition we will also work very closely with community groups and voluntary sector organisations who can help us to widen our reach into communities and will also be a valuable resource of knowledge to help with developing outcomes.

Similarly the provider market will be able to bring knowledge and experience around the outcomes that are possible and ways of evaluating and demonstrating those outcomes. We will work closely with existing and potential new providers who will be able to assist with the analysis of any gaps in the market that may enhance the quality of outcomes achieved across the board.

In addition we will use this engagement to explore ways in which collectively we can build and develop resilience and capacity in communities and therefore design approaches aimed at reduce future demand.

We want to design outcomes to best meet the needs of Shropshire's people and communities. Therefore at a very early stage in any commissioning exercise we will consider who needs to be involved in determining the required outcomes and the methods for evaluation. This will include customers, communities and other organisations including providers, the voluntary sector and public sector partners who will help us to collect, collate

and understand the information that we need. In return it is important that those people who we need to engage with are able and willing to do so in order that we get a complete picture and are able to base decisions on good and complete evidence.

[\[Linked Resource – Evidence & Engagement\]](#)

The Importance of Outcomes - Measuring the Impact

We want to make sure that what we have designed meets the outcomes we have identified. We will review the impact that our approach to commissioning as set out in this strategy has on our customers and communities. It is important that we understand what works well and what needs to change in the way that we commission. To do this we will review how effectively each of the aims set out in this strategy has been achieved with a focus on the results achieved and the costs saved.

We will also evaluate the impact of changes to the way that we commission services and the nature of the services that we commission, as well as the impact of any decommissioning of services. This will help us to understand, and plan for, potential adverse impacts in future.

When commissioning services we will be clear about the outcomes we set out to achieve and how we are going to evaluate whether these are being achieved or not. When determining outcomes we will ensure that they always reference back to the 4 corporate priorities for the council.

Through engaging as widely as possible when assessing achievement of outcomes, we can get a broad view of the impact of our approach.

[\[Linked Resource – Evaluating Outcomes\]](#)

Community Right to Challenge

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a number of community rights. The Community Right to Challenge gives groups of citizens, community groups, parish councils and local authority employees the right to submit an “expression of interest” in taking over and running a local authority service that they have identified they could improve. The local authority then has to consider that proposal and, if accepted, proceed to a procurement process to select a provider organisation.

[\[Linked Resource – Community Right to Challenge\]](#)

Market Shaping

‘Market shaping’ is a way of describing the range of activity which influences the current and future range and shape of support available in a locality based on meeting the needs of our customers, reducing demand by providing the most suitable services, and helping our customers to make the best choices for them.

Market shaping is:

- Capturing and sharing market intelligence such as population trends, needs, demand and expectations as to what the market may look like in future
- Structuring the market in terms of being clear about our priorities for investment and disinvestment, which in turn will help providers to make long-term decisions about how their business should develop
- Intervening in the market through targeted support and encouraging a shared understanding of outcomes and risks

It is important that market shaping is not the sole responsibility of the local authority as commissioner and its other statutory partners. In order to be most effective market shaping is about doing more to improve the planning and delivery of local services through better engagement with providers, communities, the voluntary & community sector, service users and customers.

The council will play a leading and influential role in developing local markets that support growth, build community capacity, stimulate and incentivise innovation and provide better outcomes for people within the total resources available. To support this we will adopt commissioning approaches which aim to grow the capacity and resilience of Shropshire businesses and communities.

The Role of Procurement

Procurement is a key part of the commissioning cycle. It is the stage at which we set out to secure outcomes through acquiring goods, services or works from external or in-house providers once the desired outcomes, scope and specification have been determined. There needs to be a balance between seeking innovative solutions and outcomes and giving sufficient detail of our requirements to enable bidders to understand our requirements in the way that we design tender specifications. Procurement has a focus on getting the right solution to achieve what we want in a way that gives the best value for money and which is fair and transparent. In determining value for money in our procurement activity we will consider the cost of securing outcomes through this route against alternative ways.

We recognise that by applying the following Values in our procurement activity it plays a crucial role in helping us to deliver customer outcomes and our Mission as set out in this strategy:

- Value for Money & Cost Savings
- Local Economic Sustainability
- Social Value
- Category Management – focussing on key areas of spend
- Supplier Engagement
- Standardised Methods of Procurement
- Transparency & Accountability
- Probity – being responsible and ethical in the way that we deal with public money

[\[Linked Resource – Procurement Strategy\]](#)

Paying for Services

Effective commissioning for outcomes requires ongoing review, discussion and agreement on how outcomes are to be delivered. This partnership approach will also include agreement around payments and business profit.

We will use both contracts and grants to secure services, but expect the relative proportion of contracts to increase as we secure services through open competition. In future some services currently funded by grant will be procured through a contract process, including clear outcomes and performance measures.

Grant funding does have a role to play in an effective commissioning process and a group made up of a Shropshire Councillor, a VCS representative and a Council officer (to be known as the Grant Funding Guardian) will approve any intended grant funding.

Increasingly we will use a variety of payment methods, including an increasing focus on, and use of, payment by results where appropriate. Payment methods will be developed with providers which will be appropriate to each contract or grant. The Council's standard payment terms are thirty days from receipt of invoice and we aim to make payment sooner for small and medium sized enterprises and VCS organisations.

Contracting & Grant Funding

We ensure that our contracts or grant funding agreements accurately reflect what has been procured or agreed. Contracts clearly stipulate who is responsible for what, how we will determine payments, what outcomes or outputs are required, responsibilities of all parties and a process for resolving performance or compliance issues. Grant funding agreements set out what the grant is for, payment, duration and obligations.

[\[Linked Resource – Contracting Guidance\]](#)

Contract Monitoring

We must effectively monitor the delivery of services to ensure that what we have commissioned is actually delivered in the way that we would expect. Agreement on how contracts are to be monitored should be made before completing the contract and can include provision of regular information which can be checked or sampled. However it is good practice to consider the customer and stakeholder view of how well the service is working.

[\[Linked Resource – Contract Monitoring Guidance\]](#)

Decommissioning

Decommissioning is an essential element of the commissioning process. As needs change, technology develops, users' expectations change and greater value for money is sought, it is inevitable that some services will become obsolete in their current form and that different

services or solutions will be required in their place. In addition the pace of change in the public sector in Shropshire and the requirement to be more cost-effective means that there is an urgent and pressing need to consider alternative and innovative ways to make services available to those who need them. The way in which we commission and contract for services will allow for flexibility and change according to changing requirements and ongoing review.

Decommissioning can be defined as ‘stopping provision of a service or a significant part of a service in order to bring about an improvement to existing service provision.’ This may mean stopping a service or a significant part of it or closing a building or facility. It can also include terminating or re-negotiating a contract or grant with an existing service provider, where this is driven by commissioning needs, which may include reduced budgets.

Existing provision may end to:

- make space for a new and improved service;
- enable innovation in service provision;
- provide better value for money, perhaps through more effective achievement of the desired outcomes or more efficient delivery; or
- better fit the level of provision to demand

We will consult and engage with those people most likely to be affected by any proposal to significantly change, end or close a service. We appreciate that changes of this nature create uncertainty and we will engage with people to explore for example alternative ways of achieving outcomes or different uses for a building or facility.

Successful decommissioning can leave provider organisations, service users and communities feeling that they were appropriately engaged and fairly treated, which is an important consideration particularly where partnership working to develop alternative approaches is sought. On the other hand, a poor decommissioning process can lead to unexpected consequences which may in the long run lead to additional costs elsewhere.

Decommissioning applies not only to contracts and grants but to council-provided services as well.

[\[Linked Resource – Decommissioning Guidance\]](#)

Governance and Accountability

The council spends a significant amount of public money and therefore strong and robust processes are in place to ensure that people making commissioning and budget decisions have the authority to do so. In addition, we make sure that our decision-making is clear and transparent and that it can stand up to scrutiny.

Governance is the process by which decisions can be made, and sets out the expectations for various roles and responsibilities involved in the commissioning process. It makes clear

the basis on which decisions can be made, when decisions should be made and who can make them. Good governance also allows for scrutiny of decisions made.

As the council rolls out its approach to commissioning based on a locality's needs then we will need to ensure that Local Governance Boards are in place with the appropriate authorities and powers, along with the opportunities for scrutiny of decision-making. These boards will include local elected representatives, commissioners, providers and other key stakeholders. As locality commissioning develops we will prototype and 'learn by doing' local governance approaches to help us to determine the best models for the future.

Key resources which support us include, for example, the council's Constitution, Contract Rules and Procurement Guidance.

[\[Linked Resource – Governance Guidance Document\]](#)

The Importance of Skills Development

In order to deliver this strategy we will ensure that our elected members and staff have access to skills development, training and resources. This will equip people with the skills to be able to lead and deliver the rapid transformation which the council needs to achieve through commissioning effectively.

As we move rapidly towards being a commissioning authority there will be a focus on developing skills around:

- Commissioning
- Procurement
- Customer Engagement
- Contract Management
- Negotiation

In addition we will engage with the voluntary & community sector and with providers to help them understand how we want to work with them as the council transforms the ways in which services are delivered.

More detailed guidance around specific aspects of commissioning can be accessed from this document including:

- A dedicated website
- Toolkits / checklists / detailed guidance –as a set of resources / website links, eg:
 - Decommissioning guidance
 - Social Value
 - Procurement, contract rules etc.
 - Contract monitoring
 - Engagement
 - Outcomes
 - Community Right to Challenge

- Case studies
- Good practice & resources nationally
- Commissioning Intentions & Market Position Statements – linked documents

Links to other resources including:

- Shropshire Compact
- Shropshire Council Business Plan and Financial Strategy 2014 - 2017
- Shropshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy

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