



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Commissioning Strategy

2024-2027



‘to become an innovative and effective commissioning organisation, with access to vibrant and sustainable markets whilst maintaining positive trusted relationships with our partners’



Our commissioning strategy strives for the Council “to become an innovative and effective commissioning organisation, with access to vibrant and sustainable markets whilst maintaining positive trusted relationships with our partners”.

This strategy is set within the context of the Council Plan and our vision to make Westmorland and Furness “A great place to live, work and thrive” whilst supporting our economy and culture to achieve “sustainable, inclusive, economic growth” and making sure “customers and communities needs are at the heart of designing our services”.

Sustainability must be at the centre of our commissioning approach and commissioning decisions – which means balancing the demands of environmental protection and recovery, economic development and growth, and addressing inequality and creating a fairer Westmorland & Furness.

Addressing these to make our vision a reality for everyone requires an approach underpinned by three sustainability principles of equity, economy, and environment.

- **Equity** - We know that there is a need to address any inequalities, especially those resulting from poverty and rural sparsity. We will focus on the wider determinants that drive those inequalities in a way that is fair and equitable.
- **Economy** - We know that we need to increase our productivity and improve educational outcomes, broaden and increase our skills base. We will support sustainable and inclusive growth which benefits our diverse population whilst protecting the environment.
- **Environment** - As a new Council we recognise our environmental responsibilities, including taking action on climate change and biodiversity loss. We will seek to redress damage and protect our environment for the long term.

Adopting these sustainability principles within our commissioning approach will allow us to:

- Deliver better outcomes for residents by designing and commissioning services which are **needs-led, data and intelligence driven and informed by experience**
- Provide the most efficient and **best value** use of Council resources in the most economic, efficient, effective and sustainable way
- Facilitate transformational change and continuous improvement to deliver improved outcomes for our residents whilst delivering our operating model principles through robust commissioning decisions
- Ensure we are a responsible organisation, enabling our services to deliver on our responsibilities for environmental, social and governance factors – including equality for all, financial vulnerability, carbon management reductions in the supply chain, and reversing the bio diversity losses

Contents

Introduction	4
What is Commissioning?	6
What is Commissioning not?	7
Challenges and Opportunities	8
The Commissioning Cycle	9
Commissioning Team as a Business Partner	14

Introduction

In its simplest form, Commissioning is the strategic activity of identifying need, allocating resources and determining the best way of meeting these needs, which if appropriate, could include securing a provider, within available means.

This document sets out Westmorland and Furness Council's approach to commissioning and making commissioning decisions with an overall objective of achieving better outcomes for our residents. It is intended to be an easy read, high-level summary which provides stakeholders with an overview of our approach to commissioning.

It is also for officers to read and be aware of – it is about how we make commissioning decisions and what factors are important to be considered in this decision making process, whilst achieving our operating model principles and deliver on our change agenda.

This strategy is ambitious, and we recognise that investment and development will be needed if we are to deliver our ambitions. We have work to do and will need to continue to develop capacity and capability over the next 3 – 5 years.

We will continue to review best practice and update the strategy when required for legislative and regulatory changes and the commissioning team, within the Resources Directorate, will support and act as business partners to other Directorate's and Services to enable delivery of the strategy.



Having a plan for how we work with, and for, our customers is crucial for all council services; this strategy is essential to support the delivery of a suite of Westmorland and Furness foundational strategies – as shown in the diagram below.



In addition to this overarching strategy, we will be developing more detailed and service specific commissioning strategies and statements, some of which will be driven by our statutory responsibilities for sufficiency and market management. These will identify and recognise the more specific questions and challenges that we may face.

What is Commissioning?

Commissioning is the activity of assessing need, agreeing the resources available, and then developing a plan to make best use of these resources to meet these assessed needs. It is the informed design of what we want to deliver in meeting our priority outcomes for our communities. It is frequently, but not always, facilitated by procurement activity.

In simple terms it is about securing better outcomes by commissioning the right services from the right providers at the right time and at the right price.

The current economic climate means that we must look at service delivery in different ways, be innovative in our approaches and look for alternative solutions, through the development of the commissioning plan (as set out in the Commissioning Cycle, see below). This could mean jointly commissioning services with partners or agreeing alternative models of delivery, including the decommissioning of some services, or deciding to deliver ourselves.

We are an ambitious Council and looking to transform our services whilst maintaining equity, economic and environmental sustainability – commissioning can help us achieve this by ensuring timely and appropriate decisions about future service delivery to support our operating model.

To support the delivery of the strategy and our wider ambitions, **both** commissioning **and** procurement need to be clearly defined and the approach understood throughout the council.

Procurement is the strategic process of acquiring goods, works, utilities and services from third parties. This is a process that spans the whole procurement life cycle from identification of needs, monitoring and evaluating services, through to the end of a works or services contract or the end of the useful life of an asset. (See the Procurement Strategy)

Procurement and commissioning are intrinsically linked. The procurement of goods, services, works and utilities is designed to deliver and support commissioners' intentions in a legal and compliant manner, delivering the best value for money.

What is Commissioning not?

If we are to use commissioning as part of our change agenda, then it is important that we understand what commissioning is not! Commissioning in Westmorland and Furness is:

- Not just about the money - securing better outcomes can mean that support comes from many different sources and sometimes the best options are not the cheapest available to us. Where we can, we will look to commission jointly with others to share the cost of services - this could be through the community, with our partners or the family themselves
- Not always about outsourcing or 'buying' things - if we are to ensure best outcomes possible, then this should mean service delivery by those best placed to do so. There is no commitment to procure all our services from external providers or, indeed, to deliver ourselves. Through the commissioning plan, we will identify the most appropriate best value, delivery solution for the service, with the resources available and at that time
- Not all about procurement - commissioning is wider than the procurement process and contracts. Time should be spent on agreeing the purpose for commissioning, understanding the impact of commissioning decisions, developing options with a wide range of stakeholders, crafting the specification. These will be informed by an understanding of the market and of procurement policy.



Challenges and Opportunities

The development of a commissioning model for the Council will play an integral role in the success of the council and ensure ongoing financial sustainability as pressure upon local government budgets continues.

The predecessor councils made extensive savings over the last 10-15 years, from revenue expenditure, whilst demand for services continued to increase, particularly in relation to services to the most vulnerable adults and children; alongside other challenges including the impact of war, supply chain shortages, climate change, inflation, and the cost of living crisis.

These challenges also provide opportunities for us to develop commissioning and the better integration of services as part of our overall change approach. Working in partnership and collaboration with others is one of our key values and principles

We recognise that we need to do more work across the organisation to better understand the data we do have and how we access and interrogate that data to develop intelligence to inform the commissioning cycle.

We are an ambitious council, with a clear vision and want to focus on becoming an innovative and effective commissioning organisation. To do this we must focus on:

- Making commissioning decisions - with the appropriate data and intelligence to support
- Being outcomes driven – confident about understanding and listening to what is important to residents and communities and that our resources are focused on achieving those outcomes
- Recognising the interdependencies between residents, communities, partner organisations and services, and how we can use this to inform the commissioning cycle
- Engaging as many stakeholders as possible in the commissioning cycle and decision making process – including residents, service users, communities, and providers
- Understanding our strategic and community leadership role and the resources and assets available through working with partners, providers, and communities
- Making best use of available resources, including those within our communities, avoiding duplication and ensuring value for money – seeking innovative ways to do more with less
- Develop capacity and capability to commission strategically and ensure future proofing of services

The Commissioning Cycle

Using the **Commissioning Cycle** as a framework, we have adopted a model of commissioning – shown in the diagram below.

We expect this approach to be used in all key commissioning decisions, thereby ensuring a robust and transparent approach.



The diagram above reflects the four phases of the commissioning cycle. This allows us to make clear, evidence based decisions about services, ensuring that they are future proof for purpose and meets the needs of our residents, and meeting our three sustainability principles of equity, economy, and environment.

These four stages should be proportionate to size and complexity of the service being considered. These would be carried out to enable a methodical and transparent approach to making decisions based on evidence of need, desired outcomes, and within an agreed resource envelope.

Stage 1 – Analyse

This stage is used to ensure the right outcome(s) are being commissioned. A reflective process and asking ourselves what is it we are trying to achieve, what is the gap we need to fill and what future demand are we trying to meet? Commissioners need to consider these points to ensure they feel confident about what it is that is needed and how this will make a difference to outcomes.

The focus should be on future proofing by design; and we must be creative – thinking innovatively and where necessary support moving away from the current offer. An opportunity to constructively challenge and **listen** to how services (and therefore outcomes) could be improved.

We will rely on the data and intelligence we collate to have a better understanding and insight about the residents of and places in Westmorland and Furness; using other national and regional information to triangulate this – therefore developing evidence based recommendations on the needs of our communities and service requirements.

This is a good opportunity to co-produce these recommendations and solutions with our communities and partners and incorporate the lived experience.

Our **Customer Strategy** explains more about our vision and approach to being a customer focused organisation, whilst ensuring customers are at the heart everything we do. This strategy must be considered when undertaking this stage of the Commissioning Cycle.

Stage 2 – Plan

At this stage, commissioners should have a sense of what is being commissioned and what outcomes we are looking to achieve. Working together, across the organisation and with our partners - we can get a sense of what needs to be done and what levers we have to influence any added value (or joint commissioning opportunities). With scarce resources, it is important that we have clearly defined outcomes to reduce duplication or competing priorities.

As part of this plan the following must be taken into account when making commissioning decisions:

- The impact of the decision on our commitment to reverse bio diversity loss
- Whether or not the decision has an adverse impact on climate change or whether there are other options which would have more impact
- How the plan can support the vision for achieving carbon net zero (even through the supply chain)
- Whether there is any impact on the equality of opportunity for all to live and active and healthy life as a result of the decision and implementing the plan
- How the plan supports our growing economy, providing people with access to good range of diverse work opportunities and business with the opportunity to continue to develop and diversify

If we are clear on the 'what' – then the plan will help us develop the 'how'. This could be going out to procure a service, keeping with in the resource envelope available, or it could involve supporting, for example, community led delivery, creating and influencing the markets to be able to deliver an alternative service than that already available,

It could also mean that an existing service that has been 'analysed' is decommissioned as it no longer meets our identified priorities, or a provider has underperformed and even bought 'back in house'.

The planning stage should also take into account:

- Commissioning intentions and priorities of partners and other stakeholders, such as the Integrated Care Boards, NHS England, Highways Agency, neighbouring Local Authorities
- Any specific needs of local communities and key points from reviewing the evidence base
- Any policy context and development to future proof the final design, including scope for innovation and flexibility
- A clear exit strategy if we are no longer wishing a provider to deliver the service and a contract to end

Any decisions made in this planning stage will need to be made following the governance process as set out in the constitution – ensuring that they are supported by a clear record with appropriate scrutiny and Director and Member engagement.

Stage 3 – Do and Implement

Having developed the plan – this stage is about the ‘doing’ – and considering where we are now and what actions are needed to achieve the agreed outcomes. Depending on the plan, these could be short term or simple actions, such as agreeing to procure a service on a similar basis, to more medium to longer term or complex plans that could include developing parts of the market and providers who are able to deliver certain services.

If we are decommissioning or bringing services in house – then the plan must also be followed to ensure there are no inadvertent consequences of the decision made at Stage 2. Implementing this plan will require early dialogue with stakeholders, providing clear communication about the need for change and transparency around the options appraisal.

Commissioning decisions will have implications for staffing – specifically the workforce’s capacity and capability. This is not just our own workforce, but also those who are employed by our providers. Recruitment and training can be time consuming and therefore needs to be factored into the ‘doing’ stage. The People Plan provides more information and advice should be sought from HR Business Partners.

If we are procuring, then the ‘Procurement Strategy’ must be reviewed and followed. This will ensure we consider the impact equity, economic, environmental sustainability factors, whilst being fair and transparent.

Longer term or complex plans could require support of colleagues in the Programme Management Office and other enabling services in order to ensure successful implementation.

Any decisions actioned will need to follow the governance process as set out in the constitution – ensuring that they are supported by a clear record with appropriate scrutiny and Director and Member engagement.

Stage 4 – Monitor and Review

The final stage of the cycle, before we come back to analyse. An effective monitor and review stage allows us to collate the necessary data and intelligence to support a successful and robust analysis before developing future commissioning plans.

This data can be collected on an ongoing basis through key performance information from contracts, or from experiences and comments from those residents and families, some of whom may already be using services.

Performance data and information from contracts that is to be collated should have been agreed as part of the commissioning plan and informed the procurement process from previous terms. We know that this isn't always the case and as we have a lot of historical contracts that are still delivering services on our behalf, we need to work through them identify those we can improve as a priority – based on our priorities and ensuring equality, economic and environmental sustainability.

For services we deliver ourselves – then it is just as important that we understand how well these are performing and are the meeting the requirements needed. We need to collect date and performance information on these too.

The collection of data and intelligence will allow us benchmark with other Local Authorities and Partners to identify best practice or alternative delivery models.

At this stage too, we can consider any financial information or return on investment – to help us decide whether the service is meeting the outcomes it was intended to, before making any recommendations for the duration – before moving into the analyse stage.

We can also collect data to inform other strategies and policies that are needed when making commissioning decisions, such as data to support whether or not a service has:

- Been able to evidence their impact on reversing bio diversity loss
- Had an adverse or positive impact on climate change
- Made an progress in achieving carbon net zero targets (even through the supply chain and Scope 3 targets)
- Had any impact on the equality of opportunity for all to live and active and healthy life as a result of the decision and implementing the plan
- Supported economic growth in Westmorland and Furness

Commissioning Team as a Business Partner

To ensure opportunities are maximised and commissioning activity is carried out in a robust and transparent way, capturing risks and identifying any mitigations, a Business Partner approach has been implemented with the Commissioning Team.

Currently focusing on 'Care' services the team have been supporting Adult's, Children's and Public Health Services in the ongoing commissioning of services post Local Government Reorganisation. The team have a specific skill set and relevant professional knowledge and expertise to enable this support to be opened to other Directorates and Service areas.

For 2024/25, as we continue to develop and embed the approach in our journey to becoming a commissioning organisation – we will review opportunities for enhancing the role of the Commissioning Team as Business Partner to the other Directorates and Service.

It is acknowledged that our current commissioning model has been focused on the support to Care Services, this is largely because of the historic sovereign arrangements. As a Unitary Authority, we have other service areas that could be a potential risk for us, and our ambition is to provide the same level of skills and professional support to these other services areas.

This will be an evolving model, and following successful growth bids, the offer from the Team will develop in 2024/25 – subject to successful recruitment – and it is acknowledged that further growth might be needed to support this model over the next 3 years.





Translation Services

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