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Local Authority Commissioning

Understanding the use of information and evidence by commissioners of services

Emma Disley, Lila Rabinovich, Jennifer Rubin

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Preface

In the context of pressure to commission efficient and effective services to address a range of social challenges, those making funding decisions must select from a plethora of services and interventions that may help achieve better outcomes. However, in spite of a growing number of guidelines and rules, there is currently little information on how those in a position to fund and commission such services and interventions actually make their decisions. In particular, what information do they draw on to help them to choose one type of intervention over another? How do they choose from amongst a range of providers when such choice is available? How do they decide whether to go with a tried and tested provider or to try a promising innovation?

RAND Europe was commissioned by NESTA to undertake a small piece of preliminary research into the kinds of information local authority commissioners use when making decisions to fund services and interventions. It is hoped that the study can contribute to a wider discussion about whether existing sources of information are sufficient for informing value-for-money decisions about proven ‘good practice’ and promising innovations in social interventions.

RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit policy research organisation that aims to serve the public interest by improving policymaking and informing public debate. Its clients are European governments, institutions and firms with a need for rigorous, impartial, multidisciplinary analysis. This report has been peer-reviewed in accordance with RAND’s quality assurance standards.

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The Quality Assurance reviewers from RAND Europe provided useful comments on earlier drafts of this report.
Executive summary

Evaluation and assessment of service provision is increasingly recognised as important in allowing organisations to learn about, and improve their activities. Local authorities and other service providers face growing pressure to use resources effectively and to demonstrate the impact of services on their communities, in order to obtain funds for and carry on with their provision. In the hope of using resources efficiently and achieving value for money, central and local government authorities are increasingly commissioning partners in the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide public services. The process of commissioning, however, can be difficult to put into practice, requiring commissioners to make judgments about the relative value for money and likely effectiveness of different interventions and competing providers, on the basis of information of variable quality.

NESTA asked RAND Europe to carry out a small piece of exploratory research to examine the types of data and information which Local Authorities draw upon to make commissioning decisions and to investigate how ‘promising practices’ are identified and developed. The research focused on commissioning in the field of community safety, crime and violence, and is based on twenty-three interviews with informants who have a range of roles in the commissioning process, including in Local Authorities, Regional Government Offices and the Home Office.

The RAND Europe team devised a simple framework to describe and conceptualise the types of information which typically feed into the commissioning process. This framework consists of four information types:

- Information on challenges and policy priorities;
- Information or evidence about what works or about promising practices (which may, as yet, be unproven by evaluation) in tackling a particular policy challenge;
- Information about which providers would deliver best value for money; and
- Information utilised in evaluation of interventions.

Whilst we recognise that in practice the distinction between these categories may be blurred, the existing literature tends not to distinguish, conceptually, between these different information types. We think it worth drawing out this distinction between different information types in an attempt to avoid confusing separate elements of commissioning that have distinct implications for value for money.

The key findings from this research are as follows:
Information on challenges and priorities

Interviewees stressed the importance of understanding the unique nature of the challenges in each local authority area.

Interviewees stressed that a clear understanding of the nature of local challenges was a crucial first step to effective decisions about service commissioning. This information is collated from a number of sources, including the police, A&E departments and other relevant agencies. This, according to interviewees, is an important element of ‘intelligence-led’ commissioning.

Information about what works

The Home Office Effective Practice Database was used by many interviewees as a source of information about what works.

However, examples of ‘good practice’ contained in this database have not necessarily been formally or independently evaluated. The determining factor for inclusion in the database appeared to be the experience, professional and common-sense judgement of the Home Office Effective Practice team. While this is one useful way of making judgement, it is very different from independent evaluation. This raises questions about the role of professional judgement versus evaluation evidence, which merit further discussion by those making such decisions in relation to commissioning.

Informal sources of information were widely utilised for examples of ‘good practice’

CDRPs sought information from each other about ‘good practice’. Contact between CDRPs was facilitated by Regional Government Offices, established between individual practitioners at conferences, and initiated by partnerships themselves. Interviewees also utilised informal networks within and beyond their own local authority, drawing on the opinions and expertise of local practitioners. Peer-reviewed and independent research was noticeably absent from the list of information sources used by commissioners.

Pragmatism drives some commissioning decisions

Often, central government ring-fences funding for a particular intervention, which gives commissioners less flexibility in deciding what may be the most suitable intervention to target a problem in their area. In these cases, there is much less opportunity to draw on and use information on what works. In other instances, time-frames for bidding for and using funding are limited, preventing commissioners from conducting more thorough planning and potentially leading to less evidence-based decisions.

Few interviewees questioned or engaged critically with the concept of ‘good practice’

Many interviewees said that ‘good practice’ refers to practice which was ‘effective’ or shown to have worked in other areas, but did not comment on how such practices had been proved or shown to be effective, nor did they further articulate what was meant by ‘effective’ - effective at achieving improved outcomes for particular groups? Effective at reducing costs? Or effective at achieving follow-on funding through strong reporting mechanisms? The interviews seem to suggest that once the label of ‘good practice’ is applied to an intervention, it is for the most part taken for granted.
Interviewees felt there is plenty of information available about ‘good practice’, even if it can sometimes be time consuming to find

While there was little questioning of the meaning of ‘good practice’ and what it was really able to denote about interventions and approaches, interviewees themselves were broadly satisfied both with the amount of information available about ‘good practice’, and with its quality. Interviewees did mention, however, that time and other resource constraints often prevent them from making use of such sources of information.

Information about service providers

Interviewees reported that generally, they had good information about local service providers, although this information is primarily from informal sources.

Information about providers operating locally mainly came from practitioners’ own knowledge and experience of the local area, although in some areas third sector organisations were represented on various sub-groups of a Local Authority or CDRP. In the absence of external sources of information and validation we were not able to independently assess local commissioners’ perception that they have comprehensive knowledge of local providers. It could be difficult for them to know what they do not know. Thus, it might prove difficult for a new, small provider to gain representation and visibility; they might not easily come to the attention of practitioners, thereby bolstering the competitive advantage of larger, more well-established organisations.

There is a focus on service providers’ track record and previous experience in commissioning decision-making

Interviewees’ comments suggest that Local Authorities pay particular attention to service providers’ ‘track record’ when making commissioning decisions, although it proved hard to unpack what, exactly this meant or how it could be demonstrated. Clearly, information showing a reduction in crime correlated with work by the provider would be evidence of success, but it appeared to extend to information showing that performance targets were met or that users and/or commissioners were satisfied with the service.

Assessment of providers is often limited to fulfilling administrative requirements of the procurement process

Once commissioners knew about a service provider, assessment of that provider tended to primarily arise from the procurement process, focusing on financial and institutional credentials, rather than an assessment of the likely effectiveness of the provider or the intervention in addressing the target social challenges.

Information for and from evaluations

Interviewees expressed a commitment to both performance monitoring and evaluation, but in practice evaluation was not prevalent

Interview findings suggest there was little evaluation being conducted in terms of collecting evidence about the impacts of interventions. Whilst most areas would use simple ‘before and after’ information to evaluate an intervention, predominantly the data collected in order to evaluate commissioned services related to throughput and process rather than outcomes. This type of limited evaluation does not allow assessment of causality; that is, it does not provide insight into whether the intervention itself led to any observed changes,
or whether the changes were caused by other factors. Interviewees were, to some extent, aware of the limits on their ability to carry out evaluations. It is worth noting that lack of evaluation (and the attendant inability to attribute changes in outcomes to the intervention or to other factors) may pose risks to value for money, as it is not possible to know whether the most effective interventions and services are being commissioned.

There are unresolved questions as to what should ‘count’ as evidence that a particular service or intervention is effective enough to be attempted in another area. Resources, time, skills and the small scope of many commissioned services mean that full evaluation is at times impossible and often unlikely at the local level.

There are a number of possible tools and initiatives that could support funders and commissioners of public services in making value for money decisions. All interviewees were keen to engage with the issue of value for money in commissioned services and the majority took steps in their day-to-day work to seek out information about potentially effective services. Building on practitioners’ willingness to use information, possible initiatives could include enhancing commissioners’ understanding of how to assess what is ‘good practice’, through training or the development of guidance. There is the potential to develop a centralised scheme or fund to enable robust evaluations of local initiatives, thus ensuring that even small, locally commissioned services contribute to the development of an evidence base for future commissioning.
CHAPTER 1  Introduction and background

1.1  Introduction

Public services in the UK face complex and cross-cutting challenges, including an ageing population, crime and violence, climate change and lifestyle-related problems such as obesity and substance abuse. In this context there is widespread recognition of the need to optimise the use of available resources at all levels of public administration. Local authorities and other service providers face growing pressure to use resources for service provision effectively and to demonstrate the impact of these services on their communities in order to obtain funds for and carry on with their provision.

In the hope of using resources efficiently and achieving value for money, central and local government authorities are increasingly commissioning third parties in the private, public and voluntary sectors, to provide public services. Whilst the model of commissioning promises to deliver better services and better value, the process and decision making behind commissioning a service is not straightforward. For example, it requires commissioners to; know which service would best address a particular policy issue; have knowledge of and information about potential service provider organisations; assess the ability of those organisations to deliver the service; and monitor performance and outcomes once a service has been commissioned. On top of that, commissioning is often undertaken within tight timeframes imposed by tendering procedures and by the availability of funding.

There are indications that there is room for improvement in the way that public organisations, including local authorities, commission services. According to a House of Commons Select Committee enquiry, there should be a concerted move towards ‘intelligent commissioning’, an approach based on ‘a knowledge of potential providers and of desired outcomes, based on user needs’.\(^1\) A recent report commissioned by the Cabinet Office calls for a wider understanding of the meaning of ‘value for money’ in commissioning services; all too often this concept is taken to mean the relationship between financial cost and outputs (or unit cost), but the report argues that judgements about value for money should follow the UK Treasury’s definition: ‘the optimum combination of whole-of-life costs and quality (or fitness for purpose) of the good or

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service to meet the user’s requirement’. In other words, value for money is not simply choosing the lowest cost bid. This broader view of value for money is also in line with a recent Department of Health paper on commissioning, which states that the emphasis should be on quality of outcomes rather than on price and volume. In order to make these more complicated judgements about value for money, evidence-based decision making, performance management, monitoring and evaluation are becoming ever more important aspects of service provision. This new commissioning environment places demands upon commissioners and service providers to undertake these functions and upon providers to report on outputs and outcomes to funders and other stakeholders.

Against this background, NESTA asked RAND Europe to examine the types of data and information – formal and informal – which local authorities draw upon to make decisions about allocating funding to local services and interventions; ‘commissioning’ in the widest sense of the word. As discussed in more detail below (and in Appendix A), this was an exploratory study: a small, early foray into a large and important area. As such, generalisable claims cannot be made from the available evidence. The aim is rather to provide some preliminary findings to shed light on whether and how local authorities find and use information about effective practice and promising innovations that may deliver value for money in public services. In doing so, the study can contribute to a wider discussion about what information some local authorities and other service providers and commissioners are finding useful, what is problematic in their attempts to make value-for-money decisions about social interventions, and what might further improve commissioning decision-making.

1.2 Information in commissioning processes

In defining the scope of the study, the study team developed a simple framework to understand the types of ‘information’ used in commissioning public services and the flow of this information in the commissioning process. This is shown in Figure 1, below. In this framework we highlight four key types of information which may be of particular interest in understanding how local authorities decide what to commission. This framework is by no means comprehensive and we recognise that the boundaries between these types of information are often blurred in practice. The framework is intended merely to help structure our understanding of the role of information in this area. The four information types are as follows:

1. **Information about local social challenges or policy priorities.** This involves having an understanding of a particular issue in an area, its incidence, nature, impacts, and people affected. For example if a local area has a problem with alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour: how often, when and where do incidents happen? Are there any particular groups at higher risk of being involved in such incidents, either as perpetrators or as victims?

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2. **Information or evidence about what works and promising practices** in tackling a particular policy challenge. For example, which types of interventions can be effective in reducing or preventing alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour? What kinds of cost-savings could be achieved by implementing different types of intervention that aim to achieve the same goal? Are there any interventions that have shown promising results but have not yet been formally evaluated?

3. **Information about which providers would deliver best value for money** in providing a particular service. For example, which provider will be able to deliver an intervention that works in tackling the problem, in the most cost-effective way?

4. **Information needed to carry out evaluation of interventions**, which involves assessing the impact of particular services to establish whether they achieved the expected results.

![Figure 1: Flow diagram of information important to the commissioning process](image)

Much of the literature published on commissioning by government departments and agencies, including that mentioned above, does not directly engage with the first and last types of information, nor does it distinguish between the middle two in discussions of intelligent or effective commissioning. In fact, in many ways this literature blurs the distinctions between information on what works (item 2) and information about effective and efficient providers (item 3). Whilst we recognise that the distinction between these types of information can be blurred in practice, failing to acknowledge that they are conceptually different risks confounding two elements of the commissioning process which have distinct implications for value for money. It may not always be enough to know which organisation is the most effective and efficient service provider; understanding what particular type of service is the most fit for purpose (a central element in the Treasury’s definition of value for money) should be a crucial aspect of the commissioning equation. In terms of information flows, the issue of evaluations of services is in turn linked to questions on what works and which providers since evaluations of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of particular interventions provide useful evidence on these issues.

1.3 **Research approach and methodology**

This research consisted of twenty-three key informant interviews with representatives from local authorities across England and Wales, Regional Government Offices, the Home
Office and the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA). Table 1 below shows a breakdown of the interviewees. While interviewees were drawn from a considerable range of backgrounds, organisations and areas, they had all been involved in commissioning at some level (either by actually commissioning services, or providing support and/or advice in the commissioning process).

In order to obtain some detail and comparability within the limited scope of the study, the substantive focus of most of the interviews with local authorities and Government Offices was on community safety, crime and violence reduction. Consequently, several interviewees worked within Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. This focus allowed a more in-depth overview of the challenges and opportunities in how resources are used in one particular substantive policy area. However, interviews with a small number of representatives working in other related areas (such as A&E/health) suggest that many of the findings from this area may be relevant in others. For a full discussion of the approach taken please refer to Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of interviewee</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDRPs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Community Safety Managers, Head of Crime Reduction, Partnership Managers, Strategy Officer, Performance Manager, Alcohol and Violent Crime Delivery Manager)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other roles in local authorities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cabinet member; housing services commissioner; Strategic commissioning team; Probation partnership manager, Youth Offending Team practitioners)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Office</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key informants</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(IDeA; expert on NHS commissioning; A&amp;E Consultant involved in partnership working to reduce violent crime)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Government Offices</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 **Structure of this report**

The remainder of this document describes the key findings from the interviews and discusses some of the implications, and possible future actions, emerging from them. Each chapter looks at findings in relation to one of the four types of information. Chapter 2 discusses findings about problem identification and definition. Chapter 3 looks at what

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4 These are local, statutory partnerships responsible for tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, involving the local police service, police authority, local authority, fire and rescue service, and NHS Primary Care Trust.
interviewees had to say in relation to information about what works. Chapter 4 examines information about service providers, and chapter 5 sets out what we learned from the interviews about evaluation and performance monitoring of commissioned services. Chapter 6 draws together the key findings and messages from the research.
It seems reasonable to hypothesise that a strong, evidence-based commissioning process starts with an understanding of the social problem to be addressed. We began interviews, especially those with practitioners from CDRPs, by asking about local problems and priorities.5

Although the core issues of interest in this research related to information about effective interventions and service providers, it was considered important to get a sense of the level of detail in which social problems were understood locally, since misunderstanding the nature or extent of a problem could mean that a service or intervention is commissioned which misses key challenges, does not address root causes, or fails to reach those in most need of support. In this chapter we briefly explore commissioners’ views and experiences of information available to them on local problems.

2.1 Strategic assessments, plans and problem profiles

Eleven interviewees said that the starting point for decisions about where to spend any available funding was having a good understanding of local crime and disorder problems.

Interviewees from CDRPs mentioned that information about local problems was set out in annual strategic assessments which partnerships are under an obligation to produce6 and which are based on crime statistics, police intelligence, information from public consultations, and so on. CDRPs are strongly encouraged by central Government to take an ‘intelligence led’ approach which involves gathering information from a number of sources, assessing and analysing that information, then using the resulting intelligence as the basis for decision-making, so as to direct resources and tackle problems most effectively. In order to understand local problems the Government encourages partnerships to employ or use analysts and researchers who can draw together, and make sense of, a wide variety of information.7

5 For full interview topic guide see Appendix B


7 Home Office, 2008b.
In addition, a number of interviewees explained that they also consult directly with the police, Accident and Emergency departments, and other relevant agencies in the community. Others mentioned that often knowledge and understanding of particular issues in the area come from commissioners’ own experience and expertise.

2.2 How well are local problems understood?

One interviewee expressed concerns about how well local problems are, in fact, understood by local Partnerships and authorities. Although this comment was made by only one interviewee, evidence from previous research suggests that CDRPs and local authorities vary considerably in their analytical capacity, the kinds of information drawn into their strategic assessment, and so on. The existence of a strategic assessment or problem profile certainly demonstrates a commitment to an ‘intelligence led’ approach, but even to the CDRPs themselves it was not always clear whether the assessments were in fact accurate descriptions of what are often complex local crime patterns.

2.3 The ‘uniqueness’ of each area and its problems

The need to understand the particular nature, scope and incidence of specific problems in each area was particularly emphasised by interviewees. This had implications, discussed in subsequent chapters, for sharing ‘good practice’, since a solution implemented in one area would need to be carefully tailored and adjusted for use in another.

2.4 Prioritisation of problems

Once local problems had been examined, analysed and described, they then needed to be prioritised for action. For CDRPs local priorities are set out in the local crime and disorder reduction plan. For Local Authorities more broadly, priorities are defined in Local Area Agreements.

In addition to the issues listed in these corporate documents, new priorities arise – for example in one CDRP area a gang-related killing meant that the issue of young people and gangs was promoted to a higher priority. One interviewee, for instance, explained that commissioners often have to decide, sometimes arbitrarily, where to allocate funding when conflicting priorities emerge. Sometimes, she explained, ‘one priority will have to be put on hold until further funding is available, or we may need to do a ‘needs review’ again’, to determine whether prioritizations need to change given new circumstances.

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9 CDRPs have a statutory responsibility to produce a crime and disorder reduction strategy
2.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed the first ‘type’ of information needed for commissioning decisions; information about the problem. Overall, findings from the interviews suggest that CDRPs, and local authorities more generally, are committed to an ‘intelligence led’ approach, whereby information from a number of agencies and sources is drawn together to build up an understanding of local problems. From the interviews, it was also evident that documents such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Plans are very much relied upon by local practitioners as the starting point for the commissioning process. This represents a commitment to good commissioning practice.

However, without further enquiry into such documents and the processes by which they are drawn up (which was outside the scope of this research) we are not able to comment upon the quality of problem understanding and definition. This also raises a set of interesting questions about how the information about issues in the community is interpreted by service providers and commissioners. For instance, identifying a high rate of teenage pregnancy merely describes a situation but does not in itself allow for an analysis of whether teenage pregnancy is the cause or the symptom of a wider set of issues that may also be in place (low educational attainment, limited employment opportunities, etc). Unpicking whether and how the information local authorities and service providers have is analysed and interpreted, and what the impact of this is on actual service provision could help shed more light on this highly complex process.
CHAPTER 3  Information on what works in addressing policy priorities

In this chapter we examine whether and how, in making commissioning decisions, interviewees use information about types of interventions which might be effective in addressing a particular policy priority.

When asked what sources they draw on to obtain information on proven or promising practices to tackle a particular policy issue, interviewees mentioned a number of different sources which they consult. While it was not possible to establish how frequently these different sources were used, the interviews seem to suggest that contacts with colleagues (within their own areas and in other areas) and with their Government Office seemed to be two of the most commonly drawn on. Below we outline some of the sources mentioned, interviewees’ experience of them, and the wider implications of our findings on this issue.

3.1  Information sources

The sources interviewees mentioned can be broadly categorised into web-based sources and ‘human’ sources. We describe each of them below.

Web-based sources

**The Home Office Effective Practice Database**

Six interviewees mentioned that they use the Home Office Effective Practice Database as a source of information about ‘good practice’. It was also mentioned by all three interviewees from the Home Office and all four interviewees from the Government Offices. One of the Home Office interviewees was based in the department responsible for maintaining the database.

The Effective Practice Database is part of the Home Office Crime Reduction website, and can be found at http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/epd/index.cgi. It was created in response to requests from practitioners for a central point of information about work being carried out in other areas of England and Wales. The database consists of about one hundred case studies describing local interventions and practices, usually using the ‘SARA’ methodology of a problem-oriented approach (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment).

When the Effective Practice Database was created the intention was for practitioners to submit best practice examples to the website, the Home Office would exercise a ‘quality
control’ function, and then examples could be accessed by others. In practice, one of our interviewees explained that there were fewer submissions to the database than hoped, although practitioners were keen to use it as a source of ideas. Interviewees from the Home Office and Regional Government Offices believed that the low submission rate was simply due to the fact that practitioners did not have enough time to make submissions. Another hypothesis could be that practitioners lacked the hard evidence or confidence to claim that an activity was ‘good practice’.

To overcome the low level of submissions, the Home Office now runs competitions and offers prizes for ‘good practice’, and is more proactive in seeking examples for inclusion in the database, making visits to regional and local meetings to capture and document examples of ‘good practice’.

The Effective Practice Database includes information about interventions that have not been fully or formally evaluated, as well as information about evaluated interventions. Initially, the intention was only to include those which were fully evaluated, but the conditions were relaxed when this proved impractical. For those which are not fully evaluated, the decision to include them on the database is taken by the Home Office team in charge of the database. Where possible, according to an interviewee from this team, they look for ‘some kind of assessment of impact’ or evidence of effectiveness such as ‘before and after’ crime rates, as well as using their professional judgement to decide whether it looks like a sensible and potentially effective practice. Effort is made by the Home Office team to ensure that all examples of ‘good practice’ on the database are described in detail (including set-up costs, throughput etc.) so that practitioners thinking of implementing them elsewhere have as full information as possible.

In addition to the Effective Practice Database one interviewee mentioned that he had found ‘good practice’ advice through the Tackling Knives Programme and the Tackling Violent Crime Programme, both of which were operated by the Home Office. As part of these Programmes field workers were employed by the Home Office to provide direct support to partnerships in addressing a particular problem, part of which involves highlighting good or promising practice in other areas.

The Beacon Scheme and other lessons from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

The Beacon Scheme run by IDeA was mentioned by three interviewees from CDRPs and local authorities as a source of information. The Beacon Scheme (http://www.beacons.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5615406) was set up to share best practice in service delivery across local government. One interviewee occupied a senior person at IDeA and had knowledge of the Beacon Scheme. He described to us the ‘validation’ process used to approve good practice by the Beacon Scheme, which rests on the knowledge and experience of National Advisors – people recruited by IDeA who have a track record of working in or engagement with particular areas of local government. These Advisors use their professional judgement to assess the ideas submitted to the Beacon scheme. If there is other evidence as to effectiveness this will be taken into account. As with the Effective Practice Database we again see that ‘good practice’ is not necessarily that which has been formally evaluated.
The method by which practice on the Beacon website is validated gives cause to think about the merit of professional judgement, as opposed to evaluation evidence. Many of the ‘good practices’ considered for Beacon status will not have been evaluated, in which case it can be argued that professional or expert judgement is the best available ‘evidence’ or basis upon which to establish whether an intervention is potentially effective. Even where there is evaluation evidence, expert opinion may still have a role and add something to the assessment. What is important, however, is that there is transparency as to the basis of the claim that something is ‘good practice’ – in the case of the Beacon scheme, this might involve making information available about the process of appointment of national advisors and their skills and qualifications.

The interviewee from IDeA told us about another effective practice database which was developed by IDeA on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government, focusing on ‘good practice’ in Local Area Agreements. Similarly to the experience of the Home Office’s Effective Practice Database, IDeA did not rely on local practitioners to pro-actively submit ‘good practice’ examples to this database. Rather, IDeA visited local areas and collated ‘good practice’ ideas directly, or in the words of one interviewee, ‘hoovered up’ ‘good practice’ ideas, because practitioners were considered too busy to be able to lend time to this; the interviewee thought this was precisely why a national improvement agency was needed.

Another way in which IDeA seeks to share ‘good practice’ is through ‘communities of practice’ (http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/welcome.do) which promote the development of professional social networks on-line to share ‘good practice’. Although this could be considered a ‘formal’ source of information, in that it is operated by the IDeA and has a dedicated and sophisticated website, the mechanism for information sharing here is essentially informal, relying on networks between practitioners. The interviewee from IDeA described that it was central to the ‘ethos’ of communities of practice that the knowledge was owned by the sector and facilitated by IDeA. As discussed later in this chapter, informal sources of ‘good practice’ ideas were widely used by interviewees.

It is interesting that only three interviewees from local authorities and CDRPs mentioned IDeA as a source of information on which they draw during the commissioning process (even when prompted, most interviewees did not include IDeA in their response). It is possible that this is due to the fact that we mainly interviewed people working in community safety and criminal justice commissioning who tend to use the Home Office website, rather than the Beacon Scheme and that the service is used more frequently by those working in housing or other service areas. Alternatively, it could have been that those CDRPs included in our research are not representative and other areas use the IDeA site much more. We were unable, however, to fully explore this issue within this study.

Other sources of ‘good practice’ or what works information mentioned were the Supporting People Housing Team (one interviewee), Audit Commission Reports (one interviewee) and the National Community Safety Network (one interviewee).
‘Human sources’ of information: networks and contacts

Regional Government Offices

Five interviewees said that they turned to Regional Government Offices for information about ‘good practice’. All the interviewees who worked within Government Offices said that they were asked for, and acted as a source of, information about ‘good practice’, and the role of Regional Government Offices was also mentioned by all three interviewees from the Home Office. The interviewees from Government Offices said that they received requests for information ‘all the time’ from CDRPs. In response to these requests, Government Offices often put CDRPs in touch with others who had developed solutions to shared or similar problems.

Effective practice was an agenda item at regional meetings, so that information could be gathered from local areas and fed back to the Home Office. Interviewees from Government Offices reported that they attended CDRP performance meetings regularly, to offer direct input and advice. Government Offices also run regional workshops and regional community safety networks to bring CDRPs together.

Other local areas and CDRPs

All eight interviewees from CDRPs and all interviewees from the Government Offices mentioned that other partnerships were a source of information about effective practice. This was also mentioned explicitly by one interviewee from the Home Office, although, implicitly all Home Office interviewees were informing practitioners about practice in other CDRPs – that being, fundamentally, how the Effective Practice Database works.

Sometimes contact with other CDRPs stemmed from a ‘referral’ from the Regional Government Office, other times practitioners had heard through more informal networks of practice in a particular area. Interviewees also reported making visits to meet practitioners from other CDRPs.

Two interviewees mentioned that they used iQuanta\(^\text{10}\) to identify other partnerships that were in their ‘family’ but had better performance, who might be contacted for ‘best practice’ advice. One of the interviewees said that in fact iQuanta is used not only to identify ‘good practice’ elsewhere but also to ‘rate and compare our own performance to that of others’.

Conferences

Conferences were referred to by four interviewees as a source of ideas about effective practice where practitioners draw on the expertise and experience of informal networks of colleagues and contacts from other areas.

Within a local authority

Interviewees from three different areas described examples where an idea for an intervention originated from inside the local authority or the CDRP, from the knowledge and experience of local practitioners. One interviewee commented generally that the first

\(^{10}\) iQuanta is an internet-based analysis tool developed by the Police Standards Unit to turn statistical data routinely collected by the Home Office into useful outputs for understanding and improving policing performance.
port of call when deciding how to respond to (for example) youth crime issues would be to consult members of the local Youth Offending Team. Interviewees said that they draw on expertise from across the partnerships to decide how to address specific local problems. One interviewee said: ‘What we do to decide how to tackle a particular priority is to take a partnership approach, looking at the issue from different angles’.

The three examples mentioned by interviewees are set out in Text Box 1, below.

**Text box 1: Examples of interventions developed by commissioners**

*The professional experience of a domestic violence coordinator*

Many CDRPs employ domestic violence coordinators. The role of the coordinator is to facilitate and lead a multi-agency approach to addressing domestic violence. One interviewee described how the experience and knowledge of the domestic violence coordinator in their area was heavily relied upon when making decisions about the kind of interventions the CDRP should fund to address domestic violence. This is an example of how information about what works is sourced from the professional knowledge of local authority practitioners.

*Commissioning accommodation to support Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements*

One interviewee was involved in commissioning accommodation for people who were being supervised under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). All the decisions about this appeared to have been taken by those working within the local authority housing department and the CDRP. The kind of accommodation and the nature of the support services to be provided alongside the accommodation were selected by local commissioners, without reference to ‘good practice’ guidance or lessons from elsewhere. From discussion in the interview, the reason behind this appeared to be that the kind of service to commission was quite clear to the commissioners.

*‘Pick and mix’ interventions for perpetrators of domestic violence*

The Probation Service runs a programme for men who have been convicted of domestic violence. This programme consists of a number of units, and only when all the units have been completed is the programme finished. However, one CDRP area wanted to be able to deliver the individual units of the programme as stand-alone interventions; they called it a ‘pick and mix’ version. The idea was that some offenders might benefit from one or two specific units. The ‘pick and mix’ idea was thought up locally, and the CDRP commissioned the probation service to deliver the stand alone units. This idea is now being promoted as best practice by the CDRP.

One way to interpret this set of examples is that practitioners feel that they ‘know’ them to be successful and looking beyond those for ‘best practice’ or evidence of effectiveness may be time-consuming and might not add value. Such reliance on practitioner ‘knowing’ could, on the one hand constitute innovative practice that achieves positive results – and there is an argument that there should be scope for this kind of ‘home grown’ intervention to be developed. On the other hand, there is a danger that this approach could lead to potentially more effective solutions being missed.

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11 MAPPA support the assessment and management of the most serious sexual and violent offenders
3.2 Selecting interventions pragmatically

The realities of local authority funding mean that the choice of solutions to a local problem is sometimes driven by the funding available, and the time and opportunity for planning (finding out about what works, establishing what the most appropriate intervention would be, and researching providers) are very limited. For example, one interviewee reported that funding had been made available specifically for work with the local licensed trade, and this determined the type of intervention which that CDRP commissioned to deal with the problem of alcohol-related disorder. This interviewee said that the commissioners themselves sometimes feel the money could have been better spent on a different intervention, or a different issue altogether, but when funds are made available for specific types of interventions ‘there is not much flexibility’ in their own decision-making.

Another interviewee echoed this, saying that even though the planning process behind commissioning decision-making should be thorough, in reality many commissioners cannot spend sufficient time on that. She went on to say that: ‘money is sometimes made available that needs to be spent very quickly, leaving no time for adequate planning. In these cases, you may end up funding a provider you’ve worked with many times before’. According to this interviewee, in the commissioning process, commissioners should ‘spend a third of their time planning and engaging’ stakeholders, including the target population, partner agencies and even possible providers; this, however, does not always happen.

According to some interviewees, another sense in which the choice of solution is pragmatic is where there is a limited supply of service providers in an area, and commissioners have no ability (or do not think to) stimulate alternative supply. During interviews we heard of a few examples where the provider of a particular service was described as the only available choice.

Finally, one interviewee said that when planning very small interventions, there is a sense that searching for evidence on what works is not needed. He stated that the thinking in these cases is often one of ‘let’s crack on with this; X intervention seems like a good idea for our area’. In this case, decisions about what to commission are made pragmatically, in that the time and resources spent in planning are adjusted so as to be commensurate with the size and cost of the intervention.

3.3 Strengths and weaknesses of available sources of information

Nine interviewees said that there was a lot of information available about good and effective practice. An interviewee from a CDRP qualified this point, saying that the amount of information varied between topics; on domestic violence, for instance, there was a great deal of information, but in relation to more recently emerging problems, such as gangs or knife crime, there was less. An interviewee from a local authority in fact stated that ‘the problem is not so much the amount of information available but the frequency with which it is used’ by those commissioning services. A third interviewee put it even more succinctly: ‘If you know where to look, information is not hard to find’.

There was acknowledgement by interviewees that it took time to ‘trawl’ through the various information sources and that an effort had to be made to find information – it was
for this reason that an interviewee believed that CDRPs appreciated being ‘spoon fed’ some of the available information by the regional Government Offices. One interviewee reported that very occasionally he came up against a ‘brick wall’ and was unable to find information about whether and how another area was responding to a particular problem. Another interviewee working within a CDRP said that the Government Office could do more to help when her own searching did not yield results.

Other concerns about the adequacy of information available related to:

- Home Office interviewees thought that there was much more ‘good practice’ out there than is currently being captured;
- Lack of detail in the available information about practice in a particular location.

Only three interviewees commented directly on what would improve the available information. Someone from the Government Offices said that a central repository for information about ‘good practice’ in their region might be useful (particularly when responding to questions from Ministers). An interviewee from another Government Office region was against the creation of a new centralised database, which would duplicate the Home Office Effective Practice Database; he instead believed that the emphasis should be upon encouraging more people to use the Home Office site. Another two interviewees said that funding to employ a communications manager, or researcher, whose job it would be to search for and disseminate information (including promoting locally identified ‘good practice’) would be useful. The need identified by these interviewees, therefore, was for information management rather than for more information.

The absence of independent, peer-reviewed research

It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees spontaneously mentioned existing independent, peer-reviewed academic research as a source of information on what might be an effective intervention to address a particular policy priority (only when prompted, three interviewees said they did occasionally look at this kind of literature). This is interesting because, more so than in some other policy areas, there is an extensive body of peer-reviewed, academic research in the fields of community safety, violence and crime reduction and prevention (and as mentioned earlier, most of the interviewees worked in these areas).

This raises questions about the extent to which findings from peer-reviewed literature are accessible and transferable to local practice; in the healthcare research field this is termed the ‘bench to bedside’ process. Does existing academic research adequately address the information needs and requirements of practitioners at the local level? Can this type of research contribute to making better value for money decisions in commissioning? Do local authorities and practitioners have sufficient analytical capacity to seek out, interpret and draw from academic research? While these questions are outside the scope of the current study, evidence from related research suggests the analytical capacity of commissioning bodies may not, in fact, be sufficient for processing this kind of information.\footnote{Grant, J. \textit{et al} (2002) \textit{Getting the Evidence: Using research in policy making}, RAND Europe, prepared for the National Audit Office, UK.} Whether and how capacity to effectively use existing academic research in
making commissioning and service provision decisions could be improved may merit further investigation.

3.4 What do commissioners consider ‘good practice’?

Through the interviews, we attempted to unpack the concept of ‘good practice’, and how it is understood by the interviewees. The most common response (given by five out of eight CDRP interviewees and one out of three interviewees performing other local authority roles) was to describe ‘good practice’ as a source of ideas about ‘successful ingredients’ of programmes; using ‘good practice’ would not necessarily involve transplanting an entire programme from one area to another but could mean taking elements of practice that are seen to have been effective in one area and adopting those locally in a ‘modified’ or ‘adapted’ version of that original intervention. This was very important to interviewees’ understanding of ‘good practice’; it could not be used ‘off the shelf’ and often needed ‘adjustment’ to be transferred to another area. This mirrors the response from an interviewee from the Home Office who stressed that a ‘good practice’ idea would not necessarily be suitable for implementation in another area and might need to be ‘tailored’. Sometimes, one interviewee said, local circumstances and resource constraints mean that ‘good practice’ from elsewhere is adopted in ‘a more diluted form’.

Beyond this recognition of the issues around transferability, few interviewees questioned or engaged critically with the concept of ‘good practice’. All interviewees talked about ‘using good practice’ from other areas or the Home Office, but none spontaneously went on to explain what they meant by that term. When asked directly, many replied that ‘good practice’ refers to practice which was ‘effective’ or which had been shown to work in other areas, even if only ‘to reasonably good effect’. Another interviewee said ‘good practice’ was interventions which are ‘seen to work’. For the most part, however, interviewees did not discuss how these practices had been shown to be effective, nor did they explain what was meant by ‘effective’. In many ways, the interviews suggest that references to ‘good practice’ are, for the most part, taken for granted. One interviewee said that once an intervention had been endorsed as ‘good practice’ by the Home Office it was unlikely to be questioned locally.

3.5 Concluding remarks

From this preliminary investigation it seems that some ‘formal’ sources of information about what works are used by practitioners. For those working within CDRPs this is primarily the Home Office Effective Practice Database, but a few practitioners in local authorities used the IDeA Beacon Scheme website. While some of the ‘good practice’ on these sites has been evaluated or is supported by evidence of effectiveness, for other examples of ‘good practice’ the robustness of the evidence of effectiveness is less clear.

13 The other interviewees in these groups did not answer this question
Our findings indicate that ‘informal’ sources of information may be equally if not more important to commissioners. Practitioners are able to access a network of contacts inside their own local authority or CDRP, within CDRPs in their region, or in other parts of the country. Regional Government Offices act as a facilitator, linking practitioners from different areas. Even where ‘good practice’ was identified through the Home Office Effective Practice Database practitioners will often also make contact with the area where the practice has been drawn from in order to establish whether practice is transferable to another area. There is some value in relying on ‘informal’ sources of information in some instances; ‘top down’ evaluations or assessments of what constitutes good practice might only approve of practices which fit within prevailing paradigms of policy and practice. Promising practices might be more likely to be picked up through informal networks among practitioners.

We also found evidence of pragmatic decision-making, which is not based upon information about what works, but rather responds to specific requirements for access to available funding, time scales and other constraints.

Whatever the source of ‘good practice’ information, practitioners treated this as a menu of options, from which they could select particular elements for implementation in their area, according to local need.

Generally, interviewees did not identify either a lack of information about what works, or uncertainty about the quality of such information as challenges in commissioning decision-making, although many of them agreed that it could be time consuming to seek robust evidence. Interviewees did not tend to question the reliability of information contained in existing databases such as the Beacon Scheme and the Effective Practice Database, or to reflect critically about the basis upon which a practice was claimed to be effective or ‘good practice’.14

However, our brief examination of the Home Office and Beacon Scheme databases suggests that they do not always offer robust evidence of effectiveness nor do they integrate findings from academic research. This suggests that there could be a potential gap in the ‘information market’ where there is scope to better utilise existing academic research and evaluation evidence.

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14 Is it interesting, however, that a study undertaken for the CLG on local government services found that the quality of market intelligence (in which the report includes information about current and potential suppliers) available to commissioners was ‘mixed at best’. This suggests that there are difference in how local authorities themselves, and external observers, assess the quality of information available to them in decision-making, and raises interesting questions about what the implications of this are for value for money service provision (Department for Communities and Local Government (2006). Developing the local government services market to support a long-term strategy for local government. London: Department for Communities and Local Government).
CHAPTER 4 Identifying and selecting service providers

As described in the introduction, the third dimension of information for commissioning is information about service providers. In this chapter, we describe what interviewees told us about what information they use to identify suitable service providers, and what some of the strengths and weaknesses of these mechanisms are.

4.1 Sources of information about service providers

During the interviews we explored what was known by commissioners about local service providers. At its most basic, information about service providers might simply be a list of the third sector and private organisations based in the geographical area which were currently providing services or which could provide services. However, interviewees explained that beyond this, it might be desirable for commissioners to have more detailed information about the size and staffing of providers, their prior experience in service provision and the methodologies and techniques they use.

Findings from the interviews suggest that, overall, getting information about local service providers was not perceived as a significant challenge. Seven interviewees said there is some or good knowledge about providers which they use in making commissioning decisions. Three interviewees expressed concerns, however, saying they would welcome an accessible, single source of information on service providers in their areas.

However, when interpreting this finding we must bear in mind that interviewees do not know how many potential providers they do not know about; they may be missing information on a range of possible providers. One interviewee indicated that a particular service provider was chosen because he did not know of any others (we cannot say whether this was because there were, in fact, no other providers). In some circumstances it may simply be most convenient to use a known provider. For example, one area had continued to fund the same service provider to supply the same service for several years running. The reason for this was that the performance of the service and provider had been good, the local authority had not been able to mainstream the service and there was a desire to achieve some stability and consistency in services.
As for how interviewees accessed or collected information about local service providers, three different mechanisms were mentioned by interviewees. The most commonly mentioned was through having representatives from providers’ organisations on the CDRP or the relevant subgroups. The second way in which information about local providers fed into commissioning decisions was through the local knowledge, experience and networks of local practitioners. The third, mentioned by one CDRP representative, was to make a concerted effort to discover and list all the local providers. These mechanisms are described in more detail below.

**Service provider representation and input**

At least four interviewees mentioned a formalised link with local service providers – through a representative from the third sector sitting on the CDRP, through contact with a voluntary sector advocacy group or through a CDRP voluntary sector services manager, who provided links to local agencies. These links helped commissioners understand what potential service providers were operating in the area. One interviewee who worked in local authority commissioning said that voluntary sector representatives take part in the commissioning process. One word of warning was sounded about the use of sector representatives on the CDRP, because the voluntary sector was not homogenous, and organisations were often in competition with each other.

**Local knowledge**

One interviewee said that they had a good personal knowledge of service providers in the area, having worked there for a long time. The strength of this might be that, in relation to those known providers, practitioners are likely to have quite detailed knowledge of the provider and its previous work. On the other hand, relying on local knowledge in this way risks excluding new providers in the area, or those from neighbouring areas. In one area the YMCA provided several services paid for by the community safety partnership. The interviewee said that, because the YMCA participated in the partnership and there were no suitable other provider, the YMCA was the ‘obvious choice’.

An interviewee who worked in a Youth Offending Team (YOT) reported that when finding out about providers she tended to rely on recommendations from practitioners working in other services, such as social care, or on practitioners from other YOTs.

In one area an interviewee described an audit which had been conducted of all local providers working in the area of parenting. A database had been created as a result, which aimed to overcome difficulties in identifying and linking up with local providers. One problem the interviewee mentioned with this approach, though, was that any audit was limited by the fact that some voluntary organisations were only in existence for a short period of time, so an audit would necessarily be a snapshot, thus requiring frequent updating.

**The role of the Home Office and Government Offices**

The role of the Home Office and Government Offices did not extend to signposting practitioners to particular service providers. Interviewees from the Home Office and Government Offices explained that they could not easily give advice and recommendations about particular service providers, since this may bias the procurement process; however they might encourage CDRPs to at least think about commissioning from the third sector.
4.2 **Role of proactive providers**

An interesting finding emerging from this research relates to the proactive role that service providers often play, firstly, in promoting themselves and their services – ensuring, for example, that commissioners know of their existence – and secondly, in working with commissioners during the commissioning process to refine the design of local services. We can think of this in terms of a push or a pull approach to information gathering on the part of commissioners. In the latter, commissioners actively gather information, pulling it in. In the former, information is gathered when it is pushed towards them, and we found some evidence that providers were ‘pushing’ information.

**Marketing and promotion**

Three interviewees mentioned that their decision about what type of service to commission was based on information provided to them proactively by service providers. In some cases, the service was one which the local authority had already identified as ‘good practice’ or was thinking of commissioning. In other cases, the provider was promoting an approach the local authority had not previously heard about or thought of commissioning. An example of pro-active behaviour by a provider is described in Text Box 2.

In relation to this type of behaviour by service providers the distinction we made (see chapter one) between information about effective practice and information about providers becomes rather blurred. Providers often specialise in a particular intervention or approach which is not commonly used by other providers, so it becomes difficult for commissioners to separate the nature of the intervention from who provides it.

**Text Box 2: An example of pro-activity by service providers: work with the licensed trade**

One interviewee described an organisation who had been commissioned by his CDRP to reduce binge drinking and related violence around ‘problematic’ licensed premises in the city centre. The service provider had given a presentation at a conference which the interviewee had attended. After the conference, the provider approached those who had attended asking for areas which might agree to try their approach.

Due to a budget under-spend half way through the financial year the interviewee had available a small amount of money. The interviewee knew broadly that he wanted to do some work around alcohol-related violence and disorder, so decided to take up the service providers’ offer. The model for working with licensed premises was the idea of the service provider which had successfully ‘sold’ this approach to commissioners.

Thus, as well as the sources of information that commissioners seek out themselves, they also appear to be receptive to proactive approaches and information volunteered (or marketed) to them from elsewhere. This is an interesting finding because it demonstrates that the distinction between information about effective interventions and information about effective providers is sometimes blurred, since a pro-active provider is often ‘selling’ an intervention they have developed themselves, and the likely effectiveness of the intervention may not have been subject to independent evaluation. It also raises questions about whether pro-active providers may have a competitive advantage over more reactive ones even though the former may not be more effective in their actual service provision than the latter. This has implications for value for money commissioning, as
commissioners’ are not always able to determine the relative effectiveness of different providers.

**Engaging with providers’ responses to tenders**

According to our interviewees, another way in which providers suggest ideas for services is by responding to Invitations to Tenders (ITT) that leave some scope for bidders to define the service. This was mentioned, to slightly different extents, by interviewees from four areas.

Interviewees said that when commissioning services they composed tenders of varying specificity. Some invitations to tender only specify the broad area to be addressed or the outcome to be achieved, leaving the modality of intervention to be defined by service providers (several interviewees described their approach to commissioning as ‘outcome focused’). One interviewee commented that the purpose behind invitations to tender which left scope to define the interventions was to encourage creativity on the part of providers and to help commissioners find out about new ideas.

In other tendering exercises, the kind of intervention to be commissioned is outlined in more detail. One interviewee said that there is typically less scope for service providers to define the intervention where a statutory service is being commissioned.

An example of a commissioning process where there was engagement with service providers is described in Text Box 3. It involved commissioners in the CDRP entering into dialogue and negotiation with providers who had submitted bids, in order to ensure commissioned services were value for money and met local need.

**Text Box 3: Commissioning diversion activities for young people**

This commissioning process started by the identification by the CDRP of geographical areas in which anti-social behaviour by young people was problematic. The Partnership knew that, broadly, they wanted to commission sporting, media and arts-type activities for young people in these identified areas to ‘divert’ them from disorderly behaviour; however, they left the detail of the interventions to be defined by service providers. Local organisations were invited to submit proposals in response to an initiation to tender. The proposals were assessed by young people, the CDRP board and the police.

The partnership engaged with providers who had responded, asking them to amend the submitted proposals so as to ensure that the bids met the needs of the partnership and service users. For example, a small number of bids were submitted to provide services in some geographical areas, and the partnership addressed this by instructing those organisations which had bid to work across the whole borough to instead focus on those areas which had few bids. Where similar bids were submitted for work in adjacent areas, they asked providers to cooperate. The exercise resulted in about twenty voluntary organisations being commissioned.
4.3 Assessing and selecting providers

Knowing of the existence of or receiving a tender from a service provider is merely the first step. The next is to make judgements about known providers; specifically whether they will deliver a quality service which is value for money.

Interviewees mentioned five key factors which feed into their assessments about service providers: their institutional credentials; their ‘track record’; their capacity to undertake performance management; their ability to begin work quickly; and their ethos and approach. We discuss each of these below.

Institutional credentials

Once particular service providers were in contact with commissioners, information could be collected from them, often as part of a procurement process, about their financial situation, charitable status, performance management arrangements, costs, and so on. It was this kind of ‘institutional’ information – about financial provenance and organisational structure – which was mentioned first, and most commonly, by interviewees. The emphasis appeared to be upon satisfying procurement rules.

Track record

Despite the focus on institutional credentials, two interviewees said that they would look to collect information about whether a service provider had worked effectively or at least competently in the past. Both of these interviewees said they would look for a ‘track record’ on the part of a provider. It proved hard to unpack what, exactly this meant or how it could be demonstrated. Clearly, information showing a reduction in crime correlated with work by the provider would be evidence of success, but it appeared to extend to information showing that performance targets were met or that users and/or commissioners were satisfied with the service. One interviewee working in Youth Justice commented that she was unlikely to commission a provider who did not have ‘background’ or references.

Evidence of a track record was also obtained from having worked with a particular provider in the past. One interviewee said: ‘All areas are guilty of always using the same people, because that’s who they know’. Another interviewee said that ‘if they have performed well, you often return to the same provider without competitive tendering, especially if the budget for an intervention is very small which, in our case, is most of the work’. This use of what another interviewee called ‘historical providers’ appeared to be quite common. Although our evidence does not speak to this issue, we can hypothesise that this could have important implications for opportunities for new or smaller service providers, which may be unable to provide evidence of a track record. The way in which the ‘market’ for service providers develops and operates in particular areas may be, to a significant extent, determined by commissioning authorities’ requirements, raising interesting questions about whether and how these ‘markets’ can be stimulated to improve competition and provide more (and perhaps better) alternatives.

Performance management

The ability of a service provider to undertake performance management also emerged as important in assessing and selecting service providers. The importance of monitoring
commissioned services was stressed by twelve interviewees, and of those, several said that it was important that service providers themselves had the capacity to deliver data about their own performance. This finding resonates with other research that notes the tendency of voluntary and third sector organisations to become ‘professionalised and managerialised’ when they form partnerships with local or central Government. Of course, being able to monitor service delivery is necessary to assess whether public money is being spent efficiently and effectively, but at the same time, requirements to conform to demanding monitoring and reporting requirements may disadvantage small service providers. One interviewee specifically commented that small providers often found it difficult to comply with monitoring requirements and that because of this it might be better to commission ‘bigger outfits’. We can speculate that it would also be difficult for new service providers or providers who are new to an area to undertake onerous monitoring requirements.

**Ability to get ‘up and running’**

Some interviewees indicated that capacity to get up and running quickly could be an important factor in assessing and selecting providers. One interviewee described how the probation service had been selected to provide a particular intervention to address domestic violence because they had the capacity to begin delivering the service very quickly; they had experience of conducting the work as part of their core, statutory services and were able to staff the project immediately.

**The desire to commission a particular approach**

Although this was not described widely in these interviews, one interviewee mentioned that one factor which may have influenced the selection of the probation service in the above example was the fact that it would run the intervention in the way the commissioners wanted, in terms of ethos and approach. The intervention in question related to work with perpetrators of domestic violence. The CDRP wanted the programme to be based upon the same principles – of encouraging perpetrators to accept responsibility and recognise the harm they cause – as the mainstream probation programme. Other providers may have taken a slightly different approach which was not necessarily in line with the commissioners’ preferences.

### 4.4 The impact of the current economic climate

During interviews we asked interviewees about the effect, if any, they thought the current financial climate might have upon commissioning and the use of evidence. Three interviewees mentioned a possible effect in relation to innovation: tighter budgets might make it more difficult to try new ideas and might make commissioners more careful, more risk-adverse. and even more likely to stick to tried and tested practice than they are already.

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An interviewee from the Government Offices commented that there was, generally, increased pressure on CDRPs to be accountable as to their public spending and to be more strategic in their approach (questioning existing spending and whether it would be continued); a tighter economic climate would just feed into this. One interviewee commented that a reduction in funding was likely to lead to less money being made available for evaluation.

4.5 Concluding remarks

Generally, interviewees reported that they had enough information about local service providers, although we were not able to explore the accuracy or comprehensiveness of that information. As with information about what works, informal networks of contacts were key to practitioners’ knowledge about which service providers existed in the area. Commissioners also appear to be open to approaches from pro-active providers who can ‘sell’ their way of working or intervention. ‘Commissioning’ is a term which describes what appears to be an at times ad hoc process; rather than a systematic process of defining the problem, identifying and assessing a possible solution, and then searching for a provider to deliver it, the starting point for commissioning could be that a service provider approaches and makes a pitch to the commissioner. Larger, more established and more entrepreneurial service providers are likely to be advantaged by this ad hoc arrangement, since they may be more likely to be well networked, well known, and likely to have the resources and contacts necessary for ‘marketing’ themselves to commissioners.

Once commissioners knew about a service provider, assessment of the provider tended to arise from the procurement process, rather than an assessment of the likely effectiveness of the provider. It is not possible to say on the basis of our interviews whether providers were able to point to robust evidence of their effectiveness; indications were, however, that this kind of evidence is simply not available.
Once a service provider has been commissioned, interviewees explained that it is necessary to monitor the implementation and delivery of that service, and ideally, to evaluate the impact of that service upon the social problem being addressed. This chapter sets out our findings about whether, how, and using what information, commissioned services were monitored and evaluated.

There is a distinction worth highlighting between performance monitoring and evaluation. The former takes place throughout the time a service is provided and involves the systematic collection of data on specified indicators that relate primarily to the extent of progress against specific outputs and within given resources. Evaluations, on the other hand, are typically assessments of an ongoing or completed service or intervention, focusing on its design, implementation and, most importantly, its impact. Other questions that evaluations consider include the sustainability, acceptability and replicability of the intervention under scrutiny. In sum, monitoring gives information on where a policy, programme or project is relative to targets and outcomes. Evaluation gives evidence of what the impact of particular interventions may be, including but not exclusively the specific targets and outcomes intended; it also seeks to provide evidence and address issues of causality (i.e. whether and how the intervention itself contributes to any changes observed).  

5.1 An expressed commitment to monitoring and evaluation

As alluded to in section 4.3, performance monitoring was described as central to commissioning, because commissioning services involved complying with rules about procurement. ‘Evaluation’ was also described by some interviewees as an essential part of any commissioned service; four interviewees said that evaluations of commissioned services were always (or almost always) conducted. A number of interviewees referred to evaluations of interventions which had been conducted or were planned. For example, one interviewee who was involved in work to address alcohol-related disorder by engaging with the licensed trade spoke of an evaluation of this service which looked at levels of violence and disorder before and after the intervention was put in place. In another example, two

interviewees from government offices spoke of consultants being brought in to conduct an independent evaluation of a local project to address alcohol related disorder.

On the other hand, it did appear that the commitment to evaluation varies between areas, depending on practitioners’ knowledge and experience of research. One interviewee described how the probation service in their area had a ‘culture of research’; the service had a research department which regularly carried out evaluations, and these evaluations were published on their website. An interviewee from the Home Office referred to guidance issued by the Home Office to local areas on conducting evaluations.\[^{17}\] However, as we explore below, many interviewees identified challenges to conducting evaluations of services provided or commissioned.

5.2 The content of ‘evaluation’ of commissioned services

In spite of overall commitment to and recognition of the importance of evaluations, when probed as to what evaluation meant in practice it seemed that there was a very blurred line between performance management and evaluation. There are two different types of information that interviewees said were involved in ‘evaluation’ of commissioned services: data about outcomes and measures of process. Each of these is discussed below, and it is clear from the discussion that none of these measures strictly enable evaluation. However, as discussed in section 5.4, when asked about this, interviewees recognised the limitations of their ability to ‘evaluate’ services.

Data about outcomes of service provision

Several interviewees gave examples of evaluations which looked at outcomes of service delivery, commonly ‘before and after’ evaluations that looked at either crime or other relevant statistics, or at impressions of service users. Whilst this can only show a correlation rather than cause and effect, using this kind of output data is a good start, and might be all that is possible given the time and resource constraints.

Two interviewees mentioned that they use iQuanta to compare themselves and their performance to similar CDRPs. By using a similar area as a comparison, practitioners were employing some principles of evaluation. However, this could not demonstrate that improvements in outcomes were due to the commissioned intervention.

Measures of process and throughput

Many ‘evaluations’ involved detailed description of what was done, such as staffing levels, set up and running costs and numbers of service users. One commissioner, for example, told us that he made site visits to get a sense of the day-to-day running of commissioned services. This overlaps closely with the kind of information required as part of the (often very stringent) local authorities’ commissioning and procurement processes.

\[^{17}\] It is possible the interviewee was referring to Home Office (2009). National Support Framework Delivering Safer and Confident Communities Passport to Evaluation 2.0. London: Home Office.
Case studies were mentioned by one practitioner as a method of monitoring or evaluating some interventions. The ‘story’ of a particular service user is presented, demonstrating the effect upon them and, in the words of one interviewee ‘the difference it had made to them’. Another interviewee described how, in relation to a street pastors scheme, an account of the first night on the job written by a new pastor had been widely circulated locally and to the Government Office, describing what the pastor did and who they interacted with. Whilst such case study approaches may provide a useful tool for monitoring some aspects of implementation and practice, they do not, strictly, enable evaluation.

5.3 Challenges to evaluation

Interviewees, when questioned, had a clear idea about the limits of the evaluations they were and were not able to conduct. One interviewee, for example, mentioned that answering questions about the counterfactual (‘what if the intervention had not been implemented’) was very difficult, and she acknowledged it might not be possible. Along the same lines, an interviewee from the Government Offices pointed out that areas often implement a number of responses to a problem at the same time, making it hard to separate out the effects of the different initiatives. Another commented that evaluation was often not ‘in depth’ and was more performance management than evaluation. Two interviewees from the Home Office mentioned the limitations of CDRP analytical capacity to undertake evaluations.

Nevertheless, a few interviewees argued that even limited evaluations had value. For instance, one interviewee commented that whilst it might not provide information about cause and effect, the kind of evaluations conducted of commissioned services could be a proxy indicator of whether things were going in the right direction. Another interviewee mentioned it would be useful to have clear, shared guidelines on ‘when to do evaluations, and how, so we can establish more clearly whether something in ‘good practice”.

What ‘counts’ as good evidence?

There are statistical techniques and research designs which, when employed, enable researchers to make statements about the likelihood that intervention A caused effect B. However, there are a number of barriers to the use of such techniques. First, they are often expensive. When asked about local evaluation, one interviewee replied that it seemed ‘disproportionate to spend scarce resources on evaluation of a service when only a small amount such as £4,000 or £5,000 are available for the service itself’.

Second, these techniques require significant time commitment, whereas some interventions are commissioned for only a year or even for a matter of months. Third, such techniques require specialist expertise that practitioners working in CDRPs or Local Authorities may lack. Even if the time and resources were available the small scale of some local interventions mean that sample sizes may be insufficient for the most robust research designs to be implemented.

Given this, there are questions yet to be resolved as to what should ‘count’ as evidence that a particular service or intervention is effective enough to be continued or attempted in
another area. The fact that this is not resolved is reflected in the Home Office Effective Practice Database – which was intended at its inception to include only fully evaluated interventions, but for reasons of practicality this database was opened up to other forms of evidence.

### 5.4 Concluding remarks

All the interviewees we spoke to were aware of the need for commissioned services to be performance monitored and evaluated – in the same way as they would seek to monitor any public money they spent. According to them, performance management arrangements are standard in contracts with service providers, and performance is regularly reported back to the commissioning body, for example, the CDRP.

However, in relation to evaluation – that is, understanding whether the service or intervention caused a change in the social problem being addressed – current arrangements seem to be less developed. Whilst most areas can compare crime rates or public satisfaction before and after an intervention, time, resources and skills impose limits upon how much evaluation can reasonably be expected locally, as do the often short time scale and small size of many local interventions.

While the issue of proportionality in evaluation (that is, spending scarce resources on evaluating a very small project may seem disproportionate) is important, the lack of formal evaluation poses risks to value for money, even in the case of interventions costing small amounts of money, since it compromises commissioners’ ability to reliably judge the effectiveness of the services they fund. This prevents areas (both those providing the service and others seeking ‘good practice’ examples from their colleagues elsewhere) from maximising learning and capacity building from the work that they do. The question remains as to what should count as ‘good’ or at least ‘good enough’ evidence of effective practice, and therefore, what should we expect of local commissioners in terms of evaluation.
Practitioners from CDRPs and local authorities with whom we spoke during this research were keen to engage with the issue of value for money in public spending. They seemed committed to the thorough assessment of local problems, triangulating information from different agencies and stakeholders. They were also keen to learn from good and promising practice elsewhere, and the vast majority took steps in their day-to-day work to seek out information about potentially effective services. Further, they agreed in principle that there should be evaluation to look at whether interventions improved outcomes. In sum, we found extensive evidence of a willingness amongst practitioners to ensure, to the extent that is possible, value for money in the provision of public services.

Building on practitioners’ willingness to seek ‘good practice’ and use information our findings suggest there is scope for supporting commissioners to make more evidence-based decisions through the use of information, without adding to their workload. Drawing on the interviews conducted for this project, we suggest a few practical measures which this research suggests might support those funding or commissioning public services in making more informed value for money decisions.\textsuperscript{18} In order to do this, however, such measures must be feasible and acceptable to local practitioners who clearly are interested in improving their understanding of what works and what is promising, but who but often lack the time, resources and sometimes specialist or technical skills.

\textbf{Enhancing understanding of the meaning of ‘good practice’}

In response to our findings about the variety of activities which are covered by the term ‘good practice’ we think that practitioners might benefit from better or more accessible guidance on what actually constitutes ‘good practice’ or ‘promising practice’ so they are better equipped to assess and decide whether to implement ideas in their areas. The aim would not be to make local practitioners into researchers or experts in methodology, but merely to strengthen their ability to assess and draw from the information which appears on websites like the Home Office Best Practice Database and which is circulated through other formal and informal networks.

This is part of a wider need for CDRPs (and perhaps other areas of local government) to develop their analytical capacity through, for example, employing people with research and analysis skills. This might improve their ability to use data which is shared between local

\textsuperscript{18} Of course it would be worth testing these indicative findings through further interviews, survey work and workshops or focus groups to obtain a wider sense of their applicability.
agencies in decision making – including commissioning decisions. It may also improve, in the absence of robust evaluation information, their ability to assess whether innovative but as yet un-evaluated practice is showing promising results.

When making commissioning decisions the local practitioners interviewed in this research appeared to trust their own judgement and expertise (and that of their colleagues) as much if not more than information from more formal sources. If this is the case more widely, then part of the key to improving decision making may be to develop practitioners’ capacity to assess risks and returns from established ‘good practices’ and from promising innovations that claim to be ‘good practice’. A concern with developing capacity in this area echoes a message from a report by the Department for Communities and Local Government which states that ‘greater investment should be made in the development of commissioning skills and capacity in local government’.

**Develop a centralised scheme for evaluation of commissioned services**

It is unrealistic to expect that full evaluations of commissioned services can be widely conducted locally. A response to this is to explore the possibility that evaluations of interventions could be centralised in some way. A central evaluation team could draw multiple, similar interventions in different parts of the country together as part of the same ‘strand’ of evaluation activity, and conduct a more robust assessment of effectiveness than could be carried out by local authorities individually (for example, there would be larger sample sizes). Of course, the methods employed in such evaluations would need to delve into the ‘black box’ of local context to identify key drivers of change, but this is entirely possible using available evaluation techniques.

A variation of this theme would be to concentrate centralised evaluation efforts upon pilot schemes or areas, to provide robust assessments of effectiveness at an early stage of a new intervention. This information could then be shared via a centralised database or in other ways, and would contribute to a more reliable evidence base to be disseminated using informal networks.

**Create an evaluation fund**

A centralised fund could be created specifically for the purpose of conducting robust, local evaluations so that commissioners would not need to draw funds from interventions themselves, which often have very limited budgets, to evaluate their outcomes. For example, local practitioners could bid for money from this fund to evaluate new practices that they are implementing, thus acting as a pilot area. Only bids which met quality standards in research design and methodology would be approved. Practitioners would probably need support in writing the bids and it could be a condition of the award of a grant from this fund that practitioners are advised by a professional researcher, to ensure the quality of the evaluation conducted.

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Supporting the identification of useful comparison areas

Practitioners were aware that it was not possible to simply take an initiative from one area and implement it in another; best practice from elsewhere would need to be tailored to the local demographic and nature of the problem. However, one way in which commissioners might be supported in making assessments about transferability would be through the provision of information about the ways in which they are similar or different to other areas – a baseline of information about areas which allows similarities to be identified. The evaluations, learning and ‘good practice’ examples in similar places might be more transferable and informative to commissioners than the interventions and examples from other areas. This kind of information might give commissioners the security to take risks on providers that have innovative solutions that may have worked elsewhere or be based on effective practice elsewhere. There are currently, for example, ‘groupings’ of CDRPs into most similar families but it is not clear whether these groupings are well suited to identifying areas from which ‘good practice’ might more easily be transferred.

This research has provided an opportunity to hear about the range of information drawn upon by some local practitioners who are in a position to fund interventions and services to address local social challenges. We have provided a framework for thinking about some of the types of information needed to make such funding decisions, and based upon analysis of our findings we have drawn out some possible implications and recommendations. These recommendations are, like the research, exploratory, and merit further investigation. We believe it would be useful to consider some of these recommendations with commissioners and service providers themselves; both to hear what these groups think of our preliminary conclusions and suggestions, and to get a balanced view of their needs and the challenges they face in achieving efficiency, effectiveness and value for money in commissioning, given local needs and available resources.
APPENDICES
Appendix A: Methodology and approach

The findings in this report are based upon twenty-three semi-structured interviews conducted in May and July 2009 by three members of the RAND Europe research team. This appendix describes the research approach and methodology.

The impetus for the research

The questions posed in this research originate from previous collaborative work between NESTA and RAND Europe looking at the ability of third sector and voluntary agencies to demonstrate their effectiveness and thus compete for work. RAND Europe, NPC and NESTA had been exploring the creation of a ‘results library’ – a database of evidence about ‘good practice’ and promising innovations that could be used by commissioners, service providers and service users to identify interventions and approaches to addressing social challenges for which they sought improved outcomes.

Whilst this research on local authority commissioning is a standalone project, its aim is to contribute to the development of NESTA Lab’s\(^{20}\) agenda on Local Authorities by offering insight into the kind of information on which commissioners draw when making decisions about what services and interventions to fund.

Selecting a methodology

Semi-structured interviews with commissioners and key informants were selected as the most appropriate methodology to answer the research questions within the time and resource constraints of the project.

An outline of key topics to be covered in the interviews was drawn up in consultation with the NESTA Team. This semi-structured interview protocol, or topic guide, is provided as Appendix B, below.

The advantages of using semi-structured interviews is that the pre-determined topics in the outline were covered with all interviewees, thus increasing the chance that comparable data is collected from each interviewee. However, a semi-structured interview enables flexibility to vary the order of the questions, to improvise questions to clarify or extend answers and

\(^{20}\) See http://www.nestalab.org.uk/
to ask additional questions (which, for example, took account of the particular features of
an area). The interviews, therefore, had a conversational style, becoming ‘conversations
with a purpose’ at some points, but maintaining a necessary orientation to cover core areas
of interest.

The development of the sample of respondents

There were two strands to our sampling strategy: speaking to local commissioners and to
key informants. At the broadest level the aim of our sampling strategy was to allow us to
speak with people working within local authorities who had personal experience of making
commissioning decisions, or who were knowledgeable about how such decisions were
made. To implement this sampling strategy we needed to decide:

• how to focus substantively
• the geographical areas to approach
• whom to interview within those areas.

We also had to decide which key informants to approach. These are discussed below:

1) Substantive focus

It was decided at the NESTA-RAND Europe kick off meeting that the research would
primarily focus on people working in the area of crime and disorder, particularly violent
crime but also interventions for offenders, crime prevention work and so on. The reasons
for this focus were threefold. Firstly, this is one of the areas in which a Results Library
might eventually focus. Secondly, RAND Europe had expertise and knowledge of local
Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and the kinds of interventions being
employed locally to respond to crime problems. This expertise helped us both to select
knowledgeable and well placed interviewees, and ask insightful and probing questions
during interviews. Thirdly, and related to the second, we were aware that there were a
number of funding streams available for CDRPs to spend on interventions to address
violence and anti-social behaviour, and thus we hoped that there would be commissioning
activity in this field.

2) Selecting geographical areas

We took the preliminary decision to try to speak to CDRPs in a number of different
Government Office Regions. We then drew on the following sources of information to
identify a pool of potential areas from which to draw interviewees.

Local strategic assessments and crime and disorder reduction strategies

It is a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce a crime and disorder reduction
strategy, and most areas make this available on the internet. We looked at approximately
30 different strategies (from two CDRPs from each government region). From this we

21 There are nine government office regions in England: the North East; the North West; Yorkshire and the
Humber; East Midlands; West Midlands; East; South West; London
drew up a list of 15-20 CDRPs whose strategies stated that tackling violence or some other specific crime problem was a priority in that area.

LAA National Indicator Set priorities

The Improvement and Development Agency lists on its website the National Indicators chosen by each Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). There are a number of indicators which relate to violent crime:

- NI 15 Serious Violent Crime Rate (selected by 50 areas)
- NI 20 Assault with injury crime rate (selected by 83 areas)
- NI 28 Serious Knife crime (selected by one area)
- NI 29 Gun Crime Rate (selected by three areas)

We looked for LSPs which had selected at least one NI. We then looked for overlaps between these LSPs and the CDRPs selected because violence (etc.) was priority in that area.

Tackling Violent Crime Programme (TVCP)

This programme\(^{22}\) was launched in 2004 and was aimed at areas which have a high level of violent crime. Part of this programme involves spreading ‘good practice’ and highlighting innovations. Thus areas which were selected to take part in the TVCP are likely to have had a good opportunity to access information and have been strongly encouraged to use evidence. We selected three or four areas that joined the programme in the 2006 round, again, cross referencing with the areas who had selected National Indicators related to violence and CDRPs for whom violence was a priority in their strategy. We also included areas some that were NOT part of the TVCP.

Sources of funding

We tried to work forward from two other sources of funding apart from the TVCP: the Connected Fund\(^{23}\) and the Safer Communities Fund\(^{24}\). This sampling strategy, however, was hard to implement; some of these funding streams had dried up and some were administered directly by central Government thus bypassing local authority decision making.

By consulting and cross referencing all the above sources we drew up a list of about 20 areas as a pool to be potentially contacted.

3) Selecting interviewees from each area

The initial strategy, decided at the kick off meeting between NESTA and RAND Europe, was to select about four different areas and interview two or three people in each who were working at different levels of the local authority or CDRP organisation.

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\(^{22}\) No longer running – now replaced by the Tackling Knives Action Programme

\(^{23}\) [http://connected.homeoffice.gov.uk/index.html](http://connected.homeoffice.gov.uk/index.html)

\(^{24}\) [http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/crimereduction036.htm](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/crimereduction036.htm)
In line with this approach, our starting point for identifying interviewees was to contact the Community Safety Manager, or equivalent role, within a CDRP. It was hoped that this person would either be able to take part in the interview themselves, or suggest the correct people to speak to; thus we hoped to employ a snowball approach.

For some of the 20 areas identified, RAND Europe knew the name and contact of the Community Safety Manager from previous work. For those areas where we did not know a contact, we used Google to search for those details. Only one or two areas did name their Community Safety Manager (of equivalent) on their webpages.

To start with, the RAND team sent emails or telephoned about five Community Safety Managers from five different areas, in the hope that at least three or four would respond and could begin our snowballing approach.

We had a good response to these emails and arranged interviews with three Community Safety Managers. One of those interviewees was able to suggest two further potential interviewees within that area, however they were not at different levels of the organisation but rather worked for different agencies involved in the local authority or worked in a separate part of the local authority. Thus these suggested people were occupying roles which were outside of the intended scope of the sampling strategy.

The other two of our initial interviewees did not think that it would be worth while speaking to others in their area.

We also began to question our initial sampling approach on grounds of the usefulness of speaking to many people within each area; instead we came to think that it might be more useful to try to capture information from a wider number of areas. Having discussed this with the NESTA team we contacted people from more of the areas in the initial pool of 20.

In total we contacted 12 different areas, arranging interviews with people from 8 of these.

4) Selecting key informants

We aimed to speak to selected key informants in order to get a bigger picture of commissioning practice on a national scale, to learn about any recent or forthcoming developments, and to talk over emerging findings from interviews with local commissioners.

As a starting point we decided to approach interviewees from the Home Office, because it operates the Effective Practice Database and makes policy for CDRPs. We used RAND and NESTA’s existing knowledge of the organisation to identify two or three potential interviewees. Using the internet, we also contacted the part of the Home Office responsible for liaison with CDRPs, and contacted potential interviewees there.

Secondly, we decided to approach interviewees from Regional Government Offices because they act as a ‘go between’ for the Home Office and local partnerships, and many local commissioners had mentioned during interviews that they sought advice from Government Offices about ‘good practice’. Some local interviewees suggested contacts at Government Offices.
The third key informant we approach was selected on the basis that a local partnership was seeking to introduce a best practice model of information sharing between accident and emergency departments and the local police, in order to gather information about violence which is not otherwise reported to the police. We approached a Consultant who was involved in this.

Fourthly, we sought an interviewee from IDeA. The commissioning team at NESTA were able to suggest appropriate contacts.

Finally, using RAND’s contacts, we were able to interview someone who currently works in health service commissioning, but who had previously worked in local authority commissioning.

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Appendix B: Interview protocol

Introduction to the interview and the project

• [NESTA] Blurb.

We're conducting some research for NESTA looking at how Local Authorities and CDRPs decide what interventions, providers or programmes to fund when they have a pot of funding for reducing crime or addressing other significant social challenges.

• Tell interviewee:
  - We will use job title/role to identity interviewees but will not use their name or area, and will remove references to specific initiatives which would allow the area to be identified.
  - The information gathered from interviews will be written up in a report which will be used by NESTA (through internal publications, workshop material or roundtable discussions), but will not necessarily be published more broadly. The project will not report any findings publicly in a way which would reveal your identity).
  - At interviewees’ request, we will allow them to check the factual accuracy of any comments we are using in the final report.

Interviewee’s job, role and ‘discretion’ to spend

1. Could you please clarify/confirm your job title?
   1.1. and role?

2. How long have you worked within [area]?
   2.1. and in this position?

3. On average, how much budget is allocated (by your department? By the council? From central government) to crime and disorder generally, and to tackling violent crime specifically?

TVCP areas
4. Is or has [area] been part of the Tackling Violent Crime Programme?

5. When were you made part of the Tackling Violent Crime Programme?

6. What kind of funding was made available through the Programme?

7. How much discretion do you/ your colleagues have to spend this money?

   7.1. Are there any constraints on how it is spent?
       - formal/ informal
       - internal/ due to the requirements of the programme/ funding

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**Other sources of funding**

8. What 'pots' of money do you have to spend on violent crime/ crime and disorder?

   8.1. How much?

   8.2. How frequent?

   8.3. Do you have to bid for them/ how are they allocated?

   8.4. What constraints are attached to different 'pots'?

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**What interventions have been funded?**

9. Can you give examples of programmes/ interventions/ initiatives related to violent crime or crime and disorder that the Council has delivered or commissioned others to deliver, using some of these pots of money you’ve just mentioned?

   - What was the nature of the intervention, who was it aimed at, how long will it last, who provided it?

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**Probing the examples 1: Selecting interventions**

10. Using one or two of the examples of programmes, interventions or initiatives you’ve just mentioned, can you tell us about how this programme/ intervention was selected?

   - Encourage interviewees to use two examples. If possible, which are funded from different pots or deal with different problems

   10.1. Who was involved?

   10.2. What factors influenced choice of intervention?

      - Restrictions on how funding could be spent
      - (Government) policy priorities
- Local area agreements (national indicators and locally defined priorities)
- Informal networks (friends, professional colleagues, etc)
- Formal networks – conferences etc
- Local or national media or public interest
- Information/evidence about problems in the community
- Information/evidence on performance of delivery bodies, outcomes, etc ‘what works’ Clarify understanding of ‘evidence’.

10.3. Were these examples ‘typical’ or unusual? Why?

Probing examples 2: Sources & use of information about effectiveness/ outcomes/ value for money /new ideas

If, in relation to these examples, you did have information about effective or new practice in tackling violence …

11. What was that information?

12. From where did you get the information or evidence?
   - websites, guidelines, peer review papers, grey literature, conferences and events, networks of colleagues etc

13. How did you determine which information was useful/could be drawn on in this case?
   - are there agreed sites, databases, etc do you have your own approach?

14. Were there any particular challenges in using this kind of information?
   - e.g. not directly applicable to the Council’s context, language too technical, resources not sufficient to do what the evidence indicates, etc)

15. Where there any particular challenges to finding and obtaining this information?

16. What might have helped overcome these challenges?

17. How typical are these examples, in terms of the information used and how you access the information?

Probing the examples 3: Sources & use of information about providers/ delivery bodies

18. Who delivered/ provided the interventions?

18.1. What kind or organisation?

18.2. How large?
18.3. Had you used them before?

19. How was the provider selected?
   - *Competitive tender, established relationship?*

20. Were there a range of possible providers to choose between?
   - **20.1.** Did you have information about different providers?
   - **20.2.** Where there any particular challenges to finding and obtaining this information?
   - **20.3.** What might have helped overcome these challenges?
     - *In terms of the processes, challenges and strengths?*

21. Were there any providers or interventions which could be seen as relatively unknown but who demonstrated new practices?
   - **21.1.** If so, how were these ‘innovative’/ or new providers/ interventions perceived, as compared with more well known organisations and services?
   - **21.2.** How would or did you decide between a provider or intervention with a track record (whether evaluation type evidence of outcomes or not) and what might be seen as a riskier new innovation?
   - **21.3.** Were there any challenges in deciding who will deliver this particular intervention?
   - **21.4.** Where there any aspects of the decision-making process that worked particularly well?
   - **21.5.** How common/typical were the processes, challenges and strengths on this particular instance?

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**A counter-factual**

22. Have you ever used information to challenge central government instructions as to how budget should be spent?

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**Economic downturn**

23. What effect, if any, do you think the current economic situation will have upon the Council’s spending decisions?

24. Have you noticed any changes in approach, or any particular things getting squeezed, in choosing areas for tackling, providers to tackle them, etc with the economic downturn?