

June 2010

## Commissioning to develop and sustain user-led organisations (ULO)

### Key messages

- developing ULOs is a key component in delivering personalisation outcomes
- strong ULOs help commissioners tackle inequality, build social capital, contribute to prevention, and be more responsive to the local community
- ULOs in the UK have a long history, and share common values of choice, involvement and human rights
- the essential features of a ULO are that it is run and controlled by service users, promotes the social model and independent living, and provides peer support
- commissioners can help ULOs by creating a level playing field and making their processes more accessible
- commissioners can pump prime ULOs to support their development and can consider limiting tenders to supported businesses
- good procurement is not just about price but about meeting social objectives.

### Introduction

This At a glance summary looks at how commissioners working in local authorities can commission in a way that develops and strengthens user-led organisations (ULO). It is a summary of a longer guide – SCIE guide 36 – available online at [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk).

A ULO is an organisation that is run and controlled by people who use support services, including disabled people, mental health service users, people with learning difficulties, older people, and their families and carers (SCIE, 2009).

Commissioning ULOs is important because the Putting People First initiative to transform adult social care highlights the need to work with ULOs in developing and delivering services.

ULO play a unique role in the local community by providing a point of contact for information and advice. They have expertise in advocacy, accessibility, self-help and peer support and are a ready-made partner to co-produce services. However they often have difficulties in attracting long-term finance, (especially to cover core running costs), and attracting sufficient activists with skills in such areas as business development.

Commissioners can create and sustain ULOs by making their contracting processes more accessible and easier to understand; by developing the tender specification with local service user involvement and by considering limiting tenders to supported businesses.

### The value of ULOs

ULO are uniquely placed to help commissioners fulfil policy requirements, including personalisation and the transformation of adult social care. Their knowledge and skills can also help to make commissioning more effective. This is because ULOs are founded on shared core values which have arisen from the lived experience of service users.



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A ULO is an organisation based on clear values of independence, involvement and peer support. Unlike other third sector organisations, service users have the power and control over the organisation. ULOs are unique because their knowledge is based on direct, lived experience.

(Shaping Our Lives)

ULOs of disabled people, in their current form, started in the early 1980s with the activities of disabled people in Hampshire who wanted to escape from residential care to live in the community. The Hampshire Centre for Independent living (HCIL) was formed to support this group, and others like them, to live in the community. Many more CILs and ULOs have been established since, especially following the passing of direct payment legislation in 1996.

### What ULOs do

The Department of Health has produced 21 design criteria to describe what a ULO looks like and the sort of services it provides. The criteria are detailed because of the need to be clear about what a ULO is and what it is not. You can find the design criteria on the DH website at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk), under 'policy and guidance'.

The criteria cover three broad areas: the value base – (e.g. promoting the social model and independent living), how a ULO is governed and managed – (e.g. a minimum of 75 per cent of the members of the management committee should be service users), and the sort of services ULOs provide, (e.g. advocacy and peer support).

A ULO does not have to fulfil all of the 21 design criteria and, in reality, most do not. The criteria are to provide a picture of what a ULO could do – the gold standard.

### Typical activities of a ULO might include:

- information and advice
- advocacy and peer support
- support in using personal budgets and direct payments
- assistance with self assessment and support planning
- support in employing personal assistants
- equality training
- campaigning
- co-producing policies and services with local statutory agencies.

### Diversity

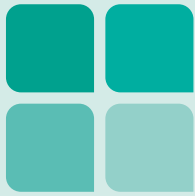
As ULOs are often small and insecure, it has not been easy for them to include all sections of the community. This is because funding has typically been from specific impairment budgets, preventing ULOs from reaching out to other social care user groups. Another reason is that in the early days of direct payments, these were only available to younger people with physical and sensory impairments.

It is important that all sections of the community have the opportunity to have their voice heard and be involved in ULOs. This means that ULOs need to include all social care user groups and all sectors of the community.

To achieve this, ULOs need resources. Organisations representing particular groups should also be resourced and supported to play a part in a central ULO, or network of ULOs.

### Carers

Historically, users and carers have felt a need to compete to have their aspirations recognised. Service users and carers are likely to have different agendas on a day-to-day basis, but fundamentally their interests coincide. It makes sense for a ULO to include carers either within the ULO itself, or for the ULO to be working with a carers' organisation.



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### Barriers to the Sustainability of ULOs

**Limited income** – especially to cover core costs.

**Business acumen** – ULOs are run by people who have been excluded from areas such as employment, which means their opportunities for skill development have been limited.

**Exclusion from other parts of the third sector** – civil society organisations with a remit for development and training (for example councils for voluntary service) don't always include ULOs.

**Tendering and contracting** – much tendering and contracting by statutory agencies favours large organisations with the specialist resources to respond to tenders.

**Valuing what ULOs do** – the support that ULOs can give to service users is not always recognised or valued.

### Commissioning approaches

**Commissioning policies can be developed that:**

- encourage the development of ULOs and promote the use of third sector infrastructure resources to benefit ULOs
- work in partnership with ULOs to develop and deliver services
- foster a level playing field for ULOs to compete in the tendering process, including giving adequate time and making the process accessible
- consider how the contract specification could be drawn up to encourage ULOs
- recognise the added value that ULOs bring, including credibility with service users and working to independent living outcomes
- offer three to five year funding agreements
- use the principles of the local compact to inform commissioning arrangements
- take account of article 19 of the EU Procurement Directive 2004/18/EC to reserve contracts for ULOs.

#### Reserving public contracts for supported businesses

- a 'supported business' is where over 50 per cent of the workforce are disabled people
- for contracts under £144k, invite tenders from supported businesses only, or offer the chance to match your best price
- for larger contracts tick the 'reserve under article 19' box in EU advert
- treasury guidance suggests there should be at least one contract with a supported business.

For more information, see:

[http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Supported\\_Factories\\_\\_Businesses.pdf](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Supported_Factories__Businesses.pdf)

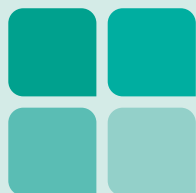
#### Developing a new ULO

Commissioners in Tamworth decided the area needed a ULO. They worked with a ULO in a neighbouring authority to help them establish a local group. Mercian Ability Partnership (MAP) was formed to be the voice of local disabled people. It took time to establish the ULO but now it is providing information, advice and services to support independent living. Sustainability has been built into the organisation through training in securing bids, strong governance structures, secure premises and networking with other organisations to avoid duplication.

#### Strengthening and networking amongst existing ULOs

Hampshire has a number of very large, well established ULOs that have a long association with the local authority. One of the oldest, Southampton Centre for Independent Living (SCIL), worked with Hampshire Centre for Independent Living to set up a Personalisation expert panel or PEP. The PEP brings together a wide range of user and carer-led organisations with senior social services managers. It enables these groups to influence the local authority agenda and also provides a forum for ULOs to network with one another.

The full guide, *A commissioner's guide to developing and sustaining local ULOs* is available at [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)



## Commissioning to develop and sustain user-led organisations (ULOs)

### Further reading

Branfield, F. and Beresford, P. (2006) *Making user involvement work: supporting service user networking and knowledge*, London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Department of Health (2009) *Putting people first: working together with user-led organisations*, London: DH

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the life chances of disabled people*, London: HM Government

Joint Protocol between NCIL, ADASS and the LGA protocol for the provision of User-led organisations (including Centres for Independent Living) and User Led Support Services (2009)

Maynard-Campbell, S. with Maynard, A. and Winchcombe, M. for the Department of Health (2007) *Mapping the Capacity and Potential for User-led Organisations in England*, London: DH

Morris, J. for the Department of Health (2006) *Centres for Independent Living/Local user-led organisations*, London: DH

SCIE At a glance 15 (2009) *Personalisation briefing: Implications for user-led organisations (ULOs)*, London: SCIE

Social Care, Local Government & Care Partnerships Directorate (2007) *User-led organisations project policy*, London: DH

### Useful websites

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE): [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)

For more detailed guidance, see *SCIE guide 36: A commissioner's guide to developing and sustaining local user-led organisations*.

Capacity Builders: [www.capacitybuilders.org.uk](http://www.capacitybuilders.org.uk) This website offers advice and support to third sector organisations.

Department of Health: [www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/Userledorganisations/index.htm](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/SocialCare/Socialcarereform/Userledorganisations/index.htm)  
This area of the DH website is dedicated to ULOs.

National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL): visit [www.ncil.org.uk](http://www.ncil.org.uk) and follow the link to ULO resources. This section of the NCIL website shares information about ULOs. It also records learning that has come from DH funded Action and learning sites.

SOLNET (Shaping Our Lives network): [www.solnetwork.org.uk](http://www.solnetwork.org.uk) This is a networking website for ULOs, and can help commissioners and others find out what ULOs are doing in their area.

SCIE's At a glance summaries have been developed to help you understand as quickly and easily as possible the important messages on a particular topic. You can also use them as training resources in teams or with individuals.

We want to ensure that our resources meet your needs and we would welcome your feedback on this summary. Please send comments to [info@scie.org.uk](mailto:info@scie.org.uk), or write to Publications at the address below.

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