

Minutes of the inaugural *Merlin* Working Group meeting, 7th July 2009 & Advisory Group meeting, 8th July 2009

Working Group Meeting - summary points

Comments/Suggestions:

- The standard should be looking at minimum standards, not just best practice
- Should research OGC, Direct Gov, Compete 4 (Olympic site) and LDA web portal and West London approach
- Important to keep scope of standard tight – focus should be on standard first and web portal/information opportunity second
- Agreement needs to be reached how any assessment activity will reach/affect in terms of supply chain tiers
- Consider producing an input and output matrix for the interfaces and ‘read across’ possibilities with other functions e.g. Star Rating, FAM, SRM & OFSTED
- Encouraging advertising on the portal could be a way of generating income to fund a stand alone service
- Careful consideration will need to be made about any DWP data which was posted or accessible on the site

Questions:

- How will it promote sustainability within supply chains
- What would happen to accreditation/certification if supply chain structures changed dramatically
- Will the standard be able to identify restrictive supply chain behaviour and have means to address it
- If the standard applies at provider level, will it also be able to consider the different contracts and potential supply chain structures the provider manages
- Will standard criteria be generic enough to service the needs of other supply chains and commissioning/procurement approaches e.g. MoJ(NOMS)

Actions:

- **AP 1:** Share outputs with Advisory group, advance schedule future meetings and organise as much involvement via correspondence (e mail) **Lucy Williams**

Advisory Group meeting - summary points

Comments/Suggestions:

- Advisory group believes it can help develop a solution to the Code of Conduct issues without the need for a process driven standard
- It is not felt that a 'badge of honour' approach, perceived as the direction of the support contract, is the right solution, or that providers will want to pay for such
- Agreed that there is a need and opportunity to:
 - provide definition of the actual Code of Conduct terms, rather than a re-write of the code being required
 - identify what drives the right (or wrong) behaviours underpinning the Code, including via the interface with DWP
 - look at evidence of where behaviours supporting the Code is being, or has become embedded
- A mediation service would be perceived as a watered down version of the required ombudsman requirement – people want 'teeth', not 'light touch'
- Providers will be keen that the relationship between DWP and Primes will be subject to any 360 degree feedback, as it forms the basis of the subsequent contractual arrangements within any supply chain
- As the standard will look at early stages of procurement, not just delivery, there is suggestion of review of contract design and perceived fairness of the procurement process
- Outputs from assessment should ideally help to identify the 'levers' which affect supply chain behaviours
- One area to focus on is how Primes 'offload' responsibility and risk within their supply chain to their delivery partners
- There is urgent need for standard forms to be made available to assist current procurement rounds – to be considered as part of the pilot activity
- Important that as part of any standard development work that behaviours and expectations are articulated not just for primes, but also for supply chain partners
- The standard has the opportunity to assist in preventative measures and activity which could help supply chains remain more positive
- There will need to be a compelling case for providers to want to self-finance at the end of the pilot period

- Development of an ombudsman or mediation service will need to ensure it removes likely cynicism about the effectiveness and outcomes of the service
- It will be important to develop a successful strap line which helps to both describe what the standard is, and also what it is not (i.e. not a quality standard)

Questions:

- Will any feedback from assessment be utilised within the contract evaluation process, e.g. 'read across' to supply chain management experience credentials
- If standard becomes part of annual self-assessment process, will it being able to contribute to OFSTED inspection e.g. leadership and management
- Can part of the pilot work help to evaluate and feed back on the supply chain experience
- Can the standard help to explore the tensions within supply chains between private and third sector organisations and their values and business drivers
- In terms of acid test, will the new standard be able to help incentivise good behaviour but also help weed out bad behaviour

Actions:

- **AP1:** Consider the scope of the support contract – concern that it may head off down the wrong path **Lucy Williams/Simon Shimmens**
- **AP2:** Produce forward dates for future meetings once pilot programme schedule is agreed **Lucy Williams**
- **AP3:** Arrange as much information as possible to be handled by correspondence (e mail) **Lucy Williams**

OFSTED follow on meeting – summary points

Suggestions:

- Would be beneficial for definitions regarding subcontractors to be consistent. Working explanation of tiers is helpful but has some inconsistencies with OFSTED definitions
- Rather than use the term 'assessment', would it be more beneficial to align the activity with the support of provider development plans and continuous improvement

Actions:

- **AP1:** OFSTED to be involved as necessary throughout the period of the pilot
Jackie Wenham/Simon Shimmens
- **AP2:** OFSTED inspection process may want to take account of Merlin outputs as part of future inspection e.g. in terms of Leadership and Management (of supply chains)
Jackie Wenham/Simon Shimmens

Standard agenda items for future meetings

- Requirement for the new standard
- Working Group terms of reference
- Code of Conduct – present status in contracts (some teeth)
- *Merlin Standard* – pilot activity & benefits
- Mediation service
- Shared information
- Key questions and discussion
- Future considerations and next steps