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Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

About applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

Draft 9 June 2023

Feedback

We invite and welcome feedback on this toolkit, which will be kept under review. Please send your additions, observations, corrections, or changes to marketsandcommissioning@local.gov.uk

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Glossary

Key elements of Applying a Strengths-Based Methodology to Your Strategic Commissioning

Applying a Strengths-Based Methodology to Your Strategic Commissioning – the collective name given to the suite of resources that combine to support councils through the process of using information about the local context (place, partners and people) and their overall aims and objectives to consider the options open to them and decide which approach is the best "local fit". Within this toolkit there are some key resources and key references, which are defined below:

Self-assessment and development tool – An Excel tool that supports a place to self-assess their commissioning strengths and weaknesses, against eight "commissioning aspects" (see below). After undertaking the self-assessment, commissioners should be better able to consider the eight "strategic commissioning approaches" and decide which one is for them.

Introducing commissioning aspects 1 – 8 – A guide that introduces the commissioning aspects used in this toolkit. This guide includes pre-reading material for each commissioning aspect to support partners and stakeholders to work through the self-assessment element of the toolkit.

Introducing and implementing strategic commissioning approaches 1 – 8 – A guide that focuses on the practical application of each of the strategic commissioning approaches included and the decisions councils make as a result of the self-assessment. This guide will shape and inform how the commissioners will implement their chosen strategic commissioning approach.

Commissioning aspect –A key term within **Applying a Strengths-Based Methodology to Your Strategic Commissioning** and there are eight **commissioning aspects**. These aspects relate to a specific element of commissioning and provide a structure to help the council self-assess their current commissioning practice, and the risks, opportunities and challenges posed in their place.

Strategic commissioning approach – A key term within **Applying a Strengths-Based Methodology to Your Strategic Commissioning** and there are eight **strategic commissioning approaches**. Each approach is forward looking and will guide the key actions and decisions a commissioning organisation makes. The selection of the strategic commissioning approach will be informed by the self-assessment of the place against the eight strategic commissioning aspects and supported by the relevant worksheet of the Excel tool.

Strategic commissioning plan – A high-level plan that may be developed to articulate the selected strategic commissioning approach. In addition this plan would

describe the long-term needs of the place, where the place is now, in terms of supply and demand and types of provision, what is required to meet the identified long-term needs and how, broadly, this will be achieved, using the chosen strategic commissioning approach that has been selected, as part of this work, following an assessment of the strengths of the place in relation to commissioning aspects 1 - 8. The strategic commissioning plan may include a consideration of constraints and enablers that may have an impact on its delivery (and so may contain within it the commissioning development plan – see below). There is no set approach, template or content provided for this plan, but it should be provided in a way that best supports the council to meet its objectives.

Commissioning development plan – An optional plan that a council may develop, based on the insights from the self-assessment and the consideration of the top constraints and enablers identified in the process. A consideration of these constraints and enablers will include whether they are, or are not, in commissioners' control, which should be boosted or influenced, and which may benefit from experimentation, to inform action planning to support the commissioning function. This plan may be a standalone document or form part of a strategic commissioning plan. There is no set approach, template or content provided for this plan, but it should be provided in a way that best supports the council meet its objectives.

Key functions and roles that relate to applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

Commissioning / Commissioner – these terms collectively refer to the function carried out by a council in relation to adult social care (commissioning) and the group of people within that council that are part of the commissioning process (commissioners). They should both be taken in the broadest sense as they cover a range of activities and people and their roles and responsibilities. As an example, 'commissioner' will include people within a formal commissioning team and others who contribute to the commissioning process such as brokerage, procurement, finance, legal, social workers, health colleagues and a wide range of senior managers involved in planning and decision-making. All of these people should be considered as the potential users and beneficiaries of **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning**. It is important to note that some partners, such as Integrated Commissioning Boards (ICBs) commission adult social care (specifically as part of their NHS Continuing Healthcare duties). These other commissioners are expected to be part of the commissioning process and may benefit from **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning** but are not the primary audience or intended beneficiary, which is the council commissioning team.

Strategic commissioning – This element of the commissioning function focusses on influencing the 'shape' of the whole local social care sector, typically in relation to the amount or type of social care provision available, how it is provided or the quality

of it. This may sometimes be referred to as 'market shaping' and is underpinned by the duties on councils as set out in the Care Act 2014. Strategic commissioning will involve and affect a variety of partners and stakeholders, primarily citizens and care and support providers, as well as other relevant organisations (such as health organisations). It is likely that a council's strategic commissioning activity may also touch areas that are beyond what is traditionally considered as social care, such as housing, community groups and the local economy. Strategic commissioning actions and decisions will be taken in the short-term, but the impact and results are likely to be experienced in the medium to long-term. Strategic commissioning – as opposed to operational or short-term commissioning – is the focus of **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning**.

Operational commissioning – This element of the commissioning function is concerned with the detail of the commissioning, contracting and procurement and the day-to-day implementation and monitoring of these arrangements. Operational commissioning deals with the detailed working of strategic commissioning approaches. As such, whilst **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning** is focussed on improving strategic commissioning, it is important to consider operational commissioning when implementing a chosen strategic commissioning approach.

Generic terms used in applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

System – Where this term is used, it provides a broad description of the social care and health system in a particular area. It will therefore cover people that receive and provide care and support (including those employed, those supported, unpaid carers, family and friends), the organisations that commission (councils and health commissioners), provide and regulate it and other stakeholders.

Tool – Where this term is used, unless specifically stated otherwise, it is a generic reference to a resource provided as part of **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning**. No specific meaning should be interpreted from this word and the same is true where the word framework, guide, resource is used.

Plan – Where this term is used, unless specifically stated otherwise, it refers to a document that contains the actions a council will take

Methodology – Where this term is used, unless specifically stated otherwise, it refers to an overall description of 'how' a council undertakes its commissioning. A methodology is likely to include processes, decisions, activities, steps and actions of a commissioner.

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Introduction and overview

This project was designed and developed by the Public Service Transformation Academy for Care and Health Improvement Programme (CHIP), now referred to as Partners in Care and Health (PCH), which is jointly run by the Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS). We encourage experimentation with these resources and welcome feedback at marketsandcommissioning@local.gov.uk.

This toolkit has been designed to help adult social care commissioners to think about the local conditions they are working with, to:

- Undertake a self-assessment of their strengths and areas for development
- Better understand the relevant factors at play that constrain and enable effective adult social care commissioning locally
- Apply the insight and key discussion points from the self-assessment to select a strategic commissioning approach that builds on local strengths and suits the place
- Apply the insight from this work to plan to deal with current commissioning challenges, undertaking action planning based on key constraining and enabling factors to support commissioning development, expanding commissioners' room for manoeuvre, influence, and impact. Councils may choose to use this action planning to draft a separate Commissioning Development Plan
- Understand the implications of implementing the selected strategic commissioning approach and the challenges this may present
- Start to put the selected strategic commissioning approach into practice. Councils may choose to draft a separate Strategic Commissioning Plan to articulate how it will meet the strategic needs of the place, using the selected strategic commissioning approach.

Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning consists of a downloadable, multi-sheet, Excel self-assessment and development tool, with accompanying reading materials and this guide. The toolkit includes six steps and councils can choose to use as many of the steps as they wish. Some may use the self-assessment only; others may use all of the toolkit.

Context

Local authority duties, in relation to adult social care, are outlined in the Care Act 2014, which codified, consolidated and expanded duties in various prior pieces of legislation. In relation to commissioning, the Act defines a number of clear expectations:

1. **Duty to promote a diverse and high-quality market:** The Care and Support Statutory Guidance (which accompanies the 2014 Act) states that 'high quality, personalised care and support can only be achieved where there is a vibrant, responsive market of services available'. Under section 5 of the Care Act, the duty to shape and maintain an efficient and effective market of services for meeting care and support needs in the local area is firmly placed with local authorities.
2. **Market shaping of social care:** To this end, authorities are expected to understand current and future need for care services and the configuration of current services and to work with stakeholders to define both what the future configuration of services needs to look like to meet future needs and how this future configuration will be achieved.
3. **Managing the consequences of regulated provider failure or service interruptions:** This includes ensuring that, as part of broader contingency planning, the local market is sufficiently robust to deal with such failures or service interruptions[1].

Inspection of council functions, including commissioning, by the Care Quality Commission, along with other national policy changes, may change the work undertaken by adult social care commissioners and significantly reshape the landscape of supply and provision of care services. Councils may wish to review their strategic approach to commissioning adult social care with partners, in the light of these changes, with reference to the local context of their place whilst aware of national pressures, such as the focus on hospital discharge, sometimes to the exclusion of helping people to live their best possible lives.

This toolkit enables councils and their partners to apply a strengths-based methodology to their strategic commissioning, considering a wide range of factors, to build on their strengths, make the most of opportunities and overcome or neutralise constraints. This will enable partners to share perspectives, and discuss and avoid actions that could mitigate against people returning home from hospital and rebuilding their independence.

Why have we developed this toolkit?

This work focuses on commissioning as a method of improving outcomes for people in the complex systems that determine wellbeing in a place, shaping an ecosystem – not solely on the specification and organisation of service provision. At heart,

[1] A more detailed description of commissioning duties under the Care Act is available at https://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/careact/index.html

commissioning is about creating an environment in which it is easier for the right things to happen in people's lives, communities, places, and at the level of public or citizen-facing practice. Service provision plays a significant role in how well people do in a place but is only one part of the story. The ultimate judgement of commissioning success is the experience of citizens and communities in the local place. People, and what matters to them, are at the centre of this, and commissioners are agents of change. This toolkit is provided to help adult social care commissioners to be more creative and to create the environment for positive change – an environment in which it becomes easier for the right things to happen at the level of citizens' lives.

Some key issues which dominate the day-to-day lives of commissioners are not covered in the tool at a headline level. There is no single section for funding or post-COVID and post-'Brexit' workforce challenges because all the aspects of commissioning and approaches seek to address these from different angles and in different ways. It is likely to be important in most places to pull all these together and think strategically about how to deal with these issues across the council and the whole system, based on shared learning from reflecting on the different aspects. These are major drivers of activity and change but being blinkered about how they are addressed can create counterproductive outcomes. Commissioners are often in a pressurised, stressful, and highly responsible role, and **Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning** and the action planning it supports aims to provide useful support in this context.

It is important to remember that, while the role of commissioner is to influence the 'whole system' of wellbeing in a place, managing the capacity and energy of commissioners is also critical – **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning** aims to help commissioners to obtain a productive overview and to increase strategic focus.

Who is it for?

Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning has been developed for council commissioners who wish to improve their strategic commissioning. They may choose to use it in partnership with other stakeholders, who may also find it useful.

How has this been developed?

The development of this toolkit has been overseen by a steering group made of stakeholders from the LGA, ADASS, Care Provider Alliance and others. The developers have worked with councils and a wide range of contributors who have tested the materials operationally.

What further support is available to help me use this?

For further support, contact marketsandcommissioning@local.gov.uk.

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Overview

Councils will be able to:

1. Use the **self-assessment toolkit** to assess the council and place against each of the eight commissioning aspects.
2. Building on the self-assessment, use the **analysis tool** in the toolkit and the improved insight from discussions, to select a preferred strategic commissioning approach (either a single approach or a combination, from a range of eight strategic commissioning approaches). This uses an analysis of the self-assessment scoring to ensure that strengths are built on and known weaknesses are not able undermine the selected approach.
3. Building on the self-assessment, use the top constraining and enabling factors to inform action planning to support commissioning development to focus effort on developing the council's commissioning function (to provide scope/elbow room for better strategic commissioning).
4. Understand and start to implement the selected strategic commissioning approach (either a single approach or a combination) that provides the best fit for the council's requirements.

Councils may choose to use the outputs from **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning** to develop a strategic commissioning plan to describe the plan for meeting the needs of the area (in both the medium and long-term) – the council's preferred strategic commissioning approach will support delivery of the strategic commissioning plan. Councils may also choose to build the action planning from **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning** into a commissioning development plan to describe how the commissioning function will be developed to support the strategic commissioning plan.

Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning takes the view that the right approach to commissioning depends on where the council and the local place are starting from – the conditions locally (in the place, the team, the organisation, partners, community), the history and the forces which are shaping the future. There is no perfect, "one size fits all" commissioning approach to advocate for, since the only ultimate judgement of commissioning success is the experience of citizens and communities in the local place. This toolkit, therefore, aims to help select the approach that will give the best fit for the local circumstances, enabling commissioners to make a noticeable and positive difference to their ways of working and to make a difference to people's lives.

The eight commissioning aspects and strategic commissioning approaches

We recommend self-assessment against eight commissioning aspects. Once the assessment has been completed, this enables the council to use the insights from any discussion and the suggested scoring system to select, from eight strategic

commissioning approaches, the one that will provide the best fit for its area and to start to implement the selected approach to support its future strategic commissioning planning. The eight commissioning aspects and strategic commissioning approaches have been defined as part of the development of the toolkit and tested with council commissioners and other stakeholders, to check that they work in practice.

The eight commissioning aspects are as follows:

Commissioning Aspect 1. Whole system design
Commissioning Aspect 2. Relationships and organisation across the system
Commissioning Aspect 3. Capacity, capability, and confidence
Commissioning Aspect 4. User and outcome centred
Commissioning Aspect 5. Information, insight, and innovation
Commissioning Aspect 6. Managing the policy and compliance landscape
Commissioning Aspect 7. Commissioning process
Commissioning Aspect 8. Models and tactics

The commissioning aspects are not set in a strict hierarchy, but commissioning aspects one to four relate more to whole systems, with a focus on outcomes and strengths. These support understanding commissioners' role as shapers of complex systems. Commissioning aspects five to eight are more focused on data, process, and service delivery. These support commissioners undertaking their role correctly and on skilful identification and procurement of services to meet needs.

The eight strategic commissioning approaches are:

Strategic Commissioning Approach 1. Place-based wellbeing
Strategic Commissioning Approach 2. Leadership of place for whole system change
Strategic Commissioning Approach 3. Unlocking potential
Strategic Commissioning Approach 4. Citizen-centred commissioning
Strategic Commissioning Approach 5. Values-based/disruptive commissioning
Strategic Commissioning Approach 6. Strategic procurement of services against needs
Strategic Commissioning Approach 7. Market management
Strategic Commissioning Approach 8. Delivery model design

The approaches are not mutually exclusive and a blend of approaches is possible.

The eight commissioning aspects align with the eight strategic commission approaches. See the table on the next page.

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Table of the commissioning aspects and strategic commissioning approaches

The following table gives a brief summary of each commissioning aspect and associated strategic commissioning approach:

Commissioning aspects	Strategic commissioning approaches
Aspect 1. Whole system design Working as one place to create a context that is optimally set up for wellbeing, mutual support, and care	**Approach 1. Place-based wellbeing** Design and creation of a place-based wellbeing system, with a strong focus on keeping people 'out of care' and maximising conditions for them to be able to look after themselves
Aspect 2. Relationships and organisation across the system A place where everyone is focused on achieving shared goals, together, and incentives and funding streams are aligned	**Approach 2. Leadership of place for whole system change** Acting as convenors to shape the whole system of health, care, wellbeing, and need in place
Aspect 3. Capacity, capability, and confidence Shaping provision from all sources (including market provision, social procurement, VCSE, asset-based work, workforce, community) so that people have access to what they need to live their lives well	**Approach 3. Unlocking potential** Spend and provision is targeted to enhancing capacity, capability, confidence, and the local economy, pushing 'upstream' from demand to focus on prevention and wellbeing wherever possible
Aspect 4. User and outcome-centred Citizens are in charge of their own care, and their assessment of whether they got what they needed is how we measure our success	**Approach 4. Citizen-centred commissioning** Putting people in charge of care – creating conditions for individuals to manage, select, fund, and direct their own care needs
Aspect 5. Information, insight, and innovation A commissioning approach that targets commissioning innovation and creativity, based on solid information, insight	**Approach 5. Values-based/disruptive commissioning** Challenging the status quo based on citizen perspectives and equity, or innovation, creativity, novel approaches and technology
Aspect 6. Managing the policy and compliance landscape Meeting, interpreting, and actively shaping the policy and legal requirements that we have to work within	**Approach 6. Strategic procurement of services against needs** Focus on good service provision and management, well-matched to demand
Aspect 7. Commissioning process Technically excellent and highly professional commissioning mechanisms, including competition, collaboration, commercials, clarity of contracting, and continual improvement as well as well-judged introduction of new approaches	**Approach 7. Market management** Creating conditions for best value and outcomes within financial constraints, from a mixed and healthy economy of providers
Aspect 8. Models and tactics Design of delivery models that are fit for purpose, effective, and innovative, based on real attention to how services are structured and delivered	**Approach 8. Delivery model design** Effective delivery models enabling effective practice

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Resources included in applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

The toolkit includes the following resources, which are all downloadable from the webpage:

- Self-assessment and Development tool – (Excel)
- About Applying a Strengths-Based Methodology to Your Strategic Commissioning (Word)
- Pre-reading – Introducing Commissioning Aspects 1 – 8 (Word – embedded in the spreadsheet)
- Pre-reading – Introducing and Implementing Strategic Commissioning Approaches 1 – 8 (Word – embedded in the spreadsheet)
- Additional reading (Links to other websites and documents)

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How to use applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

Applying a Strengths-Based Methodology to Your Strategic Commissioning is structured into a number of steps, each supported by either downloadable reading materials or one or more worksheets in the downloadable Excel toolkit.

Recommended Steps
(Steps 2 – 5 are supported by the Excel self-assessment and development toolkit)

Step 1: Familiarisation with the pre-reading resources and About applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning.

Step 2: Internal discussion and quick assessment of place in each of the eight commissioning aspects (Use Quick tool worksheet)

Step 3: Workshop(s) with partners and stakeholders to consider the place against each of the eight commissioning aspects. Read the pre-reading – **Introducing Commissioning Approaches 1-8**. The relevant worksheet enables the key discussion points to be captured against a range of factors, to weight each factor in terms of relevance and importance in the local place and to score the place in relation to this factor. Once all factors for the commissioning aspect have been considered, the toolkit offers a provisional score for the commissioning aspect, which can be over-ridden, which feeds into the scoring analysis (separate worksheet for each aspect)

Step 4: Based on the insight and scoring from Step 3, use the Step 4 scoring analysis worksheet to consider which strategic commissioning approach would provide the best fit for the local place. These are introduced in the pre-reading – **Introducing and Implementing Strategic Commissioning Approaches 1-8**

Step 5: (Optional step) Based on insight and scoring from Step 3, use the Step 5 worksheet to consider the top constraints and enablers for the local place, which are, or are not, in your control as commissioners, which can be boosted or influenced, and which may benefit from experimentation, to inform action planning to support the commissioning function. If wished, this can be developed into a commissioning development plan.

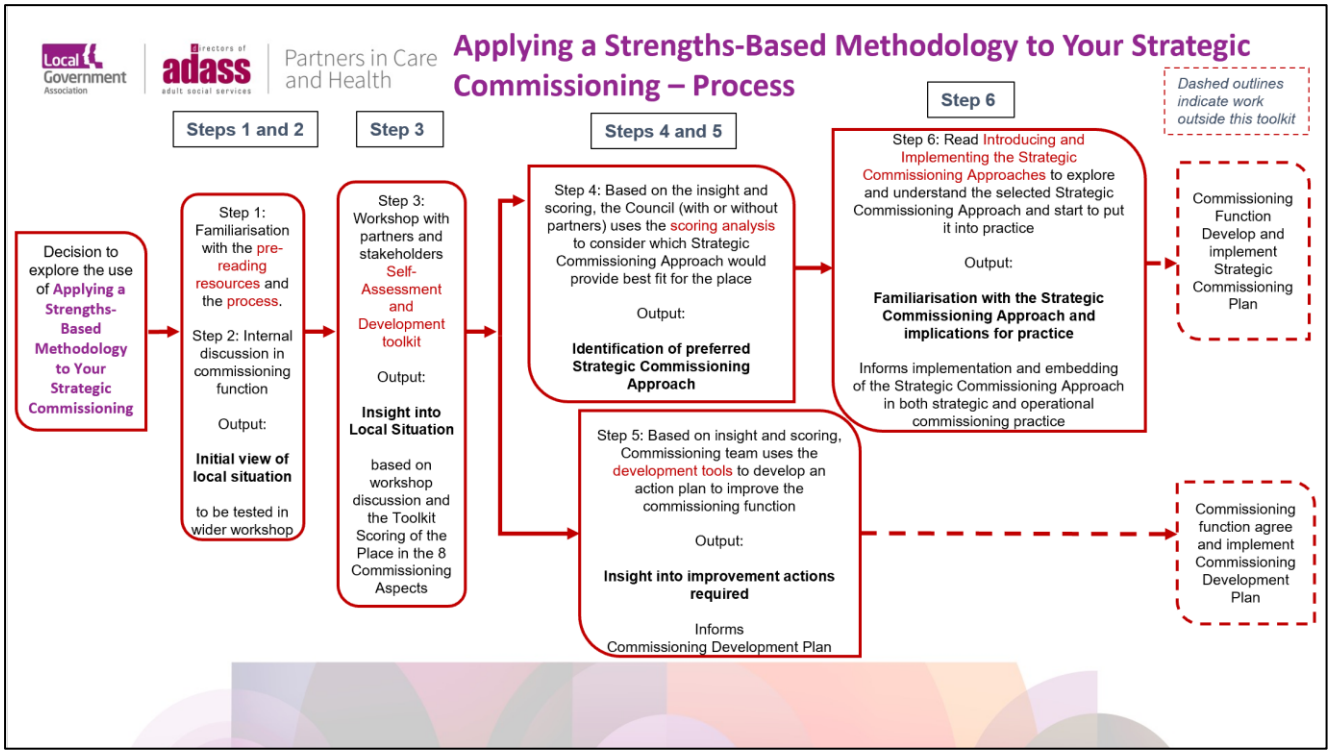
Step 6: Re-visit the pre-reading – **Introducing and Implementing Strategic Commissioning Approaches 1-8** to explore and understand the selected Strategic Commissioning Approach and start to put it into practice. The Council may wish to develop a strategic commissioning plan.

See the steps laid out in an overall process diagram on the next page.

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Overall Process Diagram

The overall process is shown in this flowchart diagram:



The structure of the Excel self-assessment and development tool

The spreadsheet has a contents worksheet with links to all the other worksheets. Each worksheet has a “Return to Contents” link at the top. For Step 3, there is a Methodology worksheet, followed by a separate worksheet for each commissioning aspect. The worksheets also provide links to the relevant pre-reading materials, which enable the download of the linked word documents. The full list of worksheets is as follows:

Contents
Step 2 – Quick evaluation tool
Step 3 – Methodology - Self-assessment against the eight commissioning aspects
Aspect 1. Whole system design
Aspect 2. Relationships and organisation across the system
Aspect 3. Capacity, capability and confidence
Aspect 4. User and outcome-centred
Aspect 5. Information, insight and innovation
Aspect 6. Managing the policy and compliance landscape
Aspect 7. Commissioning process
Aspect 8. Models and tactics
Step 4 – Overall assessment
Step 5 – Constraints and enablers
Place-based factors

The individual worksheets for each commissioning aspect are laid out in the same way. The Step 3 Methodology worksheet provides further advice on how to work through each of the worksheets, with cell references.

Working through the steps of applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning

Councils can choose to use as many of the steps as they wish. Some may use the self-assessment only; others may complete all of the steps of the toolkit.

The Self-Assessment – Steps 1 to 3

Once it has been decided to use **applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning**, councils, partners and stakeholders will find it useful to have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the pre-reading materials (Step 1), and may wish to do a quick evaluation (Step 2) prior to the system undertaking the full self-assessment (Step 3).

Step 1: Familiarise the team with the eight commissioning aspects

Read pre-reading – **Introducing commissioning aspects 1-8**. For each commissioning aspect, the following is provided:

- A single sentence (or strap line)
- An overview of the commissioning aspect
- A case study of a council and place that scores higher in this aspect
- A case study of a council and place that scores lower in this aspect
- Dynamic tensions to be considered with this aspect
- Equality and equity considerations with this aspect

Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning provides a structure (based on the eight commissioning aspects) to help commissioners review, understand and assess their current situation and circumstances as they relate to the strategic commissioning of care and support provision in the local area. It is not necessarily seeking to identify right and wrong or good and bad, but it aims to help commissioners understand and evaluate the current factors in order to support decision-making and action-planning for overall objectives and what changes and improvements are needed to deliver these.

For all of the aspects, the self-assessment involves considering a range of statements which include both factors, including placed-based factors, which might be influencing commissioning in a place, and also the room for manoeuvre as a commissioning function in that place.

At Step 2, there is the opportunity to make an initial quick evaluation of the place against each commissioning aspect, based on this pre-reading. At Step 3 there will be an opportunity to debate some of these matters as well as having a dialogue

about a range of statements, recording key points from the dialogue and weighting and scoring each statement in relation to the commissioning aspect.

Step 2: Quick initial evaluation against the eight aspects of commissioning

We recommend that individuals give the place an instinctive score on how commissioning is doing in terms of this aspect of commissioning, which can then be revisited at Step 3 in a wider workshop. The quick evaluation worksheet in the Excel toolkit can be used to allocate a score out of 100 for each commissioning aspect, using the slider in the worksheet.

Step 3: Self-assessment workshop

We recommend that this step is undertaken in a mixed group reflecting the diversity of perspectives across the local system. This is supported by the downloadable Excel toolkit. There is a worksheet for each commissioning aspect, where key discussion points can be recorded and statements can be scored (using the slider tool in the worksheet) and weighted. The notional score and weighting of each statement is combined with that for other statements to recommend an overall score for the commissioning aspect. The group can confirm that score or override it with a revised score if desired). Taking each aspect in turn, in groups or pairs, work through Part A to Part F, described below.

Part A. Read and then discuss the high scoring council case study and the low scoring council case study. Also consider the dynamic tensions and equality and equity issues identified for this commissioning aspect. Record any key points from the discussions on the worksheet for that commissioning aspect (the worksheet allows space for recording key points on the high and low scoring case examples, the dynamic tensions and the equality and equity issues).

Part B. Then move on to discuss each statement given and record any useful observations.

Part C. Using the slider in the worksheet, assign a **score** from 1 - 100 (where 100 is best performance) relating to how well you feel that you are achieving what is set out in the statement giving a notional score for each statement (using the sliding bar in the worksheet)

The purpose of the scoring is to force an overall evaluation for each statement, and to compare different answers and different perspectives. The starting point for thinking about scoring is to review the case studies of higher scoring councils and lower scoring councils for each commissioning aspect. These are intended to reflect scores of around an average of 60-75 and 25-40, respectively. In undertaking such exercises, scores of over 75 are relatively rare, and there is usually room for manoeuvre.

Ideally, at a minimum, there will be at least two people (with different experience) reviewing each score, and discussing the reasoning behind it. Several people could

score the statement independently, then each justify their score before coming to a consensus. Because individuals are not marking against an ideal, ultimately the results will only be as good as the quality of investigation and, most importantly, honest discussions.

Part D. Revisit each of the statements and select the most appropriate **weighting** for each, **within the context of this commissioning aspect**, reflecting how important/critical each element is to success of this aspect of commissioning in the local place.

As some elements within the commissioning aspect may be more important for a place than others, the allocation of a weighting has been built in for each statement's relative importance in your assessment of that aspect. The overall recommended (calculated) score for each commissioning aspect is therefore not simply an average of all the individual statement scores.

Part E. After you have completed all of the above, a 'notional score' for this aspect as a whole will be displayed. Considering the above elements, discuss the observations and how each statement has been scored and weighted, then review the recommended notional score for the aspect overall. Discuss the whole commissioning aspect and come to a collective view about the score for the whole aspect. Look at the overall pattern you are seeing. Try to come to a consensus on whether to confirm the recommended score or to amend the score. You have the opportunity to set your own, different, score, if required, which will be used in the overall self-assessment instead of the recommended notional score. You may feel the notional score is accurate. If so, use that score. The richness of the discussion and dialogue may mean that in spite of the scoring and weighting of each statement, you nevertheless feel that a different score is warranted. Please agree a score from 1-100 for this aspect as a whole, and record the confirmed score for the commissioning aspect on the worksheet in the cell provided. The confirmed scores for each commissioning aspect will be carried forward into the worksheet for Step 4, and will be used to support your selection of Strategic Commissioning Approach.

Part F. After you have completed all of the above, consider from the discussion of this commissioning aspect which factors constrain and which enable this commissioning aspect. As well as the statements, dynamic tensions and equality and equity issues, consider the place-based factors (listed in the separate "Place-based factors" worksheet, after the Step 5 worksheet). There may also be other factors which have not been considered so far, but which are important to the place. Following this discussion, record which factors are the three most enabling (supportive) factors and which are the three most constraining (limiting/inhibiting) factors for this commissioning aspect, in your place, in the boxes provided. These will be carried through to the Step 5 worksheet, to support further action planning.

After completing the self-assessment – steps 4 to 6

Using the insight from discussion and scoring from the self-assessment, councils will then be able to use the scoring analysis worksheet to identify which strategic commissioning approach would provide the best fit for your place (Step 4), based on the self-assessment. Councils can also use the key constraining and enabling factors to undertake action planning (Step 5), to support development of the commissioning function and read the supporting materials (Step 6), to familiarise themselves with the selected strategic commissioning approach(es) to enable them to start planning for implementing the approach in their strategic commissioning. Steps 4, 5 and 6 can be done in any order or at the same time, in parallel.

Step 4: identify the most appropriate strategic commissioning approach to fit your context

The outputs from Step 3, the self-assessment, include considered and evidenced scores out of a hundred for each of the commissioning aspects.

Aspect	**Score /100**	**Approach**
Whole system design		Place-based wellbeing
Relationships and organisation across the system		Leadership of place for whole system change
Capacity, capability and confidence		Unlocking potential
User and outcome centred		Citizen-centred commissioning
Information, insight and innovation		Values-based/disruptive commissioning
Managing the policy and compliance landscape		Strategic procurement of services against needs
Commissioning process		Market management
Models and tactics		Delivery model design

These scores are fed into the Step 4 worksheet in the Excel toolkit, which is designed to identify which strategic commissioning approach will provide a best fit for the place, building on local strengths, without letting them to be undermined by weaker aspects. This will not simply be the approach that aligns with the highest scoring aspect.

The following table shows how the toolkit analyses the scores. The first score over 50, reading down the table, which also does not have a lower score beneath it, identifies the recommended strategic commissioning approach. This reflects the fact that an approach higher in the table, whilst being more strengths, system, and outcomes-focused, is only sustainable if the commissioning aspects lower down the table can support it.

Commissioning Aspect	Aspect Score out of 100	Strategic Commissioning Approach
1. Whole system design	45	Place-based wellbeing
2. Relationships and organisation across the system	55	Leadership of place for whole system change
3. Capacity, capability, and confidence	40	Unlocking potential
4. User and outcome centred	65	Citizen-centred commissioning
5. Information, insight, and innovation	66	Values-based/disruptive commissioning
6. Managing the policy and compliance landscape	70	Strategic procurement of services against needs
7. Commissioning process	72	Contestability and market management
8. Models and tactics	74	Delivery model design



Look for the score above 50 that is highest up the arrow **and** does not have a lower score beneath it.

Select the associated approach to the right of that aspect.

In this example, the "User and Outcome Centred" aspect is the over 50 score that is nearest the top and has no lower scores below it. Although the aspect "Relationships and organisation across the system" has a score over 50 and is nearer the top, it has a lower score beneath it, for the aspect "Capacity, capability and confidence".

This means that the Strategic Commissioning Approach of "Citizen-centred commissioning" would build on the strength of the aspect "User and outcome centred" and be supported by the aspects beneath it, and their associated approaches, which are all strong and would not undermine this approach.

Before making the decision whether to select the recommended strategic commissioning approach, or to opt for a blend of approaches, it will be useful to sense-check the suggested strategic commissioning approach with an understanding of specific commissioning challenges, considering key constraints and enablers and any associated action-planning to support the development of local commissioning (Step 5), and the description of what to consider for this approach in the pre-reading – **Introducing and implementing the strategic commissioning approaches** (Step 6). A blend of approaches may be useful at different times and in different commissioning situations.

Step 5: Review the key enabling and constraining factors to support action planning for commissioning development

Step 3 included the identification from all the factors discussed, of which factors are the top three constraints and enablers for the place. These are carried forward from the Step 3 worksheets to the Step 5 constraints and enablers worksheet. For each constraint and enabling factor, the Step 5 worksheet shows the factors brought forward from the Step 3 worksheets, and whether the factor is an enabler or constraint. It enables commissioners to identify and record:

a) Whether the factor is:
   - in commissioners' control
   - influenceable
   - out of commissioners' control

b) whether, in the opinion of the group, the factor is:
   - to be boosted
   - not to be boosted
   - would benefit from innovation or experimentation

This will enable commissioners (either with or without partners and other stakeholders) to consider action-planning to support the development of the commissioning function for the place. Action-planning on the factors that constrain or enable effective commissioning can help to expand 'elbow room' for commissioners – their space and power to make an impact. Making space to develop the effectiveness of commissioners will pay dividends in supporting the implementation of the selected strategic commissioning approach and enabling the delivery of strategic commissioning plans.

No set format is provided for the action-planning, but it is suggested that the following questions can be worked through to support the development of actions in response to each factor.

1) How will we boost enabling factors?
2) For constraining factors within our control, how will we ensure we overcome them?
3) How will we use our influence where we can, to reduce constraining factors and build on enabling factors?
4) How will we take account of and work around constraining factors that are not in our control?
5) What experiments can we run to look at constraining factors that require innovation?
6) Which of these are the most urgent?
7) Which of these are the most important?
8) Which of these would require the most work?
9) Are there any "quick wins"?

If desired, this action-planning can be developed into a Commissioning Development Plan.

Step 6: Familiarise yourselves with the selected strategic commissioning approach and start to implement it

Read or re-visit the pre-reading – **Introducing and Implementing Strategic Commissioning Approaches 1-8** to familiarise yourself with the selected strategic commissioning approach(es), to explore and understand the selected approach, to learn what may be required, understand and plan for the associated strategic risks and start to put it into practice (Step 6). For each strategic commissioning approach, this includes:

- Introducing the approach
- How to move towards this approach
- What to do, and what not to do, when pursuing this approach
- Specific risks to watch out for, including when your room for manoeuvre is limited, and other hints and tips
- The commissioning skills and structure that might be needed for this approach

- Examples of the approach in practice
- Recommended reading to support this approach
- The Council may wish to develop a Strategic Commissioning Plan.

The council may wish to articulate the selected strategic commissioning approach in a strategic commissioning plan, which may set medium or long-terms goals for meeting the adult social care needs in the place and how it intends to meet those needs and may also include the intended plans for commissioning development (see Step 5 above) in the place.

Examples

Here we provide three example summaries, in outline form, of councils undertaking this process. Like the case studies of higher and lower scoring councils given for each aspect, these are fictionalised examples based on descriptions of commissioning aspects for real councils and places.

Council A – moving from a focus on residential care to a 'care at home' model

- Whole system design – weak overall planning
- Relationships – weak relationships with health due to historic issues over non-contiguous boundaries, but good with voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE).
- Capacity, capability, and confidence – good basic market-shaping but not yet strong community capability development
- User and outcome centred – good, with strong carers' engagement
- Information, insight, and innovation – some recent successes mean proposing a bold experiment is feasible
- Managing the policy and compliance landscape – good
- Commissioning process – good particularly with smaller providers, lack of large-scale procurement and capital programme capacity
- Models and tactics – good level of competence

There are enablers and constraints in place:

- Land values and the local plan prevent the opportunity of developing significant volumes of extra care housing
- Good understanding of new requirements to purchase on behalf of self-funders
- The home care market is weak and dominated by one large national provider
- The local political ideology is also against significant outsourcing of care, however, is very focused on VCSE (and faith) care, and would support development of community capability and micro-providers
- Excellent programme of community referrals and social prescribing
- Very good understanding of current and future demand thanks to recent analysis including ethnographic work
- Some local history of failed residential schemes
- Opportunities to pilot new assistive care and telecare

The assessment points to the opportunity to build on some values-based and disruptive commissioning, target a community development / VCSE capacity approach, and develop micro-providers and community provision for a ‘stay at home’ approach.

Council B – radical market-making

- There is some quite strong capability in whole system design and excellent relationships in the emerging ICS, through capacity and capability building and user and outcomes focus are not well explored due to a traditional reliance on one large provider.
- Some good insight has recently been gained into high levels of unmet need, and the current situation is that the provider is underperforming and struggling to manage workforce issues across the county.
- It is determined that the overall commissioning cycle and county-wide procurement has been too slow and unresponsive/uncreative. There is strong expertise though in delivery model design.
- The assessment points to the possibility of letting small local lots with limits on the amount of lots to one provider to stimulate a new type of market locally – focusing on market management and model development.

Council C – developing an integrated system

- Service delivery working well and balanced against demand
- Strong commissioning process and practice
- A strong place-based strategic commissioning strategy with good buy-in
- Well-developed commissioners with a decent reputation
- Good user and outcome focus driven by coproduction
- Reasonably good capacity and capability development with an emerging political economy focus
- Good relationships all round

However, there is a current provider failure, increasing unmet demand and volumes of demand in general, and lack of prevention and early intervention. The decision is to focus on whole system design and prevention and early intervention, even with some emergency measures in place, to try to shift the whole system away from high-cost care.

Logos – PCH, LGA, ADASS, (??PSTA, RedQuadrant??)

Annex: Tips to consider

Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning has been created to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of your commissioning approach, and into where changes could be made to have the greatest impact. This can support the overall commissioning strategy and decision-making about the direction of travel – and help with shorter-term challenges and decision-making.

This annex covers:

- Options for depth of engagement (depending on the time and resources you can invest)
- Facilitation
- Self-assessment
- Scoring and maturity levels
- Dynamic tensions
- Constraints and enablers

Options for depth of engagement

Councils will vary in how much time they can afford away from the day job to undertake this exercise. As described in the six steps approach, a staged approach is recommended, with initial familiarisation followed by a more detailed self-assessment.

Councils with little time may simply bring together the strategic commissioning team for a couple of short sessions to run through the statements based on their existing knowledge. This is probably the minimum required to yield useful ideas and insights.

Councils with support for a comprehensive exercise, may take a planned project approach, scheduling sessions and workshops to work through the six steps described, over a number of months. This could be followed with further work to draft a commissioning development plan and a strategic commissioning plan. This would of course be a significant investment of time and resource.

Commissioners are highly likely to be busy people – the opportunity the self-assessment presents is to spend a little time looking “up” and “out” and thinking about the bigger picture for your place. This eight-aspect process enables you to work through a wide range of perspectives, providing useful insights and information, to enable a collective view on the best way forward. However a council chooses to undertake the self-assessment, a rich picture of your commissioning will be generated with some obvious and perhaps some more surprising ideas for change.

Whichever strategic commissioning approach is eventually selected, the shared insight gained will support the shared ownership of that approach and the plans that are based on the work.

Logos – PCH, LGA, ADASS, (??PSTA, RedQuadrant??)

Facilitation

For councils who choose to bring stakeholders together in a workshop to explore the eight commissioning aspects, facilitation will prove useful, both for the overall workshop and also for group discussions.

In gathering information and perspectives, and asking probing questions about your own commissioning system, you will, in a sense, be playing the role of consultant and facilitator. A number of techniques are worth thinking about to improve engagement and reduce defensiveness. First of all, it will be important to be clear whether the self-assessment is for the council's internal use, or for use with partners (which will inform how widely it is shared). It is important that those involved can say (and experience) that the self-assessment exercise is about learning, not about blame or judgement.

It can be helpful to speak to people in groups to get multiple perspectives (for example, one council brought payments and brokerage staff together to hear both sides of the story). It is essential to manage the time effectively, remembering the need to enable everybody to make their contribution and the importance of striking a balance between rushing too quickly through the statements and the tendency of some to want to share anecdotes, which may take up too much time. Agreeing ground rules at the beginning may help everyone to keep to task.

One approach is that the person who is engaging with stakeholders leads a conversation but then records discussion points, scores and weighting to the statements afterwards. It is not critical to answer every single statement; it is more important to provoke useful and insightful thinking and discussion.

Some councils may want to have an independent person leading the discussion for each aspect, aiming to ensure 'fresh eyes' are combined with people who understand commissioning terminology. It can help for someone who is not directly responsible for a particular aspect to lead that discussion, and it is important to avoid defensiveness – the scoring is there only to make you critically assess how you are doing. It will be important to avoid going down deep 'rabbit holes' on particular statements, but stay focused on working through them all.

The best tip of all is to use the opportunity of the self-assessment process and information gathering to celebrate success and – perhaps most importantly – honesty and progress, to support motivation.

Self-assessment

The process helps you to take a considered perspective on your own commissioning, answering three core questions:

1) What are our strengths, and what are the key issues limiting our success today?

2) In this place, given our strengths and issues, what approach should we focus on for maximum impact?
3) What action will have the most success in getting us there?

Commissioners can use it to learn not only how they are doing, but also how good a fit what they are doing is for the local place, and how colleagues might rethink commissioning for that place. Of course, this will not necessarily make the task any easier – you will still have to deal with stakeholders, providers, citizens, communities, politicians, partners and so on, sometimes in difficult financial circumstances, and with new challenges arising all the time. But working through the self-assessment can help to make sense of the huge complexity that commissioning always involves.

The spreadsheet is a tool to support your situational assessment and the selection of your strategic commissioning approach to enable maximum impact. You will have to use your judgement to identify the learning from the reflections you undertake. The self-assessment can support you to take time to reflect and think strategically, providing multiple options to try to address the challenges you face.

It can also help to create a shared sense of understanding and purpose. That is one reason why we strongly recommend undertaking the self-assessment as a group exercise, ideally with a blended 'whole system' group, although you may wish to do your own reflection first in a smaller group (or as individuals (see Step 2 in the Excel spreadsheet toolkit to support a quick, headline evaluation). The 'whole system' group may bring in partners, people with lived experience, a cross-section of providers. Peer support may also be valuable to give an external perspective.

Applying a strengths-based methodology to your strategic commissioning is not designed for comparison or evaluation of different places, but for development and learning – success is about the degree of improvement, rather than objective evaluation. Benchmarking with others is unlikely to be valuable because your circumstances will all be different – shared learning, however, will be valuable. At the end of the process, you will have new ideas and perspectives to apply to your current commissioning challenges.

Councils that use the Step 2, quick evaluation tool, may find it useful to compare the final considered scores with initial evaluation, and what accounts for the differences.

Scoring and maturity levels

One reason why there is no "perfect" scoring is that each of the aspects can be approached with different levels of maturity. The case study examples for each commissioning aspect are labelled 'higher scoring' and 'lower scoring' because they attempt to give examples not of 'good' or 'bad' commissioning, but of different stages on a journey. It may be that without real challenge and reflection, the fictional councils in the 'lower scoring' case study would actually consider themselves very advanced; they are certainly doing some of the right things, if they would like to be generous to themselves!

At different maturity levels, there is likely to be a focus on different factors (it might change from service delivery to client need, or from citizen outcomes to place-based wellbeing, for example). There is likely to be a shift in which resources are included (from council spend to council and partner spend, for example), what outcomes are aimed for (meeting demand, supporting needs, enabling thriving), and so on. These are relevant to all commissioning aspects, and form part of the journey of developing a strategic commissioning approach. Councils that return to their scoring in a couple of years' time, may think it overgenerous with hindsight. That doesn't matter, as the important thing is to enable development and improvement.

Dynamic tensions

Under each aspect, particular 'dynamic tensions' have been identified. Whilst some of these may apply to more than one commissioning aspect, they are presented to encourage you to think through, in your context, how you are balancing these tensions.

In the case of standardisation versus personalisation, for example, the challenge is the 'right care' for the person. There is huge power in listening carefully and co-designing bespoke support to meet a person's needs. It is also the case, however, that if you gain real actual knowledge through engagement with citizens that if there is a particular need at volume that can be met at volume, then this may be an appropriate response. It is also worth noting that an espoused approach at one level can enable or constrain experience at a different level – for example, you can have completely individual personal budgeting, but if people can only buy from a small catalogue of approved providers, you may effectively have a centralised system, whereas you might let a single big 'centralised' alliance contract, which in fact does extremely contextual, tailored, personalised work.

Constraints and enablers

As you discuss each commissioning aspect, make a note of factors that constrain commissioners, that is, hold them back from being able to progress further with that aspect of commissioning.

For example,

- a council may identify that despite very good governance and a reasonable score overall on the aspect ‘relationships and organisation across the system’, what was really holding them back was a failure to learn from the past and to address trust issues between partners (despite great work during COVID).
- a council may identify average scores on the aspect ‘capacity, capability, and confidence’, due to being held down by lack of market making and management capability, alongside a lack of long-term funding.

Similarly, note each of the factors that empower and enable commissioners, giving confidence and freedom in commissioning.

For example,

- a council may identify really great progress thanks to a dynamic digital team, on service dashboards, and a real commitment to co-production across place-based partners, which support the aspect of ‘user and outcome-centred’.
- a council may identify extremely good, shared purpose and planning in the ‘whole system design’ aspect, despite mediocre scores on other self-assessment statements.

These factors can then be re-visited, towards the end of the self-assessment work for each commissioning aspect, when the toolkit enables you to record the top three constraints and the top three enablers for that commissioning aspect.