

A New Kind of Commissioning for Challenging Times

In this blog IPC Associate John Bryant reflects on some of the challenges of commissioning health and social care and offers an approach that can be used to do things differently, with a focus on more effective collaborative and partnership commissioning arrangements.

John and IPC Senior Consultant Amy Harmsworth will be discussing their ideas at the next national Commissioners Conference.

Their workshop will consider the challenges of commissioning in an increasingly complex and political world, where resources are strained, and how we need to prepare our workforce to respond in an effective and agile way to this. John will be sharing an example of effective collaborative commissioning arrangements across health and social care, and Amy will be introducing a new course being developed by IPC – which will focus on developing the next generation of leaders in adult social care commissioning within these challenging times:

A New Kind of Commissioning for Challenging Times

Health and social care commissioners are facing a ‘perfect storm’ of change:

- Restructures show the system isn’t working
- Funding is tight and needs rethinking
- People are in short supply across roles and regions

These challenges aren’t unique to our sector; they are global and affect all areas of public care. Commissioners are under pressure to deliver person-centred care through joined-up, multi-agency approaches that meet both policy goals and rising public expectations.

We’re working in a world of:

- Wicked Problems – complex issues with no clear solutions
- Brittle systems, anxiety inducing targets, and confusion
- Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that challenges traditional planning and decision-making

This calls for a commissioning approach that’s flexible, thoughtful, and built on strong relationships — ones that foster trust, shared purpose, and real change.

Moving Beyond Performance Management

Current approaches aren’t delivering the results we need. A traditional performance management approach of contracts, measures, and reporting can’t solve these problems alone. It often misses the human side of care, especially when working with volunteers and community partners.

Instead, we need to build high-performing cultures — environments where people feel valued, trusted, and motivated to do their best. These cultures go beyond targets and systems. They focus on shared values, collaboration, and purpose.

The 6Cs of Future-Facing Commissioning

Inspired by the 6Cs of Care, the 6Cs model can help senior strategic commissioners navigate today's complex landscape. It's not about finding new leaders — it's about helping current ones lead differently.

Behaviour	What It Means
Connect	Build real relationships based on trust and care
Comprehend	Listen deeply and understand the bigger picture
Convene	Bring people together to solve problems collectively
Collaborate	Share resources, data, and responsibility
Catalyse	Drive change with courage and action
Celebrate	Recognise success and learn from setbacks

These behaviours help shift focus from commissioning services to growing a culture of innovation and shared value. They support the kind of relationships we need, which are ones that are generative, not just transactional.

Generative Relationships and Real Impact

In a stretched system, we need partnerships built on trust and shared goals. Successful commissioning means moving beyond silos and working together across organisations and communities.

The ultimate goal? Real impact — making a real difference in people's lives. That means setting clear goals, working together, and focusing on outcomes that matter to those giving and receiving care.

Future-facing leaders will bring the commissioning cycle to life, using diverse assets and partnerships to create sustainable, joyful, and impactful services.

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