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ALL THE BEST INTENTIONS

A review of a sub-national attempt
at reshaping the not-for-profit/public
sector nexus

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Introduction

There is little doubt that, over the past two decades, governments in developed Western countries have increasingly relied on the not-for-profit (NFP) and charitable sector as an infrastructure framework for the delivery of policy (Frumkin 2002). This is no less the case in Australia, where the NFP sector is articulated effectively into many activity areas that are also the domain of national and sub-national governments.

In the Australian case, in the aftermath of World War II, the implementation of the welfare state broadly followed the example of the United Kingdom and saw governments take an increased responsibility for human services.¹ Governments met this responsibility in one of three ways: (1) they provided services directly (e.g. primary health care); (2) they funded other governments to undertake service provision

¹ The definition of human services can be fraught as differing contexts may imply different activities that fall into or out of the accepted definition. While the definition is not so important in this chapter, it includes disability services, aged care services, child protection and mental health services, as well as hybrid activities such as the provision of post-incarceration supports.

(e.g. local government service provision funded by state governments, state government health provision funded by the Commonwealth government); and/or (3) they directly funded NFPs to provide services (Butcher & Gilchrist 2016). It is the third case, and the resulting government/NFP nexus, that is my focus here.

At this point, it is appropriate to indicate that there has been considerable discussion in academic and industry circles regarding the government/NFP nexus (Butcher & Gilchrist 2016; Alford & O’Flynn 2012; McGregor-Lowndes 2008; Mendes 2008). There is a metaphysical and practical aspect to this discourse. It is the outcomes achieved from a practical attempt at strengthening the nexus in an Australian sub-national jurisdiction, however, that is of interest in this chapter (Wilkins & Gilchrist 2016).

In recent years, the nexus between governments and the Australian NFP sector² – hereinafter termed the NFP sector or the sector – has undergone changes due to ‘traditional’ funding arrangements giving way to quasi market systems intended to result in better service delivery and better outcomes for service users (Alford & O’Flynn 2012). While the extent to which the introduction of quasi-market-style arrangements has resulted in the outcomes expected warrants further examination, this chapter is concerned with the broader development of the government/NFP nexus in one Australian sub-national jurisdiction – Western Australia (WA).³

In 2008, the newly elected WA Government undertook an economic audit of the state’s public sector. The focus of the audit was to identify prospective efficiencies, cost savings and better ways of conducting government business. The audit considered all aspects of government business, including the relationship between the NFPs contracted to

2 The Australian NFP sector is composed of an estimated 600,000 organisations that can be incorporated under many differing types of legislation under both state/territory and federal legislative frameworks. Further, charities are a sub-sector of the NFP sector and comprise approximately 55,000 organisations. Charities are the primary regulated NFP sub-sector and they are also most likely to be the type of organisation providing human services in Western Australia. This is because the types of services provided in human services attract charitable status and certain tax advantages. As the tax or other status of the organisations discussed in this chapter is irrelevant to the context and findings, I have retained the use of NFPs throughout the chapter to cover all types of entities that may be impacted by the Delivering Community Services in Partnership (DCSP) policy.

3 Additional changes in recent years have included the establishment of a national charities regulator (the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) in 2012, the establishment of a new statutory definition of charity (*Charities Act 2013* (Cth)), and the development of federal regulatory requirements for charities including the annual lodgement of financial and operational data.

provide government-funded services and the government agencies procuring those services – the WA Government/NFP nexus. This aspect became a major subsection of the final economic audit report.

Specific recommendations relating to the government/NFP nexus (Economic Audit Committee 2009) were adopted, including that a partnership forum should be established of senior representatives from the NFP and government sectors that would: (1) act as a policy and practice driver; (2) seek to recognise the value of the NFP sector; and (3) establish a number of subcommittees – including a contracting subcommittee – focused on practical improvements. The various recommendations that were developed as part of the economic audit were wrapped into what became the Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy (or DCSP) (Government of Western Australian 2011).

The initiative was also to be evaluated on an annual basis; subsequently, assessment of the outcomes achieved, having been identified as a result of this annual evaluation, was to be reported to parliament. Since its inception, the author has carried out three evaluations on behalf of the WA Government and reported the largely quantitative aspects of these evaluations in previous publications (Gilchrist 2016; Knight & Gilchrist 2015; Gilchrist 2013; Gilchrist & Knight 2013a). Now, over a decade after the establishment of the Partnership Forum, and after the election of a new government, the forum has been discontinued and a new, replacement, structure is being introduced.⁴

It is appropriate, then, for this chapter to look at the Partnership Forum structure and to analyse the impact it has had at a policy level, and whether or not it has achieved its intended outcomes. I do this by reviewing the most recent evaluation (together with previous evaluations where useful) within the context of the government/NFP nexus.

⁴ While not strictly relevant to this chapter, the new WA Government's policy framework is entitled the Supporting Communities Program and it will focus on procurement processes but include the establishment of a Supporting Communities Forum to be made up of senior government and sector personnel but also including service user representatives (see www.wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Draft-Terms-of-Reference.pdf). Amongst other things, this new arrangement is intended as a response to the Partnership Forum's failings by including service users, appointing and prioritising participation in forum deliberations of senior public sector personnel, and appointing a local chair.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In section two, I consider the government/NFP nexus with respect to human services, and place the DCSP in that context. In this section I also briefly describe the structures that made up the Partnership Forum. In section three, I analyse the forum's achievements by considering the 2016 report to the WA parliament and, in section four, I provide concluding remarks.

The government/NFP nexus: The WA Partnership Forum

While this chapter is concerned specifically with the WA experience and while this sub-national government has sovereignty with regard to its response to human services challenges, due to the nature of the Australian national polity, this response is also tempered by the impact of federal government policy and funding as well as by practice in other Australian jurisdictions. It is necessary, therefore, to consider a broader, national framework before narrowing the view to the WA experience.

The development of funding and practice relating to human services has not been uniform across Australia⁵ or within each sub-sector of the sector – nor, indeed, has it been uniform worldwide (Young 2006; Salamon 1995). Broadly, however, the NFP sector has been involved in direct service delivery for over three decades, during which time there has been a general reduction in the level of direct government involvement. It has also been the case in Australia that governments have traditionally provided different services to varying degrees, but the trend is now toward a reduction in direct government services and an increase in the role of NFPs as service providers (Butcher & Gilchrist 2016).

Indeed, over the past five or so years, Australian governments have increasingly sought to transfer their services delivery activity (including in relation to assets and staff) to the NFP sector (Alford & O'Flynn 2012).

5 For clarity, Australia is a federation of six states and two territories, while the federal government also controls a number of territories that are external to the continent of Australia. Each state and territory has a set of responsibilities relating to human services delivery and these responsibilities can be both concomitant with those of the federal government or they can be separate and specifically a state/territory responsibility. Because of Australia's vertical fiscal imbalance – where the states/territories have many responsibilities but the federal government has the chief income sources – it can be difficult to disaggregate the roles of the federal government and that of the states and territories. For our purposes, I have restrained my discussion to the WA nexus and the DCSP.

This objective has been pursued because: (1) savings can be made – NFPs are cheaper and more efficient than government in the delivery of services; (2) clinical and other service delivery risk can be transferred to the NFP sector (although, importantly, it is questionable as to whether political risk can be effectively transferred); (3) NFPs are more connected to the communities in which they operate and, therefore, better understand service needs and effective delivery techniques; and (4) NFPs are able to be defunded and policy is able to be changed without the need for changes to machinery of government and the industrial relations issues that arise from such changes (Productivity Commission 2010; Mendes 2008).

Due to the considerable costs associated with the provision of human services in Australia, watchdog agencies, particularly auditors-general (for instance, see Victorian Auditor-General 2013; Office of the Auditor General Western Australia 1998, 2000, 2003, 2012 and 2013; National Audit Office 2005), have also subject the government/NFP nexus to review. Concomitantly, there has been a move to change the government/NFP nexus in recent years, particularly in terms of procurement arrangements. Indeed, this development has seen the replacement of ‘traditional’ service funding arrangements – including government control, acquittal processes, funding in advance and often in quarterly tranches, and limited input from service users – toward the development of quasi-markets in human services. In such funding rationing structures, the various governments providing funding in support of service delivery do so in a way that is reminiscent of the operation of markets so that, in the ideal scenario: (1) service users are able to exercise choice and control; (2) procuring government agencies pay a price per iteration of service provision, often via the service user, and after the service has been provided; (3) and service providers are intended to be user responsive and more commercial in their outlook but recompensed to an extent that is reflective of the true cost of service delivery (Knight & Gilchrist 2015; Alford & O’Flynn 2012; Productivity Commission 2010; Mendes 2008).

The costs of service delivery in Western Australia are no less significant than elsewhere (Gilchrist & Knight 2017a) and the resources provided by the state’s Treasury support a considerable level of service delivery provided largely by NFPs on behalf of the state government (Government of Western Australia 2016). Given the significance of the sector’s work and its cost to the state government, it is logical for the government to look at alternative ways of driving efficiency and effectiveness in relation

to the nexus. The introduction of quasi-market-funding rationing systems is one such alternative. There are other aspects driving government policy, however, including in relation to managing the nexus itself.

Indeed, in the WA context, the economic audit resulted in a set of recommendations intended to modernise and rationalise the relationship between the state government and the NFP sector. This included the Partnership Forum's establishment as a standing committee with the authority to receive reports and make recommendations regarding the government/NFP nexus, including in relation to the procurement of services, red tape reduction and broader human services policies.

The DCSP was the WA Government's policy response to the recommendations it accepted and this policy impacted the contextual framework within which the government and NFPs operated, both at a metaphysical level and at a practical level.

The DCSP provided for a number of changes in the way that the government procurement process impacted the delivery of human services in Western Australia with the intention of changing the relationship between government and the sector as well as impacting the service-user focus of human service providers. In short, the DCSP set the scene for the government to hand more of its services over to the NFP sector on the basis that: (1) the NFP sector was best placed to provide services due to its closeness to the community; (2) the provision of funding should be made such that resources are to be provided to individuals using the services so that they can make provider decisions based on their needs and their perception of provider responsiveness to them (individualised funding); (3) recipients then have control over decision-making regarding the services they access (person-centred care); and (4) the evaluation of funded programs should be focused on the assessment of outcomes rather than the provision of outputs (Government of Western Australian 2011).

Further, the DCSP also provided for a policy framework that encouraged state government agencies to exit service delivery, it confirmed that the price offered for service procurement should be sustainable from the perspective of the NFP providers, and that the administrative burden experienced by the government procuring agencies and the NFP sector should be reduced. It also established a policy framework within which to provide additional funding – in the form of \$600 million paid to the

sector in a number of tranches according to need – intended as a response to the apparent real reduction in funding experienced by the sector over previous years.

The DCSP also provided for the creation of the Partnership Forum, which was established with considerable political commitment being made by the then premier of Western Australia who saw this infrastructure as the pinnacle roundtable for shaping the government/NFP nexus. Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the elements making up the forum and the context in which it operated. As can be seen, the premier saw himself as having a central role, while members of the forum were recruited from the NFP sector via cabinet appointments – they naturally included representatives from sector peak bodies, but there was no design from the sector’s perspective in terms of who should be around the table – and from the public sector by reference to the roles, rather than specific people, required to be in attendance.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet, at the centre of government, acted as secretariat and directors-general and senior policy personnel were required to attend on behalf of government. By and large, NFP representatives were either peak body policy personnel or sector leaders with a high profile. However, on the sector side representation changed over time, while the sector peaks remained as part of the structure at all times.

The Partnership Forum created a number of subcommittees charged with widening the opportunity for specialist input into policy relating to key elements such as procurement and funding. These were especially important in the context of the implementation of the DCSP and its impact on government purchasing, funding acquittals and so on. As can be seen in Figure 6.1, the procurement subcommittee was supported by the Department of Finance as the central department with primary responsibility for facilitating the reform of the procurement process. Procurement personnel from key agencies and relevant sector personnel were appointed to this subcommittee.

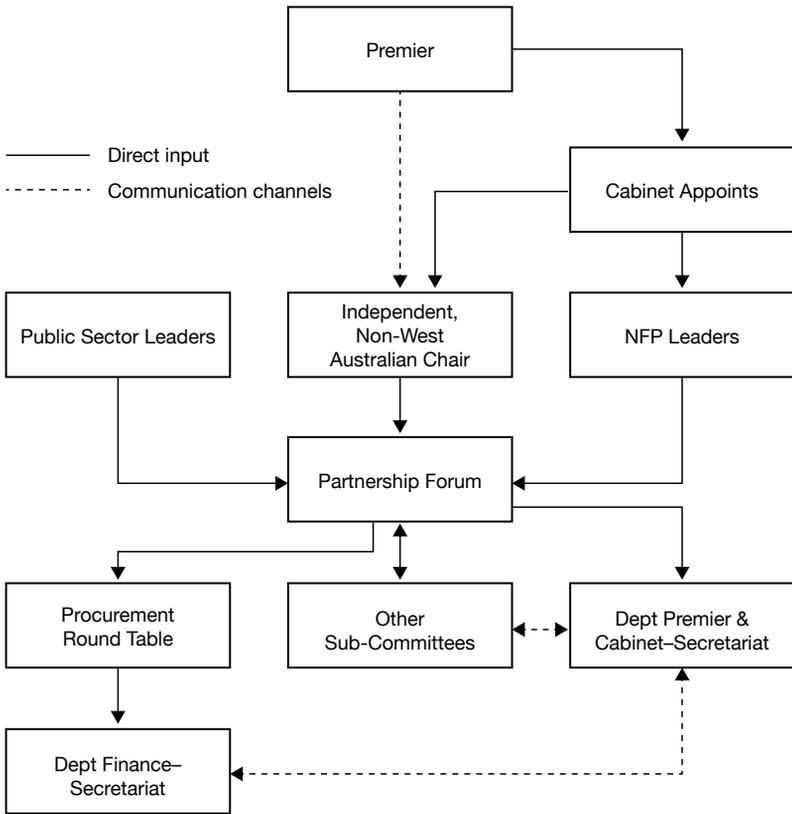


Figure 6.1. Partnership Forum structure

Source. David Gilchrist

Importantly, while the Partnership Forum was seen to be an important roundtable and facilitator of communication between the government and the NFP sector, it had no financial or human resources available to it to deploy in order to examine alternative policy frameworks, assess or evaluate existing practice or with which to drive its own agenda. As such, the Partnership Forum had limited real autonomy.

It is the impact of the Partnership Forum that is of interest in this chapter. In order to accept the policy framework and the concomitant funding increase that accompanied it, the parliament of Western Australia insisted that the government must annually evaluate the DCSP, its implementation and impact, and provide a report communicating the evaluation outcomes to the parliament. I have taken the results reported in the latest evaluation (Government of Western Australia 2016) related to the nexus and the

objectives of the DCSP as a proxy for the success or otherwise of the Partnership Forum. In short, the evaluation process examines the extent to which the DCSP was achieved in the context of the Partnership Forum infrastructure. The evaluation methodology, findings and commentary are provided in the following section.

Annual policy evaluation and commentary

As indicated above, the WA parliament required an annual evaluation of the DCSP in relation to the relative improvements achieved through the policy's implementation. The evaluation took place each year for four years – the first three evaluations were undertaken by the author and the fourth evaluation – the focus of this chapter – was undertaken by the WA Treasury (Government of Western Australia 2016). The evaluation was carried out in 2016 but considered 2015–16 data due to the need to use lag data in this process. In this section, all references relate to this evaluation unless otherwise stated.

In 2015, approximately 1,500 individual contracts were established between approximately 400 NFPs delivering human services on behalf of 14 government agencies. These contracts had a value of approximately \$1.65 billion while the median contract value was \$250,000.

In summary, if the DCSP was impactful we would expect to see outcomes such as the increased transfer of services from government to the NFP sector, increased sustainability of the NFP sector as a result of the increased prices that should have been applied, and a reduction in administrative burden. These outcomes should be found to have increased sustainability, improved outcomes and reduced cost for both government and the NFP sector.

To undertake the evaluation, the WA Treasury implemented four key data-gathering processes: (1) a review of the 2015–16 whole-of-government NFP contract database; (2) a survey of NFP organisations delivering human services on behalf of the WA Government via contracts established under the DCSP; (3) a roundtable discussion with procurement staff representing applicable government agencies; and (4) a review of a sample of 20 human services contracts developed under the DCSP.

The inclusion in the evaluation process of government agencies procuring services was a critical aspect because the intent was to see an improvement on both sides of the nexus. This evaluation constituted an important confirmation of the government's genuine intent with respect to the delivery of the expected advantages of the DCSP. This section is divided into four subsections, the first examines the impact of the DCSP on government agencies, the second examines the impact on NFPs, while the third section examines the deficiencies identified by Treasury and that relate to government agencies and the NFP human services sector. The final section considers the evaluation findings and draws conclusions regarding the Partnership Forum.

Importantly, all of these findings were also reported to the Partnership Forum and their lack of resolution is also likely to be an indication of the relative success of that body.

The impact of the DCSP on government agencies

In many respects, the impact of the DCSP is highlighted via an examination of what has not been achieved by government. This is partly because the key value of the DCSP from the perspective of procuring agencies is a decrease in administrative burden and partly because the complexity of the DCSP means that new skills need to be acquired and new processes need to be implemented in order to achieve the outcomes sought.

In terms of the deficiencies identified, the evaluation made it clear that, notwithstanding the DCSP was under its fourth evaluation, insufficient investment was made in training and systems to develop the intellectual capital and infrastructure required to ensure the DCSP achieved the desired results. The lack of government resulted in the DCSP's limited impact in relation to a number of key result areas thus also limiting the capacity of procuring agencies to evaluate the purchases they made from the NFP sector – a critical element in any public sector accountability regime (Wilkins & Gilchrist 2016).

Specifically, Treasury identified a need to improve how service level outcomes – an important aspect of the DCSP given its focus on the need to achieve service delivery outcomes from the user's perspective – are defined and measured in human services contracts. This finding is not necessarily an indictment of the commitment of the WA Government

in relation to the DCSP, however, as outcomes are notoriously difficult to identify, measure and report upon (Gilchrist & Knight 2017b). Notwithstanding, the need for investment in training and systems is an important consideration for government if it expects to achieve the DCSP's desired outcomes; the evaluation results are strongly suggestive of a lack of investment in this regard.

Additionally, the evaluation identified insufficient machinery necessary for managing the increased number of contracts – under the person-centred care and individualised funding paradigm, service users signed separate contracts resulting in an exponential increase in the numbers of contracts managed by procuring agencies – and for evaluating the extent to which the contracts achieved the intended outcomes. The contract management processes evinced by agencies needed improvement in order to undertake value-for-money evaluation. Once again, however, this deficiency is a result of a lack of investment. Without such investment, the additional cost of administering greater numbers of individualised contracts and assessing outcomes achieved adds cost to the process rather than reducing it. Thus, technology and know-how are critical to ensuring the containment of costs.

An extension of the identified infrastructure deficiency was that of a need to provide for data linkages between government agencies. NFPs providing human services can contract with more than one government agency depending on the breadth of services they offer. Therefore, Treasury identified a need for data sharing to assist with the analysis of a program's efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness.

A need was also found for government agencies procuring services from the NFP sector to support that sector in developing skills and awareness with respect to undertaking collaborations. It is widely held that such collaborations are likely to increase the integration of services and develop better approaches to service delivery while also enhancing efficiencies, thereby ensuring the right resources are allocated to the right areas at the right time (Butcher & Gilchrist 2016). As such, this issue identified that the procuring agencies have a responsibility for supporting the NFP sector, which obviates against the rhetoric of commercialisation and quasi-markets that underpins much of the discussion relating to the DCSP.

The impact of the DCSP on human services NFPs

The deficiencies identified in the previous section were found to manifest on the NFP side of the nexus – they invariably had limited capacity with respect to identifying and measuring outcomes; they did not have the capacity to invest in training, change management or systems; and they were impacted negatively by the growing administrative costs associated with the management of a substantially increased number of contracts and involved in identifying and reporting on outcomes.

There were also, however, some NFP-specific deficiencies identified by Treasury in its evaluation in 2016. These included that the sustainability of NFP organisations' was brought into question because 57 per cent of their income in 2014–15 was raised via WA contracts; Treasury described this as an excessive proportion. Clearly, this is also a finding specific to the cohort reviewed given that other research has identified that approximately 71 per cent of the income of Western Australia's charities is raised from government sources, including federal government sources (Gilchrist & Knight 2017a). It is accepted, however, that diversity in income sources is an important indicator of financial sustainability (Zhai et al. 2017).

The Treasury evaluation also found, however, that NFPs were confident in their capacity to meet both current and future demand for their services. This confidence included the issue of individualised funding. The positive perspective was also extended to the NFPs' belief regarding their desire and ability to work with other NFPs and government in the development and provision of services. This positivity suggests that, where government was found to have a need to invest in and support the development of NFPs' capacity for collaborative work, any response to this need by government would meet fertile ground.

Joint deficiencies identified – the challenges of outcomes measurement

The deficiencies identified above were particular either to the WA Government agencies or NFPs. As already described, however, a deficiency on one side of the nexus usually impacts the other. In this case, both sectors felt the lack of real investment needed to support change.

Specifically, outcomes measurement always represents challenges because outcomes can be difficult to identify, measure and report, especially when they are related to human services (Gilchrist 2018a, 2018b; Gilchrist & Knight 2017b). For instance, while government and NFPs may agree on specific outcomes, when it comes to human services, valid outcomes do not always neatly allow for annual reporting against contractual requirements, can be difficult to aggregate to allow for corporate governance regarding service delivery due to differences between individual service users, and the collection and measurement of individual outcomes can be difficult as well as expensive in time and infrastructure.

As such, investment is needed in upskilling agency procurement staff and NFP personnel, to establish outcomes measurement frameworks that are satisfactory to government and NFP providers, to establish the infrastructure required (such as IT platforms) for data gathering, and to develop the skills necessary for appropriate analysis of the data and a suitable response.

The co-design of services between government and the NFP sector was also identified as an important goal. Indeed, the Treasury report posited that the co-design of services would likely result in better targeted services that represent better value for money. The communications channels and collaboration between government procurers and the NFP sector, however, were identified as unsatisfactory and further work was needed in order to ensure the realisation of the advantages of collaborative work. Such an improvement would likely require investment on the part of government, as would the mitigation of additional concerns raised by Treasury.

For instance, a need was identified to recognise the expenses associated with the process of outcomes reporting. Data collection can take up time from a service delivery perspective, and there is administrative cost and time associated with identifying and implementing outcomes for individual service users (Gilchrist 2018a, 2018b; Gilchrist & Knight 2014). While the outcomes framework is accepted as an improvement with respect to the prospects for individualised funding and person-centred care, it is also true that the framework increases the administrative burden because all of these activities need to be conducted at an individual service-user level rather than a corporate level.

An increase in the administrative burden also requires a change in perspective relative to administrative and governance costs associated with human services delivery – it is almost universally agreed that the aspiration of person-centred care and individualised funding are worthy goals, yet the cost of administering the service design and reporting responses to this aspiration are not accepted. These costs are important elements in the success of outcomes and need to be accepted as such rather than simply as unnecessary red tape.

The evaluation further identified the need for additional skills development to support government agencies and NFPs to collaborate in identifying and operationalising outcomes measures. Guides and exemplars would add capacity on both sides of the nexus and there was a need for additional expertise to be applied at a sector level. Treasury expects that such upskilling and exemplars will improve the prospects for collaborative outcomes identification and measurement, thus improving the effectiveness of government service purchases.

The final element raised by Treasury, which appeared likely to be an ongoing issue for the DCSP, was the need for administrative streamlining and reform. While it has already been observed that elements of the DCSP, such as individualised funding and person-centred care, will naturally result in an increase in administrative effort, a fundamental recommendation of the audit review that resulted in the DCSP was that administrative burden ought to be reduced with respect to the government/NFP nexus. Co-design between government purchaser and NFP supplier, shared data and genuine joined-up government are required if administrative costs are to be meaningfully reduced.

The impact of the Partnership Forum

Clearly, the deficiencies identified endured through the first three evaluations and continued into the period covered by the fourth, with no expectation that change was imminent. Fundamentally, the Partnership Forum was supported by the government and the NFP sector. It is clear, however, that there were a number of aspects of the forum that impacted negatively on its capacity to effect change, notwithstanding the almost universal support it enjoyed.

While the Partnership Forum was intended to be the peak venue for guiding the government/NFP nexus in Western Australia, it was effectively restrained by the central agencies of government as it did not have a budget of its own or an independent secretariat. This restraint was not ‘negative’ in that the central agencies did not necessarily move to constrain the forum or reduce the opportunity for realising the DCSP. Rather, as his government aged, the premier’s attention was focused elsewhere, and the subsequent lack of political focus on the DCSP meant that the necessary resources for change were withheld.

Without a budget, the forum was neither able to develop an implementation plan to guide the functional introduction of the DCSP, nor examine alternative policy settings or undertake research or other work in its own right. Additionally, the lack of executive capacity meant that, while four annual evaluation reports consecutively described the same problems and prescribed the same solutions, there was no appetite or capacity to respond positively.

The lack of an implementation plan combined with the absence of executive capacity and effectively sidelined the Partnership Forum, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that senior government personnel routinely sent subordinates to represent them at forum meetings – an indication of the failing relevance of the body.

Additionally, the Partnership Forum was chaired by a non-WA resident – who arguably lacked context as a result – and provision was not made for a contribution by service users or their advocates. Consequently, the gradual dissipation of influence meant that, when the government changed in April 2017, the forum was suspended.

Following initial consideration by the new government, the Partnership Forum was disbanded and the Supporting Communities Forum has been established. Among other things, this new body will include service users’ advocates, be chaired by a Western Australian with an understanding of the human services sector and include senior government and sector personnel. Importantly, it appears that the body will not have any financial or human resources at its disposal, suggesting that the same problems that arose with the previous body may be replicated in this new one.

Concluding remarks

The establishment of the DCSP in 2011 was identified as a paradigm shift in Western Australia's government/NFP nexus. Expectations were raised that the Partnership Forum would husband the change sought, and implementation of annual evaluation of both sides of the nexus was an important signal that the government was serious about driving effective change to the state's provision of human services – change that would benefit those relying on supports funded by government and provided by NFPs.

The four subsequent annual evaluations, however, including the evaluation undertaken by the WA Treasury in 2016 that forms the basis for this chapter, confirm that the government did not supply sufficient funding for investment and change management. The need for capital to support change was highlighted by the fact that the necessary infrastructure and skills sets remained deficient, even though the policy itself was in place for six years and preceding evaluations raised similar concerns.

Additionally, the prospects for improving the effectiveness of the government/NFP nexus seemed strong at the commencement of the DCSP. Annual evaluations, however, highlighted the need for improved collaboration between government procurers and the NFP sector to co-design services and identify and report on outcomes.

Of course, the prospects for improvement might have increased if there was also a fundamental reconstruction plan in place that could have been used to prioritise the allocation of resources, guide the development of service frameworks and guide reporting and other requirements for ongoing improvement. Such a plan was, and remains, likely to identify investment needs, establish a logical timeframe and allow for government and sector change processes.

The implementation of a policy framework of the significance of the DCSP required broader consideration at a whole-of-government and a whole-of-sector level. The change impacted two intertwined sectors that have worked together within the context of a policy framework that has been in existence for decades, making it difficult to change cultures as well as practices. Continued government enthusiasm at the highest levels is critical to ensuring the prospects for the expected outcomes associated with

the DCSP can be realised, even under the new Supporting Communities Forum. Unfortunately, it is clear that the prospects for positive change expected out of the DCSP have, to date, not been fully realised.

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