Model Service Specification / SLA

A properly drafted and well thought out specification and SLA should have the following elements:

- It will state the business objectives to be achieved in the provision of the services.
- It will describe the service deliverables.
- It will define the performance standards the customer expects in the provision of the services by the service provider.
- It will provide an ongoing reporting mechanism for measuring the expected performance standards.
- It will provide a remedial mechanism and compensation regime where performance standards are not achieved, whilst incentivising the service provider to maintain a high level of performance.
- It will provide a mechanism for review and change to the service levels over the course of the contract.
- Ultimately it will give the customer the right to terminate the contract where performance standards fall consistently below an acceptable level.

1 Introduction

It should start with a brief description of the nature and scope of the service required, the people for whom the service will be provided and the overall purpose and aims of the service. Locally agreed principles or values underpinning the service are normally included at this point as well as relevant information about partnership working in this area. It may also be useful to include an explanation/definition of any technical terms used in the document as well as the recent background of the service or client group, for example is it a new service or existing one?

It should be made clear at the outset if the service specification is based on any national standards and related targets, or other national or local guidance as appropriate, or a local analysis of needs.

2 Description of service to be provided

This section should give a fuller description of the size and nature of the service required, including information about:

- The different client groups requiring services.
- The differing needs of the people who use services.
- The geographical location and spread of services.
- How it is intended that people will be referred or otherwise enter the service.
- Any eligibility criteria for the service that will operate.
- The processes or activities to be provided under the contract and an indication of the volume.

3 Specific standards and targets for the service

This section should detail the specific outcome and output targets to be achieved. It will be necessary to differentiate between those that are requirements and those that offer some flexibility for the provider. It is normally considered good practice to get a balance between outcomes, outputs and inputs, and, in any event, for outcomes to be restricted to three or four vital issues, which are meaningful and measurable.

To help the provider understand how these factors fit with the overall service requirements, it may be possible to include model care pathways for the different client groups.

Having determined the outcomes and outputs of services required, it is important to identify any other quality aspects that you require. Examples of minimum practices and policy requirements in a specification are:

- Expectations/requirements in relation to staffing levels, training, qualifications and experience.
- Expectation/requirements in relation to the management of staff, professional supervision and HR/employment standards.
- Compliance with local or national service standards and guidance.
- Provider policies, procedures and systems ensuring a safe, consistent and quality service.
- Expectation/requirements of provider involvement in the review of services.
- Expectations of provider complaints procedures.

4 Monitoring Arrangements

This section should closely link with section 3 above and provide the means by which commissioners can satisfy themselves that service delivery accords with the agreed levels and standards.

There are two main possibilities in respect of information systems. One, that commissioner systems dictate the way in which information is recorded, collated and transmitted by the provider. Two, that the commissioner is happy to leave the collection, collation and transmission systems to the provider, providing it is able to meet the overall information requirements. It is vital that the specification makes clear what is required of the provider in these terms.

The specification should also make clear the expectations of the commissioner in terms of the provider attending meetings and the sharing of information. A schedule of meetings and the main agenda items might be included as an appendix of the specification.

As well as the performance indicators that the provider will be expected to report on, any other monitoring arrangements need to be outlined such as monitoring visits, complaints or the possibility of spot checks.