



ACADEMY for  
JUSTICE COMMISSIONING

## Evening Seminar

# Effective decommissioning: The flip side of effective commissioning

**Chris O'Leary**

Centre for Public Policy and Health  
Durham University

21 October, 2015



# Your challenges and questions

- Range of reasons to decommission
- Range of experience levels
- Evidence base
  - *Understanding the impact, alternative arrangements*
- Planning and delivering change
  - *Planning, risk, transition arrangements, sustainability*
- Managing relationships
  - *Leadership, providers, service users, media*

# The context

- Dependent variable problem (what counts as decommissioning?)
- We decommission all of the time
- There are positive reasons to decommission
- The austerity narrative
- There is no single, simple answer
- Problems faced in all sectors – opportunities for learning
- Lack of academic evidence
- Decommissioning is a political, rational, technical and emotional process
- Myth of the policy cycle
- Myth of evidence-led policy

# The evidence

- Lack of evidence base
- Some resources
  - NAO – *focuses on rational*
  - Healthcare dominates
- Four key ingredients (*mixing rational, political, emotional*):
  1. Make the case
  2. Manage relationships
  3. Strong leadership
  4. Communicate, communicate, communicate

# Make the case

- Planning is important
- Focus on rational and technical
- Quick fixes no longer an option – *transformational change needed*
- Difference between what should and what does affect decommissioning (Robert et al, 2014)
- What should ‘make the case’
  - Clear strategic goals
  - Fair decision-making process
  - Strong evidence of case for change
- Decommissioning costs
  - Time and money to implement
  - Impact of closures
- Face the future (what happens following decommissioning)

# Strong leadership

- Complex system with complex governance
- Part of whole complex, adaptive system
- ‘Wicked problems’
- Decommissioning is difficult and stressful
- Active role of senior managers
  - Clients
  - Staff
  - Partners
  - Wider public
  - Legal
- Challenge vested interests
- Political support

# Manage relationships

- Map/identify key stakeholders
- Plan how to manage these relationships
- Be proactive (don't wait for the s\*\*t to hit the fan)
- Don't just focus on 'core' stakeholders
- Decisions to de-vest: knock on implications for others
- Be clear about:
  - pace of change
  - transitional arrangements
  - support arrangements
  - future arrangements
- Remember that change is difficult and emotional

# Communicate, communicate, communicate

- Planning is important
- Media
  - Make local contacts
  - Actively manage relationships
- Regular updates to all those affected
  - Email updates, meetings, public meetings
  - Clear, accurate messages
- Appetite for risk decreases as you approach D:Day
- Gauge risk appetite
- Public, community, service users involvement and engagement
- Positive not negative

# Useful resources

National Audit Office: decommissioning toolkit [www.nao.gov.uk](http://www.nao.gov.uk)

HAC (2010) *Ten lessons learnt from closing the Hearing Aid Council*

Robert et al (2014) Disentangling rhetoric and reality: an international Delphi study of factors and processes that facilitate the successful implementation of decisions to decommission health services, *Implementation Science*, 9 (123) (open access article)

Robinson et al (2013) It ain't what you do it's they way that you do it: lessons for healthcare from decommissioning of older people's services, *Health and Social care in the Community*, 21 (6), pp614-622

Bunt and Leadbeater (2012) *The art of exit: in search of creative decommissioning*, National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

# Effective decommissioning: the flip side to commissioning

**Dr. Chris O'Leary**

Centre for Public Policy and Health  
Durham University

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015**



ACADEMY for  
JUSTICE COMMISSIONING

---

Any Questions ?

