**Discussion on the social value of participation at the NHS England – Suppliers, Patient and Public Participation Framework Workshop, Resource for London 09/05/17**

1. **Barriers to implementing social value in commissioning noted during discussion:**

* Commissioning is driven by value for money; if told that they must save money, commissioners cannot see beyond figures*: “I don’t have any choice, if I have to cut back, social value goes out of the picture.”*
* Commissioners are accountable to their heads of service so cannot run at a deficit, they will be “in trouble” if they do.
* Commissioners question if social value benefits the entire community, or just a minority. Is it therefore in the interests of the “majority” and worth it?
* When I (Research Associate working on GTC) pointed out that they are potentially saving money elsewhere by implementing social value (i.e. less reliance on other resources such as mental health service, welfare/benefits), commissioners said: *“That may be so, but that doesn’t directly benefit my department or make cashable savings for me. How do I account for that?”*
* It also takes time to see the benefits of social value. Commissioning runs on a one year (two years’ max) cycle, so it doesn’t fit.
* What is “good” social value? How do commissioners measure the benefits? Difficult to agree to it if you cannot quantify the benefits.
* Doing social value is “a trade-off”.
* If commissioners are going to do social value, they prefer to work with local organisations; a distrust of national organisations.

1. **Summary:**

My overall take-home thought from the day was that commissioners appear to have restricted aims and objectives in their work. They are concerned with “balance” i.e. balancing the books and doing what they perceive to be fair for everyone. That means being able to quantify things, to justify it; that is their job. They don’t necessarily see the bigger, connected picture, or think about the individuals behind the figures. They have difficulty accepting that anecdotal evidence could be sufficient reason for doing social value. There is a fear or mistrust of working with a different approach as they are accountable for their actions, which are measured in monetary terms.