Assessing the impact and implications for social workers of an innovative children's services programme aimed to support workforce reform and integrated working

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Abstract: *This article reports findings from an independent audit and evaluation of an innovative children's services programme (CSP) funded 2009-2011 by twelve Local Authorities under the auspices of the North-East of England's Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (NEIEP) to manage improvements and efficiencies across the children's services sector focusing upon messages for social workers. The overall purpose of the CSP was to make demonstrable progress in tackling the challenges of child poverty by delivering high quality support to the growing number of children with social care/health needs through regional improvement. The key objectives of the CSP included supporting workforce reform and integrated working; development of personalised services; family support to reduce the need for residential care; and provision of tools to aid commissioners with needs analysis. The audit identified key outputs, for example, improvements to best practice on Whole Family approaches, safeguarding and leadership training evolved through a skills framework; and included a regional model of social work supervision training along with a provision of options to increase the range and quality of foster care placements. The evaluation considered actions arising from the above findings, including demonstrated improvements to inter-disciplinary working and pooling resources to produce better outcomes for families; setting up a data-base to improve the balance between fostering, residential care and family support; and creating opportunities for social workers to explore the practical implementation of using personal budgets.*

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Date of first (online) publication:

Introduction

> Provision for children and young people is taking by far the heaviest hit from the Coalition Government's austerity measures. The bottom fifth of families will suffer 12% losses over the next four years, in tax, benefits and public services. Children lose most in tax credits, frozen child benefit and extra child care costs, most disabled children losing all credits. Hardly a week goes by without another report on children's services being cut – the loss of Sure Start centres or lost after-school or breakfast clubs…the Children's Society warns that 80,000 children will be homeless unless the cap on housing benefit is raised, with 200,000 being pushed into poverty. (*Guardian* 13.9.2011)

> The £2.3bn early intervention grant is (now) abolished. Already cut by 20% it pays for Sure Start, teen pregnancy prevention and other programmes to catch problems early. The (new minister's) answer to exorbitant child care costs is more deregulation with one child-minder caring for 5 under-5s'. (*Guardian*, 16.10.2012)

The above two quotations from a well-known left-wing political journalist predict the effects of the United Kingdom's (UK) Coalition Government's policies, contrasting these fundamental policy shifts with other efforts to address social mobility issues, such as a pupil premium – which gives extra money to schools for each poor pupil eligible for free school meals. However, a regional level, local government in England has also sought to develop public sector efforts to reduce child poverty. In one such innovation, the Children's Services Programme (CSP) was funded (2009-2011) by 12 Local Authorities under the auspices of the North-East of England's Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (NEIEP) to manage improvements and efficiencies across the children's services sector. The CSP service objectives were to: (1) support workforce reform and integrated working; (2) develop services that are personalised and tailored to an individual or family to support achievement of best outcomes; (3) innovate to reduce the need for children and young people to be placed in residential care completely or at least closer to their families and home communities; and (4) provide services and tools to help commissioners of services for looked-after children with needs analysis (NEIEP,2009). This article presents and discusses the findings from an independent evaluation of the CSP with a focus on messages for social workers.

The intention of the CSP was that the four objectives would be achieved through discrete projects each shaped by performance indicators as 'outputs' or 'deliverables'. Many outputs from the projects were items such as the production of plans or the development of new approaches/regional strategies, or establishing groups or creating evaluation frameworks for judging best practice. It was acknowledged that whether these were achieved or not would in reality say very little about the quality or impact of the project 'deliverables'. Similarly, the project outcomes were not easily measured (many were broad and the contribution of the individual projects to them at an overarching level was difficult to interpret). Each project devised a strategy to improve

local/regional children's provision, based on improving agency or professional collaboration; and/or fostering best practice and developing new ways of working, particularly social work interventions. These were locally determined (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. The projects and their aims and remit

Think Family ISSP
• To develop a Family Assessment Framework – protocols and systems; and a model of practice characterised by: assessments creating 'family files' fusing data from two separate computer systems (FIP and ISSP); and an holistic approach focused on acquisition of new skills and strategies learned by FIP and YOS workers, to improve outcomes for families experiencing multiple vulnerabilities.

Integrated Learning Disability Services Pilot
• To produce efficiency savings by preventing, or delaying any costly out of area residential placements, by delivering high quality support to families which have a child who falls within the autism spectrum with complex needs and preventing family breakdown.
• To improve ability to meet need locally with clearer focus on current/future cost control and to share strategic capacity by providing a better skill base.

Leadership Development for Middle Managers
• For participants to obtain a comprehensive understanding of existing work-based and accredited opportunities for leadership and management professional development underpinned by national/local findings and scientific evidence.
• To develop, deliver and evaluate a programme comprising two modules mapped to the 'Leadership Management of Children's Services in England Professional Development Framework' and pilot in the north/south of the region for a minimum of 40 middle managers selected from each of the 12 Children's Trust arrangements.
• To develop and contribute to a directory of leadership skills for the region.

Supporting Social Work Through Regional Codes of Practice for Supervising Practice Learning and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
• To develop an increased level of consistency across the region with regard to how social workers are managed and supported through local authorities completing organisational health checks and learning from the regional analysis of these checks.
• To develop a regional model of supervision training and develop the skills and knowledge of social workers to allow for effective supervision incorporating line management, professional supervision and continuing professional development.

Applying Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)
• To share good practice in the application of Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA).
• To promote the use of it as a tool within the region through the design and delivery of a training and action learning programme to local authorities across the North East with a focus on Children's Services.
• To enable participants to apply OBA to work on and improve the outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy within the region.

Partnering Commissioners On Needs Analysis for Residential Placements
• To provide information to support commissioners across the region in developing services and managing the market for out-of-borough placements.

- To provide examples of facilitation of development of regional and/or sub-regional resources to meet identified need and develop new services.

Collaborative Foster Care
- To explore options for collaborative working between 12 local authorities in provision of foster placements for children who are looked after.
- To identify options for collaboration which will (a) increase the range and quality of placements provided by local authority fostering services for children from the area; (b) maintain children in stable placements in or close to their home area whenever possible; and (c) demonstrate efficient use of resources and share best practice among local authorities for innovative solutions

Improvements to Safeguarding Including Collaborative Supervised Contact Arrangements
- To establish a Regional Best Practice Contact Strategy that safeguards vulnerable children and supports effective use of children's services.
- To achieve a baseline position statement with regard to provision of contact services by local authorities within the region.
- To improve safeguarding practices within the region through research-based models of effective intervention.
- To share lessons from common areas of activity such as serious case reviews.
- To use above learning to develop, document and deliver training modules to up-skill staff.

Name of project: Supporting 'Grow your own'(GYO) Social Work Schemes
- To provide examples of collaborative working among local authorities with regard to 'grow your own' schemes, and the provision of temporary social workers.
- To identify/assess options for and feasibility of developing collaborative arrangements either across or within the region to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of 'grow your own' (GYO) schemes and the provision of temporary social workers

Policy background and concepts

The Child Poverty Act (2010) introduced duties for local authorities to work with their partners to produce Child Poverty Needs Assessments (CPNAs) and Child Poverty Strategies. The development of the Coalition's *Child Poverty Strategy* has focused on identifying 'root causes' framed as worklessness, educational failure, parenting and early child development deficiencies, family breakdown, and health inequalities (HM Government, 2011). This takes forward 'social investment state ' perspectives, emphasising highly targeted social investments however seeking a shift from the 'social investment state' to the 'social investment market'. The Strategy was strongly influenced by two Government-commissioned reports – Frank Field's (2010) *Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances* and Graham Allen's (2011) *Early Intervention: the next steps*. Both reports stressed the 'fundamental importance

of the early years in determining a child's life chances' (HM Government, 2011:43). Allen, in particular, argued that *evidence-based* approaches were found to improve children's development, education and health outcomes, and social behaviour, and although there is much less research about longer-term outcomes, in the long-run, early intervention programmes would lead to large public savings to reduce welfare expenditure.

To provide a focus for evaluation of the broader outcomes of the CSP, precedence had been given within the Programme's design (NEIEP, 2010) to the management requirement to create efficiencies or cost savings. The pervasive impact of managerialism has influenced governance of all types of children's services in terms of information flows; lines of accountability and even – in the case of some Children's Centres (see Lewis, Roberts and Finnegan, 2011) – reduced parental participation. Purcell and Chow (2010), in their study of management arrangements in Children's Services Departments (CSDs) in England, claim that the model of New Public Management (NPM) inspired ideas behind their reorganisation, in marked contrast to existing modes of operation revolving around more traditional notions of the profession. These authors present a narrative where *costing* work (seen as the domain of managers) merges with *caring* (the domain of caring professionals such as social work) aligning the two producing 'hybridisation' characterised by incorporation of cost considerations into caring work.

It was envisaged (see for example, Atkinson, 2006; Kahan et al, 2008; Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health, 2011) that changes to the organisational culture of provider agencies (for example, fostering agencies or residential placements) might emerge as a result of the CSP. This may be through identification of new ways of creating shared or collaborative services across Local Authorities, reflecting a commitment to particular values, for example of equality, flexibility, openness and creativity. Culture within an organisation entails a system of shared meanings among members, reflecting deeper values, horizontally across separate organisations and at vertical levels through an organisation's relationships and so forth. It can serve two critical functions of integrating members so that they know how to relate to one another, and to help the organisation adapt to the external environment (Hafford-Letchfield, 2009). Within the CSP, projects which had a central focus on sharing foster care resources were accompanied by attempts to create a realistic case-load for social workers; while others aimed to share aspects of safeguarding services, through promoting best practice and delivering effective multi-disciplinary training.

Changes to organisational culture are reflected directly through measures for achieving workforce reform towards 'integrated working' or more effective partnership-working (DCSF, 2008) and were not confined to the CSP or to the local authorities that participated in it. It took place at a time of major investigation and introspection for social work in England. The National Social Work Reform Board (2011) called for 'promoting meaningful learning opportunities within multi-professional teams' and made trenchant criticisms of some aspects of social

work performance and culture. Whereas the CSP maintained its aim of tackling the challenges of child poverty, and securing cultural workforce changes. This entailed re-engineering of social work services in relation to more specialisation, improved co-ordination /tracking in child protection, in contrast to other possible workforce changes such as greater skill mix and promotion of more generic health and social care workers. Achieving cost efficiencies by means variously described as 'skill mix' or 'grade mix' reviews or even 're-profiling the workforce' at root may consist *de facto* of labour substitution – the practice of substituting cheaper for more expensive labour but may also substitute less for more skilled labour (although the two are often conflated, see for example Thornley, 2007). It is in this context of local authority commitment to work regionally and national uncertainties about social work that the CSP and its evaluation are situated within wider social policy concerns to reduce child poverty and to reduce public expenditure.

Aims and method

Although evaluation can mean a whole range of things, it is essentially about judging the value or worth of something, typically some innovation, intervention, policy, practice or service (Robson, 2002, p.202). Evaluation and audit have some similarities. They are both interested in programme outcomes and have a similar purpose in trying to improve services. A key distinction is that audit usually concentrates on answering normative questions such as whether the programme or service is operating as intended and meeting the standards that it has set, whereas evaluative research has a broader brief in particular as regards questions about cause and effect (Fox, Martin & Green, 2008:66). The first part of the CSP evaluation comprised an audit to determine how successfully, or otherwise, the projects comprising the CSP had met their stated objectives, for example making efficiencies and improvements, or contributing to best practice, enhanced business plans or sharing resources. The second part comprises a wider data collection analysis focused on assessing the effectiveness or impact of the CSP overall, including estimating possible longer-term impact on social work practices, for example, inter-agency or partnership-working; or influencing systems or cultures in individual local authorities. Data were collected during 2010-2011 from two key sources:

1. Interviews mainly with managers and professionals who comprised selected workers from across the overall programme. This consisted of face-to-face audio-taped interviews with 18 participants using a short semi-structured interview schedule designed to focus on their views and experiences of implementing the project gathering evidence about individual project outputs/deliverables, how far they felt that they had been achieved, and any reasons for non-achievement.

2. Documentary evidence such as project reports provided by external consultants enclosing, for example, project statistics, analysis of how 'outputs/deliverables' had or had not been achieved, and business case option solutions; individual project leads' formal monthly progress reports; and a limited number of follow-up interviews (N=6) with key personnel to verify and provide comment on the main body of gathered evidence.

Providing a summative analysis of findings was undertaken within a context of *realistic evaluation* ' (identifying) the mechanisms that explain how an action affects outcomes in particular contexts' (op.cit: 69); and drew upon all available data to devise a form of narrative picture of how individual projects had been shaped. The following main findings are presented within the context of the CSP's broad objectives combining those from the service delivery project audits with those from the evaluation process overall.

Main findings

From their initiation documents, most projects emphasised management, professional but rarely user objectives. While user outcomes were alluded to by at least two projects, there was generally little guidance about goal pathways in the CSP design (NEIEP/ILG, 2009) about how to achieve improved 'outcomes for children and families'. An inherent mismatch appeared to exist between the implicit aims of the overall CSP, which were expressed in language of 'tackling the challenges of child poverty' and 'mirroring cultural changes in the *Every Child Matters (ECM)* agenda'; when set aside the aims of individual projects which collectively were meant to reflect these broader aims but in practice were rather different. For illustrative example, overarching outputs of the CSP were as follows:

1. Support workforce reform and integrated working:

The *Think Family ISSP* project was characterised by interdisciplinary working, whereby managers and frontline professionals shared information and decided on a course of action together including planning in detail the rudiments of an education and family support programme. For example, a Family Intervention in Practice (FIP) worker and a Youth Offending Service (YOS) worker agreed an intervention plan for six families; each plan embracing an approach described as 'holistic, strengths-based' geared to problem-solving, trusting family members and encouraging whole family engagement, resulting in new skills - shared planning and completion of assessment tools with direct involvement from family members. This problem-solving approach was designed to enable family members to participate in service design and development. Both the ISSP and FIP workers commented positively on new

opportunities to share information, move out of 'silos' and provide a more integrated service to families. One FIP manager stated:

[it] meets the needs of all the family members as opposed to focusing on just the child or carer. It encourages whole family engagement which in turn encourages relationships to develop which may have been strained or non-existent for varying reasons in the past, focusing on families working together to achieve desired outcomes, focusing on promoting independence as opposed to dependence.

Greater flexibility of response was associated with modest improvements to outcomes for families experiencing multiple vulnerabilities through use of personal budgets (cash grants); also sibling advocacy. This project was said to build the self-esteem of family members and to promote professional trust by helping to solve practical problems, for example, by enabling family to pay their bills, or alter household equipment. This 'holistic' approach proved a useful needs analysis tool for social workers, using an internally devised system along with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to fuse data from separate computer systems (FIP and ISSP) to create individual family files.

Other projects deployed a trans-disciplinary practice model, where sharing or transferring information and skills across traditional disciplinary boundaries enabled one, two or more staff-members to be primary workers supported by others working as consultants. An example was the *Integrated Learning Disability Services Pilot* which created a support service for families who had children with challenging behaviours associated with core autism, deemed at risk of family breakdown. The project built up support packages for families – based on support from short-breaks, one-to-one counselling training, and sibling support – using significant resources of about £50,000 per family per annum. The Project Lead explained why this seemed to be cost-effective:

By keeping families together and giving extra intensive support, the child can remain at home and in their community, which is beneficial to all concerned. Longer term it would also potentially be easier to support the young person when they move to adult services, which in itself would be more cost effective than accommodating them when they come back to the Local Authority, where they do not even know their own community. This is a longer-term efficiency, as well as a better outcome … (Project Lead)

This project pooled funding to buy support services across three Local Authorities with an overall aim of preventing the placements of children and young people in high cost residential establishments, particularly outside the region. The support service was provided by a team of practitioners who received specialist training (CALM/Challenging Behaviour Foundation info@the cbf.org.uk) supported by mentoring from social workers and psychologists. The focus was on gathering

evidence to demonstrate improved outcomes for five families measured in terms of family functioning, behaviour management, and reduction in parental stress.

Another example of trans-disciplinary working resulted from a regionally-based project using an *Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA)* model to achieve reductions in teenage pregnancy. The project focused on changing the behaviours of frontline staff employed in health, social care and education services with support from external consultants and other in-house staff such as social workers acting as mentors. The OBA model lays emphasis on the importance of using a shared and common language across partner agencies, focuses on outcomes that are desired and monitored, and producing evidence of progress towards those desired outcomes (NFER, 2010). This project was aimed at developing the skills of midwifery, early years or social care practitioners, through, for example, holding a 'Turning the Curve' workshop. At this workshop projections were made about what would change over time if nothing changed, and then planning changes which hopefully would lead to improved outcomes or 'turned curves' that move away from the initial prediction. Very little if any substantive formal evidence was presented by consultants in their report to support or underpin their major claim that:

> *In order to turn the curve for teenage pregnancy in the region there is a need to improve the skills and knowledge of practitioners with regard to outcomes-focused planning, performance and evaluation as a basis for driving service improvement and enhancing outcomes for young people.*

However this project increased the number of practitioners trained in the OBA method; and was reported also to have built up local expertise in a form of mentoring based on evidence-gathering to support each practitioner in their work around a set of desired outcomes.

2. Develop services that are personalised and tailored to an individual or family to support achievement of best outcomes:

Progress towards a 'personalised services model of working' continued as a consequence of the CSP through a sharing of best practice and exchange of learning across the region. For example, the use of direct payments (involving payment of cash equivalent of a directly provided service to a person or family eligible for social care) or personal budgets (clarifying the financial amount available to meet a person's needs, then allowing maximum choice over how this amount is spent) included a social worker managing the full amount on the person's behalf. The projects created a learning opportunity for some professionals to explore the practical implementation of using personal budgets, for example finding out whether recipients receive enough money to purchase sufficient care or testing out the notion of whether personal budgets leave service users vulnerable to abuse or at risk of significant harm. Success was said to depend on the attitudes and training of front-line staff, and in the case of

the *Integrated Learning Disability Services Pilot,* user choice occurred within the local standardised service package offered to families.

Individual projects, namely *Think Family ISSP* and *Supporting Social Work through Regional Codes of Practice*, used the 'In Control' (2007) templates where professionals attempted to think creatively about how it might be possible to work within the current system to free up more resources to do things differently. The project *Partnering Commissioners on Needs Analysis for Residential Placements* involved use of personal budgets to help find new placements and so support children in their own homes. This project developed a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment through creation of a data-base providing information on almost 300 children integrating social care, special educational needs and NHS information through a single collection point. External consultants reporting on this project stated:

> *Audit would become an annual exercise once a complete data-set is produced based upon the findings and feedback from this process. The benefits identified from the audit include evidence to demonstrate cost efficiencies in placement activity - in 3 named local authorities- and an evidence base to support more local, accessible services.*

These projects were characterised by freeing up of resources - using Local Authority money as personal budgets to pay bills, and to buy household equipment - and identifying the impact on outcomes. The *Supporting Social* Work *through Regional Codes of Practice* project introduced an overarching professional standards framework consisting of a regional model of supervision and mentoring for social workers around Continuing Professional Development and practice learning. As a result the focus of practice was said to have shifted from heavy emphasis on assessment, to support planning and review; thereby giving people who use services a more direct say in how these services were run.

3. Innovate to reduce the need for children and young people to be placed in residential care completely or at least closer to their families and home communities:

One project, *Collaborative Foster Care*, succeeded in establishing elements of a shared service aimed to increase the range and quality of foster care placements across participant Local Authorities. Other projects invested in feasibility studies to examine options to deliver a service based on a social enterprise model or shared facilities model. However the CSP had singled out foster care as needing to be strengthened through innovation as an alternative to residential care. The *Collaborative Foster Care* project, with help from external consultants, produced detailed business case options, including 'the most advantageous', for developing foster care such as combining the resources of several Local Authorities to pay for areas such as marketing methods and in-house training. Project outputs included a data-base on foster carers for each Local Authority, building up evidence to increase retention of foster carers through

a consultation to highlight what is important to them, a small increase in foster care pay rates; and a process to harmonise fees and allowances across participant Local Authorities. Nevertheless one or two key proposals from the external consultants involved in this project were rejected by the group responsible for implementation resulting in action that: *'a collaborative foster care service (planned to run across the 12 local authorities) would be pursued in a different way through a 3-way conversation between 3 participant councils, agreeing separately allowance and carer rates' (Chair of Collaborative Fostering Services Project Board).*

The project, *Feasibility Study into Collaborative Supervised Contact Arrangements,* for safeguarding children aimed to improve collaborative arrangements among the Local Authorities to increase the provision of contact services for children and families as determined by the courts, through commissioning child contact centres as a temporary venue for supported contact, and also for foster care work. The project sought information about the level of demand for extended safeguarding post-court services and about the rise in social work contact required based upon a consistent service specification. The focus was on ensuring that wishes and feelings of children and young people were included, maximising the input of other stakeholders; and employing more social workers or equivalent as regional co-ordinators to lead multi-disciplinary training events and ensure that overall project aims were met. Delivering a Best Practice Contact Strategy, this project established a valuable picture of services across the region based on a multiple-sourced audit, and in so doing, provided evidence to support current policy initiatives around prevention and family support.

4. Provide services and tools to help commissioners of services for looked-after children with needs analysis

Several local and regional audits were undertaken, intended to deepen the process of 'needs analysis' to aid commissioners to plan alternatives to residential care and evaluate their capacity for sharing elements of service provision either directly through 'buying-in' or *quid pro quo*, or by sharing information. The purpose of the *Intelligence and Benchmarking* project was to collate data from education, social care/social work and primary care sources; to form a profile of individuals - based on gender, age, breakdown of need - who are currently in 'out of borough' residential placements; and then to commission alternative short or long-term placements nearer to the family home, if such individuals' needs could not be met through living at home with their primary carers. The total number of 'out of borough' placements identified across twelve Local Authorities for 09/010 was 283 of which 128 (46%) were 'Subject to a Care Order'. The most frequent need identified was in relation to 'Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulty' (39%), followed by 'Autistic Spectrum including Aspergers Syndrome' (14%). The database 'output' was however incomplete as a result of failure to secure full engagement of all relevant agencies, particularly PCTs. However sufficient data were obtained to begin a process of commissioning individualised placements and by mid-2011 around 15-20 new placements had been

found through new provider contracts.

A further audit was established based on collaborative working among Local Authorities for *Supporting 'Grow Your Own' (GYO) Social Work Schemes* for providing a temporary social work resource, and traineeship for individuals with an appropriate degree to undertake social work training via secondment. This needs analysis assessed the feasibility of developing collaborative arrangements across the region to improve 'effectiveness and efficiency' of GYO schemes resulting in extending the GYO pool of social workers, including arrangements for progression of newly-qualified staff in first year of practice, and reduction of agency costs. The external consultants serving this project presented evidence to demonstrate that collaborative agreements could benefit the region as a whole and identified specific cost savings confirming the normative assumption across the UK of a strong correlation between high staff turnover and high agency costs (Cornes et al, 2011; Noble, J et al, 2010):

> *There appears to be some correlation between high staff turnover and high agency costs; if all 4 high agency spenders reduced their agency costs to the average of 23% of what is spent on qualified staff , it would save nearly £700K. (external consultants' report)*

Discussion

Implications for the policy-making process

The heuristic devices to break down the complexity of policy processes, that is, agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation and evaluation, characterised the linear nature of the CSP. Providing a patina of 'invited policy space led through government agencies (RIEP/ILG) involving selective stakeholder participation' (KNOTS, 2006) helps to understand the dynamics of this policy process encompassing different conceptualisations of power embedded in its structures and institutions.

Jones and Sumner (2011, p.55) present a model of policymaking entailing three interwoven components: a policy idea and narrative; key policy actors and networks; and a political context /institution that shapes policy processes. As a manifestation of the CSP, the first of these is represented by the notion of management problem-solving and action to create efficiencies and service improvements, this being despite an absence of a clear, perceptible association with the expressed goals of the North -East Child Poverty Action Plan (NEIEP, 2010). The second involves key individuals, for example lead commissioners drawing up plans to secure specified outputs/deliverables, and inviting external consultants to gather and interpret a range of evidence. A dilemma arising from the CSP implementation process concerns attributing impact to the contribution of the work of external consultants. In 6 of the 9 named projects consultants were employed to provide set project 'outputs' or

'deliverables'; yet in some cases business case options proffered by consultants were rejected or only partly accepted by project leads due, it was said, to the poor evidence-base underpinning some of their key recommendations. The third component is highlighted by the level of centralised decision-making, limited democratic openness, and less consideration orientated towards professional-user relationships within the overall policy implementation process. The CSP did not appear to produce a coherent strategy for interagency or partnership–working across projects which would impact successfully on key programme objectives, for example to enhance effectiveness of front-line services, to develop services that are personalised.

Implications for developing a culture of integrated working

The inter-related elements of organisational strategy, structure and culture form an organic whole, integral to which an organisation exists through transactions across its boundary (NESTA, 2010, p.15). The CSP embodied in its design a potential to influence systems and cultures within participant Local Authorities, as each project involved a minimum of three and a maximum of twelve Local Authorities. Each project had a structure centralised within a host organisation, typically a Local Authority, and relied on a network of interactions among stakeholders to achieve its aims. Funding had been dispersed according to a set of rules built into each project's design covering aims/deliverables, programme structure, monitoring and reporting arrangements, with timescales set at the outset. This performance management approach emphasising efficiency contrasts with for example a children's rights perspective singling out developmentalism, protectionism and participation as 'dominant discourses defining practices mediated via expert professionals' (Pinkney, 2011).

As for cultural change the main evidence suggests that projects were not transformational in the sense of providing a role model (see, for example, Peck & Dickinson, 2008:27) but rather that their outputs were management-process driven, entailing the production of an explicit business case, a strong project steering group who can offer a reality check, and processes to demonstrate improvement or performance management. Whereas a hierarchic, managerial-driven culture appeared to characterise the norms and values of the CSP as a whole, there were elements of a more democratic-styled culture found within specific projects. This aspect was characterised within specific projects by an evidence-based practice (EBP) approach (c.f. *Intelligence and Benchmarking, Improvements to Safeguarding including Collaborative Supervised Contact Arrangements, Applying Outcomes-Based Accountability* and *Collaborative Social Work);* also by inter-professional working (c.f. *Integrated Learning Disability Services Pilot, ISSP Think Family).* It has been claimed that EBP in social work and social care has failed to provide a means of addressing any of the underlying problems of a lack of national policy on the relationship between research

and practice, a lack of skills in systematic reviews, and in the lack of investment in the intervention studies that provide the building blocks for EBP (Fisher, 2012). We need to know why interventions are effective or not, how they relate to existing practice knowledge, whether they can be implemented in daily practice, and whether the intervention is acceptable and accessible to people who use services. Evidence to underpin a culture of integrated working came from practices revealed across a range of projects, such as trans-disciplinary working involving professionals from different disciplines mentoring one another; whole family multi-disciplinary assessments leading to alternatives to residential placements; and collaborative agency working to devise a data-base or multi-sourced audit for planning Local Authority foster care, a recognised growth in safeguarding contact centres and in setting up GYO social worker schemes.

Limits of the evaluation

There has been a transition from evaluation as academic research to a more participative and dialogue based form of research where evaluators and the evaluated meet (Julkunen, 2011). The CSP evaluation however mirrored a management narrative with a focus on the extent to which individual projects achieved outputs designed for them. As such the limits of the evaluation were pre-established from the design of the CSP per se. Applying managerial reforms involving occupations, for example social work that requires a high degree of discretion and judgement in day to day work, will benefit most from the participation of all stakeholders in order for the reforms to succeed. Managerial control through measurement and specification of outputs (the volume of work done) or outcomes (the results) raises arguments about what should be measured and how that becomes part of the debate about who should control the work.

The design of the CSP posed a problem for evaluation in that it appeared to lack clarity regarding its overarching aims, delivery mechanisms; along with how each individual project was expected to contribute, through its outputs, towards the broad Programme aims. This produced a situation where it could be claimed that outputs had been achieved at individual project level yet on aggregate this result failed to make a significant impact upon Programme goals as a whole. The evaluation focus was on assessing the extent to which individual projects had achieved their objectives, typically measured by new or improved internal management processes or specific 'outputs/deliverables', with an additional focus on gathering evidence to identify changes in work practices, systems or cultures. An obvious limitation of this approach was that of restricting the data source to manager and commissioner perspectives, along with a number of key professionals/programme staff; thereby omitting perspectives of children and families seemingly intended as the main

Programme beneficiaries. This single case-study contained a varied number of projects yet excluded any comparative element, located either internally or externally, nor was it designed experimentally; for example in the sense of comparing any of the Programmes outputs and changes with those from a different region. The presentation of data from the evaluation thus may appear inconclusive – '(the evaluation) argues rather than demonstrates, and there is a complex connection between evidence and conclusion' (Shaw and Gould, 2001, p.181).

Conclusion

> The overall purpose of the CSP (was) to make demonstrable progress in tackling the challenges of child poverty by delivering high quality support to the growing number of children with social care and health needs through regional improvement. (Draft specification evaluation protocol, NEIEP, 2009)

This objective directly associates policies to reduce child poverty with those intended to deliver social care and health services support. In the UK however recent cuts both to the welfare bill and to public spending mean that child poverty looks almost certain to rise from 2010/11, an early challenge to both the spirit and substance of the Child Poverty Act (Stewart, 2011, p.183). Attention has been increasingly focused on the institutions of the welfare state, for example through family policies, in search of socio-political solutions to the problem of child poverty (Bäckman & Ferrarini, 2009). It has been argued that allowing child poverty to exist, and thereby denying some children the opportunities and life chances that are taken for granted by others, is a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The wide variations in child poverty in rich countries, ranging from a few per cent in Nordic countries to over twenty per cent in the US, shows that there is scope for political action (UNICEF, 2005).

Tackling challenges posed by child poverty requires developing an appropriate knowledge or evidence base underpinning dominant understandings of childhood and well-being; how to accommodate multiple forms of expertise whose evidence prevails in policy debates, for example managerial or professional expertise; along with understanding the interaction between knowledge, policy processes and agency culture (Jones and Sumner,2011, p.55). As part of a general trend towards democratisation in developing country contexts (for example, Bessell, 2009) the role of policy advocacy in shaping resource allocation decisions, policy networks and communities is motivated by a common set of ideas rather than by the exercise of self-interested power (Buse et al, 2005).

What should be the main features of any proposed future programme of this kind?

Suggested features of any future programme are: (1) that the programme becomes led by a more 'rights-based', child-centred approach based on the notion that child poverty is a violation of human rights. Evidence of this trend is most visible in the recent Sarkozy Commission (Fitoussi, Stiglitz, & Sen, 2009) which marked a shifting emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being. Jones and Sumner (2011, p.16) have analysed a 3-dimensional well-being approach - interactions between beings, doings and feelings (McGregor, 2007, p.317) – to understand child poverty as the interplay of: the resources that a person is able to command; what they are able to achieve with those resources and what needs and goals they are able to meet; and the meaning that they give to the goals they achieve and the processes in which they engage. To promote a concept of rights, Davis (2011, p.114) has argued that we need to examine a range of discourses concerning children and families if we are to develop integrated, participatory and social justice solutions within children's services, highlighting that, for example, there has not been enough in-depth studies carried out for us to be able to claim that children's services are becoming participatory; or that participation has led to better outcomes for children and families. And (2) that the programme uses and learns from evidence drawn from outcomes-research and evaluation linked to the implementation of practice reforms enabled from the CSP to develop integrated working, personalised services and tools for needs analysis. A number of writers suggest that it is not possible to give a formulaic description of integrated working but that at its heart is the idea of 'jointness'. Jointness is believed to occur when more than one agency responds to the ideas/decisions of others (Christie & Menmuir, 2005; Scott, 2006; Davis, 2011). It may involve schools, health centres, play settings, children's centres, social work offices and community projects, or also educational psychologists, nurses, doctors, social workers, volunteers, and faith group members (Fitzgerald & Kay, 2008; Glenny and Roaf, 2008); and may involve a range of services being provided by more than one discipline (Author, 2007). In the case of strengthening integrated working a future programme may need to address learning cultures and their development, for example communities of practice; supporting individuals as regards professional identity; and looking to a common set of values and attitudes in dealing with risk and uncertainty (Trodd and Chivers, 2011, p.12).

Although the CSP was characterised by individual projects sharing governance with a range of interested stakeholders, its predominant culture was of a gradual shift towards managerial forms of organisational coordination. This culture paid attention to outputs and performance rather than inputs, to an efficiency drive and a belief that objectives (would be) produced at lower cost when the appropriate management techniques are applied (Cutler and Waine, 1998, p.xiv). Creating efficiencies was seen

as a Programme objective in itself; and for social work services in particular there was an additional focus on improving or transforming services through better leadership towards a model of user empowerment and well-being with business principles applied (Hothersall, 2006). Any future programme needs to focus more on how to achieve transformation, including putting in place a 'rights-based' or empowerment approach for those intended to benefit. The whole family approach arising from Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) in which a key worker coordinates services for a family and uses support and sanctions to motivate, engage and improve parenting skills, needs a new emphasis on child-centred outcomes (Churchill and Clarke,2009:50). The emphasis within the current Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers in England (2011) identifies standards for a professional social worker, including an ability to engage effectively with situations of increasing complexity, and challenge, for example, those with multi-agency input, and multiple/significant risk factors. To do this effectively demands an evaluation framework combining an evidence-based, action planning approach setting out underlying values and principle to achieve relevant integrated processes and outputs, for example performance measurement; vision; leadership/governance and participation. Some of the real benefits and outputs of the CSP proved difficult to interpret perceived from within a complex infrastructure of each individual project resulting from inevitable blurred lines of accountability characteristic of a multi-faceted, multi-agency, multi-professional programme.

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