

Reducing Reoffending Change Fund Evaluation of Year 1 – Public Social Partnership Development

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The Scottish Government commissioned Iconic to evaluate the development of Public Social Partnerships (PSP) during Year 1 of the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund. The evaluation examined how the 14 organisations awarded Development Funding in Year 1 have used the funding to develop PSPs, and what has been achieved in this initial six-month period (October 2012 to March 2013). PSPs involve public and third sector bodies co-designing services to deliver agreed social outcomes.

Main Findings

- Lead partners' motivation for applying to the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund was primarily the availability of funding to expand or develop mentoring services. However, a secondary motivation was the opportunity provided by the PSP model to work in a new collaborative way with the public sector.
- Development Funding enabled the lead organisations to undertake a wide range of activities such as engaging new and existing partners, consulting service users and mapping existing services, and the activities were generally viewed as successful.
- Partnership working was regarded as a real strength of the PSP development process. The impact of the PSP model on partnership working was evident in improved relationships, better understanding between partners, and the development of trust and shared values. Overall there was a sense of equal partnership working although this was a challenge in the time available.
- The PSPs involved service users in the development process which was viewed as successful as it identified a number of issues which led to several PSPs redesigning services. Service user involvement mainly consisted of consultation to gather views on existing services and PSP proposals rather than direct engagement in the service design process.
- Partners found co-production a valuable process in terms of learning about services, sharing knowledge and experience and fostering a system of close joint working. The majority of partners felt the proposals were co-designed and the process has had a positive impact on the quality of services developed.
- Discussions around sustainability resulted in written commitments from public sector partners to underwrite services in 13 PSPs, subject to caveats. The commitments came mainly from the Community Justice Authorities and they were largely seen as the most appropriate organisation to provide this commitment in the circumstances. However, the limited involvement and commitment of some public sector partners that could benefit in the long term from savings from a reduction in reoffending was highlighted.
- Most lead organisations and partners would be part of a PSP again mainly because they felt that they had achieved a great deal in a short space of time. The process had been challenging but this had not dissuaded lead organisations and partners from future involvement in the PSP model.

Introduction

The Scottish Government commissioned Iconic to evaluate the development of Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) during Year 1 of the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund (RRCF). The research is the first part of a package of work to evaluate the development and delivery of the RRCF, and it focused solely on how the 14 organisations awarded Development Funding have used the funding to develop Public Social Partnerships, and what has been achieved in this initial six-month period (October 2012 to March 2013).

The RRCF was launched in August 2012 to provide offenders with substantial one-to-one support through evidence-based mentoring schemes, and to promote strong, equal partnership working between third and public sector organisations.

Aims and Objectives

The evaluation addressed the following questions:

- Why did the organisations choose to get involved with a PSP? What did they hope to get out of this model of working?
- What activities did organisations undertake as part of the PSP development? How successful or unsuccessful do they feel these were?
- Do they feel that the PSP model is having a positive, negative or no impact on the quality of the service that has been/is being developed? What is it about the model that is having this impact, if any?
- What impact has the model had on partnership working? What mechanisms have been put in place to ensure an equal working relationship between partners and are these successful?
- What challenges are they facing through the process?
- Do they feel that the service being developed through the PSP model is likely to be sustained after the Change Fund ends. Why or why not?
- Are they achieving what they wanted to from being part of a PSP model? Would they be part of a PSP model again?

Methodology

The evaluation comprised a mixed approach involving a document review; a survey completed by 61 PSP partners; depth interviews with over 100 individuals from the 14 PSP lead organisations, PSP partners, national stakeholders and organisations not awarded Year 1 Development Funding or involved in mentoring or reducing reoffending; and observation of PSP meetings.

Public Social Partnerships

PSPs involve public and third sector bodies co-designing services to deliver agreed social outcomes and they consist of three phases: design, piloting and tendering. It was prescribed that a third sector organisation must lead the RRCF PSPs and the evaluation considered the lead organisations and their leadership of the PSPs. The evaluation also considered the key elements of PSPs: partnership working, service user involvement, co-production, and sustainability.

Lead organisations and leadership

There was significant variation in the size, scale and experience of the 14 third sector organisations that led the PSPs.

Lead partners' motivation for applying to the Change Fund was primarily the availability of funding to expand or develop mentoring services. However, a secondary motivation was the opportunity provided by the PSP model to work in a new collaborative way with the public sector.

The lead organisations undertook a wide range of activities in the development of PSPs and they were generally viewed as successful. Lead partners described their involvement in the PSP process in positive terms, and identified a range of benefits from the experience including the opportunity to engage new and existing partners, build closer working relationships through collaborative working and secure cross-sector support for the project that was developed. A small number of lead organisations also highlighted that they had increased their profile.

Challenges were also faced by the third sector lead organisations including in some cases limited experience of PSPs and/or the justice system, difficulties in assuming the leadership role and issues engaging partners within the timescale.

Interviewees identified both advantages and disadvantages of third sector organisations leading PSPs.

Partnership working

Partners were evenly divided between the third and public sectors and generally, interviewees felt the right partners were involved in the PSPs. Public sector partners were predominantly the eight Community Justice Authorities (CJA) and local authorities. The involvement and the role of key public sector partners varied significantly between PSPs.

Partnership meetings played a significant part in the PSP development process; the frequency, format, and size of the meetings varied significantly.

Organisations performed a variety of roles as lead, providers, referral, support and strategic partners. Roles were not mutually exclusive.

The impact of the PSP model on partnership working was said to be evident in improved relationships, better understanding between partners, the development of trust, and the development of shared values.

Overall there was a sense of equal partnership working although there was a view that this was a challenge in the time available. The main mechanism to ensure equal partnership working was dialogue to address issues. Learning from the experience was also highlighted as an important means of developing equality in the future.

A number of challenges to partnership working were encountered and they involved the limited timescale available to develop PSPs, the competitive nature of the Change Fund, the different approaches of partners, the need for clarity at the outset on some issues, the input of different personnel, and the issues faced in discussing sustainability.

Service user involvement

PSPs involved service users in the development process. Service user involvement was viewed as successful as it identified a number of issues and an impact was evident in several PSPs with services redesigned following input from users.

Service user involvement mainly consisted of consultation to gather views on existing services

and PSP proposals rather than direct engagement in the service design process. PSPs recognised the importance of engagement and most had developed proposals during Year 1 for ongoing engagement.

Development Funding was used to consult users in variety of ways including focus groups, depth interviews and surveys. There were also some innovative approaches including the use of video to capture the views of one hard to reach group.

The third sector led the involvement of service users and public sector partners played an important supporting role in many PSPs. Existing links and an understanding of service users, including hard to reach groups, were identified as key factors in the success of the service user involvement.

Co-production

In the RRCF PSPs co-production primarily focused on third and public organisations working together to design interventions with service users' views fed into the process following consultation.

Two approaches to co-production were identified: refinement of an approach proposed by the lead organisations, and a more fundamental approach to the design of a new service from scratch - feedback on involvement in the latter process was positive. Views on the success of the two approaches varied and precluded conclusions about which was more effective.

The co-production process typically involved a number of tasks involving a wide range of partners to identify gaps and evidence need, consider how schemes linked with existing and developing interventions, and define objectives and outcomes. The process varied between PSPs and some challenges were faced.

The process of co-production was one of the elements of PSP development that partners found most valuable, in terms of learning about services, sharing knowledge and experience and fostering a system of close joint working. The majority of partners felt the proposals were co-designed and the process has had a positive impact on the quality of services developed.

Sustainability

Discussions around sustainability occurred in all PSPs and resulted in written commitments from public sector partners to underwrite services in the future in 13 of the 14 PSPs. The commitments were subject to a number of caveats including the outcome of the 2014/15 UK spending review and the outcome of the evaluation of the PSP services.

Commitments to underwrite services came mainly from the CJAs and this was welcomed by partners. The CJAs were largely seen as the most appropriate organisation to provide this commitment in the circumstances.

Interviewees highlighted the limited commitment of some public sector partners that could benefit in the long term from savings resulting from a reduction in reoffending. Partly this was because some public sector partners had not been invited to join the PSPs and partly it was because funding pressure and the 2014/15 UK spending review meant that some public partners could not provide written commitments to underwrite services at this time.

Interviewees highlighted challenges during sustainability discussions including engaging all public sector partners, the limited timescale, working across administrative borders, and the prevailing funding and policy environment.

The interviewees were unsure about whether the services developed through the PSP model would be sustained after the Change Fund ends mainly because of the caveats attached to the commitments to underwrite services. Despite this partners welcomed the requirement to consider sustainability at the outset as they felt it would allow them to hold public sector partners to account in the future.

A number of other issues were highlighted by interviewees during discussions about sustainability including mixed views about competitive tendering, concerns about best value, intentions to source

additional funding, and the importance of non-financial sustainability.

Most lead organisations and partners would be part of a PSP again and this was essentially because they felt that they had achieved a great deal in a short space of time.

Conclusions

The 14 organisations awarded Development Funding in Year 1 of the Reducing Reoffending Change Fund used the funding to develop Public Social Partnerships and proposals for mentoring services. The Development Funding enabled the lead organisations to undertake a range of activities which were generally viewed as successful.

Overall, interviewees felt that strong partnership working occurred during the PSP development process. They also highlighted that co-production and extensive service user consultation had a positive impact on the quality of mentoring services developed. Constructive discussions on sustainability occurred which led to commitments from some public sector partners to underwrite services in the future subject to caveats.

Interviewees highlighted challenges throughout the PSP development process. The limited time for PSP development was felt to be the main issue as it was highlighted as a challenge to partnership working, service user involvement, co-production and sustainability. The challenges had not generally dissuaded interviewees from future involvement in the PSP model.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131-244 4211.