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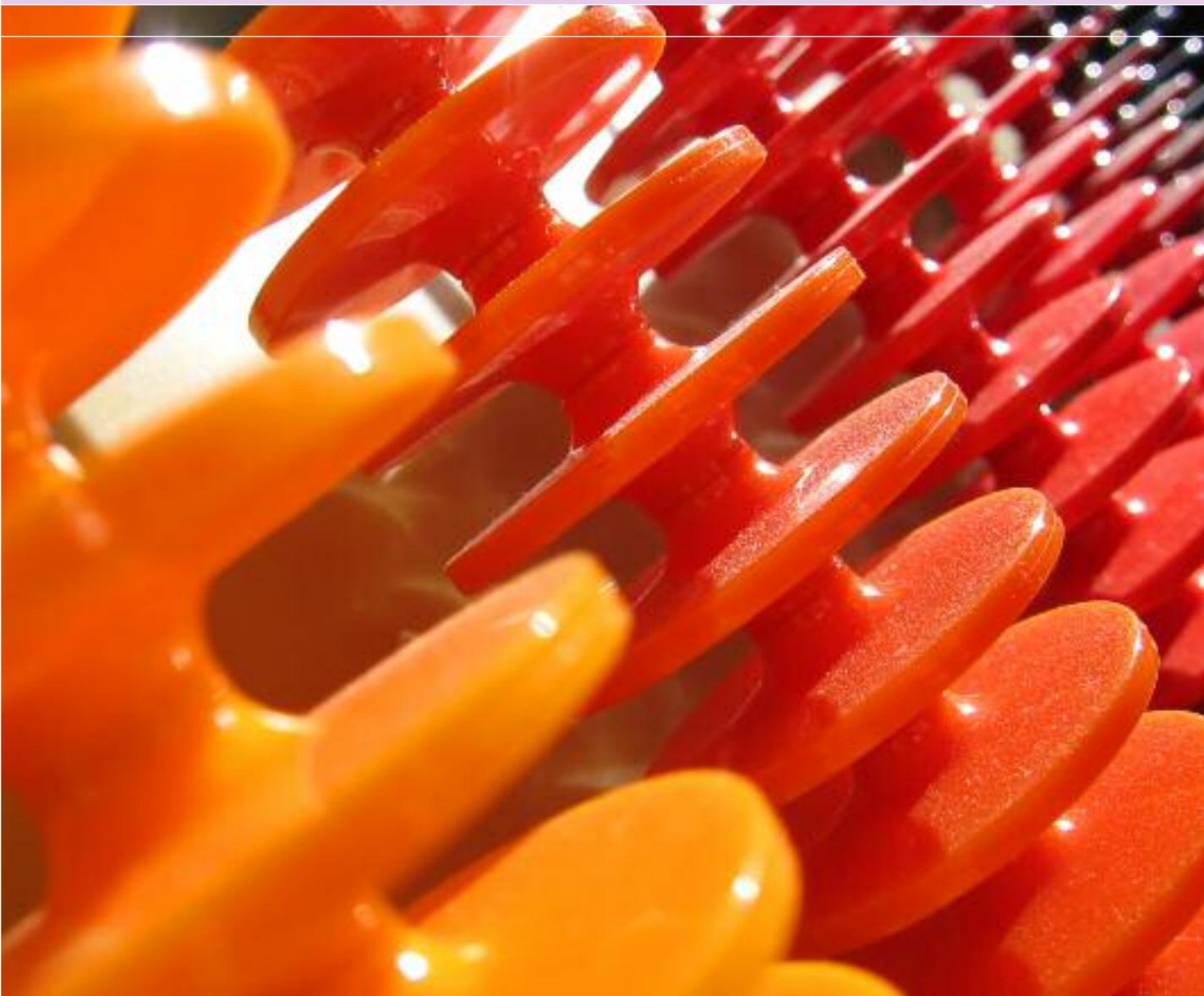
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The **online guidelines** to facilitate sustainability and replicability of effective practice, which were developed as part of this research, can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRSV01.

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Executive summary

Background

Innovations in practice in local authority children's services face a number of key questions in the current organisational and economic environment. First, is it possible to show how a project, programme or process has made a positive difference in outcomes for the children, young people and the families concerned: that is, can effective practice be validated? Second, can the longer-term benefits in terms of impact be proven to outweigh the costs of implementation of a programme or initiative? The challenge, while being mindful of cost-effectiveness, is to evidence how practice can be:

- *sustained*: that is, continue to work effectively beyond the initial effort to establish the practice and/or

- *replicated*: that is, transferred to different settings with different staff.

The Local Government Group (LG Group) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to examine how effective practice examples that have been through the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) validation process[1] have been, or could be, replicated and sustained, with a view to informing guidelines for future practice.

Key findings

How do you sustain and replicate effective, validated practice?

- **Appropriate 'buy-in'** from key individuals at a strategic and operational level was considered particularly important in order to promote and drive the programme forward.

- Although not always believed to be necessary, evidence showed that **collaborative working** (especially where the role of partners was clear and the size of the partnership was manageable) was often perceived to be vital.

- When replicating a programme, it was believed to be important that the **core principles remain the same**, as this helps to ensure that the aims of the programme remain clear.

- Ensuring resources and adequate funding are secured and that the **long-term impact outweighs the costs** associated with the programme or initiative, were felt to be important. Moreover, resourceful 'joined-up' funding should also be explored.

- Other essential factors included defining the key stages of the operational process, devising a clear plan at the outset, **having a documented system** and embedding that system.

- There was a general consensus that evidence of impact is critical and can be achieved through, for example, **systematic evaluation and dissemination of findings**.

What are the challenges and how do you overcome them?

- 'Change' in itself was identified as a challenge. Staff involved in sustaining or replicating practice often need to change their working practice and develop new ways of thinking. Therefore, it is important to manage and support staff through transition by ensuring that effective communication allows them to have a clear understanding of why change is necessary.

- There was widespread concern about the potential impact of budget cuts in terms of, for example, changes in staffing and discontinuation of funding streams. However, having 'champions' at all levels can help promote the positive aspects of the programme and help keep it on the agenda.

- Meeting the needs of a particular community can prove challenging. Therefore, it is important to have high calibre staff who possess, for example, a good knowledge of the local area to lead the programme or initiative.

Methodology

This executive summary builds on Phase 1 of this research (which considered whether validated examples have been, or could be, replicated and sustained) and presents key findings from Phase 2 and Phase 3. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in validated practice programmes and initiatives. Interviews were carried out between October and December 2010. In order to explore further and refine the key factors that were identified as facilitating sustainability and replication, two focus groups were conducted with those practitioners involved in current validated practice programmes and C4EO sector specialists with experience of validation panels, between January and February 2011.

Note

1 Effective practice which demonstrates evidence of impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families are eligible for validation.

Introduction

Background and aims

Innovations in practice in local authority children's services face a number of key questions in the current organisational and economic environment. First, is it possible to show how a project, programme or process has made a positive difference in outcomes for the children, young people and the families concerned: that is, can effective practice be *validated*? Second, can the longer-term *benefits* in terms of impact be proven to outweigh the *costs* of implementation of a programme or initiative? The challenge, while being mindful of cost-effectiveness, is to evidence how practice can be:

- *sustained*: that is, continue to work effectively beyond the initial effort to establish the practice and/or

- *replicated*: that is, transferred to different settings with different staff.

Taking advantage of the work of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4E0) in identifying examples of validated local practice (VLP),[1] this project aims to identify the factors that enable local practice to be sustained and replicated.

The LG Group commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to examine how effective, validated practice examples[2] that have been through the C4EO validation process have been, or could be, replicated and sustained, with a view to informing guidelines for future practice. A detailed discussion about what is meant by 'sustainability' and 'replicability' is available in the Phase 1 report in Appendix B. More specifically, the research aimed to:

- identify evidence that effective practice examples (that have been validated)[3] have been, or could be, replicated and sustained

- identify the main factors that facilitate sustainability and replicability of effective practice

- investigate cases where effective practice is being sustained whilst funding, resources and staffing are being reduced.

Phase 1 of this research[3] (Hetherington *et al.*, 2010), which was undertaken between 2009 and 2010, comprised a scoping study based on the analysis of 63 examples of validated practice published by C4EO. It sought to explore whether examples of validated practice showed evidence of having been replicated and/or sustained. The initial factors identified as contributing to or inhibiting sustainability and replicability are:

- meeting an ongoing need

- practitioner 'buy-in'

- 'buy-in' from target group or groups

- adequate resourcing

- support from budget managers and commissioners

- organisational stability

- seeking continuous improvement

- effective sharing and use of information

- effective dissemination

- a willingness to take risks plus mutual trust between practitioners.

These factors were used to inform the development of the interview schedules for Phase 2.

In addition, definitions of sustainability and replicability were examined in detail as part of Phase 1 of this research and were reviewed in the initial stages of Phase 2. Analysis of this data suggests that the key features associated with sustaining and replicating effective practice that had been validated were similar to those associated with effective non-validated data.

The main aim of Phase 2 of the research was to further elaborate on and explore facilitating factors for sustaining and replicating validated practice and to provide greater clarity to the key facilitating factors identified in Phase 1 of the research. Following on from this, focus groups were held with practitioners from local authorities and voluntary organisations and C4EO sector specialists in order to present the key elements of sustainability and replication and discuss the draft guidelines.

The comprehensive spending review (HM Treasury, 2010) resulted in significant cuts in public spending, including 'a settlement for local government that radically increases local authorities' freedom to manage their budgets, but will require tough choices on how services are delivered within reduced allocations' (p.8). Moreover, the pressures and uncertainty surrounding the current economic climate place greater importance on local authorities with regard to being able to evidence the longer-term cost/benefits of investing in programmes and initiatives. Therefore, this research and subsequent guidelines have real practical value to all local authorities interested in effective practice emanating from validated practice.[4]

Methodology

In order to meet the aims of the research, a qualitative methodology was adopted. The research comprised two main strands: semi-structured telephone interviews with stakeholders involved in validated practice programmes and initiatives and with C4EO sector specialists. In addition, two focus groups were undertaken with those practitioners involved in current validated practice programmes and those who might consider them in the future and with C4EO sector specialists who had experience of validation panels.

Telephone interviews (Phase 2)

Twenty-five cases of practice seen by C4EO panels between November 2009 and July 2010 and deemed to be fully validated (meeting the C4EO criteria for validation), or promising practice (examples with some evidence of impact on children, young people and their families, but not submitting sufficient evidence to be fully validated), were identified as the sample. Practice

examples were then systematically drawn on the following criteria:

- the extent to which there was evidence that the programme has already been sustained and/or replicated in some way

- ease of sustainability and replication in terms of, for example, over-reliance on an external organisation.

Other considerations included how long the validated practice had been in existence, in so far as how long it was from when the programme was initiated to when it was validated, and the current relevance or strategic importance of the programme. In addition, the sample achieved a cross-section of C4EO themes, a geographical spread and different local authority settings (for example, rural or urban).

In accordance with the proposal, 15 semi-structured telephone interviews were undertaken with seven programme stakeholders and, where appropriate, a further member of staff, or partner organisation. A further five telephone interviews were undertaken with C4EO sector specialists in order to gain their perceptions on sustainability and replication of validated practice. The sample was selected from those who had attended at least one validation panel. The sample was also selected to represent a range of C4EO themes.

In total, 20 telephone interviews were undertaken between October and December 2010.

Focus groups (Phase 3)

The main aim of the focus groups was to explore further and refine the key factors that programme stakeholders and sector specialist interviewees identified as facilitating sustainability and replication of validated practice identified through Phase 2 of the research. Participants were asked to provide their views of these factors and the extent to which they felt that they would form the basis of future guidelines to facilitate sustainability and replication. The focus groups were also used to explore the draft guidelines that had been developed, in terms of ease of use and clarity.

Participants, or stakeholders, comprised practitioners from local authority and voluntary organisations and C4EO sector specialists. The sample sought to ensure

that a geographical spread was achieved and different types of local authority (for example, rural or urban) were represented. Sector specialists were selected from those who had attended at least one validation panel. The sample comprised specialists across a range of themes including: schools and communities; families, parents and carers; disability; early years; safeguarding and vulnerable children.

Structure of the report

Chapter 1 explores the main factors that facilitate sustainability and replicability of validated practice. Chapter 2 outlines the main challenges, particularly in light of the current economic climate and budget reductions across the public sector, and suggests ways to overcome the identified challenges. Chapter 3 briefly outlines the rationale for the recommended guidelines. Finally, Chapter 4 concludes the report, highlighting the key messages arising from the research and suggested guidelines.

Notes

1. The C4EO validation process confirms the effectiveness of practice. Further information about C4EO and the validation process can be found in Appendix A.

2. It should be noted that this research has investigated validated practice that has evidence of impact on children, young people and families. Practice that has *not* been validated could also have impact, but it has not been evidenced through the C4EO validation process.

3. Phase 1 findings can be found in Appendix B.

4. 'Validated effective local practice' will usually be referred to as 'validated practice' henceforth.

1 Factors facilitating sustainability and replicability of effective practice

Key findings

- Appropriate 'buy-in' from key individuals at a strategic and operational level was considered particularly important in order to promote and drive the programme forward. 'Buy-in' from other individuals, such as volunteers who are passionate about the programme and what it can achieve, can also help.

- Collaborative working was considered important. However, there was recognition that in some cases partners are not critical to implementation, while in others the number of partners can be too large, which could mean that you lose sight of what the programme is trying to achieve.While having knowledge of local need was viewed as essential when considering replicating a programme, it is important not to adapt the programme too much. The core principles need to remain the same so that the aims of what the programme set out to achieve are clear.

- While funding was clearly viewed as a key consideration, the evidence points to the understanding that, although some funding is usually required, it is not necessarily the most important consideration.Ensuring resources and adequate funding are secured and that the long-term impact outweighs the costs associated with the programme or initiative are considered important. Moreover, resourceful 'joined-up' funding should also be explored.

- Defining the key stages of the operational process, devising a clear plan at the outset, having a documented system and embedding that system were deemed to be important factors.

- Evidence of impact was widely viewed as vital. Evidence of outcomes through systematic evaluation and the dissemination of findings were thought to be a necessary prerequisite.

The validation of practice has been widely welcomed as a quality-assured and endorsed means of sharing and accessing best practice. It is particularly valued because submissions are reviewed by peer practitioners, have a local context and are evidenced (and the degree of sustainability and replication is part of the evidence criteria laid down in the process). The examples and vignettes cited in this chapter are based on evidenced validated practice.

Overall, it appeared that most programmes had been developed with sustainability in mind. One stakeholder, for example, reported that an external evaluation had been undertaken to explore the sustainability of the approach and its effectiveness in terms of outcomes for children and young people. Her colleague explained:

> It [the programme] *has lasted through initiative, through motivation, through energy to do the best they could for those clients* [parents and children] … [and has] *meant that it* [the programme] *was embedded.*

Sector specialist participants were in agreement that sustainability should be a consideration when programmes or initiatives are developed. However, a decision cannot be made regarding whether or not initiatives are worth sustaining until evidence has been collected about the impact that it has achieved.

Across all programmes there was evidence to suggest that validated practice had been sustained for at least a period of two years and, in some cases, longer: a finding that was supported by evaluation data. For example, the aim of one initiative was to promote and support the health benefits of breastfeeding. The data revealed that there had been an increase in the rate of mothers initiating breastfeeding of 11 per cent in one local authority and 2 per cent in an adjacent local authority, between 2005/06 and 2008/09.

In the process of sustaining validated practice, in most cases it appeared that the programmes had evolved to some extent. For example, one programme stakeholder noted that while the method of working had not

changed, as the key workers had become more embedded in other services a more widespread awareness of the programme had been achieved. They had, for example, captured political interest at a senior level and had been able to evidence the cost-effectiveness of the programme and the outcomes achieved.

In contrast, few programmes appeared to have been developed with replication in mind. However, in one instance, for example, the stakeholder interviewee said that it had been a consideration from the outset, reasoning that staff had always held the view that they wanted to explore whether the programme could be developed elsewhere. The first resource centre which was set up to provide support for parents and children with disabilities was used as a pilot to see the extent to which it was successful. In the majority of cases, programmes had been replicated at a local, regional or national level, although not always in their entirety.

Largely in line with findings from Phase 1 of this research, where factors such as commitment, strong management, excellent communication, quality information sharing and funding were found to enable sustainability, this phase of the research highlighted similar enablers. Appropriate 'buy in', working partnerships, flexibility, resources, a documented operational model and evidence of impact were considered to facilitate sustainability and replication, and are discussed in greater detail below.

1.1   Appropriate 'buy-in'

When considering initiating local practice, the evidence indicated that there is a need to be mindful of the local community. Needs are likely to differ at various levels (locally, regionally and nationally). For example, the programme stakeholder involved in the breastfeeding initiative stated that while in one area there might not be a demand for a breastfeeding group, there might be a need for information to be disseminated via a midwife. Therefore, interviewees reported that it is essential to ensure that the appropriate partners are involved and consulted. For example, **'buy-in' from key individuals** at a strategic and operational level was (in addition to internal motivation and the

identification of a genuine need) considered particularly important amongst stakeholders involved in over a half of the programmes, a few sector specialists and stakeholder focus group participants, in order to promote and drive the programme forward. This finding was also identified in Phase 1 of this research. In addition, stakeholder participants explained that while 'buy-in' might have been achieved at the strategic level, translating it into practice on the ground to frontline managers can prove more challenging as it can require different 'buy-in' and appeal to different motivations. Vignette 1 illustrates the importance of taking a holistic approach in order to ensure sustained 'buy-in' amongst all partners.

Vignette 1: The importance of ensuring engagement from key stakeholders

The family support model was described by one programme stakeholder as a multi-agency partnership approach to the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. The model comprises a set of arrangements, common terminology, policy, procedures and documents that are used by a wide range of agencies to improve and aid integrated working for children who need multi-agency support. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and preventative work (outside of the social care remit) relies wholly on engagement with partners at the outset.

All partners needed to understand the benefits of engaging with the process and how it could enhance their own service or practice. To achieve sustained 'buy-in', it was important for partners to appreciate how the support model would benefit them as well as the local authority. In this way, partners at all levels could influence any developments, ensure systems were flexible enough to meet their own needs, and were therefore more likely to take ownership of the processes. If the project had been imposed by the local authority it would not have met the needs of all the partners and would have limited their engagement, so mutual benefits would not have been extensive.

Sector specialist focus group participants felt that appropriate 'buy-in' was the most important factor for sustaining a programme. One participant reasoned: 'you're asking people usually to do over and above their day job or to be seconded ... to do a particular development task. In order to agree [with] that, they have to buy into it'. It was also recognised that 'buy-in' should be ongoing throughout the duration of the programme or initiative.

There was some recognition amongst programme stakeholders and sector specialist focus group participants that 'buy-in' from other individuals, such as volunteers, who are passionate about the programme, and what it can achieve, can help facilitate sustainability and replication. For example, **having champions who can drive the programme forward** was believed to ensure that the practice is kept on the agenda as explained by one sector specialist: 'you do need the passion and dynamism to start initiating change and take others with you and adapt'. Furthermore, a stakeholder interviewee observed the need to have key champions to ensure that the initiative remains on the agenda:

> Unless a few key people see it as a key part of what they are doing to drive it [forward], the risk is that it gets lost under the weight of all the other things that people have to do.

However, the evidence further indicated that having a dedicated member of staff driving the initiative forward was not enough to secure a sustained programme, because if knowledge and commitment are invested solely in one individual, and they decide to leave their current role, there is a risk that expertise will leave with them. Succession planning and capacity building were also considered essential. Therefore, there was recognition of the need to ensure that dedicated time is allocated to undertake such tasks.

Moreover, sustainability and replication also appeared to be facilitated by having high calibre staff who have **credibility**, **local knowledge and the ability to influence**. In one instance, for example, the personal attributes of the coordinator, their ability to influence and have a clear understanding of the model (and what it sought to achieve), were considered instrumental to sustaining and steering the project.

A **change in culture** (to advance a collective belief and will to succeed) was considered key amongst a few stakeholder interviewees in order for a programme to succeed. With this in mind, it was considered important to ensure that all staff understand the reasons for change and the aims of the programme. One interviewee remarked:

> If you're going to change ways of working, then obviously you have got to take people with you and to do that, they've got to believe in the work that they're doing and the model that they're working with. They then can see the impact ... and that is really a great motivator.

Internal motivation was identified as a particularly important process by stakeholder focus group participants because 'if you invest in something, you give to it'. This could take place through, for example, staff taking ownership of particular aspects of work to ensure that all staff at all levels are inspired and engaged.

1.2 Partnership working

There was evidence across all programmes and initiatives to suggest that **collaborative ways of working** are important, both in terms of having a positive impact on sustaining and, in some cases, replicating validated practice. Vignette 2 provides an illustration of this.

Vignette 2: The positive impact of partnership involvement in sustaining validated practice

A resource centre which is run by the local authority was set up in 2008 with the aim of providing a range of support for children with disabilities and their families. Services are offered 'on a universal basis right up to the specialist and targeted working with more complex needs'. Through consultation with parents, the centre seeks to develop a diverse range of resources that are flexible, creative and responsive to the needs of families.

The centre (which is registered as a children's satellite centre) works with a range of partners, including the primary care trust (PCT) who were involved in reviewing care plan processes. Centre staff also had the opportunity to attend medical reviews alongside their own looked-after reviews or service planning reviews. Prior to the resource centre opening, parents reported that they were attending a number of meetings and duplicating information across a range of agencies. Therefore, the setting up of the centre was considered a useful way in which to share information across agencies and prevent duplication of effort.

The centre also works collaboratively with the education services, including schools and speech therapists, to enable consistent approaches to, for example, meeting young people's targets and sharing information with regard to how the centre works with a young person. In addition, voluntary agencies such as Action for Children sit on the centre's resource panels where they assess children's needs in order to determine the types of services families require.

The involvement of partners was perceived to have had a positive impact with regard to sustaining the programme in terms of, for example, being able to provide a broader range of resources to meet the needs of children with different support requirements. Moreover, it was felt that partnership working had helped facilitate replication of another centre locally.

A further project was developed as a result of the Hidden Harm agenda which nationally recognised problems of the impact on families of substance misuse by parents. The programme is managed by a third sector organisation with specialist knowledge and experience regarding children and young people and substance misuse issues. The organisation provides some of the support, including children's workers who facilitate children and young people's groups. Their involvement was considered important, not only because of their experience but because of the potential wariness and reluctance amongst parents if the programme was labelled a local authority project. The programme also involves a pool of local authority staff, including social workers and youth offending workers who, for example, help facilitate the groups.

The involvement of the local authority was considered 'absolutely key and crucial because ultimately, they're the ones [who] funded on the recommendation of the evaluation pilot. They have added it to their core funding in social care'.

More frequently cited ways in which **partnership working was developed** and perceived to have a positive impact on sustaining a programme amongst interviewees (stakeholders and sector specialists) included:

- drawing together a **range of skills and knowledge** in order to meet the needs of the client group. This was felt to provide a more integrated way of working.

- providing access to **funding and resources**. Helping to raise the profile of the programme and the impact that it can have

- providing **credibility** – partners can help raise awareness amongst potential stakeholders

- preventing **duplication of effort**.

Furthermore, if partnerships are built on a history of existing relationships, they appear to benefit by achieving faster progress. The rationale is that:

you're not starting from a standing still position … people know each other – a lot of joint working, particularly when you're developing things [are] around personal relationships and a willingness to work together to do things differently.

A key factor of partnerships such as these is the development of informal contact, for example, through using email, as well as more formal communication such as regular meetings.

Partnership working also emphasised the importance of **shared knowledge** and how this serves to benefit all partners. One project offered holistic support services for offenders serving community sentences. The project provided a range of support in terms of, for example, identifying stable accommodation, entry to employment (E2E), benefits and back-to-work support and signposting to other agencies. The programme was embedded locally, with all key organisations involved and informed. Such engagement ensured not

only that knowledge was shared but also that efforts were not duplicated.

Focus group participants identified some limitations of partnership working. More specifically:

- A single agency approach could be more appropriate when looking to achieve a focused outcome and partners are not considered critical to implementation.

- The number of agencies involved in a programme can become too large. There can be a tipping point where the programme becomes too broad and you lose sight of the objectives.

1.3   Flexibility

When considering replicating a programme, there was evidence to suggest that it is important to have knowledge of **local need**. One programme stakeholder observed:

> *It's about replication not duplication … there will be local differences … you can't take something and say this will work as it is here … you need to look at what you've got already … and adapt to local circumstances … it's not an off-the-shelf product.*

Despite the importance of awareness of local need, it was considered to be important not to adapt a programme too much; the risk being that proven practice is not implemented. Focus group participants noted that if a model becomes too diluted, there is a risk that the aims of what the programme set out to achieve become less clear. Therefore, when trying to replicate a programme or initiative, it is vital that the core principles remain the same. Sector specialists suggested the following approach:

- Identify the core principles in your programme.

- Consider local needs and how transferable the core principles are.

- Tailor the programme to need but within a framework, using the core principles to help guide the decisions made.

- Consider the extent to which the model is workable for each individual context.

Importantly, while potential transferability was reported to capture interest, it was considered to not always be clear whether a programme was transferable until it has been implemented.

There was also widespread recognition amongst sector specialist interviewees of the importance of ensuring that situations and context are similar, as these facilitate replication. For example, it would be difficult to replicate a programme which has been successful because the local authority has had a one-off grant that was unique to the authority.

Moreover, the majority of sector specialists felt that local factors, such as whether a programme is based in an urban or rural location, could impact on sustainability and replication. For example, implementing a programme in a rural location raises a number of potential issues such as the distance required to travel and the cost of transportation. Furthermore, cross-borough working was believed to be more challenging in a rural location. Consideration should be given from the outset to the geography of an area and this should be clearly conveyed to those who may wish to replicate the programme.

There was widespread recognition amongst interviewees that another important consideration for replication and sustainability is **external forces** at a local and national level such as the political and economic climate. These can have a negative impact on a range of factors such as available funding, staffing and partner engagement. This highlights the need for practitioners to not only be adaptable to local circumstances but also to wider changing prevailing situations as well as to consider potential alternative ways of working.

1.4   Resources

The majority of interviewees felt that the sustainability and replication of validated practice is linked to the availability of resources, especially funding. While funding was clearly viewed as a key consideration, the evidence points to the understanding that, although

some funding is required, for example, for the set up of projects and for subsequent planning, it is not necessarily always the most important consideration as 'some of the most innovative projects are low cost or no cost'. Furthermore, other factors such as appropriate 'buy-in' (discussed above) to the project were generally considered to be more important. Nevertheless key aspects of resources were viewed as cost/benefit analysis, 'joined-up' funding and resource adequacy.

Cost/benefit analysis

In order to encourage sustainability and replication, strategic and operational staff involved in three programmes and one sector specialist felt that cost/benefit analysis was important to demonstrate that investment in a programme would reduce costs in the future (in terms of money) and/or increase quality of life. It was perceived to be important to demonstrate the longer-term cost/benefits of investing in a programme and the extent to which it was observed to reduce potential costs in the future. The sector specialist explained that it was important to show that short-term investment could result in long-term savings: 'sustainability is helped if you can show … that by spending your money in a different way you have better outcomes'. Vignette 3 illustrates this point.

Vignette 3: The importance of cost/benefit analysis

The Children and Families Enterprise (CAFÉ) was commissioned to provide support for families of offenders by, for example, providing stable accommodation and back-to-work support. Cost/benefit analysis revealed that the successful completion of community orders by CAFÉ clients was 90 per cent compared to 50 per cent for the county. Additionally, in 2009/10 73 per cent of CAFÉ clients found suitable or settled accommodation after living in poor or temporary housing. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the ability of CAFÉ families to maximise income and manage debt after intervention was 92 per cent. This analysis contributed to the continuation of the programme.

Resourceful 'joined-up' funding

Four sector specialists and one programme stakeholder emphasised the importance of using a 'joined-up' approach in order to take full advantage of current resources. For example, one headteacher from a high-performing school who was tasked with raising key stage 2 results in a lower-performing school observed that costs could be 'spread' if distributed over a longer time period and over more institutions by schools working together in a federation. Sector specialists also noted that if initiatives could be combined as 'natural extensions of work already done', 'incorporated' into the existing roles of staff or 'self-funding', then 'you're onto a winner' or costs could be mitigated.

In addition, three interviewees felt that early financial planning was essential to the sustainability of a programme, for example, in terms of stability as illustrated by the following observation: 'staff lose momentum if they are unsure whether their job is going to be kept'.

Securing adequate resources

Interviewees involved in two programmes and one sector specialist recognised that it was important to ensure that there were adequate resources, for example, to buy time for leading the programme, for meetings and for training. Additionally, there was a need to maximise existing resources and to ensure that costs were not 'prohibitive'.

1.5   Operational model

Interviewees from the majority of the validated practice case studies emphasised the importance of defining the stages of the operational process. Similarly, one sector specialist believed that recording the process (or 'how you do it') was vital. She pointed out that 'in the past the danger was that outcomes would be achieved and not recorded and things would move on'.

At the outset it was believed to be important to have a **clear plan** which set out, for example, the objectives of the programme or initiative, the targeted outcomes and timeline in which they should be achieved.

Stakeholders from the majority of validated practice case studies explained the importance of having a **documented system** in order to not only facilitate the monitoring, recording and reviewing of progress against outcomes but also to assess the operational side of the programme and the degree to which it may need revision. For example, one programme stakeholder believed that an assessment system ensured that developments could take place and provision was adapted to the needs of the young people and their families. Another stakeholder highlighted the need to have regular meetings with clear agendas and documented outcomes.

It was further suggested that if the operational model was successful it should be **embedded** by, for example, 'having a documented action plan which is modified and monitored regularly'. One interviewee believed that 'having things in writing definitely helps to embed practice'. Examples of aspects that should be embedded were culture change or training.

1.6   Impact

Impact was widely viewed as very important to sustaining and replicating validated practice (see Vignette 4). Moreover, it was considered to be important to evidence outcomes through **systematic evaluation** and the provision of 'robust' evidence such as 'statistical data'.

Interviewees from the majority of case studies believed that **evidence of impact** was vital for sustaining and replicating effective practice, as it not only showed that the validated practice worked but was additionally viewed as valuable for other reasons, such as to motivate staff, because it was a 'powerful tool in training'. Another interviewee believed that evidencing impact was pivotal to sustainability or replication of validated practice, as 'without evidence of impact you wouldn't be able to create an argument for funding and you wouldn't be able to ensure you had appropriate "buy-in"'.

Furthermore, one sector specialist considered that evaluation and evidencing impact was critical, because 'if organisations are not delivering in terms of outcomes then local authorities should be decommissioning service providers'.

> **Vignette 4 : The importance of evidencing impact**
>
> A project called 'Holding Families' emerged from the Hidden Harm agenda which recognised the damaging impact on families of substance abuse (alcohol or drugs) by parents. It was acknowledged that while parents might get treatment for addiction, there was a need to take the whole family through the process in order to support and move them forward.
>
> The interviewee highlighted the need to not just consider and record the short-term outcomes in terms of the successful treatment of an adult for substance abuse but also how early intervention yields successful longer-term outcomes for the family. She said: 'not only is it [the programme] cost-effective but the chances of the children or young people getting better long-term outcomes [are] greater'. In addition, she recognised that key to the continuation of the project was demonstrating the impact of the programme.

Finally, dissemination of validated practice was widely viewed to be essential. One sector specialist said validated practice should be 'disseminated in as many ways and as widely as possible'. The following methods were suggested:

• Via the internet. The C4EO website or the local council intranet homepage could be used, as well as web links. For example, validated practice in the early years sector could be linked to the 'Sure Start' website. Additionally online booklets, guidelines and case studies (of ways to overcome problems and not just highlighting good practice) were also considered useful.

- National, regional and local conferences. Local workshops and neighbourhood meetings were thought to be good methods of dissemination by a few interviewees as there was less travelling involved.

- Open days, local authority visits and buddying between local authorities were also considered helpful ways to share validated practice.

In addition, one sector specialist suggested that an evidence base should be built, where good practice could be exchanged at community or regional level or between statistical neighbours. She felt that there could be a role for 'an honest broker – someone not involved in meeting targets'.

2   Challenges and ways to overcome them

Key findings

- Meeting the needs of a particular community can prove challenging. Therefore, it is important to have high calibre staff who possess a good knowledge of the local area.

- 'Change' in itself was identified as a challenge because staff involved in sustainability or replication need to change working practices and develop new ways of thinking. Therefore, it is important to manage and support staff through transition by ensuring that effective communication allows staff to have a clear understanding of why change is necessary.

- There was widespread concern about the potential impact of budget cuts in terms of, for example, changes in staffing and discontinuation of funding streams. However, having champions at all levels can help promote the positive aspects of the programme and help keep it on the agenda.

Vignette 5: The importance of having credible staff with local knowledge

One programme stakeholder involved in a programme that provides support for offenders reflected on the challenges associated with replication and noted the importance of having high calibre staff with credibility and knowledge of the local area. He remarked: 'If you haven't got the right member of staff, it's not going to work.'

In contrast, the breastfeeding initiative was considered successful in other areas because there was a key member of staff who was initiated into the programme who worked in partnership with the PCT and managed all the elements of the programme. Their role included helping to raise the profile and embed the initiative as well as provide training to frontline practitioners across the children's centres. This approach ensured consistency and awareness of local needs.

This chapter explores the challenges faced in sustaining and replicating local practice. These include the impact of the current economic climate and the budget cuts across the public sector, in terms of, for example, organisational restructuring and levels of the workforce.

While consideration of local circumstances was identified as a key factor to facilitate and sustain validated practice, there was also recognition amongst some interviewees (across three programmes and sector specialists) of the challenges associated with being flexible and meeting the needs of a particular community, as illustrated by Vignette 5:

Moreover, when concentrating on the delivery of a programme or initiative, it was observed that there is a need to be mindful of potential repercussions that could occur. For example, one headteacher working in a soft federation of primary schools led a successful initiative to narrow the achievement gap between two schools. He observed that there was a need to be aware that while raising standards in one school, the other school did not suffer as a consequence. On reflection, he would have divided his time more equally between both schools and provided more support to the headteacher in the school deemed 'outstanding', due to that headteacher's lack of experience. Additionally, including a further school in the federation would have helped share cost and experience.

Moreover, **'change' in itself** was perceived to be a challenge amongst some stakeholder interviewees across three programmes, as staff sustaining or replicating validated practice will inevitably need to

adapt to different ways of working and new ways of thinking. For example, staff working in a resource centre were traditionally used to working with children with autism in long-stay provision. Staff were required to change their working practices in order to support children with a more diverse range of disabilities who were attending short breaks. Despite staff receiving training and having the necessary skills to support the children, they were apprehensive of change: a finding which emphasises the need to manage and support staff through transition. On reflection, it was felt that it may have been beneficial for staff to have spent time in one of the sister short-break units shadowing colleagues in order to gain a practical insight into the changes that would be taking place.

Linked to this, a few programme stakeholders spoke of the importance of effective communication to ensure that staff have a clear understanding of why change is necessary and are supportive of such developments. One interviewee reflected on the lessons that had been learnt following the set up of a programme, noting that while families were consulted on developments and included in the process, this happened to a lesser extent amongst key stakeholders. She acknowledged that 'communication only works when everybody has the information ... rather than having to go back over things which are a waste of resource and staff time'. This, therefore, was a key consideration from the outset when the programme was replicated in another part of the authority.

Another reported challenge identified amongst some interviewees from across three programmes and sector specialists, which, in part, is linked to budget cuts, is the **potential reduction in the level of staffing** and the impact this could have on sustaining or replicating a programme or initiative. Fewer staff with additional responsibilities could make it difficult to build in programme work to current roles or to take on additional projects. One sector specialist expressed concern that 'good practice that is good and innovative could be pushed to the side because they have to focus on their core … job'. In addition, two programme stakeholders spoke more generally about the challenges linked to staff turnover and emphasised the importance of ensuring staff are replaced quickly. This could, however, become increasingly difficult in light of the current economic climate and reductions in funding.

Concerns with regard to the potential impact of the budget cuts announced in the comprehensive spending review across the public sector were widespread amongst interviewees (stakeholders and sector specialists). Some interviewees, for example, spoke of the uncertainty surrounding the **continuation of particular funding streams** and **changes in staffing** (also identified in Phase 1 of the research). In response to the latter comment, it was recognised that it can be difficult to maintain momentum amongst staff when there is so much uncertainty regarding job security. One programme stakeholder spoke of her concerns regarding 'buy-in', due to major changes in strategic management. However, having champions at all levels that reinforced the positive aspects of the model and helped keep it on the agenda were instrumental in ensuing that this did not happen. She recalled: 'When we had new management, it was only weeks before they were saying, what is this model? Come and tell me what it is because I keep hearing about it.'

Furthermore, there was also recognition that reductions in local authority budgets would prevent access to resources such as training. Pooling budgets with other departments or organisations and providing in-house training rather than from an external provider were suggestions for ways in which this could be overcome.

There was, however, awareness amongst some interviewees that systems that benefit from value-for-money procedures are particularly relevant at a time when funds are reduced. One sector specialist remarked:

> If you have got something that is demonstrably providing improved outcomes for children, young people and their families, and it is also cost-effective, so that whoever is funding it ... is putting less money into it, then you are really onto a win–win situation.

Focus group participants were asked to suggest ways in which sustainability could be supported at a time of fundamental change within local authorities. There was widespread agreement amongst sector specialists (and a few programme stakeholders) of the need to carry out a cost/benefit analysis in order to determine whether the cost of running a programme outweighs the potential long-term impact in the future. However, there was acknowledgement amongst participants of

the difficulties in undertaking such analysis meaningfully and they stated that they would welcome the development of a simple formula to allow for comparisons to be made.

Two sector specialists noted the difficulties surrounding **changing political agendas**. For example, if current ways of working are not part of the political climate and local priorities change, there could be a danger that collaborative networks dissipate. One interviewee suggested trying to fulfil programmes in the parliamentary life span, by which time they should be embedded and therefore be sustainable.

Despite a range of challenges to sustaining and replicating validated practice having been identified amongst interviewees and focus group participants, it was evident that, on the whole, views were positive about the ways in which these challenges could be overcome.

3 Guidelines

Key findings

- Interviewees wanted the guidelines to sustainability and replication of validated practice to be succinct and easily accessible. It was important that they should be available online but also should be easy to print.

- It was believed that the guidelines would either be used to understand the stages of the process, for quick reference, or as a link to more detailed information if needed.

In addition to identifying the key factors to facilitate sustainability and replicability (shown in Figure 3.1) and replicability and the stages in the process, this research also explored the most effective way of summarising the findings into guidelines that could be widely disseminated. Two focus groups were conducted to discuss the facilitating factors and in order to investigate further the preferred format and style of the guidelines. These findings are presented here.

3.1 Considerations for guidelines

In considering the layout and wording of the guidelines, focus group participants considered it to be important to be aware of people's different learning styles and to aim to ensure the guidelines appeal to as wide an audience as possible. There was also widespread agreement that the guidelines should be succinct (no longer than two pages), should be available on screen, but it should also be possible to print off the whole document easily for those readers who prefer to read a paper version and/or would like to pin one up for easy reference.

Participants generally agreed that a clear diagram with supporting evidence (for example, brief case studies) behind the key factors would meet most people's needs. This would also enable a reader to either access all the supporting evidence or only those parts of interest. One sector specialist explained the need to signpost people to examples that are relevant to them:
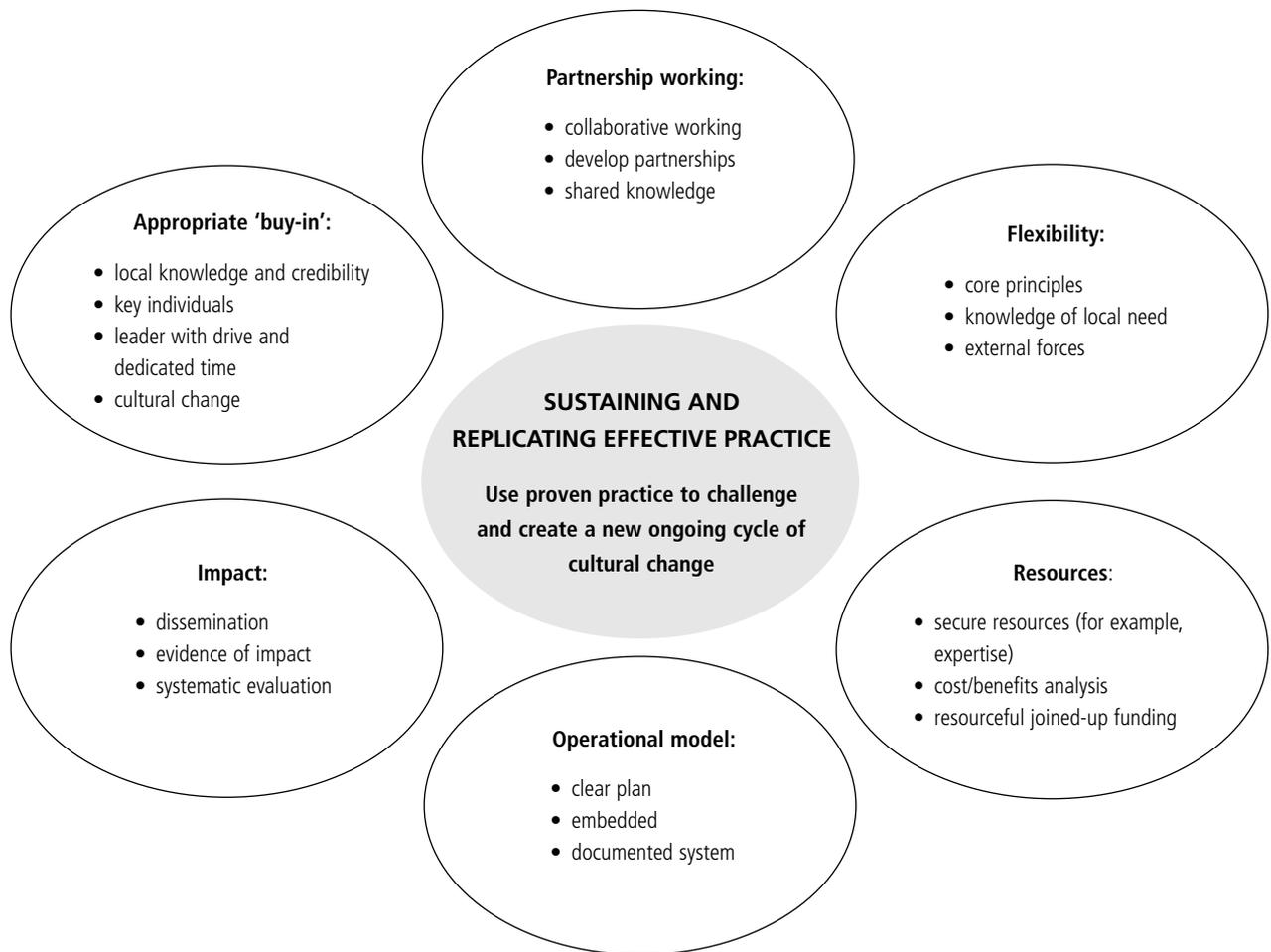
> *Having a book of validated practice isn't really helpful because it needs to be focused on what the issues are … so if people have a particular issue they would know that they could find a practice example for that particular example.*

Additionally, the iterative nature of the diagram, case studies and quotations were believed to bring the evidence 'to life'. It was also considered important to have a clear visionary statement in the middle of the diagram to 'draw people in' and 'make it clear what the diagram is and what it can do for you'.

Other suggestions included:

- a newsletter format containing bullet points with key information

- the provision of web links to the C4EO validated practice example

- video clips to bring it to life: for example, explaining what the model does or describing projects, using quotations and photographs.

Figure 3.1 Key factors for sustaining and replicating effective practice

Partnership working:

- collaborative working
- develop partnerships
- shared knowledge

Appropriate 'buy-in':

- local knowledge and credibility
- key individuals
- leader with drive and dedicated time
- cultural change

Flexibility:

- core principles
- knowledge of local need
- external forces

SUSTAINING AND REPLICATING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Use proven practice to challenge and create a new ongoing cycle of cultural change

Impact:

- dissemination
- evidence of impact
- systematic evaluation

Resources:

- secure resources (for example, expertise)
- cost/benefits analysis
- resourceful joined-up funding

Operational model:

- clear plan
- embedded
- documented system

4 Concluding remarks

As has been previously noted, the validation of effective practice is particularly valued because submissions are reviewed by peer practitioners, have a local context and are evidenced (and the degree of sustainability and replicability is part of the evidence criteria laid down in the VLP process).

The merits of sustaining and replicating effective, validated practice were considered to be valid by interviewees. Although the impact of public spending cuts and the resultant significant budget reductions and cuts were believed to have created extra pressures and challenges to sustaining and replicating validated practice, there was still believed to be potential for localism. Through an exploration of the key factors that facilitate and inhibit sustainability and replication of validated practice, this research has drawn out guidelines that can be used to either direct the process or provide a route to further information.

The key factors reported to facilitate sustainability and replicability (see Figure 3.1) are to:

- ensure that the programme has the 'buy-in' from appropriate and key stakeholders

- develop partnership working where appropriate

- be flexible to changing needs, while adhering to the core principles

- consider resources and in particular be creative about the use of existing resources

- devise a documented operational model

- evaluate outcomes and impact and disseminate findings.

Overall, it appeared that most programmes had been developed with sustainability in mind and, furthermore, sector specialists agreed that sustainability should be a consideration when programmes or initiatives are developed. Across all programmes there was evidence to suggest that validated practice had been sustained for at least a period of two years and, in some cases, longer: a finding supported by evaluation data.

In contrast, few programmes appeared to have been developed with replication in mind. However, in the majority of cases, programmes had been replicated at a local, regional or national level, although not always in their entirety.

Appropriate 'buy-in' from key individuals at a strategic and operational level was considered particularly significant to sustainability and replication in order to promote and drive the programme forward. Additionally, on the whole, collaborative working was considered important. However, there was recognition that in some cases partners are not critical to implementation, while in others the number of partners can be too many, which could mean that you lose sight of what the programme is trying to achieve. While having knowledge of local need was considered to be key to replicating a programme, it was felt to be important not to adapt it too much. Furthermore, the core principles need to remain the same so that the aims of what the programme set out to achieve are clear.

In terms of sustaining and replicating validated practice, resources were also viewed as important. Interviewees indicated that, as well as ensuring adequate funding is secured, carrying out cost/benefit analysis and exploring resourceful 'joined-up' funding were valuable exercises. In addition, defining the key stages of the operational process, devising a clear plan at the outset, having a documented system and embedding that system were deemed to be important factors to ensuring sustainability and replication of validated practice.

Finally, evidence of impact and progress against planned outcomes through systematic evaluation, and the dissemination of findings, were thought to be a necessary prerequisite for sustaining and replicating validated practice.

Being flexible and meeting the needs of a particular community can prove challenging particularly in relation to replication of an initiative. Therefore, it is important to have high calibre staff who possess a good knowledge of the local area as well as the programme.

'Change' in itself was identified as a challenge because staff involved in sustainability or replication need to alter their working practices and develop new ways of thinking. Therefore, it is important to manage and support staff through the transition. In addition, there was widespread concern about the potential impact of budget cuts in terms of, for example, changes in staffing and discontinuation of funding streams. However, having champions at all levels can help promote the positive aspects of the programme and help keep it on the agenda. Furthermore, considering

ways to be resourceful and 'join-up' funding were also suggested in addition to having a documented operational model that records the stages of the process.

In terms of the guidelines for sustainability and replicability of validated practice, interviewees wanted them to be succinct and easily accessible. They also indicated that it was important that the guidelines should be available online and should be easy to print. They believed that the guidelines would either be used to understand the stages of the process, for quick reference, or as a link to more detailed information if needed.

Guidelines are available on the NFER and LG Group websites.

Appendix A The validation process

The C4EO operates a programme to identify, validate and share effective local practice at a local level. Local authorities and other organisations are invited by C4EO to submit examples of practice to a validation panel for assessment. Those which demonstrate evidence of impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families are eligible for validation. The management and administration of the validated local practice process has been led by members of staff in EMIE at NFER since October 2009. The end result of this process is to produce validated local practice examples that can be shared with others. This builds on EMIE's success as an exchange for local practice, its contacts and its skills in dealing with local authority staff.

The validation process for each theme of work operates through a validation panel comprising the theme lead, theme coordinator and sector specialists: these are local authority or other agency managers and practitioners contracted by C4EO for their expertise in each of the theme areas of work. Both the sector specialists and theme leads are engaged with the full extent of the C4EO's activities, not just the validated local practice programme.

Appendix B Phase 1 report

Monica Hetherington, Lesley Kendall, Amanda Harper and Gill Featherstone

Executive summary

Key points

- Almost all the examples analysed show some potential for replication or sustainability and a shortlist of 19 examples has been identified as displaying enough merit to act as possible case studies.

- Although the sample covered all nine Government Office regions, most submissions were urban-based projects, although there were also several county-wide initiatives. There were far fewer examples of practices based in rural areas.

- Voluntary sector partners were involved in at least a fifth of the examples analysed.

- Ten factors that contribute to, or, if lacking, inhibit sustainability and replicability, have been identified from an initial review of current literature and work in these areas. They are:

  – meeting an ongoing need, which is seen to be important

  – practitioner 'buy-in'

  – 'buy-in' from target group or groups

  – adequate resourcing

  – support from budget managers and commissioners

  – organisational stability

  – seeking continuous improvement

  – effective sharing and use of information

  – effective dissemination

  – a willingness to take risks plus mutual trust between practitioners, particularly for replication.

- In terms of sustainability, the following factors are associated with and **enable the sustainability of a practice** in general or beyond the initial pilot phase: funding, low costs and using existing resources, the practice being well embedded, the practice being simple and easy to embed in other existing practice, involvement of past participants, commitment, strong management, excellent communication and quality information sharing. **Barriers** to sustainability were identified as funding and resources, lack of evidence of impact on outcomes, and staff changes.

- Some factors associated with sustainability apply equally to replicability, for example, commitment, strong management, co-location of services, good communication and quality information sharing.

- **Enabling factors for the replication of practice** in another setting, context or geographical location are: documentation/training notes/detailed case studies, the practice having been replicated before, training and staff. **Barriers to replication** were found to be funding, lack of access to high-quality voluntary sector partners, need for specific skills set/aptitudes/creativity and local 'fit'.

1   Introduction, purpose and aims

1.1   Background

This project, Phase 1 of which is funded by the Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme, builds on the work of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) which has devised a system to identify, validate and share effective local practice that demonstrates outcomes for children, young people and their families. Local authorities and other organisations are being invited by C4EO to submit examples of practice to a validation panel for assessment. Those which demonstrate evidence of impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families are eligible for validation. The management and administration of the validated local practice (VLP) process has been led by members of staff in EMIE at NFER since October 2009. The end result of this process is to produce VLP examples that can be shared with others. This builds on EMIE's success as an exchange for local practice, its contacts and its skills in dealing with local authority staff.

The validation process for each theme of work operates through a validation panel comprising the Theme Lead, Theme Coordinator and Sector Specialists: these are local authority or other agency managers and practitioners contracted by C4EO for their expertise in each of the theme areas of work. Both the Sector Specialists and Theme Leads are engaged with the full extent of the C4EO's activities, not just the VLP programme. The responsibility of the EMIE team is to receive and track submissions, undertake a pre-filter of submissions to ensure information is complete and to a high enough standard before going to panel, and to manage and coordinate the validation process. The Operational Manager – VLP ensures regular validation panels are set up, sends/oversees confirmation emails to submitters on the outcomes from the panels and also oversees and monitors follow-up, where necessary, with those submitting examples.

A general proposal regarding the LGA support for the VLP programme was submitted to the Research Board and approved in September 2009. A further proposal was submitted in December 2009 in response to an additional request for a methodology to assess the longer-term impact of validated practice in terms of sustainability and replicability.

1.2   Purpose and aims

This project aims to consider whether validated examples have been, or could be, replicated and sustained.

The proposal to LGA in December 2009 identified the aims shown below for a project planned to run in three phases. Phase one includes initial desk research and represents the scoping study stage. This report documents the initial findings from that stage.

The purpose of this exercise is as follows:

- to identify evidence that VLP examples have been, or could be, replicated and sustained

- to identify the determining factors, both within C4EO processes and in the way material is generated and used by local authorities and other service delivery partners in Children's Trusts such as voluntary agencies, which contribute to the successful replication or continuation of VLP.

In addressing these issues the aim is to derive recommendations as to:

- how practice can be developed and evidence of effectiveness gathered locally to enable practice to be replicated and sustained

- how those seeking to benefit from VLP examples can make use of them to best effect to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

These issues are particularly pertinent in the current economic climate where funding, resources and staffing are being reduced and local authorities are facing a policy and contextual landscape that is constantly shifting.

1.3 Sample and approach used

The sample comprised 63 examples of local practice, passed as 'validated local practice' (VLP) or 'promising practice' (PP) by the C4EO validation panels, as detailed in Table 1.1. They spanned all nine Government Office regions. The variation in numbers over the themes reflects the fact that the VLP process was introduced earlier in some cases than others, for example, early years and disability, and so these have had longer to build up examples. Some themes have also attracted more submissions than others.

Table 1.1 Overall analysis of sample

C4EO theme	Total analysed	Of which VLP	Of which PP
Child poverty	4	2	2
Disability	20	5	15
Early intervention	5	2	3
Early years	18	8	10
Safeguarding	4	4	0
Schools and communities	6	2	4
Vulnerable children	6	4	2
	63		

The analysis reviewed each submission and any associated comments from the relevant validation panel for evidence of which factors may facilitate, and which may inhibit, sustaining or replicating the practice.

The submission forms and accompanying literature (such as evaluation reports or statistical information) for each piece of local practice were analysed for evidence of to what extent the practice had already been sustained and/or replicated, and for factors that appear to inhibit or encourage sustainability or replicability.

A framework was set up and data entered into the template in order to build up a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of each submission, with an emphasis on sustainability and replicability. On the basis of the information available – and this did vary considerably from submission to submission – judgements were made on the extent to which there was evidence of changes to processes, routines/experiences/attitudes and outcomes, and evidence of institutional or systemic embedding. Based on this, a judgement was made as to whether each submission demonstrated low, medium or high levels of sustainability. Each submission was also awarded a low, medium or high score for replicability, based on evidence of costs and barriers/enabling factors identified in the submission form and on any comments from the validating panel.

The framework was then used to identify key messages emerging across submissions which were drawn together into an overview report. It was also used to highlight a shortlist of submissions from amongst those which mainly scored highly in terms of replicability and sustainability and which would be interesting to pursue as case studies. These were selected to give a range of different scale practices from across the C4EO themes.

2 What do we mean by sustainability and replicability?

2.1 Definitions

Sustainability has come to be associated with the need for long-term environmental, ecological and economic development, which

meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs.

United Nations, 1987

Government departments and agencies in England have policies and strategies to promote sustainability in this sense. Examples include the Sustainable Schools policy developed by the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (see Teachernet, 2009). Here, sustainable development is defined as 'a way of thinking about how we organise our lives and work – including our education system – so that we don't destroy our most precious resource, the planet', and a sustainable school as one that 'prepares young people for a lifetime of sustainable living, through its teaching, its fabric and its day-to-day practices'. It is guided by a commitment to care:

- for oneself

- for each other (across cultures, distances and generations)

- for the environment itself (far and near).

For the purpose of this exercise, a less ambitious but more useful definition of sustainability is that an activity should be capable of long-term viability and stability without creating an unreasonable pressure on available resources, although what we mean by 'long-term' and 'unreasonable pressure' will vary with the scale and type of activity under consideration.

Dictionary definitions of replication are based on the idea of making an exact copy of something, as in the ways a cell can replicate itself, or a scientific experiment can be replicated. In thinking about the

potential replicability of VLP, it is not realistic to expect exact replications of practice that has been developed and validated in one set of circumstances: differences in local context will almost always be such that this would not be possible. Instead, we should be asking: 'Does an example of VLP offer an approach that can be modified and built on – to a greater or lesser extent – to meet local needs and conditions?'

Sustainability and replicability are not absolutes: activities will vary in the extent to which they are sustainable and in the extent to which they are replicable. There will be examples where the boundary between the two becomes blurred, such as those listed below.

- A pilot scheme that is extended, so that it both continues for longer and encompasses more settings, represents both replicability and sustainability.

- An initiative developed in one setting and then implemented with some modifications in another setting may be an example of replicability, depending on the degree of difference.

- There are examples of VLP that would be relatively easy to replicate in part but it would be more difficult – and perhaps unnecessary – to replicate them in full, for example, where young people or staff have been involved in the development of training materials or guidance materials.

While much has been written about sustainability and children's services, much of this relates to either financial sustainability in a period when public expenditure is facing considerable pressure, or environmental sustainability, and there is little evidence about what makes an initiative sustainable or replicable.

One useful approach is the 'sustainability toolkit' developed by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) for use by clusters of schools providing extended services (TDA, 2009). This sets out ten 'conditions for success':

- consultation and needs analysis

- integration of extended services into school planning and management

- alignment with local area plans and targets

- effectiveness of cluster arrangements

- effectiveness of links with local services

- training and development of school staff in relation to extended services integrated with the training of other professionals within the children's workforce

- effective promotion and publicity

- targeted to meet identified needs

- sound funding arrangements

- effective evaluation in order to offer a service that meets needs, grows and improves.

While some of these conditions are phrased in ways which are specific to this particular example, it is not difficult to see how they could be modified to cover a wide range of types of practice.

One area addressed in the literature is sustainable school leadership. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) say that sustainable leadership:

- creates and preserves sustaining learning

- secures success over time

- sustains the leadership of others

- addresses issues of social justice

- develops rather than depletes human and material resources

- develops environmental diversity and capacity

- undertakes activist engagement with the environment.

Hargreaves and Fink focus on headteachers as the primary audience for their book, but advocate distributed leadership (encompassing all school staff) and the formation of strong professional learning communities. The concept extends from the school to the local area and national spheres of influence promoting sustainable schools.

Fullan (2005) identifies the keys to sustainable leadership as:

- a commitment to change

- lateral capacity building through networks

- continuous improvement, adaptation and collective problem solving

- refocusing effort on new goals to reach new levels of achievement

- building capacity for leadership.

A study of effective primary school leadership by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (Thomas, 2007) found that, in creating 'successful, strategic and sustainable primary schools', effective leadership was crucial, there was a focus on both long- and short-term goals, the importance of the sustained contribution of staff to raising standards was recognised and there was a commitment to professional development.

Taking these ideas as starting points, what do we see as the factors that contribute to or inhibit sustainability and replicability? The following list acts as an ideal taxonomy or gauge, but the reality may be, or will be, very different in the future.

Meeting an ongoing need which is seen to be important

Practice may be developed to meet what is seen as specific short-term need and sustainability beyond that timescale is not a consideration. But that practice may still be valuable because it can be used elsewhere if a similar need is identified. Interesting areas to explore

further would be who defines that it is an ongoing need (and how), particularly in a context of rapidly changing structures, systems and priorities.

Practitioner 'buy-in'

Activities that do not have the support of practitioners will be difficult to sustain or implement.

'Buy-in' from target group or groups

Active 'buy-in' may not always be necessary, but if a practice is not seen as supportive by target groups it is not likely to be effective in improving outcomes.

Adequate resourcing

Those involved in delivery need to be confident that all the necessary resources – financial, staffing, availability of premises, training, IT support and the like – are available and will continue to be so. It is therefore important that these have been included in any future planning.

Support from budget managers or commissioners

Support needs to be evident not only in financial terms: leadership and vision are also needed if momentum is to be maintained. This will happen only if the practice is closely aligned to organisational aims.

Organisational stability

Within an organisation which is itself undergoing major change it will be more difficult to sustain initiatives, and practitioners may be unwilling to take on new types of practice.

Seeking continuous improvement

New ways of working may bring about initial improvements in outcomes, but it may be difficult to maintain enthusiasm and commitment if a plateau is reached and results are no longer seen to be improving.

Effective sharing and use of information

Practice cannot be sustained or replicated unless those involved have the information they need to be effective.

Effective dissemination

Replication and, to a lesser extent, sustainability, depend on effective dissemination within and between organisations.

Replication, in particular, may need a willingness to take risks and requires mutual trust between practitioners

The C4EO validation process and similar validation schemes seek to reduce, but cannot eliminate, the risks seen to be associated with changing practice.

In analysing examples of VLP, the team has been exploring the extent to which they provide evidence that these factors are, indeed, those which seem to promote or act as barriers to replicability and sustainability.

3 Overview of the analysis

This section provides an overview of the findings from this initial analysis. It draws out the key messages from the analysis into the 'sustainability' and 'replicability' of examples of local practice, which have been validated by C4EO. It should be noted that the level of detail varied from submission to submission as did the scale and lifespan of each project.

Using the approach described in section 1.3 and all the information available from each submission, it is possible to say that almost all the examples showed some potential to be replicated or sustained. Most of the examples analysed were urban-based projects, although there were several county-wide initiatives and few examples of practices based in rural areas. The involvement of voluntary sector partners was evident in at least a fifth of the sample.

3.1 Sustainability

The following factors are associated with the sustainability of a practice in general or beyond an initial pilot phase.

Funding. Securing appropriate funding and resources to continue or expand a practice is clearly crucial. Several practices had secured funding for a pilot phase from a central government initiative. There was little information about how such schemes would be funded beyond this period, although in one case the local authority had decided to fund the ongoing costs for a further defined period (see, for example, a soft federation between a failing and an outstanding school, aimed at narrowing the gap for children in a deprived area). Sustainability in terms of funding can also be enabled through sharing costs of ongoing development across a number of agencies (for example, a notification form alerting children's centres of new pregnancies) and where funding is taken over by the organisation(s) benefitting from the practice (for example, where schools themselves now fund early years rhyme and song sessions aimed at improving speech and language skills).

Low costs and using existing resources. Practices where it is possible to keep costs down or to provide the service within existing resources are arguably more sustainable, not least in the current financial climate. Examples of this include the Cannock Resource Centre, which reconfigured resources to provide flexible and innovative respite care for children and young people with complex health needs. Clearly, however, not all projects can be achieved within existing resources or with limited additional resources.

Practice is well embedded. A number of practices appeared sustainable because they had already become part of the system. An example of this is the service remodelling for vulnerable children to access quality community paediatric services, where the practice had been characterised by a holistic and systemic approach to change over a number of years.

Practice is simple and easy to embed in existing practice. At the other extreme, simple ideas that could easily be embedded in existing arrangements also seem sustainable. For example, the notification form introduced at routine antenatal appointments to alert children's centres of new pregnancies (as a means of providing earlier support to vulnerable families as a safeguarding measure) was easy to implement and sustain.

Involving past participants. A number of practices mentioned using past service users, largely as volunteers, as a means of sustaining provision, both in terms of maintaining enthusiasm and momentum and of keeping costs down. Examples include training local mothers from the South Asian community as 'feeding advisors' in a weaning intervention, training parents as trainers to run more groups to engage black and minority ethnic families with disabled children and extending the use of volunteers in a summer reading scheme.

Commitment. Ongoing commitment from practitioner up to managerial and strategic levels is identified as central to sustainability in very many cases.

Strong management. This is also highlighted in many submissions and particularly relating to multi-agency and partnership working. Multi-agency steering groups were a feature mentioned in several submissions as important.

Excellent communication and quality information sharing. This is another theme that came across in many cases. More specifically, the role of co-location of services and multi-agency staff was emphasised in the remodelling of early years services in Kent.

Barriers to sustainability

The following factors are identified as presenting barriers to sustainability.

Funding and resources. Again, this is an obvious potential barrier, in particular, as discussed above, when seeking to sustain a practice initially funded through central government initiatives. Success can also be a barrier to sustainability – two submissions highlighted concern that the practice might not be sustainable within the current level of resources, as it was becoming too popular, with demand outstripping supply.

Lack of evidence of impact on outcomes. Clear and robust evidence of impact on outcomes is required to convince commissioners. This takes longer to gather in some cases than others, and so a greater degree of risk taking may be required. One example of this is a coordinated campaign aimed at reducing sudden infant death rates, which will take time to show impact.

Staff changes. Factors that impact upon the stability of an organisation, such as staff leaving, can hinder sustainability: new staff may need to be trained to sustain the practice and there may be issues in ensuring their awareness and level of 'buy-in'. Key individuals leaving can mean the drive to sustain the practice is lost: this is highlighted as a potential pitfall in a submission on 'breastfeeding champions' in children's centres. Changes in strategic direction, or in strategic-level personnel, can also be detrimental, given the importance attached to commitment from the highest levels.

3.2   Replicability

Inevitably, a number of factors associated with sustainability, such as **commitment**, **strong management**, **co-location of services**, **good communication** and **quality information sharing**, apply equally to replicability. The analysis also highlighted a number of specific factors that could enable replication of a practice in another setting, context or geographical location:

Documentation/training notes/detailed case studies. A great many submissions included the development of training manuals and similar, which could be used by others attempting to replicate the practice. One example of this is a summer holiday scheme for disabled children and young people using student volunteers: a training manual and programme has already been used by another organisation and the practice replicated in short-break provision. Similarly, documented 'hints and tips' from other projects can be used, even if the whole practice is impractical or too expensive to replicate. For example, two submissions in which young disabled people were given the chance to participate in the evaluation of accessibility in leisure centres and schools (a project with the dual purpose of giving the young people 'voice' and highlighting accessibility issues) produced documents helpful to others just wishing to improve on provision.

Practice has already been replicated. Several submissions contained evidence that the practice had already been replicated elsewhere in the authority or further afield, suggesting that further replication would also be achievable.

Training and staff. Training, with its associated cost implications, was highlighted as important for replicating practice in a number of submissions. An example of this is the coordinated approach to assessing vulnerability developed by Northumberland's Risk Management Group. Similarly, suitably qualified staff can enable replication.

Barriers to replicability

The analysis suggests the following barriers to replication.

Funding. Again, this is a key factor.

Lack of access to high-quality voluntary sector partners. Some successful and sustainable practices involved voluntary sector organisations as key partners. Some of these were highly specific and localised and thus the chances of replicating the degree of success could be reduced. The 'Time Out' programme, run with the voluntary sector organisation 'Dreamwall' in Southampton, providing residential events for young people within or at risk of entering the care system, is a typical example of this.

Need for specific skills set/aptitudes/creativity. In a similar vein, some practices demonstrating good sustainability could be hard to replicate given the dependence on a key individual. For example, in the soft federation of schools to narrow the gap for children in a deprived area (mentioned above) the executive headteacher was a strong factor in its success. Similarly, collective creativity can be hard to replicate, such as that exhibited in the 'Time Out' programme highlighted above. It may also be difficult to have the confidence to replicate a more 'alternative' approach such as the 'appreciative story/story catching' approach used in a scheme to help parents back to work, or 'Holding the Space', a radical approach to working with trauma and abuse.

Local 'fit'. Is there a barrier to translating the practice into a new community context? The groups set up to engage black and minority ethnic families with disabled children, for example, are an example of a practice that had been specifically tailored to the needs of its specific community. Those wishing to replicate such a scheme would have to consider how it could translate into their own context.

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Recently published reports

The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by the NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/

Devon multi-agency safeguarding hub: case-study report

Safeguarding children and young people is a central concern for a range of agencies, in particular CYPS, the police and the health service. This case-study report covers the MASH model, its outcomes and impacts, and future developments. A companion report examines the hub's value for money.

http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LGMX01
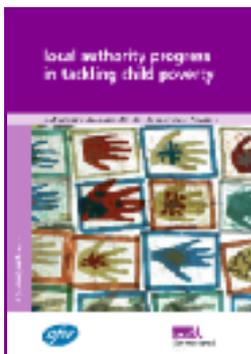
Local authority progress in tackling child poverty

In 2010, the *Child Poverty Act* placed new duties on local government to tackle child poverty. This report assesses the progress being made by local authorities in this area. It presents the findings from in-depth telephone interviews with child poverty partnership members across nine case-study areas.

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This report reviews current models of school governance and considers alternative models that may be appropriate for the schools of the future. It covers current approaches to governance, the impact and effectiveness of school governance, governor services, support and training, changing contexts and future developments, and implications for policy and practice.

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The Local Government Group (LG Group) commissioned the NFER to examine how effective practice examples that have been through the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services' (C4EO) validation process have been, or could be, replicated and sustained. This was with a view to informing guidelines for future practice.

Based on findings from desk research, telephone interviews and case studies, this report covers:

• factors facilitating the sustainability and replication of effective practice

• challenges and ways to overcome them

• guidelines and recommendations for practitioners in local authorities and their partner agencies.

It will be of interest to policy colleagues at LG Group, elected members and professionals working in children's services.