

Links between Outcome Data Collection across Supporting People and Tackling Poverty Programmes: A Scoping Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Supporting People programme is a Wales wide programme that provides housing related support to vulnerable people to help them find and keep a home. It is funded by the Welsh Government, who pays each Local Authority to procure services to meet local need in their area.

2. Research aims and methodology

- 2.1 Since March 2012 there has been a Supporting People Outcome Framework in place, designed to evidence the support that is being delivered and the impact of that support. The outcomes are part of a wider range of tools used to help Welsh Government understand how this budget is being used and also evidence impact the Supporting People has in terms of helping prevent higher levels of expenditure in other areas, such as health. As part of the wider Tackling Poverty agenda the Welsh Government is reviewing outcomes across a number of portfolios and how they could be better aligned. Some steps were taken in March 2016 to align the reporting periods of outcomes and further work on alignment is continuing. This short piece of work was undertaken between October 2015 and January 2016 to take a first look at:

- i. The potential for overlap of outcomes between Supporting People and other Tackling Poverty Programmes;
- ii. How Local Authorities currently collect outcomes across Tackling Poverty Programmes.

- 2.2 In addition to Supporting People, the other Tackling Poverty programmes included in this study include:

- **Communities First:** The Welsh Government's community focused Tackling Poverty programme. The programme supports the most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas of Wales with the aim of narrowing the economic, education/skills and health gaps between the nations most deprived areas and the more affluent areas, to alleviate persistent poverty.
- **Flying Start:** Welsh Government funded 'early years' programme for families with children under 4 years of age who are living in disadvantaged areas of Wales.

- **Families First:** Welsh Government funded programme developed in response to its child poverty strategy. The programme emphasis is on the prevention and early intervention for families living in poverty

Additionally, this study looked at the Common Outcomes Framework: A number of Local Authorities are piloting this framework which includes common indicators for Communities First, Families First and Flying Start. (Please note: in February 2016 the then Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty took the decision, based on evidence from the pilot, not to roll out the Common Outcomes Framework across the whole of Wales. However, fieldwork for this project had already been undertaken and the findings regarding the Common Outcomes Framework are still relevant to future alignment and are included here for completeness).

2.3 The project was undertaken in two stages:

- (1) Mapping of Outcomes across all Tackling Poverty Programmes.
- (2) Interviews in six Local Authority areas with key Local Authority personnel from across the four Tackling Poverty Programmes.

2.4 The project took a case study approach and so as such the findings reported here can only be considered indicative. The project raises some points for consideration but cannot be considered to be representative of the situation across all Local Authorities.

3. Key findings

Mapping of Outcomes

- 3.1 Unsurprisingly, Supporting People has certain high level outcomes in common all the Tackling Poverty Programmes. There is greatest overlap with Communities First, with 10 of the 11 Supporting People outcomes having direct and substantial overlap. For example, Communities First has the outcome *Promoting mental wellbeing*, which is all but the same as the Supporting People outcome of *Mentally healthy*.
- 3.2 The project also looked in more detail at the indicators used across the Tackling Poverty Programmes to see the extent to which these indicators could also provide evidence for Supporting People outcomes. In this case, a distinction is made between 'direct' indicators; those which can directly (and potentially alone) provide evidence for a Supporting People outcome and 'partial' indicators which while contributing towards evidence of the outcome, cannot provide robust enough indication alone.
- 3.3 The Supporting People outcomes that have the most direct overlap with the other Tackling Poverty Programmes are as follows:
 - (1) Engagement in Employment (25 direct overlaps: 22 with Communities First and 3 with Families First)
 - (2) Engagement in Education and Learning (24 direct overlaps: 20 with Communities First and 4 with Families First)
 - (3) Managing Money (10 direct overlaps: 9 with Communities First and 1 with Families First)
- 3.4 In general, the mapping found that the majority of indicators from across the three other Tackling Poverty Programmes which could be used as 'direct' indicators for the Supporting People Programme came from Communities First. Again, this is unsurprising given that the majority of the indicators for Flying Start and Families First focus specifically on children and parenting where as Supporting People focuses on housing related support.

Data Collection

- 3.5 Key to understanding the process of outcome collection is understanding the way in which they are collected by Local Authorities and submitted to the Welsh Government.

Frequency of Submission

- 3.6 At the time the research was undertaken, there was variation in the frequency with which the four programmes submitted outcome information to the Welsh Government programme leads. Families First and Communities First teams in Local Authorities submitted their data quarterly, Flying Start submitted it termly (school terms) and Supporting People provided it on a six monthly basis. However, it is understood that since the completion of fieldwork, the alignment work being undertaken in the Welsh Government has started to consider the frequency of the outcome data collection.

Method of Submission

- 3.7 With the exception of the Communities First teams, where data submission is via the database collection system provided by the Welsh Government known as 'Aspireview', the other three programmes (Families First, Flying Start and Supporting People) submit the information using Excel spreadsheet templates specifically provided to them by the respective programme leads in the Welsh Government.

Experience of Data Collection at the Local Authority level

- 3.8 All interviewees were asked about their experience of data collection at the Local Authority level. Four of the 19 interviewees (two from Families First and one each from Communities First and Flying Start) reported no issues with the data collection process but qualified this by reporting that there were no issues with the process while databases were being used, as there is clarity about what needs to be collected right from the beginning.
- 3.9 The most frequently mentioned issue with the process of data collection was the time and resource required to complete it. Six out of 19 teams (three Supporting People, one Flying Start and two Families First) considered the process to be time consuming or resource intensive. As a total of six Supporting People teams and four Families First teams were interviewed, this means that half of the Supporting People and Families First programmes in the six case study Local Authorities considered the data collection process to be time consuming. While this cannot be considered representative of all Supporting People and Families First teams in Wales, it provides an indication that time and resources are a potential issue for those collecting the data.

Data Collection Systems

- 3.10 The majority of the programmes in the case study areas use software systems to collect their outcome data, with six using only Excel spreadsheets. The type of system used differs across the programmes within the same Local Authority, for example one Local Authority uses Excel for Communities First but uses a combination of five other software systems for Families First, Flying Start and Supporting People.
- 3.11 In total there are 11 different systems being used across different programmes in the six case study Local Authorities. From the information gathered, it does not appear that any Local Authority had a preference for one particular system across all programmes. Apart from Excel which is used by all four programmes and PARIS which is used by one Families First and one Flying Start, there are no indications that either Local Authorities or Tackling Poverty Programmes have systems in common.
- 3.12 There is some indication that Local Authorities are taking steps to join together to use the same systems, anecdotally the research was told that:

'It [the software] was available. I think LA1 started using it and then a number of Local Authorities bought on to the database and it was promoted internally in the Communities First arena..'

4. Conclusions/Recommendations

Conclusions

- 4.1 This project was short scale and offers a first look at some of the potential issues and area for consideration in aligning Supporting People with the other three Tackling Poverty Programmes. The conclusions made here summarise what the project found, but are indicative only and cannot be taken to definitively represent the situation across all 22 Local Authorities in Wales.
- 4.2 The project found variation in the structure of outcomes and in the number and level of supporting indicators (performance measures etc) across the four Tackling Poverty Programmes. There is also an issue of language specifically whether terms such as 'performance measures', 'indicators' and 'measures' can be used interchangeably and be considered essentially the same. This ambiguity would need to be resolved if further alignment is to go ahead.
- 4.3 However, the mapping exercise undertaken would suggest that closer alignment between Communities First and Supporting People could be possible. Although there was less direct overlap, alignment would also be possible across all four Tackling Poverty Programmes albeit with some flexibility. The study found that alignment could potentially help to alleviate some of the reported issues with time and resources, as outcomes could be collected once and used across multiple programmes. The shared outcomes would have to equally evidence all Tackling Poverty Programmes and this may prove difficult given the very specific focus of Families First and Flying Start on young children and families.
- 4.4 Across the Tackling Poverty Programmes, data is submitted at various times of the year, varying from termly to six monthly, so at the moment the processes of reporting to Welsh Government are not compatible. However, it is understood that since this study was undertaken, alignment work being undertaken in the Welsh Government has started to consider the frequency of the outcome data collection. In addition to this, as the majority of Tackling Poverty Programmes use Excel to submit their data, the *method* across all but Communities First who report via Aspireview may be compatible.
- 4.5 When it comes to the process of data collection and submission, the main concerns expressed across all four Tackling Poverty Programmes, were around the time and resource the process takes and the amount of information required. Alignment of outcomes could potentially see a reduction in this, as one indicator could then be used for more than one Tackling Poverty Programme.
- 4.6 The data systems used to collect and record data pertaining to the Tackling Poverty Programmes varied. The majority used some sort of data collection system, either bespoke or off-the-shelf. However there was no evidence of preference by either a Local Authority for a particular system or indeed within the Tackling Poverty Programmes themselves. As already stated, this project was small in scale and the findings can not be considered to represent the whole of Wales, but it would indicate that there are no preferred systems either within a Local Authority or within a Tackling Poverty Programme. Such a variation in systems may pose difficulties for alignment of data collection systems, especially where systems currently use link into other Local Authority activities.
- 4.7 Of those interviewed as part of this research, there were indications of links and some joint working between Communities First, Families First and Flying Start teams. There was little evidence of joint working between these programmes and Supporting People, although it was reported that discussions were underway to develop closer links.
- 4.8 Supporting People teams did report links with Housing Options teams and vice versa, also reporting good working relationships, including the co-location of some teams.
- 4.9 It should also be noted that this study was undertaken prior to the Welsh Government initiating an alignment project between the Communities and Tackling Poverty programmes and some of the

findings will therefore have been superseded by actions undertaken since that time. This report has therefore been updated where relevant.

Recommendations

- 4.10 The recommendations made below were made prior to the alignment project being started, or the Common Outcomes Framework roll out being halted.
- 4.11 Alignment may be possible, but any joint outcomes either need to be directly applicable to all Tackling Poverty Programmes and all Programmes should be equally able to evidence them, or it should be clear that only the relevant outcomes for an individual needing support should be selected.
- 4.12 Given the number of data systems currently used, the development of a standardised database will need to involve considerable consultation across all Local Authorities and all Tackling Poverty Programmes to ensure that both the technical capabilities and administrative uses and links are fully understood.
- 4.13 A standardised reporting Excel template should also be developed and used as the main reporting tool in the interim, while the work on scoping the most appropriate data collection system is underway. This could be submitted once to Welsh Government but used by multiple Tackling Poverty Programme teams. Although the eventual data collection system would take over this role, the use of a standardised spread sheet would enable alignment to occur quicker. It could also act as a 'pilot' of the new process. The pilot and the feasibility of alignment could then be evaluated before significant investment is made.
- 4.14 It is important to develop a standardised database across all Tackling Poverty programmes irrespective of whether the alignment goes ahead or not. This can assist with greater streamlining of the programmes, whilst enabling greater cross working and cutting down on bureaucracy in the Local Authorities and service providers.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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