

# Innovators shaping

What will children's social services look like ten years from now? In England the Government believes its *PSW* takes a look at a selection of schemes that have won funding from the Children's Social Care Innovation

## Hertfordshire – £4.8 million

Hertfordshire has won the biggest slice of innovation programme money. Its service redesign is based on a belief that the split between children's and adult services has not been helpful. Domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues in adults are the factors that present the most risk to children and therefore families need to be viewed holistically.

It is planning to co-locate children and adult teams into multi-disciplinary family safeguarding teams. Co-location, it says, will reduce time spent on recording, travelling, meetings and writing separate reports, which can be rechannelled into direct work with families.

Each team consists of a team leader and includes children's social workers, a community psychiatric nurse, a domestic abuse specialist and a business support officer.

As well as working more closely with families, staff will be trained in Motivational Interviewing, a collaborative approach that has proved particularly effective working with clients who show a high level of resistance and

adults with substance misuse issues.

To help social workers adapt to the new way of working, an electronic family 'workbook' is to be created by the authority's lead psychologist. This sets out what each contact session with families will consist of and includes individual, group and family sessions for parents and for children. It aims to support decision-making on when families can be safely 'stepped down' to targeted services.

The authority wants to use this as the main recording tool for social workers, replacing case notes, chronologies and assessments and reports which it says are bureaucratic, repetitive and take up too much social work time. A new IT system will be designed to facilitate this.

The authority is also developing its own measurement for outcomes, believing the current national performance management framework is inadequate.

Among other things, this will be based on school attainment, family relationship scores, parental prosecutions, repeat referrals and rate of children entering care.

## Islington – £2.5 million

Core element of the London Borough of Islington's proposal focuses on "measuring what matters" rather than "what is easy to count". The authority says it will systematically collect evidence on the quality of practice and its impact on parents and children, rather than focusing on the number of days an assessment has taken. This, it believes, will help to drive improvements for individual workers, teams and the service as a whole.

Under the plans, social workers will visit families more frequently and practitioners will be observed regularly with feedback given on their performance in practice. They will have regular supervision to help them "reflect and explore different hypotheses for understanding the needs and risks in the family".

The expectation is better skilled practitioners will be able to make better relationships with

parents and children. Through this they will be able to motivate parents to change behaviour and care safely for their children.

Social workers will agree goals with families which will become a plan for collaborative working. They will be able to use evidence-based tools and support for "reflective and thoughtful risk assessment", to inform the plan and measure the progress of the family. Where there are concerns about progress being made there will be clear evidence for deciding on next steps.

Social workers will be able to access the skills and expertise of professionals from other disciplines to provide more intensive intervention, particularly when a child is considered to be at very high risk. They may, for example, employ a family therapist to complement the input of the social worker.



The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme was launched in 2013 with £30 million from the Department for Education.

It aims to stimulate local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and the private sector to come up with "mould breaking" new ways of delivering children's social services.

There are two key areas of focus – rethinking how children's social work is delivered and support for adolescents on the edge of care.

# the future...

£100 million funding pot to test run new ideas for delivering services is showing the way forward.  
 tion Programme



## Newcastle – £2.7 million

Newcastle's plan is to create four new social work teams specifically to work with children and families sharing similar needs and characteristics.

The authority believes this way of working recognises that families vary in terms of referrals and journeys through the system, for example, in some cases the likelihood of a child entering care within nine months of initial assessment is 0.9 per cent, whereas for others it is as high as 23.6 per cent.

Segmentation by family, says Newcastle, enables more focused targeting and benchmarking based on relevant outcomes.

The authority also plans to create a "social work learning and teaching organisation with learning and testing at its heart". It will do this

by capturing the "huge number of potential learning activities" generated by the social work units in their day-to-day practice. These will be fed back and tested to understand how interventions are most effective and shared across the workforce. Learning from the workplace will also be shared with local higher education institutions to inform course design.

Each unit will be given new cases with an explicit remit to learn from them and develop an improved knowledge of what works for specific family types. There will also be opportunities for collaboration and reflection.

By implementing this new programme, which it calls Family Insights, Newcastle predicts it will result in 375 fewer children entering the system, saving £6.9 million a year.

## Stockport – £3 million

Stockport believes strengths within families currently get lost because of "fragmented relationships" with professionals.

It is piloting an integrated team that brings together social workers and NHS Foundation Trust staff under one roof in the community. They will be trained to share common purpose and core values, with an emphasis on restorative approaches. The pilot will focus on a cohort of "complex families" and children and young people on the edge of care.

Social work teams will sit alongside health visitors, school nurses, midwives, youth offending staff, services for young people and

children and family workers. The authority developed the 'Stockport Family model', which focuses on helping families generate solutions to their issues through intervention.

The authority says it will "encourage social workers to be social scientists as well as practitioners" who are "research active".

Families with complex needs will be assigned a lead professional to build a trusting and effective relationship rather than being referred to multiple agencies and departments.

Stockport claims the model will result in a 20 per cent reduction in looked after children, resulting in a saving of £1.8 million.

The Government also wants to support ways of delivering better value for public money through the scheme.

Ministers say they want to do away with bureaucratic and rigid local structures and practices that they claim leave little room for trying out new ways of working.

Last October, Children's Minister Edward Timpson said the Education Department was receiving "inspiring, adventurous, imaginative

ideas that could revolutionise the way that children's services are delivered".

Because of this, he announced a £70 million funding boost to the scheme bringing the total to £100 million.

Bids for funding are considered by an investment board administered by the Spring Consortium which includes England's Chief Social Worker for Children and Families Isabelle Trowler and President of the Association of Directors of

Children's Services Alan Wood. Its other members are financial investors.

Both Trowler and Wood have expressed their enthusiasm at the ideas coming forward. Mr Wood maintained they were "the beginning of a renaissance in thinking" while Ms Trowler heralded signs of a "completely different landscape" in children's social care.

See Bridget Robb's agenda – page 21