



Social work improvement fund – summary report on activity 2010-12

Background

The Social Work Improvement Fund (SWIF) was established in 2010 as a response to a recommendation from the Social Work Task Force¹. This fund was divided between all local authorities using a relative needs formula² agreed by the Department for Education (DfE) and ministers. Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) was asked by DfE to distribute these funds and support employers to use the funding to reduce pressure on front line social workers and build capacity for reform and improvement in social work with children and families. To provide further support to local authorities a second allocation of SWIF was made available for 2011-12 with the total funding for local authorities increasing from £23m in the first year to £43.9m.³

To support the effective use of the SWIF a peer support model was identified in the first year as the most appropriate way to meet the needs of employers and provide opportunities for senior staff to work with their peers in other local authorities. CWDC invited senior social work staff working in a strategic role in local authorities to become advisors. In the first year 23 SWIF peer support advisors were recruited and this number increased to 32 in 2011-12. A number of advisors from 2010-11 have remained but there was no expectation that advisors would provide peer support to the same local authorities in 2011-12.

The peer support element to the SWIF project has offered employers additional support to implement change and allow individuals to work with other local authorities for 20 days over the year. In recognition of the time involved in this work CWDC allocated an additional £12,000 of funding to local authorities for each advisor.

¹ 'Building a Safe and Confident Future: Implementing the recommendations of the social work task force' (HM Government, 2010)

² For further information on the Relative Needs Formula see www.local.communities.gov.uk/finance/0607/simpguid.pdf.

³ An addition £8m SWIF was made available in late 2011 to support the implementation of the recommendations in Professor Munro's report

Methodology and Reporting

SWIF advisors were required to make two visits to local authorities and after each visit a standard form was completed. This was then uploaded into the CWDC's payment system in order for the SWIF monies to be released to the local authorities. As part of the data capture process CWDC is able to report how the SWIF monies were used and gauge the local authorities' views on the CWDC social work project. The possible change in advisor needs to be acknowledged when comparing reports submitted in 2010-11 with those of 2011-12.

Annex 1 presents findings from the second SWIF advisor visits in 2011-12. Visits to all 152⁴ local authorities were undertaken between 25 October 2011 and 30 March 2012. Findings from the first and second SWIF advisor visits carried out in 2010-11, as well as the first visit in 2011-12 are also included to allow for comparisons to be made across all four visits. Percentages are provided on the bases both of all authorities and of authorities taking part in a particular initiative.

Key Findings

- The percentage of authorities participating in the Newly Qualified Social Work [NQSW] programme and reporting a positive impact has remained at 99 per cent for the past three visits. The percentage of participating local authorities reporting that the NQSW programme is having a high impact has also increased with 71 per cent reporting this at the final visit.
- The percentage of authorities participating in the Early Professional Development [EPD] programme and reporting a positive impact has increased from 53 per cent at the first visit in 2010-11 to 85 per cent at the final visit. As with the NQSW programme the percentage of authorities reporting a 'high impact' has also increased between visits with 27 per cent reporting this at the final visit, an increase of 15 per cent from the first visit in 2010-11.
- The percentage of authorities taking part in Support to Front Line Managers and reporting a positive impact also increased, with 79 per cent now reporting an impact, compared with 58 per cent at the first visit in 2010-11.
- The percentage of authorities participating in Step Up to Social Work has increased in 2011-12 with 64 local authorities now involved compared with 42 at the very first visit. The percentage of those taking part in the programme and reporting a positive impact has fallen from 69 at visit two in 2010-11 to 53 per cent and there has been a subsequent increase in the percentage of authorities reporting that it is 'too early to say' if the programme is having an impact in 2011-12.

⁴ Only 151 local authorities participated in SWIF in 2010-11

- The percentage of local authorities using the health check or similar tool has increased from the first visit in 2010-11 with 89 per cent now using a tool. Nearly all of the authorities using a health check or similar tool found it helpful and by the final visit there had been a very slight increase in those claiming it was very helpful.
- Nearly all responding authorities were 'on top of' or 'making progress with' workload management, workflow management, right tools to do the job, a healthy workplace and effective service delivery across each of the four visits. Since the first visit in 2010-11 there has been an eight per cent increase in authorities 'on top of' workload management. Over the same period the number of authorities reporting 'no progress' with workflow management has reduced from a high of six to zero.
- Overall, since the first visit in 2010-11 there has been a small [5 per cent] increase in the percentage of authorities estimating that they employ 0-10 per cent agency staff. At all four visits the majority of authorities reported social worker caseloads as between 11-20 cases, and the percentage selecting this option has increased slightly between each visit. Over the same period there has been a seven per cent decrease in the number of authorities reporting an average number of 21-30 cases.
- At each of the four visits the vast majority of authorities said that managers were holding between 0-10 cases, 97 per cent of authorities selected this option at the final visit an increase of six per cent from the very first visit.
- In each of the four visits the percentage of responding local authorities reporting 0-10 unallocated cases has remained largely consistent. However, at each of the four visits five local authorities have reported over 50 unallocated cases.
- The most frequently identified challenge at all four visits was establishing effective workload management, although the percentage of authorities selecting this option has fallen since the first visit in 2010-11.
- Social work staff continued to be the most selected option for how authorities planned to use SWIF but the percentage of authorities selecting 'other' increased between the first and second years.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>

Further information about this research can be obtained from

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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.