Department for Education

FutureSocial

Evaluation report

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ICF Consulting Services Ltd.

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Acknowledgements

Key messages

FutureSocial was a multi-faceted programme hosted by Solihull and covering 14 councils and trusts in the West Midlands[1]. The programme aimed to achieve system change in workforce market management and the delivery of high quality services to children, young people and families at the West Midlands regional level. Evaluation evidence suggests that the programme made the most progress in increasing recruitment rates and better managing the use of agency staff. The key mechanism for this was the active management of the social care market underpinned by a strong and shared rationale for this workstream and a commitment to collaborative working. Close working with recruitment agencies operating in the region was also key. There were 3 programme strands that were less advanced at the time of the evaluation: improving quality of practice; leadership and management; and governance and co-production. FutureSocial has yielded some important learning with respect to the management of the children's social care workforce market at the regional level and the prerequisites for achieving wider system change.

Change at this scale takes time: FutureSocial set out an ambition for wide-reaching change across multiple layers of the children's social care system. Building a culture of collaboration and establishing the systems and processes that enable change to be enacted are fundamental to success. However, as interviewees stressed this takes a considerable length of time – far longer than the 18 months afforded to the programme.

Set clear, measurable and achievable goals while building in flexibility: At the outset FutureSocial lacked clear targets and milestones to enable success to be identified and measured. While the ability to be innovative is important, some programme stakeholders noted that the scale and complexity of the programme would have benefited from a more clearly defined and shared vision for success.

Appoint a programme team at the outset: FutureSocial was slow to appoint to key posts and as a consequence many elements of the programme did not get going until late on. The exception to this was the Workforce Development Coordinator whose energy and focus were described as a key factor in the success of this strand of the programme.

Regional working is challenging: Regional buy-in from stakeholders in both children's social care and recruitment agencies was critical in designing and implementing the changes necessary to help stabilise the children's social care market. Key challenges included: a high level of turnover at senior level; the tension between working to regional priorities while meeting the staffing needs of individual organisations; and

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[1] Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Herefordshire, Sandwell, Shropshire, Solihull, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wolverhampton and Worcestershire

getting local frontline stakeholders to 'think regionally'. Establishing a shared vison and rationale for change was a key enabler.

The programme would have benefited from greater emphasis on formative learning: The nature of the programme and the fact that it was unlikely to realise significant change in outcomes in the given timescale suggests that a greater emphasis on formative learning to help shape programme development would have been valuable. The employment of the cost benefit tools designed as part of the evaluation will provide useful information as elements of the programme mature further.

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from the mixed methods evaluation of the West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) 'FutureSocial' programme funded through the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, (Innovation Programme hereafter). The programme (hosted by Solihull local authority) covered 14 councils and trusts in the West Midlands region. The report draws on the following key sources of data: 2 rounds of qualitative interviews with programme stakeholders; a focus group with workforce leads; a theory of change workshop; a review of programme data and documents; 2 workforce surveys (1 for permanent staff and the other for agency staff); and analysis of relevant national data.

The project

The West Midlands region faced problems in recruiting and retaining a stable, high quality children's social care workforce. A shortfall of staff had resulted in a high reliance on agency workers, resulting in instability in the workforce and inconsistency in practice. The problem was further compounded by high staff turnover and variable opportunities to access quality training. In 2017 (when application to the Innovation Programme was made) there were over 700 vacancies in the regional workforce and the region had the second highest turnover (16.1%) and vacancy rates (17.5%) nationally, outside London.[2] In autumn 2016 40% of the 14 councils reported a 0 response rate to practice supervisor recruitment. In 2017 the region was also well below average in terms of Ofsted judgements: 4 of the 14 councils had been judged inadequate, 7 required improvement and only 3 good (West Midlands Children's Services ADCS, 2017).[3]

'FutureSocial' was conceived as a potential solution to these problems. Its overarching aim was the creation of a stable, well-developed workforce, through creation of a shared workforce development infrastructure and supporting the career progression of children's social work professionals and their quality of practice. The original programme design was set out in 4 phases, commencing in May 2017 and ending in March 2021. By this time, it was anticipated that there would be a fully embedded alternative delivery approach funded by the participating councils and trusts[4].

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[2] Proposal Form Children's Social Care Innovation Fund ADCS West Midlands 2017
[3] FutureSocial Business Plan 2017, West Midlands Children's Services ADCS
[4] At the time of reporting in March 2020, plans for the future of the programme, and how activities might be sustained without Innovation Programme funding which concluded in March 2020, were still being discussed. It was assumed that elements of the programme that people were invested in would return to ADCS.

Programme activities were designed to focus on 5 (linked) priorities: stabilising the social care workforce; managing the use of agency staff; improving the quality of social work practice; inspiring better leadership and management; and improving governance and co-production arrangements.

The evaluation

This evaluation aimed to evaluate FutureSocial at the programme level, through an assessment of workforce outcomes, with contextual understanding provided through qualitative research. Significant changes were made to the original evaluation methodology, first in January 2019 and then again in October 2019, to reflect the delay to programme inception and ensure the appropriateness of planned research activities.

In summary the final methodology comprised: document and data review of 28 internal programme documents; 6 scoping interviews with senior programme stakeholders (August 2018); a workshop with 17 regional senior stakeholders from the participating Trusts and Councils to co-produce a programme theory of change and strand level logic models (April 2019); 13 semi-structured interviews with regional stakeholders (January to March 2020); a focus group with 9 members of the Workforce Leads (January 2020); development and implementation of a workforce survey – first piloted in 2 local authorities in November 2018 and redesigned for region-wide roll-out (May 2019 and January 2020. The first roll out returned 191 eligible responses with a response rate of between 0-45%, the second 105 responses from 8 local authorities); development and implementation of a second workforce survey for agency staff (this returned 27 eligible responses across 8 local authorities); descriptive analysis of workforce outcomes in the West Midlands from nationally collected administrative data sets from 2013 onwards to explore changes in staff turnover rates and agency staff rates

Key findings

Managing the use of agency staff: This strand of work was concerned with attempting to manage the balance of agency versus permanent staff through active management of the children's social care workforce market. A key mechanism for achieving this was the implementation of a regional Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the provision of agency social work professionals into children's services. National data on agency workers indicates that the MoU and its on-going implementation have helped achieve an overall reduction in the use of agency staff in the region by the end of September 2019. This is in spite of a substantial increase in agency workers in one local authority, agreed as part of a service realignment.

Key enablers for this element of the programme were firstly the role played by the workforce coordinator in building relationships with agencies and leading revisions to, and implementation of, the MoU, and secondly the sense of importance of reducing

agency worker rates shared between Directors of Children's Social Care and their understanding that this could only be achieved through a collaborative endeavour.

Stabilising the workforce: This strand of work was concerned with improving the recruitment and retention of social workers and practice supervisors. A key element of this work involved identifying and paying for highly qualified agency staff from across the country (not just neighbouring authorities) to come into the region to fill vacancies as permanent members of staff. Interviewees reported that the programme had been effective in filling vacancies and in some areas helping to stabilise the workforce. Whilst the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) social workers increased over the period (by 6%), there is no robust indication that staff turnover rates have stabilised. Activities planned by the FutureSocial programme team to help improve staff retention include growing an understanding of best practice in retention and the development of a diagnostic tool to identify and evaluate the level of risk associated with staff loss in local authorities and trusts, down to a team level.

Improving quality of practice: This strand aimed to facilitate consistently high quality social work practice across the region. Delays in appointing the Quality Practice Lead meant this work was not as far advanced as originally envisaged. Nonetheless some important pieces of work had been undertaken including: a strengths and weaknesses assessment to identify common regional themes and explore opportunities to share good practice; a strengthened Principal Social Worker network; a programme of grant funding for local continuing professional development projects; and the staging of a regional conference with the theme of 'Getting to Good Outcomes for Children'. FutureSocial have also taken the lead in coordinating the regional implementation of the National Accreditation and Assessment System Phase 2; this was described by strategic stakeholders as going well and facilitated by good regional collaboration.

Leadership and Management: While the business plan described the development of leadership and management as fundamental to FutureSocial's vision for an alternative delivery model key activities planned under this programme strand did not really get started over the lifetime of the evaluation and it was unlikely that they would be progressed by FutureSocial post-March 2020 when the funding ended. This was in part due to the late programme inception, but a number of interviewees reflected that the programme was too broadly scoped and had been over-ambitious in trying to include this element along with everything else.

Governance and co-production: The main success of this programme strand was the creation of a regional data collection and analysis capability through the appointment of a data analyst. Work was on-going to strengthen the sharing of local best practice, and collaboration on common areas of work.

Cost benefit analysis (CBA): As FutureSocial did not develop within the timeframe or to the extent that was originally envisaged in the project application, there were few

clear attributable benefits to assess at this stage. The CBA work therefore involved the development of a cost benefit analysis tool designed to enable analysis of the benefits and costs of the programme as they develop in future. The tool enables the testing of future benefits scenarios, for example by estimating the effects that would need to be observed in future for the benefits to exceed the costs incurred by the programme.

Lessons and implications

FutureSocial has demonstrated that through collaborative commitment and endeavour it is possible to implement a strategy for active management of the children's social care workforce market through a shared approach to recruitment and the use of agency staff. Engagement of key stakeholders, including agencies, was fundamental to progress made against the goals of stabilising the workforce and managing the use of agency staff. The programme has yielded important learning with regard to implementing a complex change programme at the regional level. Interviews with key stakeholders highlighted some important lessons for other complex change programmes:

- Build a shared vision for change underpinned by a common understanding of the rationale for intervention;

- Set achievable and realistic goals so that success can be measured while building in flexibility to respond to issues and problems as they arise; and

- Appoint a programme team early on to lead elements of the change process while ensuring that all stakeholders take ownership of the programme.

FutureSocial's short timescale means it has been impossible to implement a robust evaluation of outcomes attributable to the programme. Interventions of this type, that are unlikely to demonstrate attributable quantifiable outcomes in the short to medium term, may benefit more from an evaluation that focuses on formative learning to help guide the programme as it is implemented.

1. Overview of the project

Project context

The West Midlands (WM) faced a number of problems in relation to recruiting and retaining a stable, high quality children's social care workforce. In 2017 there were over 700 vacancies in the regional workforce and the region had the second highest turnover (16.1%) and vacancy rates (17.5%) nationally, outside London, The shortfall of frontline social workers and social work managers had resulted in a high reliance on agency workers (in 2017 there were 634 agency staff in the region equating to 19% of the workforce[5]). Together these factors had led to instability in the workforce and inconsistency in social work practice and management. A heavy dependency on agency staff also meant the region faced rising costs as councils competed for staff through offering higher salaries[6]. The problem was further compounded by high staff turnover and variable opportunities to access quality training. Together these factors had contributed to underperformance in a number of areas and concomitant sub-optimal outcomes for children and families[7].

WM Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) Innovation Programme FutureSocial was designed to combat these problems through the development of a shared workforce development infrastructure to shape and improve the WM workforce market. The programme (hosted by Solihull local authority) covered 14 councils and trusts in the WM region. The region covers 5,000 square miles with a population of 5.9m people (2018 mid-year estimate). The area is geographically and politically diverse, bringing together the large urban conurbation of the WM Combined Authority with rural areas of Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire.

Based on national returns for the 2018-19 year, the region had: 88,580 Child in Need (CiN) episodes; 8,070 children who started a Care Protection Plan (CPP) in the year; and, excluding children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements, 10,560 Looked After Children (LAC) by the year end (31 March 2019) (DfE, 2020). Trend data (accessed through the Local Government Association's "LG Inform" tool[8]) shows that although there has been a very slight fall in the number of CiN since 2014/15 (from 96,300 to 88,580) this is still higher than in 2012/13 (79,400) and the number of LAC has steadily increased (from 8930 in 2012/13 to 10,560 in 2018/19).

FutureSocial has been implemented in an evolving organisational and policy environment overlapping with elements of other programmes in the region.

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[5] FutureSocial Business Plan 2017, WMCS ADCS
[6] Ibid
[7] In 2017 4 of the 14 councils had been judged inadequate by Ofsted and 7 required improvement
[8] https://lginform.local.gov.uk/

National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS)

NAAS is a voluntary assessment and benchmark of good practice measured against knowledge and skills statements developed by the DfE. There is agreement to implement NAAS across all 14 local authorities and trusts in the West Midlands. FutureSocial became the lead for the implementation of NAAS Phase 2 for the WM in May 2019, with a task and finish group set up under the Programme Board.

The WM Teaching Partnership

The WM Teaching Partnership is 1 of 23 accredited social work teaching partnerships funded by the DfE to strengthen the quality of education and training for social work students and practitioners across the West Midlands. The partnership brings together local authorities, children's trusts, NHS trusts and universities to improve the quality of social work practice through a research-led evidence-based approach to improving pre and post qualifying social work education.

Project aims and intended outcomes

FutureSocial was conceived as a multi-stranded, complex programme with ambitions to achieve systems change at a regional level. The original business plan set out a vision for a programme of change that would see the development of an alternative delivery approach that would transform recruitment, retention, quality and cost of the region's children's social care workforce. Collaborative working across the region, the development of strong leadership and management and co-production with children, young people and families were described as fundamental elements underpinning the success of this system change programme[9].

The business plan set out an ambitious set of aims and associated outcomes for the programme.

For the workforce:

- A more stable, confident, happy and motivated children's social care workforce.

Leading to improved workforce outcomes:

- Reduced numbers of agency workers
- Reduced workforce turnover and increased length of service, reducing costs of recruitment and induction of new staff;

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[9] FutureSocial Business Plan 2017, WMCS ADCS

- Reduced rates of absenteeism.

For children, young people and families:

- A better quality of service to children, young people and families

Leading to improved outcomes for children and their families (who are better protected, and their needs are met);

- Reduction in the numbers of LAC;
- Reduction in the numbers of Child Protection Cases, repeat Child Protection Cases and Ofsted judgements.

FutureSocial was originally designed as a 4 phase programme with the first phase (planned to commence in May 2017) involving the development and refinement of a delivery plan followed by 3 implementation phases culminating in a fully embedded and sustainable delivery model by 2021. Delays to programme initiation, including the sign-off of the final FutureSocial business plan and subsequent receipt of funding (which was not available until May 2018), and to the recruitment of key staff (including the Programme Manager who only began in September 2018 and the Lead for Practice and Quality who began in July 2019) meant that the timing and detail of these phases were subject to revision. Hence the implementation plan, originally due for completion in September 2017 (as part of the original phase 1) was not developed in draft form until January 2019.

The 2019 Draft Implementation Plan sets out an overarching aim for the programme:

> "To create a stable, well-developed workforce, by identifying innovative approaches to supporting and developing children's social work professionals and by directly engaging with and investing in Children's Social Work professionals in all 14 councils and trusts"[10]

FutureSocial was designed by WM ADCS as a collective response to the region's problems. Oversight and monitoring was provided by the FutureSocial Board with DCS representation from all 14 councils and trusts. Day to day responsibility for managing and facilitating delivery of the implementation plan lay with the Programme Team[11] who worked closely with the regional Workforce Leads and Principal Social Workers Groups who in turn established Task and Finish Groups for some elements of the work.

FutureSocial was conceived within part of a broader change programme, Challenge 2021, delivered through the WM Regional Improvement Alliance.

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[10] FutureSocial Implementation Plan 2019_DRAFT V2.0
[11] The Programme Team was led by staff in management positions within the Childrens Services and Skills Directorate and West Midlands ADCS, hosted by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The team was chaired by the DCS for Coventry.

Project activities

FutureSocial set out to create a stable and well-developed workforce, by directly engaging and investing in children's social work professionals in all 14 councils and trusts across the West Midlands.

According the 2019 Draft Implementation Plan[12], FutureSocial would attempt to do this by:

- Acting as a 'catalyst for change' across the social care workforce, testing (in collaboration) alternative delivery models and new ways of working.

- Sharing expertise, resource and functions at sub-regional or regional level to improve economies of scale and performance.

- Creating a WM Children's Services Community Interest Company (CiC), sustained through the investment by councils and trusts (CaTs).

- Creating a Regional Co-operative Agency CiC provider to offer an alternative agency provider/bank of specialist social workers owned by its members.

The plan identified 5 (linked) priority areas for action: 1) stabilise the social work workforce, 2) managed use of agency staff, 3) quality social work practice, 4) inspired leadership and management; and 5) governance and co-production.

A set of activities were described under each of heading and evaluation findings are also structured under these:

- **Stabilising the social care workforce:** which aimed to focus on both recruitment and retention through a multi-faceted approach. Key activities were to include establishing a regional recruitment campaign, which was intended to include targeted approaches for different social worker sub-groups (for example new recruits, returnees, and career changers); developing a regional approach to induction, pay and reward, and career pathways; and addressing short-term staffing issues.

- **Managing the use of agency staff:** Several activities were proposed to address a heavy reliance on agency staff including updating the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to address quality and cost issues and provide alternative strategies for solving staffing issues. Regular engagement with agencies and managed service providers was identified as important in making progress against this priority.

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[12] FutureSocial Implementation Plan 2019_DRAFT V2.0 (not published). The Plan set out an extensive range of objectives, activities and outcome indicators for each of these priority areas. These are summarised the programme logic model set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

- **Improving the quality of social work practice:** A key activity proposed under this heading was the development and effective implementation of a regional approach to the NAAS. There was also the aspiration to develop regional career and practice development pathways in alliance with other providers including the WM Teaching Partnership (TP). Continued professional development (CPD) would be supported through sharing best practice and tools, testing innovation, and utilising the expertise of those excelling in this area and the Partners in Practice network.

- **Inspiring better leadership and management:** Key planned activities included delivering a regional development programme for all levels of leadership; improving succession planning for management/leadership roles; improving opportunities for CPD and showcasing best practice in leadership across the region and; engaging in national development programmes.

- **Improving governance and co-production arrangements:** This strand envisioned the establishment of regional governance and decision-making arrangements, improvements to the collection and analysis of local and regional data and supporting the participation of children, young people and families.

2. Overview of the evaluation

This section provides an overview of the evaluation setting out the research questions and methodology. Changes to the original approach are described as are the limitations of the evaluation.

Evaluation questions

1. What is the impact of the programme on the children's social care workforce at the regional level?

2. What factors enable or hinder improvements to the children's social care workforce?

3. What is the impact of the project on the quality of operational and managerial practice?

4. What factors enable or hinder improvements to the quality of operational and managerial practice?

5. Are all partners effectively engaged? What works well and what are the challenges for a regional approach?

6. What are the key mechanisms of change and how do these relate to observed or measured impact?

7. What are the cost implications of the project? Is it good value for money?

8. What lessons are there for wider roll-out of the model?

9. What needs to happen at the organisational level for the project to be a success?

10. What is lacking (or present) in the system that hinders the success of the project?

11. Have the conditions for sustainability been created; will the change be sustained?

Evaluation methods

This evaluation aimed to evaluate FutureSocial at the programme level, through an impact assessment of workforce outcomes, with contextual understanding provided through qualitative research. The methodology was designed to generate both formative and summative learning, to help shape the programme as it developed and refine the delivery model. Early meetings (autumn 2017 and spring 2018) were held with key stakeholders including members of the project team, the regional data analyst, workforce leads and principal social workers, to build understanding of the programme and to agree priorities for the evaluation. The evaluation proper began in August 2018

with a scoping phase involving: 6 strategic stakeholder interviews; a documentary review to develop a detailed understanding of the programme; and the design and piloting of a workforce survey. Significant changes were made to the original evaluation methodology, first in January 2019 and then again in October 2019 (as described below).

In summary the evaluation comprised:

- Document and data review of 28 internal programme documents, including minutes of Programme Board meetings, plans for activities, and discussion papers, and data provided by the regional analyst on staff workforce outcomes.

- 6 semi-structured scoping interviews with senior programme stakeholders to provide contextual understanding of the programme rationale, activities, intended outcomes and regional organisational and policy context (August 2018).

- A workshop with 17 regional stakeholders to co-produce a programme theory of change and strand level logic models (April 2019).

- 13 semi-structured interviews with regional stakeholders to gauge progress against programme objectives, explore system and infrastructural barriers and enablers to implementation, and capture early achievements (January-March 2020).

- A focus group with 9 members of the Workforce Leads Network to explore specific progress against the workforce development elements of the programme, its achievements, and barriers and facilitators to success (January 2020). A further 2 focus groups were planned: 1 with the Principal Social Worker (PSW) Network and 1 with agency staff providers. However, it proved extremely challenging to organise these for logistical reasons arising from a lack of awareness of the FutureSocial programme among potential participants and the limited time available. As such they did not go ahead.

- Development and implementation of a workforce survey exploring a range of themes including working hours, caseloads, job satisfaction, stress, career progression and management and leadership. The survey was based on a list of standardised questions set by the DfE, with additional questions to provide detailed insight into the issues being tackled by FutureSocial. The survey was piloted in 2 local authorities in November 2018 (Solihull and Dudley) and then redeveloped to take account of feedback from respondents and to align with questions from the DfE's *Longitudinal Study of Child and Family Social Workers*.

- The redesigned survey was first rolled out at the end of May 2019 and remained open until early August 2019 due to poor response rates. In total, there were 191 eligible responses disproportionately spread across the 14 local authorities and Trusts with response rates ranging from 0 – 45%. After discussion with DfE and the FutureSocial programme team it was agreed to roll the survey out a second

time in January 2020. A targeted approach was used to encourage responses from areas with minimal or no response to the first survey. There were 105 responses in total, from 8 local authorities. 1 local authority failed to gather any responses to either round of surveys.

- Development and implementation of a second workforce survey specifically focused on agency staff and exploring, in addition, reasons for choosing to work for an agency and experiences of agency working. This was rolled out at the same time as the main workforce survey in May 2019 but was not repeated a second time. In total, there were 27 eligible responses across 10 local authorities (normally between 1-3 responses in each area, though up to 7 in 1 area).

- Analysis of workforce outcomes in the WM from nationally collected administrative data sets from 2013 onwards (Children's Social Work Workforce, DfE).[13] Given limitations in the availability of data the proposed Interrupted Time Series (ITS) analysis was not possible (as described in the limitations section below). Instead data were descriptively analysed to show changes in staff turnover rates and agency staff rates across the time period 2013-2019.

Changes to evaluation methods

In January 2019, the evaluation methodology was revised following agreement (between ICF, ADCS West Midlands, Opcit Research and the DfE) that elements of the original approach to the evaluation were no longer appropriate or possible, largely because of significant delay to programme implementation as described above. Key revisions were:

- To undertake the workforce survey at 1 time point and to add a further separate survey for agency staff;

- To remove any analysis of child and family outcomes as any programme impacts would not be observable or attributable during the lifetime of the evaluation; and

- To undertake some additional qualitative work, including focus groups and interviews, as the programme team were keen to obtain insights to shape formative and summative learning.

In October 2019 further revisions were agreed. Following a poor response rate to the workforce survey (in some areas 0 responses were received), and at the request of the FutureSocial programme team it was agreed that the main workforce survey would be rolled out for a second time to permanent staff.

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[13] Despite the nationally collected social work workforce data returns being completed by all local authorities in the West Midlands, there are potential problems with data quality as reported by the regional analyst. This is because the format in which workforce data is collected changed in 2017, and there continues to be some divergence across local authorities in the way that data is interpreted and submitted.

In addition, the method for determining any programme impact on workforce outcomes had to be revised. It had been proposed to use an ITS approach however this was amended for 2 key reasons. Firstly, the introduction of the MoU represents the only suitable activity (or intervention) for which a change in outcomes might be determined. However, causal effects could not be attributed to the MoU through an ITS, because this was signed in 2015 and data was only available for 2 years prior to this (as data returned in the years 2011 and 2012 based was completed on a voluntary basis and could not be used as not all local authorities submitted data). An ITS would have required more data points for the pre-intervention period. Secondly, delays to programme implementation meant that there would be no clear post-intervention period.

Limitations of the evaluation

A robust evaluation framework should be grounded in, and able to capture the specific activities that comprise a programme and the main goals it is seeking to achieve. However, the task of defining FutureSocial proved problematic from the outset for 2 key reasons: the scale and complexity of the programme and the iterative nature of its design. In turn these led to practical constraints and methodological limitations to the evaluation.

The scale and complexity of the programme: FutureSocial aimed to work at multiple levels of the children's social care system: from recruitment through to practice at the frontline. Furthermore, it was seeking to achieve fundamental system change across all 14 local authorities and trusts in the region. The programme had ambitions to work at both the strategic and practical levels with 5 workstreams each comprising multiple tasks and activities. Achieving change at this scale requires a whole system approach and FutureSocial overlapped with other key initiatives including NAAS and the Teaching Partnership. Any programme impacts were not only unlikely to be achieved during the lifetime of the evaluation but would be extremely difficult to attribute to FutureSocial.

The what and the how of FutureSocial continuously evolved: late programme inception and slow recruitment of key staff meant that the aims, objectives and foci of activity were subject to revision throughout the lifetime of the programme. The implementation plan, originally due for completion in November 2017 was not developed until January 2019 and then only in draft form. The workforce development strand was the most consistent, reflecting the fact that this work had started pre-programme and benefited from a clear and shared understanding of the rationale for the work, its aims and the strategy for achieving these.

By way of contrast the Lead for Practice and Quality was not successfully recruited until late into the programme (July 2019). Additionally, the programme lead recruited in September 2018 left a year later in September 2019 and was not replaced as it was felt momentum would be lost so close to the end of the funding period, given the time

required for recruitment. It was therefore difficult to undertake a meaningful evaluation of any programme activities relating to the quality of practice, co-production and leadership and management strands.

Given that the programme could no longer be expected to have an impact on measurable workforce outcomes within the timeframe of the evaluation the planned impact analysis was deemed inappropriate. Hence, as described above, the original ITS approach was revised, and a descriptive analysis of workforce outcomes undertaken instead. This means that any observed changes in outcomes are only indicative and cannot be attributed to the programme activities.

The workforce survey, although rolled out twice, was not undertaken at baseline and programme end as originally envisaged so no comparative survey data is available with which to determine distance travelled. The response rate to the survey was patchy across the region with some local authorities responding relatively well while others returned 0 completions. Based on discussions with programme staff, possible reasons for this include the number of different surveys being carried out with social workers at the same time and low levels of awareness of the FutureSocial programme. An additional issue was accessing social workers; email invitations containing a link to the survey were cascaded down by each local authority but there was no incentive provided to encourage survey completion. Similar surveys rolled out by ICF in other areas have benefited from the support of embedded researchers able to encourage participation at the local level. Nonetheless the survey has provided useful relevant data that could be used to inform future workforce planning at the regional level.

Late programme implementation also meant that the approach to cost benefit analysis (CBA) had to be revised. As there were no clear benefits to inform the CBA, work involved the development of a cost benefit analysis tool designed to enable analysis of the benefits and costs of the programme as they may develop in future. The tool also enables the testing of future benefits scenarios which we recommend the programme undertakes going forward.

Given the limitations described it is likely that the programme would have benefitted most from a formative qualitative approach designed to yield learning for the programme team and Board to inform ongoing implementation of the different programme components.

3. Key findings

This section sets out key evaluation findings, by bringing together evidence from the stakeholder interviews undertaken at both time points, the focus group with workforce leads, the workforce surveys, and the analysis of workforce outcome data. Evaluation findings are set out under the 5 priority area headings as described in the Draft Implementation Plan.

Managing the use of agency staff

This strand of work was concerned with attempting to manage the balance of agency versus permanent staff through active management of the children's social care workforce market as well as trying to source staff in a sustainable fashion. In common with the goal of stabilising the workforce, this component of the programme benefited from a strong and shared understanding of the rationale for the work and its importance. Interviewees agreed that workforce development had been the most productive strand of FutureSocial, elements of which were most likely to be sustained going forward.

Key to the managed use of agency staff was the implementation of a regional MoU for the provision of agency social work professionals to children's services. The MoU was first established in 2015, prior to inception of the FutureSocial programme with the latter taking the lead for its on-going revision and implementation. The MoU, referred to as the Agency Protocol, agreed a regional cap on agency pay rates for temporary social work professionals at team manager level and below with the aim of stemming escalating costs and reducing competition within the region for staff. The FutureSocial Workforce Co-ordinator led on implementation taking responsibility for tasks such as monitoring and audit of compliance, dealing with social worker queries about the MoU and negotiating revisions to pay scale caps. The MoU was most recently reviewed and updated in April 2018 to include provision for taking action when it was believed agencies were working outside the MoU. Any agencies breaking the agreement were engaged with and corrective actions applied.[14] Serious breaches could lead to suspension from the list of agencies able to supply staff to the 14 councils and trusts. To date 6 temporary suspensions had been applied with 1 on-going suspension in place.

Some tensions were discussed between the aspiration to work collaboratively and the need to meet the needs of individual local authorities and trusts. However, interviewees from both children's services and agencies agreed that in general the MoU had been well received and adhered to and as 1 interviewee noted was 'a solid, good thing for region'. This laid the foundation for further collaborative work with the agencies, for example, a showcase event took place in December 2018, involving 9 agencies and all

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[14] The corrective action was normally an agreement signed by the agency detailing a negotiated set of remedial actions in the areas where the agency had been working against the letter of the MoU.

14 councils. The aim of this was to facilitate LA access to the agencies' permanent staff offers and identify other areas for future collaboration. Interviewees reported that this event had been positive, by providing a good platform for agencies to engage with local authorities and trusts. The intention, following on from this event, was to continue to shift the focus of recruitment to permanent rather than temporary staff. While this work was still in its infancy, stakeholders were optimistic that good progress would be made.

The agency survey provides some evidence of some of the challenges in trying to reduce rates of agency working. The most frequently reported reasons for choosing agency work were better pay (n=15), flexibility over work location (n=13) and to gain experience in different roles (n=13). There was also a very high level of satisfaction among agency workers with the local authority/trust that they are undertaking work for: 22 respondents reported that they were very or fairly satisfied while only 2 respondents felt fairly or very dissatisfied.

FutureSocial aimed to reduce dependency of agency workers and the indicator used to explore this is a change in agency rate[15]. The following graph plots the change in rates in the WM over the time period 2013 – 2019.

Figure 1: Change in agency worker rate (2013 – 2019)
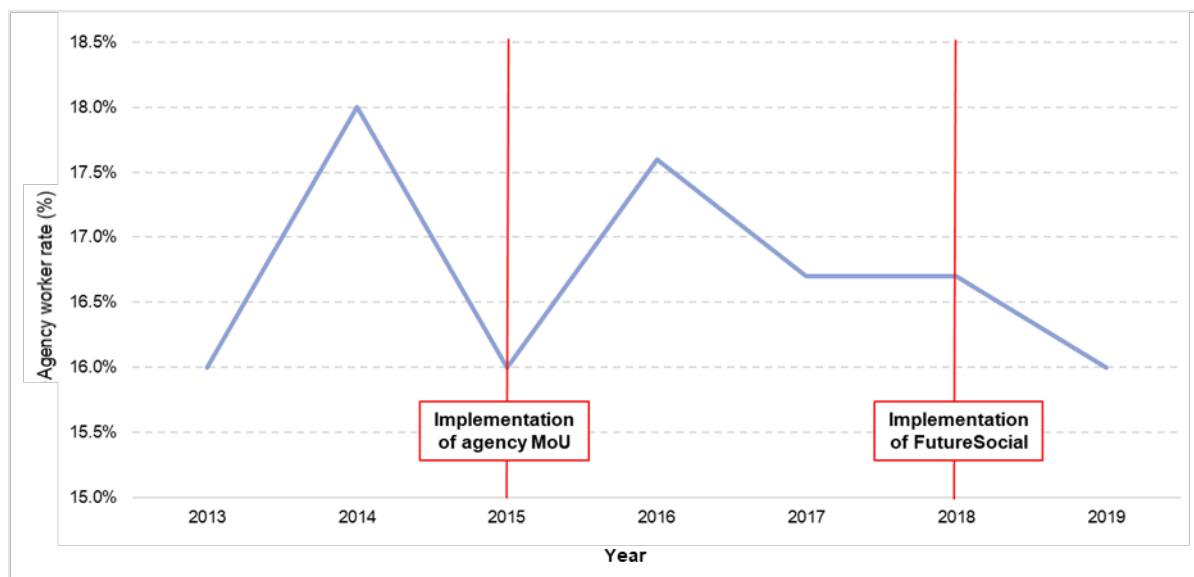
Source: Department for Education; Children and family social workforce statistics

When the MoU is first introduced in 2015 the agency worker rate shows an increase until September 2016, when it begins a slow and steady decline up to the latest observed period, September 2019 when rates drop back to 2013 levels. According to regionally collected data[16], 2018-19 showed a slight increase in the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) agency workers overall, from 641.0 to 643.1.[17] However, this was

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[15] Rate (%) of agency staff at 1 time point – calculated as the number of agency staff divided by the number of all (agency and non-agency) staff; and then multiplied by 100 to reach the percentage.
[16] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childrens-social-work-workforce-2019
[17] N.B. National figures for the same timeframe showed an increase of 7.4% (DfE 2020).

mainly due to a significant increase in agency workers in Stoke-On-Trent (+83.1), 28.9 to 112.0. This local authority can be considered an outlier as they had the stated intention of retaining a number of agency workers additional to the agreed capacity as part of a service realignment. A stakeholder from within the FutureSocial team reported that the ability to source this level of staffing while maintaining the MoU should be considered a 'major success' while stressing that this had received considerable regional support. Despite the slight increase in numbers the agency rate has reduced from 16.7% to 16% due to the greater increase in the number of FTE at the end of September 2019.

The national data suggests that the MoU and its on-going implementation have helped achieve an overall reduction in the use of agency staff (Stoke-on-Trent being the exception), which was certainly the perception of interviewees.

Stakeholder evidence suggests that one of the key enablers for this element of the programme was the critical role played by the workforce coordinator. The coordinator was recognised as driving forward the work, demonstrating a passion and commitment to move things forward. Key also was a shared sense of the importance of reducing agency worker rates and the understanding that this could only be achieved through a collaborative endeavour. Indeed, this strand of work was credited by some interviewees as having supported a 'culture change' in regional work, laying the foundation to work collaboratively on other things.

Stabilising the workforce

This strand of work was concerned with improving the recruitment and retention of social workers and practice supervisors. The ambition was to establish regional approaches to recruitment, induction, pay and career pathways. The main focus for 2019 was the attempt to plug gaps in capacity through development of a regional recruitment plan designed to bring 800 qualified social workers into the region, replacing agency workers with permanent staff.

A strand of this work involved identifying and paying for highly qualified agency staff from across the country to come into the region to fill permanent vacancies. The idea was to use agency staff to fill vacancies where there was a need for specialist skills, short term cover, or to address unexpected capacity issues, thereby reducing immediate staffing pressures and providing support for existing permanent staff. It would then be possible to focus on retention of permanent staff, recruitment of newly qualified staff to replace the agency workers and trying to convert agency staff into permanent staff. The benefit of this strategy of active market engagement was that instead of pulling resource from within the region, they would be able to 'spread' the impact and try to attract agency workers from other areas with fewer vacancies or issues.

The approach was first trialled in Hereford, where they successfully attracted workers from Medway, Neath and Durham with an enhanced pay rate. Following its success, a number of local authorities accessed workers using the same approach – for example, in summer 2019, workers were accessed by Walsall (May 2019), Birmingham (June 2019), Herefordshire (June/July 2019) and Stoke on Trent (June 2019).

Interviewees reported that the programme had been effective in filling vacancies and in some areas stabilising the workforce. According to regionally collected data[18] the vacancy rate decreased from 18.4% in 2017/18 to 16.6% in 2018/19 (from 720.7 FTE vacancies at the end of September 2018 to 673.6 FTE vacancies at the end of September 2019, although there was a query around the number of vacancies being reported by 1 council, as this was much lower than in the previous year). It is also worth noting that the fall in the vacancy rate sits alongside an overall increase in the number of posts in the region; an increase in FTE social workers: 177.8 (from 3199.0 to 2276.8).

There were only 3 local authorities that reported an increase in vacancy rate although 1 of these only saw a slight increase of 4 additional vacancies. The local authority which saw the biggest increase in rate (14 to 41 vacancies), had greatly increased their agency workers, meaning that they were 71 FTE social workers over standard requirement at the end of September 2019.[19] The third local authority saw an increase in rate from 13.1 to 50 FTE vacancies and were reporting having only 9 agency workers. A 4th local authority stated in their data return that they had created some positions in preparation for re-structuring, and therefore their vacancy figure was likely to be overstated. They reported 50 vacancies at the end of September. Across the region the number of FTE Social Workers increased from FTE 3199.0 to 3390.70 (up 191.70 FTE positions, which is equivalent to 6%).

The development of a regional recruitment website and app was planned as part of an endeavour to create more efficient recruitment processes. In summer 2019, a member of the programme team attended a recruitment exposition and had follow up discussions with app developers to understand the indicative costs. A task and finish group was then appointed in late 2019 to lead on plans to develop the digital tools. However, stakeholders reported that progress on this had been slow and that getting regional buy-in to the idea challenging due to a degree of risk averseness among decision makers and a tendency for people to 'hold on to conventional ways of doing things' (FutureSocial Stakeholder)

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[18] WMCS Q4 2018_19 Workforce Data Update (Unpublished): WMCS Regional Analyst
[19] During the roll out of the programme FS worked very closely with this local authority (with the Workforce Lead being seconded there) to help stabilise their workforce

The indicator used to explore any indicative programme impact on workforce stability was a reduction in staff turnover rate[20]. The following graph plots the change in rates over the time period 2013 – 2019. The expected benefits of the MoU were both the managed use of agency workers and stabilising the social care workforce and so its introduction is marked as an intervention on the graph.

Figure 2: Change in turnover rate (September 2013 – September 2019)
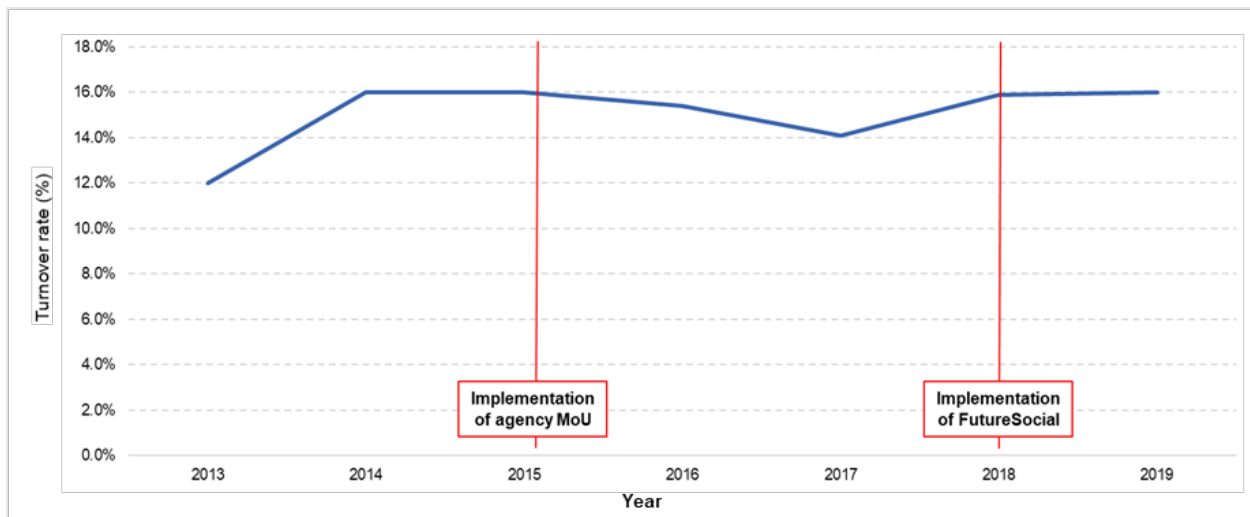
Source: Department for Education; Children and family social workforce statistics

A large increase in turnover rates across the WM is evident between 2013 and 2014. The MoU was first implemented in January 2015. From this point, the turnover rate stabilises until 2016 when there is a slight drop, and then an increase in 2017. The rate then stabilises in 2018-2019 – the period when FutureSocial began to be implemented.

According to regionally collected data there were only 5 local authorities that reported an increase in turnover rate (Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Telford & Wrekin and Warwickshire), and all of these except Birmingham had a sizeable increase.[21] Evidence from both stakeholders and survey data reflect this observation. Hence, approximately three-quarters of respondents (74% n=129) to the workforce survey who had been working in their local authority or trust for 2 years or more (n=174) indicated that they felt staff turnover had got worse in the last few years. Additionally, in interview, some stakeholders acknowledged that turnover rates had risen in some areas, explaining that, in response, the FutureSocial focus had moved from recruitment towards retention.

The workforce survey provides some insights into factors that might facilitate or act as barriers to staff retention. Respondents were asked why they chose to work at their current local authority or trust. Geographical location was integral for the large majority (75%), but other factors influencing their decision included a good work-life balance/

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[20] Rate (%) of leavers of positions in preceding year – calculated as the number of leavers in preceding year divided by the number of workers in position at 1 time point; and then multiplied by 100 to reach the percentage

[21] WMCS Q4 2018_19 Workforce Data Update (Unpublished): WMCS Regional Analyst

flexible working options, opportunities for staff development and training, pay and benefits, and opportunities for career progression. Permanent social worker survey respondents were largely satisfied with most aspects of their job; they were positive about the variety in their workload (85%), the opportunities to use their abilities (79%) and the sense of achievement from work (77%), and around three-quarters felt valued by colleagues and managers (76%) and appreciated by service users (72%).

However, there was more negativity in other areas, where a large proportion of respondents indicated feeling dissatisfied. This related to their pay, where 41% were dissatisfied, and their work life balance, with 40% indicating they were dissatisfied. There was also a relatively high proportion of respondents reporting some dissatisfaction with their promotion prospects (30%).

Figure 3: Levels of job satisfaction among permanent social workers
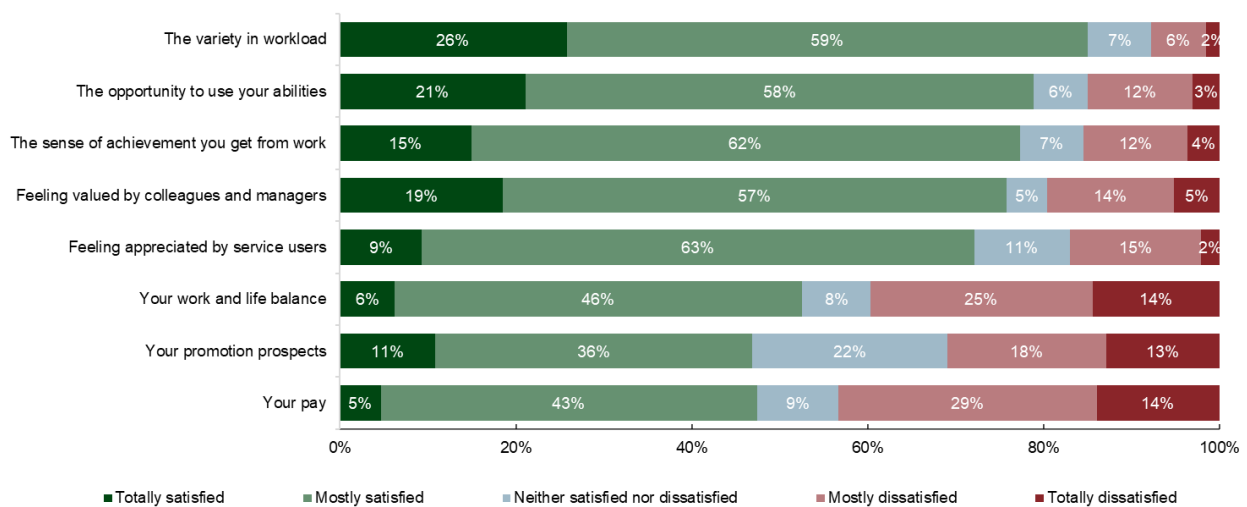
Source: Permanent SW survey (n=222)

Job-related stress was also fairly commonly reported by respondents which may also represent a barrier to workforce stabilisation. Only 4% said that they never feel stressed by their job while others report being sometimes (52%), often (35%) or always (9%) stressed by it. This was chiefly related to workload, with over half (58%) reporting it to be too high and 45% feeling that they had insufficient time for direct work with children and families. Similarly, respondents were asked how often they had to work over and above their contracted hours and over half (65%) reported that they did so either all the time or most weeks.

77 of the 222 respondents to the permanent worker survey strongly disagreed or disagreed that they were likely to remain in their role for the next 2 years, mostly reporting that this was because they were considering (56%) or actively looking for (51%) alternative positions. 31% of respondents were both considering and looking for alterative positions.

Nearly half (43%) also suggested they were considering leaving social work altogether, though far fewer were actually actively seeking a position outside of social work (23%).

Importantly, most of those considering leaving social work or actively seeking positions outside of social work were at the same time still actively looking for alternative positions in their field (66% and 79% respectively). Other reasons given for leaving social work included plans for retirement or having already handed in their notice.

Respondents who had been working in their local authority or trust for at least 2 years or more (n=174) were also asked whether they had observed any changes over the last few years. There were very strong feelings of negative change in some key areas – a sizable majority (84%) indicated that they had noticed an increase in budget pressure. More than half also reported negative changes to the time spent on administrative tasks, resources available and workload pressure. A higher proportion reported positive change in terms of the quality of partnership and multidisciplinary working, and the tools they had to do their job effectively, but for other measures (including quality of services) there were either equal or greater numbers of respondents reporting negative change.

Planned activities to help improve staff retention include improving understanding of best practice in retention and developing a diagnostic tool to identify the risk profile in individual local authorities and trusts down to team level. The long term aim is to enable cross regional data gathering and analysis to identify common push factors to enable pro-active mitigating solutions to be found.

Improving quality of practice

This strand aimed to facilitate consistently high quality social work practice across the region. The Implementation Plan described aspirations to develop regional career and practice development pathways, support CPD through sharing best practice and leading the coordination of the regional implementation of NAAS Phase 2.

Delays in appointing the Lead for Practice and Quality (the postholder came into post in July 2019) meant that the focus on practice came late in the programme roll out. These delays were in part due to drawn out recruitment processes (including agreeing the grade for the post) but also because the post had to be advertised twice when no suitable candidates responded to the first recruitment drive. Furthermore, this element of the programme was described difficult to define as the work needed to be responsive to and based on DCS priorities. Given that priorities not only varied across the region but, given the high level of turnover in senior staff, were also subject to change, achieving a shared vision for this work proved extremely challenging.

Since being in post the Lead for Quality and Practice has been working collaboratively with the PSWs to identify the key areas for practice improvement. This has included undertaking a strengths and weaknesses assessment using recent Ofsted reports to identify common regional themes. This has been used to explore opportunities for sharing good practice, in particular where local authorities and trusts are demonstrating

strengths in areas that they can share with others that are weaker. The key vehicle for this has been the PSW network that has been strengthened through revision of its terms of reference, a revised implementation plan and the creation of some task and finish groups to drive forward the priorities of the implementation plan.

In January 2020 a PSW conference was held with the theme of 'Getting to Good Outcomes for Children' and attended by social care practitioners, managers and workforce leads across the region. Keynote speakers included the Chief Social Worker and an Ofsted inspector, and workshops were led by practitioners to share best practice. Written and verbal feedback demonstrated that this was extremely well received. The development of this was driven forward by the PSW Network which was supported by the Lead for Practice and Quality who helped facilitate the development and arrangements for the conference.

Trying to support people to develop a regional perspective was described as challenging and interviewees described a reluctance among some stakeholders to do things at the regional level. The difficulty in engaging people with sufficient power and influence in their own organisations was also identified as a barrier to moving this work forward and there was some suggestion that there was not a strong enough steer from DCSs to work regionally.

Coordinating the regional implementation of NAAS

In 2019, the WM was approached by the DfE to take forward the implementation of NAAS phase 2 across the 14 local authorities and trusts. A few interviewees felt that this demonstrated DfE's recognition of the region's ability to work productively on a collaborative basis, including through FutureSocial.

The regional coordination led by FutureSocial was generally described by senior stakeholders as a success, though some early challenges with union antipathy to assessment and accreditation were described by the same interviewees. This had, nevertheless, yielded some useful learning to inform future roll out. Collaborative working at the regional level, while not without challenges, was described by interviewees as a facilitator of NAAS implementation and in particular the regional management of placements. Key tasks for the Lead for Practice and Quality for the forthcoming months were to: ensure all trusts and local authorities complete their NAAS; support leads to achieve their targets; facilitate the sharing of ideas; and undertake collaborative work.

Continuing professional development and regional career pathways

There had been limited tangible progress made by FutureSocial per se in delivering against its intended aims of developing regional career and practice development pathways. FutureSocial and the Teaching Partnership have had discussions about how they can work together on their separate remits while exploring where there might be

value in coming together. Much of the initial conversation focused on the scope of their respective work – for example, unlike FutureSocial, the Teaching Partnership focuses on both children and adult social care, works in partnership with higher education institutions, and also covers Cheshire East. This meant there were some early challenges noted by stakeholders involved in the Teaching Partnership work on how the programmes might align and if the governance structures in place were appropriate

At the end of the evaluation period, the Teaching Partnership was leading on work to map the social work career journey, and shape what the outputs might be that sit within this. The Lead for Practice and Quality was hopeful that this would help development of a framework identifying where FutureSocial might add value. The map is also intended to provide information to social workers about access to CPD opportunities and accredited routes to support career progression.

The workforce survey provided some insights into social worker views on CPD across the region. The vast majority felt they had access to a range of CPD and learning opportunities (83% agree). Around two-thirds reported learning from their peers (65% agree), felt there were opportunities to share best practice (64% agree), and had time to reflect and improve on their practice (61% agree). However, 43% felt they did not have the time to access development opportunities. Around a third felt that career pathways were not clear (33%), that there was not the time available to implement learning from training into practice (35% felt they did not have time) and that they were not encouraged to read research (37% felt they were not encouraged).

Grant funding for local CPD projects

In 2019 FutureSocial invited local authorities to apply for funding for CPD projects and activities. The Lead for Practice and Quality developed a rigorous application and approval process to ensure that all applications met the terms of the grant. A monitoring process was also developed to oversee the implementation of projects. The performance of each project was monitored through the FutureSocial Programme Board by the Lead for Practice and Quality. The approval process ensured that any applications which did not meet the criteria were further developed to ensure that they met the criteria.

Examples of successful applications include Worcestershire, which aimed to improve its supply of social workers through running a wide range of learning and development opportunities for social workers as part of its Social Work Academy. Two neighbouring local authorities (Staffordshire and Shropshire) joined together to introduce a sustainable model for restorative practice, to create a pool of Restorative Practice

Practitioners, who would deliver the training offer across their sub-region and potentially wider.[22]

Leadership and Management

Interviewees agreed that the key activities planned under this programme strand had not really got started. This was in part due to the late programme inception, but a number of interviewees also reflected that the programme was too broadly scoped and that it had been over-ambitious to try to include this element a with everything else.

Participants in the Workforce Leads focus group felt that one of the key problems the region faced was a lack of people with the right level of experience to step up into management. There was a feeling that people expected to be promoted to senior management roles too quickly – with as little as 3 years' experience post-qualifying. This was felt to reflect a high degree of 'churn' in the region's children's social care workforce which people felt had not yet stabilised. All interviewees reflected on the high level of turnover amongst senior staff especially at DCS level. This was seen as part of a national problem and was also cited as a key challenge in achieving collaboration at the regional level.

The permanent social worker survey provides some insights into perceptions of management and leadership. In terms of their own line management respondents reported having formal supervision with their line manager or supervisor at least once a month (75%) or most months (18%), although for 7% it is less often than this (once or twice in the last 6 months, or never). Important information around changes in plans, priorities, and working arrangements are mostly communicated by line managers (80%) but respondents also report hearing about them during meetings (58%), from colleagues, through service or local briefs (33%) or through corporate means (32%).

Overall, as shown in Figure 4 (overleaf) most permanent workers (80%) say they are totally or mostly satisfied with the overall quality of supervision they receive. Line manager support around complex cases was perceived positively by a similar proportion of respondents (86% satisfied) as was the emotional support they provide during difficult or stressful situations (80% satisfied). However, of those that were mostly or totally dissatisfied with the overall quality of their supervisory support, nearly half (49%) felt unlikely to remain in their jobs for the next 2 years, and 9 respondents (22%) were already looking for alternative social work positions.

The positive view of line management is also indicated by the high level of respondents that agreed that their manager supported them in their professional judgement and decision making (86%).

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[22] https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Care-for-children-and-families/Children-and-families-news/2019-09-Restorative-Practice.aspx .

Figure 4: Satisfaction with line manager and supervisory support among permanent social worker survey respondents
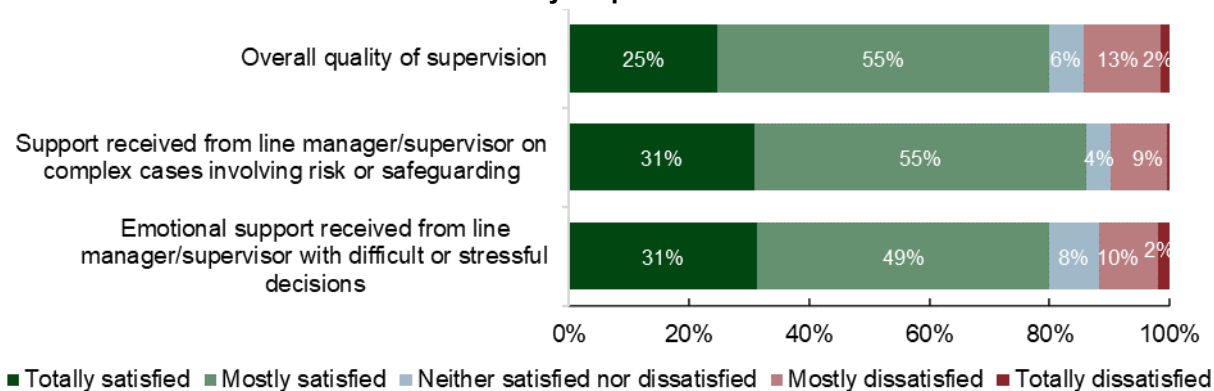
Source: Permanent SW survey (n=222)

Governance and co-production

According to many interviewees the main success of this programme strand was the creation of a regional data collection and analysis capability through the appointment of data analyst. The intelligence gathered by this post-holder was described as extremely useful, for providing information on the workforce to inform planning and effective use and targeting of resources. The intelligence detailed further insights into the workforce data returns for the region and supplied information on pay and reward.

Less successful had been the branding and communications work, which was intended to support and promote FutureSocial activities. This work had originally been undertaken in-house, but interviewees suggested it should have been done through appointment of a dedicated post-holder or commissioned externally from a specialist provider. However, there were conflicting views on whether it was important for FutureSocial to be recognised as a separate entity with its own branding or simply to be considered a facilitator and conduit of sharing good practice and as a way of strengthening existing collaborative structures.

Co-production and participation

In December 2019, the FutureSocial Programme Board approved a recommendation that a formal network be set up for Participation Leads from the 14 councils and trusts. The aim of the Participation Leads Network is to improve the quality of participation with experts by experience, children and young people, through sharing best practice in involving them with decision making processes and strategy forming as well as developing regional links to allow for wider consultation to be undertaken.

In February 2020, a workshop was scheduled with participation leads from across the region with the aim of scoping out initial priorities to inform an implementation plan. Whilst there are national developments to support participation work, it was felt that a

formal network would add value by allowing the sharing of local best practice, and local collaboration on common areas of work.

Designing an alternative delivery approach[23]

The FutureSocial Business Plan set out the aspiration of creating an alternative delivery approach to provide the governance arrangements that would help sustain the activities of FutureSocial beyond the funding period.

In early 2019, West Midlands Children's Services (WMCS) was invited by the DCMS to apply for a £75,000 grant[24] to explore the potential of establishing an alternative delivery approach as part of FutureSocial's sustainability. WMCS decided to commission Mutual Ventures, a social investment advisory firm, to undertake an options appraisal, and topped up the grant funding with an additional £25,000. In August 2019 Mutual Ventures set out a business case which presented the benefits, dis-benefits and financial implications of 3 options: an 'as is' option (no change), a contractual joint venture (where change is established through robust contractual structures rather than incorporating a new vehicle) and a corporate joint venture (creation of a separate company to maximise potential benefits from pursuing an alternative delivery model).

Following a consultation period, the WMCS decided to choose the 'as is' option and agreed not to set up a new alternative delivery vehicle given the political and financial risks it posed. A full report on alternative delivery approach can be found in appendix 4.

Cost benefit analysis

ICF's planned evaluation of FutureSocial included a CBA of the programme, which aimed to examine the benefits of FutureSocial (which were expected to include improved outcomes for the children's social care workforce and for children and families) and to compare them to the costs.

However, because the programme did not develop in the way that was envisaged, there were few benefits to assess at this stage. The CBA work therefore involved the development of a cost benefit analysis tool (appendix 3) designed to enable analysis of the benefits and costs of the programme as they develop in future. The tool also enables the testing of future benefits scenarios.

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[23] This terminology is used by the project but is generally referred to as an Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) by the Department for Education
[24] Through the DCMS Mutuals Support Programme https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mutuals-support-programme-2

Anticipated costs of FutureSocial

The costs of the programme were expected to comprise 3 main elements:

- **Staffing** (including a Director, Area Co-ordinators, PSW, Programme Manager, Researcher and Analyst, Administrator and Apprentices) as well as their travel and subsistence costs;

- **Set Up** (including office and recruitment, communication, equipment and website); and

- **CPD** (including regional, sub-regional and local authority area training; a national conference; research; evaluation; partner and user engagement; and learning and dissemination).

Table 1 in appendix 2 summarises the projected costs of the FutureSocial programme, as set out in the Business Plan document.

The total cost of the programme was expected to be £3.125 million over 4 financial years between 2017/18 and 2020/21. The largest expenditures were expected to be on continuous professional development (52%, with three-quarters of this on local authority area training), and staffing (46%).

Of the total of £3.125 million, the DfE grant would contribute £1.5 million, with most of the remaining budget funded by the local authorities (see Table 2 in appendix 2).

No data were provided to the evaluators on the actual costs incurred in the delivery of the FutureSocial programme, so it is not possible to assess whether these aligned with expectations. The analysis that follows is therefore based on the costs projected in the Business Plan.

Expected benefits of FutureSocial

The benefits of the programme were expected to include: a more stable, confident, happy and motivated children's social care workforce; a better quality of service to children, young people and families; improved outcomes for children and their families (who are better protected, and whose needs are met); and improvements in service efficiency, resulting in cost savings.

These benefits were expected to result in financial cost savings through:

- **Improved children's outcomes:** reduction in the numbers of LAC; reduction in the numbers of LAC; reduction in repeat Child Protection Cases; and improved Ofsted judgements (since local authorities with adverse Ofsted ratings incur significant additional costs). Only the cost impact of the reduction in the numbers of LAC was quantified.

- **Improved workforce outcomes:** Reduced numbers of agency workers; reduced workforce turnover and increased length of service (and hence reduced costs of recruitment and induction of new staff); and reduced rates of absenteeism. Only the savings from reductions in agency workers were quantified.

The Business Plan contained some outline estimates of potential annual cost savings:

- **£9 million** from reduced numbers of LAC. This was based on a conservative estimate of an average annual cost of £40,000 per placement, suggesting an annual reduction of 225 in the number of LAC (2.4% of the 2016/7 total of 9500);
- **£5.8 million** from reduced numbers of agency staff, which appears to be based on an annual reduction in the number of agency workers of 330 and a net saving of £17,500 per worker.[25]

These figures estimate the cost savings that would be achieved if the Business Plan ambitions for child and workforce outcomes were to be met. No details were given as to how these levels of ambition were quantified.

The figures indicate that, should the ambitions of the FutureSocial programme be met, the financial cost savings in a single year would greatly exceed the total costs of the programme.

CBA Tool for FutureSocial

As the FutureSocial programme did not progress in the way that was anticipated, the benefits of the intervention could not be measured at this stage, so it was not possible to undertake a full cost benefit analysis. However, ICF has developed a CBA tool which quantifies the costs of the programme and enables future benefits – in terms of cost savings through workforce and children's outcomes – to be valued in monetary terms.

The CBA Tool

The CBA tool has been developed in MS Excel format. It comprises 4 main worksheets:

- The **"Costs of FutureSocial"** worksheet records the costs of the FutureSocial programme, which can be based on either the costs projected in the Business Plan or the actual costs recorded for the programme;
- The **"Savings in Workforce Costs"** worksheet records data on changes in the children's social care workforce and uses these to estimate cost savings from

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[25] The only details given in the Business Plan were that the average cost of employing a social worker is £35,000 and that there is a mark-up of 50% for agency workers, which would suggest an annual cost of £52,500 for agency workers. There appears to be an arithmetic error, as the average cost per agency worker is given as £47,500. The source of these figures is not given. The estimated cost saving is consistent with a net saving of £17,500 per agency worker (i.e. the assumed 50% mark-up) and an annual reduction of 330 in the number of agency workers employed (from 630 to 300).

reduced reliance on agency workers, maintenance of the agency MoU, reduced staff turnover and reduced absenteeism;

- The **"Looked After Children"** worksheet records changes in the numbers of LAC and uses these to estimate changes in the costs of placements;

- The **"Cost Benefit Analysis"** sheet brings together data on the financial costs and benefits of the programme over time, calculates their present value and estimates the overall financial net benefits and benefit cost ratio of the programme.

These worksheets draw on 2 further data sheets, which record data on the costs of FutureSocial (as projected in the Business Plan) and the impact of the MoU on agency fee rates.

It should be noted that the tool focuses on the financial costs and benefits of FutureSocial and concentrates on those cost savings that can be readily valued (since unit cost data are available). The programme also aimed to deliver wider social and economic benefits which are more difficult to value. For example, improving outcomes for children and families will deliver benefits for their wellbeing, whether or not it reduces the costs of support services. The tool does therefore not capture all the benefits that FutureSocial may deliver. Nevertheless, since the expected financial cost savings as set out in the Business Plan are substantial, the financial benefits of FutureSocial alone would be expected to exceed the costs if the programme has its intended effects in future.

The detail of these 4 elements of the CBA tool is set out in appendix 3.

CBA of Potential Future Scenarios

The tool enables future benefits scenarios to be assessed, to examine how they would affect the balance between benefits and costs.

It enables the user to calculate the improvement that would be required in each of the indicators (workforce measures and number of LAC) for the value of cost savings to cover the costs of the programme.

The following sections summarise the estimated cost savings resulting from unit changes in each indicator, and the level of change that would be required for the cost savings to exceed the programme costs.

Estimated Unit Cost Savings

The estimated annual cost savings, using the base estimates included in the model, amount to:

- £18,118 per net FTE reduction in the number of agency workers (i.e. per agency worker replaced with an in-house social worker[26]);

- £79,000 to £200,000 per 1% reduction in staff turnover rates (with the wide range accounted for by estimated differences in the cost of in-house and agency recruitment);

- £29,000 to £122,000 per 1% reduction in agency staff costs through the MoU that is attributed to the FutureSocial programme. The MoU agreed a price cap on agency rates. WMCS estimated that this could result in a saving of between 7% and 29% on overall agency expenditure. The lower estimate assumes that the growth in agency staff rates would be in line with in-house wage rates, while the upper estimate is based on comparison with a neighbouring region. It is uncertain to what extent these cost savings can be attributable to the FutureSocial programme, and to what extent they would have occurred anyway. The model therefore calculates how much would be saved per 1% of the overall cost saving that is attributed to the programme;

- £134,000 per 0.1% reduction in staff absence rates. The cost of staff absence is estimated at prevailing staff cost rates; and

- £40,000 to £58,664 per unit reduction in the number of LAC. This is based on unit costs per LAC placement, with the lower estimate that used in the Business Plan, and the upper estimate the current estimate of the average cost per LAC in the Greater Manchester Unit Cost database.

Changes Required for Cost Savings to Exceed Programme Costs

The modelling tool can be used to estimate the levels of workforce and/or children's outcomes that the programme would need to deliver for the cost savings (in present value terms) to outweigh the programme costs.

Using the total programme cost of £3.125 million from the Business Plan, the present value of the net costs of the programme are £2.94 million, so the programme would need to deliver a flow of cost savings with a present value of £2.94 million for the benefits to cover the programme costs.

It is estimated that the following changes would be required to cover the programme costs:

- A reduction of 64 (10%) in the number of agency workers used (and replaced with in-house staff) over the 3 years 2020/21 to 2022/23; or

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[26] This is based on more recent estimates of costs in the CBA tool, rather than the figures used in the Business Plan. This CBA tool estimates cost per agency worker at £65,000 and the cost per inhouse worker at £47,000 (including overheads). Estimates calculated by programme staff suggest that a reduction in 75 agency workers would result in £1.3 million in savings – with targets set at a much higher reduction of 150-200 workers

- A reduction in staff turnover rates to 10% in each of the 3 years 2020/21 to 2022/23 (from 15.9% in 2017/18). This depends on the higher cost estimate of recruitment (using an agency); or

- A reduction in staff absence rates from 3.8% in 2017/18 to 2.9% in each of the 3 years 2020/21 to 2022/23; or

- A combination of workforce changes, such as a reduction of 20 (3%) in the number of agency workers, 2% reduction in staff turnover rates and 0.3% reduction (to 3.5%) in absence rates; or

- A reduction of 20 (0.2%) in the numbers of LAC to 9480 in 2020/21 to 2022/23 (compared to 9500 in 2017/18).

Furthermore, if it was possible to attribute just 7% of the savings in fees for agency workers estimated to have been realised by the MoU (medium cost savings estimate), those savings would outweigh the programme costs. This is a positive finding for the programme given the progress that has already been made with this strand of work. However, the degree to which any savings resulting from the MoU can be attributed to FutureSocial, and the degree to which they could have been achieved without the programme, remains unclear.

4. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes

As set out in the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report (2017), evidence from the first Round of the Innovation Programme led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore further in subsequent rounds[27]. This section relates the key evaluation findings described in the previous chapter to those features of practice and outcomes that are relevant to FutureSocial.

Features of practice

High intensity and consistency of practitioner: The programme aimed to improve the consistency of practitioners across the region through stabilising the workforce. While a great deal of progress had been made in filling vacant positions, the indications are that staff turnover rates have not yet reduced. This is supported by stakeholder and survey evidence. The survey shows that 62% of respondents disagree that they have enough time to undertake direct work with children and families and over a third (38%) indicated that they felt they had too many cases. Over three-quarters (79%) agreed that they spent too much time on administrative tasks.

Family focus: The programme aimed to give families, children and young people a voice in decision making and co-producing solutions. Interviewees agreed that this strand of the programme had not made substantial progress to date, although a formal network of participation leads had been established and discussions were ongoing over where FutureSocial could align with and add value to existing local and national initiatives.

Skilled direct work: Through a series of workforce transformation activities, FutureSocial aimed to directly enhance social workers' skills and ability to deliver high quality support to families. The quality of practice strand was slow to begin, and the Lead for Quality and Practice was appointed late in the programme in July 2019. Some work had taken place to enhance the PSW network and create opportunities for sharing good practice especially between local authorities that were doing well and others that were weaker. FutureSocial had also implemented a grant that local authorities and trusts could apply to for the development of CPD initiatives. The intention going forward was to continue to enhance opportunities for sharing good practice and support CPD at the regional level.

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[27] Sebba, J., Luke, N., McNeish, D., and Rees, A. (2017) *Children's Social Care Innovation Programme: Final evaluation report*, Department for Education, available here.

Outcomes

Increase staff wellbeing: There is no evidence to suggest the programme has contributed to an increase in staff wellbeing. This is not surprising given that FutureSocial was fundamentally a strategic change programme and any long term impacts at the individual level were highly unlikely to be felt in the time since programme inception. Nonetheless, overall job satisfaction is high among both permanent and agency social worker survey respondents – there is 82% agreement among respondents in the permanent social worker survey with the statement 'overall, I find my job satisfying' and 73% of respondents to the agency social worker survey are very or fairly satisfied with their current role.[28] Levels of stress related to workload are however fairly high. Hence only 4% said that they never feel stressed by their job while others report being sometimes (52%), often (35%) or always (9%) stressed by it.

Reduce staff turnover and agency rates: Interviewees suggest that FutureSocial has been successful in bringing additional social worker resource into the region, filling a large former gap in capacity. However, there is no robust indication that staff turnover rates have reduced, and some interviewees acknowledged this, explaining that retention will be the key focus going forward. Descriptive analysis of administrative data suggests there has been a drop in agency rates since 2016. This could indicate that the MoU and its on-going implementation have helped achieve a reduction in the use of agency staff which is reflected in interview evidence. However, given that the work around the MoU began in 2015 there was scepticism among some stakeholders that any outcome could be attributed to the FutureSocial programme. That said, as some senior stakeholders and members of the Workforce Leads focus group highlighted, FutureSocial funding and capacity has helped maintain this workstream.

Generate better value for money: To date the programme had not developed or become as effective as quickly as expected and there is no directly attributable or robust evidence that projected cost savings have been realised. The financial CBA tool developed to assess future cost benefits demonstrates that the programme would have to achieve only modest improvements in workforce indicators such as use of agency workers and rates of staff absence, and/or small percentage changes in the numbers of LAC, for the programme benefits to outweigh the costs.

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[28] The findings of the 'Longitudinal study of local authority child and family social workers (Wave 1) show that 74% of the 5,508 workers employed in child and family social work in England agreed they found their job satisfying. The social workers in the West Midlands therefore appear to have slightly more job satisfaction though this may be a result of methodological differences in how the 2 surveys were conducted.

5. Lessons and implications

FutureSocial was a complex highly ambitious programme that aimed to achieve regional system change in children's social care workforce market management and the delivery of high quality services to children, young people and families. Quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that the programme has been most successful in increasing recruitment rates and reducing dependency on agency staff. Other workstreams had been slow to progress, in part because of delays to funding and late appointment of the programme team. This meant that outputs from the quality of social work practice workstream were only just being realised when this report was written while the leadership and management and governance and co-production strands had not yet got underway in any substantial form.

The programme was credited by some stakeholders as having supported a shift in culture across the region so that local authorities were working more collaboratively rather than in competition on issues related to agency management, recruitment and retention. A synthesis of stakeholder reflections on what has been learnt and implications for the future highlights the following key points.

Set clear, measurable and achievable goals: FutureSocial was described by some stakeholders as being too broad in scope and ambition with a lack of clear targets and milestones that would enable success to be identified and measured. They noted that while the DfE had given the programme the mandate to be organic and innovative this had meant that the programme lacked definition and that one of its key problems was that it had never had any clear deliverables. Given the scale and complexity of the programme, it would have benefited from a clearer vision for success from the outset while building in flexibility to adjust as events developed.

Establish a clear and shared rationale for each strand of the programme: The workforce strand, established prior to programme inception, was clearly the most successful of the programme's planned strands of activity and benefited from a strong and shared rationale for action. Other workstreams lacked this and there was less collective ambition to drive them forward. Senior stakeholders described the programme as conflation of other initiatives partly as a result of the way in which local authorities bid for and obtain grant monies 'there is lot of making work fit prescribed priorities. This means everything is piecemeal – a jigsaw of different initiatives' (Senior Stakeholder).

Early negotiation and close stakeholder engagement could have helped to ensure the programme was refined into a coherent set of activities that reflected local and regional priorities and complemented existing initiatives.

Appoint a programme team at the outset: Stakeholders agreed that the programme had been too slow to appoint to key posts and that as a consequence many strands of the programme had not had a chance to effect any significant change during the lifetime

of the evaluation. The exception to this was the Workforce Development Coordinator who was effectively in post and working to this agenda prior to the implementation of the FutureSocial programme. The postholder was widely credited with having driven this strand forward, fundamental to which was their ability to build effective working relationships with agencies and workforce leads. This provides evidence of the need to provide strong designated leadership and build the trust and partnerships necessary to enable different parts of the system to assume responsibility and lead change. By way of contrast the programme lead was not appointed until September 2018 and whose departure after only a year in post was described by some stakeholders as stifling progress. 1 senior stakeholder felt that the programme would have progressed further and been more successful if a serving Assistant Director of Children's Services, had been seconded to the post.

Change takes time - build on success and learn lessons from the past: The success of the workforce development strand built on work that had been underway since 2015. This reinforces the fact that change takes a long time to achieve – considerably longer than the 18 months that FutureSocial had – and that relationship building, and stakeholder engagement are critical to success. That said, change may have been quicker to achieve had the 3 conditions for success described above been in place. On a related, but slightly different point, the fact that the workforce development strand was built on work initiated in 2015 raises questions over the degree to which the outcomes achieved can be attributed to FutureSocial. Whilst some stakeholders felt that this work would have happened without FutureSocial, others felt that the programme had supported success through putting capacity into the system, for example through increased resourcing, support for the practice networks, and increased opportunities for regional collaboration (e.g. between local authorities and with agencies).

Regional working is challenging: Regional stakeholder buy-in was clearly critical in defining, designing and implementing the changes necessary to help stabilise the children's social care market. This was challenging for a number of reasons, key amongst which were the degree of churn at senior level (9 of the 14 DCSs changed over the lifetime of FutureSocial), and the tension between working to regional priorities and meeting the staffing needs of individual organisations. There were also recognised challenges in getting local stakeholders to 'think regionally' with the observation by members of the programme team that some frontline staff found this difficult. This was particularly true for programme activities within the quality of practice workstream where willingness to learn and share good practice across the region was key.

Sustainability and moving forward: The workforce development work is most likely to continue as the DCS network remains invested in its further implementation. The regional data analysis function will be retained into the future given the consensus over its value. At the time of fieldwork, discussions were being had at Board level over future

governance arrangements for on-going work and which activities should be continued and developed further.

Recommendations for future evaluation: Programme staff recognised the benefit of continuing to monitor and evaluate aspects of the work already undertaken and to be continued by the region. Evaluation methods that could be built on include continued analysis of workforce data on key indicators such as turnover, vacancy rates and absenteeism and the application of the cost-benefit tools that have been designed as part of this study.

Appendix 1: Project theory of change

The programme theory of change was developed following a workshop in April 2019 with 17 stakeholders from the West Midlands. A draft programme theory of change was produced prior to the workshop, drawing on the scoping activities and the programme documentation. During the workshop, stakeholders were given the opportunity to refine this and to also design individual logic models for 4 of the 5 programme priorities. There was no further development of the theory of change undertaken by the Programme Team.

The West Midlands faces a number of problems in recruiting and retaining a stable, high quality children's social care workforce. A shortfall of staff has resulted in a high reliance on agency workers, resulting in instability in the workforce and inconsistency in practice. The problem is further compounded by high staff turnover and variable opportunities to access quality training, leading to sub-optimal outcomes for children and families. FutureSocial aims to create a shared workforce development infrastructure, based on a collaborative rather than competitive approach, to drive up the quality of the region's workforce focusing on recruitment arrangements, retention of staff and system change.

Where are we now? Financially challenging environment for individual LAs; high reliance on agency workers and high levels of permanent staff turnover (often between LAs) causing instability in the workforce; inconsistency in the way social work practice is undertaken; and little succession planning for practice leadership ... **which leads to:** underperformance and poor outcomes for children.

Assumptions and risks:
- Sufficient resources
- Realistic timelines
- Shared values including an appetite for regional working
- Leadership to steer the agenda

INPUTS

Funding mechanisms

Innovation Fund (up to £1.5m) to design and develop a model that is sustainable by 2019-2020

Overall investment of £3.5m

Stakeholder engagement

Time commitment from stakeholders at all levels (including commissioning, human resources, finance, procurement, legal, data intelligence and leadership)

Strategic partnership between local authorities, training providers and other bodies (e.g. Frontline)

Data collection

Increased capacity to evidence impact at a regional level

Ongoing evaluation

ACTIVITIES

Changes to practice

Support career pathways across every level

Programme to develop new social workers

Establish career pathways and opportunities for post-qualifying CPD

Leadership development through sub-regional and regional programmes; shadowing; placements; projects and secondments

Changes to care

Improving and developing a workable co-production model with children, young people and families

Changes to the local system

Implement regional recruitment strategy

Workforce planning to ensure the region and individual councils have the right shape and size of social work workforce

Agreements with capping agency fees

Use data to target resource effectively

OUTCOMES

Stabilising the workforce

Reduced reliance on agency workers: regional rates of agency staffing reduced to at least 10% by 2020

Quality and cost issues of agency workers addressed

Fewer unplanned moves within the region and reduced competition between LAs for the same social workers

Improved recruitment arrangements: sufficient high quality social workers recruited and retrained

Greater levels of succession planning

Increased retention of staff

Developing the workforce

Greater consistency of experience among qualifying/newly qualified staff

Raise practice standards: strengthen relationship-based training and 95% of staff achieving accreditation

Improved leadership capability and capacity: stronger, more effective front-line managers

Whole career pathways established for social workers at a regional level

Care for children and young people

Improved experience of care

More children and young people prevented from going into care

Increased stability of home situations; reduced number of children and young people going into care

Increased permanence for children

Empowered care: influence on design, implementation, monitoring and review of any approach

System Improvements

Improved approaches to delivering care that operate regionally, sub-regionally and locally

Increased collaboration and shared learning

Increased partnership working across multiple local authorities and partners (teaching partnerships, local universities, Frontline, Step-up, adult social services).

Increased trust across all local authorities and partners

Commissioning together to attract the best value contracts

Create confidence at a national level with future "Partners in Practice" drawn from the region

IMPACT

Workforce

Consistent, reliable social workers for CYP to build and maintain relationships with

Well-developed and supported workforce

Confident leadership and management that motivates, understands and extols best practice led by the ADCS network

Children, young people and families

Education and health outcomes that are in the national top quartile and compare favourably internationally

Improved life chances - Enhance their future chances

Impact on the aspirations of children and increase their ability to become more socially mobile

System

All LA and Trust services rated as good or outstanding by 2020

Improved collaboration regionally and sub-regionally

Increased coordination with private sector to enhance available resources

Stronger governance structures

Cost-savings from improved efficiency

Appendix 2 Costs and benefits

Table 1 provides an overview of anticipated FutureSocial programme costs, as estimated in the Business Plan.

Table 1: Anticipated Total Costs of FutureSocial Programme (£000)

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total
Staffing	**FTE**					
FutureSocial Director	0.6	29	58	58	58	203
Workforce Coordinator	1.8	90	90	136	136	452
Quality & Performance	0.6	23	90	46	45	204
Programme Manager	1	31	63	62	63	219
Research & Analyst	1	19	38	38	39	134
Administrator	1	15	30	30	30	105
Apprentices	4	0	27	12	12	51
Travel & Subsistence		11	20	20	20	71
Subtotal: staffing	*10*	*218*	*416*	*402*	*403*	*1,439*
Set-Up						
Set up costs		0	0	0	0	75
Office and Recruitment		21	0	7	7	35
Communication		3	0	2	2	7
Equipment		5	0	0	0	5
Website		13	1	2	1	17
Subtotal: set-up		*42*	*1*	*11*	*10*	*64*
CPD						
Regional Training		5	15	20	20	60
Sub-regional Training		15	30	75	60	180
Local Authority Area Training		140	280	392	420	1232
National Conference		0	5	5	0	10
Research		6	14	10	20	50
Evaluation		10	20	30	30	90
Subtotal: CPD		*176*	*364*	*532*	*550*	*1,622*
TOTAL		**436**	**781**	**945**	**963**	**3,125**

Source: FutureSocial Business Plan, January 2018

Table 2 provides an overview of anticipated FutureSocial programme funding and the yearly allocation, as estimated in the Business Plan.

Table 2: Anticipated Funding for FutureSocial Programme (£000)

	Funding provided by:			
	Innovation Fund	**Local Authorities**	**Other**	**Total**
2017/18	368	68		**436**
2018/19	718	63		**781**
2019/20	414	531		**945**
2020/21		898	65	**963**
2021/22				**0**
2022/23				**0**
TOTAL COSTS	**1,500**	**1,560**	**65**	**3,125**

Source: FutureSocial Business Plan, January 2018

Appendix 3 The CBA tool

Costs of FutureSocial

The "Costs of FutureSocial" worksheet records the costs of the FutureSocial programme. It gives a choice of using the costings projected in the Business Plan, or entering actual data on programme costs (which have not been provided to the evaluation team). The user can choose to run the CBA on either the full costs of FutureSocial (which were projected at £3.125 million in the Business Plan) or the costs met by the DfE Innovation Fund grant (projected at £1.5 million) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Costs of FutureSocial Worksheet

COSTS OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL PROGRAMME

For the costs data, there is a choice to:
Use costs projected in Business Case — The costs table will be populated from the "Business Case Costings" sheet
Input cost data — Cost data will need to be inputted into the "Input costs" sheet

Choice of cost data — Use costs projected in Business Case — *Please select choice in green drop down box*

Input cost data (optional)
Complete this table only if you wish to input cost data rather than using costs projected in business case

| £000 | Funding provided by: | | | |
	Innovation Fund	Local Authorities	Other	Total
2017/18				0
2018/19				0
2019/20				0
2020/21				0
2021/22				0
2022/23				0
TOTAL COSTS	0	0	0	0

SUMMARY OF COSTS OF FUTURE SOCIAL PROGRAMME (£000)

| | Funding provided by: | | | |
	Innovation Fund	Local Authorities	Other	Total
2017/18	368	68	0	436
2018/19	718	63	0	781
2019/20	414	531	0	945
2020/21	0	898	65	963
2021/22	0	0	0	0
2022/23	0	0	0	0
TOTAL COSTS	1500	1560	65	3125

COSTS TO BE INCLUDED IN CBA

The CBA can be run using:
a. The Total Costs of Future Social Programme   or
b. Innovation Fund costs only

Please select the choice of costs from the drop down box — a. The Total Costs of Future Social Programme

Costs to be included in CBA

Based on the data and choices above, the following costs are included in the Cost Benefit Analysis worksheet

	£000
2017/18	436
2018/19	781
2019/20	945
2020/21	963
2021/22	0
2022/23	0
TOTAL COSTS	3125

Savings in Workforce Costs

The "Savings in Workforce Costs" worksheet requires data to be entered on the size of the children's social care workforce (in-house and agency workers) before and after the FutureSocial programme (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Changes in Children's Social Care Workforce

CHANGES IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE

This section estimates the numbers of in-house social workers and agency workers in the West Midlands with and without the Future Social Programme.

It requires data to be entered on:
- The numbers of social and agency workers at the start of the programme
- The numbers of workers expected to be employed in future years in the absence of the programme, or an assumed growth rate (i.e. to set the baseline); and
- The effect of the programme in reducing the numbers of agency workers and bringing them in-house.

Number of workers in 2017/18 (FTE)

Social workers	3199	*Please enter the number of workers in 2017/18*
Agency workers	641	
Total	3840	

The next series of questions concern the numbers of workers that we would expect in the future if there was no Future Social programme - which forms the baseline against which to assess the programme.
To estimate the numbers of social workers each year, we can either:
A. Use an annual % change — *This can be set at zero if no change is assumed*
B. Input number of social and agency workers

Method used to estimate (baseline) numbers of social and agency workers:

A. Use an annual % change	*Drop down box*

A. Annual growth in numbers of workers
If you wish to use an estimated annual change in workers, select this in box B21 and complete boxes C25 and C26

Social workers	0%
Agency workers	0%

B. Input data - number of workers without Future Social programme
if you wish to enter estimates of the numbers of social and agency workers, select this in box B21 and complete the yellow cells in the table below

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Social workers	3199					
Agency workers	641					
Total	3840	0	0	0	0	0

Summary: Estimated Number of Social and Agency workers without the Future Social Programme (Baseline)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Social workers	3199	3199	3199	3199	3199	3199
Agency workers	641	641	641	641	641	641
Total	3840	3840	3840	3840	3840	3840

In order to estimate the cost savings resulting from reductions in the number of agency workers, the worksheet asks the user to estimate the net reduction in the number of agency workers as a result of the programme (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Reduction in Agency Workers resulting from FutureSocial Programme

Effect of Future Social in bringing Agency workers in house - net change in number of agency workers each year

Please enter the net change in the number of Agency workers as a result of the Future Social programme (enter a negative number for a reduction, positive for an increase)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Change in number of agency workers	0	0	0	0	0	0

Number of Social and Agency Workers with Future Social Programme (FTE)

The following table calculates the change in the number of in-house social workers and agency workers, based on the figures above, and assuming the overall social workforce remains constant.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Social workers	3199	3199	3199	3199	3199	3199
Agency workers	641	641	641	641	641	641
Total	3840	3840	3840	3840	3840	3840

The worksheet then estimates the costs of employing agency and in-house social work staff. The net unit cost per agency worker is then multiplied by the net change in the numbers of agency workers to estimate the annual cost savings (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Cost Savings from Reduced Use of Agency Workers

STAFFING COSTS		
This section requires data on the costs of employing social work staff and agency workers, in order to estimate cost savings from reducing agency workers		
Social workers		
Average salary per FTE, 2017/18, £	£35,000	*Business Plan suggests an average salary of £35,000 per FTE*
Mark-up for overheads:		
Pension and NI	20%	*Enter % mark-up*
Office costs, IT, training, expenses	15%	*Enter % mark-up*
Total	35%	*C64+C65*
Total staff cost per FTE, 2017/18, £	£47,250	*Applying mark-up to average salary*
Agency worker		
Average hourly rate	39.26	*Spreadsheet "Workforce ADCS data" gives a figure of £39.26*
Hours per week	37	
Weeks per year	45	
Average cost per FTE	£65,368	*Hourly rate x hours x weeks*
Saving from in-house employment per FTE	£18,118	*Agency cost per FTE minus staff cost per FTE*

The base version of the tool uses an annual average salary of £35,000 per social worker, with mark-up of 20% for pension and National Insurance, and 15% for office overheads. Costs per agency worker are based on latest data on average hourly rates. This gives an estimated cost saving of just over £18,000 per FTE using these base assumptions. The user can vary these unit cost estimates as required.

In 2015 the West Midlands local authorities entered into an MoU with social work agencies to limit rates of pay for agency social workers data provided by West Midlands Children's Services estimate that the MoU has reduced costs by between £2.8 million and £11.8 million annually, a saving of between 7% and 29% on overall Agency expenditure. According to WMCS, the FutureSocial programme played a key role in the implementation of the MoU, though it is worth noting that the MoU pre-dates the FutureSocial programme. The worksheet allows a proportion of the estimated cost savings in agency pay rates to be attributed to the FutureSocial programme (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Cost Savings from Reduced Agency Pay Rates

SAVINGS IN AGENCY RATES RESULTING FROM FUTURE SOCIAL PROGRAMME					
This section explores possible savings in costs of employing agency staff					
It refers to the Memorandum of Understanding on Agency rates, the resulting cost savings, and the extent to which these are attributable to Future Social					
Please use the drop down box to choose the level of cost savings brought about by the MoU				Cost savings from MoU	
				Low	7%
% saving in agency costs from MoU	Medium	20%	*Use drop down menu to choose Low, Medium or High*	Medium	20%
			See sheet "Impact of MoU on Agency rates"	High	29%
% of MoU savings attributable to Future Social	0%		*Enter an estimate of proportion of any savings that can be attributed to Future Social programme*		
Cost savings per agency worker (£ per FTE)	£0.00		*Applying % saving and % of that attributable to FS to average agency cost per FTE*		

Cost savings from reduced staff turnover are estimated by estimating the cost of recruitment (either in-house or through an agency) and training/induction of a new member of staff, and multiplying this by the change in the number of new recruitments taking place annually (Figure 6). Again, baseline assumptions regarding recruitment

time and costs have been entered into the tool, and these can be varied by the user as required.

Figure 6: Cost Savings from Reduced Staff Turnover

RECRUITMENT COSTS

This section estimates changes in recruitment costs
It requires data to be entered on staff turnover rates before and after Future Social programme

Staff Turnover Rate (%)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
Without Future Social Programme	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	Baseline against which programme is assessed
With Future Social Programme	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	15.9%	New staff turnover rate following programme
Change in Staff Turnover rate following FS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Reduction in recruitment required to maintain workforce	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Costs of recruitment

Costs of recruitment can be estimated either through:
A. Use recruitment agency
B. Recruitment-in house

Chosen means of recruitment

A. Use recruitment agency		Use drop down list

A. Recruitment agency

Cost of recruitment as % of average salary	15%	Enter cost as % of average salary
Average cost per recruit	£5,250	Average salary x recruitment fee as % of salary

B. In house recruitment

Cost of job advert (£)	500	Enter cost per job advert

Cost of time spent on recruitment:

	Hours	Cost per ho	Time cost (£)	
Administrators	20	20	400	Enter administrator cost per hour
Social workers	20	£28.38	568	Social worker cost is calculated from cell C68 above
Total	40		968	

Total cost of in-house recruitment	£1,468	Cost of advert + cost of time

Training and induction costs

Costs of training and induction per recruit	£1,000	Enter cost of training and induction per new recruit

Savings per avoided recruitment	£6,250	recruitment + training and induction

Overall cost savings from reduced staff turnover

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Cost saving	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

Reduction in recruitment x cost savings per recruitment

Savings resulting from reduced staff absence rates are estimated by estimating the extra hours worked and valuing these at the prevailing staff cost rates using the estimates above (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Cost Savings from Changes in Absence Rates

COSTS OF STAFF ABSENCE

This section estimates reduction in costs of staff absence
It requires data to be added on absence rates before and after Future Social

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Absence rate without Future Social Programme	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%
Absence rate following Future Social Programme	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%
Reduction in absence rate following FS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Additional time worked following FS (FTE)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Value of additional work (£)	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

Finally, overall savings in workforce costs are summarised by bringing together the results of the above calculations (Figure 8).

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Figure 8: Summary of Savings in Workforce Costs

The following table summarises the overall savings in workforce costs attributable to the Future Social Programme, based on the changes entered above.

COST SAVINGS ATTRIBUTABLE TO FUTURE SOCIAL PROGRAMME

|	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Savings from reduced reliance on agency workers	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Savings from reduced agency fee rates	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Savings from reduced staff turnover	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Savings from reduced staff absence	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

Cost of Placements for Looked After Children

The "Looked After Children" (LAC) worksheet asks for data on the numbers of LAC in the West Midlands at the start of the FutureSocial programme in 2017/18 and in subsequent years. The user is asked to judge the proportion of any recorded change in numbers of LAC that can be attributed to the programme.

Cost savings from reductions in LAC are estimated through inclusion of unit costs for each Looked After Child. The tool includes the conservative annual cost estimate of £40,000 per child suggested in the Business Case, as well as the latest unit cost estimate of £58,664 per child per year from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority Unit Cost database[29]. There is also an option to enter an alternative estimate if required.

Cost savings attributable to the FutureSocial programme are estimated by multiplying the estimated attributable change in the number of LAC by the unit cost (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Cost Savings from Reduced Numbers of LAC

SAVINGS IN COSTS OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES - LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

This section estimates the changes in costs of Children's Social Services in the West Midlands as a result of the Future Social Programme, focusing particularly on the costs of looked after children (LAC)

It requires data to be entered or choices to be made regarding:
- The numbers of looked after children;
- The effect of the programme on the number of looked after children; and
- The unit cost of care for each looked after child.

A. Number of looked after children
Please enter estimates of the numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) in the West Midlands before and after the programme.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
Looked after children	9500	9500	9500	9500	9500	9500	Enter data on numbers of LAC
Change since 2017/18	0	0	0	0	0	0	

B. Attribution of observed changes to Future Social Programme

Please estimate the proportion of the change in numbers of looked after children that can be attributed to the Future Social programme. This will be multiplied by the observed change to estimate attributable change.

% of observed change attributable to Future Social Programme	100%

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
Reduction in number of Looked after Children as a result of program	0	0	0	0	0	0	Calculated by multiplying observed change by % attributable to programme.

C. Unit Cost of care for Looked after Children

Please use the drop down box to select the unit cost estimate to be used

Unit cost estimate used (use drop down menu)	Greater Manchester Unit Cost database - national average		Business case - conservative estimate	£40,000
			Greater Manchester Unit Cost database - national average	£58,664
			Other (please specify)	£0

Annual Unit cost per Looked after Child	£58,664

D. COST SAVINGS ATTRIBUTABLE TO FUTURE SOCIAL PROGRAMME

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	
Savings in costs of Looked after Children	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	Unit cost multiplied by change in LAC attributable to programme

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[29] https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/research/research-cost-benefit-analysis/

Cost Benefit Analysis of FutureSocial Programme

The "Cost Benefit Analysis" worksheet combines estimates of the costs of the FutureSocial programme with estimates of savings in workforce related costs and costs of placements for LAC, in order to estimate the overall financial costs and benefits.

The sheet calculates the present value of costs and benefits in later years by applying the HM Treasury social discount rate of 3.5%.

This enables estimation of the net present value of benefits and benefit: cost ratio of the intervention (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Financial Cost Benefit Analysis Worksheet

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF FUTURE SOCIAL PROGRAMME (£000)							
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	TOTAL
The discount rate is used to calculate the present value of a flow of future costs and benefits							
The recommended discount rate is 3.5%, as specified by the HM Treasury Green Book							
Discount rate	3.5%						
Discount factor	1.00	1.04	1.07	1.11	1.15	1.19	
Costs of Future Social Programme	436	781	945	963	-	-	3,125
Present Value of Costs	436	755	882	869	-	-	2,941
Benefits of Future Social Programme							
Savings in Workforce Costs							
Savings from reduced reliance on agency workers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Savings from reduced agency fee rates	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Savings from reduced staff turnover	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Savings from reduced staff absence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Savings in Costs of Children's Social Services							
Savings in costs of Looked After Children	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Benefits of Future Social Programme	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Present Value of Benefits	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Net benefits of Future Social Programme	-436	-781	-945	-963	0	0	-3125
Net present value of benefits	-436	-755	-882	-869	0	0	-2941
Benefit/ Cost Ratio							0.00

Appendix 4   Report on alternative delivery approach

Changes to project plans/activities

Original plans for an alternative delivery approach

FutureSocial aims to

> "create a shared workforce development infrastructure in the West
> Midlands, based on a collaborative rather than competitive approach,
> to drive up the quality of the region's workforce focusing on recruitment
> arrangements, retention of staff and system change".

Originally, the alternative delivery approach proposed by FutureSocial in its **business plan** (dated January 2018) consisted of 3 packages (bronze, silver and gold) to **provide** local authorities in the West Midlands the flexibility to opt into a package depending on their own needs. It was expected that all authorities would opt into the bronze 'minimum' level which covers a range of activities around agency working, recruitment, career development and training.

Building on the bronze and silver levels, the gold package aims to bring all local area activity together to create:

● a West Midlands Children's Services community interest company, sustained through the investment by LAs; and

● a regional co-operative agency community interest company to offer alternative and more 'radical' agency provision, owned and backed by its members.

As explained in a stakeholder interview conducted in September 2018, these plans would help to achieve more control over the market across the West Midlands and sustain the activities of FutureSocial beyond the funding period. However, at the time of the stakeholder interviews, stakeholders agreed that the priority would be implementing short- to medium- term activities (i.e. bronze level activities).

What is the project doing now?

In early 2019, WMCS was invited to apply to the DCMS for a grant to explore the potential of establishing an alternative delivery approach as part of FutureSocial's sustainability. Along with an investment of £25,000 (25%) by WMCS DCMS awarded the region a grant of £75,000 used to commission Mutual Ventures to undertake an options appraisal. This funding was used to commission Mutual Ventures to conduct an options appraisal to determine the most appropriate delivery model for the region that enables the most effective regional collaboration; and would be most financially sustainable in the future. This was finalised in June 2019 and highlighted that a Local Authority Joint Venture (LA JV) was the most preferred ADM.

Importantly, a key change to the original proposal has been to focus on the entire WMCS instead of just FutureSocial (therefore covering a wider range of service offers). A key assumption in the business case is that the new entity would be owned by all 14 LAs, which would ensure equal say, level of control, risk and reward sharing.

In August 2019 **an outline business case** was presented to WMCS by Mutual Ventures which presented the benefits, dis-benefits and financial implications of 3 options:

- **As is** – this option assumes no changes other than those currently expected or planned by the WMCS team

- **Contractual Joint Venture** – this is a light-touch option which is essentially an 'improved as is' option

- **Corporate Joint Venture** – this option performed best in the Options Appraisal scoring and the business case assesses, in detail, its suitability for WMCS's delivery.

Following a consultation period over September and October 2019, the WMCS decided to choose the 'as is' option and agreed not to set up a new alternative delivery vehicle at this stage.

Reasons for change

The rationale to pursue an ADM was made in line with plans for sustaining FutureSocial activities and future income generation. It was felt an ADM would help to: bring all the various services under 'one roof'; build on the innovation work begun with FutureSocial and in the local areas; improve regional commissioning; and support the overall vision for developing children's services in the West Midlands.

However, as outlined in the Business Case, several risks were considered in the proposed design of the ADM including:

- **The financial model** – the viability of the proposed approach is dependent on a series of financial assumptions about WMCS's future income generation. All 14 LAs must commit to fund and jointly resource the service. A key consideration is whether the new entity would be able to operate as a Teckal company and what implications, risks and rewards might be associated with this. Another consideration is that model needs to be flexible enough to respond to any market changes.

- **Timescales for delivery** – the ambition was to launch the new model in April 2020, but joint ventures are inherently complicated and resource intensive (particularly corporate joint ventures)

- **Engagement and buy-in** – there would need to be sufficient buy-in to commission, deliver and implement the new delivery model at all levels and agreement on the organisational status. All staff affected by the changes need to also buy into the model, and therefore changes must be communicated well.

- **Competition** – there are other organisations that are already present in the children's services marketplace offering staffing and practice improvement services.

Ultimately, a decision was made by WMCS to not pursue the ADM approach, and to instead focus on strengthening/firming up of the current host LA arrangements. A stakeholder explained:

> "It was felt that at this point this best delivered what the region requires within the budget availability and flexibilities required, and secured sustainability of priority activities".

Lessons

The key lessons for children's services are:

- Whilst an ADM may create opportunities for increasing cost-effectiveness, achieving sustainability and bringing services together, there are inherent political and financial risks which need to be carefully considered. Stakeholders in more risk-averse organisations need to be part of these conversations from the beginning.

- Services are likely to have different views on what the approach might look like and there needs to be full agreement on issues such as private profit, open procurement, future expansion, and local authority contributions.

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