Department for Education

North of Tyne Collaboration

Final report

December 2019

Professor Keith Moultrie
Institute of Public Care
Oxford Brookes University

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1. Executive summary

Introduction

This report summarises the findings from the evaluation of a project across 3 local authorities (Newcastle, Northumberland and North Tyneside) concerned with developing a shared business plan to underpin further collaboration between the local authorities in the design and delivery of children's social care services. The project commenced in March 2018 and this report summarises the position at July 2019.

The project

Partners across North of Tyne (NoT) agreed to explore the opportunities for greater collaboration in their children's social care services and the 3 local authorities met from late 2017 onwards to develop their plans. Since the range of possibilities for greater collaboration between the 3 councils was very wide it was agreed to focus on 3 work streams:

- Looked After Children placements.
- Workforce and practice.
- Shared services.

The work was supported by the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme and the NoT project was managed by a Board led by the Director of Children's Services in each of the 3 Councils. The NoT Collaboration Board reported into the North of Tyne Devolution, a wider collaboration between these Councils. The specific purpose was to produce a realistic shared business plan for future collaborative working in the 3 areas identified above, and to do this in a way which was characterised by a low-key, integrative and exploratory approach rather than a 'big bang' high concept approach.

The evaluation

The evaluation was a limited evaluation concerned only with tracking the activities and analysing the progress and approach that was taken with partners. It involved quarterly review meetings with key officers involved.

Key findings

The project is an interesting study in collaborative working focused on key areas of practice rather than on redesigning organisational arrangements or governance. The

effectiveness of the approach has, by self-report, allowed partners to work carefully together to build good long-term relationships and to take forward a range of specific operation-focused service improvements through collaboration across boundaries in 3 local authorities.

Implications and recommendations for policy and practice

It is too early in the development of improved long-term working arrangements across the Collaborative to draw out specific implications or recommendations for wider policy or practice – but the project does offer a model for shaping change and developing collaborative plans which may be particularly appropriate for children's services across local authorities, and the evaluation report considers some of the key activities and approaches which might needed to make such arrangements work well.

2. Overview of the project

Project context

Partners across NoT agreed to explore the opportunities for greater collaboration in their children's social care services and the 3 local authorities met from late 2017 onwards to develop their plans. In mid-2018 a programme support team was established, and preparatory work also involved engagement with senior Children's Services teams across NoT. Since the range of possibilities for greater collaboration between the 3 councils was very wide it was agreed to focus on 3 work streams:

- **Looked After Children placements** – reviewing the way in which each council individually currently buys or provides services to support children needing local authority care and exploring opportunities to do this in better ways by sharing skills, expertise and resources across the 3 authorities.

- **Workforce and practice** – Exploring the potential for a North of Tyne approach to child and family social work recruitment, retention and skill development as well as shared models of practice.

- **Shared services** – examining common services and functions to see what each Council might be able to share and learn from each another.

The work was supported by the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. The North of Tyne Collaborative Programme was and is managed by a Board led by the Director of Children's Services from each of the 3 Councils.

The NoT Collaboration reports into the North of Tyne Devolution, with both programmes working closely together and communicating progress. In addition, the Collaboration Programme is also linked with North of Tyne Devolution on work for Employment and Skills, which is seeking to create a unified education and skills system and a joint strategy that raises aspiration, leadership and performance from early years through school education, to learning pathways into technical, further and higher education.

Project aims and intended outcomes

The overarching rationale behind the project was to explore areas for greater integration or collaboration between the 3 neighbouring local authorities, and then to create a realistic and achievable shared business plan to drive subsequent implementation. The business plan was completed and accepted by all 3 local authorities by the completion of the programme in July 2019.

Project Activities

Partners in each of the 3 multi-agency workstreams worked together through 2018 to develop proposals for a business case for testing by the Leadership Board in December 2018 and January 2019. The business case for each was subsequently accepted by the Board which then led the production of a single shared plan. Around that time the overall programme was informed by the DfE that funding to support the implementation of any business case was not certain, and so the business cases were asked to consider 3 options for development based on different scenarios of 'gold', 'silver' and 'bronze' levels of funding. At the time of completion of the evaluation, the workstreams had completed a combined business plan for the programme, guided by work by the Leadership Board on potential funding.

An early area for additional discussion was whether or not there should be an Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) explored for children's services. A report on potential alternative delivery models was prepared and considered at the April 2018 Programme Board. The report covered the key issues and implications of four possible models of delivery, as follows:

- Shared services.
- Contracted delivery authority.
- Local Authority Trading Company.
- Charitable Body.

The report recommended that it was not appropriate to explore an ADM at that point, but that the final business plan might wish to revisit these options. No further work has been done on this since that point. However, there is wider work, outwith the programme, where this is taking place. For example, Adopt North-East, the local regional Adoption Agency collaboration has been established. There are also discussions taking place about potential future shared governance arrangements to oversee shared projects in the future, including how these might fit with wider developments within the wider 3 local authorities North of Tyne devolution deal (see below).

The confirmation of commitment to the North of Tyne Devolution Deal in October 2018 led to some exploration of revised governance arrangements for the programme. Up until this point, a relatively low-key governance arrangement had been in place, involving the 3 Directors meeting regularly to co-ordinate thinking and planning across the projects. This team worked very effectively together and its mutual trust and respect has meant that they have been able to move forward quickly in areas they agree and share learning in a range of peripheral areas. However, at the end point of the evaluation this group was considering how the good working arrangements that they had developed could be taken forward on a more formal basis. They wanted to ensure that the delivery programme is embedded in the strategic shared agendas of the respective Councils, particularly in light

of the recently confirmed North of Tyne Combined Authority arrangement. Under this arrangement the 3 Councils have all committed themselves to a vision comprising 6 key development priorities:

- Champion of enterprise

- Leaders of tomorrow

- Hotbed of talent

- Spark of innovation

- Network of connections

- Pride of place

While at first glance this might appear to focus on an economic agenda, the Leadership Board for the NoT Collaboration project are convinced that good quality integrated social care services to support children and families can be shown to be a key component of the agenda, and as such they are determined to be seen as an integral part of the vision and of the delivery programme it will drive. The Board plans, as part of the delivery of the shared business plan, to explore how this link can be strengthened, and how the programme can be established as a key element of the programme and the Devolution Board, and how it can secure funds to support its agenda through this route.

This also stimulated some exploration of more formal partnership arrangements to support this specific project, such as a wider partnership board, but these were at early stages of exploration at the end of the evaluation. Partners were considering the development of a framing device such as 'The North of Tyne Children's Alliance' to capture this more formal commitment. In summary partners were confident that they had achieved the following by the end of the project:

- A partnership influencing local Devolution plans and a North of Tyne approach for children, young people and families.

- A North of Tyne needs analysis on LAC demand, trajectory and service gaps which produced a joint commissioning plan for future provision.

- An options analysis to take forward a 'Teaching Partnership' model North of Tyne – shaping future social work student training.

- An assessment of the best social work practice to raise standards and outcomes.

- A detailed analysis for future workforce collaboration across North of Tyne.

- A shared Kinship Care Policy with early agreement to jointly develop future children and young people's major policies.

- A high-level analysis of domestic abuse need and provision North of Tyne.

- 'North of Tyne First' - a commitment to always look at shared funding proposals as a North of Tyne opportunity first, taking a place-based approach to driving innovation and investment across the area.

They also agreed plans to build on the joint work to date to implement the business plan which commits it to:

- Funding a shared Principal Social Worker (PSW) - to drive learning and improved social work practice across North of Tyne children's services.

- Investing in a future-proof North of Tyne teaching partnership.

- Developing shared policies and procedures - where doing so will improve the consistency of child and family experience across North of Tyne.

- Piloting adolescent hubs across North of Tyne - to test out new models which keep our young people supported closer to their schools, friends and communities.

- Delivering a North of Tyne campaign to raise awareness and increase access to earlier support for domestic abuse.

- Continuing to proactively seek out external funding opportunities to drive shared ambitions, which will include further, more detailed conversations with the DfE.

3. The Evaluation

Overview

The project was not intended to have had an impact on services or outcomes at its end. Its purpose was to produce a business case and business plan which justifies future collaborative arrangements between partners. The evaluation is a review of the process taken, and its impact on the partners' plans. It is very limited in scope and resources, and is intended to provide the following:

- An overview of how key stakeholders have viewed the project and the impact it has had on their collaborative arrangements and future plans.

- The arrangements which partners worked up in 2018-19, and the extent to which these were different from previous arrangements, evidence-based, and likely to have a positive impact in the future.

- An analysis of the impact of the activities undertaken during the programme itself, the demands it placed on officers and professional staff, and the extent to which it engaged stakeholders and encouraged good performance by partners during its course and successful preparation for future arrangements.

The evaluation comprised the following elements:

Figure 1: Stages in Change Journey

Baseline analysis   Quarterly reviews   Final report
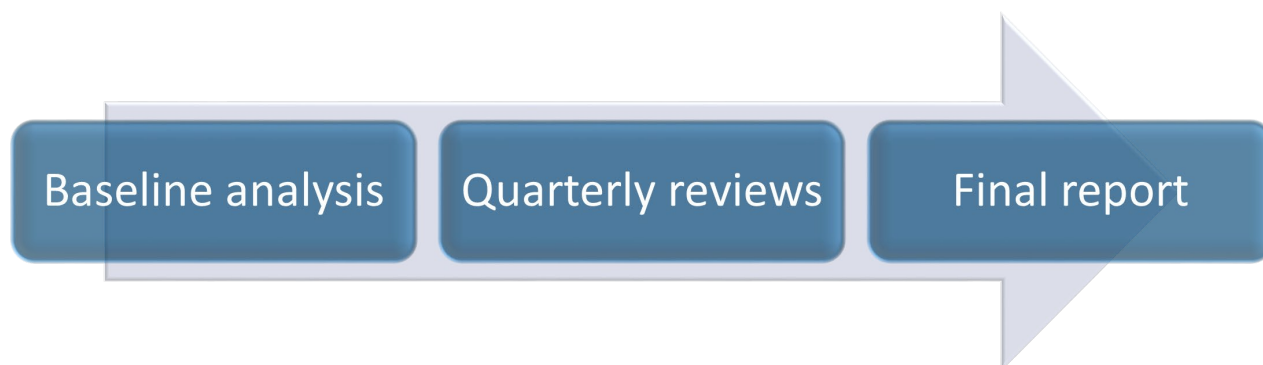
Baseline analysis

This stage involved drawing together initial plans and key design elements from North of Tyne Partners, and using these and interviews with key leaders on 11 May 2018 to summarise the approach, aspirations and evidence base for the approach of the programme.

Quarterly reviews

Subsequently we collected updated project reports from the lead manager from the programme on a quarterly basis in July and October 2018, January and May 2019, and on each occasion met with the same key leaders to review progress against the plans, reflect on challenges and opportunities which had arisen, and explore the rationale for any changes in direction. At the end of each review we produced a short update document summarising progress against the plans.

Final report

Following the final review meeting and subsequent additional data updates, this final evaluation report focuses on the overall progress made by partners in the Collaboration, the approach which has been taken and in particular what has been learnt about the complexities of working across local authorities and how best to manage this.

Changes to evaluation methods

The methodology and design have not changed since originally agreed.

Key challenges

The evaluation has not been challenging to complete as it based on regular local government officer interviews and published papers from the client.

Evaluating the 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes

As reported in the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report (2017), evidence from the first round of the IP led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore further in subsequent rounds.[1] The only features and outcomes that this evaluation might have been concerned with are:

- Increasing workforce wellbeing

- Increasing workforce stability

- Generating better value for money

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[1] [1] Sebba, J., Luke, N., McNeish, D., and Rees, A. (2017) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme: Final evaluation report, Department for Education, available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-innovation-programme-final-evaluation-report

However, although the project is concerned with developing a business case which will, in due course, address these areas, at this stage there are no data available with which to evaluate them.

Evaluation questions

The focus questions, and the relevant data sources explored throughout the evaluation are included in the table below. The questions are captured in the headings section of the table, and the data sources are included in the central part of the table.

Table 1: Evaluation questions

Stake-holders	Original planned approach to engagement	Original planned level of involvement	Original rationale	Key people involved in last period	Key activities in last period	Changes in approach or level of engagement	Reasons for any changes and future plans
Delivery team including those assigned to analysis, design, development and business case work	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Project management team including cost and resource management	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Other sub-regional, regional and national bodies	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
The direct workforce including practitioners, managers and support staff in the 3 LAs	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Service users, carers and their representatives	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Public and the media	Initiation documents and	Initiation documents and	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review	Project reports and Review	Project reports and Review	Project reports and Review

Stake-holders	Original planned approach to engagement	Original planned level of involvement	Original rationale	Key people involved in last period	Key activities in last period	Changes in approach or level of engagement	Reasons for any changes and future plans
	team interview May 2018	team interview May 2018		meeting team interviews	meeting team interviews	meeting team interviews	meeting team interviews
Bodies monitoring and inspecting local authorities	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Relevant service providers in the private and voluntary sectors	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Formal political stake-holders including cabinets, scrutiny and wider members	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
Executive sponsors and governance	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews
DfE Innovation programme sponsors	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Initiation documents and team interview May 2018	Team interview May 2018	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews	Project reports and Review meeting team interviews

4. Key findings

Theory of change

In terms of the original principles behind the approach and how this has adjusted over the course of the project, the programme leaders are clear that their approach has been characterised by minimal necessary formal governance arrangements, a focus on key issues and how to address them together, and time enough to share concerns, analyse them properly, and share and work in the context within which they each deal in their own authorities. They think that so far this has produced a limited number of specific new services, but it has given them the time needed to make sure that the projects they are working on are properly designed, not just developed to meet the aspirations of external funders or national policy. The NoT Collaboration can be summed up as 3 autonomous, separately accountable, parallel partner bodies developing services together in an alliance of children's services in a way which is:
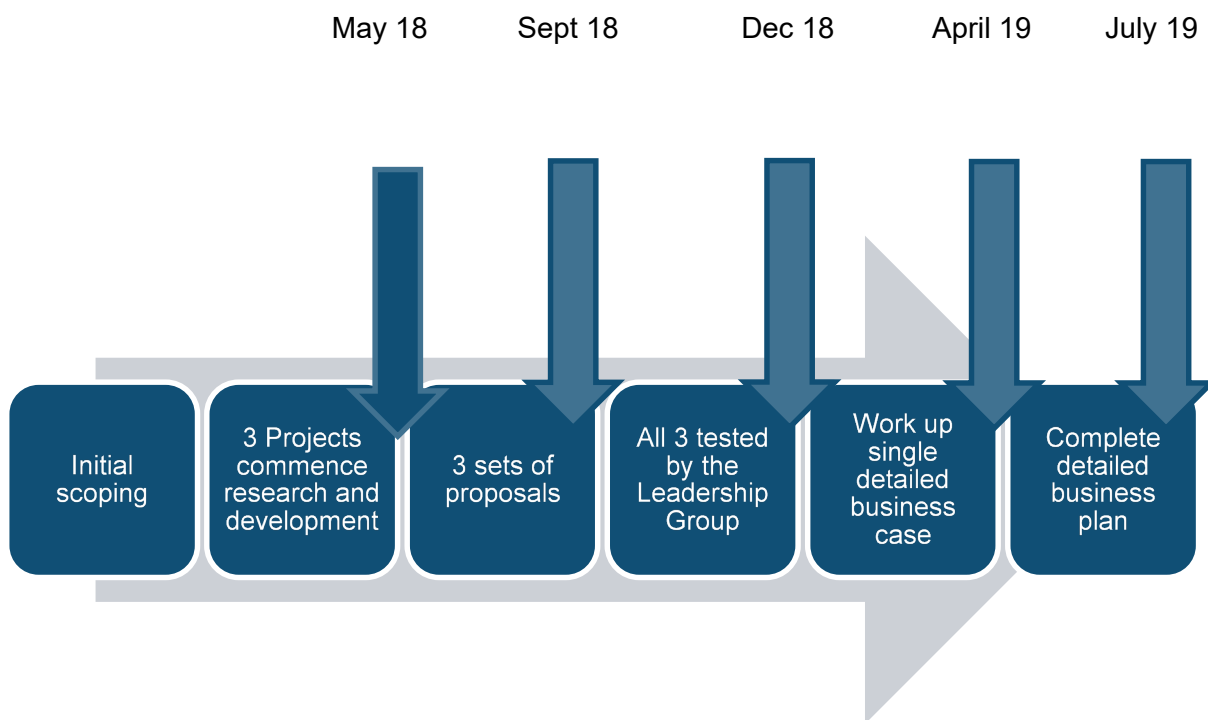
- Exploratory. Partners agreed that they would use the programme to consider what collaborative arrangements might be agreed without having an agreed pre-set destination in mind. The rationale for this approach was that they were agreed on working for better outcomes for children and families, but that there were a wide range of factors which need to be considered, tested and explored before a decision could be taken on the most effective delivery mechanisms to achieve this. Partners were clear that proposals could be wide-ranging and developed in areas as diverse as organisational structures and governance, service design, commissioning or provision, workforce planning, skills or practices, or care pathways. Nothing was ruled out. This approach has continued throughout the period of evaluation, with the project teams exploring options and developing proposals.

- Low-Key. Partners also agreed that the project needed to have a low-key profile, certainly in its initial stages. It was described as about exploring collaborative opportunities as part of partner's ongoing work together. Partners did not consider it appropriate to be announcing a major initiative which might attract unnecessary public or political interest during a period of political uncertainty on devolution and regional arrangements, or which might raise concerns from partners elsewhere in the region about existing collaborative arrangements. People involved have been primarily seconded officers currently in substantive posts within the partner agencies with resources being used to back-fill their posts, the rationale being that this will help to ensure that any collaborative agreements will be fully owned by the key people involved and this will help to ensure successful implementation. This aspect of their approach has continued, with projects being run internally and with limited public or wider staff engagement.

- Integrative. Partners were also clear that any proposals which were developed would need to fit with the emerging political and operational collaborations that partners are each involved in, and that this would require careful detailed design and delivery to ensure they are not perceived as replacing or negating these. The North of Tyne Devolution plans will provide the political framework within which these and the shared business plan will be taken forward in the future.

Project pathway and change management

In terms of the project pathway, the programme and evaluation reviews can be summarised as follows:

Figure 2: Process for Leading Change

May 18   Sept 18   Dec 18   April 19   July 19

Initial scoping | 3 Projects commence research and development | 3 sets of proposals | All 3 tested by the Leadership Group | Work up single detailed business case | Complete detailed business plan

In terms of the change management process, we used a tool to enable reflection by those leading the programme. We asked interviewees to reflect on the progress of the overall programme using the '8-Step Process for Leading Change' model developed by John Kotter in the nineteen-nineties[2]. In this model Kotter identifies the following 8 stages as essential for the successful introduction and delivery of major change:

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[2] John Kotter, Leading Change, Harvard Business School 1996.

Figure 3: Change Elements
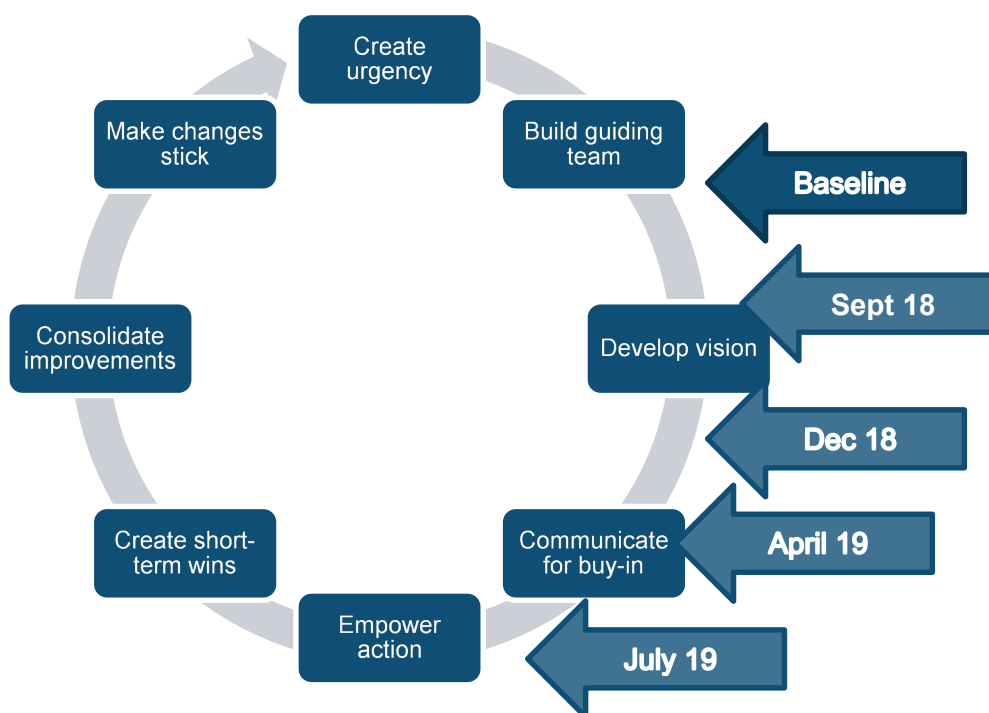
The arrows and dates on the right-hand side of the diagram above show where interviewees judged they had got to in this cycle at each review point during the programme. It was clear from interviews that leaders felt that the project enabled them to invest resources successfully in creating a degree of urgency about change, in particular in building a good guiding team through a combination of the Leadership Board and the Programme Team, and that they were able to work together to develop a realistic and compelling vision for the future in 3 service areas across the North of Tyne area. The business case and business plan stages were seen as the completion of this stage, and they did not plan to extend the engagement, to communicate more widely to secure buy-in, until these activities were completed. The project supported by the DfE was intended to take the work no further than the completion of the business plan, but this plan is intended to steer further collaboration and 'empower action' (in Kotter's terms) across the NoT region for the foreseeable future.

More specifically, the table below describes the original approach to each key group of stakeholders, the rationale given by the team, and how the approach has changed in the period May 2018 to July 2019. It is based on interviews with the Delivery Team and the Project Team.

Table 2: Stakeholder Engagements

| Stakeholders	Original approach	Original rationale	Changes between May 2018-July 2019
Delivery Team and Project Team	The delivery team comprise current staff seconded into the team from the 3 local authorities. It is a team of senior staff with experience and credibility. It is complemented by a project team for each project which is led and largely supported by operational or support staff from each local authority meeting on a regular basis to review progress and compel actions. The central team services these teams and undertakes or commissions activities agreed with the project team. This is the delivery hub of the programme, and the essence of the partnership approach. All 3 local authorities are equally represented in each project team. The project team's progress will be monitored by the Delivery Team on behalf of the Executive Team responsible for the overall programme. The project teams are in set up and establishing phase at the current time.	The rationale behind this approach is to create an architecture which: • Uses the experience and networks of existing senior officers to ensure that the design and development work undertaken by partners is well-targeted and most likely to be effective – this is particularly relevant here because of the subtle nature of the exercise – to explore and agree specific collaborative arrangements across 3 local authorities which are likely to be genuinely effective in improving outcomes. • Draws in additional resources as needed to ensure that agreed tasks get completed at pace and to quality. • Ensures that Executive Leads are in a good position to maintain an overview of progress and emerging challenges or complications.	This approach has not changed. The Delivery Team members have remained the same over the period and their approach has remained constant. They have described how their role with the project teams has developed from initial support to establish and set terms of reference and areas of activity, to checking more on progress and supporting them to ensure they are able to develop proposals.
Other regional, sub-regional and national bodies	NoT partners are part of the North-East ADCS region comprising 13 local authorities, and part of a 5 council sub-region. Partners are involved with a wide range of national bodies representing local government and children's services. Partners have extensive close working arrangements with other public services including Police, Health Services, Education and Leisure as well as important relationships with the voluntary and private children's sectors. The approach to these stakeholders is one of low-key communication at this stage. The emphasis in communication is on the exploratory nature of the collaboration and an emphasis on minimising any potential impact on existing relationships and arrangements	The rational here is to minimise any mis-information about the emerging collaboration plans, and to re-assure partners that there is nothing planned yet which will have an impact on them specifically. This approach may need to change for specific partners during the programme as proposals emerge.	Circumstances have not changed in the region. DfE regional contacts have changed. The messages from DfE have changed regarding ongoing funding support which is likely to have a significant effect on the scope of the business case and business plans. A focus for activity in the next period will be to revise governance arrangements to link the

Stakeholders	Original approach	Original rationale	Changes between May 2018-July 2019
	The recent North of Tyne Partnership has strengthened Council-wide links between the 3 authorities, and the Leadership Team wants to link the programme with this wider agenda		programme into the North of Tyne Partnership, the Chief Executives and the wider development programme.
The direct workforce, including practitioners, managers and support staff in the 3 local authorities	The approach to this very large group of stakeholders will be to provide regular updates on the work of the project to ensure that staff are aware of the projects, but clear about the limited nature of the areas being considered and assured that there are no major plans being developed with immediate implications for roles or jobs. The team will produce a regular briefing paper which will be available to all staff. Staff who are involved directly in a participative way are currently limited to the more senior officers in the project teams.	The rationale is to minimise potential concerns amongst the workforce about jobs and roles, and ensure, through communications at this stage, they are aware that work is taking place so that they are not surprised if they receive information from other routes. Some senior officers are involved in participation activities in the projects because they need to offer their expertise into design work at this stage. Once the projects move towards producing business plans it may be an appropriate time to move from a communication approach towards more active participation and consultation	The approach has not changed. Projects have been kept very tightly focused on key priorities and involving the project teams almost exclusively.
Service users, carers and their representatives	Again, this is a large stakeholder group. The approach at this point has not been to communicate about the project as a whole as it is currently in early stages of scoping and development. The approach will be to develop communications and engagement opportunities as the projects begin to generate proposals. These will be linked to wider devolution communications by the Partners, complemented by engagement and consultation activities as the projects progress related to specific proposals and service improvements. All 3 Councils have existing Forums for engaging with service users and carers and these will be used in the first instance.	The intention here is to ensure the projects are located very much within the wider North of Tyne Devolution programme which will ensure political support, and that engagement is realistic and meaningful – focusing on specific proposals and potential developments in services when the time is right to do this, using existing mechanisms.	No change to this approach at this stage.
Public and the media, bodies monitoring and inspecting local authorities,	Again, there are no plans at this stage to engage with the public or media, inspection bodies or providers about the programme except as part of the wider devolution agenda. Once the initial exploratory phase has finished on the projects this will be reviewed.	There is judged to be no particular value in engaging more widely at this point – and potential risks to the project in having to deal with tangential queries before the projects have had the chance to establish their priorities.	No change at this stage.

Stakeholders	Original approach	Original rationale	Changes between May 2018-July 2019
providers of services		This approach may need to change during the programme as proposals emerge. There may well be, for example, value in engaging with inspectorates or with providers as soon as the key lines for development begin to emerge.	
Formal political stakeholders	The approach here will be to maintain close and regular active partnership between the senior executives and the key political links in each Council. The projects will be presented under the Devolution agenda and as part of the opportunity that this agenda presents.	Cabinet and scrutiny bodies in all the Councils need to be kept closely up to date with the project and any emerging proposals. These stakeholders are crucial in deciding on the viability of some potential proposals, particularly any which go beyond 'operational' developments or have governance or ownership implications. The NoT devolution programme will send the political framework for the projects and the senior executive team will need to maintain close links with members to ensure they are comfortable with the emerging proposals- and that members steers are applied to projects.	The Leadership Board has ensured a careful joint and singular engagement with Chief Executives who have been very supportive of the approach. Wider engagement has not been appropriate at this stage.
Executive sponsors	There is a team of 3 senior sponsors overseeing this project and directing the work of the Delivery Team. It comprises of the Directors of Children's Services for Newcastle, Northumberland and North Tyneside. They meet very regularly, at least monthly, and review the progress of the projects. Each is the chair of the project team on 1 of the 3 projects. The leaders describe their working relationships as very good, and they are agreed on the overall approach to the programme and what they hope to get out of the work in the next year. Partners have chosen not to create a wide – ranging structure involving lots of stakeholders to oversee this work, preferring to use a tight small team with senior executive leadership roles to provide regular and ongoing direction, and drawing other in to the projects through the project teams.	The rationale for this approach is based on the nature of the exercise as it currently stands. The task is to apply careful judgement to work out realistic and potentially effective options for service improvement through collaboration, which can then be further tested. Partners are clear that a small executive group comprising key Directors with very regular involvement with the project will ensure that the quality of the work is high enough to deliver what is required. This approach may change during the programme as proposals emerge and wider engagement is needed.	

Engagement and governance

Within this context, the emphasis has been on securing high quality, carefully analysed proposals drawing on a limited number of stakeholders to date. Using the 'engagement tool' described in the baseline analysis, it can be summarised as:

Figure 4: Engagement Summary
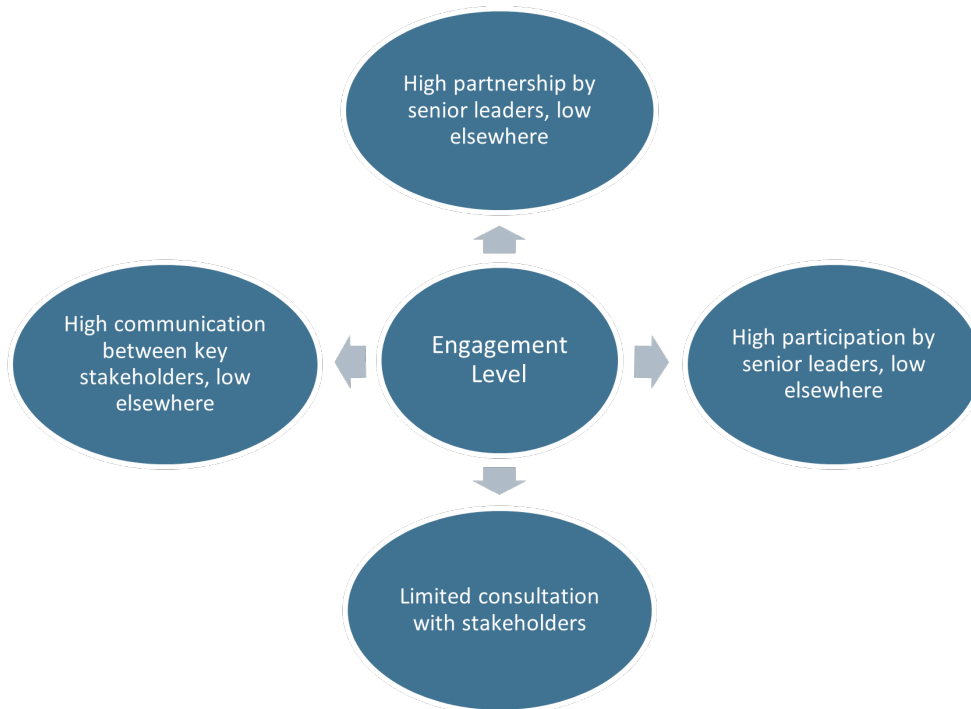
At the point at which the business plan was agreed, and the evaluation was completed, partners have also been considering whether governance and engagement activities might need to develop further. As previously noted, up until this point, a relatively low-key governance arrangement has been in place, involving the 3 Directors meeting regularly to co-ordinate thinking and planning across the projects. This team works very effectively together and its mutual trust and respect has meant that they have been able to move forward quickly in areas they agree and share learning in a range of peripheral areas. However, this group is now considering how the good working arrangements that they have developed can be taken forward on a more formal basis. They want to ensure that the programme is embedded in the strategic shared agendas of the respective Councils, particularly in light of the recently confirmed North of Tyne Combined Authority arrangement.

The Leadership group for this project are convinced that good quality integrated social care services to support children and families can be shown to be a key component of the agenda, and as such they are determined to be seen as an integral part of the vision and of the delivery programme it will drive. So, while relatively little engagement has taken place so far with the Chief Executive level across the partnership, the Leadership

Group plans to explore how this link can be strengthened, and how the programme can be established as a key element of the programme and the Devolution Board.

This has also stimulated some early exploration of more formal partnership arrangements to support this specific project, such as a partnership board, but these are at early stages of exploration. They are considering the development of a framing device such as 'The North of Tyne Children's Alliance' to capture this more formal commitment.

In summary then, the project is an interesting study in collaborative working focused on key areas of practice rather than wider organisational or governance arrangements. The effectiveness of the approach has, by self-report, allowed partners to work carefully together to build good long-term relationships and to take forward a range of specific operation-focused service improvement through collaboration, and these will be explored further in the next stage of the evaluation.

5. Limitations of the evaluation

Any evaluation which involves considering only self-reports on a process to develop a business case is inevitably limited. The sources for the evaluation are only some key documents and the views and experiences of the officers primarily involved in this project, and it has only been concerned with reviewing the approaches that have been used to develop a business case.

As such it is inevitable that a limitation of the evaluation is that it is unable to test demonstrable impact of the project, or the wider experience of staff and service users about the work that has been undertaken.

6. Conclusions and implications for policy and practice

This evaluation was very light-touch and based on reviewing key programme documents and interviews with the key stakeholders, so it would not be appropriate to draw out too many conclusions from the project. The project itself has not explored high level strategic change across local authorities, and it has not explored how to address situations requiring major system change or network breakdown or the need for service transformation.

As such, partners in the Collaborative have been in a fortunate position. They have been able to use the project to build relatively small-scale incremental and operational improvements into the system, and at the same time to promote good communications and shared learning between operational staff and leaders across 3 local authorities.

The potential of using an Alternative Delivery Model approach was considered and rejected. Perhaps this is not surprising that an ADM approach was seen by partners to require a high degree of organisational and governance change, and is not necessarily appropriate for their situation which was characterised by:

- High contextual political changes.

- Multi-authority collaborations.

- Improvement rather than transformative change.

In a multi-authority situation, a project-based approach supported by a regular and constructive programme and project architecture, allowing professionals and leaders to meet regularly and discuss how to develop and implement local projects based on shared specific improvement agendas can result in important but relatively low-level improvements between authorities and high levels of shared learning. Certainly, the leaders involved felt that the project enabled them to invest resources successfully in creating a degree of urgency about change, in particular in building a good guiding team through a combination of the Leadership Board and the Programme Team, and to be able to work together to develop a realistic and compelling business plan for the future across the 3 LAs in the North of Tyne area.

Other local authorities, particularly those needing to improve their operational working arrangements across boundaries with partner authorities might find the NoT approach worth considering.

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CSC.Research@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus