

TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SERVICES:

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION OF THE LIFE CHANCES FUND

Evaluation Synthesis Report

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MESSAGE FROM STEPHANIE PEACOCK MP

Minister for Sport, Tourism, Civil Society and Youth



As Minister for Civil Society, I am proud to champion one of the UK's most vital and dynamic sectors - the beating heart of our communities. Civil Society plays a central role in shaping who we are as a nation, uniting people through shared values, collective action, and a deep-rooted commitment to the common good.

This government was elected to deliver change. To improve the lives of working people and strengthen our country. We know that we can only tackle the most difficult social issues through stronger partnerships between government and civil society. Our local civil society organisations know what works and what doesn't. We need locally led partnerships, focused on shared goals, to drive better outcomes in places and towns across the UK.

The Life Chances Fund (LCF) offers powerful learning for this type of collaboration. Delivered between 2016 and 2025, the £70 million fund supported innovative, locally-led approaches to deep-rooted social issues. It helped local projects find place-based solutions and forged strong partnerships rooted in lived experience and local knowledge - partnerships that were built to deliver long-term, meaningful impact.

Crucially, the LCF championed outcome-based partnerships, where socially-minded investors shared both the risk and responsibility for achieving results. This pioneering approach meant that commissioners only paid

for measurable outcomes - not just activity - ensuring public money created real, tangible value where it was needed most.

In total, the LCF supported 29 ambitious projects across England, engaging with more than 50,000 people in critical areas such as youth unemployment, mental health, and homelessness. Through a close partnership with the Government Outcomes Lab at the University of Oxford, we have also generated invaluable evaluation insights - providing tools and evidence that continue to empower local commissioners, improve outcomes, and raise living standards.

The LCF has shown that Social Outcome Partnerships deliver results. We are committed to expanding Social Outcome Partnerships as a commissioning tool to deliver against our Plan for Change. In July, we unveiled the Better Futures Fund (BFF) - a landmark £500 million investment aimed at breaking down barriers and opening up opportunities for up to 200,000 children and their families over the next decade. Built on the lessons of the LCF, the BFF represents a whole-society approach. It will harness the collective power of government, communities, charities, social enterprises, investors, and philanthropists - all working collectively to build a fairer, more compassionate future for the next generation.



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ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT OUTCOMES LAB

The Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab) is a global centre of expertise based at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. Our mission is to enable governments across the world to foster effective partnerships with the non-profit and private sectors for better outcomes.

We are an international team of multi-disciplinary researchers, data specialists and policy experts. We generate actionable knowledge, offering a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to the study of cross-sector partnerships through the three main strands of our work: research, data and engagement.

You can find out more about our work at golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk.

About the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) supports culture, arts, media, sport, tourism and civil society across every part of England – recognising the UK's world-leading position in these areas and the importance of these sectors in contributing so much to our economy, way of life and our reputation around the world. The department champions sport for all at every level, supports our world-leading cultural and creative industries, and enhances the cohesiveness of our communities.

DCMS delivered the Life Chances Fund (LCF) between 2016-2025. The LCF aimed to help those people in society who face the most significant barriers to leading happy and productive lives. The £70m fund contributed to outcome payments for locally commissioned social outcomes contracts which involve socially-minded investors. Projects have helped support tens of thousands of beneficiaries in areas like youth unemployment, mental health and homelessness.

About the National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest community funder in the UK. Thanks to National Lottery players, the Fund is able to support communities to come together, be environmentally sustainable, help children and young people thrive and enable people to live healthier lives. Tackling inequality and taking an equity-based approach is at the core of what the Fund does, focusing on where there is greatest need.

For over a decade the Fund has played a major role in the development and delivery of social impact bonds/social outcomes partnerships (SIB/SOP) and has been involved in more than 50 of the UK's SOPs. From the HMP Peterborough SIB in 2010 to the launch of our own Commissioning Better Outcomes programme in 2013 and most recently administering the Life Chances Fund on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

CONTENTS

Message from Stephanie Peacock MP	2
About the Government Outcomes Lab	3
Foreword	4
Preface	5
Acronyms & glossary	7
Introduction	8
Part I. The Life Chances Fund at a glance	10
Part II. The Life Chances Fund projects: overview & outcomes achieved	20
Part III. Key findings from GO Lab's evaluation of the Life Chances Fund	32
Conclusion	63
References	66
Appendix 1. Life Chances Fund projects: summary table	68
Appendix 2. Life Chances Fund evaluation reports and related publications	73

FOREWORD



For nearly a decade, the Life Chances Fund has stood as a bold endeavour by the UK government to transform how public services are delivered. The work of the fund is anchored in the promise that outcomes-based commissioning, when thoughtfully deployed, can drive more innovation, collaboration and prevention to improve people's lives.

As governments across the globe confront the complexities of inequality, constrained public finances, and a demand for more responsive and accountable institutions, the need for reform within the public sector remains urgent and unrelenting. Public sector reform, if it is to endure, must be informed by high-quality evidence that is timely, constructive, and actionable.

This report synthesises an extraordinary body of evidence generated by the Government Outcomes Lab at the Blavatnik School of Government as the UK government's learning and evaluation partner for the Life Chances Fund. The GO Lab's pioneering model of engaged scholarship has allowed it to work alongside practitioners and policy leaders to evaluate this programme and its social outcomes partnerships. The Blavatnik School's mission – to improve government through world-class research, teaching, and engagement – has been vividly embodied in this long-standing collaboration with the UK government. In doing so, the School has contributed an invaluable institutional memory to a rapidly evolving field, demonstrating the lasting value of rigorous, practically engaged research in delivering better public services.

What makes this report truly compelling is both its scope and its accessibility. It traces the arc of a policy experiment from its inception through implementation and impact, offering a window into what works and what doesn't, and – perhaps most crucially – why. As governments continue to navigate complex social challenges, the insights distilled here are vital: they shine a light on how cross-sector partnerships can be designed with greater accountability, how flexibility and innovation can be embedded in service delivery, and how data can guide smarter risk-taking in public policy. For those tasked with designing future programmes, allocating scarce resources, or shaping policy levers in times of uncertainty, this report is an essential guide.

Professor Ngaire Woods

Dean of the Blavatnik School
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PREFACE



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The evaluation of the Life Chances Fund has generated one of the most extensive bodies of evidence on outcomes-based cross-sector partnerships in recent years – twelve evaluation reports, eight case studies, seven comprehensive technical guides, thirteen peer-reviewed publications, and an open-access dataset with granular outcomes data.

We are mindful, however, that drawing conclusions from this complex, nuanced - and at times quite technical - evidence can be challenging. This is why we have distilled nearly a decade of data and research into one single document. We hope that this will make it easier for policymakers and practitioners in the UK and across the world to understand the lessons and legacy of this pioneering programme and build on the experience of the Life Chances Fund when developing new

programmes designed to improve the life outcomes of people who face disadvantage in our communities.

Who is the report for?

Our evaluation of the Life Chances Fund centred on the impact of social outcomes partnerships as an innovative commissioning tool. For those interested in understanding in-depth the effectiveness and efficiency of this way of funding public services, the report offers a wealth of insights grounded in the experience of the 29 projects funded by the Life Chances Fund. Our findings are deeply rooted in the specific context of the Fund and the local circumstances where each of the projects was delivered. As such we urge caution in extrapolating or generalising these findings.

We believe that many insights from our research have wider relevance, beyond the value of a particular funding model. Our analysis sheds light on broader questions of how to improve public services so that they are well-integrated and organised around people's lives and needs; focused on improving value for money by augmenting long-term outcomes rather than just cutting costs; and designed with and for people, grounded in the needs of local communities. This is why we hope that this report will be helpful not just to those interested in innovative funding mechanisms such as social outcomes partnerships, but more broadly to those working in and with government to make public services more adaptive, accountable and person-centred.

We have tried hard to avoid using jargon and confusing acronyms, but if you are new to social outcomes partnerships and outcomes-based funding more generally, we encourage



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you to first consult the Glossary section of this report. For an overview of the state of play of social outcomes partnerships in the UK context, we recommend our recent report on the Evolution of Social Outcomes Partnerships in the UK. A good understanding of some of the key concepts and the practice to date will help you make better sense of the findings discussed in this report.

Before you dive in...

There are a few considerations that we wish to highlight.

1 Context is key

Our evaluation findings are highly context-specific and in many ways the Life Chances Fund itself can be seen as a product of a specific policy moment for the UK government. At its launch in 2016, the Fund was pioneering in many ways – not only was it designed to propagate the adoption of an innovative public service model, it was also hugely ambitious in its size (the largest fund of its type at the time, spanning nine years and multiple spending review cycles); the breadth of themes considered (which enabled considerable experimentation and the application of social outcomes partnerships to social challenges where they had not been deployed

before); and the way it connected local and central government via co-commissioning (in a way that sought to balance flexibility and accountability). The impressive longevity of the Fund enabled a consistency, continuity and diligence rarely seen in the delivery of social programmes.

2 Limitations

The Life Chances Fund was underpinned from the outset by an ambitious and comprehensive evaluation strategy. As the Fund's learning and evaluation partners, our ability to work closely with the UK government from the early stages of the Fund has been a particular strength of our approach. However, this closeness did not insulate us from obstacles, and we were not able to conduct the research exactly as we had initially envisaged. Perhaps inevitably, we have had to adapt our approach and methodologies. This has led us to unanticipated new insights, but has also left some of our original questions only partially answered. We discuss these barriers openly in the report, in the hope they will help inform the next generation of research on outcomes-focused partnerships.

3 Read the full reports

Whilst we hope this report offers a clear and comprehensive set of insights, we recommend engaging with the full body of evidence we have generated for a deeper understanding of the data, research methods, limitations, and nuance of the findings. If you haven't already read our in-depth evaluation reports and related knowledge resources, we hope this report will serve as the first step in your exploration of the rich evidence base that we've developed collaboratively with the social outcomes partnerships community. All our publications are free to access on our Knowledge Hub.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the immense contributions that our partners in the UK government, the National Lottery Community Fund, and the 29 Life Chances Fund projects have made to our evaluation. None of this work would have been possible without their collective commitment to rigorous evidence generation, transparent sharing of achievements and honest reflections on the lessons learnt along the way.

We are also deeply grateful to the wonderful GO Lab researchers and data analysts who have worked tirelessly on this evaluation over the years. Their curiosity, dedication and perseverance have been the driving force behind this work. Together, their efforts have not only deepened our understanding of outcome-based funding models, but have strengthened the foundation for future innovation in public services, ensuring that robust evidence continues to shape better outcomes for communities.



If you haven't already read our in-depth evaluation reports and related knowledge resources, we hope this report will serve as the first step in your exploration of the rich evidence base that we've developed collaboratively with the social outcomes partnerships community.

ACRONYMS & GLOSSARY

Acronym	Definition
BOP	Bridges Outcomes Partnerships
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media & Sport
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
GO Lab	Government Outcomes Lab
HMP	His Majesty's Prison
ICER	Incremental cost-effectiveness ratio
INDIGO	International Network for Data on Impact and Government Outcomes
IPS	Individual Placement and Support
KBOP	Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership
LCF	Life Chances Fund
LMEP	Labour Markets Evaluation Pilot
MHEP	Mental Health and Employment Partnership
NHS	National Health Service
NPC	Net Present Cost
OBC	Outcomes-Based Contract
PbR	Payment by Results
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
PTS	Person-led, Transitional and Strength-Based (intervention)
SIB	Social Impact Bond
SOP	Social Outcomes Partnership
SPV	Special Purpose Vehicle
TNLCF	The National Lottery Community Fund
UCHE	Universal Credit Housing Element
VCSE	Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise

Commissioner: An organisation responsible for commissioning (contracting) services. In social outcomes partnerships, commissioners are typically the outcome payer and are typically (1) a central and/or local government organisation or (2) a multilateral agency. Sometimes private or philanthropic sources act as co-payers.

Commissioning: The cyclical process by which public sector entities assess the needs of people in an area, determine priorities, design and contract appropriate services, and monitor and evaluate their performance. This term is used widely in the UK public sector context, but less so elsewhere. It is sometimes used interchangeably with 'contracting.'

Intermediary: Social outcomes partnerships are often supported by experts that provide specific advice. These are typically all referred to as "intermediaries" but can encompass at least four quite different roles: consultancy to develop business cases, social investment fund managers, performance management experts, and special purpose vehicles.

Investment fund manager: An organisation responsible for providing the project finance and managing the investment strategy on behalf of the (social) investors.

Net Present Cost: The present value of all costs associated with a project over its lifespan. It is essentially a way to assess the total cost of the project, taking into account the time value of money.

Outcomes-based contract: A contractual arrangement whereby payments are made wholly or partly contingent on the achievement of pre-defined and measured outcomes.

Outcomes fund: Outcomes funds pool capital from one or more funders to pay for a set of pre-defined outcomes. Outcome funds allow the commissioning of multiple social outcomes partnerships under one structure.

Payment by Results: A way of delivering services where all or part of the payment is contingent on achieving specified results.

Provider: Also known as service provider, service delivery organisation or delivery partner. Providers are the entities responsible for delivering the intervention to users. A provider can be a private sector organisation, social enterprise, charity, or any other legal form.

Rate card: A schedule of payments for specific, pre-agreed outcome measures that a commissioner (outcome payer) is willing to make for each user, cohort or specified improvement that verifiably achieves each outcome.

Social outcomes partnership: A type of outcome-based contract that incorporates the use of private funding from social investors to cover the upfront capital required for a provider to set up and deliver a service. Also referred to as 'social impact bond' and 'social outcomes contract.'

Special purpose vehicle: A legal entity (usually a limited company) that is created solely for a financial transaction or to fulfil a specific contractual objective. Special purpose vehicles have sometimes been used in the structuring of social outcomes partnerships.

Top-up fund(ing): An outcomes fund may provide a partial contribution to the payment of outcomes, where the remainder of outcomes payments are made by another government department, local government, or public sector commissioner. In the Life Chances Fund the partial contribution from DCMS 'tops up' the locally-funded payment for outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The Life Chances Fund was launched by the UK government in 2016 to support people facing significant barriers to leading happy and productive lives. It was designed with a specific objective to grow the number and scale of social outcomes partnerships commissioned at local level in England. The programme ran for nine years and provided funding, alongside local commissioners, for 29 projects spanning various policy areas, including child and family welfare, health and wellbeing, employment and training, education, criminal justice and homelessness.

Each of the 29 projects took on a very different social challenge and partnership configuration at a local level. What they all had in common however is that they were funded and operated through a social outcomes partnership model.

As the learning and evaluation partner for the Fund, the Government Outcomes Lab team has investigated if, when, and how social outcomes partnerships offer an improved model for tackling complex social problems when compared to more conventional public service commissioning approaches. This question was of particular interest to the UK government at the time of the launch of the Fund, as social outcomes partnerships were seen as a novel and relatively untested instrument for public service commissioning and the evidence on this tool's effectiveness was limited.

To make sense of the findings of our evaluation work, it is important to first understand how the Life Chances Fund worked in practice and the projects it supported. As such this report is organised in three parts:

Part I includes an overview of the Life Chances Fund, including its objectives and thematic areas of focus; application and fund management process, and the key organisations involved.

Part II looks across the Fund to provide a summary of the types of projects supported and the outcomes they achieved. This information is supplemented by project-by-project descriptions in Appendix 1 of this report.

Part III provides a synthesis of the main findings from the different strands of our evaluation. These are grouped around the four core original research questions and are supplemented by wider reflections and learning from the evaluation experience. Appendix 2 includes a full list of our publications related to the Life Chances Fund.

A note on terminology

We are mindful that for those with limited knowledge of social outcomes partnerships, navigating the evidence may be challenging. The implementation of these innovative mechanisms has evolved significantly over the past decade, as has the language used to describe them and the suite of organisations involved in their design and delivery. In addition, we recognise that

some of the terms used throughout the report are specific to the UK context. We clarify below some of these terms. Do refer to our Knowledge Hub for further introductory guidance¹. In some instances, the names of projects and organisations have shifted over time – for these we have provided clarification in footnotes.

Social outcomes partnerships

The terms used to describe these outcomes-focused partnerships vary widely and may well continue to evolve in the future, as organisations adapt this model to respond to new social challenges in new geographies. 'Social impact bond' or 'SIB' is the original term coined to describe a way of creating an investment vehicle for social value². Increasingly though the desire to distinguish this approach from traditional bonds led many to move away from talking about 'impact bonds' and start referring to 'social outcomes contracts'. In 2023 the UK government went a step further and, in a nod to the intentionally cooperative nature of these approaches, adopted the term 'social outcomes partnerships'. Elsewhere in the world a range of other terms is used.

In our work, we define social outcomes partnerships as cross-sector partnerships that bring organisations together in the pursuit of measurable social outcomes. They are defined by two specific characteristics:

- Payment for social or environmental outcomes achieved (an outcomes contract)
- Up-front repayable finance provided by a third party, the repayment of which is (at least partially) conditional on achieving specified outcomes.

¹ The Knowledge Hub can be accessed online at: <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk>.

² Mulgan, G. et al., 2011 Social Impact Investment: the challenge and opportunity of Social Impact Bonds, The Young Foundation



Outcome funds have been used globally to address a diverse range of complex social problems, including unemployment, homelessness, reoffending and refugee integration.

As such, social outcomes partnerships bring together three key partners: an outcome payer, a service provider and an investor. In practice, there may be multiple organisations that make up each of the partnership roles. Often technical advisers, fund managers, performance management experts, and evaluators are also involved.

For the social outcomes partnerships supported through the Life Chances Fund, the configuration of organisations involved was defined at local level, reflecting local circumstances, priorities and capacity. In all projects, the UK government - through the Life Chances Fund - was a co-outcome payer, alongside local public sector commissioners such as local councils. This enabled the pooling of local and central government funding to address entrenched social problems at local level. Some projects only involved one service provider, others involved multiple delivery organisations – often managed by a dedicated fund manager or an intermediary. Our structured dataset on social outcomes partnerships³ includes the specific details of each of the projects, including the organisations involved and their roles.

Outcomes fund

This is a term used to describe an approach that enables several outcomes-based contracts to be grouped in a portfolio to be developed and supported in parallel. Outcomes funds pool funding to financially reward the successful delivery of outcomes, with disbursement of funding contingent on results. Outcomes funds initiate and support multiple, separate outcomes-based contracts. They are not investment funds and there is no expectation of financial return. The projects that outcomes funds support may involve the use of social impact investment, when upfront funding is

required by the service providers to implement social programmes.

The outcomes funds model was pioneered by the UK government, which launched in 2011 the world's first outcomes fund – a £30 million programme designed to support disadvantaged young people by helping them participate in education and training to improve their employability, while also developing the social investment market and testing the generation of benefit savings alongside wider fiscal and social benefits.

Outcomes funds have been used globally, with the UK hosting the largest number to date (10 outcomes funds). They have been used to address a diverse range of complex social problems, including unemployment, homelessness, reoffending and refugee integration⁴.

³ Government Outcomes Lab, n.d. INDIGO Impact Bond Dataset

⁴ Government Outcomes Lab, n.d. INDIGO Outcomes Fund Directory

PART I. THE LIFE CHANCES FUND AT A GLANCE

Included in this section:

- The Life Chances Fund in numbers
- How the Fund worked in practice
- Organisations involved and their roles
- Timeline
- The Life Chances Fund evaluation

This section provides a brief overview of the Life Chances Fund, explaining the application process, the roles of the key organisations involved in the management of the Fund and the approach to the evaluation.

Overview

The Life Chances Fund was a £70 million⁵ programme funded by the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport to support individuals facing significant barriers to leading happy and productive lives.

The programme ran between 2016–2025 and supported the delivery of 29 projects across England. The Fund was administered by the National Lottery Community Fund on behalf of the UK government. The Government Outcomes Lab acted as the learning and evaluation partner for the Fund.

The programme was set up as an outcomes fund, contributing to outcome payments for locally commissioned social outcomes partnerships. At the time of its launch, the Life Chances Fund was the largest outcomes fund in the world.

The Fund had a specific focus on tackling complex social problems⁶, with target population groups and outcomes metrics agreed locally at project-level. A key principle of the Fund was to enable voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to take a lead in transforming public services, as service delivery organisations and managers of social outcomes partnerships. The Life Chances Fund envisaged that this service transformation would be delivered through social outcomes partnerships that 'take a real systems change approach through genuine risk taking, and through focusing on prevention and early upstream action'.⁷



⁵ The Fund was launched by DCMS as an £80 million programme; approximately £9 million was subsequently allocated to the Greater Manchester Reform Investment Fund and the Refugees Transition Outcomes Fund.

⁶ Life Chances Fund guidance explained that 'when an individual or a group of individuals within a community faces a particular social issue, it may well be interconnected with other social issues (...) this means the individuals in question have a complex set of needs, making it difficult to develop and deliver effective interventions. Interventions may exist, but often fail to improve long-term outcomes because they don't take the full complexity of the problem faced by individuals into account.' Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2020. Life Chances Fund

⁷ Cabinet Office, 2016. Life Chances Fund Guidance

CORE OBJECTIVES

The Life Chances Fund was launched with seven core objectives:

-  1 Increase the number and scale of social outcomes partnerships in England

-  2 Make it easier and quicker to set up a social outcomes partnership

-  3 Generate public sector efficiency by delivering better outcomes and understand how cashable savings are achieved

-  4 Increase social innovation and build a clear evidence base for what works

-  5 Increase the amount of capital available to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to help them compete for public sector contracts

-  6 Provide better evidence on the effectiveness of the social outcomes partnership mechanisms and the savings resulting

-  7 Grow the scale of the social investment market.

LIFE CHANCES FUND IN NUMBERS⁸

Total number of individuals engaged:

54,213

Total number of people who achieved at least one outcome:

48,904

Social investment received:

£27,358,129

Amount of outcome funding provided (Life Chances Fund & local commissioners):

£125,845,483

(of which £41,607,712 was 'top-up' outcomes funding provided by the UK government through the Life Chances Fund)

⁸ We include in our analysis figures reported by project leads on the Life Chances Fund Data Portal as of September 2024, the deadline set by the Fund for final submissions of outcomes achievement data and payment claims.

HOW THE FUND WORKED IN PRACTICE

The Life Chances Fund provided ‘top up’⁹ contributions to outcomes-based contracts commissioned by local government and health authorities, where these local partnerships were supported with upfront capital by socially motivated investors. The Fund was set up in this way to leverage outcomes payment from local commissioners¹⁰ alongside the funding made available by central government, and to encourage wider adoption at local level of social outcomes partnerships.

The Fund was launched in July 2016 and was implemented through three calls for applications across six themes:

- 1 Drug and alcohol dependency
- 2 Children’s services
- 3 Early years
- 4 Young people
- 5 Older people
- 6 Healthy lives

Proposals outside these themes were still considered for funding if they demonstrated a particularly innovative approach.

The selection of projects followed a multi-stage process¹¹:

- **Expression of Interest:** a total of 197 expressions of interest were submitted, with 122 applicants invited to proceed to the next stage;
- **Full application and in-principle award:** 109 full applications were received, with 51 awarded ‘in-principle’ offers of funding;
- **Final award and mobilisation:** 31 projects were offered a final award, with 29 proceeding to mobilisation and delivery.

The selection of projects was led by the UK government, with critical review by a range of external organisations and experts. Applicants who required financial support to obtain specific technical advice could apply for a development grant. Ninety-seven development grants were awarded, totalling £3.7 million. Non-financial support was also made available through the Government Outcomes Lab and the Life Chances Fund team.

⁹ Local commissioners were expected to pay the majority of the outcomes payments, with the Life Chances Fund ‘top-up’ contribution towards outcomes payments designed to ‘reflect the balance in savings that are generated for the wider public sector’. ‘Cabinet Office, 2016. Life Chances Fund Guidance’.

¹⁰ In the Life Chances Fund, ‘local commissioner’ included any bodies that commission public services outside central government, for example: local authorities, clinical commissioning groups, housing associations, policy and crime commissioners, schools.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of the application process please see: ‘FitzGerald, C. et al., 2021. An introduction to Life Chances Fund projects and their early adaptations to Covid-19: Life Chances Fund evaluation interim report’.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED AND THEIR ROLES

Public Service Partnerships Team, Civil Society & Youth Directorate, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The Public Service Partnerships Team (previously the Centre for Social Impact Bonds) was the central government team responsible for designing and delivering the Life Chances Fund. The team led the selection of projects, oversaw delivery and evaluation of the Fund alongside partner organisations, and worked with a range of stakeholders, including local commissioners, service providers, academics, social investors, intermediaries and departments across the UK government to share learning and evidence from the Fund.

Find out more: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-outcomes-partnerships>

The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund managed the Life Chances Fund on behalf of DCMS. Key responsibilities included managing the application process and the engagement with individual projects, financial management, and outcomes data collation and verification through a dedicated Data Portal.

The National Lottery Community Fund awards money raised by National Lottery players to communities across the UK, working with local groups and UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to thrive. It is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

For over a decade the National Lottery Community Fund has played a major role in the development and delivery of social outcomes partnerships and has been involved in more than 50 of the UK's social outcomes partnerships - from the Peterborough social impact bond in 2010 to the launch of its own Commissioning Better Outcomes programme in 2013, and most recently administering the Life Chances Fund on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

Fine out more: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/commissioning-better-outcomes-and-social-outcomes-fund>

The Government Outcomes Lab

The GO Lab served as the learning and evaluation partner for the Life Chances Fund. The evaluation work began in 2017 and was focused on understanding if, when, and how social outcomes partnerships offer a better model for commissioning social programmes than more conventional commissioning approaches, such as fee-for-service contracts.

Alongside this evaluation work, the GO Lab worked with the UK government and other stakeholders to develop knowledge resources and learning opportunities for those interested in social outcomes partnerships. The GO Lab also hosts a global dataset on social outcomes partnerships, which includes granular outcomes achievement data for all the projects supported by the Life Chances Fund¹². This approach has led to a large body of evidence, learning and data being publicly available well before the final evaluation of the Fund concluded in spring 2025.

Find out more: <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/about/outcomes-based-contracting/life-chances-fund-lcf-evaluation/>

Other key stakeholders

In addition to these three organisations, independent expertise and support was offered across the Fund by Dr Chih Hoong Sin.

Across the 29 projects a suite of local commissioners, delivery organisations, intermediaries, and impact investors were involved. A full directory of the organisations involved at project-level can be accessed via our INDIGO dataset¹³.

Involvement of socially motivated investors

Socially motivated investors or impact investors are organisations or individuals who make financial investments in pursuit of both social impact and financial returns. For the Life Chances Fund, the application process stipulated that projects must incorporate a social investor to be eligible for funding. This is a key distinguishing feature of the Life Chances Fund compared to other international outcomes funds.

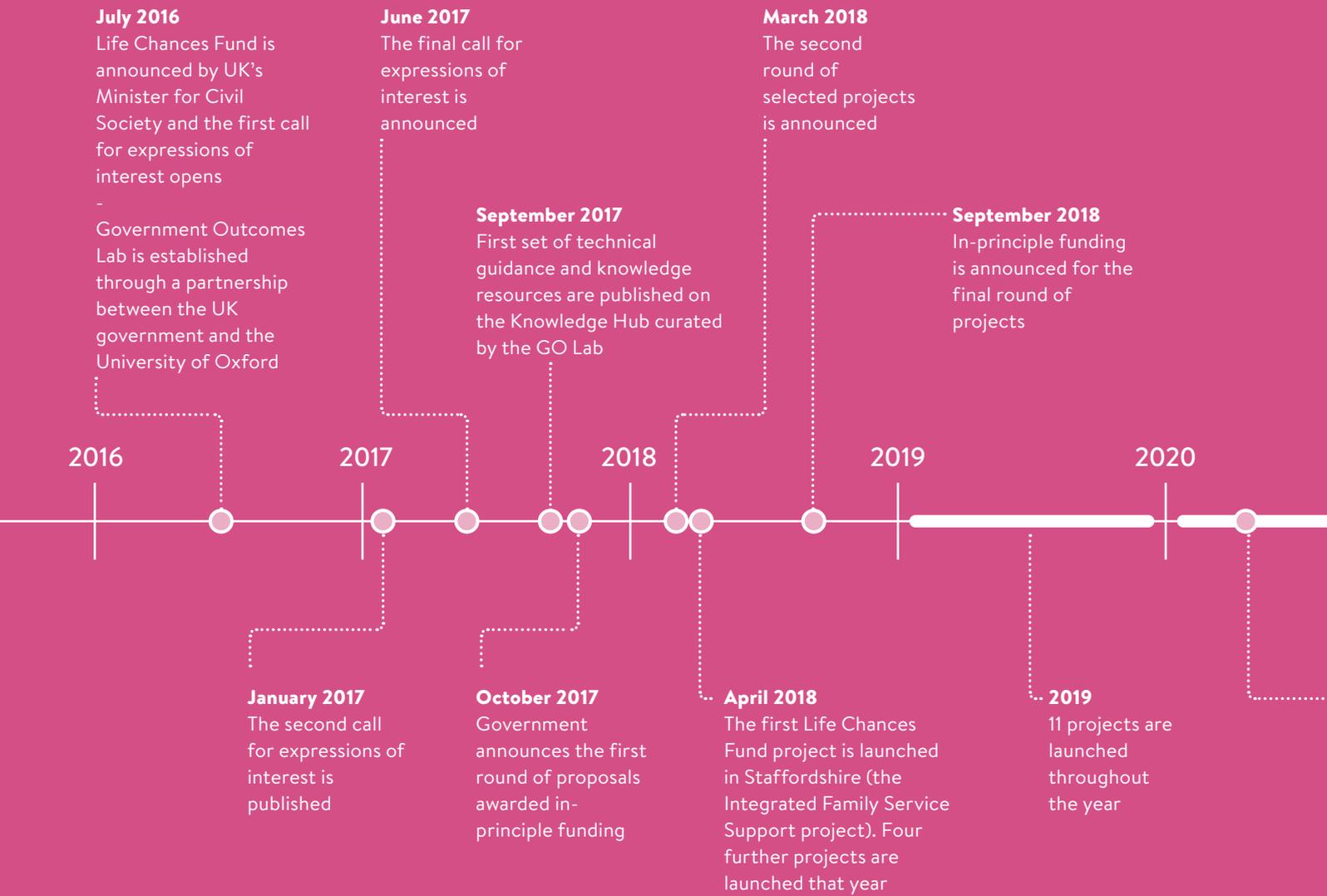
In the development and launch of the Fund, DCMS approached potential investors which had previously been involved in financing social outcomes partnerships, such as Big Issue Invest and Bridges Social Sector Funds (now known as Bridges Outcomes Partnerships). Through market engagement, DCMS with the support of the National Lottery Community Fund, the GO Lab and Better Society Capital (formerly Big Society Capital) compiled a list of socially motivated investors which expressed an interest in supporting potential projects¹⁴. Project applicants were encouraged to secure in-principle agreement from at least one investor by the time of submitting a full application.

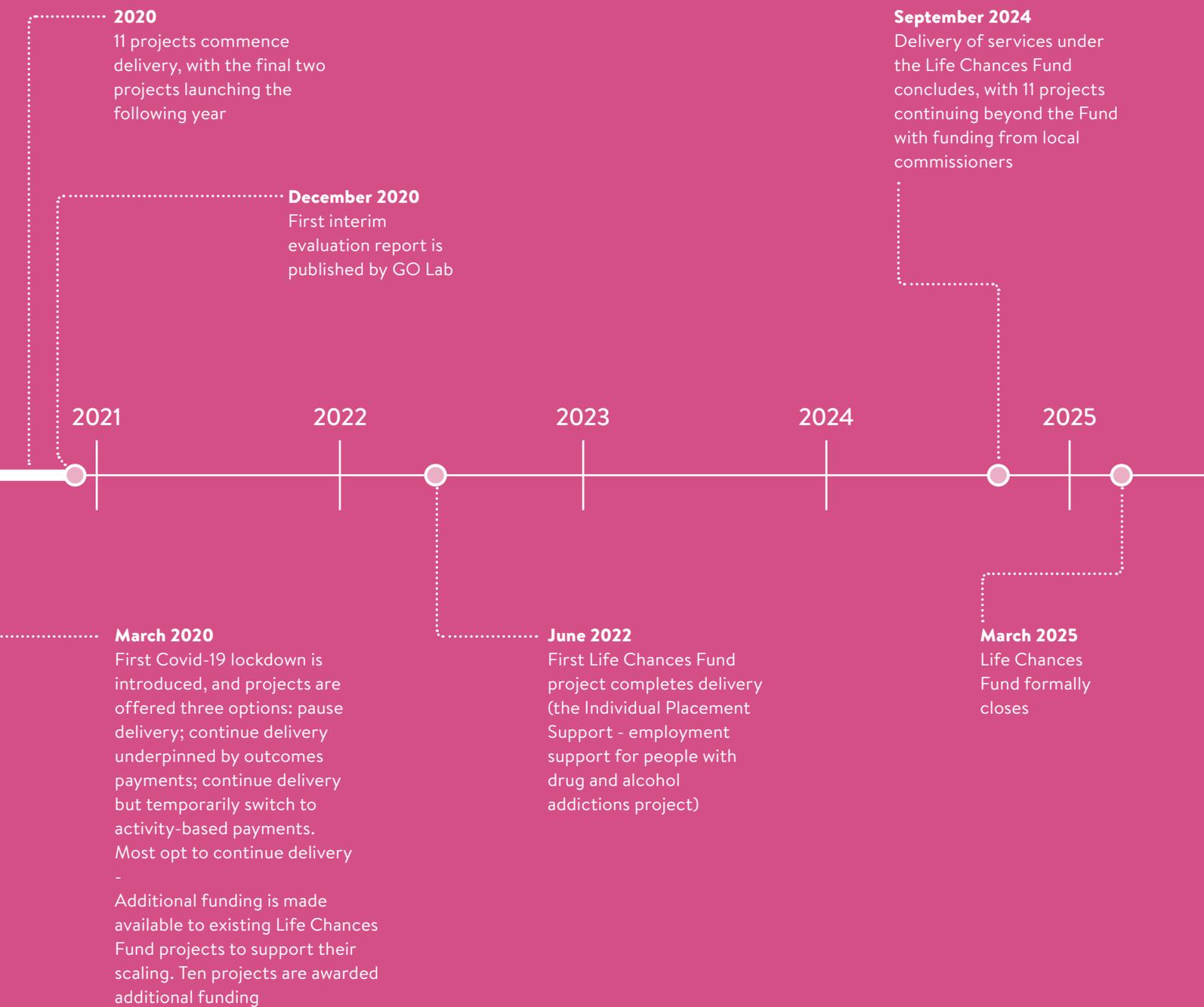
¹² Government Outcomes Lab, n.d. INDIGO Impact Bond dataset

¹³ Government Outcomes Lab, n.d. INDIGO Impact Bond dataset

¹⁴ Directory of SIB Investment Funds n.d. 'The National Lottery Community Fund, n.d. Directory of SIB Investment Funds'

TIMELINE





ABOUT THE LIFE CHANCES FUND EVALUATION

From the outset, the Life Chances Fund emphasised evaluation and learning. This reflected the UK government’s ambition at the time to use the Life Chances Fund as an opportunity to improve the extent and quality of evidence around the use of social outcomes partnerships, as compared to more traditional public sector commissioning models.

In practice, this meant that the Life Chances Fund was accompanied by a pioneering and comprehensive evaluation strategy, structured across three strands:

1

A fund-level programme evaluation

This was led by ICF, a consultancy, and sought to evaluate the whole fund as a tool for growing the social outcomes partnerships market in the UK, the process involved, and lessons learned from the administration of the Fund.

In January 2021, ICF published a report¹⁵ examining stakeholder perspectives and insights from the first few projects launched through the Life Chances Fund.

2

An evaluation of the social outcomes partnership mechanism

This strand was led by the Government Outcomes Lab. The aim was to evaluate social outcomes partnerships as a commissioning tool or, in other words, the ‘social outcomes partnerships effect’.

The GO Lab was tasked with evaluating the impact, process and value for money of selected Life Chances Fund projects, and with conducting a longitudinal evaluation across all 29 projects to deepen understanding of the specific characteristics of social outcomes partnerships. The GO Lab team used a mix of innovative qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct the evaluation. These are discussed in further detail in the next section of this report.

3

Project-level evaluation

Responsibility for this strand of the evaluation rested directly with the respective lead organisations for each of the 29 projects supported through the Life Chances Fund. Project-level evaluations were locally commissioned and their scope was determined by the commissioning organisation(s), with a view to inform future service provision at local level.

Where available, project-level evaluations for Life Chances Fund projects are published on the GO Lab Knowledge Hub¹⁶.

¹⁵ Loveless, L. & Lloyd, R. 2021. Process Evaluation for the Life Chances Fund. ICF Consulting Services Ltd.

¹⁶ Government Outcomes Lab n.d. Resource Library.

GO LAB'S EVALUATION OF THE LIFE CHANCES FUND

The GO Lab conducted a longitudinal evaluation across the 29 projects supported by the Fund. The evaluation focused on understanding the outcome partnership mechanism as a tool for public service improvement.

The key findings from our evaluation are discussed in Part III of this report, but we include below a summary of the main research questions and the respective methodological approach.

Research question	GO Lab evaluation strand	Methodology	Evaluation strategy
1. What are the specific characteristics of the social outcomes partnership projects funded through the Life Chances Fund?	Primary evaluation (across the 29 social outcomes partnerships supported by the Life Chances Fund)	Longitudinal portfolio-wide survey (three waves), focus groups with social investors, and Covid-19 adaptation analysis across all 29 Life Chances Fund projects; analysis of applications, performance reports and other administrative data	We looked across the full Life Chances Fund portfolio to understand how projects were designed, who was involved, and how they evolved over time. By analysing both planned and adaptive elements (including early Covid-19 responses) we were able to identify patterns in delivery structures, actor roles, and partnership models. This allowed us to examine the enabling and constraining features across diverse settings. This also included thematic scoping analysis (children's social care projects), which offered early insights into project setup, delivery models, and sector-specific challenges.
2. Did the social outcomes partnership approach make a difference to the outcomes achieved, compared to alternative commissioning models?	Supplementary evaluations (Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership & the Mental Health and Employment Partnership)	Quasi-experimental impact analysis (KBOP) and dose-response analysis (MHEP) supplemented by longitudinal qualitative analysis, including interviews and staff surveys	We sought to compare outcomes achieved under social outcomes partnerships with those from previous or parallel traditional commissioning models. This involved using administrative data to support quantitative impact analysis (KBOP) and a novel dose-response analysis to explore how different intensities of the social outcomes partnership model related to improved outcomes (MHEP).
3. Through what mechanisms do social outcomes partnerships operate?	Supplementary evaluations (Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership & the Mental Health and Employment Partnership)	Theory-based process evaluation, socio-legal analysis of contracts, system mapping (KBOP), peer-led research, and longitudinal observation of governance, data use, collaboration, and service delivery changes	We explored the mechanisms behind observed changes using theory-based evaluation. Rather than isolating single variables, we investigated how contractual, managerial, and relational features of social outcomes partnerships were associated with behavioural and operational changes across complex systems. By triangulating across interviews, mapping tools, and peer-led methods, we constructed plausible, evidence-informed causal narratives.
4. Do the benefits of a social outcomes partnership approach outweigh the costs?	Supplementary evaluations (Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership & the Mental Health and Employment Partnership)	Transaction cost analysis (MHEP), cost-effectiveness analysis (KBOP), and document review to explore perceived value and trade-offs	We examined whether the benefits of social outcomes partnerships justify their costs through structured transaction cost analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis. By comparing social outcomes partnerships with legacy contracts, we considered not only financial metrics but also qualitative dimensions like administrative burden, governance effort, and relational value. This helped highlight practical trade-offs for commissioners and providers.

PART II. THE LIFE CHANCES FUND PROJECTS: OVERVIEW & OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

This section draws on data from the Life Chances Fund Data Portal managed by the National Lottery Community Fund, who administered the Fund on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

2



Eve Grennan
Data Officer



Juliana Outes Velarde
Senior Data Steward

We include in our analysis figures reported by project leads on the Data Portal as of September 2024, the deadline set by the Fund for final submissions of outcomes achievement data and payment claims.

We include in this section some aggregate figures across the Fund, however any average figures or summary statistics included need to be considered with due recognition that each of the 29 projects worked within different contexts, with different population groups and different outcomes metrics. As such average figures across the Fund may obscure a significant degree of variation across the projects. The heterogeneity of projects, even within the same policy area, constrains our ability to make meaningful comparisons across projects.

In addition, our ability to fully assess the level of performance of the projects is limited by the fact that eleven of the Life Chances Fund projects continued delivery beyond the Fund and for those projects final outcomes achievement data is inevitably incomplete.

Finally, in making sense of the outcomes achieved by the Life Chances Fund projects it is important to note the impact of Covid-19. The pandemic caused significant disruption to the operations of the social outcomes partnerships supported through the Fund and forced them to adapt their delivery models – some saw a reduced ability to achieve outcomes due to lockdown measures; others saw their support offering expand, to include mental health support, supply of basic goods, supporting access to digital communication tools, welfare advice and general Covid-19 guidance.

For a full discussion of the outcomes achieved by the projects, as well as the data used for our analysis, please see our report *Achieving Outcomes: Life Chances Fund Final Report*.¹⁷ In addition, granular project-level outcomes achievement and payment data, alongside contextual information provided by project leads, are available publicly on the INDIGO dataset curated by the GO Lab.



Please note that we were not able to include outcomes achievement data beyond the duration of the Life Chances Fund, which completed delivery by September 2024. For projects that continued delivery beyond that date, the outcomes achievement and payment data provided do not capture the full, final achievement figures of those projects. We recommend getting in touch with individual projects directly for their latest outcomes achievement figures.

LIFE CHANCES FUND PROJECTS OVERVIEW

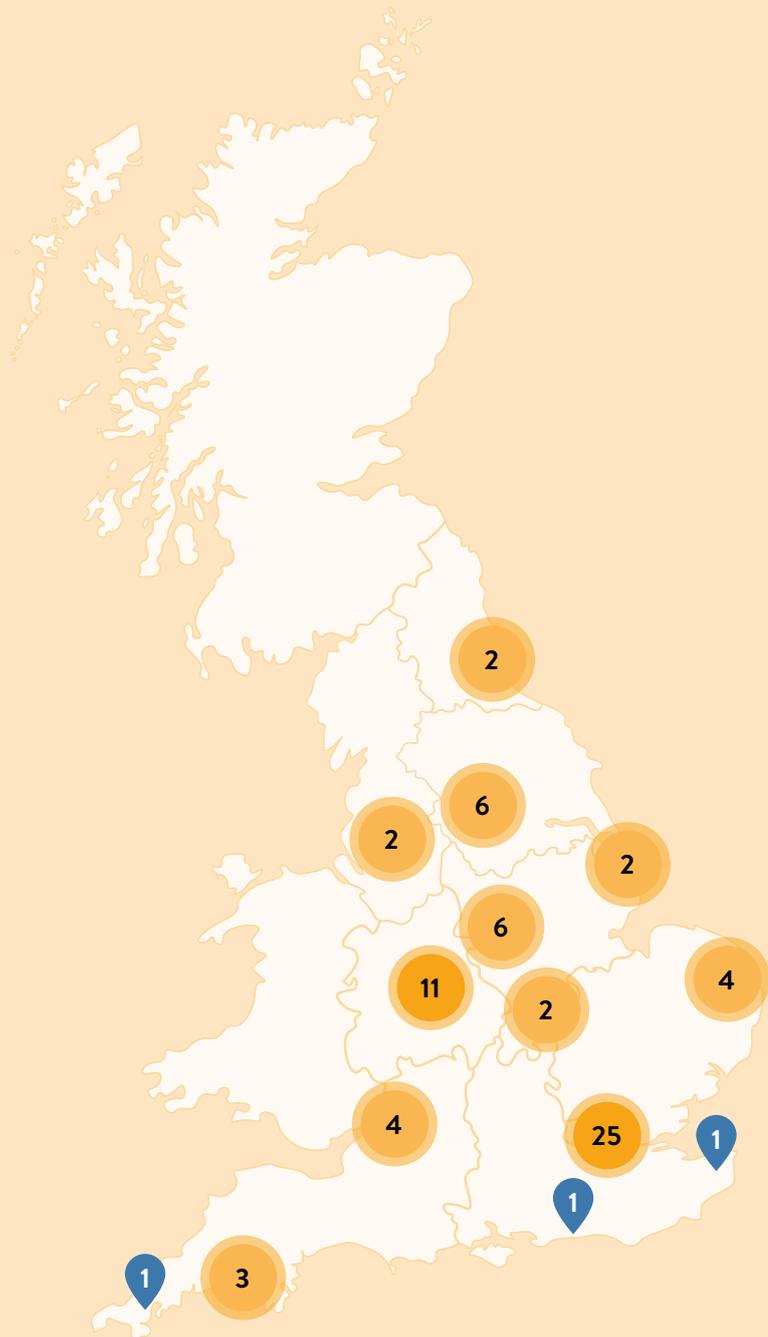
Under the Life Chances Fund 29 projects delivered services across multiple locations in England. They focused on tackling a wide array of complex social issues, including children's social care, unemployment, substance abuse and homelessness. Over 50,000 individuals were supported through the Fund, with 90% of them achieving at least one outcome.

Funding for the projects was committed across three rounds of selection, so projects started delivery at different points between 2018 and 2020. Eighteen of the projects completed service delivery and claimed their final outcomes payments from the Life Chances Fund by September 2024. Eleven projects claimed their final Life Chances Fund payment by the same date but secured further funding commitments from local commissioners. These eleven projects therefore continue to run and, upon achievement of their set outcomes, receive payments from their local commissioners.

Appendix 1 of this report offers a summary of each of the projects, including a brief description of the service provided, the primary outcome and the size of the project in terms of individuals supported, planned upfront social investment and the maximum potential outcomes payment.

The Life Chances Fund was open to applications from England only, as social investment and social outcomes partnerships are devolved policy areas in the UK¹⁸. Some of the Life Chances Fund projects operated across multiple locations. For example, the Mental Health and Employment Partnership delivered across five locations in London and in Shropshire, and the Chances project ran in Sunderland and over 20 other locations across England.

Figure 1.
Distribution of projects' delivery locations across England



¹⁸ For further information on devolution arrangements in the UK please see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-on-devolution#devolved-responsibilities>

Figure 2.
Distribution of projects across thematic areas by number of projects

The Life Chances Fund invited applications across six core themes: drug and alcohol dependency; children’s services; early years; young people; older people; and healthy lives. Innovative approaches tackling cross-cutting social challenges beyond the themes above were also considered (marked as ‘other’ in the figure on the right).

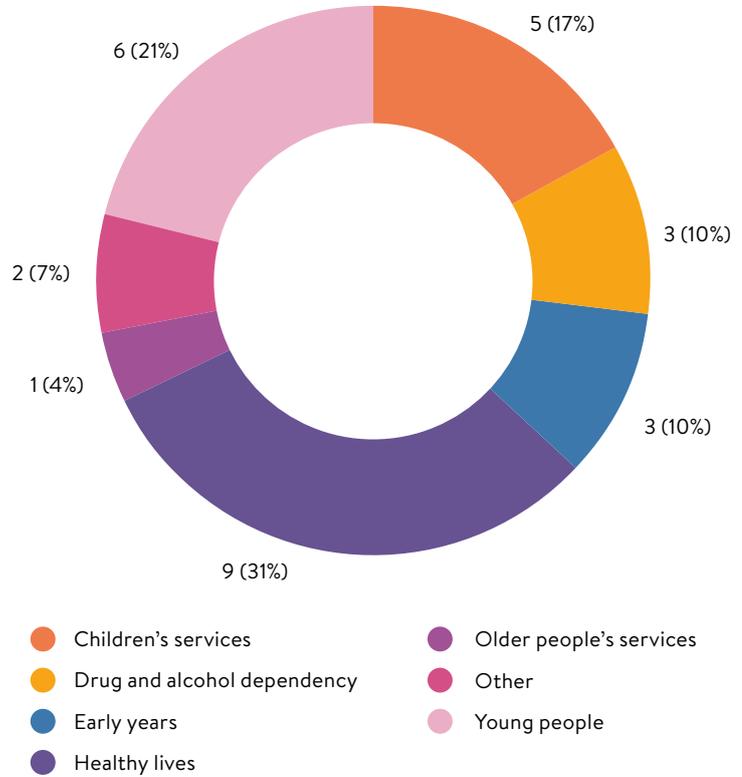


Figure 3.
Distribution of projects across thematic areas by number of service users engaged

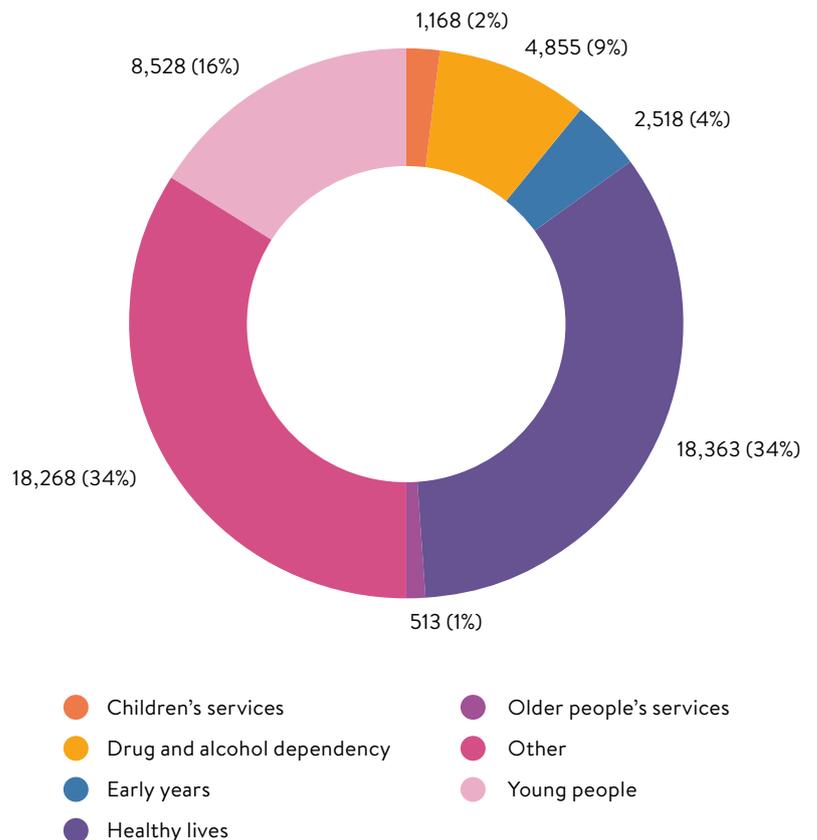
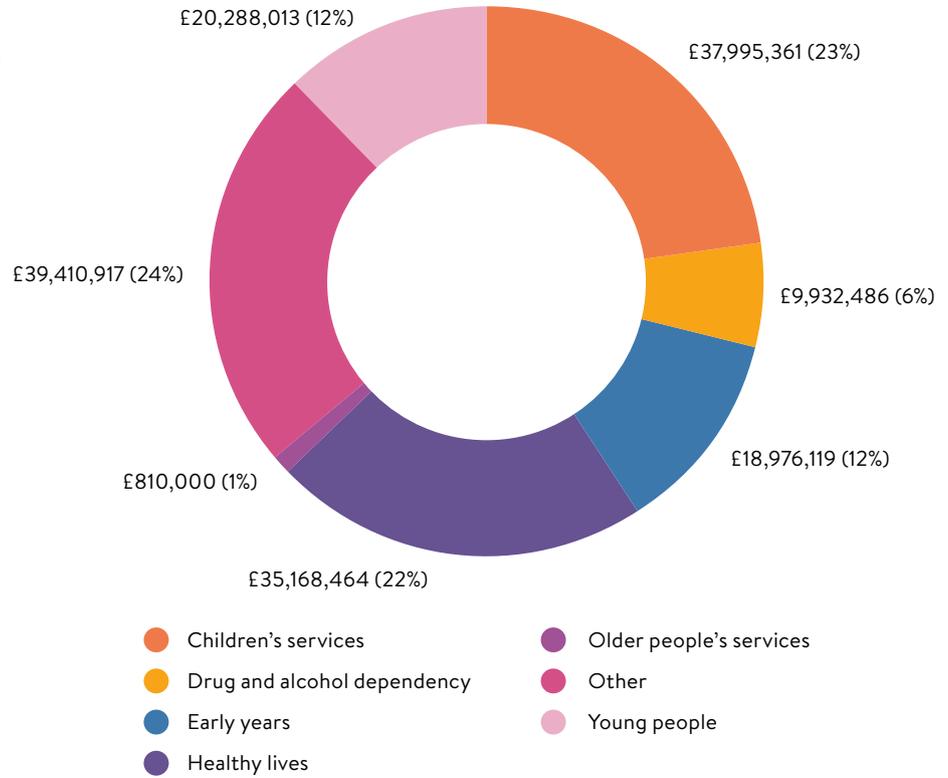
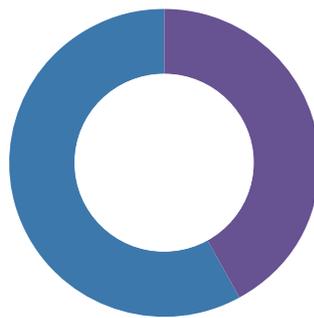


Figure 4.
Maximum potential outcome payments committed by thematic area



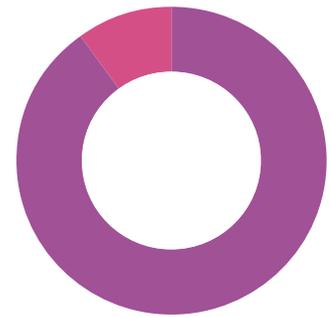
Total number of individuals supported across the Fund by September 2024¹⁹



Number of service users engaged

42%

54,213 people engaged
130,345 people referred to LCF projects



Number of service users who achieved at least one outcome

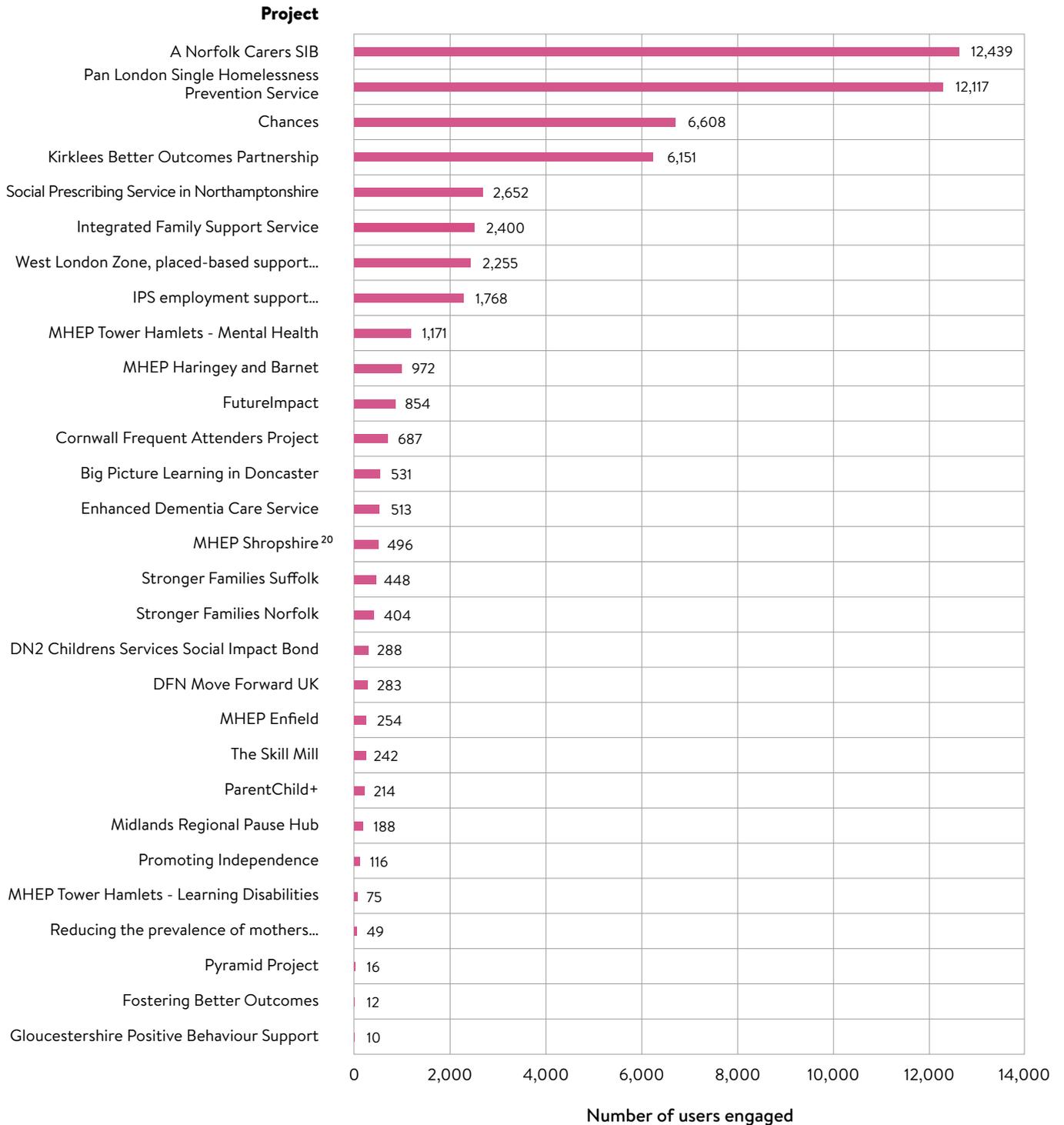
90%

48,904 people achieved at least one outcome
54,213 people engaged with LCF projects

¹⁹ Number of engaged service users according to the DCMS Data Portal as of September 2024.

Figure 5.
Number of service users engaged by project

This figure shows the heterogeneity of projects with respect to cohort sizes. For instance, in Norfolk the Carers project engaged with, and provided support to, more than 10,000 adult carers. At the opposite end of the scale, Gloucestershire Positive Behaviour Support supported a very small number of individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism and who exhibited particularly challenging behaviours.



²⁰ At the end of the grant the project self-reported having engaged with 496 service users. As the project hit a cap this additional performance could not be verified through the DCMS Data Portal.

Figure 6.
Frequency of top ten
outcome metrics used
across the 29 projects

The Life Chances Fund projects have used a wide variety of outcome metrics, defined at local level by the project stakeholders. To facilitate comparability across projects, we have coded each project outcome metric and converted them into metric categories. Each category may encapsulate multiple metrics. For example, the 'Job retention' category encapsulates '26 weeks full-time employment' and '13 weeks part-time employment'. If a project uses both metrics '26 weeks full-time employment' and '13 weeks part-time employment', we consider that the project is using the 'Job retention' category twice. This figure depicts the frequency of the top 10 outcomes metrics used by the projects. For example, 'Prevent a child entering out-of-home placement' has been used 20 times and 'Job retention' has been used 18 times. Please refer to Appendix 1 for further information on project level details.

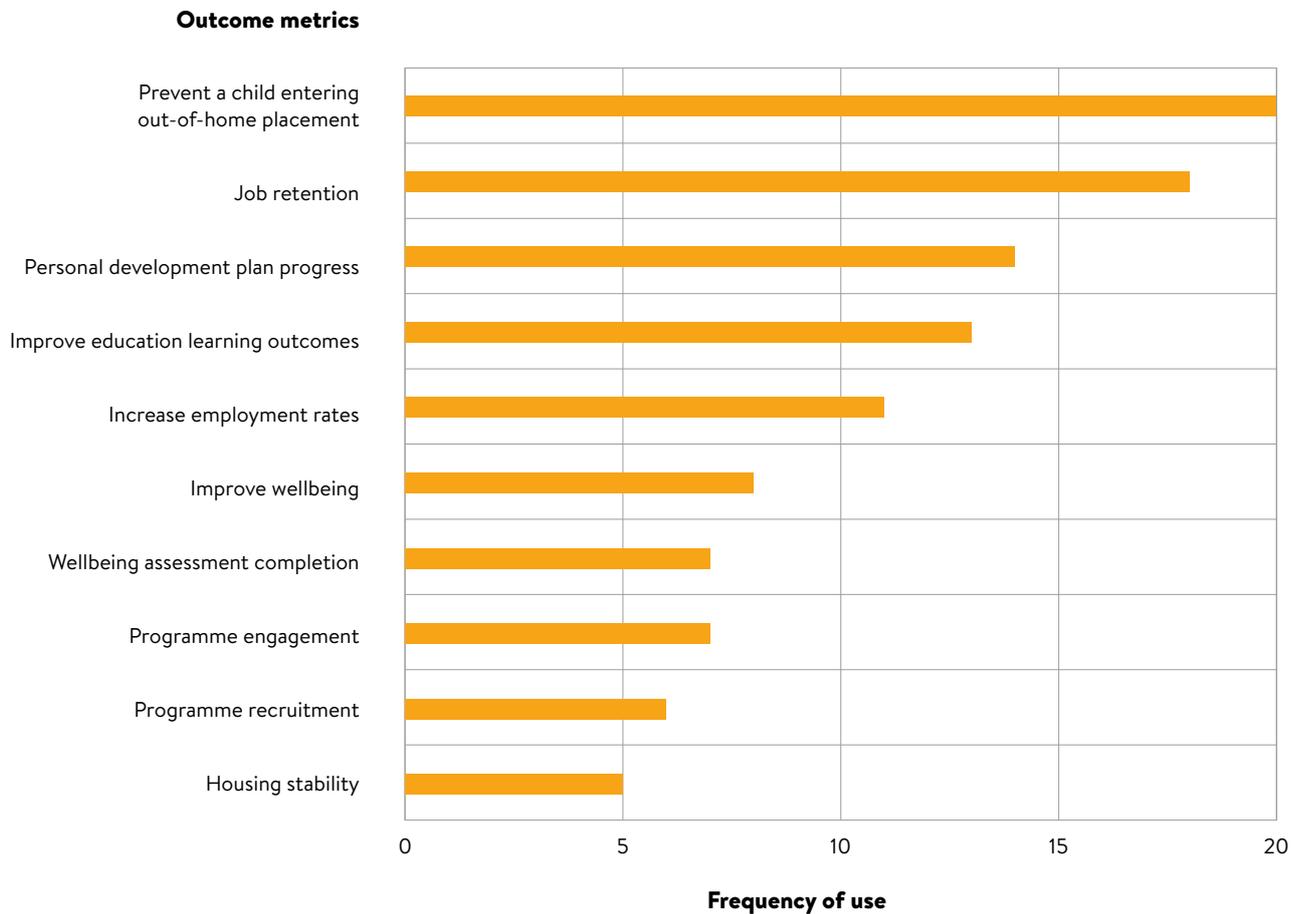
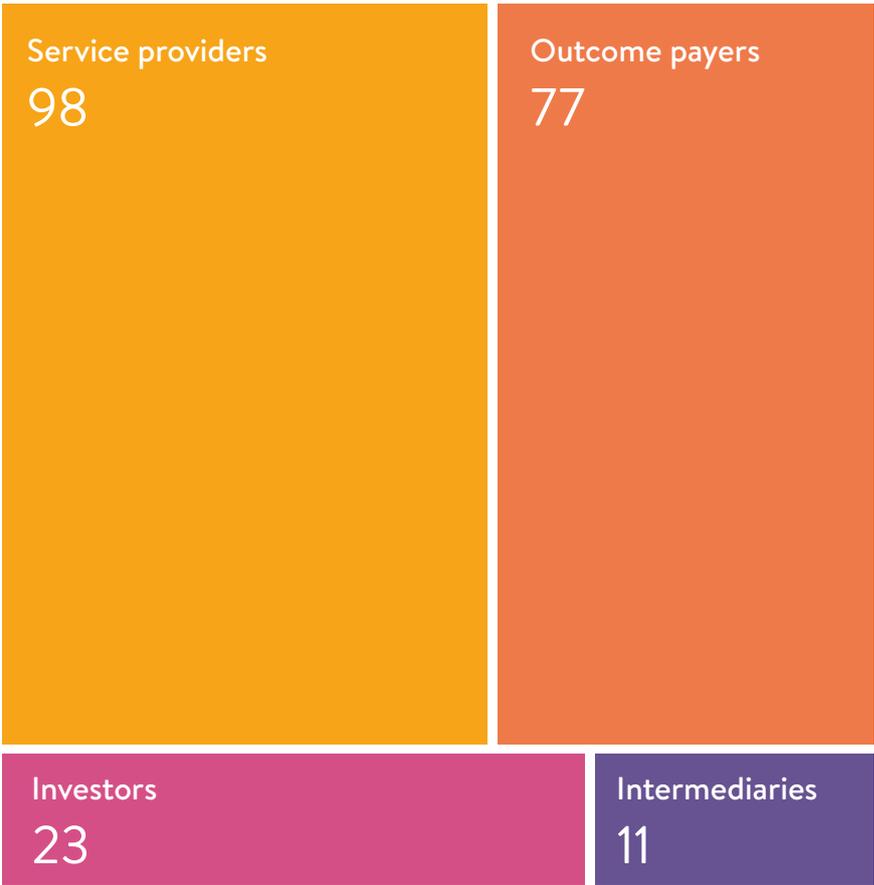


Figure 7.
Organisations involved
in the 29 LCF projects

Based on data from our INDIGO dataset, 205 organisations were involved in the 29 projects. There were 77 outcome payer organisations, 98 service provider organisations, 23 investor organisations, and 11 intermediaries²¹. The majority of the organisations involved in the Life Chances Fund were only involved in one project (76% or 156 organisations out of the total 205). 26 organisations were involved in two projects, while 5 organisations were involved in three different projects. Eighteen organisations supported more than three projects within the fund, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport involved in all 29 as co-outcome funder, alongside local commissioners. Please refer to the INDIGO dataset for a network map of the organisations involved and their related projects.



²¹ Please note that four organisations are double counted because they are recorded as having played multiple roles in Life Chances Fund projects. Please refer to the INDIGO dataset for project-level information on the suite of stakeholders involved in each project.

WHAT OUTCOMES WERE ACHIEVED BY THE LIFE CHANCES FUND PROJECTS OVER THE DURATION OF THE FUND?

A note on data sources

To collect data on the Life Chances Fund projects, the Fund required projects to report data at several stages of their preparation and implementation, through the Life Chances Fund Data Portal.

- Upon successful award of funding through the Life Chances Fund application process, projects completed grant baseline forms which included information on investment commitment, outcome achievement expectations, outcome funding contribution from each outcome payer, initial expectations around costs and savings for commissioners, among other figures. These figures were updated every time stakeholders renegotiated project details or revised outcomes achievement expectations or targets.
- Outcomes achievement data and payment claims were submitted by project leads on the Life Chances Fund Data Portal quarterly, which were then verified by funding managers at the National Lottery Community Fund.
- At the end of their project, leads were also asked to submit a final end of grant form, which included self-reported data but could not be validated by funding managers. Thus, we have only used end of grant forms in our analysis when no other independent and verifiable data sources were available.

As explained in the introductory section of this part of the report, the Life Chances Fund projects worked with different contexts, population groups and metrics. This makes summarising and aggregating outcomes achievement across the Fund challenging. We strongly encourage readers of this report to refer to the 'Achieving Outcomes: Life Chances Fund Final Report' for detailed, project-level outcomes achievement information for each of the 29 projects supported through the Fund.

To explore outcome achievement, we have calculated the percentage of achievement of the primary outcome against the best-case scenario expectation (for the entire length of project delivery). As a requirement from the Fund, primary outcomes were selected by project stakeholders (in their baseline forms) to signal the metric that was most important or relevant to each project. 'Primary outcome' measures did not always represent the most long-term, nor the most difficult to achieve metric within the project. Nonetheless, for succinctness and as the outcome metrics most relevant to projects, we have used primary outcomes here to summarise project outcomes achievement.

Average primary outcome achievement for:

18 completed projects

87%

11 ongoing projects²²

89%

²² Each project delivers a different intervention with distinct achievement and payment cycles, so all data for ongoing projects should be understood as interim data that may be updated in the coming years.

Table 1.
Primary outcomes
achievement
by policy theme²³

Policy theme	Average	Number of projects
Children's services	62%	5 (2 complete, 3 ongoing)
Healthy lives	70%	9 (5 complete, 4 ongoing)
Drug and alcohol dependency	86%	3 (2 complete, 1 ongoing)
Young people	97%	6 (5 complete, 1 ongoing)
Other cross-cutting themes	118%	2 (1 complete, 1 ongoing)
Early years	111%	3 (2 complete, 1 ongoing)
Older people	207%	1 (1 complete)
Total		29 (18 complete, 11 ongoing)

Note: Where projects achieved over 100% of their primary outcome target, projects have achieved more than forecasted in their best-case-scenario expectations.

²³ This table uses data self-reported by project leads in their end of grant forms. It was not possible to use data from the Life Chances Fund Data Portal, as there were gaps and different levels of granularity for projects' data.

OUTCOME PAYMENTS²⁴:

LCF outcome payment spent, as of September 2024:

£41,607,712

(85% of the £48.63m total funding committed to launched projects)

Combined Life Chances Fund and local commissioner outcome payments, as of September 2024:

£125,845,483

(77% of the £162,581,360 total funding committed to launched projects)

When ongoing and completed projects are considered separately, the outcome payments claimed (as a percentage of the maximum potential outcomes payments) from Life Chances Fund and local commissioners are:

18 complete projects:

91%

11 ongoing projects:

72%

²⁴ We include in our analysis figures reported by project leads on the Life Chances Fund Data Portal as of September 2024, the deadline set by the Fund for final submissions of outcomes achievement data and payment claims.

Table 2.
Committed and actual
outcome payments
by policy theme²⁵

Table 2 illustrates the amount of outcome payments (from Life Chances Fund and local commissioners) claimed by policy themes, as percentage of the maximum potential outcomes payments. It is worth noting here that we should not expect 100% of outcomes-related payments to be released across these projects, as some of them are still delivering services. Project costs and performance are further detailed in our Measuring results: data, outcomes achievement and insights from *Achieving Outcomes: Life Chances Fund Final Report*.

Policy theme	Number of projects in policy theme	Total maximum potential outcomes funding from LCF and local commissioners per policy theme	Total outcomes funding from LCF and local commissioners spent per policy theme	Percentage of outcomes funding achievement by policy sector
Children's services	5 (2 complete, 3 ongoing)	£37,995,361	£19,470,727	51%
Healthy lives	9 (5 complete, 4 ongoing)	£35,168,464	£25,578,243	73%
Drug and alcohol dependency	3 (2 complete, 1 ongoing)	£9,932,486	£8,939,542	90%
Young people	6 (5 complete, 1 ongoing)	£20,288,013	£17,754,799	88%
Other cross-cutting themes	2 (1 complete, 1 ongoing)	£39,410,917	£34,473,342	87%
Early years	3 (2 complete, 1 ongoing)	£18,976,119	£18,818,830	99%
Older people	1 (1 complete)	£810,000	£810,000	100%
Total	29 (18 complete, 11 ongoing)	£162,581,360	£125,845,483	77%

²⁵ The figures on actual outcome payments as of September 2024 were sourced from the Life Chances Fund Data Portal. These might differ from the figures that projects have reported internally, given that some local commissioners kept paying for outcomes after September 2024.

PART III. KEY FINDINGS FROM GO LAB'S EVALUATION OF THE LIFE CHANCES FUND

This section offers an overview of the main findings of our evaluation of the Life Chances Fund. It distils over half a decade of mixed-methods research²⁶. For concision, we have not included detailed information on the methodological approaches across the different strands of the evaluation. We strongly encourage readers to refer to the full evaluation reports for detailed information on the research approach and findings (see Appendix 2).

3

²⁶ This research was conducted over the course of nearly a decade by current and former members of the GO Lab team. Please refer to Appendix 2 for details of authorship for individual evaluation publications and to the Acknowledgements section at the end of this report.

Included in this section:

We start by setting the wider **context** within which the Life Chances Fund and its evaluation were designed and delivered.

This is followed by a **synthesis of the main findings**, structured around the four core original questions of our research:

- 1 What are the specific characteristics of the social outcomes partnership projects funded through the Life Chances Fund?
- 2 Did the social outcomes partnership approach make a difference to the outcomes achieved, compared to alternative commissioning models?
- 3 Through what mechanisms do social outcomes partnerships operate?
- 4 Do the benefits of a social outcomes partnership approach outweigh the costs?

We conclude this part of the report with some wider **reflections on the use of data** in the Life Chances Fund.

CONTEXT-SETTING

The Life Chances Fund was shaped by an ever-evolving policy context over the course of nearly a decade. This had a significant impact on our evaluation journey. The initial design of the Fund was greatly influenced by policy imperatives such as a strong commitment to growing the social investment market, using social investment as a force for social change²⁷, and enabling more voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to take part in multi-year outcomes-based contracts with the public sector.

At the time of launching the Life Chances Fund, the UK government could build on the experience of only about a dozen completed social outcomes partnerships (HMP Peterborough social impact bond, ten projects of the Innovation Fund at the Department for Work and Pensions and two London projects supporting rough sleepers).

Despite the limited empirical evidence, social outcomes partnerships were the subject of an incredibly polarised debate between supporters and detractors of the approach²⁸. Due to the scarcity of robust evidence, investment in high-quality evaluation of this innovative tool was central. Given the UK government's enthusiasm surrounding the approach, there was also a policy ambition to support practitioners with a view to a more extensive and sustainable ecosystem of practice.

A bold vision for reforming public services

The Life Chances Fund was launched as an opportunity to 'revolutionise our public services to focus on achieving positive outcomes for people' through the use of social outcomes partnerships. The Fund was at the heart of the government's ambition to grow the social outcomes partnership market to be worth £1 billion as part of the 'social investment revolution'.²⁹

As such the Fund was deliberately designed to increase the number and scale of social outcomes partnerships in England and was underpinned by an assumption that through greater familiarity with outcomes-based contracting models, 'it will become easier and quicker to set them up and there will be a much clearer picture of what works and what doesn't'.³⁰ At the same time, the government recognised that as a relatively new form of commissioning public services, adoption of social outcomes partnerships needed to be accompanied by high quality evidence on their impact and value for money. This was seen as key to informing and improving future policy and practice.

27 HM Government, 2016. Social investment: a force for social change - 2016 strategy

28 Carter, E. et al., 2018. Building the tools for public services to secure better outcomes: Collaboration, Prevention, Innovation

29 Wilson, R., Cabinet Office, 2016. The growth of social investment in the UK: Rob Wilson speech

30 Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2020. Life Chances Fund

It was in this context that the UK government commissioned the GO Lab to conduct an in-depth evaluation to understand the value of social outcomes partnerships as innovative commissioning tools designed to address entrenched social challenges, where traditional commissioning models had struggled. Alongside the team's evaluation work, the GO Lab was also tasked with actively engaging local and central government officials to improve understanding of the model and help strengthen local capacity to design robust projects. In the words of the Minister for Civil Society at the time, 'it is about central and local government, academia and the voluntary sector – all coming together to work at tackling some of the most entrenched social challenges we face'.³¹

Building on existing practice

Social outcomes partnerships were first pioneered in the UK, where the world's first such project – the HMP Peterborough social impact bond – was launched in 2010 to reduce recidivism. By 2016 when the Life Chances Fund was launched, the UK government had launched around 30 social outcomes partnerships, or social impact bonds as they were referred to at the time³². Most of these had been funded through dedicated programmes called outcomes funds, which were designed to catalyse the adoption at scale of social outcomes partnerships. By 2016, seven such outcomes funds had been launched in the UK by various government departments³³.

Most of these funds used a pre-defined outcomes framework, also called a 'rate card', to set out the metrics and level of payment central government was willing to pay, with outcomes payments made exclusively by central government. The Commissioning Better Outcomes

Fund, a £40 million outcomes fund set up by the National Lottery Community Fund and the Cabinet Office's Social Outcomes Fund, took a different approach – mandating the design of outcomes frameworks at local level and requiring co-payments for outcomes from local commissioning authorities. It was this co-commissioning model that the Life Chances Fund built on, with the National Lottery Community Fund acting as the Fund administrator on behalf of the UK government (the Department for Culture, Media and Sport).

While practice was growing, with the UK seen globally as a leader in the field, the evidence base around the effectiveness and value for money of these innovative approaches remained underdeveloped. At the time, most evaluations of social outcomes partnerships focused on the implementation or efficacy of specific interventions, often without robust quantitative impact evaluation. This is why a key focus of the Life Chances Fund evaluation was to clarify whether, where and how social outcomes partnerships add value when compared to more conventional public service provision.

Adaptation and evolution

By design, the Life Chances Fund afforded the projects it supported a great degree of flexibility. Local teams were able to identify the specific policy areas of focus, the outcomes metrics used, the partners involved and how their partnerships were to be managed at local level. This enabled the social outcomes partnerships to be stretched and flexed in response to a wide array of local circumstances and priorities, with significant variation in the way these partnerships worked in practice.

This heterogeneity across the Life Chances Fund projects made the evaluation more challenging but also richer, moving us away from a simplistic understanding of social outcomes partnerships as a financial mechanism, to seeing them as tools for more adaptive, accountable and person-centred cross-sector partnerships³⁴.

Nearly a decade on since the launch of the Life Chances Fund, the social outcomes partnership model continues to evolve in the UK and globally, with over three hundred such partnerships launched worldwide at the time of writing.



The UK government commissioned the GO Lab to conduct an in-depth evaluation to understand the value of social outcomes partnerships as innovative commissioning tools designed to address entrenched social challenges.

31 Wilson, R., Cabinet Office. 2016. Launch of Life Chances Fund: Rob Wilson speech

32 For an overview of outcomes funds in the UK, please see Anastasiu, A., Carter, E. and Airoidi, M. (eds.), 2024. The evolution of social outcomes partnerships in the UK

33 Government Outcomes Lab, n.d. INDIGO Outcomes Fund Directory

34 Anastasiu, A., Carter, E. and Airoidi, M. (eds.), 2024. The evolution of social outcomes partnerships in the UK

A responsive evaluation by design

Our evaluation of the Life Chances Fund was designed from the outset to be responsive, relevant and timely to inform both policymaking in the long term, as well as live practice on the ground as projects were being set up and implemented. Well before our Life Chances Fund evaluation strategy was formally launched in 2019, we had worked extensively with the UK government and other stakeholders in the field to understand the gaps in the existing evidence, refine our research questions and methodologies, and map opportunities for data collection (within and outside the Fund).

We designed our evaluation amid some uncertainty. The final number, size and specific focus of the projects that would be supported through the Fund remained uncertain. We also had to reckon with some substantive stumbling blocks along the way – from delays to the original timelines to a lack of access to suitable data in comparator sites outside the Life Chances Fund for our impact evaluation. There were other unforeseen challenges that we managed to turn into opportunity - for example, in 2020, following the onset of Covid-19 we worked with our UK government partners to quickly revise our evaluation approach to include an additional study on the ways in which the Life Chances Fund projects were impacted by and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic³⁵.

The evolution of the practice and understanding of social outcomes partnerships as tools for public sector reform also sparked new questions that we had not quite anticipated when we first set out our evaluation strategy. For example, our qualitative evaluation of the Kirklees Better Outcomes

Partnership has opened up a whole new area of research and government engagement around ‘formal-relational contracting’³⁶. Our initial research designs did not fully integrate the perspectives of programme participants, and we subsequently sought to support a peer-research project³⁷. Additionally, we have seen growing interest from the policy and practice communities in the long-term legacy or system-level implications of social outcomes partnerships, and this is a topic that we hope future research will investigate in an in-depth and systematic manner.

Finally, a seemingly superficial but important evolution has been seen in the terminology used to describe these outcomes-focused partnerships – from social impact bonds to social outcomes partnerships. As the UK government adopted the phrase ‘social outcomes partnerships’ in 2023, so did we. This is why our evaluation reports and knowledge resources published pre-2023 reference ‘social impact bonds’, but switch to ‘social outcomes partnerships’ from 2023 onwards. As explained in the introduction of this report, we use these two terms interchangeably.

When we launched our Life Chances Fund evaluation strategy, we began by reviewing the state of the evidence at the time, highlighting the ‘identification of relevant comparison against which to compare this new model for public service provision’ as a particular challenge in the evaluation of social outcomes partnerships³⁸. This was an obstacle that we were not immune to, and proved to be the most significant barrier in our efforts to identify and quantitatively measure the social outcomes partnership ‘effect’, as we explore further in the next section of this report.



A key focus of the Life Chances Fund evaluation was to clarify whether, where and how social outcomes partnerships add value when compared to more conventional public service provision.

35 FitzGerald, C. et al., 2021. An introduction to Life Chances Fund projects and their early adaptations to Covid-19: Life Chances Fund evaluation interim report

36 Carter, E. & Ball, N., 2023. Social outcomes contracting: seeding a more relational approach to contracts between government and the social economy? in Krlev, G. et al. ‘Social Economy Science and Making Society More Resilient’.

37 Rosenbach, F., Carter, E., van Lier, F.-A., Patouna, M., 2025. The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: ‘The final qualitative process evaluation report of the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership. Government Outcomes Lab, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

38 Carter, E., 2019. Evaluation Strategy for the Life Chances Fund

WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS FUNDED THROUGH THE LIFE CHANCES FUND?

This question was at the heart of what we call our 'primary evaluation', a longitudinal evaluation across the 29 projects, drawing on data from the Life Chances Fund Data Portal and a series of surveys of project stakeholders at key stages – project mobilisation (wave 1), during service delivery (wave 2), and after project completion (wave 3). In

future research, we hope to extend our analysis to identify common characteristics associated with successful or less successful achievements.

The findings stemming from our analysis of the data captured in the Life

Chances Fund Data Portal are discussed in-depth in the *Achieving Outcomes: Life Chances Fund Final Report* (and summarised in Part II of this report). Detailed discussion of the methodological approach and findings of the longitudinal survey is included in the Life Chances Fund evaluation intermediate and final data releases.³⁹

LIFE CHANCES FUND PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS' SURVEY

Elaine De Gruyter, Eleanor Carter,
Franziska Rosenbach & Madhu
Chauhan

Key resources:

- Government Outcomes Lab (2025) Life Chances Fund evaluation: final data release.
- Government Outcomes Lab (2023) Life Chances Fund intermediate evaluation: data release.

The responses to the longitudinal survey shed light on the implementation experience of the local commissioners and service provider organisations directly involved in the 29 projects supported by the Fund. Responses also capture how experiences and perceptions of social outcomes partnerships evolved over time.

The survey was conducted in three waves between August 2018 and July 2024. Over the three waves, a total of 673 survey invitations were sent, with a total of 271 responses.

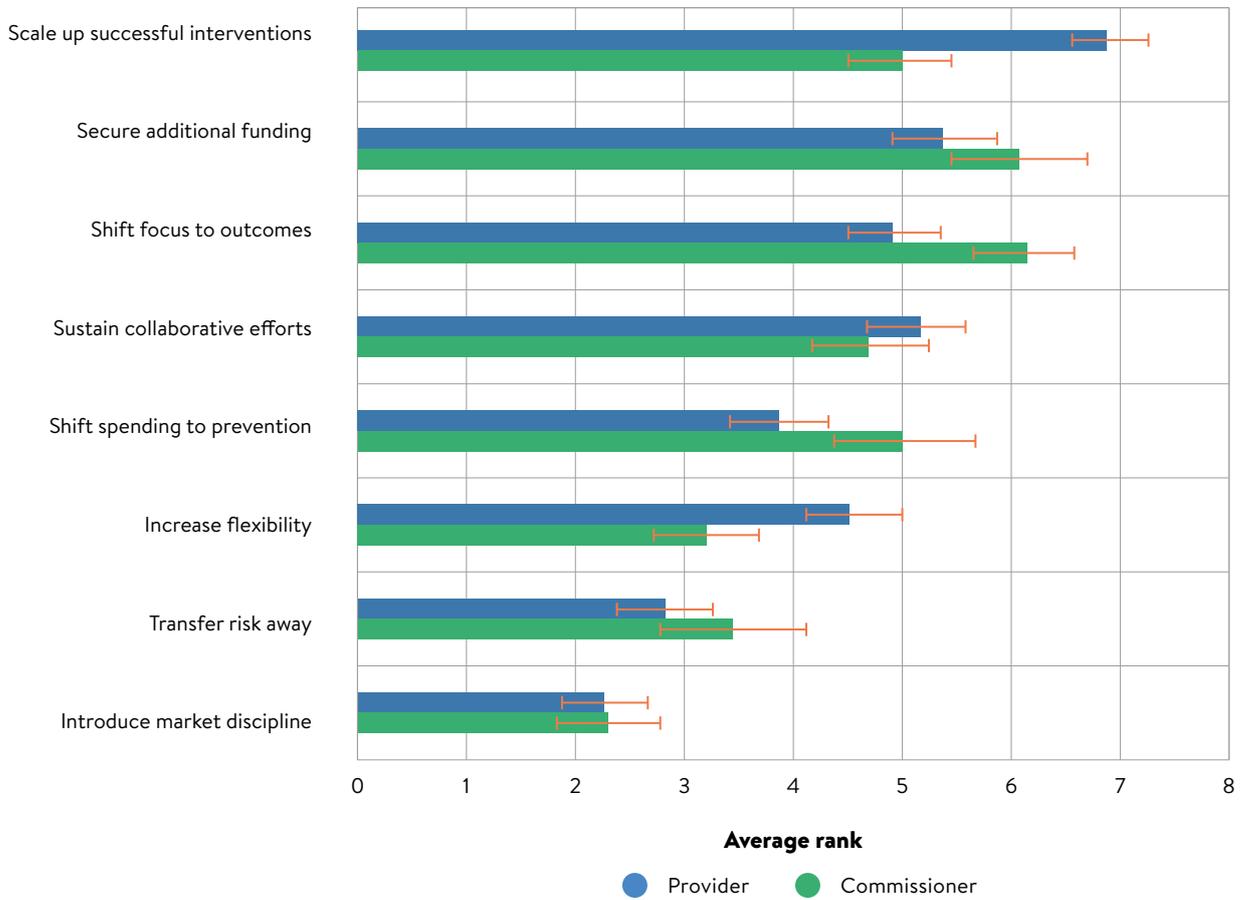
We include in this subsection some of the key findings coming out of the survey.

³⁹ Government Outcomes Lab, 2023. Life Chances Fund intermediate evaluation: data release & 2025. Life Chances Fund evaluation: final data release

Figure 8.
 Commissioner & provider
 rationales for using social
 outcomes partnerships

All respondents were asked to rank their priorities in terms of what they hoped to accomplish by using a social outcomes partnership, from 1 (lowest) to 8 (highest). The chart shows that providers rank the scaling of successful interventions as more important than seen in commissioner rankings. Commissioners rank a shift in focus to outcomes as key rationale. Base count: 120 respondents (72 providers; 48 commissioners).

Commissioner & provider rationale



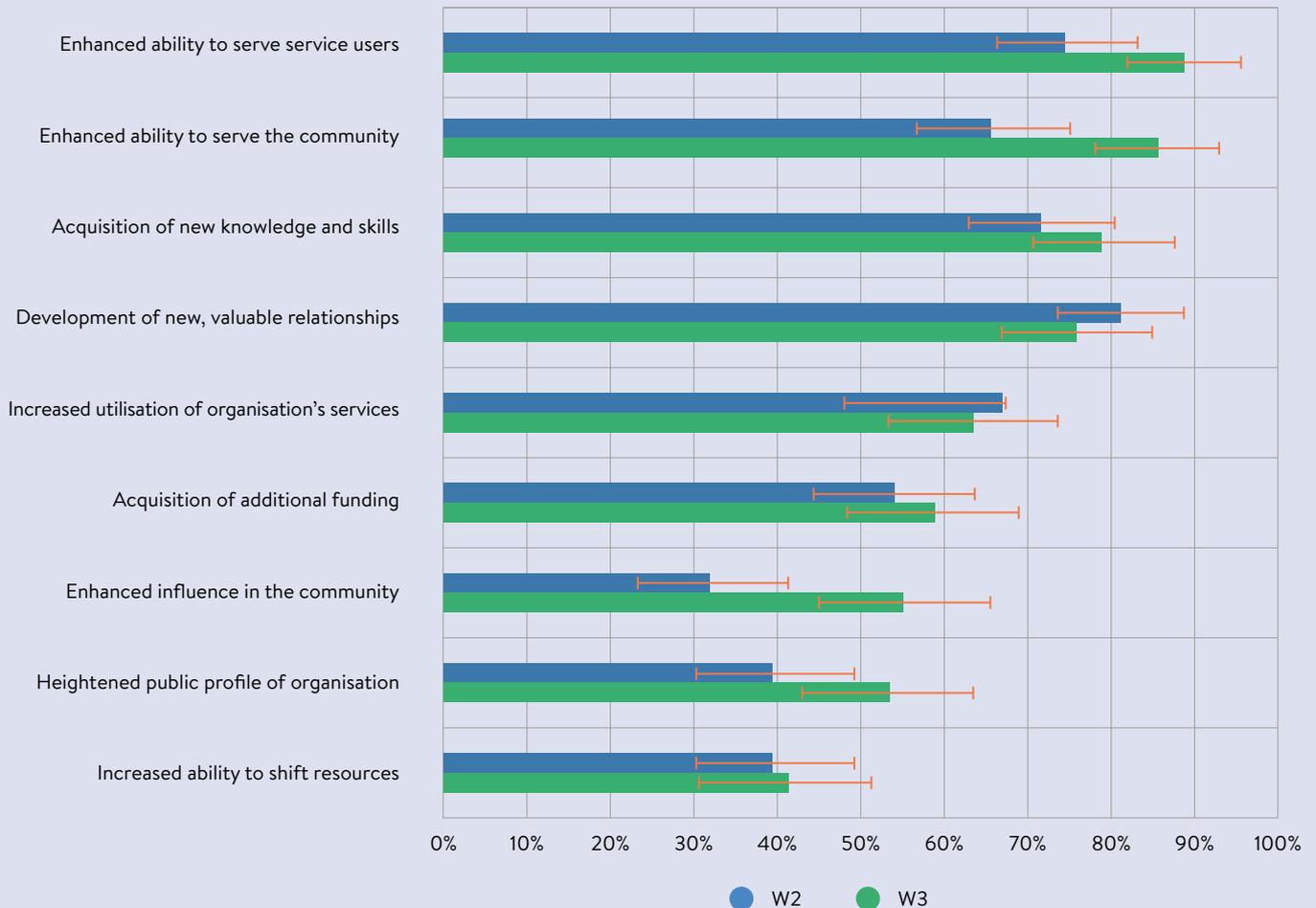
Benefits & drawbacks

The main benefits reported by respondents to the survey during implementation were the development of new, valuable relationships and the enhanced ability to serve service users. As projects approached completion, the final wave of the survey found that the top benefits reported by respondents were an enhanced ability to serve service users and an enhanced ability to serve the community. Relative to the previous wave, the final phase of the survey showed that respondents saw a significant increase in benefits that had occurred. This result was driven by providers, who generally perceived more benefits that had occurred compared to commissioners in the third wave of the survey.⁴⁰

Figure 9.
Benefits that occurred
in wave 2 and wave 3

This chart considers 107 respondents in wave 2 and 91 respondents in wave 3. All respondents were asked to ‘indicate whether the following possible benefits of your SIB have, in your opinion, already occurred, are expected to occur, or are not expected to occur.’ The chart shows that during implementation (wave 2) respondents ranked the development of new, valuable relationships as the highest benefit, followed by the enhanced ability to serve service users. At the end of the project (wave 3) the enhanced ability to serve service users became the highest ranked benefit, followed by enhance ability to serve the community.

Benefits

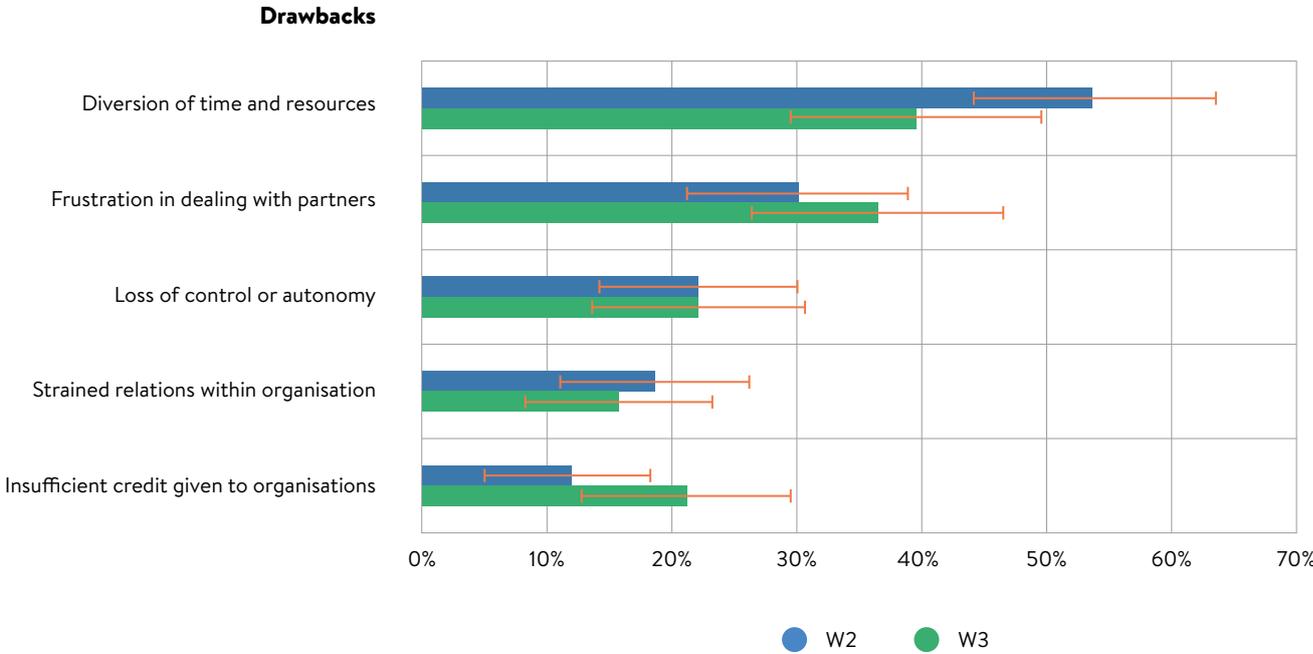


⁴⁰ Government Outcomes Lab, 2025. Life Chances Fund evaluation: final data release

The main drawback reported during implementation was the diversion of time and resources, which was reported across all organisation types and roles. Significantly more drawbacks were experienced by providers, although by the final wave of the survey, providers reported a reduction of 17 percentage points in the occurrence of diversion of time and resources, which may point to adaptation taking place within the project.

Figure 10.
Drawbacks that occurred in wave 2 and wave 3

This chart considers 107 respondents in wave 2 and 93 respondents in wave 3. All respondents were asked ‘indicate whether the following possible drawbacks of your SIB have, in your opinion, already occurred, are expected to occur, or are not expected to occur.’ The chart shows that the main drawback reported was the diversion of time and resources.



Trust & collaboration

For the stakeholders’ survey, trust between project stakeholders was considered using a set of academically established indicators.

Overall, there was general agreement amongst respondents that their project stakeholders are trustworthy. During implementation (wave 2) providers had significantly lower levels of trust than commissioners, but by the final wave there was no significant difference. The survey results also indicated that prior experience with outcomes-based contracting was associated with higher levels of trust.

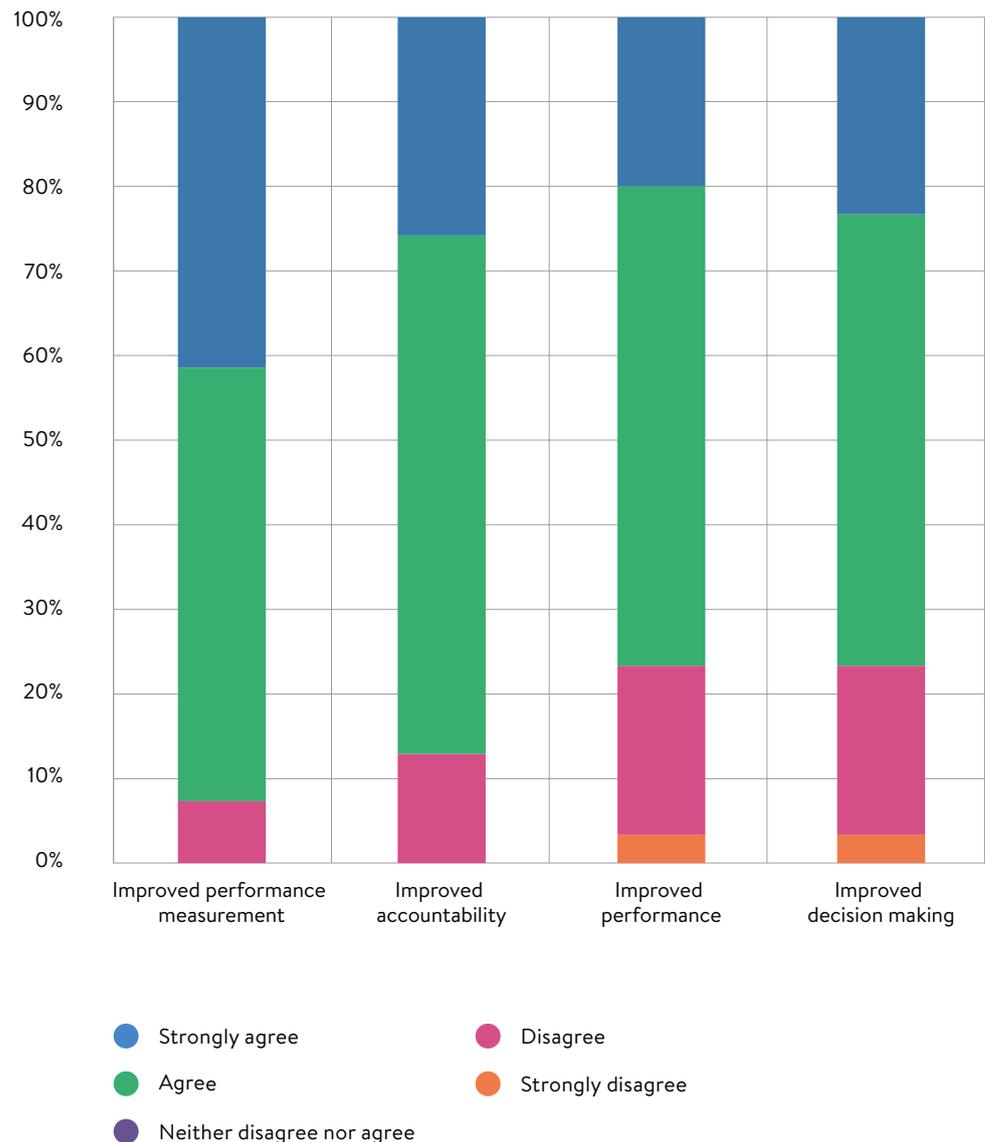
Figure 11.
Providers' perceptions of the impact of performance measurement, wave 3

This chart is based on 132 observations from providers in wave 3. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statements on performance measurement impacts on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The chart shows that most providers agreed (or strongly agreed) that performance measurement has a positive impact on all the assessed dimensions.

Performance management

The survey explored performance management across three dimensions: frequency of performance information use; information sharing; and the impact of performance management. It found that systematically collected performance information was used frequently and played an important role in making day to day decisions and allocating resources across all waves of the survey.

There was consensus among providers that performance measurement has brought more advantages than disadvantages, and there was general agreement that accountability, performance and decision-making improved mainly because of performance management in the social outcomes partnerships.



Legacy

The top three accomplishments of social outcomes partnerships supported by the Life Chances Fund, as reported by respondents in the final wave of the survey were:

- 1 **The scale up of successful interventions**
- 2 **Securing additional funding**
- 3 **A shift in focus to outcomes**

These were different from the top three expected accomplishments, as shared in the first wave of the survey, which were: 1. Introduce market discipline, 2. Transfer risk away, and 3. Increase flexibility. This change is consistent with the shift in emphasis from ‘social impact bonds’ and the innovative finance elements to ‘social outcomes partnerships’ and the relational nature of the collaboration.

In the final wave, providers and commissioners ranked similarly most actual accomplishments, but *shifting spending* to prevention is ranked significantly higher by commissioners, while *increased flexibility* is ranked significantly higher by providers.

Table 3.
Ranking of actual accomplishment in wave 3 – by stakeholder type

Accomplishment	Mean ranking			
	(1) Commissioners	(2) Providers	(3) Difference	(4) p-value
Shift focus to outcomes	3.9	3.3	-0.6	0.159
Transfer risk away	6.3	6.4	0.2	0.707
Shift spending to prevention	4.4	5.3	1.0	0.030**
Introduce market discipline	6.7	6.1	-0.6	0.092*
Scale up successful interventions	3.0	2.9	-0.1	0.748
Increase flexibility	5.2	4.1	-1.0	0.013**
Sustain collaborative efforts	3.7	3.9	0.2	0.636
Secure additional funding	2.9	4.0	1.1	0.051*
Observations	31	52	-	-

Respondents were asked “what have you accomplished by using a SIB”. Respondents were asked to rank the accomplishments from 1 (most important) to 8 (least important). (3) represents the difference between column (2) and (1). This chart shows that providers and commissioners ranked most actual accomplishments similarly, but shifting spending to prevention is ranked significantly higher by commissioners, while increased flexibility is ranked significantly higher by providers. *A p-value<0.10 indicates that there is less than 10% chance that the results are due to random chance (i.e. we are fairly confident there is a real effect); **A p-value<0.05 indicates there is less than 5% chance that the results are due to random chance (i.e. we are even more confident the effect is real). This is based on 83 respondents.

DID THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP APPROACH MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED, COMPARED TO ALTERNATIVE COMMISSIONING MODELS?

This overarching question was underpinned in our evaluation by three closely related questions, each addressed through a distinctive evaluation strand:

3.1

An impact evaluation

What is the impact of services commissioned by a social outcomes partnership on targeted social outcomes, compared to the outcomes achieved under a more conventional (non-outcome-based) commissioning approach?

P.47 - Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: impact evaluation

P.49 - Mental Health & Employment Partnership: understanding the social outcomes partnership effect through a 'dose-response' analysis

3.2

A process evaluation

Through what mechanisms do social outcomes partnerships operate?

P. 51 - Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: insights on the social outcomes partnership mechanisms

P. 53 - Mental Health and Employment Partnership: insights on the social outcomes partnership mechanisms

3.3

An economic analysis

Do the benefits of the social outcomes partnership approach outweigh the costs?

P. 56 - Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: cost effectiveness analysis

P. 58 - Mental Health & Employment Partnership: unpacking the transaction costs of the social outcomes partnership mechanism



Taken together, our findings suggest that well-designed and effectively managed partnerships can meaningfully improve outcomes through mechanisms such as enhanced flexibility for person-centred support, stronger performance management, targeted collaboration, and proactive market stewardship.

We discuss the key findings for each of these three strands in turn in the following section of this report.

We sought to address these questions through in-depth, mixed-methods evaluations of a small number of projects supported through the Life Chances Fund – namely, the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership and the Mental Health and Employment Partnership (which comprised five social outcomes partnership projects). This is what we refer to as our ‘supplementary evaluation’.

While the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership and the Mental Health and

Employment Partnership projects are very different, we did see from the respective qualitative evaluations of these projects some common themes emerging. We include in this report the main findings from the two evaluations, as well as discussion of some of the cross-cutting themes. Findings are particular to these project evaluation sites and, although they illuminate the mechanisms at play on these projects, they cannot simplistically be applied to the social outcome partnership model as a whole.

Challenges and limitations

In practice our ability to conduct evaluation work across these strands was significantly influenced by access to data and a fragmented data landscape in the UK public sector. We selected projects for in-depth longitudinal research due to four core features:

- Availability of a comparable, conventionally commissioned service or programme to act as a comparator to the social outcomes partnership (i.e. the availability of a counterfactual);
- Sufficiently large numbers of programme participants to achieve ‘statistical power’ – that is, to be confident that any differences in detected levels of outcome achievement between the social outcomes partnership and the comparator were not due to chance;
- Clear, routinised data collection processes amongst delivery teams to support access to detailed management information at a granular level (essential for any quantitative estimate of the social outcomes partnership effect);
- Enthusiastic commitment from those involved in delivering the social outcomes partnerships. Since the impact, process, and value-for-money evaluation would require data relating to multiple years of implementation, longstanding ‘buy-in’ to the evaluation from the social outcomes partnerships stakeholders was crucial.

These features were absent for many of the Life Chance Fund projects, and despite considerable scoping research (for example, with several children’s social care projects and other non-launched social outcomes partnerships), ultimately only the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership and the Mental Health and Employment Partnership projects became involved in mixed-method, longitudinal programmes of research.

AT A GLANCE:

THE KIRKLEES BETTER OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP



The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership (KBOP) was one of the 29 social outcomes partnerships delivered under the Life Chances Fund.

The project sought to improve accommodation, employment, stability and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable adults in Kirklees, West Yorkshire, in need of support to live independently. It focused on people who faced multiple challenges, including homelessness or the immediate risk of becoming homeless, mental health or substance misuse issues, experience of domestic abuse and offending. Delivery focused on personalised service provision, using a strengths-based approach that builds on the individual strengths, motivations, and personal ambition of the people supported.

KBOP brought together a network of nine providers under a single outcomes partnership - the largest in the UK to date - with support from a coordinating social investment fund manager - Bridges Outcomes Partnership. The local commissioner was Kirklees Council. The Council funded 70% of the total contract value for the outcome payments, with the remaining 30% covered by central government through co-funding

provided by the Life Chances Fund. Following the conclusion of the Life Chances Fund, Kirklees Council committed to continuing service provision under a new outcomes contract, retaining the same contractual model. However, the new arrangement will operate with significantly less funding, a scaled-down service and fewer service providers.

Under the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership, Kirklees Council moved from commissioning services under a fee-for-service model to using an outcomes-based contract. This provided a valuable opportunity to better understand how changing the payment model affects relationships, practices and outcomes when the same providers continue delivering the services. Our evaluation focused specifically on the Life Chances Fund-funded service provision and did not include any ongoing delivery following the conclusion of the Fund.

AT A GLANCE:

THE MENTAL HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP

The Mental Health and Employment Partnership (MHEP) was set up in 2015 to drive a large-scale expansion of high-quality supported employment programmes for people with mental health issues and other groups with health conditions and disabilities.

MHEP is a special purpose vehicle run by Social Finance, with investment from Big Issue Invest. Originally backed by outcomes fund support from the Commissioning Better Outcomes Fund and the Social Outcomes Fund, MHEP began as three projects in Tower Hamlets, Haringey, and Staffordshire.

Five MHEP social outcomes partnership projects were supported by the Life Chances Fund and were in scope for GO Lab's longitudinal evaluation. These include: Haringey and Barnet, Shropshire, Enfield, Tower Hamlets (Mental Health), and Tower Hamlets (Learning Disabilities).

The service provided through the Mental Health and Employment Partnership is based on the Individual Placement Support (IPS) model, which has been subject to rigorous national and international research demonstrating impact and is underpinned by a well-defined operating model. The service is based on a 'place then train' model which is

thought to be more effective than traditional approaches such as vocational training and sheltered work that are mainly formed around a 'train and place' model. The IPS service within MHEP predates and operates in addition to the national commitment to expanding IPS services in the NHS. The broader adoption of IPS in England has been supported by IPS Grow, which was commissioned by NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions and is managed by Social Finance.

The five Mental Health and Employment Partnership projects supported through the Life Chances Fund offered a promising longitudinal evaluation opportunity because the delivery arrangements bring the ability to assess the social outcomes partnership commissioning mechanism in comparison to other Individual Placement Support services which are funded through more traditional contracting arrangements.

3.1 AN IMPACT EVALUATION

What is the impact of services commissioned by a social outcomes partnership on targeted social outcomes, compared to the outcomes achieved under an alternative commissioning approach?

3.1 AN IMPACT EVALUATION

KIRKLEES BETTER OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP: IMPACT EVALUATION

Maria Patouna, Elaine De Gruyter & Eleanor Carter

Key resource: Patouna, M., De Gruyter, E., and Carter, E., 2025. Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: Understanding the Effects of Person-Centred Service Reforms in Housing Support

Our impact evaluation of the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership focused on the effect of the Person-led, Transitional and Strength-Based (PTS)-inspired⁴¹ intervention on employment, earnings and the use of housing-related benefits among the programme participants, compared to those who received the conventional support prior to the programme.

A quasi-experimental research design was implemented to estimate the intervention's causal effect on employment and housing outcomes. It drew on data from KBOP and pre-KBOP legacy service providers, linked to administrative records from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The study tracked individuals' employment and housing benefit trajectories over a five-year period, covering two years pre-intervention, the intervention year and two years post-intervention. Propensity Score Matching (PSM⁴²) was used to construct a matched comparison group between the KBOP and pre-KBOP cohorts based on individuals' pre-intervention characteristics (including demographics, employment history and benefit receipt) and estimate the average treatment effect of KBOP's PTS-inspired intervention.

The evaluation provides compelling evidence that the KBOP intervention had a positive impact on participants' employment and housing outcomes, particularly among those facing significant structural barriers to the labour market. Compared to their

matched pre-KBOP counterparts, participants supported under KBOP were significantly more likely to either sustain existing employment or begin a new job within six months of programme entry, with effects persisting into the first and second years post-intervention (KBOP participants were also 5 and 6 percentage points more likely to be in work, within the first and second year post-intervention respectively).

The intervention was also associated with a 5 percentage-point increase in the likelihood of sustaining employment for up to six consecutive months, signalling stronger and more durable labour market engagement. While average earnings were higher among KBOP participants – by £518 in year one and £402 in year two – these differences were not statistically significant. Subgroup analysis showed the greatest benefits among older individuals, long-term unemployed participants, and those with histories of disability-related benefit receipt, highlighting KBOP's ability to engage people with more complex support needs.

⁴¹ In this report, "PTS" refers to an adapted version of this model delivered by KBOP. While drawing on the core principles of PTS, such as flexibility, holistic support, and a focus on individual strengths and ambitions, the KBOP approach incorporated elements of structured professional support. Specifically, support workers played a more active role, offering advice and guidance around accommodation and related challenges, in recognition of the fact that participants were typically referred in situations of acute housing need. Expert input was considered necessary to prevent further deterioration of participants' circumstances. While still person-centred and strengths-based, the KBOP model also allowed practitioners to exercise professional judgement, including encouraging or constructively challenging decisions where these were likely to affect key outcomes, such as progression in education, training, or employment. As such, the intervention is best understood as a PTS-inspired approach, rather than a direct implementation of the original PTS model.

⁴² Propensity Score Matching is a statistical technique used in evaluations to construct a control group that is as similar as possible to the group receiving an intervention, based on observable characteristics such as age, employment history, and benefit receipt. It allows evaluators to more confidently attribute differences in outcomes to the intervention itself, rather than to pre-existing differences between groups.

On housing outcomes, KBOP participants were 6 to 10 percentage points more likely to sustain non-receipt of the Universal Credit's housing component (Universal Credit Housing Element - UCHE) for up to 18 consecutive months. Among those who stopped receiving UCHE, KBOP participants were 6–8 percentage points less likely to return to any form of housing benefit during the follow-up period, suggesting a movement away from temporary or supported accommodation. Although no statistically significant differences were found in Housing Benefit receipt alone, this likely reflects broader structural shifts in the national housing policy and support system over time.

Taken together, these findings indicate that KBOP made a meaningful contribution to improving employment stability and reducing benefit dependency among a highly disadvantaged population – many of whom are understood to be furthest from the labour market.⁴³ Please note these findings should be understood in the broader context and the limitations of the research and analysis work, as described in detail in the main report.⁴⁴



The evaluation provides compelling evidence that the KBOP intervention had a positive impact on participants' employment and housing outcomes, particularly among those facing significant structural barriers to the labour market.

⁴³ Please note that KBOP served individuals facing multiple and overlapping disadvantage, including homelessness, mental ill-health, substance misuse, learning disabilities and histories of (re)offending. These are groups typically furthest from the labour market and independent living, for whom sustained progress is difficult to achieve.

⁴⁴ Patouna, M., De Gruyter, E., and Carter, E., 2025. Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: Understanding the Effects of Person-Centred Service Reforms in Housing Support

3.1 AN IMPACT EVALUATION

MENTAL HEALTH & EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP EFFECT THROUGH A ‘DOSE-RESPONSE’ ANALYSIS

**Emily Hulse, Eve Grennan,
Mara Airoidi & Eleanor Carter**

Key resources:

- Hulse, E., Grennan, E., Airoidi, M., Carter, E., 2025. The Mental Health and Employment Partnership: the final evaluation of the Life Chances Fund outcomes partnerships
- Hulse, E., Nagarajan, S., Carter, E., 2024. Mental Health and Employment Partnership: second interim report as part of the LCF Evaluation
- Hulse, E., Shiva, M., Hameed, T. and Carter, E., 2023. Mental Health and Employment Partnership LCF Evaluation

Most social outcomes partnerships adopt a ‘black box’ model, allowing significant discretion in defining the service and how outcomes are achieved. By contrast, the MHEP projects supported by the Life Chances Fund mandated the delivery of Individual Placement and Support (IPS).

IPS is a very structured intervention, which mandates how support should be provided. It includes the requirement to integrate employment specialists in mental health teams to support the return to work of people experiencing mental health issues. It is based on the evidence that ‘place then train’ principles are more effective than traditional approaches such as vocational training and sheltered work. IPS has expanded in England through NHS provision, but it has experienced operational challenges, in particular in terms of data quality, data flows, investments, contracting and staffing arrangements⁴⁵. Social outcomes partnerships have been explored as a tool to address the operational challenges.

Due to barriers to accessing data for sites that delivered IPS through traditional grants at the same time as the MHEP social outcomes partnerships, it was not possible to determine how the presence or absence of a social outcomes partnership payment structure (compared to traditional commissioning) impacts outcome performance. However, our qualitative research identified hypotheses on how a social outcomes partnership approach may generate impact, particularly through the role of performance management and the performance-linked financial incentives. We could hence exploit these differences statistically with a dose-response analysis. Dose-response

analysis investigates whether higher levels or intensity (the “dose”) of a particular intervention or incentive lead to better or quicker outcomes (the “response”). In the Life Chances Fund context, it explores whether increased financial incentives or stronger performance management lead to improved outcomes for participants.

The dose-response exploratory analysis found that for every £1,000 increase in outcome payment there was about 20% increased likelihood of outcomes achievement, and the employment outcome was achieved faster. The reverse also applies. However, this does not simply mean that greater financial input automatically results in more outcomes from service providers. Although the effect was statistically significant for the MHEP social outcomes partnerships, the analysis also indicated that more data is needed before it can be used to make predictions.

The qualitative analysis revealed that the important factor was the intermediary who translated the hard incentives (higher value outcome payments) into softer encouragements (e.g. drawing out intrinsic motivation, articulating personal bests) for service providers, via more relational and operational support. Thus, the incentives work less through hard-edge financial pressures on service providers and more through the motivation and accountability anchored by the intermediaries.

⁴⁵ NHS England, 2023. Individual placement and support for severe mental illness. URL <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/individual-placement-and-support-for-severe-mental-illness>

3.2 A PROCESS EVALUATION

Through what mechanisms do social outcomes partnerships operate?

The mechanisms through which social outcomes partnerships are expected to affect change are specific to each local partnership. Some outcome partnerships – such as KBOP – have adopted a ‘black box’ model which gives implementing teams considerable flexibility to test and adapt the nature of services in response to feedback and learning. Other social outcomes partnerships – such as MHEP – adopt a more tightly defined service, in the expectation that the outcomes-focus will act as an enabler to other areas of practice improvement and performance management.

The social outcomes partnership mechanisms of change may also operate by altering the behaviour of different stakeholders. For example, for frontline staff in KBOP the flexibility of the outcomes approach was implemented alongside a leadership model that enabled staff to more deeply listen to and engage with programme participants to take a more person-centred approach to support. Alternatively, practice shifts may occur through the exchange of learning and best practice amongst team leaders (as seen in MHEP). At the senior leadership level, accountability shifts in some social outcomes partnerships enabled service directors to alter the configuration of multiple service providers to increase the involvement of better performing delivery organisations within a service network.

3.2 A PROCESS EVALUATION

KIRKLEES BETTER OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP: INSIGHTS ON THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP MECHANISMS

Franziska Rosenbach, Felix-Anselm van Lier & Eleanor Carter

Key resources:

- Rosenbach, F., van Lier, F-A., Patouna, M., Carter, E., 2025. The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: The final report of a longitudinal evaluation of a Life Chances Fund outcomes partnership.
- Rosenbach, F., van Lier, F-A., Domingos, F.D. & Carter, E., 2023. The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: The second report of a longitudinal evaluation of a Life Chances Fund Impact Bond
- Rosenbach, F. & Carter, E., 2020. Kirklees Integrated Support Service and Better Outcomes Partnership: The first report from a longitudinal evaluation of a Life Chances Fund impact bond

We conducted a five-year research study investigating how using a social outcomes partnership influenced the management approaches and practices of the Council, providers and frontline service delivery in the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership. The evaluation compared the social outcomes partnership model with the Council's previous commissioning approach, a traditional fee-for-service model.

Both contracts covered housing support for people experiencing multiple and complex disadvantage and were delivered by the same providers (except one which exited the social outcomes partnership contract early in delivery).

We identified four mechanisms by which the social outcomes partnership approach contributed to changed services and improved social outcomes:

- 1 Enhanced market stewardship
- 2 Strengthened and data-led performance management
- 3 Cultivation of cross-provider collaboration
- 4 Enhanced flexibility and personalisation of frontline services.

Market stewardship

By market stewardship, we mean the commissioner's role to create the conditions in which the market will deliver the desired outcomes of the service. In the KBOP project, Kirklees Council was the commissioner. Market stewardship was stronger under KBOP than under the previous contract because actions by the KBOP 'social prime' (see box on the right) enhanced constructive competition, improved

transparency on performance and demand, and created opportunities for more coordination in service provision through contractual arrangements. In practice, KBOP filled important gaps in the Council's ability to effectively steward the market.

Social prime (Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership⁴⁶): A 'social prime' is an independent organisation that coordinates and oversees service delivery by multiple service providers as an intermediary. It mediates between the service providers and the contracting authority (Kirklees Council), advocating for the providers and co-developing solutions. Responsibilities include holding the contracts, tracking performance, and ensuring outcomes are met. It can also be known as a network orchestrator or a partnership co-ordinator.

⁴⁶ Please note 'Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership' is the name of the social prime organisation, but also the title used to refer more generally to the Life Chances Fund-supported project. For more information on the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership organisation, please see: <https://www.kirkleesbetteroutcomespartnership.org>

The social prime ensured strong performance oversight by proactively monitoring providers' performance, applying strengthened quality standards and supporting underperforming providers with targeted performance improvement plans. KBOP's market stewardship was bolstered by its local knowledge and credibility, the trust it fostered with providers, and its ability to influence delivery by leveraging data for informed decision-making. As an independent intermediary, it also mediated between the Council and providers, helping shape the care and support market by responding to provider perspectives and service insights. KBOP invested significant capacity into proactive market oversight and provider support so it could perform these functions.

Though market stewardship is traditionally seen as a public sector role, delegating it to an external organisation enabled this more proactive oversight – but also introduced the risk of the Council becoming more detached from shaping the service delivery landscape. A concern raised was that reduced direct engagement between the commissioner and providers might limit the Council's opportunities to directly assess service challenges, respond to provider needs and ensure alignment with broader public service priorities.

Performance management

Collaborative performance management was partially enabled by the social outcomes contract, which provided the framework for stakeholder alignment and established shared accountability across providers. KBOP's performance management approach relied on managerial tools like its centralised data and performance system, which enabled timely responses to performance issues and facilitated the sharing of best practice across providers.

However, some stakeholders felt it was challenging to balance KBOP's user-centred strengths-based approach with adherence to outcomes-driven targets and their accountability requirements.

Effective performance management relied on a culture of trust, shared learning and proactive engagement, fostered through the social prime, which helped mitigate pressure and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders.

Collaboration

Collaboration among service providers was significantly greater under KBOP than under the legacy fee-for-service contract. A key driver of this improvement was the establishment of the social prime as a dedicated network coordinator responsible for collaboration through structured governance and relationship-building. The social prime facilitated a collaborative infrastructure by building trust-based relationships, ensuring transparent governance, convening regular meeting and training sessions, and creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and collective learning.

Another key enabler of increased collaboration was the shared outcomes framework (pre-agreed outcomes shared across providers), which aligned provider goals and fostered collaboration at managerial levels, while simultaneously spurring some competition among frontline staff.

However, enhanced collaboration was felt more strongly at the managerial level than amongst frontline staff. Despite the overall improvement in collaboration, uncertainty towards the end of the social outcomes partnership contract created challenges. As providers anticipated the transition of the contract ending, organisational self-preservation took precedence over collective goals, weakening the collaborative ethos that had been cultivated. Provider staff expressed concerns over diminished cooperation and resurging competitive pressures that impacted staff morale and trust.

Flexibility & personalisation

Compared with the previous fee-for-service model, the outcomes partnership provided enhanced flexibility in service provision. This was

partially driven by the 'personalisation fund', a £250,000 fund which enabled case workers to tailor support to the service user. For example, it could be used to purchase one-off items to support participants to achieve their goals or to drive wider service innovations. Survey data indicated frontline staff were significantly more able to shape their support than they had been under fee-for-service models.

Staff capacity was developed through strengths-based training that emphasised professional discretion and user empowerment, and tailored caseworker support was enhanced by specialist services like mental health experts. User voice was amplified through the co-production interventions of peer mentoring and user involvement in service development, including focus groups and staff recruitment.

The outcomes-based contracting model provided a structured framework that clarified expectations and enhanced accountability while maintaining light-touch service specifications, thus enabling user-focused and flexible service delivery.

The implementation of the outcomes framework relied on ongoing calibration of a strengths-based approach and on maintaining accountability through evidence requirements. On some occasions, evidence requirements strained staff-user relationships or failed to align with user interests. Some staff felt that the pre-defined outcomes conflicted with service users' primary interests. Mean caseload size increased under KBOP; this may have also posed challenges to delivering highly personalised support, as staff had to balance flexibility with workload demands. However, some workload mitigation was possible through adaptable service delivery approaches. Despite growing reporting requirements under the social outcomes partnership, survey data indicated no overall increase in time spent on administrative tasks amongst case workers.

3.2 A PROCESS EVALUATION

MENTAL HEALTH AND EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP: INSIGHTS ON THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP MECHANISMS

Emily Hulse, Eve Grennan,
Mara Airoidi & Eleanor Carter

Key resources:

- Hulse, E., Grennan, E., Airoidi, M., Carter, E., 2025. The Mental Health and Employment Partnership: the final evaluation of the Life Chances Fund outcomes partnerships
- Hulse, E., Nagarajan, S., Carter, E., 2024. Mental Health and Employment Partnership: second interim report as part of the LCF Evaluation
- Hulse, E., Shiva, M., Hameed, T. and Carter, E., 2023. Mental Health and Employment Partnership LCF Evaluation

At the beginning of the MHEP social outcomes partnerships supplementary evaluation, we developed a theory of change to understand the hypothesised mechanisms through which these social outcomes partnerships were expected to improve IPS outcomes.⁴⁷ Stakeholders identified three possible underlying mechanisms: (1) additional financial and human resources, (2) collaborative working, and (3) enhanced performance management.

The qualitative research explored how these mechanisms operated in practice in the social outcomes partnerships⁴⁸ and compared it to the experience of providers delivering IPS through traditional contracts⁴⁹.

Additional financial and human resources

Involved stakeholders assumed the social outcomes partnership would increase provider capacity through access to additional funding made available by the Life Chances Fund, and as a result, support higher quality provision than traditionally commissioned IPS.

The qualitative analysis shows that the social outcomes partnership allowed providers to increase local capacity and hire additional employment specialists, providing greater financial security compared to traditional commissioning routes. However, increased funding also brought higher expectations and administrative demands due to rigorous outcome monitoring, which some providers felt intensified workload pressures.

Collaborative working

A second hypothesis put forward in the theory of change was that the social outcomes partnership structure would create a more integrated, three-way partnership between provider, commissioner, and intermediary (MHEP, managed by Social Finance).

The evidence shows that providers strongly valued the collaborative working facilitated by MHEP. Regular communication and structured meetings reduced provider isolation and enhanced strategic alignment among stakeholders. Nevertheless, complexity in contractual and payment structures sometimes weakened mission alignment and diluted collaborative potential, indicating a clear opportunity to simplify partnership frameworks.

Additional performance management function

Stakeholders expected the social outcomes partnership to improve performance management through regular oversight and better use of data.

⁴⁷ Hulse, E., Shiva, M., Hameed, T. and Carter, E., 2023. Mental Health and Employment Partnership LCF Evaluation

⁴⁸ Hulse, E., Nagarajan, S., Carter, E., 2024. Mental Health and Employment Partnership: second interim report as part of the LCF Evaluation

⁴⁹ Hulse, E., Grennan, E., Airoidi, M., Carter, E., 2025 The Mental Health and Employment Partnership: the final evaluation of the Life Chances Fund outcomes partnerships

The evaluation shows that social outcomes partnership providers experienced structured and consistent performance monitoring, that was usually welcomed as supportive and beneficial. The approach promoted data-driven decision-making and improved service fidelity. However, as already mentioned, the complexity of reporting and evidence requirements created confusion and administrative burdens, potentially undermining performance motivation and the clarity of performance incentives.

A fundamental finding of the qualitative interviews is that financial incentives are most effective when directed at the intermediary level. Providers' incentives from the MHEP social outcomes partnerships' performance-based payments are more muted than expected and at times were understood differently by different stakeholders. Providers derive greater motivation from mission pride, personal bests, and efficiency and autonomy gains. Staff of the socially-motivated service providers did not appear to be influenced by (or consistently aware of) the financial incentives articulated by the outcome payments and instead described an intrinsic motivation to support IPS clients.

Instead, our evaluation finds that the effective financial incentive in MHEP social outcomes partnerships sits with the performance management team in Social Finance, the intermediary. The intermediary translated the financial incentives they received into softer incentives, which respected the intrinsic motivation of the providers. With the knowledge that front-line staff are not motivated by financial outcomes payments, the intermediary must find a way to encourage behavioural change among provider staff, if and when necessary to lead to better outcomes.

The intermediary did respond to financial incentives through outcomes payments, investor scrutiny, and pressure of reputational success to drive to the achievement of outcomes. Therefore, it can be suggested the performance of the MHEP social outcomes partnerships (as defined through effective incentives on performing pre-defined outcomes) is contingent on an intermediary (such as Social Finance in this case) acting as 'coaches' rather than 'referees'. Instead of simply passing financial pressure down to front-line service providers, intermediaries used the outcome-based funding structure to encourage providers positively. They motivated service providers by setting achievable targets, sharing helpful performance insights, and emphasising their shared social mission. This relational approach ensured front-line staff remained intrinsically motivated, preventing them from feeling demotivated or pressured by purely financial incentives.

The translation of "hard" to "soft" incentives is a key finding. In fact, the academic literature on financial incentives to drive performance highlights the risk of crowding-out intrinsic motivation⁵⁰. Monetary incentives are seen as demotivating and rewarding a transactional attitude to tasks, creating tensions and damping the intrinsic motivation of actors wishing to "do good". In the MHEP social outcomes partnerships, the intermediary responded to the financial incentives but also acted as a buffer between financial pressures and service delivery, protecting the muted incentives of the providers and avoiding the crowding out.



The intermediary translated the financial incentives they received into softer incentives, which respected the intrinsic motivation of the providers.

⁵⁰ Ariely, D. et al., 2009. Doing Good or Doing Well? Image Motivation and Monetary Incentives in Behaving Prosocially

3.3 AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Do the benefits of the social outcomes partnership approach outweigh the costs?

3.3 AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

KIRKLEES BETTER OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP: COST EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSIS

Maria Patouna, Elaine De Gruyter & Eleanor Carter

- Key resource: Patouna, M., De Gruyter, E., and Carter, E., 2025. Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: Understanding the Effects of Person-Centred Service Reforms in Housing Support

Our cost effectiveness analysis of the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership project asked: Was the PTS-inspired intervention delivered under an outcomes-based contract cost-effective when compared to the legacy fee-for-service housing support in Kirklees?

The analysis followed HM Treasury guidance⁵¹ and was conducted from the perspective of a government commissioner aiming to maximise employment and housing outcomes within a constrained budget. It compared aggregate per-person costs and effects across the two models (the social outcomes partnership-backed person-centred support and the preceding fee-for-service arrangements), drawing on both monetary outcomes (earnings) and non-monetary outcomes (time in employment and receipt of housing-related benefits).

Costs were classified into three categories:

- 1 programme delivery costs,
- 2 transaction costs, and
- 3 other relevant costs.

Cost data were drawn from contract documents, financial records, and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in local and central government. Effectiveness was measured in terms of earnings from employment, cumulative time in employment, and housing benefit receipt. Outcome data were estimated using linked datasets that combine provider-reported management information with administrative records held by DWP.

The cost-effectiveness analysis reinforced the findings discussed in the 'impact evaluation' section of this report. While the total net present cost (NPC) of KBOP was higher than the pre-KBOP model (£23.2 million vs. £17.8 million), this difference reflects the inclusion of additional cost categories—such as programme set-up, evaluation, central government coordination, and digital infrastructure. Crucially, because KBOP supported more participants, the NPC per person was lower (£3,236 vs. £4,856).

In terms of outcomes, KBOP participants earned more over the three-year period (£29,288 vs. £25,776), spent more time in employment (26 vs. 24 months), and relied less on housing-related benefits. A greater proportion were also employed at some point during the follow-up (33% vs. 29%), consistent with the programme's emphasis on early and sustained steps into work. Incremental cost-effectiveness ratios (ICERs) suggest that for every additional £1 in earnings, KBOP cost £0.46 less per person; each additional month in employment cost £639 less; and each avoided month of housing support cost £510 less than under the legacy model.

⁵¹ HM Treasury, 2020. Magenta Book: Central Government Guidance on Evaluation & 2022. Guidance: The Green Book

Importantly, KBOP targeted a wider range of outcomes than its predecessor – including mental health, wellbeing, education, and recovery from substance misuse – none of which were systematically addressed or measured under the pre-KBOP model. Despite the legacy programme’s specific housing remit, KBOP delivered stronger housing-related results at lower unit cost, suggesting that its holistic, strength-based approach was better suited to addressing participants’ complex and interrelated needs.

Overall, the findings suggest that pairing outcomes-based contracting with a person-centred, asset-based support model can lead to earlier and more sustained progress in employment and reduced benefit dependency. Compared to the legacy fee-for-service model, KBOP delivered improved outcomes at lower per-person cost. These results offer valuable insights for other local authorities and government departments considering the case for scaling similar partnerships and investing in more effective, person-led public services.

The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership case study demonstrates the potential of innovative partnership models to improve social outcomes at lower marginal cost, particularly when combined with holistic, person-centred approaches to service delivery. While the evaluation indicates earlier and more sustained engagement in employment and reduced benefit dependency among disadvantaged groups, it also highlights the inherent complexities of evaluating social interventions in practice – particularly regarding data access, attribution of outcomes, and long-term tracking.

Rather than offering a definitive judgement on value for money, this analysis reinforces the need for strong data infrastructure and rigorous evaluation methods. As governments continue to explore outcomes-based commissioning, ongoing learning, evidence generation, and adaptive implementation will be critical to maximising impact and ensuring public value.



Overall, the findings suggest that pairing outcomes-based contracting with a person-centred, asset-based support model can lead to earlier and more sustained progress in employment and reduced benefit dependency. Compared to the legacy fee-for-service model, KBOP delivered improved outcomes at lower per-person cost.

3.3 AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

MENTAL HEALTH & EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP: UNPACKING THE TRANSACTION COSTS OF THE SOCIAL OUTCOMES PARTNERSHIP MECHANISM

Emily Hulse, Eve Grennan,
Mara Airoidi & Eleanor Carter

Key resources:

- Hulse, E., Grennan, E., Airoidi, M., Carter, E., 2025. The Mental Health and Employment Partnership

While the economic evaluation of the MHEP social outcomes partnerships could not quantitatively assess the cost effectiveness of the social outcomes partnership mechanism due to the absence of a suitable counterfactual, we could generate insights on the transaction costs associated with these social outcomes partnerships. The transaction costs refer to the costs of managing the social outcomes partnership mechanism and include the cost of finding and negotiating (or renegotiating) terms with stakeholders, monitoring the implementation of the contract and enforcing its terms if necessary.

The key qualitative insights from the evaluation are included below:

1 The transaction costs that could be monetised were lower than anticipated: on initial analysis, total monetisable transaction costs were approximately **6% lower than anticipated**, driven mainly by lower-than-forecast investment costs.

2 Complexity is a key cost driver: the complexity of contractual arrangements—such as detailed reporting requirements, multiple stakeholder relationships, and intricate payment mechanisms—drove higher transaction costs. For example, the requirement for providers to frequently collect detailed evidence of outcomes (such as sustained employment periods) increased administrative workload and required additional oversight and clarification from intermediaries. Nonetheless, deliberate attempts at standardisation and the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) structure did help mitigate some transaction costs, indicating nuanced dynamics worth further exploration.



The complexity of contractual arrangements—such as detailed reporting requirements, multiple stakeholder relationships, and intricate payment mechanisms—drove higher transaction costs.

3

Efficiency gains versus managerial effort:

efficiency improvements

emerged over time due to automation, standardisation, and cumulative experience. Yet, despite these efficiency gains, overall management costs remained higher than initially forecasted. Significant management effort continued to be invested in maintaining stakeholder relationships, clarifying incentives, and building and sustaining trust among partners.

4

Provider incentives and intermediary role:

contractual complexity

significantly affected managerial stakeholders. However, frontline staff were largely shielded from contractual details by the intermediary, who effectively translated financial incentives into simpler, outcome-focused goals. This buffering role by intermediaries was critical in preserving frontline staff motivation and effectiveness, despite underlying contractual complexity.

5

Performance fluctuations and payment caps:

Payment caps (limits on the total

payments providers or intermediaries could receive for achieving outcomes within a given period of time, which were often set annually) had unintended consequences. Once caps were reached, intermediaries prioritised supporting projects still eligible for outcome payments. This meant that some providers received less proactive support once the cap was reached, potentially limiting ongoing improvements and outcomes.

6

Forecasting challenges**and uncertainty:** accurate

forecasting was complicated by inherently complex needs of clients served by the programme. This intrinsic uncertainty, combined with external events (notably Covid-19), directly contributed to higher-than-expected management costs. Structured, data-driven management was valuable but had to be supplemented by ongoing qualitative discussions to adapt to these uncertainties.

7

Reconciling outcomes with financial models:

efforts required to reconcile

forecasted outcomes with actual performance directly increased transaction costs. Improved baseline documentation and clearer initial assumptions could significantly reduce these costs in future projects.

These qualitative findings indicate that while the social outcomes partnership approach introduces distinctive transaction costs and complexities, particularly around stakeholder management and contractual design, it also demonstrates valuable mechanisms to preserve frontline motivation and responsiveness.



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REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF DATA IN THE LIFE CHANCES FUND

Juliana Outes Velarde &
Mara Airoidi

A critical strength of the Life Chances Fund Data Portal was its ability to record granular data on actual social outcomes, providing information on metrics like wellbeing improvements, sustained employment, reduced homelessness, and decreased recidivism. Capturing granular data across such a diverse set of outcome measures is a tremendous achievement for the UK government.

For most social programmes, it is difficult to access such detailed data on ultimate participant outcome achievements. It is easier to access data on budgets, allocated funding and resources, but data on actual outcomes is hard to find. By contrast, the final outcomes can be very well described for each of the 29 social outcomes partnerships supported by the Life Chances Fund. While comprehensive in capturing final outcomes, the data systems within the Fund had some limitations, particularly around the adaptive processes and qualitative shifts in service delivery experienced by frontline workers and participants.

We share below some of our reflections regarding the tracking and use of data within the Life Chances Fund.

Making sense of data: where to start

Each Life Chances Fund project began with a theory of change. Practitioners used these theories to clarify assumptions about connections between activities, outputs, and outcomes and to address the specific contexts within which projects operated. For example, the Skill Mill project explicitly linked job training for young ex-offenders with reduced reoffending rates, clearly outlining anticipated outputs and expected outcomes.

However, practitioners often faced complexities requiring multiple, adaptable theories of change simultaneously. For instance, the Chances project, working with diverse cohorts of disadvantaged young people, continuously adapted its approach based on participant needs. This flexibility was critical to success but challenging to document comprehensively within standardised data platforms. Hence, future outcome funds should invest more deliberately in capturing qualitative insights and iterative learning processes alongside quantitative outcome tracking.

Making sense of data during implementation

The evaluations of the MHEP and KBOP projects illustrate how performance incentives and robust data-driven management systems enhance outcomes. The MHEP stakeholders reported significant benefits from the analytical support provided, which included detailed performance reports and data dashboards that were regularly reviewed during contract meetings. The granularity and clarity of these reports allowed early identification and proactive response to performance issues, which were beyond what stakeholders had experienced under traditional commissioning arrangements, as well as improved, data-driven accountability. The



Future outcome funds should invest more deliberately in capturing qualitative insights and iterative learning processes alongside quantitative outcome tracking.

enhanced data capabilities within provider organisations have been identified as an improvement likely to be sustained over time. Despite these benefits, stakeholders reported some difficulties related to the complexity of data handling and contract structures.

In KBOP, the implementation of a centralised data platform allowed timely interventions and supported collaboration across service providers. KBOP also underscored the value of flexible funding through the ‘Personalisation Fund’, enabling tailored, immediate support for service users—crucial in achieving personalised and sustainable outcomes. However, KBOP faced challenges balancing accountability pressures with user-centric, strengths-based service delivery, highlighting the need for sensitive performance targets aligned closely with user needs.

Making sense of data for the evaluation

The experience of adapting to Covid-19 was pivotal in shaping our understanding. Over the evaluation period, we increasingly recognised that robust outcomes evaluations cannot rely solely on rigid, quantitative, and self-reported data. Instead, we realised the need for data systems that are adaptive, clearly defined, contextually sensitive, and supported by appropriate resources.

Key takeaways

The evaluation highlighted several critical lessons:

- **Data clarity and standardisation:** ambiguous definitions and inconsistent data reporting undermined the potential for robust comparative analysis across projects. Clear, exhaustive definitions agreed upon by all stakeholders, alongside adequate resources for rigorous data entry, are essential for reliable, meaningful evaluation.
- **Flexible and responsive governance:** the ability to quickly adapt data collection methods and performance management frameworks was critical, especially during external shocks like the pandemic. Future data systems must incorporate flexibility from the outset, allowing rapid changes in metrics, targets, and evidence requirements as needed.
- **Systematic integration of qualitative insights:** qualitative data collection should be integrated systematically into outcome tracking processes to enrich the understanding of partnership dynamics, service adaptations, and contextual influences on programme performance.

- **Comprehensive tracking of costs and resources:** beyond outcome measures, detailed tracking of initial investments, setup costs, and ongoing resource allocations is vital. Such data supports critical cost-benefit analyses, essential for decisions around scaling and replication of successful programmes.
- **Investment in learning:** recognising data collection as an investment in learning rather than merely an administrative burden changes how project partners engage with data systems. Careful selection of high-potential projects for detailed, qualitative-rich case studies can offer valuable insights for future replication and scaling decisions.

The Life Chances Fund evaluation underscores a shift toward recognising data collection as an investment in future learning and decision-making. Comprehensive, granular quantitative outcome data is vital, but the value of qualitative insights and adaptive tracking must be equally appreciated. Future outcome funds should balance the imperative for rigorous outcome measurement with the need for flexible, contextually-sensitive data systems capable of capturing complex, iterative, and relational processes inherent to social outcomes partnerships.



Clear, exhaustive definitions agreed upon by all stakeholders, alongside adequate resources for rigorous data entry, are essential for reliable, meaningful evaluation.

Moving forward, policymakers should:

Clarify and standardise data definitions

Clearly define and agree on outcome metrics across stakeholders at the beginning of projects. Standardisation improves data comparability and reduces ambiguity, ensuring robust evaluation.

Invest in adaptive data systems

Design data infrastructure flexible enough to adapt quickly to unforeseen changes (e.g. pandemics or policy shifts). This will support real-time decision-making and rapid service improvements.

Balance quantitative and qualitative data

Complement quantitative outcomes data with systematic collection of qualitative insights, such as frontline staff and service user experiences. This enriches understanding of why interventions succeed or face challenges.

Prioritise cost data tracking

Collect detailed data on transaction and setup costs from project inception. Clearer insights into these costs allow more accurate assessments of value for money and inform future budgeting decisions.

Frame data collection as a learning investment

View data collection not merely as compliance or administrative burden, but as an investment in continuous learning. Encourage projects to allocate resources and time to systematically reflect and adjust based on findings.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the social outcomes partnership ‘effect’

Our evaluation of the Life Chances Fund has examined the distinct contribution of social outcomes partnerships as an innovative tool to commission public services or, in other words, the social outcomes partnership ‘effect’. This was a challenging endeavour as the Fund design did not identify conventionally commissioned ‘business as usual’ sites to act as a credible comparator. Nevertheless, we found that well-designed and effectively managed partnerships can meaningfully improve outcomes through mechanisms such as enhanced flexibility for person-centred support, stronger performance management, targeted collaboration, and proactive market stewardship.

Well-designed partnerships clearly specify outcomes that are meaningful for participants, engage stakeholders early, and provide flexibility for innovation and data-led adaptation. Well-managed partnerships use data proactively, clarify and draw on the distinctive roles for each partner organisation and critically reflect on unintended behaviours through active governance arrangements and forums that foster continuous collaborative learning.

The majority of Life Chances Fund projects successfully achieved the primary outcomes that partners set for themselves, but some projects fell short. Where outcomes were not achieved it was not possible to assess whether this was due to the partnership model, to overly ambitious targets, to a more challenging than expected operating environment, or other factors. However, what is notable is the visibility of social outcomes that both were and were not achieved.

As the social outcomes partnership approach continues to evolve in response to new social challenges, embedding the dual features of adaptation and accountability will be critical to unlocking their full potential.

Does this mean that social outcomes partnerships are a silver bullet for lagging public services? Certainly not. Their development must account for technical complexity and additional operational demands. The appropriateness of the model is context-specific, and the value for money of these partnerships needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. The benefits identified in our evaluation are not guaranteed – each partnership requires technical and relational work to achieve better outcomes and value for money. Realising improved outcomes and cost-effectiveness requires ongoing commitment to service participants, data, evaluation and collaborative performance management – each of which comes with additional resource implications. Weighing these costs against potential impact is essential in determining whether this model is appropriate in any given context.

Some Life Chances Fund projects have continued or evolved after September 2024, pointing to broader impacts of these projects beyond the life of the Fund. However, data collection for the evaluation ended in September 2024, limiting our ability to systematically capture and analyse these longer-term implications comprehensively. To fully understand and leverage the broader impacts of social outcomes partnerships, future outcomes funds should explicitly invest in systematic tracking of project outcomes and broader system-level changes beyond the formal conclusion of contracts. This longer-term perspective will

ensure deeper insights into sustainability, legacy effects, and lasting value for communities.

Although our research did not explicitly examine the role of investors in social outcomes partnerships, we offer a few reflections here in recognition of how frequently this topic arises in discussions with government officials and delivery organisations. Terms such as ‘investor’ and ‘fund manager’ often suggest a faceless uniformity that does not reflect practice when it comes to social outcomes partnerships. In reality, we observed significant variation in how socially-motivated investors and fund managers operate across partnerships, in how upfront capital is structured, and in the terms under which it is provided. To support a clearer understanding of these roles, we suggest two areas of further development for the community of practice. First, we encourage a more thorough articulation regarding investment structures and fund manager approaches to help appraise the functions of investment in social outcomes partnerships (beyond the provision of repayable finance).



As the social outcomes partnership approach continues to evolve in response to new social challenges, embedding the dual features of adaptation and accountability will be critical to unlocking their full potential.

Second, we encourage more consistent definitions and standardisation of financial data reporting. Within Life Chances Fund projects, for example, we observed differences in how stakeholders interpreted and reported cost and financial data – highlighting a broader need for clarity.

The potential of outcomes funds as catalysts for innovation in public service

Although our evaluation focused on the social outcomes partnership mechanism, our sustained engagement with stakeholders from across the Fund has unlocked insights about the Life Chances Fund as a catalyst for practice change. Notably, the Fund enabled blending of local and central government resources and offered essential flexibility at local level to define and adapt outcomes⁵². This interplay of mission alignment alongside local autonomy offers a promising blueprint for future initiatives that seek to pool multiple sources of funding in a way that balances strong accountability with local flexibility.



Notably, the Fund enabled blending of local and central government resources and offered essential flexibility at local level to define and adapt outcomes⁵¹.

We also observed the central importance of adaptable data systems to aggregate and learn across a portfolio of diverse projects. The Fund's pioneering approach to learning and evaluation has significantly enriched the availability and quality of data and evidence on social outcomes partnerships. In a world's first, the Life Chances Fund published granular, outcomes-achievement data for all 29 projects, including interim data during live delivery, accompanied by an in-depth contextualisation of the results provided directly by project stakeholders. This unprecedented transparency has been invaluable for real-time learning about what works, what doesn't, and why.

The Life Chances Fund offers plentiful learning for the design of future outcomes funds, yet these lessons need to be considered in the specific policy context in which the Fund operated. Our survey of commissioners and providers involved in Life Chances Fund projects⁵³ revealed that local procurement procedures required for launching social outcomes partnerships were seen as a significant source of cost and frustration. The novelty of commissioning for outcomes and involving social investors at the launch of the Fund meant that conventional market engagement and procurement procedures came under strain.

The Fund's multi-stage application process was administratively burdensome for applicants. There are opportunities for clearer articulation of expectations and enhanced support for financial modelling and procurement processes. Future outcomes funds could streamline administrative processes and better support contractual alignment between central and local government terms early in the process.

The Life Chances Fund's specificity—such as requiring investor participation, local co-funding, and targeted metrics for complex social problems—reflects only one model among several possible approaches for outcome funds.⁵⁴

The legacy of the Life Chances Fund

Beyond immediate project outcomes, the Life Chances Fund has significantly contributed to global practice and understanding of social outcomes partnerships. It has informed and inspired similar initiatives internationally, genuinely strengthening the broader ecosystem. The extensive learning generated from the Fund's rich dataset and the transparent sharing of evaluation findings have positioned the UK as a global leader, with influence on social policy innovation globally. We hope that new programmes in the UK and internationally will build on this extraordinary contribution and embrace a similarly ambitious vision for impact at scale that recognises the value of open and transparent data sharing, peer learning and rigorous evaluation.

⁵² We explore this further in our publication *Tracing 25 years of 'initiativitis' in central government attempts to join up local public services in England* (2023)

⁵³ FitzGerald, C. et al., 2021. *An Introduction to Life Chances Fund projects and their early adaptations to Covid-19: Life Chances Fund Evaluation Interim Report*

⁵⁴ We explore different approaches to outcomes funds and key design considerations in our publication *Understanding Outcomes Funds: A guide for practitioners, governments and donors* (2021)

The Life Chances Fund evaluation has provided deep insights into the mechanisms through which social outcomes partnerships could improve outcomes. Both the Fund and the resulting projects have spurred public service reform in an era of ongoing austerity. Notably, approaches such as formal-relational contracting, data-driven iterative learning (so-called test and learn approaches), and the importance of investing in local capacity emerged as particularly powerful insights. Embedding these ways of working within traditional public service commissioning can enable more adaptive, accountable and person-centred public services.

The way forward

Looking ahead, we hope to continue to work collaboratively with the global community of policymakers, practitioners and researchers to generate further knowledge on how to design and manage effective outcomes-focused partnerships. We need to understand how to balance the 'formal' elements of cross-sector contracting – such as transparent and meaningful performance measures – with 'relational' practice, so that partners can flex and respond to changing needs in a way that is accountable. We also need a clearer understanding of how to embed a broad conception of public value – beyond cost cutting or blunt output measures – in contractual arrangements for key services.

We hope that future policy and practice will build on the learning from the Life Chances Fund by encouraging more adaptive commissioning models and more relational forms of contracting, and by embedding robust data measurement and learning mechanisms into service provision. For a wider adoption of social outcomes partnerships, sustained commitment to building an enabling environment in the public sector will be essential. Strengthening capacity at local level needs to be a central part of future efforts to bring a focus on outcomes to the funding and provision of public services.



For a wider adoption of social outcomes partnerships, sustained commitment to building an enabling environment in the public sector will be essential.

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APPENDIX 1. LIFE CHANCES FUND PROJECTS: SUMMARY TABLE

Name of project	Location	Year delivery start and end	Planned size of cohort	Primary outcome	Planned social investment (upfront capital)	Maximum potential outcome payment (LCF and LAs)
Children's Services						
Fostering Better Outcomes	Cheshire West and Chester	2018-2024 (complete)	30 individuals	Supporting children and young people in foster care, as an alternative to residential care.	£300,000	£1,028,926
	Fostering Better Outcomes aimed to reduce the number of children in residential placements by 'stepping down' to specialist foster care, thereby offering an intensive, therapeutic and family-based support package.					
Stronger Families Suffolk	Suffolk	2019-2026 (ongoing)	542 individuals	To avoid the need for sustained care through the delivery of an evidenced-based therapeutic intervention.	£1,400,000	£6,925,607
	Stronger Families Suffolk is a whole family-based intervention using Functional Family Therapy. It sought to improve communication and supportiveness between parents or guardians and young people, while decreasing hostility.					
Stronger Families Norfolk	Norfolk	2019-2028 (ongoing)	436 families	Prevention of families from breaking down and young people/children from entering care.	£2,100,000	£9,576,245
	The project delivers a service based on Family Functional Therapy. It seeks to improve communication and supportiveness between parents or guardians and young people, while decreasing hostility.					
Pyramid Project	Telford and Wrekin, Warwickshire, Sandwell, Stoke on Trent, Surrey, Worcestershire, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, and Dudley	2020-2024 (complete)	92 individuals	Young person moves from residential to foster placement.	£925,562	£11,341,260
	The project delivers a service based on Family Functional Therapy. It seeks to improve communication and supportiveness between parents or guardians and young people, while decreasing hostility.					
DN2 Children's Services Social Impact Bond	Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire	2020-2027 (ongoing)	304 service users	Child/young person steps down from residential care into a familial type of environment.	£884,831	£9,123,323
	DN2 offers intensive support to children and young people (aged 10-17) at risk of care entry or who recently entered care. The goal is to help them remain with their families when it is safe to do so.					

Drug and Alcohol Dependency						
Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS)	Staffordshire	2018-2027 (ongoing)	2,006 individuals	To reduce the number of children with Child Protection Plans escalating to become looked after children.	£475,000	£5,331,000
	IFSS works with families who have children and young people identified as being in need or who are under child protection plans, particularly in cases where parental drug and alcohol use may indicate a potential risk.					
Cornwall Frequent Attenders	Cornwall	2018-2023 (complete)	705 individuals	Reduce the avoidable use of A&E by drug and alcohol 'frequent attenders'.	£407,000	£2,226,336
	The project works with residents of Cornwall aged 18 and older who are experiencing issues related to substance misuse and have had eight or more visits to Accident & Emergency or two or more hospital admissions within a year. The intervention included regular key worker outreach, home visits, drop-in sessions, crisis management to address immediate problems, and other therapeutic techniques.					
IPS employment support for people with drug and alcohol addictions	West London Boroughs	2019-2022 (complete)	2,074 individuals	Job start.	£400,000	£2,375,150
	Individual Placement Support Service helps adults (16-70 years old) with drug and alcohol addictions, who are out of work, to gain and retain competitive employment.					
Early years						
Reducing the prevalence of mothers experiencing recurrent care proceedings (Pause)	Plymouth	2019-2024 (complete)	56 individuals	Women are supported to take a 'pause' from pregnancy to enable them to focus on their own needs and take control of their lives.	£1,100,000	£1,623,872
	Pause works with women of childbearing age who have experienced (or are at high risk of experiencing) a cycle of recurrent care proceedings leading to removal of their children into local authority care. Pause is an intensive, relationship-based support programme.					
ParentChild+	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and City of Westminster	2019-2023 (ongoing*)	198 individuals	To narrow the school readiness gap by improving early speech and language, and personal-social-emotional skills.	£100,000	£1,107,287
	ParentChild+ aimed to narrow the gap in school readiness between vulnerable children and their peers. The service targeted families with a child aged 2-3 who do not meet age related goals on speech and language, and social-personal skills assessed during the national 2-year-old checks. *Project delivery ended in June 2023, although final outcomes are still to be achieved up to the end of September 2025.					
West London Zone (AllChild), placed-based support for children and young people: scale-up	London Boroughs (Brent, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and Hammersmith and Fulham)	2019-2024 (complete)	2,420 individuals	Child achieves at least one outcome on the AllChild rate card to set a foundation for successful development into adulthood.	£1,400,000	£16,244,960
	All children who participated in this project faced various challenges, including economic disadvantage, emotional wellbeing, proficiency in English and Math, school attendance and interpersonal relationships. The intervention was structured around each child's Individual Support Plan, which had four key components: informal engagement, formal engagement, developmental support, and specialised support from Delivery Partners.					

Young people						
FutureImpact	Nottingham	2018-2023 (complete)	1,180 individuals	Young person demonstrates increased resilience, social inclusion and capacity for independent living, ability and knowledge to support career planning and further education/training.	£498,000	£3,288,900
	FutureImpact coaches worked with young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to overcome problematic behaviours, build capacity, resilience and confidence, and sustain their progress.					
DFN- MoveForward UK	London, West Midlands and Kent	2018-2024 (complete)	358 individuals	Young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities will enter and sustain paid employment.	£450,000	£1,683,620
	DFN-MoveForward supported young people aged 14-25 with mild to moderate learning disabilities, such as cognitive impairment and communication and interaction difficulties. The programme offered a framework of one-to-one coaching and action planning.					
Big Picture Learning in Doncaster	Doncaster	2019-2024 (complete)	541 individuals	Personal Learning Plan (PLP) established for students in Key Stage 3 and KS4.	£750,000	£6,194,792
	Big Picture Learning works with young people in small advisory groups, as an alternative provision to Learning Centres and Pupil Referral Units. The target population was children and young people aged 11-16 who are disengaged from education and showing early signs of crisis.					
The Skill Mill	Birmingham, Croydon, Durham, Leeds, Nottingham, Rochdale, Surrey, and West Sussex	2020-2024 (complete)	252 individuals	No reoffending for 12 months.	£1,100,000	£3,241,776
	Skill Mill service centres around the provision of employment. High risk ex-offenders aged 16-18 are offered paid employment four days a week and are encouraged to acquire a Level 2 qualification.					
Chances	22 different locations across England	2020-2024 (complete)	6,720 individuals	Improved engagement and attitude to physical activity and sport.	£1,245,000	£4,104,000
	The aim of the Chances project was to use sport and physical activity to provide new opportunities and alternative life pathways for children and young people in disadvantaged areas whilst improving their health and wellbeing.					
Gloucestershire Positive Behaviour Support	Gloucestershire	2020-2029 (ongoing)	14 individuals	Avoidance of full-time residential care for the young people accessing the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Service.	£501,000	£1,774,925
	Gloucestershire Positive Behaviour Support's target cohort is young people with a learning disability and/or autism and displaying challenging behaviour, who are at risk of going into residential care. The service delivers practical solutions to improve the individual's quality of life, reducing the need for residential placements, with a focus on them remaining at home or other supported homes.					

Older People's Services						
Enhanced Dementia Care Service	London Borough of Hounslow	2021-2024 (complete)	300 individuals	Reduction in avoidable hospital admissions.	£345,000	£810,000
	Enhanced Dementia Care Service offered coordinated and integrated services using evidence-based care pathways, case management and personalised care planning. The aim of the service was to anticipate and avoid deterioration of conditions and support reduction in hospital admissions for people affected with dementia with a high rate of admissions.					
Healthy lives						
MHEP Haringey and Barnet	Haringey and Barnet	2019-2023 (complete)	985 individuals	Job start.	£227,000	£1,421,234
	Individual Placement Support aimed at getting people with enduring and severe mental health issues back or into paid employment.					
Promoting Independence	Sheffield	2019-2026 (ongoing)	105 individuals	Adults with mental health issues move from 24/7 provision into their own tenancy and sustain this move.	£725,000	£2,744,750
	Individual support to assist adults with mental health issues to live independently in the community.					
Midlands Regional Pause Hub	Derbyshire, Northamptonshire, Plymouth, and Worcestershire	2020-2026 (ongoing)	166 individuals	Women are supported to focus on themselves, increase their wellbeing, employability, sense of self and engage with other services whilst taking a 'pause' from pregnancy.	£2,150,000	£5,643,426
	The service aims to help women who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing at least two episodes of care proceedings leading to the removal of one or more of their children into care. Pause seeks to address the cycle of repeated removals by intervening at a time when women are not caring for children.					
MHEP Enfield	Enfield	2020-2024 (complete)	674 individuals	Job start.	£126,000	£620,689
	Individual Placement Support aimed at getting people with enduring and severe mental health issues into paid employment.					
MHEP Tower Hamlets – Mental Health	Tower Hamlets	2020-2024 (complete)	3,644 individuals	Job start.	£300,000	£2,068,270
	Individual Placement Support aimed at getting people with enduring and severe mental health issues back or into paid employment.					
MHEP Shropshire	Shropshire	2020-2024 (complete)	582 individuals	Job start.	£204,000	£1,034,487
	Individual Placement Support aimed at getting people with mental health issues back or into competitive employment.					
MHEP Tower Hamlets – Learning Disabilities	Tower Hamlets	2020-2023 (complete)	411 individuals	Job start.	£328,000	£1,307,059
	Delivering services using Individual Placement and Support (IPS) principles to clients with learning disabilities in Tower Hamlets.					

A Norfolk Carers SIB	Norfolk	2020-2026 (ongoing)	8,419 individuals	Sustainment of the caring role.	£2,500,000	£11,872,775
	The Norfolk Carers Partnership supports adult unpaid carers and transitioning carers (aged 16 to 24) to improve their wellbeing and enable them to sustain their caring role.					
Provision of a social prescribing framework and offer at scale in Northamptonshire	Northamptonshire	2021-2027 (ongoing)	5,832 individuals	Wellbeing improvement, measured by changes in the Well-being Star survey.	£1,350,000	£8,455,774
	Social prescribing focuses on prevention of ill health and the promotion of positive health and wellbeing through community-based services. This programme works to create sustained lifestyle changes and improved self-care for people living with long-term health conditions in Northamptonshire. The service specifically targets people with long-term health conditions.					
Other cross-cutting themes						
Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership	Kirklees	2019-2024 (complete)	6,300 individuals	Entry into, completion and sustainment of employment, education, training and/or volunteering.	£4,535,645	£22,297,917
	The project addressed issues including drug and alcohol dependency, older age, homelessness and disability, and other factors that can contribute towards a person's ability to successfully live independently. The service targeted people over the age of 16 who have vulnerabilities and support needs that may impact on their ability to live independently and who may, without support, be at increased risk of homelessness due to their disabilities, vulnerabilities, issues or lifestyle.					
Single Homelessness Prevention Service	London Boroughs (Brent, Ealing, Enfield, Hackney, Islington, and Waltham Forest) and Norfolk	2019-2028 (ongoing)	18,518 individuals	Successful completion of a Personal Housing Plan (PHP) for homeless people, or at risk of homelessness.	£2,521,000	£17,113,000
	The service targets single people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. A support worker model helps people secure new accommodation or to sustain existing tenancies.					

APPENDIX 2.

LIFE CHANCES FUND EVALUATION REPORTS AND RELATED PUBLICATIONS

All our Life Chances Fund evaluation reports and related knowledge resources are available online on the GO Lab Knowledge Hub: <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk>.

Evaluation reports

Primary evaluation

Outes Velarde, J., Grennan, E., Airoidi, M., Carter, E., Reedy, J., 2026. Achieving Outcomes: Life Chances Fund Final Report. Government Outcomes Lab, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

Government Outcomes Lab, 2025. Life Chances Fund evaluation: final data release. Government Outcomes Lab, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

Government Outcomes Lab, 2023. Life Chances Fund intermediate evaluation: data release. Government Outcomes Lab, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford

FitzGerald, C., Hameed, T., Rosenbach, F., Macdonald, J. R., Outes Velarde, J. & Dixon, R., 2021. An Introduction to Life Chances Fund projects and their early adaptations to Covid-19: Life Chances Fund Evaluation Interim Report

Hameed, T., Macdonald, J., Shiva, M., Carter, E., 2021. The use of social impact bonds in children's social care: A comparative analysis of project justifications and design considerations in the Life Chances Fund

Supplementary evaluation: Mental Health & Employment Partnership

Hulse, E., Grennan, E., Airoidi, M., Carter, E., 2025. The Mental Health and Employment Partnership: the final evaluation of the Life Chances Fund outcomes partnerships

Hulse, E., Nagarajan, S., Carter, E., 2024. Mental Health and Employment Partnership: second interim report as part of the LCF Evaluation

Hulse, E., Shiva, M., Hameed, T. and Carter, E., 2023. Mental Health and Employment Partnership LCF Evaluation

Supplementary evaluation: Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership

Patouna, M., De Gruyter, E., and Carter, E., 2025. Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: Understanding the Effects of Person-Centred Service Reforms in Housing Support

Rosenbach, F., Carter, E., van Lier, F-A., Patouna, M., 2025. The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: 'The final qualitative process evaluation report of the Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership, a Life Chances Fund Impact Bond

Rosenbach, F., van Lier, F-A., Domingos, F.D. & Carter, E., 2023. The Kirklees Better Outcomes Partnership: The second report of a longitudinal evaluation of a Life Chances Fund Impact Bond

Rosenbach, F. & Carter, E., 2020. Kirklees Integrated Support Service and Better Outcomes Partnership: The first report from a longitudinal evaluation of a Life Chances Fund impact bond

Peer-reviewed articles

Carter, E. & Ball, N. (2023). Social outcomes contracting: Seeding a more relational approach to contracts between government and the social economy? In: Social Economy Science Social Economy Science: Transforming the Economy and Making Society More Resilient. Krlev, G., Wruk D., Pasi G. & Bernhard M. (eds.) Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Carter, E. & Gibson, M. (2025). Delivering the UK welfare state. Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 41, 213-222.

Carter, E., Outes Velarde, J., Paul, O., Macdonald, J. R., & Airoidi, M. (2024). The Impact Bond Dataset: A Tool to Investigate Socially Motivated Cross-Sector Partnerships. Research Data Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1-14.

Carter, E., Rosenbach, F., Domingos, F., & van Lier, F. A. (2024). Contracting 'person-centred' working by results: street-level managers and frontline experiences in an outcomes-based contract. *Public Management Review*, 1–19.

Dixon, R. (2020). Performance management in social impact bonds: how an outcomes-based approach shapes hybrid partnerships. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 34(3), 356–376.

Fang, Z., Arana-Catania, M., van Lier, F-A., Velarde, J. O., Bregazzi, H., Airoidi, M., Carter E. & Procter, R. (2024). SyROCCo: enhancing systematic reviews using machine learning. *Data & Policy*, 6: e39.

FitzGerald, C., Carter, E., Dixon, R. & Airoidi, M. (2019). Walking the contractual tightrope: A transaction cost economics perspective on social impact bonds. *Public Money & Management*, 39(7), 458–467.

FitzGerald, C., Hameed, T., Rosenbach, F., Macdonald, J. R. & Dixon R. (2021). Resilience in public service partnerships: evidence from the UK Life Chances Fund. *Public Management Review*, 25, 787–807.

FitzGerald, C., Rosenbach, F., Hameed, T., Dixon, R. & Blundell J. (2021). Rallying together - The rationale for and structure of collaborative practice in England. *Public Money & Management*, 42(5), 349–352.

FitzGerald, C., Tan, S., Carter, E., & Airoidi, M. (2023). Contractual acrobatics: a configurational analysis of outcome specifications and payment in outcome-based contracts. *Public Management Review*, 25(9), 1796–1814.

Gibson, M., Van Lier, F., and Carter, E. (2023). Tracing 25 years of 'initiativitis' in central government attempts to join up local public services in England. *Policy and Politics*, 51(4), 695–717.

Heinrich, C. J., Malatesta, D., Carter, E., Gibson, M. and Ball, N. (forthcoming). *Contracting for Public Value: New Thinking for More Effective, Accountable and Sustainable Public Service Contracts*. Oxford University Press.

Shiva, M., FitzGerald, C., Carter, E., Airoidi, M. (2024). Beyond "make" or "buy": Evaluating value for money in public service delivery. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 95(4), 945–1279.

Practice-focused knowledge resources

These resources have been developed by the Government Outcomes Lab team, with and for practitioners. They are grounded in our research insights, as well as deep expertise from the community of practice.

Introductory guidance to outcomes-based partnerships: <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/the-basics/outcomes-based-contracting/>

Technical guidance on developing and evaluating social outcomes partnerships: <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/toolkit/technical-guidance/>

Impact bond lifecycle tool: <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/toolkit/impact-bond-lifecycle/>

Case studies (from the Life Chances Fund and beyond): <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/knowledge-bank/case-studies/>

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