

# **Internal Evaluation Report for Early Outcomes Fund Project for Leicester City, Derby City and Nottingham City Councils**



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## Introduction

This report summarises the internal evaluation of the Early Outcomes Fund (EOF) Project for Leicester City, Derby City and Nottingham City as at 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2020 including an outline of the anticipated final evaluation measures that will continue to be collected as the activity concludes in the period to the end of November, 2020.

The internal evaluation has been an ongoing, iterative process throughout the project and there are key learning points and themes that can be reported with the anticipation that the remaining evaluation will enhance the evidence for these rather than identifying completely new themes. However, the wider impact of the key outstanding workstreams in particular the local area strategies and action plans, the final SLCN pathway, and the outcomes and impact framework, cannot be evidenced for submission to the national evaluator of the EOF programme within their time frame.

The project encountered a number of delays, initially attributable to different intra and inter Local Authority processes in initiating the project but latterly due to the global pandemic which is unprecedented. This evaluation, therefore, presents an *interim reflection* and scrutiny of the project but it is the intention of the project team to deliver an updated document in November, 2020 which will have the benefit of evaluation of the core remaining outputs.

The internal evaluation has been a collaboration with formative evaluation taking place throughout the project, this is captured in the Learning Journal<sup>1</sup> which was maintained by Hayley Carter, SDSA and the summative evaluation based on the evidence of change tests led by Marie Gascoigne, Better Communication CIC.

## Background

The EOF project across Leicester, Derby and Nottingham Cities has at its core, the ambition to achieve *strategic systemic* change throughout the systems that deliver outcomes for children and young people in these cities. This was not a project focused on *operational change* in terms of interventions and provisions in the first instance. These longer-term outcomes of impact on children's outcomes were recognised as crucial but strategic change takes longer than the planned 12-month timeframe to influence and embed operational service delivery, let alone measure improved outcomes for children and young people.

The three cities came together in this project through a common context of high levels of disadvantage and low social mobility as well as being city authorities sitting in wider county level structures. The local authorities across the East Midlands have a number of strategic networks and there was an anticipation that the learning from the three cities project would have transferable benefits across the region and perhaps nationally.

The research questions set out in the bid and at the outset of the project are as follows:

To investigate,

- the facilitating and hindering factors to establishing shared outcomes for children in the early years within the three Local Authorities
- the facilitating and hindering factors to establishing joint commissioning and pooled or aligned budgets in order to move towards achieving shared outcomes
- the levels of joint planning and service delivery aimed at achieving improved outcomes for children in the early years across the three LA areas
- evidence of effective integrated service delivery and impact

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<sup>1</sup> Annex 1

The project outputs were designed to provide focused city specific projects that would require the systems to be in place and would serve as legacy outputs to facilitate ongoing change in each city.

Leicester City was the lead organisation in terms of the EOF grant and contracting with partner organisations.

In designing the internal evaluation of the project, it was agreed at the outset that there should also be learning to share from this being a 'cross city' project which was designed to take the teams from the three cities on a common journey whilst ensuring the individualisation required for each city as a unique context. This has perhaps proved one of the most revealing aspects of the project.

Leicester, Derby and Nottingham Cities are natural collaborators in this Early Outcomes Fund project in that they occupy a space in the East Midlands which places them geographically in a triangle at the core of the East Midlands Region. All three cities exist alongside the wider County Councils for Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire which again provides a key commonality when it comes to looking at local structures and processes.

In order to better understand the processes underpinning these key factors, core activities were identified as workstreams within the project. The Learning Journal<sup>2</sup>, which should be read in conjunction with this report provides detail of the workstreams in a form which can be easily cross referenced to the initial bid and proposal. In this introduction the key strands of work will be presented in terms of cross cutting themes and also a sense of proportion in terms of the activity within the programme.

For each of these themes there is a cross-city element of evaluation and a within city element.

#### **Theme 1 – Shared understanding of need and provision at a strategic level**

- Understanding the population need, the current provision across the system, the organisational relationships, structures and processes that support the provision for children and young people with SLCN. Needs analyses from a speech, language and communication perspective for Leicester and Nottingham Cities and a refresh of the needs assessment carried out in Derby as part of the Opportunity Area planning in 2017-2018
- Discussion and debate around commissioning models and models of service integrated services provision
- Using the evidence base to guide change
- Consultation and co-production

#### **Theme 2 – Commitment to change**

- Development of city-based speech, language and communication strategies including consultation
- Development of single project pathway for SLC with city specific versions
- Impact and outcomes across services and agencies
- Data sharing agreements

#### **Theme 3 – Embedding change for the future**

- Commissioning intentions
- Reporting tools
- Workforce development
- Project legacy

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<sup>2</sup> Annex 1

## **Context of the three cities**

The context for this project was complex.

Whilst the three cities shared common challenges in terms of demographic factors, social mobility and percentages of children not achieving the expected levels in the communication, language and literacy measures of the EYFS, their contexts in terms of strategic engagement and operational provision in this area were all very different.

Each of the three cities had different starting points in terms of the key areas for change and there were also a variety of other initiatives related to speech, language and communication that impacted differentially in the three cities during the planned and ultimate lifetime of the EOF project (April, 2019 – November, 2020).

Derby City was designated a DfE Opportunity Area (OA) in 2016, among the first six in England, however due to various delays and pilot projects the main OA project work for Early Years was contracted from April, 2019 – August, 2020, although as a consequence of the global pandemic, elements of delivery are ongoing until March 2021. Better Communication CIC conducted a needs analysis for SLCN in the early years in Derby as part of the option appraisal for the OA project development and was also commissioned to evaluate pilot projects prior to the main procurement in 2019. The concurrent OA projects, involving many of the same individuals as the EOF project, is significant context when evaluating the EOF project and to some degree creates 'noise' in the evaluation. Derby City was scheduled to participate in the LGA Peer Review in March, 2020. This has been postponed until 2021 but a number of EOF generated cross agency workshops were also used as preparation for the Peer Review prior to lockdown.

Nottingham City participated in the LGA Peer Review early on in the EOF project (October, 2019) and this both diverted resource and focus to the LGA Peer Review in the short term but also brought benefits in terms of synergies for the EOF project in the longer term. Nottingham also has significant lottery funding for an early years project focused in the most disadvantaged wards of the city, Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) and this programme commissions a range of services focused on early years support.

Leicester City was the first to recruit specific project team members and therefore had the most capacity in the initial three to four months and there were no other extraordinary external drivers alongside. In this sense Leicester City started from a position of relative stability.

## Evaluation methodology

The impact of COVID has severely affected the key activities relating to themes 2 and 3 above, and further internal evaluation will take place September to November, 2020 although it is recognised that this will not be considered by the Ecorys team conducting the national evaluation of the programme.

This project aimed to improve system leadership, with the long-term goal of consequently improving early language outcomes. As explained in the introduction, it was never envisaged that there would be an impact on child-level data during the funding period. Therefore, during the project's funding period it was necessary to monitor progress and impact using a range of process measures.

### Early Intervention Foundation Maturity Matrix

The EIF maturity matrix was used during bid preparation as advised by DfE but then at key milestone points in the project. Each city project team was asked to complete the evaluation but drawing on their discussions and interactions with the wider stakeholder group in each city. This was not a significant focus in the evaluation but provided a common reference point that linked to the original bid.

### The Balanced System® Baseline Evaluation and Theory of Change questions

The Balanced System® framework and tools includes a baseline self-evaluation around the core areas of:

- Commissioning
- Integrated workforce
- Engagement with children, young people and their families
- Leadership and management of local systems, and
- Training and development

Participants are asked to evaluate the outcomes in each of these areas across four levels of measure based on the outcomes and impact framework that sits within the Balanced System® tools. This framework is derived from the Friedman results-based accountability model<sup>3</sup> and has been developed to include four levels of measure:

Level 1: Input – how much did we do, traditional measures of activity

Level 2: Reach – how effective was it in terms of access for a given target audience


Level 3: Quality – was it a good offer

Level 4: Impact – did it make a difference – to an individual, group, population

Figure 1 below shows the template which is completed online to give a red, amber, green rating. Each of the three cities completed this at three points in the project to date: at the outset in April/May 2019; following the stakeholder event in November, 2019 and as part of this evaluation in April, 2020.

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<sup>3</sup> Friedman M (2005) *Trying Hard is not Good Enough: how to produce measurable improvements for customers and communities* Trafford Publishing.



BASELINE EVALUATION FOR:					Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Complete	Don't know
AREA	LEVEL 1: INPUT	LEVEL 2: REACH	LEVEL 3: QUALITY	LEVEL 4: IMPACT					
Commissioning / funding	To what extent are all commissioners with a remit for children and young people including the needs of this population in needs assessment and commissioning of their element of children and young peoples' services?	To what extent are commissioners ensuring that their collective activity reaches the full population of children and young people with SLCN?	To what extent are providers delivering services to meet the specifications developed by commissioners as intended?	To what extent has the collective commissioning activity for children and young people yielded demonstrable change in their speech, language and communication skills?					
Rating:									
Integrated workforce	To what extent is the workforce working in an integrated way?	To what extent does an integrated workforce support all pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is the integrated workforce demonstrating high quality collaborative working?	To what extent is the integrated workforce impacting on the wider community?					
Rating:									
Engaging parents and carers	To what extent are services for children and young people with SLCN engaging with parents in support of their children's SLCN?	To what extent are parental engagement strategies and activities reaching all parents of pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is parental engagement consistently of high quality?	To what extent are improved parental participation and confidence in supporting pupils' SLCN demonstrated?					
Rating:									
Leadership and management	Is there leadership and management of provision across agencies and disciplines?	Are the leadership and management arrangements facilitating services to reach all children with SLCN as appropriate?	Is the leadership and management of high and consistent quality?	Does the leadership and management contribute to achieving improved speech, language and communication skills for children and young people with SLCN?					
Rating:									
Training and development	Is there a range of training and development on offer to parents and the workforce?	Is the training and development accessible in terms of funding, time, location?	Is the training and development of high and consistent quality?	Does the training and development result in improved skills to support children and young people with SLCN?					
Rating:									

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Whilst the self-evaluations are subjective, the evaluation sought evidence to support the self-evaluations from the theory of change interviews and online tools.

The aim of using the Baseline Evaluation in this was as much to generate questioning and discussion around the descriptors as to achieve a rating and for these discussions to inform the next steps at each review point.

Figure 2, shows how the areas of the baseline evaluation underpin the outcome focused integrated service delivery model.



The Balanced System® framework and tools were used for the needs analyses in each city and the mapping of provisions and gaps using the Five Strand outcome areas of Family Support, Enhanced Environments, Developing Workforce, Early Identification and Effective Intervention provided a common framework for capture of stakeholder views and perspectives as well as building the provision map and gap analysis for each city.

The detailed data from the needs analyses are within the online Early Outcomes Project account but the summary documents for each city are available as Annex 2.

The process of conducting the needs analyses, in particular seeking contributions and discussion with key commissioners and provider teams within each city, became part of the change process for the project overall.

### Theory of change reflections

Within the Balanced System online account there are a series of theory of change reflections during the process which capture interim findings. In addition, a guided interview format was used to capture a range of perspectives. The current data focus on the impact of Theme 1 and 2 activities, next steps and aspirations for the legacy of the programme which touch on Theme 3. Evaluative interviews for themes 2 and 3 cannot meaningfully take place until the relevant activities have been completed and the outputs – namely the SLCN pathway, the city strategies and the impact and outcomes framework have been completed.

### Project learning journal

The project learning journal was maintained by the project manager for the project and added to after each strategic or operational project meeting. The structure of the journal reflects the project workstreams which the aim of capturing the key facilitating and hindering factors in achieving the workstream outcomes for each area. The journal was regularly reviewed for accuracy and comments from the project teams across the three cities.



## Key findings from the evaluation

### EIF Matrix

The EIF Matrix was completed by the strategic lead for each of the cities as part of the bid process for the EOF project. The matrix was revisited in March, 2020 and the strategic leads asked to reprofile against the indicators. The table below shows these pre and post ratings and the colour coding reflects change. It should be noted that Nottingham was generally the most optimistic in the original ratings and showed the least subsequent change whilst Derby was the most negative in the initial ratings.

The reflection from the city teams was the matrix was a useful tool for discussion with partners of the key areas that need to be addressed but was not sufficiently sensitive to capture changes which were nevertheless significant in the journey.

		PROGRESS LEVELS					
		LCC		DCC		NCC	
		Jan 2019	March 2020	Jan 2019	March 2020	Jan 2019	March 2020
Plan	1. Strategy	2	3	1	1	2	2
	2. Commissioning	1/2	2	1	1/2	2 / 3	2/3
	3. Workforce Planning	1	2	1	2	1 / 2	1/2
Lead	4. Partnership	2	3	1	1/2	2	2
	5. Leadership	1/2	3	1	2	3	3
	6. Community Ownership	1	2/3	1	1	2 / 3	3
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	1/2	2	1	1/2	2 / 3	2/3
	8. Information & Data	2	2	1	1/2	1 / 2	1/2
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1	1/2	1	1/2	1 / 2	1/2
	10. Using & Generating Evidence	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	2 / 3	3

### Key

**Green** indicates where 1 or more progress level was achieved during the one-year funded period.

**Amber** indicates where ½ a progress level was achieved during the one-year funded period.

**Red** indicates where no movement in progress level was achieved during the one-year funded period.

## Balanced System® Baseline Evaluation and Evidence Template

The Baseline Evaluation was completed at three time points: at the start of the project in April 2019, mid-way in December, 2019 and at the original conclusion time in April, 2020. Whilst the self-rating is subjective, the prompt descriptors for each level of measure challenge to provide evidence to support the rating.

Analysis has been conducted both 'within city' and 'across cities' looking at the responses over time and triangulating with evidence from the theory of change questions and other interview data as well as data obtained through the mapping exercise as part of the needs analyses. These are available as Annex 3.

## Commissioning

### Baseline Evaluation for: April 2019

			Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Complete	Don't know
Area	Level 1: Input	Level 2: Reach	Level 3: Quality	Level 4: Impact			
Commissioning / funding	To what extent are all commissioners with a remit for children and young people including the needs of this population in needs assessment and commissioning of their element of children and young peoples' services?	To what extent are commissioners ensuring that their collective activity reaches the full population of children and young people with SLCN?	To what extent are providers delivering services to meet the specifications developed by commissioners as intended?	To what extent has the collective commissioning activity for children and young people yielded demonstrable change in their speech, language and communication skills?			
Rating: Leicester							
Rating: Derby							
Rating: Nottingham							

### Baseline Evaluation for: April 2020

			Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Complete	Don't know
Area	Level 1: Input	Level 2: Reach	Level 3: Quality	Level 4: Impact			
Commissioning / funding	To what extent are all commissioners with a remit for children and young people including the needs of this population in needs assessment and commissioning of their element of children and young peoples' services?	To what extent are commissioners ensuring that their collective activity reaches the full population of children and young people with SLCN?	To what extent are providers delivering services to meet the specifications developed by commissioners as intended?	To what extent has the collective commissioning activity for children and young people yielded demonstrable change in their speech, language and communication skills?			
Rating: Leicester							
Rating: Derby							
Rating: Nottingham							

The commissioning landscape across all three cities is unusual in that the speech and language therapy services are primarily commissioned to provide a health focused, specialist level service. The needs analyses identify the predicted speech, language and communication needs in the three cities and triangulate the reported staffing against this need. The resulting ratios are amongst the lowest in England, supporting the findings of the Children's Commissioner in a report published in 2019 outlining the financial investment in speech and language therapy across England. The East Midlands was reported to have the lowest 'spend' of all the regions.

In Leicester there is a small amount of provision commissioned by the Local Authority around children and young people with SEND and a small amount of school commissioning.

The speech and language therapy services in Derby and Nottingham are commissioned exclusively to provide a specialist level service with no direct involvement in universal or targeted activity.

Only Leicester reports an improvement in the commissioning rating over the year from April 2019 to April 2020, with both Derby and Nottingham providing the same ratings.

However, there are key events reported in both Derby and Nottingham in respect of commissioning and as a direct consequence of the project activities.

## Leicester

In Leicester the EOF project has benefited from those directly involved both from the Local Authority and local health provider organisation having very senior strategic roles. This has facilitated conversations at strategic board level in the city.

The work on the strategy for speech, language and communication is well developed in Leicester and consultation was already underway when the COVID lockdown came into force.

There is every reason to expect that the strategy will proceed and this, together with the pathway which has had extensive co-production and consultation with stakeholders in the city will continue to drive the agenda towards more integrated jointly commissioned services.

## Derby

In Derby, following the three city stakeholder event in November, 2019 at which the needs analyses were presented and the pathway concepts were explored, commissioners for the Clinical Commissioning Group, Public Health and the Local Authority undertook to begin to explore development of a joint specification working across the full range of provision. This has aligned with changes in health structures across Derbyshire as a county in which Derby City sits and there is a working group considering the opportunities for a single integrated offer across the Derbyshire footprint.

This work has been interrupted by the COVID pandemic but our understanding is that it will now pick up pace again.

Alongside this, Opportunity Area projects in Derby City are continuing to build capacity in the wider system and the ambition is to bring the legacy of both the EOF and OA projects together in 2021.

## Nottingham

In Nottingham, again the speech and language therapy service to Nottingham City is commissioned only at a specialist level for 'health needs'. This is at odds with national trends and the consequence of no involvement at universal and targeted levels in the city is pressure on this service for referral where children's needs might be met appropriately by other levels of intervention.

In Nottinghamshire, there is a service operating as part of the early years children's centre provision to work with families at a targeted level however the commissioning of this provision is under review and so this example of good practice may not continue.

The commissioning landscape for Nottingham City at the outset of the project was so disjointed that it was incredibly difficult to identify the key commissioners for the needs analysis. A tangible outcome that is a step towards a more the goal of joint commissioning is an agreement to reinstate a joint commissioning group following a meeting specifically brought together to discuss the impact and legacy of the EOF project with commissioners from both Clinical Commissioning Group and Local Authority and the specific lottery funded project Small Steps Big Changes which has a further five years run and is intending to use the outputs of the project to guide the project focus in terms of identification and intervention programmes for speech, language and communication.

In conclusion, therefore, whilst none of the cities can evidence impact on the commissioning of provision at this point, it is likely that there will be significant change before the end of the activity in November, 2020. The key risk is the need to maintain momentum and build the legacy levers into the pathway and outcomes and impact framework being developed between now and then.

## Integrated workforce

### Integrated workforce April 2019

Integrated workforce	To what extent is the workforce working in an integrated way?	To what extent does an integrated workforce support all pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is the integrated workforce demonstrating high quality collaborative working?	To what extent is the integrated workforce impacting on the wider community?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating: Nottingham				

### Integrated workforce April 2020

Integrated workforce	To what extent is the workforce working in an integrated way?	To what extent does an integrated workforce support all pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is the integrated workforce demonstrating high quality collaborative working?	To what extent is the integrated workforce impacting on the wider community?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating: Nottingham				

The evidence sought to triangulate the ratings provided by the city teams for integrated workforce include the mapping of provisions within the needs analysis and reports from stakeholders through the pathway development workshops.

Given the commissioning context outlined above, it is not surprising that integrated working across the early years workforce is not felt to be well established in any of the areas. The team in Derby are keen to continue to highlight the issues, especially given the investment from the Opportunity Area into workforce development and training.

The strategies for speech, language and communication, supported by the pathway will provide a scaffold and links within and across the elements of the workforce supporting children and working with families but at present in the evidence collected there are some good individual examples of integrated working from specific settings but no consistency.

Better Communication CIC has been working as part of the OA in Derby with schools and settings undertaking the Balanced System Scheme for Schools and Settings. This takes the whole system approached used here at local area level and facilitates schools and settings to take a strategic approach to their planning and support of speech, language and communication for the population they serve. This outcomes focused approach which helps schools and settings identify the contributions they need from different elements of the early years workforce to support the children and families they work with should generate change at the 'grass roots' level over the coming year and there have been good examples from the early implementers.

In Nottingham, the commissioning landscape does not currently support integrated working in any systematic way and therefore the drive to address this will be key. The opportunities offered by the ongoing funding through Small Steps Big Changes are also significant and the programme's commissioning of identification and intervention packages should be mindful of ensuring that integrated working is part of the delivery mechanism.

## Engaging parents and carers

### Engaging parents and carers April 2019

Engaging parents and carers	To what extent are services for children and young people with SLCN engaging with parents in support of their children's SLCN?	To what extent are parental engagement strategies and activities reaching all parents of pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is parental engagement consistently of high quality?	To what extent are improved parental participation and confidence in supporting pupils' SLCN demonstrated?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating Nottingham				

### Engaging parents and carers April 2020

Engaging parents and carers	To what extent are services for children and young people with SLCN engaging with parents in support of their children's SLCN?	To what extent are parental engagement strategies and activities reaching all parents of pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is parental engagement consistently of high quality?	To what extent are improved parental participation and confidence in supporting pupils' SLCN demonstrated?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating Nottingham				

Engagement of parents and carers has, perhaps not unsurprisingly, seen tangible change in the self-ratings given the level of activity and co-production involved in both the EOF and the other projects running in the cities

In Leicester, the city lead has a strong history of community engagement and this has resulted in a very rich picture from the Leicester needs analysis qualitative data and wide engagement with community groups not primarily overtly associated with speech, language and communication issues but who therefor broaden the reach of the discussion around the issue.

In Derby the co-production around the pathway and strategy has ensured strong engagement and in Nottingham there have been the opportunities presented not only by this project but in preparation for the LGA Peer Review in October, 2019.

The impact evidence needed in all cities to move the ratings further forward will be possible to test as part of the pathway consultation in the coming months.

## Leadership and management

### Leadership and management April 2019

Leadership and management	Is there leadership and management of provision across agencies and disciplines?	Are the leadership and management arrangements facilitating services to reach all children with SLCN as appropriate?	Is the leadership and management of high and consistent quality?	Does the leadership and management contribute to achieving improved speech, language and communication skills for children and young people with SLCN?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating: Nottingham				

### Leadership and management April 2020

Leadership and management	Is there leadership and management of provision across agencies and disciplines?	Are the leadership and management arrangements facilitating services to reach all children with SLCN as appropriate?	Is the leadership and management of high and consistent quality?	Does the leadership and management contribute to achieving improved speech, language and communication skills for children and young people with SLCN?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating: Nottingham				

The leadership and management parameter of the baseline assessment is asking for evidence of systems leadership and not leadership in the wider practice groups.

The striking difference between the two time points for Leicester and Nottingham is the shift from having no evidence one way or the other – the grey ‘don’t know’ to a partially rating in 2020. Derby reports no change.

This parameter reflects integrating the workforce at the strategic level. The tangible changes have included connections that have been made through the workshops and contributions to the workstreams which have raised awareness of roles and focused on common outcomes around speech, language and communication in ways that had not necessarily happened previously.

There is evidence of excellent leadership in all three cities, not least from the strategic leads for the EOF project, however, the Derby self-rating perhaps reflects the lack of a system for ensuring that this goes beyond individual examples of effective leadership – looking to the legacy and ensuring sustainability and embedding of the work for the future.

The national projects over the past twenty years that have investigated provision for speech, language and communication needs<sup>4</sup> have all included reference to the relationship between strong leaders and champions for the issue and positive reports of service provision and outcomes. This relationship is difficult to prove empirically but nevertheless this parameter should be seen as central to making and maintaining change.

<sup>4</sup> Law et al (2000) Provision for children with speech, language and communication needs in England and Wales DfE; Bercow (2008) The Bercow Review, DfE and ICAN / RCSLT (2018) Bercow Ten Years On

## Training and development

### Training and development April 2019

Training and development	Is there a range of training and development on offer to parents and the workforce?	Is the training and development accessible in terms of funding, time, location?	Is the training and development of high and consistent quality?	Does the training and development result in improved skills to support children and young people with SLCN?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating: Nottingham				

### Training and development April 2020

Training and development	Is there a range of training and development on offer to parents and the workforce?	Is the training and development accessible in terms of funding, time, location?	Is the training and development of high and consistent quality?	Does the training and development result in improved skills to support children and young people with SLCN?
Rating: Leicester				
Rating: Derby				
Rating: Nottingham				

At the outset of the project, the city teams were unable to evidence target reach, quality measures or impact of training and development activities in the cities. This is striking and also concerning given the amount of resource that has been and continues to be directed into training of the wider workforce.

It is concerning that many of the projects funded by central Government result in significant commissions of training, with the assumption that this will result in impact on outcomes but typically without the measures in place to ensure that this is tested and evidenced.

As part of the EOF project, a desktop review was produced of the most common identification and intervention packages nationally along with additionally any others reported locally through the mapping exercise. The original brief was to recommend an identification tool and a targeted intervention package to the cities however the conclusion was that it was inappropriate to single one of each and instead an options appraisal was produced with the recommendation that the cities consider the desired outcomes and decided on the 'best fit' for their situation.

The workforce development part of the EOF project has not taken place as yet due to the COVID pandemic and also being mindful of other projects running alongside in Derby and Nottingham and the need to be strategic and avoid duplication. However, the awareness of the measures of evidence of not just 'input' training has been delivered but also reach, quality and impact has increased and any future commissioning of identification or intervention tools should have the impact measures identified at the outset.



## Research questions and findings

The research questions set out in the bid and at the outset of the project are as follows:

To investigate,

- the facilitating and hindering factors to establishing shared outcomes for children in the early years within the three Local Authorities
- the facilitating and hindering factors to establishing joint commissioning and pooled or aligned budgets in order to move towards achieving shared outcomes
- the levels of joint planning and service delivery aimed at achieving improved outcomes for children in the early years across the three LA areas
- evidence of effective integrated service delivery and impact

The analysis using the Balanced System® and drawing on the theory of change narratives and interviews has provided evidence of change in the first year of the project.

This allows us to answer the key questions which prompted the bid to the EOF.

### **The facilitating and hindering factors to establishing shared outcomes for children in the early years within the three Local Authorities**

#### Facilitating

Facilitating factors include the profile raising of the issues around the importance of speech, language and communication on learning and life chances and the impact of the disadvantage that children in all three cities experience.

The strategies for each city will require adoption at the most senior level as well as having been co-produced and developed with stakeholders. The pathway will not only provide a navigable offer of what is available locally but signpost to other resources and present a potential whole system offer.

The extension of project team members contracts or the appointment of a lead within the LA to take this work forward has been a positive step in all three cities that will both facilitate and keep momentum.

In Leicester, the senior level of strategic lead and the influence of the senior speech and language therapy manager across wider children's health provisions. This has ensured that the project and the issue more generally has been given time and space at strategic cross agency boards.

There has been strong community and stakeholder engagement and this should keep momentum for the establishment of shared outcomes.

In Derby, the synergies with the Opportunity Area projects, the forthcoming Early Years Professional Development Programme and LGA Peer Challenge all provide impetus. The appointment of the city lead to a public health funded role further builds the links necessary to establish shared outcomes.

In Nottingham, the bringing together of a commissioning group representing all key partners and the ongoing funding for Small Steps Big Changes provide tangible opportunities. The appointment of a lead for speech, language and communication within the local authority demonstrates commitment.

#### Hindering

There remains a general disconnect between speech and language therapy services and the wider children's workforce in terms of joint outcomes at strategic and operational levels. This is partly driven by commissioning issues that will be addressed below but also the expectations within the local systems. There is evidence that this is changing 'bottom up' in Derby where the work with schools and settings to better understand the needs of the children they work with and the relative contributions of the workforce including their own staff, the speech and language therapists and other early years advisors.



## **The facilitating and hindering factors to establishing joint commissioning and pooled or aligned budgets in order to move towards achieving shared outcomes**

### **Facilitating**

The EOF project has facilitated discussions around commissioning in all three cities.

The needs analyses demonstrate not only the absolute need in terms of speech, language and communication but also the patterns of distribution across each city. These patterns should directly impact on service provision. The needs analyses also introduced the whole systems approach and the importance of outcomes around supporting families, adapting environments and developing the workforce as well as identification and intervention.

The strategies and pathway will further reinforce these messages.

There is an understanding in all three cities from commissioning partners that this should be an ambition – the challenge remains to make it achievable.

The changes in health commissioning organisational footprints has potential to impact all three cities and the move to considering the city and county as part of a single offer provides real opportunities.

### **Hindering**

There are several important and related factors that continue to hinder joint commissioning and pooled or aligned budgets.

Funding for speech, language and communication is incredibly low relative to the rest of the country and relative to the levels of need identified in the needs analyses. There are differences between the three cities with Derby having marginally more SLT resource / predicted need and Nottingham having the least of the three. However, the estimated workforce levels needed to sustainably meet need in a whole systems approach is at least double the current levels.

The funding reality had an additional impact on the prospect of joint commissioning and pooled or aligned budgets because despite the goodwill that has been established and the connections between commissioners, the reality is that all budgets are under pressure and therefore this hinders free thinking about possibilities.

Schools as commissioners is an area not sufficiently explored in any of the three cities and the levels of school commissioning is low relative to other areas of the country for which we have data. Whilst schools are also under financial pressure, the increasing evidence base between learning, attainment, life chances and well-being provide a compelling case that supporting speech, language and communication should be a priority. It should be noted that the COVID recovery fund can be used for additional speech and language therapy in schools.

## **The levels of joint planning and service delivery aimed at achieving improved outcomes for children in the early years across the three LA areas and evidence of effective integrated service delivery and impact**

The levels of joint planning are variable across all three cities. There is goodwill and commitment but the systems and structures are lacking or embryonic.

There is still evidence of 'silo' planning and delivery and with that will continue the potential for duplication of effort and failure to maximise impact.

The outcomes and impact framework will be central to help focus on putting impact measures at the fore of planning. However, this is counter-intuitive and requires consistent and renewed commitment. This in turn requires strong leadership around the issue and a culture shift.

As outlined above, the integrated workforce is an area of ongoing development need. The pathway will provide some scaffold for this but true integrated working requires all of the other processes outlined to be in place.

Celebrating examples of good integrated service delivery from within the three cities will be important.

## Next steps

City leads were asked to identify key next steps towards the original outcomes. These are summarised below.

Balanced System® Themes	Derby	City Leicester	Nottingham
<b>Commissioning/Funding</b>	Consistent Public Health messaging which is sustainable beyond the life of DfE funded projects Needs analysis data used as part of preparation for LGA Peer Review Updating of data Self assessment using EIF matrix Finish strategy, followed by informal and formal consultation	Development of the joint commissioning esp involving the CCG and budgets: 9 months to continue project work and implement systems change, monitoring over the 3 year cycle. We have engaged a wide number of stakeholders 700+ staff and parents to shape SLC priorities to inform: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SLC Strategy</li> <li>• action plan</li> <li>• pathway</li> </ul>	Building the data dashboard supported by appropriate data sharing arrangements
<b>Integrated Workforce</b>	Develop robust mini pathway around integrated 2 year old checks	Develop shared outcome, monitoring and impact measures to shape transformation of support for SLCN. Readiness for School multi-agency steering group.	Pathway which is accessible to professions as well as parents.
<b>Engaging parents and carers</b>	Finish pathway, consult on final version.	Clear offer to parents - pathway. Staff and parents do not always understand that SLC is a prime area of the EYFS, so it underpins learning and development. Shift in focus of specialist service can only support SLCN English is perceived as the language of 'school' and barrier for many families. School readiness seen as an issue.	Pathway which is accessible to families.
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Workforce development audit/plan across the system.	Align the SLC strategy with the emerging Anti-Poverty strategy to keep momentum.	Maintain the profile of the work in the City through the appointment of a dedicated staff member. Getting 'buy-in' for change process and shared goals
<b>Training and development</b>	Implementation of the pathway, ensuring wide consultation on finished product and marketing plan via the Communications Team to ensure that it reaches widely.	Pathway. Workforce development: Audit wider children and young people's workforce development needs on SLCN.	Pathway. Long term workforce development strategy to ensure embedding and review in the future.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

1. The EOF project in Leicester, Derby and Nottingham has already delivered tangible progress towards the strategic, systemic level change that was at the heart of this bid.
2. The work will continue to November, 2020 within the original funding envelope in order to deliver the strategies, the pathway, the outcomes and impact framework and to share learning at a regional event.
3. Change management takes time and continual momentum over a number of years. A fixed term project therefore has to have at its centre ways of leveraging the system to continue the change and this often requires specific champions for the issue. Having a strategic lead for speech, language and communication in every authority with a knowledge and understanding of the field would be advisable.
4. Data sharing agreements will remain a challenge despite the will to solve this issue across the three cities. This requires statutory change from Government.
5. This project has been significantly impacted by the COVID pandemic but even prior to that the timeline was proving challenging. Our recommendation for any future projects would be for a minimum of 18 months timeline between award and reporting. The recruitment of project leads in each city impacted significantly on the timeline at the outset.
6. Feedback from the city teams includes that there was a benefit to having an external subject specialist involved throughout the project.

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7<sup>th</sup> September, 2020