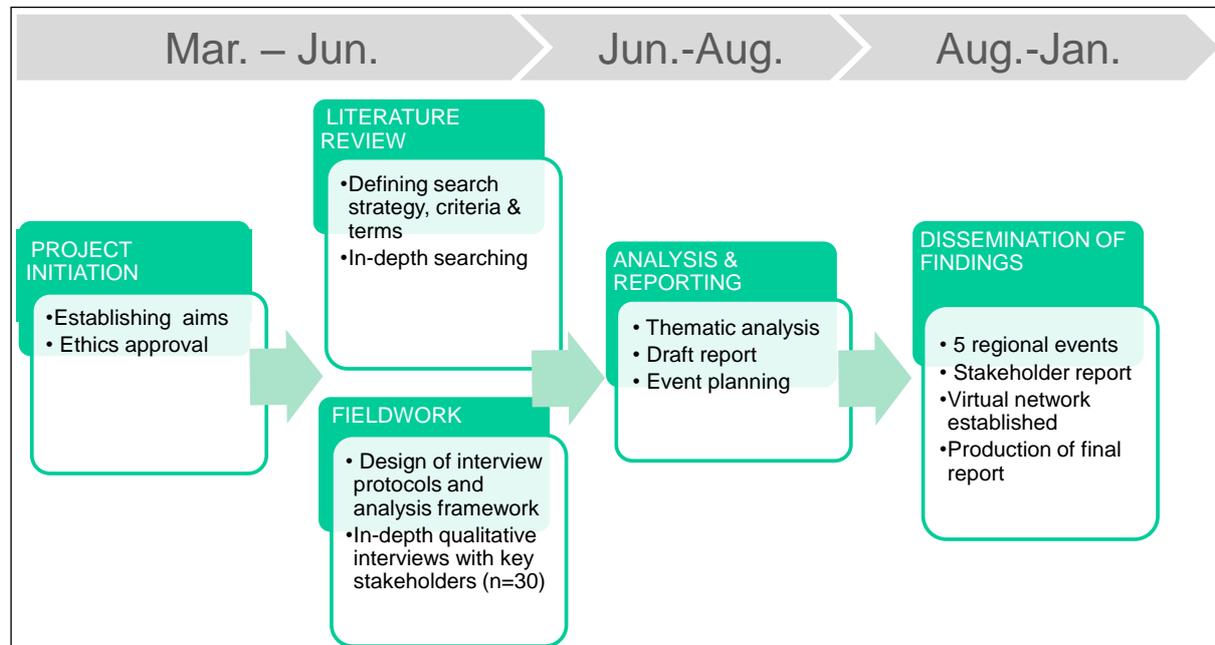


Appendix I Methods

Overview

Fig. 1 provides an overview of the approach taken to this research.

Fig. 1 Flowchart summarising study methods



Project initiation

The Project Initiation stage in March 2012 comprised: a set-up meeting involving SCIE and Action for Children to establish ways of working, aims and objectives; definition of the key research questions, literature review search strategy and approach to sampling; and securing of ethical approval for the study from the Association of Directors of Children’s Social Services Ethics Committee (reference: RGE120403).

Literature review

An initial scoping search - focused on understanding the drivers and impact of long-term versus short-term planning and decision-making within local authorities - yielded very limited results. The scope was revised, therefore, and the final search strategy aimed to find literature highlighting the characteristics of local authorities that deliver sustainable, innovative commissioning practice. Within this, we sought to identify: the common conditions that exist to facilitate and hinder innovative practice; and, how local authorities work to embed new ways of working such that they become part of a stable service model.

The revised search strategy involved conducting focused searching on a limited number of databases including, for example, Social Care Online and Social Services Abstracts. These searches used top-level search terms, for example, 'innovation', 'commissioning' and 'decommissioning' combined with 'children's services'.

This was supplemented by targeted searching of online and grey literature on relevant websites including, for example:

- UK Government departments
- Relevant 'think tanks'
- Children's charities
- Local government sector-specific and improvement bodies

Online and database searching was supplemented by reference harvesting and email contact with relevant organisations to request any additional relevant literature.

Interviews

A sample of fifty authorities was selected from a bespoke database of all local authorities in England. This was a random sample, stratified by geography. Initial contact was made with local authorities via email. This introduced the study, provided the ADCS ethical approval reference and requested participation, explaining also what this would involve. The email specified participation from the lead member for children's services and/or a senior-level officer with strategic responsibility for children's and families' services. Follow-up telephone calls were made to book in interviews. Where an authority declined to participate, it was replaced with another randomly selected authority. The achieved sample comprised 30 interviewees, across 29 authorities. Two interviewees were elected members, 28 were senior officers. The interview guide can be found in Appendix II.

Analysis and interim reporting

Literature review and interview data were analysed thematically. The nature and timescale of this work did not permit use of full quality appraisal tools; however, two researchers were involved in thematic analysis of all interview data to ensure quality and analytical rigour. Data from both sources were triangulated to identify cross-cutting themes, examples of the impact of policy on practice and available evidence to support recommendations. An Interim Report was produced which summarised the findings. These findings informed the structure of the stakeholder workshop agenda which can be found in Appendix III.

Stakeholder events and final reporting

Five regional stakeholder events took place in August and September 2012 in Birmingham, Bristol, Gateshead, London and Newcastle. With the exception of those who had declined to participate, those on the 'long list' of authorities sampled for interview purposes were invited to attend events, to ensure some overlap with

interview participants. The invitation was also sent to a number of individuals purposively sampled from relevant stakeholder organisations some of whom also passed on the invitation to other colleagues. In total, 49 stakeholders participated in the events. Attendees participated as experts in their own right, i.e. rather than necessarily speaking on behalf of their organisation, and were assured that findings would be reported thematically and anonymously. An Action for Children representative was also in attendance at each session.

At the start of each event, attendees were presented with headline messages from the Interim Report. The sessions then moved into a “round-table” format with either one or two facilitated groups (depending upon number of attendees) discussing the themes reported. A brief summary of emerging themes and recommendations was produced following each event. This was circulated to participants for validation and comment prior to event data being triangulated with interim findings to inform the final report.

Finally, the event also enabled participants to ‘opt-in’ to providing their email address to Action for Children for the purposes of continuing a virtual conversation on relevant issues in the future.

Appendix II Interview guide

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. This interview should take no more than 40 minutes.

Recap on purpose

Action for Children has commissioned SCIE to undertake a study of local authority decision-making, focusing specifically on the conditions that facilitate, and hinder innovative practice in commissioning early intervention services. By ‘early intervention’ we mean services that support children, young people and their families as soon as problems arise, in order to prevent further and escalating problems. The purpose is to identify lessons and good practice from which others can learn, particularly related to how local authorities overcome challenges related to short-term planning.

Data use

Action for Children will receive a list of study participants, but interview data will be analysed thematically and findings will be reported in an aggregated, non-attributable way.

Where there are examples of good practice you wish to share, we would request your permission to attribute these in our report to Action for Children – who plan to publish our findings - and would ensure you sign-off any summaries of your work, prior to us sharing these.

I'd also be happy to send you the notes I make from this interview if you wish, and, of course, you're free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Consent

Are you happy to proceed on this basis?

Interviewee details

1. Interviewee role:
2. Local authority:

Overview

3. To what extent do you think there is consensus among different partners (i.e. social care, health, education etc) about what early intervention is, in terms of Children's Services provision?

4. Over and above the amount of money you are given through the early intervention grant, what influences the way in which your local authority commissions early intervention services?

Decision-making mechanisms

I'd now like to talk about the way you make decisions about how to plan and deliver early intervention services.

5. Firstly, could you describe the process by which you define - and redefine – the outcomes to be achieved through your early intervention services?
6. When planning these services, to what extent do you think can you take a long-term view?
7. What conditions or factors most limit your ability to plan services over the long-term? How do you work to overcome these barriers?
8. What conditions do you think facilitate long-term planning of early intervention support?
9. What factors do you think have the biggest impact on the decisions you make about whether to provide, commission from other providers or decommission early intervention services?
10. **[If not already covered]** Could you describe the different ways in which you review and evaluate strategic-level decisions made about early intervention services for vulnerable children and their families?

Innovative practice in commissioning

As you know, we are looking for innovative examples of how local authorities are commissioning early intervention services.

11. Are there any examples of useful practice from **[name of authority]** you'd like to highlight from which others could learn?
12. Thinking more generally, what would you say are the necessary conditions for embedding and sustaining innovative commissioning practice in local authority children's services?
13. And what are the barriers?

Recommendations for the future

We would now like your recommendations for the future.

14. For local authorities' to be able to develop and embed sustainable commissioning practice, what support is needed:
 - a. ...at the local level?

b. ...at the national level?

15. For local authorities' to be able to plan early intervention services long-term, when this is appropriate, what needs to happen:

a. ...within your local authority?

b. ...at the local level?

c. ...at the national level?

Next steps

Action for Children is looking to build a community of interest in relation to this topic. We will be setting up some half-day round table events later in the year to share findings of this study and facilitate discussion about what support local authorities need to build and sustain innovative practice in early intervention. May we send you an invitation to this event?

Any other comments?

Thanks and close

Appendix III Stakeholder Event agenda

<i>Time</i>	<i>Item</i>
10.00-10.30	Registration and coffee
10.30-10.40	Welcome and introductions
10.40-10.50	Overview of research
<i>Discussion sessions</i>	
10.50 – 11.20	Intervening early to deliver long-term outcomes
11.20 - 11.50	The impact of policy on long-term planning
11.50 – 12.05	Funding & market management to deliver long-term outcomes
12.05-12.15	Comfort break
12.15 – 12.55	Recommendations for the future
12.55 – 13.00	Thanks, next steps and close
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch and networking