

Social Work Practices: Social Work Practice Pioneers

Mid-point report summary

The report sets out a summary of the progress of the seven Social Work Practice (SWP) pilots with adults at the mid-point of the pilots. The programme is managed by the Social Care Institute for Excellence, supported by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, The College of Social Work, the British Association of Social Workers, Skills for Care and the Local Government Association. King's College, London is formally evaluating the project, and Bristol University is capturing learning in relation to social work practice and social enterprises.

The full report includes an outline of the programme, the emerging themes and a summary of each of the pilot sites, and reports on work with each from Bristol University. It also includes a summary of the progress of the Social Work Practice Pioneer Projects.

The Social Work Practice pilot sites

The aims of the programme were agreed as:

- piloting Social Work Practices (SWPs) for adults to ascertain the benefits and disadvantages for people who use services, social workers and other staff, and value for money
- testing the benefits and disadvantages of a professionally-led social enterprise as a means of delivery
- furthering the development of social work with adults

We also want to see good engagement with people who need or use services.

Key achievements, issues and challenges:

Setting up the pilot sites was a complex and lengthy process, typically involving the adult social care, HR, procurement, legal and IT functions of local authorities. The authorities all either set up, recruited to or tendered for a 'host' SWP organisation. A number then seconded staff to that organisation, some through an application process.

The biggest challenges have related to timescales of set-up, and the time the new SWPs have to demonstrate what difference they make and to build in sustainability.

Six pilots, in Birmingham, Shropshire, Lambeth, Surrey, Suffolk and Stoke-on-Trent, went live between October 2011 and June 2012. The seventh, North East Lincolnshire, is in shadow form, and will fully launch as a social enterprise in April 2013.

SWP staff and people using services are involved in the governance and practice of all the SWPs. Four describe themselves as Mutuals – employee-led spin-offs from local authorities delivering public services. They are ‘social work-led’, and most deliver the council care management functions with a key social work perspective through the social work lead. A number are looking at developing new core roles like community social work.

The degree of delegation to the SWPs varies, with many local authorities retaining consultation or decision-making rights for high cost expenditure. The majority still use local authority IT systems, which both supports and potentially inhibits the SWPs in innovation and reducing bureaucracy.

Sustainability is a key concern of the pilots. They are looking at different ways of securing this, both through their relationship with the council and by developing additional services for which they charge individuals, as well as looking at other grants and income sources, including from Clinical Commissioning Groups. The recent extension of the pilots to April 2014 will help in this regard.

Issues important to SWPs include independence from the local authority, being rooted in social enterprise, being social work-led, and the investment in staff and organisational development in the field in which the SWP is working.

The Social Work Practice Pioneer Projects

The Pioneers are supported by seed funding, shared learning and publication of their progress.

The Pioneers are very diverse in size and approach. The work includes innovative council responses to adult safeguarding, support to self-funders and others not typically supported by councils, creative links with housing, and support to very specialist groups such as adult survivors of child sexual abuse or victims of human trafficking. There is also support for community and user-led groups.

The Pioneers are at very different stages; some have completed their programmes and are evaluating them, some are just at the starting point. They are due to produce their final reports in 2013.

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The full *Social Work Practices: Social Work Practice Pioneers* mid-point report will be available from 1 November 2012 at: www.scie.org.uk