

CPU Child Poverty Pilots: Interim synthesis report

By Martin Evans and Karen Gardiner

Introduction

A suite of nine Child Poverty Pilots have been operating across England since 2008, with over a third of Local Authorities involved with at least one of the initiatives¹. The pilots represent a large and varied set of policy interventions, with each pilot testing a range of different approaches to reducing child poverty. There is also diversity in terms of the client group the pilots engage with, for example, some have a whole community focus, whilst others target families and/or specific vulnerable groups or individuals. The diverse nature of the pilots reflects the complex, cross-cutting and multi-faceted nature of child poverty as well as the different ways in which services are shaped in local areas to meet the needs of their populations.

The aim of this report is to bring together information from each of the pilots, to maximise comparisons across the evaluation evidence base, and to draw out key findings relevant for policy makers and practitioners at national and local level. Additional analysis has been conducted to strengthen the evidence base.

This interim report mainly focuses on implementation and pilot delivery evidence, and explores the following cross-cutting pilot themes:

- Pilot participants.
- Developing tailored, innovative and localised solutions.
- Early indications of outcomes, experiences and perceptions of pilot services.

It is hoped that the evidence base from the Child Poverty Pilots in conjunction with other relevant poverty related reviews and reports, e.g. *Review on Poverty and Life Chances* led by Frank Field MP, the *Early Intervention Review* led by Graham Allen MP and the work conducted by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) and Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) can help shape Child Poverty strategies at both national and local level. The Child Poverty Act, which received Royal Assent on 25 March 2010, creates the framework to address child poverty at national and local level. The Act requires local areas and named partners to work together to undertake a Child Poverty Needs Assessment and to produce a Child Poverty Strategy.

Pilot context

The nine pilots are testing a range of key challenges across adult skills, employment, childcare, family intervention, the take up of services and local delivery. They reflect a good geographical mix, covering inner city, rural, urban and suburban areas. They are also testing a range of delivery mechanisms that includes the use of the Voluntary and Community Sector. Although established under the previous administration, the pilots provide valuable evidence and learning for the priorities of the Coalition Government. Links have been made in this report to demonstrate where this is the case. Of the nine pilots funded, Coalition Ministers decided that six should continue without changes to pilot delivery or evaluation design.

¹ School Gates also operates in Scotland & Wales

The three pilots subject to changes were the:

- Child Development Grant, as the conditional cash transfer element was not considered relevant for the planned Coalition reforms to Sure Start, particularly in the current fiscal climate;
- HMRC Childcare Affordability pilot, two strands of which were terminated early but evidence from all the strands will be used to inform future welfare reform and Universal Credit proposals. Evaluation evidence will still be available for these pilots albeit in reduced format;
- HMRC outreach pilot was completed, but the evaluation was terminated early after review by HMRC deemed that project was not good value for money in May 2010.

Overview of Child Poverty Pilot Programme

- Childcare Affordability Pilot 2009 tests whether changes in childcare subsidies make childcare more affordable and improve employment rates.
- Child Development Grant provides cash payments as incentives to encourage attendance and active participation at Children's Centre services. Emphasis is on developmental and parenting services to families with children aged 0-3 years.
- Child Poverty Family Intervention Project provides intensive family interventions to families with significant barriers to work including mental health problems, drug & alcohol issues, domestic violence and family functioning issues, to ensure their issues are addressed and that they are 'work ready'. These family interventions operate alongside pre-existing Anti Social Behaviour and Youth Offending Family Intervention Projects.
- Co-ordinated Local Support for Separating Parents assesses local development of integrated services to support separating and separated parents with the aim to improve access to help, minimise parental conflict and minimise negative impact on children's outcomes.

- HMRC Outreach Initiative explores the benefits of placing tax credit advisers in Children's Centres to improve tax credit delivery and customer experience and help with reducing fraud and error.
- Local Authority Innovation Pilots look at a wide range of innovative activity designed by local areas to tackle child poverty. Often consist of multiple intervention components.
- The School Gates Employment Support Initiative provides employment support to parents of primary school children through school-based information and support services to help prepare them go back to work.
- Teenage Parent Supported Housing tests locally designed approaches to enhancing the housing support available to teenage parents to improve outcomes for them and their children.
- Work-focused Services in Children's Centres Pilot explores the benefits of integrating full-time Jobcentre Plus advisers in Children Centres to help prepare parents to go back to work.

Interim findings of the Child Poverty Pilots

The evaluation evidence base from the Child Poverty Pilots is incomplete as final evaluation reports are still in preparation. At this interim stage the reports available mostly concern baseline studies and evidence of implementation, and early qualitative experience of providers and participants. However, emerging findings are:

Pilot participants

- The pilots work with low-income families at different stages throughout their lives and with a wide range of (underlying) issues. One key difference in the balance of objectives across the suite of pilots is how far they emphasise developmental services to improve life chances – to children and their parents – or services to reduce monetary poverty and material deprivation.

- Such a difference in approach is crucial to understanding routes out of poverty that can be immediate (say, through a step-change in moving into work and increasing family income) or could be preparatory and developmental (improving child development and parenting behaviour, improving maternal education and training in preparation for later work).
- Pilots that concentrate on the former are likely to show results in terms of monetary poverty within the lifetime of the pilot itself, while others that are building capacity in children and their families are more likely not to result in children ‘crossing the poverty line’ during the lifetime of the pilot but to impact on later life chances.
- One important theme in the emerging evidence base is whether the pilots are reaching out to new and previously under-served groups of parents and families. The early indications are very encouraging.
- Most pilots show that they have recruited their anticipated target groups, and often above anticipated numbers, for example the Teenage Parent Supported Housing and Coordinated Support for Separating Parents Pilots. However, some experienced delays and slower than expected recruitment, for example in some of the Local Authority Innovation pilots.
- New locally led partnerships in the Teenage Parent Supporting Housing and the Coordinated Support for Separating Parents Pilots show varied experiences that are both illustrative of obstacles and of the positive leaps forward when such obstacles are overcome: for instance in data sharing, from overcoming differences in checking and accreditation (e.g. for working with children) and in investing up-front time to reconcile differences in working practices. Some partnerships – particularly the Separating Parents pilot – provide a very wide ranging mix of services.
- Differences in organisational cultures are a common obstacle but there are early signs of real gains from integrating employment and benefits services in Children’s Centres.
- Pilots that are exploring new ways of integrating services at the local level demonstrate some of the inherent overlapping challenges to setting up pilot programmes that use innovative practices and partnership working.

Developing tailored, innovative and localised solutions

- The Child Poverty Pilots can be seen as developing new services alongside new delivery methods. Most of the pilots are trying out new delivery methods to find better ways of working with families at risk of child poverty. These new ways of operation often involve partnerships between agencies that have previously never worked together. Some pilots are both developing new services and new delivery approaches. Overall, the pilots reflect an appreciation that improved co-ordination of services provide a more client-focused, integrated and holistic approach to service provision.
- Implementation problems around the set up of the pilots have caused delays in many cases. These often involved practical constraints in terms of building size, setting up monitoring and information systems, delayed announcements of successful bids, but also conflicting wider local authority developments around recruitment, restructuring and redeployment.

Early Indications of outcomes, experiences and perceptions of pilot services

- The emerging evidence base demonstrates that the pilot services are well received by participants. Improved co-ordination of services and the more flexible and personalised approach of pilot services offered has helped engage low-income parents previously not engaged. For example, eight out of 10 teenage parents participating in the Teenage Parent Supported Housing Pilot expect the pilot to make a big or some difference to the lives of themselves and their children.

- Overall low income parents have responded positively to the opportunities provided by the pilots for locally delivered integrated services. Interviews with Local Authority Innovation Pilot stakeholders demonstrates that families can face a range of barriers in accessing provision and that, to address these barriers, family-based interventions are required.
- Services offered through Children's Centres are well-received by Centre users. However, 2008 Sure Start Children's Centre Survey data shows that not everyone eligible is aware of its existence. Modelling shows that eligible parents who are unaware of the local Children's Centre are more likely to be; male, from an ethnic minority background, expecting their first child or live in a household where no-one works. These parents are also less likely to be educated to degree level, live in a rural area, be poor, or have three or more children.
- Some parents are aware of the local Children's Centre but do not use their services. It is not clear whether this is because they do not like or require the services offered. However, modelling does show that this group of parents is less likely to live in a working household, less likely to be highly educated, less likely to live in a rural area and less likely to be poor compared with users of Children's Centres services.
- Across the interim evidence base, soft outcomes are reported as being most prevalent for participants: greater confidence; increased awareness of opportunities and options; access to job preparation skills and support. Although encouraging evidence, the route out of poverty depends heavily on finding and keeping a job. Crucially, crossing the poverty line depends on job quality, i.e. on pay and hours, as well as just getting a job. The final evaluation reports of the individual pilots will provide more information.
- Note that the evaluation evidence of smaller-scale locally-led initiatives may not be as robust as that from more centrally-led initiatives. The smaller number of people involved and the lack of suitable comparison groups often means the findings cannot be replicated or generalised to the same extent. However, qualitative and administrative evaluation evidence bases have been explored to extract as much relevant learning as possible.

© Crown copyright 2011.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 84712 954 3. Research Report 730. March0 2011).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

Other report summaries in the research series are also available from the website above.

If you would like to subscribe to our email list to receive future summaries and alerts as reports are published please contact:

Kate Callow, Commercial Support and Knowledge Management Team, Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield S1 2GQ. Email: Kate.Callow1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk.