



Department
for Education

Overview report

Department for Education Children's Social Care Innovation Programme

April 2014

Please note: updated programme information, including application details, can be found on www.springconsortium.com. Alternatively you can email the Innovation Programme at innovation@springconsortium.com.

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1. Introduction

The Children’s Minister, Edward Timpson, announced the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme in October 2013. Since then the Department for Education (DfE) has been assessing the opportunities for innovation in children’s social care, analysing the barriers to innovation and identifying two focus areas for the Innovation Programme, which were outlined in February 2014.

The purpose of this report is to set out **more detail about how the Programme will operate**, the types of projects it will support, the kinds of support available and how to get involved.

This report is accompanied by two additional reports, one on each of the focus areas:

1. rethinking children’s social work, and
2. rethinking support for adolescents in or on the edge of care.

These reports are **not the final word** – we will continue to refine our approach as the Programme develops and in light of conversations with those who share our objectives.

Figure 1 - High level timeline of activity for the Innovation Programme design and set up



We encourage all organisations who are interested in applying to be involved in the Programme to get in touch with us at innovation@springconsortium.com.

More information is also available on www.springconsortium.com.

2. Overview of the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme

Context – why is the Innovation Programme needed?

Local authorities across England are responsible for vital social care services for 369,000 0-18 year old children in need. These services are provided via complex local systems of public, private and voluntary providers operating across the local authority, health, education, police and other sectors. These services make an enormous difference to the lives of vulnerable children and families. There have been and continue to be improvements in outcomes for children – but we are not yet achieving **significant and sustained improvement**.

“The problem is that getting children’s social care wrong is a complete disaster, but when it is right no one notices”
Academic

Partly drawing on the Munro review¹, our research suggests that the regulatory framework and local structures, customs and practice tend to focus the attention of those working with children on compliance and risk avoidance. Little space is left for new ways of working to be developed and tested, and new approaches spread through the system slowly.

We need to **innovate and re-design service delivery** to achieve **higher quality, improved outcomes and better value for money**.

Both the Association of Directors of Children’s Services and the Local Government Association have published reports making this case². The Department for Education wants to get behind these efforts and support local authorities and other organisations to **try new approaches and learn from best practice**, including internationally. We want to stimulate and support innovation in the delivery and structures of children’s social care and help spread proven innovations more rapidly.

To this end, the DfE Innovation Programme has been set up to provide tailored and substantial support – £30 million in 2014/15 and a much larger amount in 2015/16.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf

² <http://www.adcs.org.uk/news/whatiscarefor.html>;

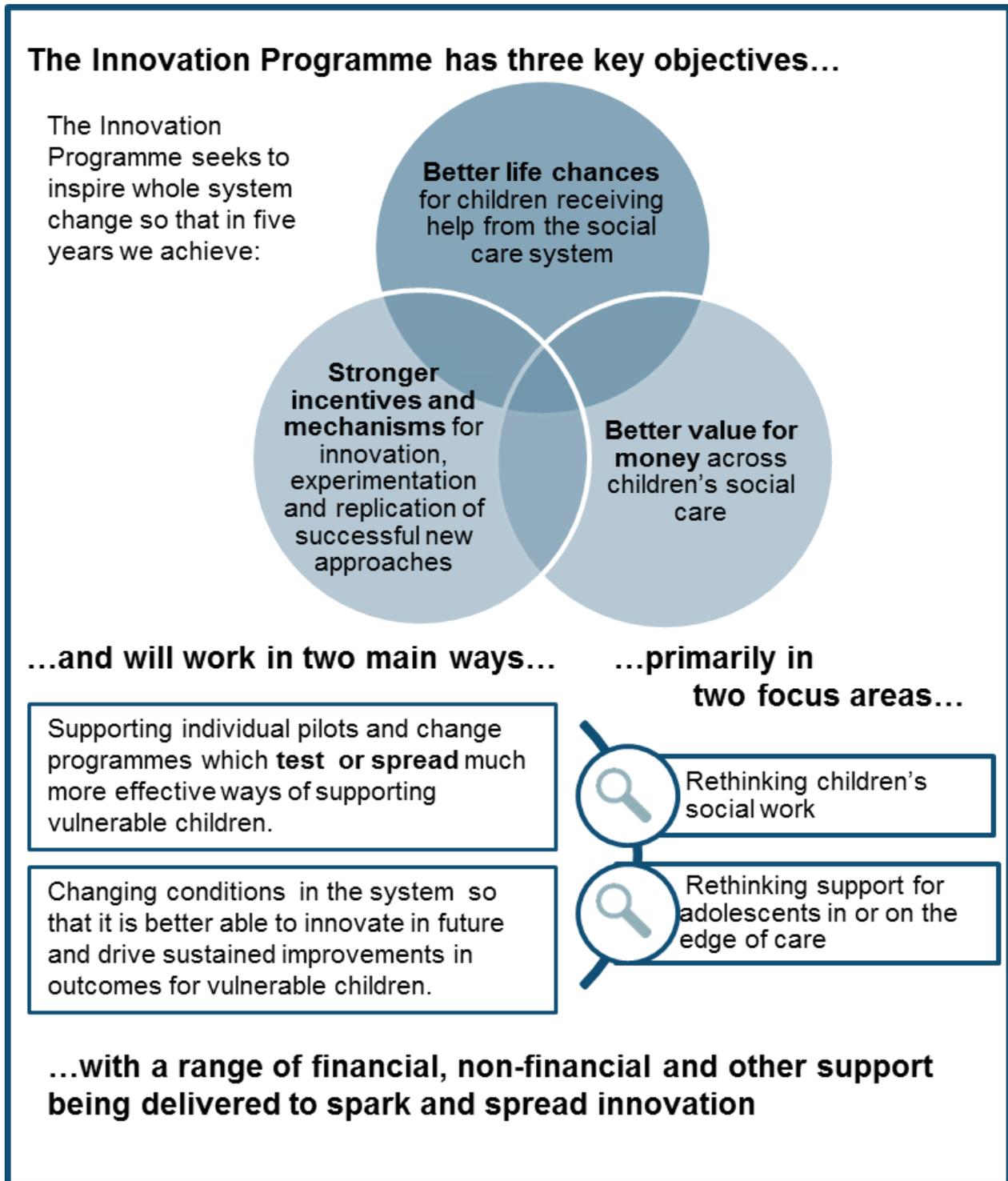
http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/publications/-/journal_content/56/10180/4048108/PUBLICATION

“Creativity, enterprise and risk-taking are not words that automatically spring to mind when we think of children’s social care. Our natural instinct, when it comes to vulnerable children, is to stick to the rules and play it safe at all costs ... but Ofsted still finds too many examples of poor performance and too few of excellence, while serious case reviews tell the same sorry stories of familiar mistakes made; as if the system has got stuck. I want to free it. If there are barriers to innovation, I’m determined to remove them. But I need you to play your part.”

Edward Timpson

Objectives of the Innovation Programme

The following diagram provides an overview of the Innovation Programme:



"We should capture good practice regionally and spread it nationally"
Academic

The Programme's key objective is to support improvements to the **quality of services** so that children who need help from the social care system have better chances in life. The

Programme also seeks to help LAs and other commissioners to get **better value for public money** spent to support vulnerable children. Finally the Programme seeks to create conditions in which **local systems are better able to innovate** in future to drive sustained improvements in outcomes for vulnerable children.

We will do this through:

- supporting individual pilots and change programmes which test or spread much more effective ways of supporting vulnerable children; and
- developing stronger incentives and mechanisms for and understanding of innovation, experimentation and spreading of successful new approaches.

This is a two year programme of support from 2014-16, supported by £30m in the first financial year and a substantially larger sum in the second. The Programme will be jointly delivered by the team at DfE and a delivery partner who will bring a strong track record of supporting innovation and detailed knowledge of social care services.

“[This] is what I want to see in social work. Room for the profession to innovate, try new ways of working, think afresh about practice and what constitutes success.”

Michael Gove

Why have we chosen the two focus areas?

There is a wide range of opportunities for innovation in children’s social care and we are open to supporting the most promising, mould-breaking ideas, regardless of their focus.

However, experience from other innovation programmes³ shows that innovation is better prompted by specific, defined problems than by a general call for ideas. We have chosen to target attention and resources on two focus areas at the core of the social care system.

These are areas where:

- we have identified **particular challenges** in prevailing practice;
- there is some **consensus** about the need for change; and
- there is clear **scope for radical innovation** to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and value for money.

³ Those interviewed or engaged include NESTA, the Young Foundation, Cabinet Office Mutuals Programme, BIG Lottery Fund, Deloitte Innovation Pioneers, Doblin (Innovation Consultancy), DWP Innovation Fund, the innovation Unit, Big Society Capital and the CLG transformation challenge.

3. A design for the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme

Design principles for the Innovation Programme

The design of the Innovation Programme and our approach to assessing applications will be informed by the following principles.

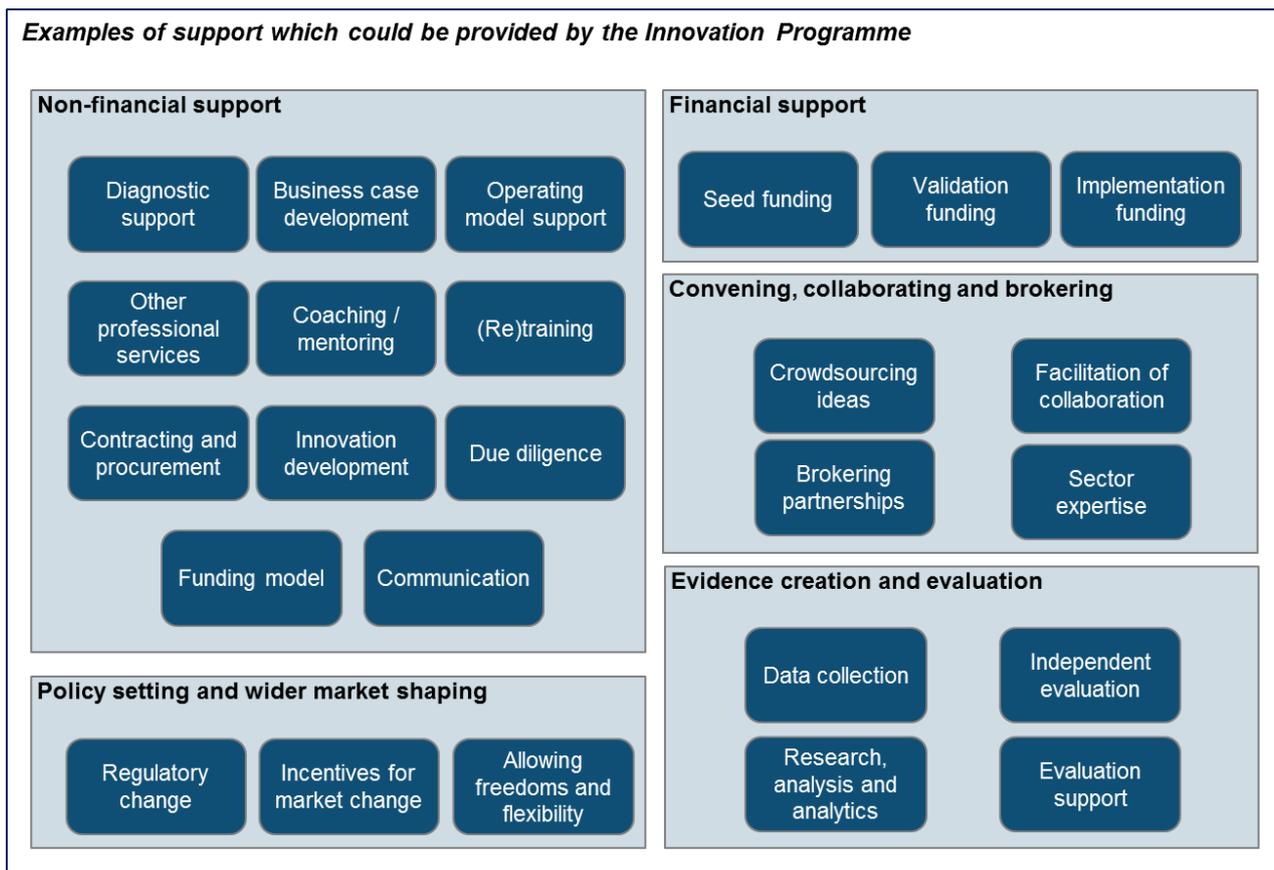
Overarching principle	Design principles – the Innovation Programme will...
A – Focus on improved outcomes for children and young people	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Through the projects it supports, have the potential to drive positive and measurable change in the short term (one - two years) in terms of outcomes for vulnerable children and value for money. 2. Through the social care system more widely, contribute to longer-term (two years plus) positive and measurable change to outcomes for children and value for money for LAs
B – Provision of sustained support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. During the two year course of the Programme, provide easily accessible financial and non-financial support to organisations to spark, scale and spread innovation 4. Over the longer term, develop an environment of stronger incentives and mechanisms for innovation, experimentation and implementation of successful new approaches so that innovation and improvement to outcomes is sustainable beyond the Programme’s end
C – Practical and integrated delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Foster bottom up, sector-led innovation, drawing on a strong base of evidence and evaluation 6. Support ideas and projects which are either scalable and/or can be successfully adapted for other contexts and settings 7. Co-design support given with recipient organisations, so that it is tailored, practical and can be delivered at pace within the context of real issues and challenges 8. Co-deliver support, drawing on a breadth of experience and expertise from the delivery partner, sector and other organisations 9. Encourage networking, peer-learning opportunities and sharing of best practice across the sector
D – Deliver robust, cross-sector governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Set up robust, accountable and nimble governance arrangements and processes for the Programme 11. Ensure robust, accountable and nimble governance arrangements are in place for any projects, organisations or initiatives supported by the Programme

Overarching principle	Design principles – the Innovation Programme will...
E – A spirit of innovation and empowerment	<p>12. Support a culture of empowerment for sector practitioners through providing appropriate freedoms and flexibilities to enable innovation and sharing risk of delivering innovation</p> <p>13. Influence, motivate and inspire organisations to think creatively, boldly and innovatively about how to radically improve outcomes for children</p> <p>14. Encourage individuals and organisations who share the programme’s objectives, but who are not currently involved in the children’s social care system to bring fresh thinking and fresh perspectives to bear on the challenges we face.</p>

Components of the Innovation Programme

What kind of support is available?

The diagram below illustrates some of the forms of the support potentially available from the Innovation Programme.



The package of support provided will be **co-designed** by the recipient organisation and the Programme team, and **tailored** in each case to the individual application and what it needs.

How to be a part of the Innovation Programme

Who can get involved?

We want to work closely with local authorities, who have the statutory responsibility for supporting and protecting vulnerable children and young people, and we also want to **open up the thinking** to everyone involved with these children and young people. We are looking for public sector, private sector, not for profit and voluntary organisations, working across the social care, justice, health, education or other sectors with an ambition to inspire and lead change and drive improved outcomes.

Some examples of organisations we want to hear from include academies, directors of public health, private sector providers of social care services or adjacent services and local authorities. We are not imposing boundaries on who can get involved – if you have an interest in improving outcomes for vulnerable children, particularly but not exclusively in relation to our two focus areas, we will support you to be involved.

We encourage applications both from organisations that already have an exciting idea and want to develop it, and from organisations that do not yet have a specific or worked up idea, but have the energy to do things differently – who have a particular challenge they would really like help to solve.

We will be working closely with local authorities and other bodies throughout the Programme to ensure that ideas taken forward are **deliverable and sustainable** within local contexts and get to the heart of rethinking how we deliver statutory services.

As this Programme is designed for the sector with the sector, we are also looking to hear from other organisations that have done exciting things to deliver improved outcomes to children and young people that we can learn from or test ideas with.

- ? Have you got a **good track record** of improving outcomes for children? Have you achieved this through innovative ways of working?
- ? Have you run a **pilot programme** that we can learn from?
- ? Have you **published a report or done analysis** that gives new insight into the problems to address in children's social care?
- ? Do you want to be involved in helping others to **test and develop their ideas**?

What types of applications are we looking for?

We are looking for applications that contain bold and interesting ideas that provoke a change in service delivery and challenge the fundamental questions at the heart of children’s social care.

Here are some ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ for you to consider in developing proposals.

Do	Don’t
<p>Be creative and seek to test new approaches which have not yet been tried;</p> <p>Think about linking with other organisations who want to change too, so you can learn together and create more generalised findings;</p> <p>Get in touch even if you only have a rough idea;</p> <p>Be ambitious in scale and seek to create whole system change;</p> <p>Look to test the validity of an independent model (i.e. one commissioned, but not directly provided, by the local authority);</p> <p>Seek to work with partners – both ‘usual’ and ‘unusual’ to help foster innovative approaches.</p>	<p>Make assumptions about our level of ambition in size, scale or level of risk we are looking for in new approaches;</p> <p>Rule out ideas based on barriers created by current guidance, regulation or policy. We will help you to work with individual regulators and policy-makers on fresh approaches;</p> <p>Worry too much about how to make it happen (yet);</p> <p>Only apply if you are a current provider of social care services. We are interested in hearing from anyone who has a good idea;</p> <p>Assume that we will fund a large number of small pilots. We are looking for whole system change;</p> <p>Ask for support for something that you could do anyway. We want you to really engage with the barriers that have held you back to date;</p> <p>Assume that we are only interested in structural innovation.</p>

To give a flavour of the types of application we are interested in, we have recently been having conversations with:

- A group of local authorities who have designed their own new approach to social work practice, based around getting social workers back into intensive and in-depth work with families. It aims to do this through a roll out of a set of specific and defined interventions with a sound evidence

base; a rethinking of some of the processes that take time away from front line work; and a new role for administrative support so social workers can focus on the tasks that they are uniquely skilled to do;

- An authority interested in making their children's services into a separate organisation;
- A voluntary organisation interested in developing a single service for adolescents on the edge of care cutting across substance misuse, youth justice, social care and family work;
- A local authority interested in developing a care pathway approach that provides a detailed assessment of young people's needs within the first few weeks in care, and provides a consistent team of staff (including specialists in mental health and substance misuse) to work with that young person wherever they move through the system.

What happens next?

Visit the Innovation Programme website: www.springconsortium.com. Alternatively, you can email us at innovation@springconsortium.com.



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