

## Torbay SWIFT Evaluation Summary

### Background

The Social Work Innovation Fund Torbay (SWIFT) was established to improve the way children, young people and families are supported by children's social care organisations in Torbay, Devon.

### Aims

The project commenced in May 2015 and the evaluation comprised three discrete elements: (1) the creation of Early Help Practices – multi-professional, locality focused hubs; (2) the formation of a Public Services Trust (PST) – a unique legal framework to facilitate pooled budgeting, joint commissioning and attract social investment; and (3) the transfer of Children's Services to an Integrated Care Organisation (ICO).

### Evaluation

The focus of the evaluation initially was on the Early Help Practices exclusively. However, implementation proceeded slowly, severely limiting the progress of the evaluation. Six months into the project, Torbay Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted and received a judgement of inadequate. This had two serious consequences for the initiative. Firstly, that strategic oversight and leadership within Children's Services had to re-focus attention on the improvement plan agreed after the inspection. Secondly, in response to a request from the DfE, the evaluation team were asked to change the focus of their research to the PST and the transfer of Children's Services to the ICO. Between December 2015 and April 2016 a modest mixed methods evaluation comprising semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation was undertaken.

The Local Authority had planned to launch the PST in the summer of 2015, however it took longer than expected to secure the formal sign up of members with the launch eventually taking place in April 2016. At the time of writing, the PST existed as a virtual entity with no staff. It had attracted a £50,000 development grant and although the intention to pool budgets and jointly commission services had been secured, the first service was not expected to be commissioned until late 2016.

From the limited number of interviews secured, respondents were supportive of the PST and foresaw many benefits around pooled budgets and opportunities for joint commissioning and integrated working; however, they also noted caution over the complicated nature of the arrangements and whether Directors could contribute the requisite time commitments to make it a success. A due diligence exercise and risk assessment with the regulator MONITOR on the proposal to transfer Children's Services to the ICO was initiated in summer 2015, but was slowed by the Ofsted judgement.

At the time of writing, a decision about the transfer had not been made. As a result, there was little for the evaluation to report on.

## Findings

It was not possible to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the innovations since neither had progressed sufficiently to make an assessment.

## Recommendations

It was not appropriate to make recommendations for policy or practice at this point.

This evaluation study was carried out between December 2015 and April 2016 by Dartington Social Research Unit.

*The DfE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme funded this project and its independent evaluation. Co-ordination of the evaluation was undertaken by the Rees Centre from the University of Oxford ([www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk](http://www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk)). A full copy of this report can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)*