As part of the Scottish Executive’s strategy for eliminating child poverty within a generation, in mid-2003 funding was given to Dumfries and Galloway and Glasgow Councils to set up pilot Working for Families projects. The projects help parents and carers to move closer to employability by providing a variety of childcare support. The pilots were the precursor to the larger programme of support that is to be implemented from April 2004. To inform the development of this main programme GEN Consulting was commissioned to undertake an ongoing (formative) evaluation of the pilots. This Findings is based on the first stage of the evaluation - an updated report is due in summer 2004.

Main Findings

The research identified several good practice lessons for setting up and running the Working for Families projects, including:

- the importance of having a steering group and linking into wider strategic and policy networks;
- project activities should be based on research and local knowledge as well as consultation with interested parties;
- someone should have a role to oversee the projects within the local authority
- project delivery benefits from being undertaken through an intermediary organisation; and
- client recruitment should be preceded by assessment to establish motivation towards employment.

The consultants also make recommendations for the monitoring and evaluation, including:

- the importance of distinguishing between outputs and outcomes and the need to have clear targets; and
- the provision of details on what data to collect, stressing the importance of soft indicators.
Background

In total 11 pilot projects were funded, 8 in Dumfries and Galloway and 3 in Glasgow. Total funding over 1 year was just over £1 million and ranged from £18,000 to £231,000. Some of the projects had levered in funding from other sources. This amounted to 10% of total project costs.

The projects were to be involved in a variety of childcare activities and support for parents in order that parents and carers could move closer to employability. These included:

- Providing childcare in the homes of parents and carers;
- Offering childcare outwith the hours of 9 to 5;
- Offering childcare in the evenings so that parents could attend classes at a local learning resources centre;
- A roving crèche that would link childcare to a mobile learning facility to provide childcare training, the intention being that parents and carers could become registered as childminders;
- Providing childcare whilst parents were being taught to drive so that they could then access job opportunities;
- A community transport initiative that would take children to childcare services thereby allowing their parents to gain a job; and
- Providing childcare subsidies so that parents could purchase childcare according to their needs. In conjunction with this a guidance worker would offer support to help with the move towards work or training which includes working with a local financial advice agency to give advice on benefits, how to maximise uptake and how to manage once the 6 to 12 month period of childcare subsidy comes to an end.

Over the time of the evaluation (June to October 2003) project development was at various stages. Some projects had still to start by the time the evaluation ended. Despite this it was possible to identify a number of lessons that might be of use to authorities that are to receive funding through the main programme.

Good practice lessons

Analysis of the progress that the pilot projects had made enabled a number of good practice lessons to be identified. The main ones are:

- A steering group should be set up to oversee project development. This should bring together staff from local authority departments dealing with economic development and childcare and external agencies;
- The project should link into wider strategic and policy networks;
- Local research should be undertaken to provide evidence of need for the types of activities that the project will be involved in;
- Prior to finalising the project there should be widespread consultation with interested groups and agencies, local elected members and regulatory bodies such as the Care Commission;
- Project development can be facilitated by drawing on the experiences of other projects;
- Councils should allocate a member of staff to oversee project development;
- Linking the contributions of childcare and economic development agencies is crucial for project success as is the development of links with specialist agencies involved in activities such as substance abuse and literacy and numeracy;
- Project delivery is likely to be most effective if done through an intermediary organisation;
- Prior to using such intermediary organisations councils need to ensure that they have the capacity to deliver. Their roles then need to be outlined in Service Level Agreements;
- Project staff are likely to be more effective if they know the needs of parents in the local area; and
- Prior to recruiting clients, they need to be assessed to see if they are committed and motivated to moving towards employment.

Monitoring and evaluation

Projects need to be able to demonstrate that they are both reaching the client group and moving them towards employability. Accordingly, all projects need to develop and implement monitoring and evaluation systems. The full report includes, as appendices, a variety of monitoring and
evaluation pro-formas. However, in general terms projects need to:

- Have a clear understanding of the differences between project outputs and outcomes. Outputs are a means to an end, for example the provision of childcare. The outcomes are what the Executive is providing funding for (moving parents or carers nearer to employability);

- Have clear, unambiguous quantitative targets; and

- Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks that collect 3 types of data:
  - Profile information on the characteristics of the clients
  - ‘Hard’ outcomes such as gaining a job or place on a training course
  - ‘Soft’ outcomes that measure ‘distance travelled’, covering such things as increases in confidence and motivation.

Given that it is unlikely that the clients will be readily moved into a job, the collection of ‘soft’ information is very important. Without this projects are unlikely to be able to show that they are moving clients in the correct direction.

**Guidance for the main funding**

The full report also includes a section providing guidance for the development of the main funding stage. This covers the following:

- funding allocation and geographical targeting;
- project size and duration;
- target groups, service provision and outcomes;
- staffing; and
- dissemination of good practice.

**About this study**

The evaluation methods consisted of:

- Visits to the operational pilot projects;
- Regular telephone contact with the projects;
- Interviews with policy staff in each authority;
- Attendance at a variety of meetings held in Dumfries and Galloway; and
- The organisation of a half-day seminar at which the consultants and the projects shared experiences.
If you wish further copies of this Research Findings or have any enquiries about social research, please contact us at:

Scottish Executive Social Research
1F (Dockside)
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ
Tel: 0131 244 7565
Fax: 0131 244 7573
Email: socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

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