

**‘Embedding an Outcomes Approach in  
Tackling Poverty and Community Regeneration’**

**Project Evaluation Report**

**Executive Summary**

**Improvement Service / Scottish Government**

**December 2011**

**Improvement Service  
Westerton House  
Westerton Road  
East Mains Industrial Estate  
Broxburn  
EH52 5AU**

## About this Report

This report was written by Dr Andrew McGuire of the Improvement Service.

The report reflects input received from:-

- The local lead officers involved in each of the five local partnerships that were assisted via the project;
- The Project Manager, Andrew Noble, who was seconded from Renfrewshire Council to support the 'Embedding Outcomes' work for a fifteen month period;
- Participants in the various national workshops that the project delivered;
- Scottish Government staff involved in the Project Steering Group; and
- Informal feedback relating to the series of 'Issues Papers' produced as part of the project.

For further information on this report or on the project contact:

[andrew.mcguire@improvementservice.org.uk](mailto:andrew.mcguire@improvementservice.org.uk)

Or visit:-

[www.improvementservice/embedding-an-outcomes-approach-in-tackling-poverty-and-community-regeneration/](http://www.improvementservice/embedding-an-outcomes-approach-in-tackling-poverty-and-community-regeneration/).

(Copies of the full Evaluation Report and the Executive Summary can also be accessed via this webpage)

## Executive Summary

*'Embedding an Outcomes Approach in Tackling Poverty and Regeneration'* was a project that was resourced jointly by the Scottish Government (SG) and the Improvement Service (IS).

This project evaluation report summarises the main features, activities and outputs of the project and concludes with reflections on the main areas of learning arising from the work.

The project operated over a fifteen month period, from March 2010 to June 2011. The project was resourced by a financial contribution of £70,000 provided by the SG. The IS contributed a similar level of funding in the form of in-kind support.

The project provided a wide range of practical, hands-on support to five local Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) throughout Scotland. The geographic areas covered by the project were Dumfries & Galloway, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian and West Lothian. The support was delivered principally to the CPP thematic groups that led on poverty / community regeneration in each of the local areas.

The precise focus of the support work in each area was determined in conjunction with the local partnerships and all of the support was delivered by the IS. The detail was set out in a project plan for each of the five areas. There was a number of recurring themes in the work with the local partnerships, with the main common areas of support provided relating to:-

- Achieving more effective, outcome-focused partnership working;
- Identifying and building understanding of the key issues contained within the evidence base in order to identify outcomes;
- Prioritisation of key outcomes;
- Developing outcome-focused action plans, to help deliver the priority outcomes;
- Developing outcome-focused indicators and targets, which reflected the priority outcomes and which were capable of demonstrating progress made towards their achievement; and
- Training, development and communication of key messages relating to the outcomes approach.

Across the pilot areas, the project supported a number of tangible outputs and improvements which enabled the following achievements:-

- Development of a greater understanding of the outcomes approach and how to work effectively within it;
- Clarification within local partnerships of the roles, structures and expectations concerning the outcomes approach;
- Development of a more robust and effective operating environment for driving the achievement of key outcomes;
- Raising the profile and priority of poverty and inequality issues within Community Plans / Single Outcome Agreements;
- An improved understanding of the evidence base on which to establish key challenges / priority outcomes; and
- A clearer articulation of priority outcomes, together with a clear set of messages for communicating across the partnership.

Whilst the project plans developed for each area provided the broad outline of support to be delivered, flexibility was also built in to take account of emerging needs that arose in each area. In practice, as support was delivered in each area, it often turned out to be the case that additional - or slightly different - issues emerged. Wherever possible, these were responded to positively and supported.

(A more detailed breakdown of the main achievements within each local area is available in the full evaluation report at Annex C).

Many of the issues identified by the local partnerships were largely generic in nature, rather than being specific to the policy area of poverty / regeneration. For example, issues such as developing partnership effectiveness, use of evidence base and prioritisation of outcomes are all matters that could equally be applied to other CPP thematic groups, such as Health & Wellbeing, Economic Development or Community Safety. In effect, therefore, much of the work focused on fundamental issues concerning what implementation of an outcomes approach actually consisted of and how local partnership working could develop to embrace the key concepts.

This was a recurring feature of the project and it was subsequently reflected, not only in the work within the local areas, but also in the published 'Issues Papers' and the national workshop events.

The evaluation questionnaire returns completed by the five local areas, indicate that the project was generally well received and that it helped the local partnerships to make progress in embedding a more outcomes-focused approach to their work.

*"The project very much helped to reinforce the need for an outcomes approach and helped us to move beyond rhetoric."* Local participant

Overall, the local areas reported that the project was effective or very effective in delivering on the agreed outputs set out in the initial project plan. All areas reported that the project had helped them further embed an outcomes approach in their area and that they now have a clearer idea of what an outcomes approach entails. It is also recognised that fully embedding an outcomes approach across a partnership is likely to involve a long-term process of continuous improvement and refinement.

Four out of the five local areas reported that the IS facilitators had helped ‘a great deal’ to provide insights into the outcomes approach. They also reported that, in most cases, they were able to facilitate solutions that may have been otherwise lacking and help progress issues which would have taken longer to resolve without external support. All areas responded that the level of support offered by the IS was ‘about right’.

(The detailed responses setting out the local partnerships’ views on the project are set out in the full evaluation report at Annex D).

The support provided to the local partnerships focused principally on helping to sharpen the various processes that underpin the delivery of outcomes. Inevitably, there will be time lags and attribution challenges in seeking to determine eventual impacts of the project, in terms of enhanced outcomes delivered within local areas. Nevertheless, the feedback from the local areas is positive in this respect and the strengthened processes, etc are generally seen to have been of value. This is reflected in the fact that all five of the local areas indicated that they would recommend this type of support to other partnerships.

In addition to the direct support provided in the five local areas, the project published a series of six ‘Issues Papers’, each of which covered a range of topics relevant to the ‘Outcomes Approach’. The ‘Issues Papers’ and other key project documentation can be accessed at:

[www.improvementservice/embedding-an-outcomes-approach-in-tackling-poverty-and-community-regeneration/](http://www.improvementservice/embedding-an-outcomes-approach-in-tackling-poverty-and-community-regeneration/)

The project also delivered a series of four national Workshops, which were advertised openly and which also focused on a range of topic areas relevant to the ‘Outcomes Approach’.

In overall terms, the financial support provided by the Scottish Government was the key factor that enabled the project to proceed. Without this funding, the project would not have been able to support the full-time, dedicated project manager post, which was central to delivering the project outputs. Similarly, the Scottish Government’s investment helped to lever an equivalent resource input from the IS as the funding of the project manager post provided a focus and impetus for drawing in the wider IS support.

In terms of specific learning identified by the Improvement Service as a result of the project, the following points are made:-

- There is a significant demand across local partnerships for practical, flexible, hands-on support relating to implementation of an outcomes approach.
- There is a significant gap between the theory of outcomes and the practice. All areas involved in the project – including those generally considered to be ‘ahead of the curve’ – experienced significant challenges in the translation from the SOA document to actually implementing outcome-focused working.
- The barriers and challenges experienced by partnerships in embedding an outcomes approach range from relatively basic problems of articulating outcomes, partnership organisation, etc to much more complex change management challenges.
- The problems encountered by partnerships and the potential solutions tended to be primarily generic issues rather than related to the particular thematic area. For example, this includes issues relating to leadership, articulation of outcomes, prioritisation, performance management, etc - as opposed to technical issues relating to a particular outcome area. Accordingly, the generic approach of the project is replicable across the full range of outcome areas.
- Change management was a major feature of the project and the support provided. The challenge of embracing and embedding an ‘outcomes approach’ generally requires a commitment to ‘doing things differently’ relative to what has gone before. For some partnerships, this can simply be a minor evolution from a path that they are already well down. But, for others, it can require more fundamental changes in practice.
- The publication of a series of six ‘Issues Papers’ was beneficial in that it demanded the discipline of articulating what it means exactly to ‘embrace outcomes-focused working’. Informal feedback from a range of sources indicates that these ‘issues Papers’ have been generally welcomed.
- The project also produced a broader range of materials relating to implementation of outcomes-focused working, which can be used for a much wider audience. This includes presentations, templates and the ‘Outcomes-focused Partnership Checklist’, which is now being offered more widely to CPPs.
- Learning from the project indicated that it is often not enough just to point out areas that require change in order to embed outcomes-focused working. Rather, it seems also to be important to offer hands-on support, challenge and encouragement to ensure that such change actually occurs.

In this respect, the independent IS facilitators were often seen as a mechanism that could help partnerships 'move on', develop consensus, reach agreement in resolving issues, etc. Effectively, the role of the IS facilitators as 'independent change agents' seems to be one that was valued across the local areas and which helped them to progress solutions more quickly than they might otherwise have been able to without such independent support.

- Key areas of 'added value' generated by the IS for the local partnerships derived from:-
  - Providing information and insights concerning what it takes to implement an outcomes approach;
  - Playing the role of 'honest broker' in facilitating open discussions that may otherwise have been difficult / Creating forums which provide 'permission' within local partnerships to instigate open discussions on where there was scope for improvement; and
  - Generally, challenging the partnership 'to do more' in embracing the outcomes approach.

The range of outputs achieved by the project include detailed, hands-on work over the course of 15 months with 5 local partnerships, four national workshops and publication of six Issues papers.

Overall, the work with the 5 local partnerships, whilst positive, has been a 'drop in the ocean' in comparison to the challenge of embedding the outcomes approach across the public sector. To scale up the work would require significant political commitment and resources across the public sector. Discussions are now taking place between the IS and the SG to consider a second phase of the embedding outcomes work. If this proceeds, it is likely to include many of the elements from phase one, which have proven to be popular and successful. But it is also likely that a second phase of work would have a number of differences, aimed at further improving its impact. This may, for example, include:-

- Working with a more intensive resource within a local area in order to avoid spreading the resource too thinly and to ensure the depth of input that is often necessary to drive genuine change;
- Providing a longer-term commitment to supporting change within local partnerships, recognising the significant, long-term nature of the challenge of fully embedding an outcomes approach.
- In line with the recommendations of the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (Christie Commission), ensuring a greater emphasis on key factors such as targeting the most severe concentrations of multiple deprivation, recognising the strong inter-relationships of

negative outcomes that affect such communities, recognising the scale of the challenge and reflecting this in the resource level allocated to support change, and developing practical examples demonstrating how to achieve the shift to early intervention and prevention.

In conclusion, it is considered that the 'Embedding Outcomes' project represented a very good return for the investment made in the project by the SG and the IS and that it would compare favourably with other interventions. Prioritising sufficient resource to scale this positive work up is now the major challenge.