Evaluation of Change and Innovation Funding as a potential model to distribute the debt levy funding devolved to Scottish Government

Introduction

Scottish Government asked the Improvement Service (IS) to identify potential funding models through which the devolved debt levy funding could be distributed.[1]. Seven models were initially identified - an eighth was subsequently suggested and also considered. Following a limited consultation in 2019 it was agreed that two of the models identified would be assessed using a 'test and change approach'. The two funding models that were to be evaluated using this methodology were 'direct grants to local authorities' and 'change/innovation'.

Details of the other potential models and the result of engagement events held in 2020 can be found here

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from the 'Evaluation of Change and Innovation Funding as a potential model to distribute the debt levy funding devolved to Scottish Government'.

This model was considered as providing a dedicated source of funding which could allow service providers to design and test innovative delivery approaches which may not otherwise have been feasible, due to constraints on core funding and the limits imposed by short funding cycles. As well as trying out new ideas it is suggested that this model might also offer other benefits such as facilitating increased collaboration. It could also be used to target approaches that would result in earlier intervention and greater use of technology.

Scope

A selected sample of projects which had been awarded funding by the Debt Advice Journey Programme (DAJP), managed by the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB), were evaluated against set criteria which had been agreed in earlier engagement sessions. It should be noted that the projects selected were chosen to participate because of their connection to 'change/ /innovation', however this was not one of the purposes of the DAJPP.

The organisations that took part in the evaluation and a brief description of the activities for which funding was awarded are set out in the table below.

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[1] https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/18057/debt-levy-funding-second-phase-update.pdf

Table One: Organisations and project activities that received DAJP funding

Organisation	Summary of project activities
Aberdeen City Council	Develop a Customer Portal as part of the AdvicePro Case Management System.
Govan Law Centre	Establish a Scotland wide website which offers advice and information and, through a triage process, access to webchat and advisors. Raise awareness of the website. Develop referral protocols and "warm handovers" for service users who require a local debt advice agency.
Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership	Develop a process that builds on existing access to advice services, which provides service users with a seamless transition onto the next stage of their advice journey, and ultimate resolution (I:MAP).
Link Housing Association	Offer remote access to advice and self-help coaching for service users in target groups across East Ayrshire, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, Inverclyde and West Lothian. Provide, and manage, a loans scheme offering 75 sets of digital equipment.
Parkhead CABx	Act as a single ongoing point of contact for service users. Assist service users to access information using digital approaches.
Money Matters- South Lanarkshire Council	Introduce a new case management system with improved functionality- Advice- Pro. Establish triage and referral pathways.
West Lothian Council- Advice Shop	Develop a Debt Advice options toolkit. Provide financial capability advice sessions for Link Workers. Development of a joint approach to service delivery between Link Workers and Money Advisors

Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to look at the effectiveness of the funded projects in relation to delivering change/innovation. To do this it was necessary to consider both the outcomes achieved by the grant funded activities and also the processes adopted in their planning and delivery. All the projects were assessed in relation to agreed measures. These included general criteria to assess overall effectiveness and others to specifically measure potential in relation to supporting change and innovation. For the purposes of this report only the criteria relating to change and innovation will be discussed. These can be found in Appendix One

A detailed evaluation plan was prepared for each of the participating projects. These considered both the processes used and outcomes achieved. A logic model was used to set out the outcomes or changes that it was predicted the activities would provide for each of the identified beneficiaries or stakeholders.

To assess the effectiveness of each project the milestone and activity reports provided to SLAB were reviewed and individual meetings with representatives of each of the funded organisations were arranged.

The table below sets out the extent to which each of the project's activities met the assessment criteria.

The results are colour coded with green being fully met, amber partly met and red not being met at all.

Table Two Assessment criteria as applied to individual projects- Change and Innovation

Assessment criteria	Aberdeen City Council	Govan Law Centre	Inverclyde HSCP Advice Services	Link Group	Parkhead CABx	Shelter Scotland	South Lanarkshire Council Money Matters	West Lothian Advice Shop
Innovation and Impact	The AdvicePro Client Portal has provided a platform for service users to upload documents, view appointments, or communicate with advice staff online. This has resulted in more efficient use of advisor time and offered increased value for money and reduced waiting times. Individuals have easier and	The Debt Navigator service offers an instant messaging platform Individuals have access to advice instantly and remotely during the hours of operation with no appointments necessary.	The Money Advisor post engages with service users using a range of creative and interactive approaches. Individuals, particularly those who are socially and economically excluded are supported to continue to engage with advice services in a way that	The digital hardware loan service tackles digital exclusion. Individuals who may not have been able to access digital advice services and support are empowered and have the option of using digital access routes.	The Money Advisor post engages with service users using a range of creative and interactive approaches. Individuals, particularly those who are socially and economically excluded are supported to continue to engage with advice services by having a		New processes and procedures have been adopted along with a new case management recording system. Individuals are able to access advice services more quickly.	By appointing a Link Worker with a defined remit and providing resources, there tis increased awareness of existing advice services within community networks. Individuals are more likely to be referred for advice services by a well-informed trusted intermediatory,

	quicker access to advice staff,		meets their needs.		named individual who facilitates access to support.			
Scalability	AdvicePro Client Portal is now available to all organisations using this case management system. (at a small additional cost)	The project/debt navigator tool is designed to be duplicated in other authority areas.	The project was designed to be easily replicated. It has resulted in a review of service delivery to individuals who are most at risk of disengaging.	Providing electronic equipment for loan and support staff would be replicable in other locations.	The buddy position can be implemented at other CABx and advice service providers. Interest has already been expressed in adopting the model.		Not relevant	Relevancy would depend on existing local arrangements.

With one exception, all the projects were all able to demonstrate that their activities would result in testing new ideas and new approaches i.e. they met the assessment criterion for innovation and impact.

In relation to the criterion measuring scalability, this was not relevant in every case. Although each have merit, a distinction has to be drawn between projects that had the potential to bring about system change if implemented nationally, and those that were introducing change at a local level based on activities or resources already in use in other areas.

However those projects that had the potential to be scaled-up or replicated were being both copied and expanded. Evidence was provided of instances where activities were shared across wider networks and new approaches that had been effective were adopted by other organisations.

One of the more innovative projects that had strong potential was the one delivered by Shelter Scotland who participated in the programme for the first year but subsequently withdrew. The aim of the project had been to work with service users to co-design a digital platform to replace certain aspects of face to face services. This was an innovative and untested approach. Whilst it was challenging to access sufficient data to do a thorough evaluation the key factors that meant the project was not successful were identified.

The main difficulty arose because Shelter Scotland was unable to identify and engage with a representative cohort of service users.

Given the networks the organisation supported – shops, advice lines etc this seemed a little surprising however it appeared that the implications of GDPR had not been fully discussed at an organisational level. As a result, there were difficulties in sharing and accessing personal information and hence in contacting potential participants. To try to overcome this, consultants were engaged but recruitment of a representative cohort of actual/potential service users remained problematic. In addition, there were several staff changes at key stages in the project.

The concept to be tested had potential but came with some risk of failure. If similar projects are to be adopted it is suggested that there is a clear pathway to recruitment of participants at an organisational level, that adequate time is built in to raise awareness of the proposed activity and to recruit a cohort of representative participants and that evidence is provided of how General Data Protection Regulation requirements will be satisfied,

Conclusions

There is evidence that this is an effective funding model and that it can be used to drive improvement at both local and national levels. Testing new approaches to drive innovation and deliver lasting change has been an effective use of funding.

In the engagement events this model was generally well received - although some concerns were expressed about the extent to which it should be used to distribute the levy fund and the priority it should be given.

Many respondents suggested that there needed to be a balance between providing core funding and testing new approaches. Maintaining existing effective services should be the priority.

Appendix One:

Assessment Criteria relating to Change and Innovation

Innovation and Impact	To what extent have the grant funded projects been innovative to the activities carried out by the organisation? What are the impacts of this innovation for both the organisation and its service users?
Scalability	Is the grant funded project able to be scaled up and implemented over a larger area? Across potentially multiple organisations?