

Report

**Evaluation of the Early Outcomes
Framework Fund:**

**Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Doncaster
Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council,
Sheffield City Council and South Yorkshire Futures**

2020 Final Report

Sheffield Institute of Education (SIOE)

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Doncaster Council, Rotherham Metropolitan
Borough Council, Sheffield City Council and
South Yorkshire Futures**

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Key findings summary

The Early Outcomes Framework project aims to support strategic level transformation of Local Authority (LA) Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) provision. A South Yorkshire Early Outcomes consortium of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Doncaster Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and Sheffield City Council came together alongside the South Yorkshire Futures (SYF) social mobility partnership based at Sheffield Hallam University as a regional working group to deliver systematic change. The project ran from April 2019 – March 2020. The Key project deliverables were:

1. Developing a South Yorkshire SLCN Strategy
2. Developing a South Yorkshire SLCN Workforce Strategy
3. SLCN Strategic Governance and Sustainability

At the project outset each LA completed a maturity matrix in regards to SLCN to assess their current provision based on select criteria. This process was repeated near the end of the one-year project and the results have been compared to reveal an overall average improvement in planning, leading, delivery and evaluation across the region.

Evaluation interviews were conducted in September/October 2019 and repeated in January 2020 to identify key enablers and barriers to successful delivery and implementation. All relevant stakeholders were interviewed including the LA project leads and members of the SYF team.

The findings indicate that all project milestones have been delivered but the levels of engagement across the four LAs varied and this was said to largely correlate with the amount of resource allocated to the project. Other key factors that impeded smooth delivery included early communication issues between the LAs and the SYF team and a lack of LA accountability. Factors that supported delivery included the use of data and the support provided by the SYF team, flexibility in delivery and a track record of previous working.

The main perceived outcomes reported by participants have been the way in which the LAs have come together and created a regional strategy with shared principles that has informed the training delivered in each area. In addition, there are future plans for the joint delivery of training to the workforce at a regional level and a sharing of data that has allowed a regional picture of training needs to emerge.

1. The Early Outcomes Framework project and the evaluation

1.1 Introduction

The Early Outcomes Framework Project was a one-year investment, which supported strategic level transformation of Local Authority (LA) Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) provision. Funded by the DfE in March of 2019, the overall ambition of the fund was to increase the number of local authorities starting a journey of transformation to improve the collective operation of local services in securing good early language outcomes for children.

The fund aimed to achieve three key things:

- To increase leadership focus at local authority level on the key issue of early language.
- To enable LAs to undertake work to improve their services and how they are delivered.
- To resource evaluation and partnership working amongst LAs that will spread innovations around the wider system.

In the South Yorkshire region the four LA areas have higher than average levels of disadvantage that impact across all phases of education including speech and language development. A South Yorkshire Early Outcomes consortium was convened around a previous working group who had delivered prior tangible outputs including a Regional Vision for Early Years, a regional approach to School Readiness and a research informed course for Heads and Foundation Stage leads providing support to those new to this phase of education. The consortium comprised the four South Yorkshire LAs (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield) alongside the South Yorkshire Futures social mobility partnership based at Sheffield Hallam University. Eligibility requirements for the DfE fund included a preference for joint-bids across a number of LAs with a single LA nominated as the lead authority. In the case of the South Yorkshire consortium this lead LA was Doncaster.

The South Yorkshire consortium proposal sought to address five key elements of the SLCN early intervention system:

- strategy;
- commissioning;
- workforce planning and culture;
- partnership;
- information and data.

To do this, the project was built around three key deliverables; developing a South Yorkshire **SLCN Strategy**; developing a South Yorkshire **SLCN Workforce Strategy** and establishing **SLCN Strategic Governance and Sustainability**. These deliverables were designed to support the consortium to develop more mature systems for SLCN resulting in a multi-agency early years strategy with a clear narrative on SLCN and disadvantage. In addition, it was felt that the collaborative project would further cement existing Combined Authority working to drive positive regional and local change.

Key project deliverables

1. Developing a South Yorkshire SLCN Strategy

- Develop a programme of data collection and analysis from all existing SLCN services to form an accurate baseline and identify all assessment points from health and education
- Create a data map of SLCN services and needs across the region based on the data and additional relevant information including levels of disadvantage and analysis of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) results so that interventions are appropriately targeted
- Agree information and data sharing agreements and processes underpinned by co-constructed statements on data sharing that meet the requirements and goals of the different organisations
- Develop a regional strategy for a graduated response to SLCN with appropriate local variation to meet community needs that has key, integrated assessment points and provides clear pathways for children with SLCN, particularly focused on those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Develop a regional approach for joint working across agencies to commission or deliver interventions

2. Developing a South Yorkshire SLCN Workforce Strategy

- Develop a regional SLCN skills framework for the multi-disciplinary teams that undertake SLCN work with children across the region
- Undertake a regional workforce skills audit against the framework
- Deliver a regional 'train-the-trainers' programme to create a sustainable SLCN training team
- Deliver common multi-disciplinary training based on the skills framework to meet any identified SLCN training needs

3. SLCN Strategic Governance and Sustainability

- Agree membership, terms of reference and memorandum of understanding established for the SLCN strategic governance group
- Establish a regional strategy development plan which would inform and be informed by individual LA strategic plans and re-evaluation against maturity matrix
- Establish a sustainable group that will continue to drive system change beyond the funding period

At the outset the project sought to pull together relevant data to create a clear picture of what was happening across the region, to in-turn, develop a data map that could highlight available services and the linkages or non-linkages between them. And from that, develop a regional strategy to improve those services that looks at a more coherent system with joint commissioning and a clear strategic plan for the region. One of the elements identified by the LAs as an area of need during this process was a training plan that encompassed all of the workforce who work with children 0-5, and to develop a regional skills framework and training programme that would ensure that the workforce have the key skills that they need.

1.2 Theory of Change

The South Yorkshire Early Outcomes project has a number of intended outcomes and impacts. These are outlined in the project logic model in Appendix A.

Intended outcomes include

- A functioning regional strategic SLCN group convened, who are accountable for and committed to system change.
- A highly skilled embedded team of experts within each LA will have appraised current data systems and SLCN services, feeding back into the regional strategy group, working collaboratively to identify the opportunities and challenges to integrate systems across the region.
- A workforce skills framework is developed to ensure the region has the skills it needs to support SLCN outcomes.
- An established pathway for young people is in place, responsive and flexible to the evidence-base.
- A regional data map will be developed.
- South Yorkshire's young people experience a common framework of integrated assessment points, which allows the early identification of SLCNs and disadvantage, and targeted interventions.
- Delivery of change to support a more mature SLCN service across the region.
- A regional training team is deployed to address skills gaps across local authorities.
- Regional partners have moved towards joint-commissioning of SLCN services across education, health and public health.

The underpinning rationale for the Theory of Change (ToC) was based on an assumption that participants were committed and empowered to enact change and implement course strategies systematically and thoroughly.

1.3 Project Delivery

Project delivery was divided into four distinct phases.

Phase 1	Detailed planning and initiation	March - April 2019
Phase 2	Analysis and development	May - September 2019
Phase 3	Development and delivery	October 2019 - March 2020
Phase 4	Legacy phase	April 2020 onwards

Phase 1 - Planning and initiation

The regional consortium comprising senior Early Years representatives from each of the four local authorities and members of the South Yorkshire Futures team convened as the project delivery team in March to:

- Establish the project board
- Establish detailed plans - delivery, communication, evaluation
- Plan to confirm Local Authority resource, procure project management and recruit the data support team

Phase 2 - Analysis and development

With a project delivery team in place governed through the established Project Board, this phase aimed to:

- Analyse current assessments across the four LAs and current SLCN services
- Deliver a regional data map of SLCN services
- Begin to develop regional strategies for graduated response to SLCN (clear pathways), information and data sharing, joint working and intervention outcome analysis
- Develop a skills framework for the cross-sector 0-5 SLCN workforce
- Map current skills, competencies and knowledge of SLCN in the cross-sector workforce against the skills framework

Phase 3 - Development and delivery

Using the learning from phase two, the regional strategic group aimed to further develop and initiate the implementation of the overarching regional strategy through:

- The delivery of the regional training strategy focussing on a regional 'train-the-trainers' programme to create a sustainable SLCN training team
- The regional delivery of common multi-disciplinary training
- The establishment of membership and terms of reference of the South Yorkshire Early Years SLCN Strategic Governance Group
- The establishment of a regional strategy development plan

Phase 4 - Legacy phase

Phase 4 seeks to embed the changes made in phase three to ensure sustainability of the system change by:

- The South Yorkshire Early Years SLCN Strategic Governance Group continuing the work of the Project Board with its role being established as the driver of continuing improvements against the maturity matrix
- The development of a South Yorkshire Futures Social Mobility Early Years strategy which includes SLCN
- The development of legacy tools from the project evaluation to support continued service improvement

1.4 Evaluation methodology

The aim of the evaluation was to undertake a process evaluation to explore indicators of effectiveness and perceptions of outcomes. It seeks to draw out learning and best practice, test out the project's ToC and identify implications for regional policy and practice more broadly.

The evaluation was divided into four distinct stages:

	Key Activities	Timescale
Inception	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agree the key research questions• Agree the evaluation timeline• Development of precise methods	April-May 2019

Stage 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary analysis of documentation and observation of group meetings to establish whether Phase 1 milestone goals in the theory of change have been met (e.g. 'A functioning regional strategic SLCN group convened, who are accountable for and committed to system change') • Interviews with relevant individuals from within the four LAs, the project management team and other stakeholders to understand the experiences of undertaking phase 1 and the reasons for success or failure in achieving the milestone goals. Twenty interviews will be conducted during phase 1 as a combination of face-to-face and telephone interview. 	June-October 2019
Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary analysis of documentation and observation of group meetings to establish Phase 2 milestone goals in the theory of change have been met (e.g. 'Data sharing agreements between partners have been agreed and implemented') • Interviews with relevant individuals, as above, to understand the experiences of undertaking phase 2 and the reasons for success or failure in achieving the milestone goals. Twenty interviews will be conducted during phase 2 as a combination of face-to-face and telephone interview. 	November 2019 – January 2020
Analysis and Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the interviews and observations are complete and written up, and secondary data gathered, we will conduct a thematic analysis • We will seek to identify themes and sub-themes in qualitative interview and observation data, particularly exploring themes relating to effectiveness and impact. Interviews will be recorded and analysed through detailed, thematic coding. 	February – March 2020

The process evaluation draws on the following:

- Participating Local Authority project team interviews in September/October 2019 comprising of LA lead and stakeholder interviews at each of the four LAs.
- Participating Local Authority project team interviews in January 2020 comprising of LA lead and stakeholder interviews at each of the four LAs.
- South Yorkshire Futures project team interviews in September/October 2019 comprising of four SYF team member interviews
- South Yorkshire Futures project team interviews in December 2019/January 2020 comprising of six SYF team member interviews
- Pre and post project Maturity Matrixes

The process evaluation was designed to assess progress in relation to the Theory of Change. The evaluation research questions sought to capture the experiences of those actively engaged with the project and the wider learning that could be taken from a collaborative LA project such as this one.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has the project achieved its espoused aims: to have in place an integrated pathway and shared data collection framework?
2. To what extent has it achieved its milestone goals?
3. What are the factors that contributed to the outcomes in relation to the first two Research Questions?
4. What can be learnt from the project to inform future learning for this LA partnership and other geographical areas?

In addition, the evaluation also explored the extent to which a regional strategic group had been formed, whether appropriate analysis of key data had been undertaken and a regional map developed and the way in which tools, such as the regional data map, have been implemented and utilised. Interviews were conducted with relevant individuals from within the four LAs, the project management team and any additional data analysts to understand the experiences of those involved.

All interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1.2 hours. All interviews were digitally recorded, anonymised and fully transcribed.

Analysis of the data was conducted thematically – assessing the emergent evidence against the indicators developed from the Research questions using a Framework Analysis approach - involving the following steps:

- gaining an initial overview of the data
- building an initial framework drawing on the indicators and research questions
- detailed coding or charting data according to themes from the framework, including creating new codes relating to evaluation objectives as they emerge if needed
- interpreting the data within the framework.
- The final phase detailed analysis involved more granular thematic exploration of the data, identifying subthemes, commonalities and differences within and across interviews for each question.

For the purposes of this report all Local Authorities have been anonymised and will be referred to as LA-A, LA-B, LA-C and LA-D in the Maturity Matrix data and simply as LA in all interview quotes. In addition all members of the SYF team will be referred to as SYF to protect anonymity.

1.5 Focus of this report

The report findings will inform learning as follows:

- Progress of project against key deliverables
- Experiences of those participating in the project
- Examples of best practice in terms of joint LA project delivery
- Learning on data sharing for the future

This extensive report will be of use to the four projects LAs for future working and other LAs as a guide on identifying and overcoming issues to ensure effective implementation of system change processes of this kind.

2. The Maturity Matrix

2.1 Background and whole consortium findings

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) in collaboration with the Local Government Association (LGA) designed the **EIF maturity matrix: Speech, language and communication in the early years**. The 'Maturity Matrix' is a self-assessment tool and guide to planning to make local early years systems more effective. It is based on other EIF Maturity Matrices, which have been developed for different domains (e.g. 0-19 services, early years, reducing parental conflict). The speech, language and communication in the early years matrix allows an authority to assess how mature

they are in creating a local system which identifies children at risk of delay, and supports them to thrive, with a particular focus on speech, language and communication skills. Undertaking this process of self-assessment allows each local area to rate their current position and identify steps they need to take to improve. Participants rate their local area against the ten key factors (Table 2.1a) and identify supporting evidence for their rating as appropriate.

Table 2.1a. Summary of the Maturity Matrix

DIMENSIONS	KEY ELEMENTS	SUB-ELEMENTS	PROGRESS LEVELS			
PLAN	1. Strategy	1.1 Vision, strategy & plan 1.2 Population needs assessment	1	2	3	4
	2. Commissioning	2.1 Commissioning arrangements 2.2 Use of resources				
	3. Workforce Planning	3.1 Workforce analysis 3.2 Workforce development				
LEAD	4. Partnership	No sub-elements				
	5. Leadership	No sub-elements				
	6. Community Ownership	6.1 Engagement 6.2 Community assets				
DELIVER	7. Services & Interventions	7.1 Quality 7.2 Evidence-based programmes / interventions 7.3 Coordinated working				
	8. Information & Data	8.1 Data collection / use for targeting 8.2 Information sharing 8.3 Information for families				
EVALUATE	9. Outcomes	9.1 Outcomes framework 9.2 Family access & experience				
	10. Using & Generating Evidence	10.1 Using evidence well 10.2 Local evaluation				
			BASIC LEVEL	EARLY PROGRESS	SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	MATURE
			Principle accepted and commitment to action	Initial development	Initial results achieved and positive outcomes evident	Embedded good practice, others learning from achievements

Each of the four South Yorkshire LAs completed self-assessments against the maturity matrix at the project bidding stage (December 2018) and then again as the project approached its end (January 2020). In addition each of the four LAs were asked to complete a short feedback questionnaire in March 2020 asking them to reflect on the impact the project may have had on their originally identified areas of potential weakness (as stated in their December 2018 maturity matrix assessments). Using these combined sources it has been possible to make some limited judgments as to the impact the project may have had. It is important, however to exercise caution in drawing conclusions from the maturity matrix findings. A number of possible policy, resourcing or departmental changes within each of the Four LAs took place during the one-year period in between completing the assessments against the matrix, which may have impacted on the differences in results. Local Authorities do not work on projects such as this one in a vacuum and as such, these changes cannot be automatically assumed to be a direct (and exclusive) result of the Early Outcomes project. The data is too limited to be able to draw such conclusions. Having said that, we can use the Maturity Matrix data as an (albeit limited) tool to explore the self-assessed levels of change that have taken place within the lifespan of the project.

The results of the December 2018 Maturity Matrix self-assessments shaped the specifics of the overall project and identified discrete areas of weakness for each of the LAs. For the delivery team at SYF there was a feeling that some participating LAs leads were under a degree of pressure from senior colleagues to overstate progress levels. Despite this it was felt that all scores were accurate, in part, due to the clear guidance provided.

I was very impressed with the honesty that people did show within that. I had some feedback that they'd had to wrestle almost with people again – perhaps more in political positions – who didn't want to present the local authority in that light and were arguing to put higher scores in certain points, but they were saying that they felt when they looked at the matrix that the matrix itself was quite clear what you had to do to achieve that and they knew they weren't in that space. (SYF)

Looking at the progress level averages across all four LAs, all areas of planning, leading, delivery and evaluation have reportedly improved (Table 2.1b). The greatest area of improvement has been that of *Workforce Planning* (>1.9 - see Table 2.1a for an explanation of what the numbers represent). As a central focus of the project it is unsurprising to see the largest upwards shift in this particular area. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, *Leadership* (>1.5) has seen a greater improvement than that of *Partnership* (>1.2). As a project seeking to improve cross-LA partnership working it may have been predicted that this area would have seen a greater change than Leadership. It is, however, unsurprising that the one of the areas with the lowest level of reported progress is *Community Ownership* (> 0.4), something that the project itself did not seek to directly influence. The remaining two areas with an incremental progress level increase of less than 1.0 are *Outcomes* (>0.5) and *Information and Data* (>0.8). As a data driven project with a considerable emphasis on the gathering, and use, of data to inform developmental change, it would perhaps be expected for this area to have seen a much larger improvement. However, this smaller than expected increase may be due to there being three areas of focus included in the overall category *Information and Data* (See table 2.1b). Alongside *Data collecting/use for targeting* and *Information sharing* (both of which could be argued were key areas of targeted impact for the project) was *Information for families*. This third sub-category may have brought the overall level of change down, as it was not a focus for this particular Early Outcomes project.

Table 2.1b. Consortium reported progress level averages

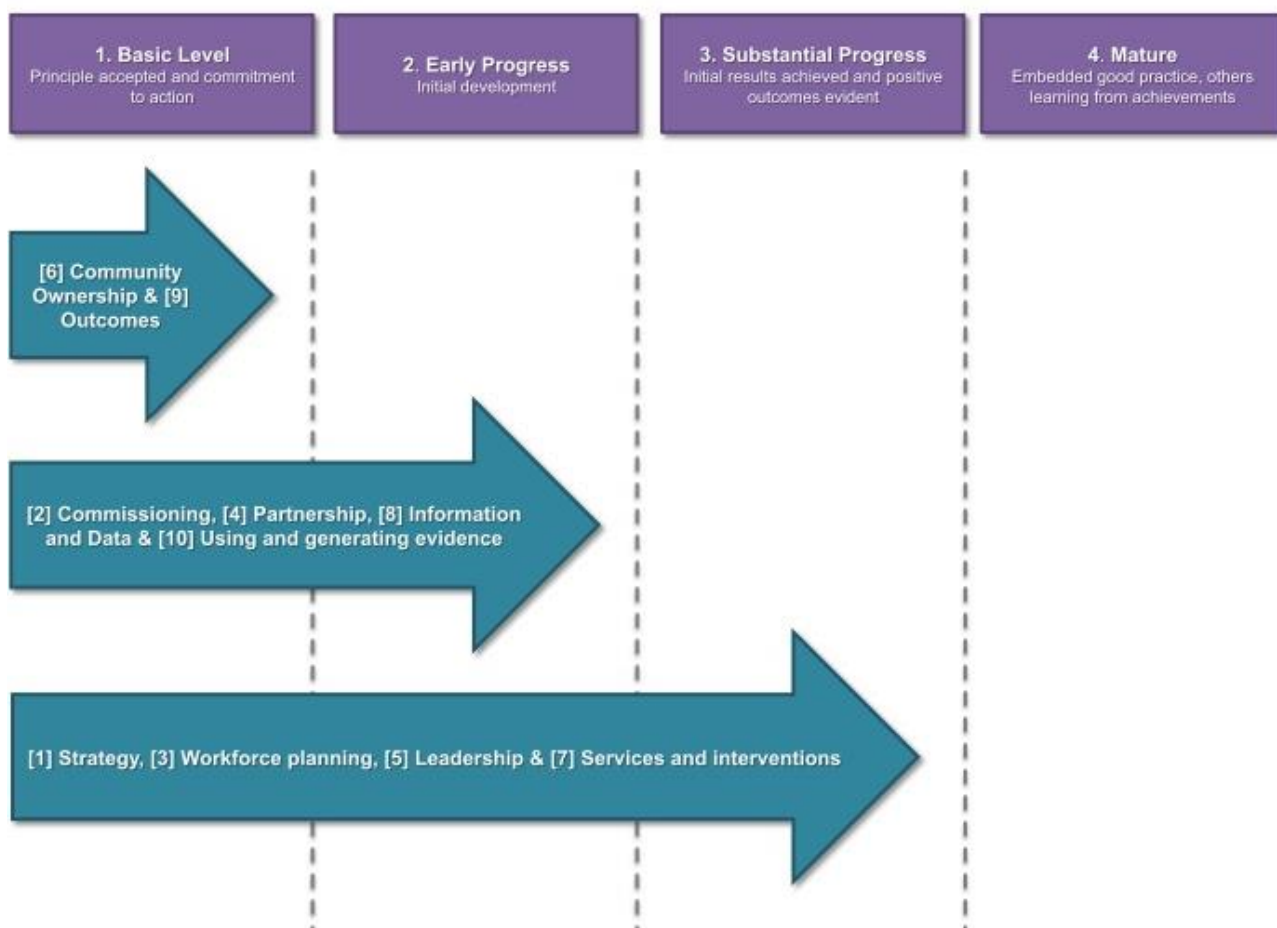
		Progress Levels ¹	
		Average Dec 2018	Average Jan 2020
Plan	1. Strategy	1.6	3.0
	2. Commissioning	1.3	2.5
	3. Workforce Planning	1.3	3.2

¹ Progress Levels as taken from table 2.1a are as follows: 1 = Basic Level, 2 = Early Progress, 3 = Substantial Progress and 4 = Mature

Lead	4. Partnership	1.5	2.7
	5. Leadership	1.8	3.2
	6. Community Ownership	1.1	1.5
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	1.8	3.0
	8. Information & Data	1.8	2.7
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1.3	1.8
	10 Using & Generating Evidence	1.6	2.8

As an overall average, the four LAs have seen a significant shift in their reported progress levels across eight of the ten categories, with four areas developing from *Basic Level* to *Early Progress* and an additional four moving from *Basic Level* to *Substantial Progress*. Only two of the ten categories remained at *Basic Level* despite small incremental rises (Figure 2.1a).

Figure 2.1a. Progress Level Changes (Dec 2018-Jan 2020)



While none of the ten categories reached level four (*Mature*), this was never predicted as an outcome of a one-year project for which the average starting level was *Basic*.

Having focussed on the consortium wide average progress levels, it is important to spend a little time unpicking the changes seen across individual Local Authorities.

2.2 Maturity Matrix: LA- A

For LA-A, the maturity matrix reveals an upward shift for seven of the ten categories, with the remaining three unchanged between December 2018 and January 2020 (Table 2.2a). In the case of strategy, workforce planning, partnership, leadership, services and interventions and using and generating evidence the progress levels moved from *Basic Level* to *Early Progress*.

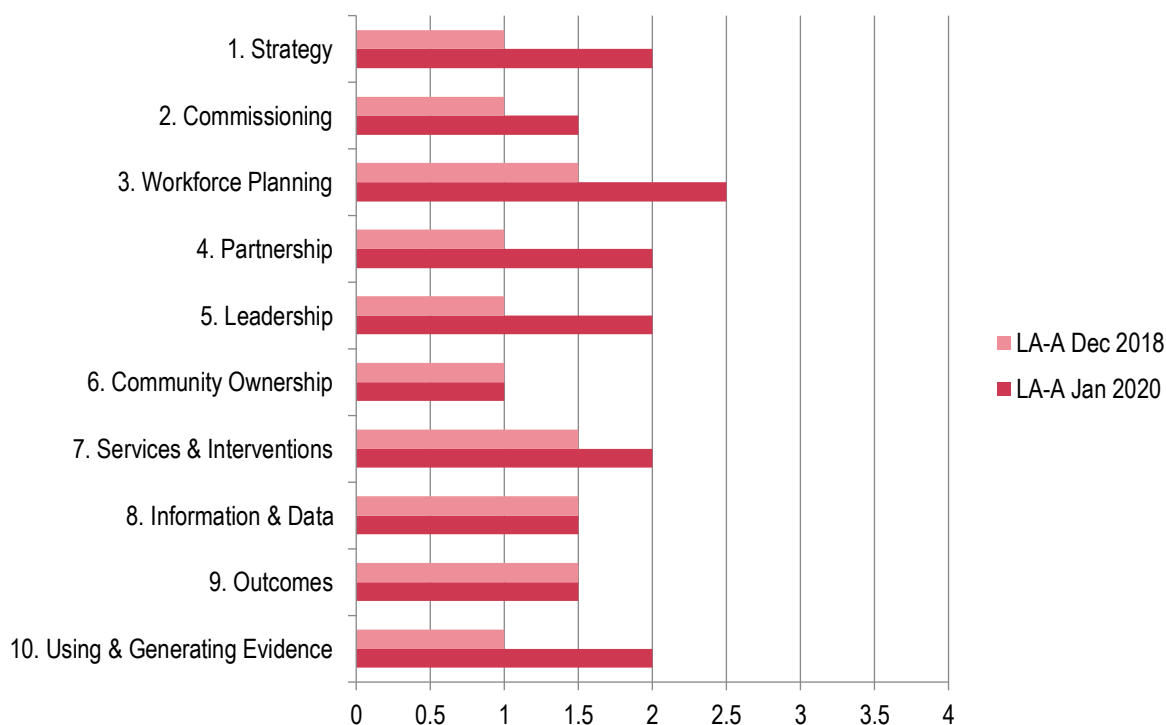
Table 2.2a. Maturity Matrix results: LA-A

		Progress Levels	
		LA – A Dec 2018	LA – Jan 2020
Plan	1. Strategy	1	2

	2. Commissioning	1	1.5
	3. Workforce Planning	1.5	2.5
Lead	4. Partnership	1	2
	5. Leadership	1	2
	6. Community Ownership	1	1
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	1.5	2
	8. Information & Data	1.5	1.5
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1.5	1.5
	10 Using & Generating Evidence	1	2

Three of the ten categories remained at the same level (Community Ownership, Information & Data and Outcomes). In the case of both Community Ownership and Outcomes this may well be as a result of the overall project aims which did not seek to impact directly on these two areas within the lifespan of the one-year project. Improvements were noted in the remaining seven categories. The largest changes were seen in Strategy, Workforce Planning, Partnership, Leadership and Using & Generating Evidence (>1). Commissioning and Services & Interventions also improved (>0.5).

Figure 2.2a. LA-A Maturity Matrix Comparison (Dec 2018-Jan 2020)



As part of the self-assessment process, key areas of potential weakness were inferred from the December 2018 Maturity Matrix (table 2.2b). When asked to re-evaluate these weaknesses in January 2020 the LA presented evidence that the Early Outcomes project has supported positive change in all of the 6 identified areas. This included the establishment of a Strategic Group and the workforce mapping exercise.

Table 2.2b. LA-A Maturity Matrix Weaknesses

Area of potential weakness (as identified through the maturity matrix 2018)	Has the Early Outcomes project brought about any positive changes in this area? If so, in what way?	Has the Early Outcomes brought about any negative changes in this area? If so, in what way?
1.1 No multi-agency 0-5 SLCN strategy in place.	[LA-A] has launched a Strategic group for this in February and will commence work on a [LA-A] Strategy. This is a very positive area.	No negative changes
1.2 No joint alignment and mapping of workforce development, planning or resourcing for 0-5 SLCN.	The Workforce Strategy was a crucial piece of work and has enabled [LA-A] to map current needs and set priorities.	No negative changes
1.3 Lack of competency, skills framework for 0-5 SLCN.	Framework was needed and the sessions and workshops gave us a clear guidance of how to bring together a framework.	No negative changes
1.4 Data is collected by individual services but is not shared or used collectively to inform joint strategic planning, commissioning and service delivery for 0-5 SLCN.	This has helped begin to gather data and through the development of the Strategic group it will be used to inform future services and delivery	No negative changes
1.5 Lack of understanding across different services of the multiple assessments and outcome measures currently being used.	We needed to look at the current services, assessments etc. Through the work of the swim lanes and then the tools now created we have a clear visual aid to help.	No negative changes
1.6 There is limited gathering and usage of evidence across services that restrict the application of evidence in the design and delivery of services.	This will be part of the ongoing work after the project has ended.	No negative changes

2.3 Maturity Matrix: LA-B

Progress level improvements for LA-B were seen across Planning, Delivery and Evaluation (Table 2.3a), with the most significant incremental change being in Workforce Planning (>1.5) and services and interventions (>1).

Table 2.3a. Maturity Matrix results: LA-B

		Progress Levels	
		LA- B Dec 2018	LA-B Jan 2020
Plan	1. Strategy	2	2.5
	2. Commissioning	2	2.5
	3. Workforce Planning	1	2.5

Lead	4. Partnership	2	2
	5. Leadership	2	2.5
	6. Community Ownership	1	1
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	1.5	2.5
	8. Information & Data	1.5	2
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1	1.5
	10 Using & Generating Evidence	1.5	2

LA-B saw progress level change for four of the ten categories (workforce planning, services and interventions, information and data and using and generating evidence) moving from Basic Level to Early Progress. The categories of Workforce Planning, Services & Interventions, Information & Data and Using & Generating Evidence all moved to *Early Progress*. Interestingly for LA-B both Partnership and Community Ownership did not move at all staying at 2 (*Early Progress*) and 1 (*Basic Level*) respectively.

Figure 2.3a illustrates the changes in progress levels for LA-B between December 2018 and January 2020. As already discussed, the largest change was in Workforce Planning (>1.5) followed by Services & Interventions (>1).

Figure 2.3a. LA-B Maturity Matrix Comparison (Dec 2018-Jan 2020)



As was the case for LA-A, key areas of potential weakness were inferred from the December 2018 Maturity Matrix. During March 2020 LA-B were asked to reflect on these weaknesses and identify any potential impact (positive or negative) that the Early Outcomes project may have had in these areas. Table 2.3b indicates that for LA-B the project had had no negative impacts on these areas but instead had significant positive bearing. This was particularly true of weakness 1.1. The project has raised awareness within the LA around the way in which joint working needs to be supported. Some of other changes raised by the LA may not be as a direct result of the Early Outcomes, but instead as a result of other projects or other internal changes.

Table 2.3b. LA-B Maturity Matrix Weaknesses

Area of potential weakness (as identified through the maturity matrix 2018)	Has the Early Outcomes project brought about any positive changes in this area? If so, in what way?	Has the Early Outcomes brought about any negative changes in this area? If so, in what way?
1.1 A strategic approach to early years support is in existence, a Great Start Strategy, however this is not specifically directing shared resources to the early identification and development of children's developing speech, language and communication skills.	The project has helped raise awareness of the level of change required to make joint working happen. Our commissions for health are managed through NHS England. This makes any changes very difficult in terms of how resources are allocated and managed as these are currently managed under a national framework. However plans are in place to make changes that will enable us to look more closely at children's developing SLCN and fund in a more streamlined and directed way.	No negative changes
1.2 There is very little joint workforce planning directly aimed at improving early the identification of speech and language delay/disorder and interventions.	We are making progress in this area and have developed a multi agency SLCN course. This is ready for roll out in the summer term. We have colleagues from the speech and language service delivering the training as well as supporting with the development of the next stages of the course. At this time we are funding their involvement but hope in the future that as we develop greater control of strategy that their continued work in this area will be a key priority.	No negative changes
1.3 There is no single multi-disciplinary action plan aimed at the early identification and targeting resources to improve children's speech, language and communication skills.	The great Start in Life action plan is the LAs commitment to this area. SLCN has been identified as a key area for the development of multi agency working. We have had a slow start to the integrated reviews for 2 year olds but as in point 1.1 above this will change as the LA secures a greater authority over the strategic planning and commissioning of health.	No negative changes
1.4 There is a lack of information sharing by services and professional disciplines so data is not fully utilised to inform practice.	This continues to be an area requiring further work. The LA has developed a portal for the early years sector to input data at 2 year progress checks. This is slowly being used and we continue to promote this across the sector. The data will help us identify developmental delay and disorder for children at an early opportunity. We will use this information to refer back to health where delay or disorder have been identified to triangulate this information with that of the 2 year health check.	No negative changes

2.4 Maturity Matrix: LA-C

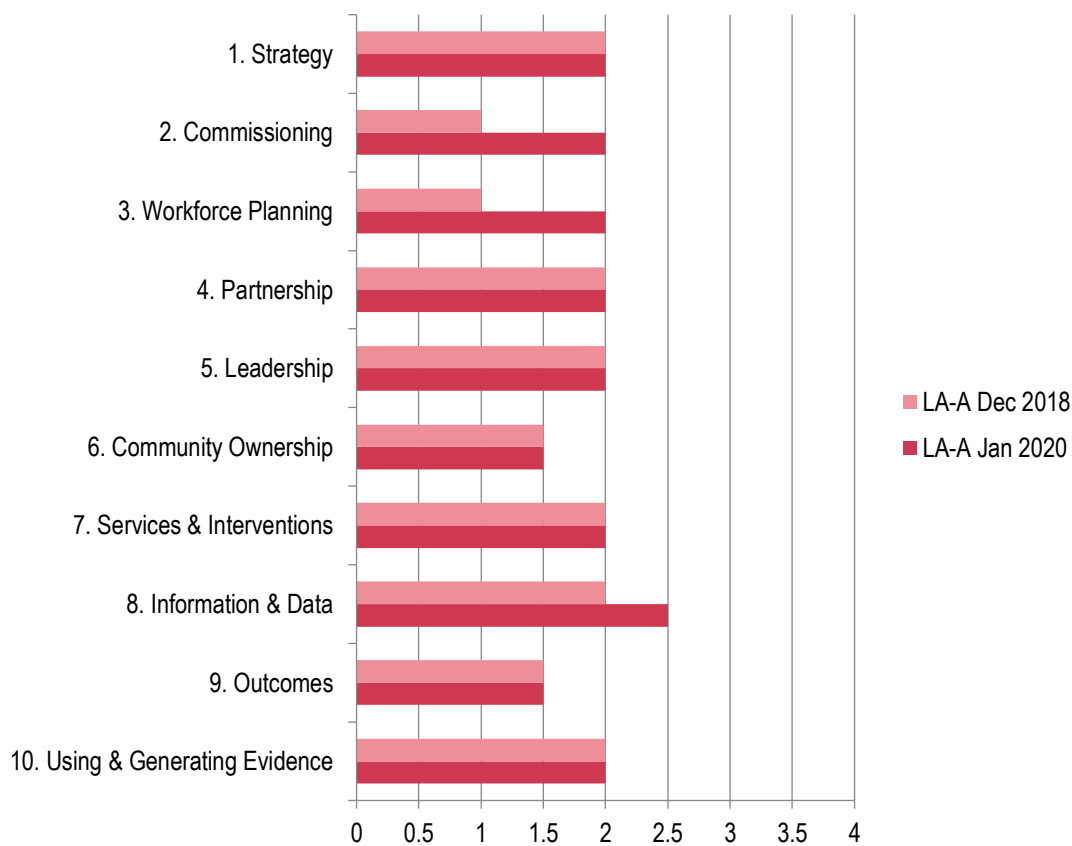
LA-C experienced the lowest overall progress level change with only three of the ten categories reported to have shifted by January 2020 (Table 2.4a).

Table 2.4a. Maturity Matrix results: LA-C

		Progress Levels	
		LA-C Dec 2018	LA-C Average Jan 2020
Plan	1. Strategy	2	2
	2. Commissioning	1	2
	3. Workforce Planning	1	2
Lead	4. Partnership	2	2
	5. Leadership	2	2
	6. Community Ownership	1.5	1.5
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	2	2
	8. Information & Data	2	2.5
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1.5	1.5
	10 Using & Generating Evidence	2	2

Progress level improvements for LA-C were seen across Planning and Delivery, with the most significant incremental change being in Commissioning (>1) and Workforce Planning (>1). For the most part, LA-C remained fairly unchanged by the Early Outcomes project as reflected by this self-assessment tool. This is highlighted further in Figure 2.4a below.

Figure 2.4a. LA-C Maturity Matrix Comparison (Dec 2018-Jan 2020)



As was the case for both LA-A and LA-B, LA-C saw no negative changes in relation to their identified areas of weakness. The evidence suggests that involvement in the Early Outcomes project has had a considerable positive impact on the LA particularly in terms of internal strategic relationships and their training offer within the sector.

Table 2.4b. LA-C Maturity Matrix Weaknesses

Area of potential weakness (as identified through the maturity matrix 2018)	Has the Early Outcomes project brought about any positive changes in this area? If so, in what way?	Has the Early Outcomes brought about any negative changes in this area? If so, in what way?
1.1 There is limited understanding about who in the workforce can impact on early years speech, language and communication, and what their learning needs are; which results in a lack of joined-up working amongst EY services that specifically focuses on SLCN. This is illustrated by the fragmented data collection and lack of data sharing protocols in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A champion's model will be rolled out by Sept 2020. This will pull together all agencies to share best practice and reduce the fragmented ways of working A data sharing protocol between health and the LA is currently awaiting sign off. Discussions around data sharing between SALT and the LA will be explored as part of the partnership model. The universal and enhanced training includes clear messages around who can impact on early year's speech, language and communication at a level specific to their role. 	No negative changes
1.2 Currently there is single agency commissioning for early years services but there is senior commitment to encouraging sectoral cooperation to improve outcomes, including joint early years commissioning of SLCN services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A partnership model between the local authority and Speech and Language Therapy Services has been initiated through the use of funds within the early outcomes project. This will be used as a pilot approach to early intervention for SLC. This pilot will be used to form a business case for what works well and propose how early intervention for SLC could be commissioned in the future. 	No negative changes

<p>1.3 Workforce planning is at a basic level. EY providers have difficulty in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified professionals to deliver speech and language development and there is limited understanding about who can impact on early years speech, language and communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The workforce assessment mirrored this sentiment. A full annual schedule for SLC training has been scheduled for the full year with management agreement for staff to attend. The training is bespoke and has been mapped against the agreed regional training matrix aligned with the intended outcomes from the SLCF. There is now a team of trained staff to deliver speech and language training on a rolling programme. Partnership working with SALT aims to address gaps and help increase workforce confidence and knowledge. 	<p>No negative changes</p>
<p>1.4 Strategically a proposal has been developed to support very young children and their families in the first 1001 days but it does not explicitly reference SLCN.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The early year's outcome project is embedded in our starting well partnership board. Governance of the project will be assumed by this board following the end date for the regional project of 31/3/20. There is a partnership commitment to the first 1001 days with a draft 1001 day's strategy in process. This project has also been aligned with this strategy. 	<p>No negative changes</p>

2.5 Maturity Matrix: LA-D

Progress level improvements for LA-D were evident in over half of the ten categories (Table 2.5a). The greatest changes were seen across Strategy, Workforce Planning, Partnership and Leadership (all >1). Four of the ten categories did not change at all. In the cases of Strategy, Workforce Planning and Partnership the progress levels moved from *Basic Level* to *Early Progress* and for Leadership the shift was from *Early Progress* up to *Substantial Progress*.

Table 2.5a. Maturity Matrix results: LA-D

		Progress Levels	
		LA-D Dec 2018	LA-D Jan 2020
Plan	1. Strategy	1.5	2.5
	2. Commissioning	1	1.5
	3. Workforce Planning	1.5	2.5
Lead	4. Partnership	1	2
	5. Leadership	2	3
	6. Community Ownership	1	1
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	2	2.5
	8. Information & Data	2	2
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1	1
	10 Using & Generating Evidence	2	2.5

Figure 2.5a further illustrates the changes in progress level seen by LA-D between December 2018 and January 2020.

Figure 2.5a. LA-D Maturity Matrix Comparison (Dec 2018-Jan 2020)



LA-D did not complete a Maturity Matrix weakness questionnaire in March 2020 and so at this stage we are unable to identify any specific changes through this method.

It is worth noting that for all of the participating LAs, progress levels either remained unchanged or increased. Of the ten categories for each of the four LAs, there was no progress level diminution.

The Maturity Matrix data represents a snapshot of each LA at the time of completion. It is important to note that this was undertaken during the project when work was still being carried out and as such does not capture progress at the end of the project itself.

3. Delivery and implementation

3.1 Delivery

Project Deliverables

All project deliverables have been met ahead of the project end date (March 2020) (Table 3.1a).

Table 3.1a. Project Deliverables and dates of completion

Workstream	Success Criteria	Deliverable / Description	Planned completion date	Actual completion date
3	PID Approved by Project Board	Project Initiation Document (PID) (containing project control strategies, governance arrangements, project plan and reporting arrangements) is produced	30/04/19	30/04/19
3	Project Board approve TOR	Membership and TOR established	11/12/19	28/1/2020
3	Regional governing body in place with meetings scheduled and EIF Maturity Matrix review schedule established & Strategy Development Plan for the sustainable governance group	Strategy Development Plan produced outlining the continued work of the sustainable group to progress the maturity of the SLCN systems and maintain momentum	11/12/19	tbc
4	Evaluation team in place	CDARE identify evaluation team	30/04/19	30/04/19
4	Plan approved by project board	Evaluation plan completed following PID	30/04/19	30/04/19
4	Evaluation updates reported at board	Data gathering at each milestone (e.g. board established, SLCN data map completed) and interim reports produced	30/09/19	11/12/19
4	Evaluation report and legacy tools approved by project board	Data analysis, report writing and dissemination of findings complete	31/03/20	tbc
1	Workforce development team established	Each partner identifies membership of the expert panel	30/04/19	22/10/19
1	Workforce audit completed across all SY authorities, identifies skills gaps to be filled by SLCN framework	Analysis of cross-sector workforce skills, competencies and knowledge of SLCN complete	30/09/19	22/10/19
1	Framework identified / developed that will support to gain necessary competencies	SY workforce skills framework developed / identified drawing on existing Communication Trust Framework if fully appropriate to regional Early Years Workforce	30/09/19	11/12/19
1	Project Board approve framework	SY workforce skills framework developed / identified drawing on existing Communication Trust Framework if fully appropriate to regional Early Years Workforce	30/09/19	11/12/19
1	Each LA has a named team of SLCN trainers	LA leads use the skills audit to identify regional SLCN trainers	30/09/19	28/1/2020
1	Contract in place for train-the-trainers course	Expert trainers identified and contracted to deliver the identified / developed SLCN framework	30/09/19	28/1/2020
1	Regional training programme delivered to newly formed regional training team	Trainers are brought together for training in the new SLCN framework	31/03/20	tbc
1	A regional train-the-trainers programme is complete	A regional training team is developed to address skills gaps across LAs	31/03/20	tbc
2	Team identified and meetings scheduled	Regional strategic SLCN group convened	30/04/19	28/1/2020
2	Project board approve report / data map on SLCN regional data and services	Current data systems and SLCN services reviewed, regional data map produced	30/09/19	tbc
2	Project board approves regional strategy	Development of a regional strategy that encompasses the elements of success identified in the EIF maturity matrix	30/03/20	tbc

The project deliverables can be used as evidence against most of the Theory of Change predicted outcomes (table 3.1b).

Predicted Outcome	Deliverable	Date of Completion
A functioning regional strategic SLCN group convened, who are accountable for and committed to system change.	Regional governing body in place with meetings scheduled and EIF Maturity Matrix review schedule established & Strategy Development Plan for the sustainable governance group	tbc
A highly skilled embedded team of experts within each LA will have appraised current data systems and SLCN services, feeding back into the regional strategy group, working collaboratively to identify the opportunities and challenges to integrate systems across the region.	Workforce audit completed across all SY authorities, identifies skills gaps to be filled by SLCN framework	22/10/19
A workforce skills framework is developed to ensure the region has the skills it needs to support SLCN outcomes.	Project Board approve framework	11/12/19
An established pathway for young people is in place, responsive and flexible to the evidence-base.	Cannot be evidenced from Deliverables	
A regional data map will be developed.	Project board approve report / data map on SLCN regional data and services	tbc
South Yorkshire's young people experience a common framework of integrated assessment points, which allows the early identification of SLCNs and disadvantage, and targeted interventions.	Project Board approve framework	11/12/19
Delivery of change to support a more mature SLCN service across the region.	Project board approves regional strategy	tbc
A regional training team is deployed to address skills gaps across local authorities.	Each LA has a named team of SLCN trainers	28/1/2020
Regional partners have moved towards joint-commissioning of SLCN services across education, health and public health.	Cannot be evidence from Deliverables	

Delivery roles

The role of SYF evolved early in the lifespan of the project. Originally intended as a facilitator for the bid, it quickly became apparent that the SYF team were well placed to deliver the project management across the whole programme.

Originally it was just around coordinating the bid...They just wanted help to bring the bid together to put the bid in. So our role was around that and getting the four local authorities on board.....Then during the process of pulling the bid together the local authorities themselves actually said, you're playing this role in this, would it be possible for you to continue with that project management role if we were successful. (SYF)

So maybe it was just sort of a natural [evolution] really that we were already fulfilling that role in pulling the bid together, and providing that support and coordination that it made sense for us to carry on doing it rather than trying to hand it over to a local authority that may run into trouble with the capacity. (SYF)

This initial project management role went on to expand significantly and in ways that had not been anticipated at the outset. For example, Workstream 1 of the programme explored skills by asking stakeholders from the region their perception of where they

were with particular speech language and communication skills and the data was used to identify gaps. This work led to the development of the regional strategy to address those particular gaps. In the bidding stage of the project it was expected that it would be the Local Authorities who would design and develop this strategy, however, it quickly became apparent that the team at South Yorkshire Futures would lead on its development in order to overcome LA resourcing issues and to meet the project time scales. As such SYF facilitated a group of experts from each authority to come together to guide them in the development of the strategy.

I think as we've moved on with the project it's become clearer for South Yorkshire Futures that we would have to pick up a lot more of the work than was originally anticipated. So some of the things that we originally planned for local authorities to lead on, we've actually led on those particular bits of work. (SYF)

SYF and Project Management

The collective decision to delegate centralised project management to SYF was seen (to a greater or lesser extent) by all interviewees as a positive move. It was felt that SYF offered an impartiality that brokered cross-LA decision-making and created capacity for the individual LAs to focus on delivery within their regions.

...having somebody external makes people feel that it's more dispassionate, nobody's got a vested interest in moving in one particular direction. (SYF)

I think the independence and – the impartiality, that's the word I'm looking for – of South Yorkshire Futures has enabled that kind of conversation to happen. For example when we had the keeping-in-touch days...[the LA] can say whatever they need to say...Whereas I think if it was to be recruited by one particular local authority, you may find that there's maybe a thought or a feeling of favouritism or leaning towards one particular local authority over another. (LA)

For SYF this also felt like a natural fit for the nature of the project and the circumstances in which LAs are working.

...we recognised that the local authorities have very limited capacity and it is quite difficult... they have suffered from lots of job losses and difficult situations that have made their business-as-usual work very tricky, never mind actually doing something on top of that, i.e. this project. So we were quite mindful of that and this is within South Yorkshire Futures strategic aims – to bring about regional systemic changes that would help young children. So this fit with our core agenda, so we assumed that position of driving this forward. (SYF)

For the LAs there was a recognition of the strength SYF brought to the bid writing process

I think they've been very proactive, and I think they've got the expertise in writing bids. And I think as individual local authorities I know we've written bids and we haven't been successful. So, on a personal level, I was really grateful for them driving it forward and being as heavily involved as they have been, because I think that's probably maybe why it's been successful. (LA)

However it was this issue of impartiality that emerged as a recurring theme. The notion of bringing together a consortium of LAs with one particular LA as lead was thought

may lead to friction over competing priorities and vested interests. As an independent body, separate from the local government systems, it was felt that SYF were able to pull together any differing positions and find a 'middle ground' that fostered progress.

If you just got four authorities in a room, they might all agree that something is right to do, but they'll all have very different ways of doing it. And I think there needs to be somebody that says, well, is there benefit in us all doing the same thing and asking those questions? Then I think it should really be somebody that's leading it who is independent from authorities, because in that way we can ask the questions that they wouldn't be comfortable asking each other, and we can suggest things based on empirical evidence. And we don't have any investment in any particular...packages. (SYF)

This impartiality offered the opportunity to draw on the self-assessment findings from across the region and work with it alongside the underlying empirical research to produce realistic and manageable working strategies for the participating LAs.

They've done an amazing job of kind of plucking what we've all said and thought and turning that into something tangible for us to then focus on and move forward. So I think that has been a key element to the success so far, for me. I think if it had just been four regions coming together, I think that would have got lost. But having that fifth arm, if you like, of being able to look at it, take a step back and just pull those kinds of commonalities and those trends and those themes into something workable and tangible, has been really useful. (LA)

The project did however encounter some initial tensions in regards to delivery.

...I think because we've taken on a lot of the work and brought the resource to it, we were therefore seen as the subcontractor for all of the local authorities in the beginning, and I think that isn't the case. We are a partner in this. We've not been contracted by every local authority to deliver this on their behalf. So there are things that they need to do. (SYF)

In addition there were some reservations about allowing SYF to lead on the project due to political concerns. There were hierarchical concerns over the way in which the project could be viewed and the size of the role played by SYF (who are based within a University) compared to the LAs themselves.

I would say, yes, there has been some resistance – probably because there's been a bit of wariness from cabinet members about other people's involvement. I think the other people in this case is the university rather than South Yorkshire Futures...I just think they want to be seen as up there leading this in [this area] (LA)

Despite this, the overall shared view of SYF delivering the project management strand of the project was a positive one.

Project Management

At the outset of the programme SYF put in place an interim project management team with a view to recruit a dedicated project manager and administrator at the earliest possible opportunity. Unfortunately however, University recruitment procedures meant that the position wasn't taken up until summer 2019. Joining the project after a few months of delivery presented difficulties to both SYF and the LAs.

I think for them, it's like reading a book, you've come halfway through, you get the middle and you get the end, but...for them to have done catch-up and getting that beginning of the book was just not even possible. (LA)

Another factor was the inconsistency in the management approaches favoured by the LAs themselves. While some preferred a hands-on style with regular communication and deadlines, others were more conformable with a degree of independence and self-governance over the project delivery.

I think at first it was really difficult to gauge how they wanted us to communicate with them, so we were getting told that one of them didn't like to be chased, just give them a deadline, they'll meet it. And then another one of the LAs was, I don't care how many reminders you send me, or ring me or whatever, as long as I don't miss a deadline – any help I can get. So we've got polar opposites. (SYF)

Some authorities are like – oh, thank god you've reminded me about that, I'm so glad that you've got this firm hand and you're asking about deadlines. And others are like – do not even speak to us, let us get on with it. (SYF)

In trying to balance the differing needs of the LAs the SYF team encountered some communication issues that led to a period of tension.

...obviously this is a time-limited project and we've got to hit deadlines and move on. It does feel at times that there isn't that understanding that...we might not be working on this on that particular day and then sometimes the response times are a bit unrealistic to turn things round. (LA)

Communication has happened but I think we felt overwhelmed with emails at times. (LA)

The team at SYF put in place measures to improve communication and delivery including a reduction in the number of emails and more informal dialogue between the SYF team and LAs.

[W]e did some work in the team to look at how we could change communication styles in order to progress things. (SYF)

The perspective within the LAs on the second evaluation visit (January 2020) demonstrated the positive effect of these changes (September 2019).

It's taken a bit of time to find our way of working, so I think we're in a very different place to where we were when we had our first evaluation where we'd got lots of concerns about how that was working. It's moved a long way since then. (LA)

All LAs acknowledged the fast paced nature of the project and the tight deadlines that needed to be met to achieve each milestone. For this reason, and despite some LAs preferring to be autonomous in their project delivery, the central SYF team did need to keep all parties on track. Sometimes this meant deadlines felt somewhat unrealistic to the LA delivery teams.

I think sometimes there's been that lack of realistic timescales, but I don't think that's because people haven't been supportive, it's just because we've got a really tight timescale to meet. It's not anybody's fault we've only got a year to do this project in. (LA)

After an initial bumpy start the SYF team did however strike the right balance for most participants between keeping the project on track and allowing LAs to work within their

own differing time constraints. And for all LAs the SYF team were cited as integral, to some degree, in the meeting of project deadlines and milestones.

The difference I would say would be having some project management from the university that's helped keep it really knitted together, because we haven't had that before. (LA)

Throughout the duration of the project there were some interesting adaptations to the project management model. The first of these was the introduction of Keeping in Touch (KIT) meetings held between the SYF team and the individual LA Leads. For all LAs this was seen as a positive opportunity to discuss delivery issues, questions or concerns in a familiar setting (on LA home ground) and outside of the formal Project Board meetings. The introduction of the KIT meetings was described by one LA as a 'game changer' in terms of communication between SYF and the LAs.

What's useful with that is actually sitting down with somebody and sort of saying, so what is it? What's the next step for us? Let's cut through everything and just tell us what it is that we need to do. That's useful. (LA)

local authorities have fed back as well that they feel more comfortable discussing things with us in that environment (SYF)

A further change to the original project management model was the introduction of Operational Groups meetings. It was felt that the Project Board meetings were not the appropriate forum to discuss practical delivery matters and as such the Operational Group, made up of the LA leads and the SYF team, would meet prior to each Project Board. This freed up the Project Board to concentrate on more official matters.

The Workforce Survey

A primary focus for Workstream 1 was the development and distribution of the workforce survey across the region. This was designed by the SYF team and shared with the LA leads who were then tasked with circulating it to their wider workforce. The survey design presented serious privacy issues relating to participant data and potential data breaches. As such the survey was closed down. The timing of this original survey was also problematic with the distribution planned for the last week of the school term before the 6-week summer break. With some of the targeted workforce based within school settings it was thought inappropriate to send the survey out at this time. Some of the LAs raised additional concerns about the survey and whether it was actually fit for purpose.

Even regardless of the GDPR bit, the system didn't really give us exactly what we needed. If we'd piloted it, we'd have known that. (LA)

The data manager within the SYF team altered the survey to allow for a new circulation date of September 2019. However, the setbacks encountered with the original survey meant that the returns had to be in quickly.

[R]ather than having a four or five-week period to get people to complete those self-assessments, we've had a window of about 10 days. So it's just been a lot tighter than it would have been. (LA)

All of the LA leads identified the SYF data manager role as an integral ingredient contributing to the successful delivery of the project.

[This] has kept it on track. And the speed that he turned around documents...[a]nd the quality of what he produces has been amazing...And because he was part of the bidding and that first part, he gets it. He knows exactly what we're doing and why we're doing it. (LA)

Accountability

The original DfE Early Outcome Framework fund was made available to Local Authorities who met certain specific criteria. As such, and despite leading on the bid, SYF were not able to submit the bid or be considered project lead. The role was taken on by Doncaster who received the funding centrally and then distributed it out to the other LAs and SYF. As SYF began to take on more and more project management responsibilities it became apparent that not controlling the project finances created a strain that sometimes made project management difficult. Some of the SYF team felt that if they had been able to drip feed the finances based on meeting certain specified milestones then they would have had more influence over the pace of delivery.

I think that if we're managing a project, we need to manage the finances. We need to manage the whole project itself. And I would say rather than giving out funds at the beginning of the project, to put it in drip... dribs and drabs really. So, once you've hit a milestone and you've evidenced that you've achieved that, we'll release X amount of funding to you. (SYF)

it was absolutely the nature of this project that the money arrived and was immediately with the local authorities. So we a project team had no way of motivating in the sense of there's some of the grant to cover this element of work, and then once that's finished we'll release some more funding. (SYF)

There was acknowledgement, however, that a shift towards SYF being purse-keeper and funds being distributed based on targets would change the nature of the working relationship between SYF and the South Yorkshire LAs.

So if were we doing it again, we might want to look at a different model, but would the local authorities sign up to that kind of model, I don't know. That would be a very different entity to what we have now, which was successful based on relationships and people wanting it to work (SYF)

Without financial incentive, however, the SYF team found keeping all four LAs delivering at the same pace to be challenging.

I think there's tensions there about who's accountable and responsible. We obviously have no power within this relationship. (SYF)

In addition there were significant concerns raised about the Project Board and a lack of accountability. The project was governed by a Project Board and chaired by the Director of the South Yorkshire Futures programme. Each Local Authority committed to implement the changes agreed by the Project Board in partnership with each Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in order to maintain momentum of delivery and maximise the impact of system improvements. The Project Board members were the LA leads and the SYF team.

And I think the beginning of the board meetings were quite tricky in getting that balance right between who are we holding to account, who is the board trying to hold to account, because the board is themselves – they are the leads in their respective authorities. And holding themselves to account for progress I think is quite problematic. (SYF)

I felt like there was nobody to hold them to account. Because they were it. They were the board and they were the people doing the do. So, there were no... although they'd got accountability back in their own organisations, for

the project purposes, it was if there were no accountability. So, no – no carrot, no stick, for hitting a deadline or not hitting a deadline. So I think it's been difficult along the way with that. (SYF)

This issue of accountability became increasingly apparent when LAs were falling behind in delivery or not meeting certain deadlines. It was suggested that senior staff members from each LA would be more appropriate board members as they would hold the LA leads to account.

So, at the moment we've got a situation where [an LA lead] is holding [themselves] to account at the board, because [that LA lead] is the only person working on this. And we've got a long list of things that [that LA lead] needs to have done that haven't been done, but the board can't really hold [them] to account because [that LA lead] is the board. (SYF)

This leads onto to the issue of Senior Leadership buy-in. For those LAs with strong senior leadership buy-in there seemed more confidence in the sustainability of the project and its aims regardless of whether personnel left or changed.

I'd say [for some of the LAs], I think regardless of if the current lead is changed and their staff changed, I think there is an even more senior buy-in to the regional way of working, and I think there is right to the top of the authorities a clear commitment – they know what's happening, they can see the benefit of it, and they want to continue. I'd say in [in other LAs] that's less the case. (SYF)

There was an acknowledgment from one LA that despite senior leadership buy-in, this had not always translated into an engagement in the progress of the project.

we've had buy-in, but nobody has asked me how it's progressing, so it was OK, get on with it, and there's been no progress... So, there is buy-in but I don't feel confident that they know as much as they should. (LA)

Cultural Differences

Somewhat unsurprisingly all participating parties identified cultural differences between the University-led SYF way of working and that of four different Local Authorities. For some this created a slight 'us' and 'them' mentality.

I think as local authorities you understand the context that the other local authorities are in. I think when you're in a consortium with a different type of partner, it's understanding each other on that front, because that caused a bit of friction at the beginning in terms of expectations. (LA)

Deadlines were set based on what would be seen as a really good project but not necessarily with the understanding of how local authorities work. Unfortunately, and it's a frustration of all local authority work, things aren't as fast as you want them to be. There is a lot of red tape. There is a lot of bureaucracy. (LA)

We've had some cultural differences I think in between the local authorities and the university in terms of the language in how they refer to stuff, how they approach things. (LA)

For others there was an acknowledgment that there were cultural differences across all contributing parties that needed to be considered.

It's the melding of cultures that is challenging. And that continues to be a challenge, in relation to... there is a very distinct culture within higher education. There is a very distinct culture generally in local government.

But there are also four distinct cultures within each of the four local authorities. And we speak a different language. (LA)

Although we keep reminding them, I actually don't think unless they've spent a month in our shoes they would fully comprehend where we're coming from as local authority officers. And the people around the table have all got different portfolios and different pressures. So, we haven't got a one-size-fits-all in terms of how services are organised, and there are different hierarchies and structures in terms of some staff around that table are more strategic than others. And it's easy to assume that we're all sort of vaguely similar. (LA)

The differences in approaches and cultures also created need for more practical considerations.

It's little things, for example, press releases. Whereas with South Yorkshire Future, you can kind of create a press release, the press office will send it out for you, we've got to have approval from our lead member, lead councillor, before we can actually send anything out. And the time scales to sometimes get that, are things that just need to be taken into account. (LA)

It's being able to take really minor things like logos and where a logo sits in the document. We've got to get individual approval for that in our local authority. So that slows things down a little bit sometimes, so that's a different way of working, a slightly different culture. (LA)

Despite the Cultural differences across the project team, there was significant praise for the collaborative nature of this project.

It will be really beneficial being part of the South Yorkshire project. And we would do it differently if we'd done it on our own. It's got challenges, but it will be worth it. (LA)

The cross-LA collaboration has been useful in terms of supporting one another throughout the process and offering sympathetic advice when needed.

But I think it's pretty good because we understand the restraints or process and all that side of it. And we are very good at helping each other. So there's no hiding it. It's not a competition. If we've got something, share it. (LA)

If something has come out that we're not sure of, we will kind of go, OK, well we just misunderstood something or missed something. Or one of the others will go, this thing that's just come out – are we thinking the same things? We'll just have those reassuring conversations. (LA)

For the SYF team, one of the biggest shifts in collaborative working has been the change in language. At the beginning of the project language was a noteworthy barrier to delivery.

You think you have a shared language but then you realise that terms mean different things to different people. So that's been quite interesting. You think you've had a really clear conversation and you realise that it's been interpreted in four different ways by four different local authorities because you're using terms that they use for a different part of their organisation or a different concept. (SYF)

However, as the project approached its end there was an interesting and somewhat significant shift in the language being used by the participating LAs.

I think although they were committed to a South Yorkshire approach at the beginning they were still very much working in silos and using their own language and terminology. Whereas at a workshop a few weeks ago we heard one of the local authorities actually using the terminology that we were using as South Yorkshire and as part of the project...which was quite ground-breaking for us really. (SYF)

Flexibility In Delivery

In the original project design it was anticipated that the four LAs would collaborate on a single model of delivery in regards to both Workstream 1 and Workstream 2. It quickly became apparent that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach would undermine the impact of the work within the four different regions.

We quickly realised throughout the project that we're not going to get a one-size-fits-all, all-singing, all-dancing training model that could then be delivered on a regional basis. We quickly realised that each one is going to want a slightly different version of training. However we can have a set of principles that every training, every local authority has to adapt to. And then we built on those principles to develop the specification. (SYF)

And I think everybody is away doing something slightly different now, but we're all following the plan, but we're focusing on different bits of it, giving more emphasis to different bits of it at different times. But we're all working to the same timescales. (LA)

This flexibility did not undermine the regional approach but instead offered the opportunity to make the project outputs meet the specific needs of each region. The collaboration evolved to focus more on those top-level strategy approaches and less on the specifics within each LA.

I think it's also been really important for us to come together as a region and say, what do we agree on? What can we as an overarching principle, overarching ethos, what can we say needs to be better and needs to be improved? What can we adopt as a whole? Then that silo bit is more around – so we've got our guiding principles, we've got our concepts, we've got our ethos – what would this look like, in terms of that [front-line] delivery. (LA)

It is partly a regional approach and partly a local approach...So, in order to be effective, each region needs to tailor this to their local population. (SYF)

Resourcing

In the original project model it was determined that each Local Authority would receive their project funding from the lead authority and would be able to manage this in a way that best suited their individual needs. It was required that all participating LAs assign a project lead to deliver the project, to work alongside SYF and to attend the Project Board meetings. It was not, however, specified whether the lead would work full-time on the project or whether there was a requirement to recruit to this role.

We agreed that we were all going to deliver this. How they went about it in terms of the funding for backfilling the people to attend the various workshops and data gathering and training, was up to them. And that is one of the characteristics of this project. (SYF)

Only one of the four LAs recruited specifically to this position and ring fenced it as a full time role. Having this dedicated resource has been viewed as a major factor in

supporting the successful delivery of the project and something that, in hindsight, others may have benefitted from replicating.

If we were doing this again, we might want to agree upfront that we would have that person in that role specifically to take things forward. We talked a little bit about that upfront but it was very much left to the local authorities to look at what they could make work and some were more successful than others really, with [the LA who recruited to role] being an example of where it has seemed to have worked really well. (SYF)

For some of the other LAs, however, recruiting to role was not a realistic option due to time constraints or internal recruitment procedures.

We ended up just doing it within the day job. Because there's no time to recruit – you've no time for that (LA)

We didn't [recruit to the role], because we felt we'd got enough people to carry the project moving forward, and what I didn't want to do was to recruit somebody and then that person would be gone when the money had dried up. And then I'd feel that we were all the back foot. (LA)

There were evident repercussions to not assigning a dedicated member or staff in terms of delivery slippage, increased workloads and stress levels.

I think we've struggled with the workload from it because of our other commitments. (LA)

In all honesty, I think sometimes deadlines slip because... although you've dedicated time within your team, you've got the other pressures. And although this is something that's really important, sometimes you do drop it for a few days or a week in between. I think if there had been that regular person that was here – I don't know, once a week – it would just keep it moving. I think we've got over that hump and we're doing that now, but I think it might have been helpful in the earlier stages. (LA)

Not recruiting to role or assigning a dedicated member of staff to this project has had implications for some LAs on their ability to keep up with the fast pace of the one-year programme.

The project has put a lot of pressure on us as a team to deliver, but partly because of the other projects we've got at the same time. (LA)

We need[ed] to start making some real kind of progress. And the local authorities just didn't have the resource to catch up with that. So obviously it differs between the local authorities. Some of them have been on top of everything from day one, but others have really, really struggled with keeping up with progress and making the right decisions and getting the resources in place, the right times and that kind of thing. (SYF)

3.2 What enables and hinders effective delivery?

Enablers

Key aspects of the programme design that were reported by participants to act as enablers included:

Flexibility in delivery	Allowing for differences in regional interpretations of the project supported project delivery
The application of the Maturity Matrix to identify gaps	Using the maturity matrix to identify gaps in training and delivery legitimised and validated the project and encouraged senior level buy-in.
The use of data	As with the Maturity Matrix, the regional data gathered as part of the project went some way to reduce resistance to change and strengthen the influence of the project.
Adequate resourcing	Allocating adequate resource within the LAs had a huge impact on the level and quality of delivery
Appropriate project management	A project management style that allows for individual LA pressures, systematic differences and sensitively keeps stakeholders on track was seen to be of overall benefit to delivery
Track Record	Having worked together previously on other projects the regional group and the SYF team were able to build on already existing relationships.

Barriers

Key aspects of the programme design that were reported by participants to act as barriers included:

Inadequate resourcing	Those LAs who did not assign adequate resource failed deliver to the standards seen elsewhere.
A lack of accountability	Project management struggled to influence pace and delivery at times due to a lack of accountability
Miscommunication	At points LAs and/or SYF made changes without proper consultation across the team

3.3 Sustainability and Legacy

With funding ending in March 2020 the sustainability of the project will rest upon a new Governance Group made of the LA leads, other LA stakeholders and members of the SYF Team. The group plans to meet on a regular basis to monitor progress and to evaluate impact.

For a number of the LAs the Early Outcomes project is now a regular item on the agenda for various internal strategic and operational groups.

LA-A have set up a specific 0-5 SLCN Strategic Board to take the project forward. The board is made up of colleagues from Health, Early Help, Early Years, Virtual School, Public Health, Commissioning and Performance. The other three LAs already have pre-existing strategic boards who will be tasked to guarantee the continued work of the project.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

At the outset, the Early Outcomes project sought to begin the process of regional systemic change and as such this evaluation can only seek to explore the impact of this initial process and not the impact had within the communities involved. Having said that, the training programmes that have already been delivered (alongside those planned for delivery) will no doubt have an impact on the lives and experiences of young people and their families.

In terms of the project itself the foremost impact has been on the way in which the LAs have come together and created a regional strategy with shared principles that has informed the training delivered in each area. In addition, there are plans for the joint delivery of training to the workforce at a regional level and a sharing of data that has allowed a regional picture of training needs to emerge.

For some Local Authorities there have been significant systemic changes including the creation of new working groups and increased cross-LA communication. For others the impact has been limited by the current systems in place. For example, one of the four LAs struggled to gain buy-in from other departments such as health. And although colleagues from Speech and Language Therapy were expected to attend their new training programme other areas of health such as midwifery and health visitors were not.

Overall, the project appears to have delivered all of its milestones to a high standard. Feedback indicates that participants have valued the programme's data analysis, the flexibility in delivery and the knowledgeable nature of the SYF team amongst other things. In contrast the lack of accountability, communication and inadequate resourcing were cited as potential negative aspects of the programme. Progress in implementation has been steady across all four LAs and any thwarting of implementation was seen to be as result of staff turnover or insufficient staff capacity.

What follows are some suggested points for reflection based on learning from the evaluation which may be used to inform future working.

- **Appropriate Project Management**
Project management should take into account the different ways in which Local Authorities are structured. Communication should be sensitive to the different pressures LA leads are under and be done so in a fair and equitable way.
- **Resourcing**
Clearer discussion at the outset is required to establish the accurate number of working days deliver would require. This would allow a more careful allocation of resource to meet the needs of the project.
- **Accountability**
Project management may benefit from the project monies being held in one place and distributed as and when LAs meet certain milestones.
The members of the Project Board should be expanded to include senior LA figures who could hold the LA leads to account. This would overcome the issues around LA leads being accountable only to themselves.

A further evaluation report will be issued in May 2020 exploring the legacy of the project and the lessons other Local Authorities can learn from this kind of cross-LA collaborative approach.

Appendix A: Project Theory of Change

