



# ssia



## Learning Product – Section 2

**Commissioning for Better Outcomes for Children in Need – A National Development Programme for Wales**

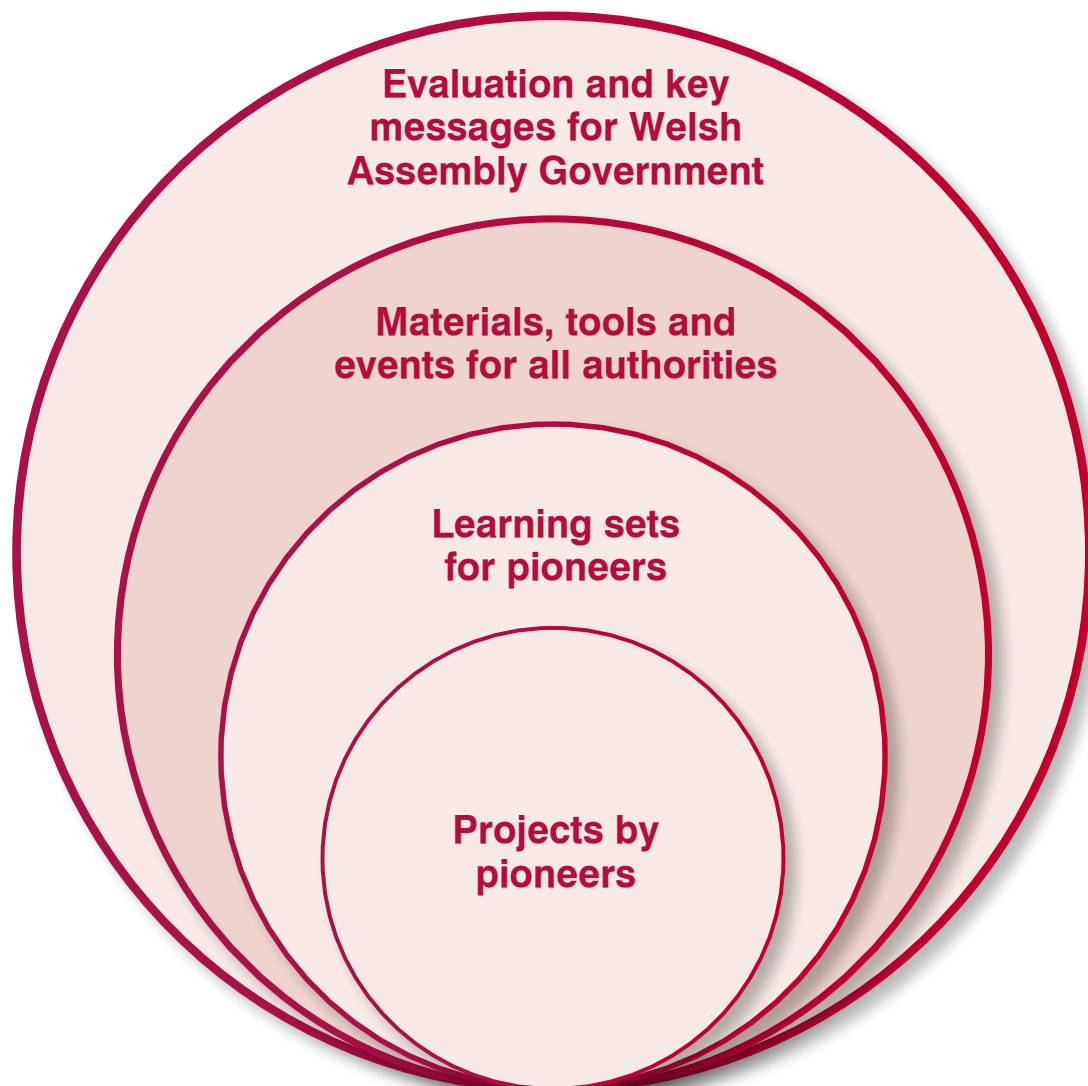
# Commissioning for Better Outcomes for Children in Need – A National Development Programme for Wales

## Introduction

The Better Outcomes for Children in Need Programme was undertaken by local authorities and their partners in 5 'pioneer' projects, sponsored by the Social Services Improvement Agency for Wales (SSIA) in 2007 and 2008. The over-arching aim of the Programme was to achieve more cost-effective and better matched services for children in need through joint strategic commissioning, and the pioneers focussed their strategic commissioning projects on issues such as:

- Better meeting the needs of children by improving the quality of intensive preventative services and substitute care
- Targeting their services towards using interventions that are shown to reduce the risk of children and young people entering the safeguarding or care systems
- Improving the quality of care and support for children and young people who do need to become looked after

The Programme comprised a series of four complementary activities co-ordinated by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University, including:





## The Projects

The pioneer authorities involved in the programme were:

- Conwy County Borough Council
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
- Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council
- City and County of Swansea
- Vale of Glamorgan Council

The projects explored aspects of the commissioning agenda facing local authorities and their partners, and focused on one of the following:

- Analysing needs and services for children with disabilities
- Developing an inter-agency partnership commissioning plan for children with complex needs
- Re-negotiating contracts and service level agreements
- Managing relationships between commissioners and providers to deliver effective change in service configuration and design
- Designing locality identification, referral and assessment arrangements between agencies to ensure that children in need are identified quickly and responded to effectively

Materials and reports, along with tools and resources developed during the course of the project have been made available to the authorities involved.

## Key Messages

There has been a great deal of effort and attention paid to developing children's services over the last decade, and much of this has focused on improving prevention or early intervention services, and developing more effective care for looked after children.

However, for the pioneer authorities, like many others in Wales, these developments appear to have had a limited impact on the continuing growth in the numbers of children needing safeguarding, complex mental health care, or substitute family care. The pioneer projects have therefore been exploring how to deliver changes in services which will turn around a cycle of experience for families with the most complex problems. Such change might include:

- Universal services such as pre-school, school and community health care services have become better at identifying families at risk of future breakdown, but do not have the capacity to support them effectively
- Services which offer early intervention and support are not able to work sufficiently intensively to be effective for families with the most complex needs
- Specialist services have had to draw tighter eligibility criteria for support, limiting their capacity to identify, reach out and support families who are struggling the most, because of limited resources, exacerbated by the cost of post-breakdown care
- Resources are having to be channelled into high cost services to provide substitute care required when these families do eventually break down

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- These services have a limited impact on the outcomes for these children and young people – who by the time they are supported have very entrenched and complex problems
- The children and young people who emerge from this experience are often inadequately prepared for adult life, and in many cases become parents who repeat the poor care they have experienced with their own children

The aim of the pilots has been to develop services and arrangements between agencies which can be characterised as:

- Recognition and early identification of children and families with high need for early intervention
- Holistic assessment of need across professional boundaries and targeted intervention for these families
- A collaborative approach to intensive service intervention and support early enough to be effective
- The building of resilience within these families to help reduce the level and complexity of need
- Re-directing of some resources previously needed for substitute care or unfocused community support towards additional early intervention and support for families facing severe stress

To help achieve this shift, pioneer authorities have used a common commissioning framework, applied in different ways to meet their particular needs. Their activities

have included systematic and co-ordinated approaches to population analysis, service user consultation, performance monitoring, budget management, contracting and service planning. They have found this approach has allowed them to be very clear about the strategic changes they need to make, and to be systematic in seeing their plans through to implementation.

Pioneers have also recognised that if long-term change is to be delivered, commissioning needs to be an ongoing activity, integral to the structure and activities of all children's services. It needs to be driven by the children and young people's plan, and attention needs to be paid to the importance of developing effective ongoing systems to bring together relevant data on finance, activity and outcomes to monitor and review the success of contracts and internal services in meeting needs and addressing commissioning priorities.

In addressing the challenges facing services for children in need, authorities and their partners have found that commissioning is a complex and time-consuming task, but ultimately worthwhile when it delivers more effective, strategic, evidence-based service development and change.

### The Learning Materials

The pioneer authorities worked closely with IPC to produce materials, guidance and tools which draw on the project experiences, and offer practical help to other authorities and partnerships needing to deliver change in services for children in need. Materials



available via the SSIA website include:

- Better outcomes for children in need - A commissioning workbook
- The role of commissioning in improving services to children in need
- National trends for children in need services
- What works in promoting good outcomes for children in need in the community?
- What works in promoting good outcomes for looked after children and young people?
- What works in promoting good outcomes for children in need where there is parental problem substance misuse?
- What works in promoting good outcomes for children in need who experience domestic violence?
- What works in promoting good outcomes for children in need through parenting support?
- These materials along with a comprehensive suite of web-based learning resources, will be available soon on the SSIA website :- [www.ssiacymru.org.uk](http://www.ssiacymru.org.uk)

## Notes