

Project Summary

Payment by Results (PbR) in Children's Centres in England – A process evaluation of the national trial for the Department for Education

Policy and practice background

Payment by Results in Children's Centres was introduced on a trial basis to 27 Local Authorities in England in September 2011 and was in operation between April 2012 and March 2013. This was the first national attempt to introduce this kind of scheme into universal services provided in the children's services sector, although variants of PbR are now becoming widespread in many other service areas such as criminal justice, employment and training, and in health. The core purpose of Children's Centres was recently reviewed by government and is 'to improve outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged, so that children are equipped for life and ready for school, no matter what their background or family circumstances'. Local Authorities in England are required to provide access to Children's Centres services for all parents and children in their local area, and there are presently about 3,350 Children's Centres in England. They provide a range of vital community-based services including day care, early learning and play, parenting support and education, and services to promote maternal and infant health and wellbeing. Through outreach and working with other agencies, they signpost to other local services, and also provide access to support with finding work and training.

Background to the trial

The purpose of the trial as stated by the Department for Education (DfE) was to incentivise a local focus on the core purpose of children's centres. The trial had a two-tier structure: a national element, whereby the Department for Education made available a reward fund out of which payments would be made to local authorities provided they submitted local data on one or two of a basket of six core indicators or 'measures', and dependent on achievement on pre-determined improvements in these; and a local element, involving local authorities developing other, additional indicators, together with their own schema for reward payments.

Project design

The process evaluation was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and started in May 2012. It finished in March 2013. **The Colebrooke Centre** collaborated with **Frontier Economics** www.frontier-economics.com on this work. Our aim was to explore the process of implementing PbR, and explore the impacts of the national scheme on local decision-making and commissioning behaviour in children's centres. We wanted to understand what changes, if any, were catalysed by the trial, and the implications of these changes for the services Children's Centres provide.

The design of the study included:

- Two telephone surveys and a workshops for PbR Project Leads in 27 pilot authorities
- Case studies in two waves with five purposively selected authorities chosen to give a view of the diversity of background contexts and approaches to PbR at local level
- A survey of Directors of Children's Services in the pilot authorities
- A brief survey of 15 non-PbR Local Authorities (conducted by DfE)

Publications and outputs

A report was prepared by the team and will be published by the Department for Education in late Summer 2013. It will be made available on the Department's website together with a summary of key findings.

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