Process and early implementation issues : emerging findings from the On Track evaluation

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Process and early implementation issues: emerging findings from the On Track evaluation

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Background

On Track is an evidence-based preventative programme that adopts a community approach to tackling crime. Initially set up as part of the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme, it aims to reduce crime by targeting early interventions (early in terms of 'the problem' and years) at the risk factors known to be associated with crime and anti-social behaviour. Local On Track partnerships have been established and funded to provide multiple interventions known from the evidence base to aid families and children aged four to 12 years at risk.

The programme was established in 2000 and has been introduced in 24 local authority areas with high levels of deprivation and crime. Whilst it has been slower to achieve planned delivery than originally expected, programme implementation has been successful and recent evidence suggests that all projects are now established and delivering interventions.

Aims of this report

An integral part of the programme is its multi-tier evaluation drawing upon the findings of regional and national evaluation teams. This report focuses upon emerging findings in stages 1 and 2 of the process evaluation surrounding programme and project implementation during the first 18 months. It identifies effective approaches in early prevention with children and families and the factors contributing to successful and effective delivery of interventions.

This summary has two key aims:

1. To identify key lessons learnt about the implementation and set-up of large national programmes such as On Track.

2. To highlight key factors – both nationally and locally - that have a positive or negative impact on delivery of large-scale programmes.

From policy to implementation

The initial phase in any programme of social change is crucial and perhaps the most challenging. Successful transitions between planning, bidding and implementation are required to ensure the programme gets off to a good start. This also increases the chances of meeting delivery targets.

The evidence suggests that transition points are best managed by providing:

(i)   Project support including:

- *Development funding*
  Where projects are required to produce detailed delivery plans in order to secure funding, it cannot be assumed that these can be generated from within existing resources.

- *Good practice guides on moving from planning to implementation*
  These ensure that the evidence base and national programme objectives inform and shape local practice. The evidence should be updated to incorporate ongoing development and include information on effective approaches in project management and set-up.

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- *Stability in policy support or strategies to negotiate change*
  This is vitally important for innovative programmes such as On Track which involve changing ways of working and need coherent support strategies to remain in place. The roles and responsibilities of those supporting project development at the national level need to be explicit.

- *Continuing project development after implementation*
  Projects require continuing practical support if they are to improve and develop. It needs to be clear who is responsible for providing this.

(ii)   Realistic programme time-scales

Timing slippage is common during the implementation of complex programmes. Prospective pilots should therefore be challenged more rigorously to determine whether they anticipate problems with time-scales and how they plan to reduce the impact of these problems. Delay cannot be attributed to a single factor but is related to multiple factors at all levels in the implementation chain.

Time needs to be built in for:

- *Funding reaching projects*
  Project approval can take longer than anticipated. Receipt of funding may be necessary prior to the appointment of all important co-ordinators.

- *Amending delivery plans*
  This is often necessary even after approval is given.

- *Infrastructure to be in place*
  It is particularly important to allow time for key staff to be appointed and trained and for premises to be identified. Complex programmes such as On Track necessitate the appointment of a research/information officer to establish data collection systems for monitoring progress and evaluation.

- *Turning planning into action*
  There needs to be time for transference of thinking between those who wrote the delivery plan and those responsible for delivery. A transition period is also required to cement partnerships and secure inter-agency co-operation and undertake the necessary groundwork for establishing new ways of working.

The impact of local circumstances

External factors outside the control of locally based practitioners are important, but local factors can also critically influence implementation. How projects manage local circumstances such as employment markets, community make-up and partnership history affects the speed of implementation. The evaluation of On Track has identified a number of factors that assist in project development, community involvement and building successful partnerships at the local level:

(i)   Project development

- A 'champion' at managerial or partnership level is an important factor facilitating successful progress. Conversely, inactive management can lead to delays in project development.
- Setting up complex, new programmes such as On Track requires a dedicated co-ordinator in post early in the process.

(ii)   Community involvement

Before involving the community
- Time needs to be allotted to build up the capacity and infrastructure for engagement.
- Strategic and managerial support is needed to enable workers to prioritise this work.
- Understanding of the 'community' to be engaged is essential to tackle diversity and difference.
- Practitioner time is required to identify and involve 'hard to reach' groups.

The engagement process
- Tokenism and 'consultation overload' should be avoided by linking with existing programmes of engagement.
- Incremental approaches are required, especially in areas where community engagement is limited.
- An accessible location is needed for the project's premises.

Creating effective partnerships

A multi-agency approach is essential to achieve programme objectives as target groups may face a range of issues which are unlikely to be addressed by a single agency in isolation. Effective partnerships need:

- to be built upon existing good working relationships
- to include those involved in early development to ensure continuity
- to include a broad range of partners to assist with delivery
- agreed strategic objectives between partners to help overcome barriers between agencies
- to include On Track 'champions' who can encourage the involvement of others
- to ensure co-ordinators have the seniority to negotiate with senior partners
- to have clear communication and reporting systems in place to limit confusion over roles and responsibilities
- to ensure that the expectations of partners are made explicit. This helps reduce the risk of declining engagement.

Lessons for implementation

The implementation of On Track has been a challenge to all involved. It is delivering its interventions and has moved from planning to action, creating real opportunities to understand how services can be effective in tackling issues of risk in a co-ordinated and planned way.   While the full results of this ongoing work are still to be understood, lessons can be learnt about how central and local programmes to tackle problem behaviour should be set-up and managed.

Creating joined up policy

- Joined-up policy requires both the local and national partners to understand the limits and pressures of each other's work.

The importance of realistic and achievable goals

- Timescales and frameworks that fail to recognise the context in which policy is to be implemented lead to delays and difficulties. Programme plans should include developmental time, resources for early planning and implementation and set-up time for projects.

Finding local solutions and developing risk management strategies

- Local strategic partners and professionals need to recognise their responsibilities in finding solutions to overcome tensions around delivery.

Supporting implementation

- Project workers need access to the evidence base for the programme and to understand how it informs their practice.
- Evidence about what works in good project management and set-up should be readily available to those who are responsible for the day to day delivery of projects.
- Project support from central and regional government is critical throughout the early stages to provide guidance on the aims and objectives of the programme.

1. Introduction

In December 1999 the Home Office invited local authorities in England and Wales to bid to participate in the On Track Early Intervention and Prevention Programme. On Track's central aim is to reduce offending by young people by providing a range of early intervention and prevention services for children and families 'at risk' of becoming future offenders. In September 2000 24 local projects were selected by the Home Office and funding was made available for local delivery. By November 2000 the Home Office had also commissioned a National Evaluation Team, four Local Evaluation Teams, and an Evaluation Advice and Support Team to ensure that critical learning could be gathered as a part of the programme.

This report concentrates on the first stages of implementation (September 2000 – October 2001) of the On Track programme and focuses specifically on set-up and early delivery.

The following report has two key aims:

1. To identify key lessons learnt about the implementation and set-up of large national programmes such as On Track.

2. To highlight key factors – both nationally and locally that have a positive or negative impact on delivery of large-scale programmes.

Each chapter is written by one of the evaluation teams and explores critical questions that have emerged from the early stages of the evaluation. Constructing and implementing policy objectives through programmes such as On Track is reasonably new to the UK. Given this, it was felt that the first report from the On Track evaluation should concentrate on an examination of how such policies are translated and then implemented at the local level. One key aspect of policy implementation such as this is a negotiation between the national and the local. Each has a contribution to make in how successful and effective implementation is. This report therefore is focused on examining how decisions made at both levels can and do influence what is delivered to service users. In the chapters that follow this theme is developed by the National Evaluators, Local Evaluators and the Evaluation Advice and Support Teams drawing upon data collected at the local level.

In Chapter 2 the policy and programme context of On Track alongside the evaluation structure is outlined in detail. In Chapter 3 Paul Howard from the Evaluation Advice and Support Team gives a programme overview of the early stages of the On Track set-up and implementation. Based on evidence collected through supporting contacts with local projects he presents an analysis of slippage that identifies problems with the structure of implementation at the national level alongside more localised problems such as difficulties of recruitment. In Chapter 4, Lesley Noaks and Howard Williamson outline issues that have impacted on delivery at the local service level, especially in the set-up phase where projects were trying to establish project identities and develop approaches that had been agreed with the Home Office in their delivery plans. In Chapter 5 Richard Lloyd discusses the issue of 'partnership'. He outlines ways that strategic partnerships have been constructed in the first stages of implementation outlining the process of local negotiation with national policy objectives. In Chapter 6 Paul Doherty, Kay Kinder and Alison Stott discuss some of the early issues about involving local communities in initiatives such as On Track. They highlight some of tensions associated with trying to manage a tight timetable for implementation alongside a policy desire for 'community engagement'. In the final chapter Alan France, Jean Hine and Derrick Armstrong as the National Evaluators draw out a national perspective highlighting main themes, trends and lessons that are relevant across the whole programme making recommendations for how programmes such as On Track need to tackle early implementation and set-up.

2. The construction of the On Track Early Intervention and Prevention Programme and its evaluation

Alan France, Jean Hine, Derrick Armstrong and Sara Trikha

Tackling risk and protection

The On Track Early Intervention and Prevention Programme is an experimental and developmental programme that aims to gather greater understanding about risk, protection and early intervention. The programme was constructed within the broader context of the Crime Reduction Programme and was aimed at developing early intervention and prevention for children (aged between 4 and 12) who could be identified as being 'at risk' of becoming future offenders.

Existing research in the UK and USA suggests that if children have, or are exposed to, a number of risk factors they may over time develop delinquent and problem behaviour (Farrington, 1996, 2000). Whilst it is not possible to accurately predict which children will become offenders according to the level of risk to which they are exposed, research suggests that children exposed to multiple risks are disproportionately likely to become serious or persistent offenders (Graham and Bowling, 1995; Farrington, 2000; Hawkins *et al*., 1992). For example, findings from the Home Office 1998/99 Youth Lifestyles Survey showed that boys subject to four or more risk factors had committed at least one offence during the course of their lives and more than half of them were serious or persistent offenders at the time of the survey (Flood-Page *et al*., 2000). Moreover, those who engage in anti-social behaviour at an early age are also more likely to become serious or persistent offenders (Graham, 1998). That said, there still remains much that is unknown about risk factors especially how they operate and shape people's lives and how some people identified as being at risk may not be involved in future problem behaviour or juvenile delinquency. Evidence also exists that suggests that protection is important in mediating against risk (Hawkins *et al*., 1992; Anderson *et al*., 2002) although even less is known about how protection works and what are the critical factors that might reduce risk and future problem behaviour (Armstrong *et al*., forthcoming). The setting up of the On Track programme by the Home Office aimed to help increase our knowledge about risk and protection by contributing to a limited evidence base.

Early interventions and prevention programmes that tackle risk

It was also recognised by the Home Office that much also needed to be learnt about how policy and programmes of interventions can help reduce risks and increase protection for children and their families (Home Office, 1999). There is limited crime reduction evidence in the UK regarding effective early preventative measures for children (Farrington, 1996; Graham, 1998). While good evidence exists in the USA concerning 'what works' (Hawkins *et al*., 1992) little exists in the UK. On Track therefore was seen as providing an opportunity not only to gather greater insight into risk and protection but also to gather knowledge about what worked in the area of early intervention with children and families. In the design of the programme the Home Office built a programme specification based on USA evidence of what works and what looks promising. Graham (1998) had indicated that a small number of programmes in five categories showed promise (Home Office, 1999). These areas were:

- home visiting

- home school partnerships
- family therapy
- parent support and training
- pre-school education.

Local areas were therefore required to construct and deliver a range of interventions to children and families who were identified as being 'at risk' across these main categories.[1] It has also been suggested that multiple interventions addressing risk factors across a range of domains (such as the family, school and community and peers) are more likely to be effective (Farrington, 1996; Hawkins *et al*., 1992 and Graham, 1998). As a result the Home Office requested that local areas develop targeting and assessment procedures that allowed multiple interventions to be developed and implemented at the local level (1999). It was therefore a central objective of the Home Office to improve the evidence base of what works in early intervention and prevention.

Selection process for On Track pilots

Eighty Local Authority Areas were asked to bid for On Track funding on the basis of their high levels of deprivation as indicated in the Index of Local Deprivation. Whilst the initial invitation to bid was addressed at local authority level, local professionals were asked to construct On Track projects that were targeted at a smaller ward-sized area within the Local Authority boundary. This should have had approximately 2,000 children aged between four and 12. It was recognised by the Home Office that a bidding process could disadvantage those areas that had less motivated staff and areas with poor infrastructure for bidding. The Home Office therefore allocated some resources to free up staff or to buy in expertise to help local areas develop their bids and make them workable in the time frame set by the Home Office. The Family Policy Unit within the Home Office then assessed final bids. Funding was awarded to 24 local areas in September 2000. Once selected, all areas had to go through further discussions to develop their plans into more detailed proposals ensuring they met the requirements set down.

The Home Office evaluation framework

A model for the evaluation of the On Track programme was developed by the Home Office and set down in the Invitation to Tender document (Home Office, 1999). The policy aspect of On Track and the support to local projects was to be managed by the Family Policy Unit (FmPU) and the evaluation was managed by the Early Multiple Intervention Team (EMIT) within Policing and Reducing Crime Unit. The evaluation structure comprised the following teams: the National Evaluation Team (NET), four regionally based Local Evaluation Teams (LETs) (who had responsibility for the evaluation of 6 projects each) and the Evaluation Advice and Support Team (EAST):

- The National Evaluation role was to identify and research trends, themes and issues across the national programme as well as gather new evidence on what works in terms of risk reduction and protection. As part of this they were responsible for shaping and directing the research and developing a National Evaluation Framework that would collect the required data to meet the Home Office requirements.

- The Local Evaluation Teams were responsible for providing information for the National Evaluation Framework (70% of their workload) and for providing analysis of the local contexts and influences on the On Track projects (30%). This included identifying emerging themes and issues across the six pilot areas they were allocated and by carrying out the evaluation of local issues.

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[1] An additional category of specialist interventions was also included so that local areas could include local programmes that looked promising.

- The Evaluation Advice and Support Team was to provide professional advice and support on evaluation issues and to help local projects interpret and put into practice the evidence based findings gained from the evaluation. The role of the EAST changed early into the programme to one that gave project development support rather than evaluation advice. At this point their role in the evaluation diminished.
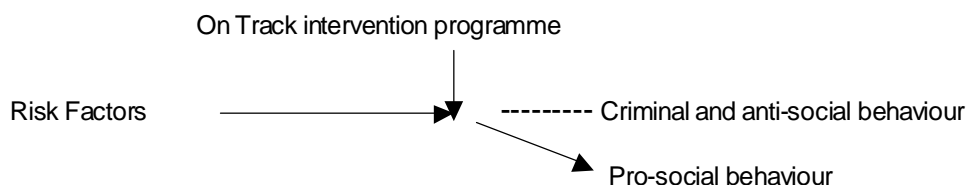
On Track programme theory

The On Track programme is a comprehensive community initiative (CCI) aiming to promote positive change in individuals, families and the community. As Kubisch *et al.*, (1999) suggest, CCIs such as On Track aim to improve physical, economic and social conditions through the expansion and improvement of social care agencies. It is well recognised that evaluating community based initiatives such as this create substantial challenges and difficulties for evaluators (France and Crow (forthcoming); Hollister and Hill, 1999). For example, Kubisch *et al.* (1999) argues that CCIs are hard to evaluate because they include the following attributes:

> *…horizontal complexity, vertical complexity, the importance of context, the flexibility and evolving nature of the interventions, the breadth of the range of outcomes being pursued, the absence of appropriate control groups for comparisons.* (Kubisch *et al.,* 1999, p2).

The construction of an evaluation framework for the On Track programme had to devise methods of understanding this complexity whilst also measuring change and impact at a number of levels. Issues of outcomes and impact are crucial in the evaluation of CCIs, but initiatives like On Track should not be seen as 'social experiments' that exist in a vacuum detached from the wider contexts of local and national developments (Pawson and Tilley, 1998; France and Crow (forthcoming)). On Track projects interact with their communities in complex ways, and understanding the programme, the community and the impact requires a diverse and multi levelled methodology that collects and analyses data from a number of different data sources. This full understanding of the complexities of programmes includes knowing something of the 'theories of change' that underpin the programme (Kubisch *et al.,* 1999). An evaluation methodology for comprehensive community initiatives such as On Track needs to be able to identify these.

The On Track programme was constructed at policy level with a particular understanding of the problem: that anti-social and criminal behaviour could be prevented by targeting early interventions at the risk factors known to be associated with the development of such behaviours, thereby diverting potential anti-social behaviour to pro-social behaviour.

This programme theory can be shown in diagram form:

On Track intervention programme

Risk Factors ———————→ -------- Criminal and anti-social behaviour

Pro-social behaviour

The task of the projects is to test this model in practice. The task of the evaluators is to assess the extent to which the various approaches to implementing this model work in reducing anti-social and criminal behaviour. This in turn requires a theorising and critiquing of the understandings and assumptions behind the model: programme theory is never straightforward.

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In the On Track policy model 'risk factors' are presented as unproblematic yet there are many unresolved questions. The causal relationships between risk factors, anti-social and criminal behaviour remain unproven. There are questions about whether some risk factors are more influential than others, and whether certain combinations of factors have greater impact on future offending behaviour. Protective factors have been identified as playing a significant role in preventing criminal behaviour, but again their relationship with risk factors and the causal mechanisms by which they effectively assist children to resist criminal behaviour are unclear. These issues will impact upon the effectiveness of On Track and therefore require investigation as a part of the evaluation.

The 'programme theory' of On Track becomes more complex when it is examined at the local level. Local understandings of the problem differ and local theories in action and the method of delivery used do not necessarily follow the programme theory developed by the Home Office. In other words there are likely to be 24 local project theories guiding practice and methods of reducing anti-social behaviour and criminality. All will be variants of the policy 'programme theory'. Understanding such programme complexity requires close attention to process ensuring that local theories in action can be identified and incorporated into the evaluation.

Assessment of the outcomes of On Track, particularly in relation to crime reduction, is the key Home Office requirement. But what are the outcomes for a programme such as On Track, and how should they be measured? At one level the task looks simple and can be related to the reduction of crime in the areas where On Track is being delivered. However, On Track is a prevention programme that aims to construct multiple interventions targeted at early intervention and it is thus not expected to achieve significant outcomes in the short term. Mid range outcomes could be identified from changes in the level of risk and protection within a community, yet little robust comparative data on this question exists in the UK. Outcomes therefore remain problematic (Utting *et al.*, 2002) and something that the national evaluation of On Track has had to consider in its construction. It is not sufficient for the evaluation to show that a particular project or approach has been successful: it will need to be able to identify what it was about this particular approach that worked. The purpose of evaluation is to inform decision making and practice development (Merrington and Hine, 2001). If successful approaches are to be replicated the evaluation must illuminate the circumstances and contexts that need to be considered when reconstructing them for others to use (Pawson and Tilley, 1998). Gathering an understanding of these processes requires an in-depth focus that explores the mechanisms of change within the programme and the context surrounding it at the project level. It is in consideration of these issues that the National Evaluation Framework for On Track was constructed.

The key objectives of the evaluation framework

The National Evaluation of On Track has been designed to generate three key products:

1. *An impact evaluation* of the On Track approach to reducing risk, crime and anti-social behaviour. In other words an assessment of the success of the On Track crime prevention strategy devised by the Home Office.
2. *An assessment of process, policy and practice* of On Track, and the identification of what works and why. The evaluation will address questions of what is needed for policy and practice to be successful in reducing risk, increasing protection and tackling the causes of youth crime, especially in relation to multi agency working, evidence based approaches, targeting, multi interventions and their implementation.
3. *Academic development of the programme theory and approach.* Opportunities have been created to further the knowledge and evidence of risk, protection and multi interventions.

The Home Office require the National Evaluation of On Track to address the question of whether early multiple intervention with children at risk of developing anti-social and criminal behaviour effectively reduces such behaviour. Within this question the national evaluators have identified five key questions which need to be addressed to enable a proper assessment of the impact of the On Track policy model:

- Did On Track projects develop 'evidence based' local services that were co-ordinated and targeted at early prevention?
- To what extent did the On Track Programme reduce anti-social and criminal behaviour in project areas?
- To what extent did the On Track Programme reduce levels of the risk factors that are associated with an increased risk of children becoming future offenders?
- What works in early prevention with children and families and what are the factors that help interventions to be successful?
- Are there certain approaches to early prevention that are more cost-effective than others?

On Track is a complex and ambitious programme, and as Weiss (1998) suggests;

> *Social Programmes…incorporate a range of components, styles, people, and procedures. It becomes difficult to describe what a programme really is.*
>
> (Weiss, 1998, p48).

The evaluation method

To address these important questions the National Evaluation Framework (NEF) for the evaluation of the On Track programme has four core strands (see Fig. 2.1) for data collection and analysis: Profiling; Process Evaluation; Tracking; and Longitudinal Work with Children and Families. Two cross-cutting strands (Equality and Cost-effectiveness) are the focus of all aspects of the evaluation. Each strand has a complex data collection process that will enable the national evaluation team to draw upon a variety of information to understand context, outcomes, impact and complexity.

Fig 2.1: The On Track National Evaluation Framework

- **Profiling:** Data specified here are designed to be collected on an annual basis from local and national sources. It includes primary long term and intermediate short- and long-term measures of outcome at the community level, such as the amount of crime, school attendance and educational attainment. A survey of school pupils (biennial) provides measures of the levels of risk and protection factors among children from the On Track area, together with self-reported problem behaviours. Other data collected in this section of the evaluation framework creates a picture of the On Track area and community and the core services available to enable an understanding of the contextual factors that might affect children and families in the On Track area.

- **Process evaluation:** An understanding of how projects implement their On Track programme and deliver their services to the children and families at risk of anti-social and criminal behaviour is essential to be able to identify the key features of good practice that will enable the replication of successful services. Understanding the theories that underpin programmes, and their mechanisms of change requires a methodology that is focused on collecting data at the project level through observations and interviews with key stakeholders.

- **Tracking:** There are two types of tracking included in the national evaluation framework. *Tracking of interventions* is designed to collect clear and consistent data about each intervention planned and delivered in all of the 24 project areas, mapping their development over time. Interventions with common objectives can be identified from these data to enable sound comparison across projects. The outputs of each intervention are measured from monthly data about intervention use and service delivery.

Tracking of children and families in receipt of interventions enables description of the users of these services, appraisal of the success of projects in accessing their target groups, and evaluation of the relative success of interventions in achieving their objectives. In the design of the tracking method a data collection sheet was constructed that allowed professionals to identify how they were assessing children and families and what risk, protection factors or problem behaviours were being targeted with individuals. This measure focused on short term objectives matching those of the overall programme (from the four domains of family, community, school and individuals). However, it provides data that will be used to measure short and long term change in risk and protection. These data are key to addressing the question of what interventions and combinations of interventions worked best, for whom and in what circumstances'.

- **Longitudinal work with children and families:** It is important to hear directly from the recipients of services about their experience of On Track and their perceptions of the success of interventions. This qualitative aspect of the evaluation will include exploration and development of the theoretical models underpinning the On Track policy.

- **Equality:** The exploration of equality issues within all data collection and analysis frameworks is essential to be able to address important issues such as stigma and racial and gender discrimination. The ethical and equality principles drawn up by the national evaluators guide all aspects of data collection, but this strand of the evaluation particularly focuses on understanding the perspectives of 'hard to reach' and minority groups, and assessing the extent to which services are successfully delivered to them.

- **Cost-effectiveness:** Cost-effectiveness of On Track, as part of the Crime Reduction Programme, was a core requirement of the Home Office, and this model has been refined by the national evaluators. A comprehensive system for the collection of data about direct and indirect inputs has been devised (the 'costs' side of the equation) and the data necessary to the measurement of outputs and effectiveness is incorporated into other aspects of the evaluation.

Understanding process

Data on process is collected mainly by the four Local Evaluation Teams (LETs) and reported upon in their reports to the Home Office and the National Evaluation Team (NET). This information is then collated by the NET to identify themes and issues emerging from all 24 areas. Models developed by the National Evaluators are in turn assessed on the ground by the Local Evaluators. To ensure all local evaluators report on similar questions the NET has constructed a thematic framework for LETs to work within. This framework reflects key stages in programme development and creates the opportunity for the NET to understand critical issues in project development and implementation. The process themes identified are as follows:

1. *Project Planning and Preparation.* The first reports (March 2001) necessarily focused on early planning, including the bidding process, the design and construction of delivery plans and early stages of project set-up.
2. *Project Set-Up.* The reports on the first year of implementation (October 2001) covered the appointment of key staff, partnership construction and development, engagement of the community, and early implementation issues.
3. *Service Delivery.* The final reports of phase 1 of the evaluation will focus upon the delivery of services by projects and the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches and intervention types.
4. *Impact.* Reports in 2003 will explore issues of effectiveness and local evidence of impact in relation to risk reduction. These will address the critical factors in understanding what works, why and in what circumstances.

Although the process of policy implementation publicly began at the beginning of 2000, work on establishing the On Track programme has effectively been in place since the selection of participating localities in May 2000 with funding for the 24 locally based projects beginning in September 2000. Project progress has been slower than planned for a variety of reasons, although movement towards full implementation has increased since September 2001 (National Evaluation Interim Report, November 2001). This report centres on early findings surrounding programme and project implementation and is focused on evidence emerging in stages 1 and 2 of the process evaluation. The following chapters cover themes highlighted within that process framework and introduce the local flavour of implementation.

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3. Project set-up and early implementation issues

Paul Howard

This chapter identifies some of the principal issues that arose at a national level during the project set-up and early implementation phase of On Track and draws out key learning points from the process.

Differential development and slippage

Among the clearest features of the programme during its earliest stages (between Autumn 2000 and Spring 2001) is the degree of differential between pilot areas, both in terms of the rate and direction of their development and the extent of slippage.

This variation was most marked following the production of delivery plans (September 2000 to December 2000). While the response to the requirement to present plans was broadly common to all 24 areas, there was a sharp divergence when it came to translating delivery plans into project set-up and early implementation. The first factor in this divergence concerned the degree of further development and clarification of the plans. Whereas most projects were able to proceed with relatively minor elaboration of their documentation, two had to undertake detailed work, which slowed their progress towards implementation. The second factor concerned the readiness of projects to act on receipt of approval of their plans by the Family Policy Unit (FmPU). Very few pilot areas had arrangements in hand to facilitate an almost immediate move to project set-up, whereas the sizeable majority had limited contingency to respond to start-up problems.

Recruitment difficulties

Arguably the biggest obstacle to pilots' engagement with the intended pace and direction of development was their difficulty in recruiting to the key post of On Track co-ordinator (Table 3.1). One pilot area continued to experience severe problems in recruiting a co-ordinator and only by Autumn 2001 did all 24 projects have co-ordinators in place.

Table 3.1: On Track co-ordinators' appointment dates

Date in post	By Dec 2000	In Jan 2001	In Feb 2001	In Mar 2001	In Apr 2001	In May 2001	In Jun 2001	In Jul 2001
No. of co-ordinators	4	4	2	8	3	0	1	2

Note: These figures include the appointment of two co-ordinators on a job share basis for one area in different months.

The recruitment difficulties fall into three categories – bureaucratic, quantitative and qualitative. In the first of these, local authority regulations in at least three areas precluded recruitment ahead of confirmation of funding. A key lesson from this phase of project set-up concerns the need to consider funding for the appointment of co-ordinators in advance of the main tranche. In a few cases, bureaucratic obstacles were compounded by a further local regulatory factor, concerning the level at which the On Track co-ordinator post could be advertised. It became clear that the levels of remuneration, which the FmPU felt to be appropriate for the co-ordinator posts, were not instantly agreeable to all lead agencies in the pilot areas. This may have contributed directly to the second main area of difficulty, the often low number of applicants.

As there was already a shortfall in some of the professions from which pilots were most likely to recruit, the recruitment difficulty was to some extent inevitable. While there was no lack of appreciation of the need to appoint to the co-ordinator posts high calibre candidates, four pilots found themselves with applicants (including interviewees) of a lesser quality and were compelled to re-advertise. While this contributed to set-up and implementation slippage, it was evidently preferable to proceeding with inappropriate people in post. As a result, the On Track pilots may be classified as being 'personnel dependent'. Although Jordan (1998) reported on the difficulties associated with strategies that are too personnel dependent, the pivotal role ascribed to the On Track co-ordinators from the outset made this dependency both inevitable and acceptable in this context.

Recruitment contingencies

Although the FmPU encouraged pilots to consider contingency arrangements in the event of recruitment problems, a little over a half were able to actively progress this item in the short-term. This was largely because the fledgling On Track partnerships lacked the capacity to initiate sustainable alternative personnel arrangements. Key factors in pilots' response to the lack of a co-ordinator were the strength and levels of activity of the groups, which had been set up to oversee pilot projects.

During the hiatus in the appointment of co-ordinators, strategic managers sought to sustain a credible operational structure. However, this tended to be limited to the partial release of managers, who continued to carry a 'mainstream' workload and were not in a position to maintain the momentum of the development.

Where pilots pre-empted recruitment problems, by making a full-time secondment to the co-ordinator post, there is evidence that they were able to make early inroads into programme implementation. In one area, this response was accompanied by a strategic decision to deliver On Track interventions through existing agencies, rather than through a dedicated On Track service. As a consequence, the majority of this pilot's programme was operational by the end of the first year.

However, there is not a direct correlation between early appointment of co-ordinators and the delivery of services on schedule. On the one hand, the appointment of a co-ordinator cannot in itself guarantee implementation of services which require further recruitment. On the other, about a quarter of pilot areas sustained their programme development to an extent that facilitated relatively smooth implementation of interventions once the co-ordinator was in post. For example, in one area a very active steering group, bridging the gap between the strategic partnership and the operational managers, helped establish and maintain a cohesive structure on which the co-ordinator was able to build swiftly after her appointment in February 2001.

Understanding slippage: gradients of development

While slippage may be expected as an intrinsic feature of complex programmes, this should not preclude attempts to make sense of it and factor it into plans. Slippage should be viewed within the context of the programme "gradient of development", a theoretical concept that describes the pace and direction of project implementation.

The FmPU's plan for On Track can be regarded as the primary gradient of development. This defined the programme, not only in terms of its prescribed core, as suggested by Graham (1998), but also the intended time-scales for implementation. The FmPU's initial plan is represented in Figure 3.1, in which the points of intersection between the gradient and the vertical time lines indicate the development milestones.

Figure 3.1: Representation of initial gradient of development for On Track

Direction of development

Time-scale of development

End of phase 1   End of phase 2

Given the significant slippage in On Track areas, clearly other gradients did not map neatly over FmPU's plan. Figure 3.2 represents the effect of a pilot area starting late, or being unable to sustain the assumed pattern of development, conditions which may have affected up to three-quarters of pilots. Here the pilot's rate of progress with project set-up is slower than the FmPU had anticipated. Consequently, milestones that had been expected at the end of the first phase are only achieved at the end of the second phase.

Figure 3.2: Representation of slippage between FmPU plan and project implementation

Of course, Figure 3.2 offers a simplified picture of project development, mapping as it does a single relationship, between the Policy Unit's initial gradient and that of a pilot area. While this provides the basis for a model explanation of slippage, it does not reveal subsequent transitions, i.e. critical points where responsibility for the development process passes from one party to another.

Transition: from national programme to local project

Besides illustrating differential in the gradients of development, Figure 3.2 also indicates one of the principal early transitions in the On Track programme, the movement from a national policy and research model to local implementation plans. Aspects of this first transition were potentially problematic, for, as the early guidance indicated, On Track is simultaneously a "top down" and "bottom up" initiative. Not in itself a weakness, this duality of direction, however, contributed to tensions in the overall structure. For example, whereas policy guidance on interventions was a central feature in the introductory phase, its impact reduced after the early transition, as pilots mapped it onto prevailing local conditions. While it was never in doubt that local areas would be able to select different models for the delivery of the prescribed core interventions, the degree of divergence was perhaps greater than expected. From an evaluation perspective, this necessitated subsequent consideration of the comparability of interventions, bearing the same or a similar title, but with different methodologies.

Around this transition point, pilots' understanding of the prescribed core, and an early sense of local feasibility, should have featured among the key considerations. A review of the pilot areas' delivery plans suggests little or no departure from the Policy Unit's original gradient. This

appears to be because pilot areas perceived delivery as much as a prerequisite of funding as a template for detailed implementation. Consistent with this is the absence from plans of critical questioning of proposed time-scales. Consequently, a sizeable majority of the delivery plans may have given an illusion of uncomplicated engagement with the intended time-frame.

If slippage is generally expected and accepted as a feature of complex programmes, it would seem appropriate to accommodate this within project planning and development design. For instance, prospective pilots could be asked directly (a) if they anticipate problems with time-scales and (b) how they plan to reduce the impact of these problems.

Transition: from national support to local action

Detailed guidance on the programme's core was provided as part of the process of assisting project areas to plan and set up. In addition to written guidance, the Unit commissioned expert input, at the national conference in Birmingham. Projects found this form of support very useful and it allowed them to consider the research basis of their delivery plans. The process was assisted substantially by the FmPU's accurate analysis of pilot areas' capacity limitations, which prompted the offer of significant development funding. A key learning point is that where prospective pilot areas are required to produce detailed delivery plans, as a step towards funded participation in an initiative, it cannot be assumed that such plans can be generated from within existing resources.

Although the Policy Unit continued to provide guidance after acceptance of delivery plans, this source became less certain in relation to some of the core interventions, as illustrated by the experience of the four areas originally planning to adopt Fast Track, which had been presented as "potentially one of the most promising family: school initiatives" (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1992). A detailed follow-up was not centrally available and pilot areas made their own enquiries of the originators of Fast Track in the United States. Although two pilots sustained interest in the Fast Track curriculum, only one pursued the entire programme. This highlights a possible 'Catch 22' in the preponderance of American initiatives among the evidence base for early multiple intervention. On the one hand, working from evidence-based research was an essential prerequisite for the evolution of On Track. On the other, detailed and sustained engagement with that evidence base was not easily achieved.

Local transition: from planned management to actual management

A number of the factors contributing to slippage were rooted in transitions, particularly those affecting the overarching management of projects. One of the key objectives during the production of local plans was the foundation of strategic partnerships to oversee On Track. This was not merely a case of identifying appropriate bodies as key partners were required to provide written endorsement of the programme and its evaluation. In his analysis of the effectiveness of different approaches to crime reduction, Goldblatt (1998) pointed out the weakness of many single measure programmes and it is against this research backdrop that the emphasis on robust, local, strategic partnerships, underpinning On Track's multiple intervention ethos, needs to be understood. Strategic endorsements surfaced as a key concern during the early stages of programme implementation, in respect of both strategic support within pilot areas and local compliance with the data requirements of On Track's national evaluation.

In about half of the areas the acceptance of a delivery plan resulted in a relaxation of the commitments that were implicit in the earlier endorsements. This highlights a critical point for other complex programmes that entail the support and endorsement of local agencies: the meaning of that support should be made explicit. Otherwise, expressions of support tend to be general and rhetorical and, therefore, vulnerable to subsequent shifts in local priorities. While it may be argued that the detail of what is required of strategic partners may not be known in

advance, the *principles* of those requirements are likely to be established. Hence, it should be possible to advise local partners of some of the practicalities of their endorsement, for instance, a level of commitment to meetings or arrangements for prioritising the provision of data.

Local transition: from planning to realisation

There is some evidence that the appointment of co-ordinators became another problematic transition point. In five areas, which put in place holding arrangements during recruitment delays, the arrival of the co-ordinator was marked by a precipitous removal of those arrangements. Whereas co-ordinators invariably received induction in the local On Track programme, its extent varied and seldom included individual, in-depth introduction to senior managers in key partner agencies. Although the Evaluation Advice and Support Team targeted co-ordinators as the principal point of support, this only partially compensated for any shortfall in transitional support from *within* the pilot.

Conclusions

This chapter has identified a number of features of the set-up and early implementation phase of On Track which have general relevance for complex programmes. As slippage is commonly experienced, it seems appropriate to factor this into initial plans and thereby reduce the impact of project delay. The concept of gradients of development offers a basis for modelling the origins and effect of slippage and responses to it.

An understanding and analysis of transition points may also be used to inform programme modelling. This heightens the need for expectations of partners to be made explicit, thus reducing the risk of declining engagement at points of transition.
Where the programme structure is complex clarification of roles, responsibilities and communications is at a premium and needs to be grounded in detailed exposition as well as the general statement of principles.

Although the model of differential gradients of development highlights the problem of slippage, subsequent experience within On Track confirms that the problem need not be terminal. While pilots experienced difficulties in fulfilling early expectations almost without exception they have accelerated the development of their programmes once critical transitions have been completed. An important factor in this progress has been the openness to learning of key players in pilot areas. The innovative character of the On Track programme and its evaluation has necessitated professional risk taking, engagement with a demanding evaluation framework and the operation of a complex communication network. In all 24 areas, managers and practitioners, especially co-ordinators, have demonstrated the capacity to respond to this challenge by both stimulating and being stimulated by the evolution of the programme. At its national launch, On Track was presented as one of the most exciting and informative initiatives to emerge in the last decade. Two years on, the sense of excitement and learning continues unabated.

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4. Project development

Lesley Noaks and Howard Williamson

This chapter draws on a local evaluation undertaken in six of the 24 On Track pilot projects, incorporating Wales, South and South-West England. A range of methodologies has been used including analysis of documentation; interviews with project staff and partner agencies; participant-observation in multi-agency meetings; and collation of data relating to community profiling, cost-effectiveness and the tracking of children and families.

Introduction

> *Case studies of community projects often identify the entry phase as a time of confusion and uncertainty for the worker who may be expected to make sense of someone else's vision rather than work to a clear job description*
>
> (Proctor and Sayer 1988, p93).

On Track represents such a vision, both from a national perspective and within the local areas which have been approved to take forward the concept which it embodies: early multiple interventions in the lives of children and families to prevent subsequent offending behaviour.

A robust time-scale was initially set out for On Track, in terms of development and implementation. There was an expectation that projects would begin delivering interventions in the early part of 2001. Inevitably, there has been slippage for a number of reasons. This chapter identifies some of the key issues that have affected the positive development of On Track and resulted in implementation delays in the six projects.

None of the six projects has adhered strictly to the timetables set out in their delivery plans and subsequent action plans. This might well have been anticipated. Delay, which has held up project development and implementation to different degrees, has been a consequence of both internal and extraneous factors. The critical factors, which have contributed to 'slippage' are inevitably often inter-connected. As will be discussed, these interconnected issues include delays in receiving final approval of funding from the Home Office; delays in appointing staff, including the project co-ordinators who are pivotal to its success; the relationship of On Track to the Children's Fund; and delays in securing On Track premises.

In this respect, implementation delay is not attributable to a single factor at a single level, but is related to multiple factors at all levels in the implementation 'chain'. Some, however, appear to have produced more critical obstacles to progress than others. These have at times been 'compensated' by particular strengths in On Track planning, such as detailed knowledge of the local contexts within which the initiative will take place.

On the strength of the evaluation material acquired to date, project development appears to be influenced by a cluster of related issues, which may work together in 'virtuous', 'vicious' or 'compensatory' ways. This can be considered alongside the overview of implementation issues and analysis of factors underpinning slippage in Chapter 3.

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The key empirical *themes* which have 'clustered' in myriad ways are:

- familiarity with local contexts;
- the establishment of an On Track infrastructure and identity;
- early development of information systems;
- clarity about the relationship between On Track and the Children's Fund; and
- a measured approach to the framework of interventions.

These, in turn, have produced five critical conceptual *issues* which are likely to repay attention in any consideration of similar project development.

- The management of expectations.
- Staffing.
- Coverage eligibility, criteria and clientele.
- Management.
- Displacement.

What follows explores the complex way in which the above factors have interacted to impact upon project development.

Key development themes

Familiarity with local contexts

Overall, this has been a significant strength within the On Track initiative. On Track managers and co-ordinators are familiar, through either professional or personal connections or both, with the local project area and already have useful links.

Where such connections were personal rather than professional or where co-ordinators' knowledge of the area was somewhat dated, they have needed to invest more time in acquainting themselves with the area and key local networks. Furthermore, in some cases the On Track delivery plan had been compiled by an external consultant and subsequently there was no immediate point of reference when issues of detail needed to be clarified. One area that had not used this strategy claimed to have produced a 'chalk face' plan, which had been a struggle to get together but which strengthened the likelihood of delivery, since it had secured 'ownership' at the local level.

Clearly, knowledge of, and contacts with, the On Track target area on the part of those responsible for project development and implementation is likely to be a major strength and may compensate for some delays. It pre-empts the need for forging links with professional service delivery relevant to On Track and for exploring the dimensions of voluntary sector commitment to children and their families in the area.

Establishing an On Track infrastructure and identity

Table 4.1: Landmarks in On Track project development

	Date approval of funding given by Home Office	Anticipated co-ordinator start date	Actual co-ordinator start date	Second ment from another post?	Date moved into OnTrack premises	*In/out Children's Fund?*
Project A	2 Jan 2001	Dec 2000	1 Dec 2000	No	Feb 2001	*OUT*
Project B	19 Mar 2001	Originally advertised 26 Jul 2000	19 Feb 2001	No	11 Jun 2001	*IN*
Project C	29 Mar 2001	Apr 2001	Jan 2002	Yes	Mar 2002	*IN*
Project D	22 Jan 2001	Jan 2001	26 Mar 2001	Yes	Oct 2001	*IN*
Project E	2 Feb 2001	Jan 2001	8 Jan 2001	No	Mar 2001	*IN*
Project F	15 Mar 2001	Jan 2001	1 Mar 2001	Yes	Jun 2001	OUT

The appointment of a project co-ordinator or project manager for On Track

As indicated in Table 4.1 above, all six areas have a co-ordinator/ manager in post. Some areas have appointed a relatively high-level manager; others a less well paid co-ordinator. Five of the six projects appointed lead officers with previous management experience. There was considerable variation in the pay levels offered across the six projects. This clearly has implications for the role and 'clout' of On Track in relation to both existing local authority structures and other initiatives within the authority.

Attracting the appropriate calibre of staff has also been an issue for some, particularly in areas that face general recruitment difficulties. Some foresaw this difficulty and advertised permanent appointments from the outset. Others adopted this strategy more recently as a means of promoting recruitment.

In some cases delay has been linked to complex secondment issues, with knock on effects for other areas of project development. For example in one area a specific case was made for delaying 'community engagement' until the co-ordinator was in place.

Developing an On Track project team

In four of the six projects it took some time to ascertain exactly what constituted an On Track project team. Beyond the 'simple' issue of whether or not to leave appointments to the On Track co-ordinator, there are continuing questions of secondments versus open recruitment, the 'transfer' of existing staff from other initiatives (not, technically, secondments, although they may be referred to as such), line management and accountability structures, and whether or not staff have a full-time or part-time commitment (and whether such commitment can be clearly distinguished).

In one area the On Track co-ordinator has established a 'golden rule': that anyone employed by On Track for more than two days a week is part of the core team and therefore will have a responsibility to report to him, even if they are not directly line managed by him.

Another area has been explicit about its concern in losing core social work (and perhaps educational) staff as and when On Track posts are advertised. As a result, it has dragged its feet

in advertising On Track posts through anxiety that this will compound its existing recruitment problems in an isolated area.

Establishing an On Track project base/location

The diffuse nature of some of the On Track project teams was offset, to some extent at least, by acquiring a tangible On Track project base, in which On Track staff are located for at least some of the working week. It can be argued that this is particularly important given the different line management structures in different project areas, and the differential authority of the On Track manager or co-ordinator. Areas have varied in the ease with which they have secured dedicated premises.

Project staff are of the view that the accessible location has facilitated community engagement, in Area E for example residents were able to use the base as a drop-in centre. In contrast, Area D was initially located outside of the project area in premises so small that it could not physically accommodate more than two staff. While accessible well-resourced premises have eventually been secured the delay contributed to issues in appointing staff and in profiling On Track in local communities. Area F is now housed in accessible accommodation in the On Track area, but experienced delays linked to community concerns over use of the premises for young offenders.

Establishing data collection systems

As well as requiring robust data collection systems for their own use, projects are contractually bound, with the support of the Evaluation Advice and Support Team (EAST), to establish such systems to fulfil the requirements of the National Evaluation Team (NET) – on whose behalf the Local Evaluation Team (LET) is partly operating.[2]

Different priorities appear to have been attached to this, either within delivery plans or through the preferences and commitments of those responsible for delivery. A critical dimension has been the relative priority that projects have given to the appointment of a dedicated research and/or information officer. The two projects that included such posts in their original plans and have made early appointments, are relatively well advanced in achieving effective information systems. Project development issues such as staffing and internal structures have impacted upon the extent to which projects have been alert to establishing a management and information system that can complement the requirements of the NET.

The capacity to record and review development is not only a technical and contractual requirement, but it is also, and equally, a key internal mechanism for monitoring progress and evaluation.

The Children's Fund

The transfer of responsibility for On Track from the Home Office to the Children and Young People's Unit has had a plethora of ramifications for the On Track projects. Three of the projects were in the first round of Children's Fund money, with the remaining English project funded in the second round. A major concern for the two projects in Wales was their position (and their funding position specifically), given that the Children's Fund applies only to England. While the two projects were reassured that On Track would continue under the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales, there was anxiety that they would become detached from the overall body of On Track pilots.

For those projects in the first round of funding, any delay was compounded by some On Track staff having to deal with Children's Fund issues. For project D there was an unwillingness to finalise plans for On Track while Children's Fund matters were pending. In project C there were

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[2] See Chapter 1 for a full discussion of the National Evaluation Framework.

political sensitivities that the benefits of Children's Fund money were being lost to On Track. Such issues have caused project staff to describe the transfer of responsibility as creating a situation which is "like walking on broken glass", "being screwed right, left and centre", and that On Track seems to be "some little cork bobbing around on the ocean". While there are some good reasons for expressing concern about the confusion created by this scenario, it has also perhaps become easy to hide behind it and to consign broader reasons for delay and inaction to this corner.

Nevertheless, there is some justification for these criticisms. In some areas, the problems appear to lie at a strategic level, where senior managers are seeking to resolve the general aspirations of the Children's Fund with the specific direction and context of On Track. Questions of management and salary scales are simply compounding the problem. While those involved with On Track were to some extent 'ahead of the game' in relation to Children's Fund requirements, and able to formulate a co-ordinated approach, some structural delays in the development of On Track were almost inevitable.

The intervention framework

All On Track projects are required to establish five core interventions but, beyond this, have the discretion to add further interventions which they believe will strengthen On Track provision. Projects are at very different stages of infrastructure development, and this is reflected both in the quantity and range of interventions established. Table 4.2 below provides a snapshot of the stage of development that projects had reached by July 2001. It shows those interventions that were up and running, those that were at the point of being established, and those that were not yet operational. Despite the aspiration for On Track to project a distinctive policy and implementation strand, there is clearly some overlap at the borders of its interventions, notably as a specific consequence of the ways different On Track projects have developed.

Crudely, some are starting new interventions, some are supplementing existing ones, and some are re-branding existing work so that it falls within the remit of On Track criteria. Furthermore, beyond the core interventions specified by the Home Office, very different balances have been struck between interventions in education, health and social services. Finally, the types of intervention in these different policy domains differ (particularly in the use of voluntary sector practice, as against statutory sector activity), and the pace of development sometimes varies considerably between these policy domains in different On Track areas.

There is also considerable variation in the balance between universal and targeted interventions. This was sometimes built into delivery plans and has sometimes evolved since. Projects have mostly adopted a mixture of universal and targeted. To comply with the On Track framework, all projects are working towards the five core interventions, even though some have yet to start, but different projects have very different additional interventions. This ranges from project A which has no additional inputs, to project F which has five additional interventions. These include interventions addressing: substance misuse, domestic violence, crime prevention, welfare rights and establishing a parent centre. This suggests that there are marked differences in the relative workload of different On Track co-ordinators.

All the projects have some operational interventions, but there have been stark contrasts in start dates and forms of delivery. In one case, they have argued that as an education linked service, the start of the school year provided an obvious point at which to begin. In terms of delivery, projects vary in whether services are being provided by contracted out or On Track staff. Three delivery models have been identified across the six areas: wholly contracted out, wholly in-house and the mixed economy model incorporating both inputs. Variations in models have a direct impact on the role undertaken by the project co-ordinator. Those projects that are more advanced in relation to implementation have gone further in developing intervention targets.

Table 4.2: Interventions – the 'state of play' (July 2001)

Project	Interventions / strands taking referrals /operational (wholly/partly)	Interventions / strands being established (staff appointed, conducting groundwork, etc.)	Interventions / strands not yet established
A	Education interventions, health: family support, health promotion in school	Welfare interventions	Health: clinical psychologist, speech and language therapy
B	None	All interventions/ strands of interventions	None
C	Breakfast clubs; Movies and Shakers; Reading Recovery	Peer mediation	Other 16 interventions
D	Transition work, primary to secondary	Pyramid Trust Scallywags	Community social worker and community play worker -might be altered, awaiting word from HO. Home visiting; pre school education; parent support and training; family therapy; family/school partnerships; Trailblazers

E	-Home school partnerships: Intergenerational Project, Rapid Response, schools counselling, P.A.T.H.S curriculum, Joint School and Family Support Team, Early Years Nurture Support -Additional: behaviour specialists in school, learning support assistant training, Paulsgrove and Wymering PYO Project -Parent support and training: Factor 85, Community Safety Partnership -Home visiting: family aides, health visitor, nursery nurse -Family Therapy: Primary Mental Health Worker	Pre-school education: High Scope	Home visiting: Home Start - not going ahead
F	Pre-school/transitions: group work; engagement Parent training/support: mutual support Schools Links: out of school; in school; individual support Home visiting: engagement Drugaid Women's Aid	Parent training/support parent training; fathers' group; Home visiting; Homestart; Parent Support	Pre-school/transitions-tracking; Family therapy; crime prevention officer; Parent Centre; welfare rights

Critical emerging issues

Heightened expectations

On the whole there has been considerable excitement and enthusiasm about On Track at ground level. It heralds the possibility of significant additional resources, structured interventions and more robust collaboration between agencies within an On Track area. There has, however, been a 'ripple effect'; sometimes starting with the Home Office, which has caused delay and is now causing some level of frustration as a result of heightened expectations. The main issue in implementation delay is clearly the challenge of recruiting suitable staff, the procedures by which staff are appointed and the anxieties within local authorities of simply shifting staffing pressures elsewhere if On Track personnel are seconded through internal mechanisms. Recruitment of staff has been a particular issue for the rural and more isolated projects who have concerns regarding losing core statutory staff to short term initiatives.

Staffing On Track development

The delays in the appointment of On Track co-ordinators have led to significant blocks on implementation, and the transfer of On Track to the Children's Fund has fuelled further uncertainty and served as a quasi-legitimate justification for further delay. It is not just a question of pay scales or the contracted period on offer but, in certain areas and among certain occupational groups, an objective shortage of key personnel (which is compounded by the more subjective questions of pay and contract).

Coverage, eligibility criteria and clientele

Proposals within project delivery plans about assessment techniques and eligibility criteria for On Track ranged from established screening mechanisms to non-stigmatising "population-based enrolment strategies". In the latter case, assessment procedures were not a priority due to the universal nature of most interventions. Most projects are still working up their assessment procedures based on a range of criteria. In one area, where all three of the interventions that were running are education-linked, there was a reliance on a schools-based assessment of need. Another has been developing a more general pro forma, but has been stalled by a lack of clarity about how to present the need for such information to parents, in order to secure their consent and their participation. For another co-ordinator the priority is developing an instrument that will integrate with other county provisions. This is seen as particularly important with regard to mainstreaming. They have commissioned the services of a clinical psychologist with experience in this area in developing their instruments. In the remaining three projects various screening tools are being deployed.

Some sharing of information between projects is taking place on these questions. Five of the projects are reaching a point at which they are distinguishing between core and intensive interventions (which do require some robust and interlocking assessment criteria) and wider interventions which may be of shorter duration and less intensive, which do not need such robust systems.

Project management issues

Both the *physical* and *structural* location of On Track project teams differs considerably. In all cases, the On Track 'team' has rather permeable boundaries. Some On Track projects have a distinctive physical base, but not all On Track staff work from that base, or only do so part of the time. On Track staff are structurally located within a variety of line management structures, leading to questions of formal authority. Further blurring of boundaries between On Track and both established and new initiatives is anticipated as a result of its being subsumed within the Children's Fund (in England) and the National Assembly (in Wales).

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Staff are sometimes exclusively attached to On Track and sometimes attached part-time. This is particularly a feature of those projects where staff are contracted in to work on On Track. This is evidenced in projects B and E and in the latter case the co-ordinator role is also shared between On Track and Children's Fund. Those staff who have already been appointed are drawn from a variety of professional backgrounds and institutional locations (local authority education and social services departments; health authorities; voluntary organisations; community groups). Bringing together such multi-disciplinary groupings is challenging and despite the aspiration for On Track to retain a distinctive and separate identity, this may prove to be increasingly difficult. It is already quite difficult to pin down precisely who are 'serving' On Track priorities, rather than other organisational or practice agendas.

Across all six projects, management structures are diverse. On Track managers/co-ordinators work to different line managers within different policy domains (community safety, community development, social inclusion, social services, education, health). They themselves have variable line management responsibility for their On Track 'team': sometimes direct, sometimes delegated, and sometimes no formal authority. Moreover, since the bidding process for On Track commenced, internal management structures in some projects have not always been consolidated but have changed again, or have remained unresolved for a while, thus contributing to the inertia.

Displacement?

There is little doubt that On Track is already replacing existing practice. This may be difficult to prove, and not all project co-ordinators are prepared to own up to this, but as one project put it, "you can't hide the knowledge". Cuts in local authority services or in grants to voluntary organisations have been made in On Track areas during the development of the initiative (the two may not, of course, be related, but the consequence is still the contamination of the 'value-added' thesis which informs On Track). For example in project C, a school-based scheme that had run prior to the inception of On Track was required to be funded from OT money once that was available. It has also been argued that in the distribution of resources for similar work from different funding streams, decisions are made with the implicit knowledge that On Track areas are already benefiting from additional resources – through On Track.

Conclusion

All of the projects have progressed to a service delivery phase although they are at different stages of development. The failure to adhere to timetables is attributable to a broad range of internal and extraneous factors. This chapter began by alluding to previous work that identified the complexities of getting projects started. In terms of project development the evaluation has demonstrated that the start-up phase has proved time consuming and that the required groundwork for establishing new forms of working can be complex and detailed. Despite that, a broad range of services are being rolled out to children and families, much of it drawing on new and innovative partnerships. As the projects continue to develop the evaluation will address how these efforts translate into effective services for children and families.

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5. Partnership

Richard Lloyd

Introduction and context

Introduction

The concept of a collaborative or partnership approach to project design, development and implementation is central to the On Track programme. This multi-agency approach is essential if the programme objectives are to be achieved, recognising that the target groups may be facing a range of issues which are unlikely to be addressed by single agencies in isolation. In practical terms, the projects were expected to build on existing local partnership arrangements, from which management groups would be drawn with responsibility for project development, implementation and staff management. This chapter examines the extent of progress towards this vision of partnership working, based on the evaluation of six projects operating in the East Midlands, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside. It reviews partnership arrangements in the early project formation stages and as they move towards large-scale intervention delivery, and discusses issues of partnership membership and strategic and operational focus. The chapter concludes with a review of partner perceptions of collaborative working to date, before setting out what appears to be working in partnership terms and summarising some of the key partnership challenges to be addressed. The chapter is based on two sets of project visits in December 2000 and April/May 2001 – the first focusing on the early development of the projects and the second to examine progress as the projects moved towards their 'full implementation' stages, and including interviews with key project partners as well as co-ordinators and other project staff. While the six projects represent only one-quarter of the 24 projects being implemented nationally, their key characteristics, structures and the development issues they face appear to be broadly representative of the wider national group.

Context – Home Office guidance

The initial guidance materials for potential On Track projects (Home Office, 1999a; Home Office 1999b) emphasised the importance of multi-agency, partnership based approaches to the development and implementation of local plans. These guidance materials set the expectation that projects would be based on:

> *committed partnerships of all the key agencies involved with children and families-health visitors, general practitioners, schools, social services, police, youth justice services and voluntary organisations.*

The guidance also described a "*strong presumption*" that the On Track partnerships would be based on pre-existing multi-agency groups-an approach offering a range of benefits including more rapid project mobilisation, reducing the need to develop shared understandings and allowing previous collaborative activities to be built upon. In practical terms, the short bid and delivery plan development timetables meant that there was little time for the establishment of wholly new partnerships.

Early partnership development

Our initial project visits in December 2000 established early 'partnership baselines' in terms of the range of organisations involved and their individual roles (both actual and expected). Projects and their partnerships were described as being in a state of flux, as their focus began to move beyond development stages towards a more operational focus and preparation for delivery.

Strategic and operational partnerships

To differentiate between these two stages the terms *'strategic'* and *'operational'* partnerships were used, with strategic partnerships referring to the original groupings charged with the development of the bids and delivery plans, as well as establishing the high level strategic linkages and multi-agency arrangements underpinning the individual projects. These early partnership arrangements were most commonly mobilised through steering groups, tasked with supporting early developmental activities.

The operational partnerships, in the early stages of development at the first visit, focused on delivery matters, often comprising a combination of initial strategic partners, agencies with delivery responsibilities, and other agencies (or different individuals within previous strategic partners) with a specific delivery focus. Clearly different projects were at different stages along this continuum, although all could at least articulate their ambitions for delivery-focused collaborative approaches.

Initial partnership arrangements

Table 5.1 sets out these initial strategic partnership arrangements by project, their membership and developments towards the establishment of the operational partnerships. The 'lead agencies' for each project are highlighted, as are the key local partnership groups to which the projects report.

Table 5.1: Summary of initial 'strategic' and emerging 'operational' partnerships

Project	Initial 'strategic' partnership	'Operational' partnership
1	**Community Safety Partnership** – steering group includes representatives of county, district and borough councils (including education, social services and health); police; YOT; health authority and trusts; voluntary sector and probation services. **Lead agency – social services**	Development stages overseen by the steering group, with additional representatives including NSPCC, inclusion and pupil support team and voluntary sector providers. Plans for community and ethnic minority representatives once identified.
2	**Crime and Disorder Steering Group** – including senior representatives from local authority (including health, education and urban forum); police; probation services; health authority; council of voluntary groups. **Lead agency – local education authority and housing department**	Developed On Track Task Group, including local authorities (education, housing, health and social inclusion/social services); health authority; early years partnership; multi-agency centre; YOT; and police. Plan for tenant, ethnic minority and voluntary representatives.
3	**Steering group formed** for development stage, reporting to the Youth Justice Management Board. Representatives of housing, social services (mental health and care services) and education (including EWO) departments; NCH Action for Children; police; NHS Trust; local special needs and family partnerships; and a school head. **Lead agency – local authority regeneration and housing department**	Operational Management Group (OMG) formed, members include social services (local, family and education teams); NCH Action for Children; primary headteacher; EWO and NHS Trust. Intend to include local community and ethnic minority representation.

4	**Safer City Partnership** – including local authority (social, education, psychological and family support services); police; health authorities; community health group; local health and regeneration partnership; primary care group; community fora and local school representatives. **Lead agency – social services**	Project Management Group, comprising community health group; local authority (education deptartment); local fora; church group; police; education action zone; and an area panel.
5	**On Track Interagency Group** – established multi-agency steering group, with representatives from Crime and Disorder Partnership; social, education, regeneration and community safety services /departments; health authority; police; YOT; Youth Service; Sure Start; voluntary sector. **Lead agency – social services**	At time of interview Steering Group reviewing membership and examining how to convert into a Management Board. Also wish to involve the community and young people.
6	**Children's Service Planning Group** – including representatives of local authority social and education services; borough council; YOT; police; CAMHS; Early Years Partnership; Community Safety Partnership; NHS Trust; Primary Care Group and NSPCC. **Lead agency – joint social services and NSPCC**	Plan to 'localise' the initial steering group, and include parents/carers, young people and local residents.

The project partnerships displayed a range of characteristics, in terms of:

- *Membership* – local authority departments were the most commonly involved agencies in the 'strategic' partnerships, with those responsible for social service provision featuring in all but one project, and health and education representatives in all six. The police also featured in all six partnerships, although YOT and probation service representation was less widespread. Partners had different degrees of input at this stage – although limited social service input in one project raised concerns over intervention selection.

- *Pre-existing vs new 'strategic' partnership groups* – four of the six were based on pre-existing multi-agency groups, most being 'crime focussed' (e.g. based on existing Community Safety, Crime and Disorder and Safer Cities Partnerships). In two cases (Projects 3 and 5) steering groups were developed specifically to prepare bids and develop projects – although both cited previous multi-agency experience as important in making the new arrangements practicable.

- *Roles and responsibilities* – given the timing of the first visit, activities had focused on bid and delivery plan preparation. While different agencies had taken lead roles, the most common were local authority departments with responsibility for social service provision (five of the six), and in one case shared with another agency (Project 6 with NSPCC). In the two remaining projects, other local authority departments took lead roles. In Project 3 Regeneration and Housing were the lead agency (with On Track being seen as contributing to the overall regeneration of the area), and in Project 4 Education and Housing took the lead following an initial interest in On Track as a means of addressing anti-social behaviour.

- *Developing 'operational' partnership groups* – the visit timing meant that variable progress had been made to establish individual 'operational' partnership groups. In all cases operational groups included project co-ordinators (many of whom were yet to be recruited), as well as members of the existing 'strategic'/steering groups – although different individuals may represent their organisations on different groups. All the projects stated the intention of involving young people, parents/carers and other local residents, as well as ensuring the representation of ethnic minority groups and the voluntary sector.

Development to delivery

While the first visits provided an early view of partnership development, the second visits in April/May 2001 allowed progress to be examined.

Partnership membership

As the projects move from planning to delivery stages, the partnership structure and membership would be expected to change to meet the new demands placed upon them.
Given the 'strategic' and 'operational' partnerships identified initially, this progression would also be reflected in the change of emphasis between the groups.

Strategic partnerships

Table 5.2 illustrates the membership of the individual 'strategic' partnerships, showing both the latest (April/May 2001) and initial membership. While the strategic grouping membership remained broadly similar, new recruits included project co-ordinators (most commonly recruited between January and March 2001), local councillors (in Projects 2 and 4), and community safety teams (in Projects 2 and 6).

However, despite describing the intention to recruit community members to their project partnerships, only three projects had achieved this thus far:

- Project 2 recruited representatives of the two main tenants and residents associations in their area.
- Project 4 recruited two residents and a local councillor, although their attendance had been variable.
- Project 6 recruited a parent representative, with another three recruits planned.

The development of the 'partnership map' in Table 5.2 also illustrated potential gaps in the 'strategic' partnerships/steering groups. In addition to a lack of community representation, other perceived gaps included the probation service (rarely represented on the project partnerships) and local magistrates (felt by two projects to have a potentially useful role in their 'strategic' groupings).

Table 5.2: 'Strategic' Partnership Members*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Project co-ordinators	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
LA – county council/met						
- Social services	X✔		X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔
- Education/including EWS and schools	X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔
- Health	X✔		X	X✔	X✔	X
- Regeneration & housing		X✔	X✔		X✔	
- Community safety team		✔		✔		
- Planning		X✔				
LA – Borough/city council	X✔			X✔		X✔
Local councillors				✔		✔
Community reps – individuals, parents, etc.		✔		✔		✔
Police	X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔	X✔
YOT	X✔	✔		X✔	X✔	✔
Probation service		X				
Health authority	X✔	X	✔	X✔	X✔	
Local healthcare trust	X✔		X✔			X✔
Primary care group	✔		✔	X✔		X
Community health partnership				X✔		
Youth service					X✔	
NSPCC	X✔					X✔
NCH Action for Children	X✔		X✔			
Regeneration partnerships (including SRB)		✔		X✔	X✔	
Sure Start					✔	
Community safety partnership						✔
Early years partnership		✔				X
Family partnership			X✔			
Special needs partnership			X✔			
Community groups				X✔		✔
Voluntary sector (including providers)	X✔	X✔			X✔	

Note: *Previous Visit X, Latest Visit ✓

At the individual project level more local issues of partner involvement were described, for example:

- In *Project 2* gaps were described in terms of representation by Headteachers, the Social Service Department and Leisure Services – a well as the voluntary sector. The lack of Social Service representation is recognised as a particular weakness, although they are members of the planning group for the Children's Fund.

- In *Project 4* concerns were raised over levels of attendance and input at steering meetings. The Police and local Community Safety Team representatives, for example, had attended only one steering meeting each, and Social Service involvement was described as limited.
- In *Project 5* concerns were expressed about the involvement of the police. The project intuitively felt the police should be involved but could not find ways to involve them on a practical level. The police, on their part, had adopted an arm's length 'wait and see' approach to the project.

Operational partnerships

The initial visit identified the formation of 'operational' groupings with responsibility for the delivery and management of the individual On Track projects. Here slippage in terms of progress against plans was an important factor, in some cases delaying the development of 'operational' groups.

Broadly arrangements across the six projects were described as 'transitory' before projects' full implementation stages were reached. The membership of the 'operational' groups varied, ranging from between six and 13 individuals, with examples of three of the more formalised partnerships being illustrated in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: 'Operational' Partnership Members

	1	3	4
Project Co-ordinators	✓	✓	✓
LA – county council/met			
- Chief executives dept		✓	
- Social services	✓	✓	
- Education/including EWS and individual schools	✓	✓	✓
- Regeneration and housing		✓	
- Sports and recreation		✓	
Police		✓	
YOT	✓		✓
Local healthcare trust		✓	✓
Youth service		✓	
NCH Action for Children		✓	
Special needs partnership		✓	

In the three remaining projects, sub-groups or working groups of the main 'strategic' partnerships/steering groups had been established to move implementation forward.

Partnership structure

While the identification of 'strategic/steering' and 'operational' groups provides a theoretical convenience, practice reveals a less clearly defined picture of emerging partnership structures. While progress had been made in establishing delivery relationships and structures at the time of the April/May visits, these structures often remained transitory.

In three projects (1, 3 and 4) 'operational'/management groups had been established. In the remaining three projects, differences between the main 'strategic'/steering groups and their operational counterparts were less clear and remained transitional. Commonly working or sub-groups had been established to deliver set tasks, or to examine the options for further development.

Concluding comments

This final section draws together the key findings and issues identified around partnership development to date. While too early to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the different approaches followed, a number of emerging key success factors and challenges for the future are identified.

Overall comments

The partnerships underpinning the On Track projects have been evolving since the results of their applications were announced. The most visible trend has been the division between 'strategic' and 'operational' groupings with the initial partnerships having a strategic focus to respond to the bidding requirements within a tight time-scale, and a more operational focus emerging once funding was secured. The pace and trajectory of this evolution has been variable, following common implementation slippage and delays in the recruitment of project co-ordinators. In addition, the announcement of the Children's Fund has had a major influence on the positioning and partnership context of On Track (see Chapter 4).

In terms of adherence to the bidding guidance, projects have broadly met membership expectations and have built on existing partnerships. Table 5.1 showed that most of the initial partnerships were based around pre-existing arrangements – featuring Community Safety, Crime and Disorder, Safer City and Children's Service partnerships. While the potential offered for rapid mobilisation was not uniformly realised for a range of reasons, it was commonly acknowledged that credible bids and Delivery Plans could not have been developed without a base of existing multi-agency partnership and previous collaborative experiences.

While gaps in representation have been identified and questions around the involvement of certain agencies raised, it is clear that projects have made considerable efforts to include the relevant agencies in their local groupings.

Partner perceptions

The assessment of partners' experience of the On Track programme is based on a programme of interviews with representatives of both 'strategic'/steering and 'operational' groups. Overall, partners described high levels of commitment to On Track, with the programme being seen as providing a range of opportunities from contributing to evidence-based policy development to the provision of much needed local resources.

While some partners showed a commitment to the developmental/evaluative aspects of the programme, it was clear that others were more concerned with service delivery than the 'learning' component. While understandable given the roles of the partners involved, this stresses the importance of ensuring the programme's evaluative component is given the necessary priority. Elsewhere concerns were raised by partners in terms of project visibility, primarily in the context of slippage against original Delivery Plans. Frustrations were identified at the apparent slow speed of progress with a number of projects as one resident described: "*They said it would start last September. Now they're saying next September. It needs a kick start. We've lost twelve months of some children's lives.*" Concerns were raised that if more visible activity does not occur shortly disillusionment will set in locally.

For some partners the introduction of the evaluation framework, and requirement to provide profiling information in particular, marked their first non-steering involvement in the projects. As such, some agencies were only now experiencing the demands of being an On Track partner. In some cases partners' initial involvement had included unexpected roles and responsibilities, which had in some cases fuelled disillusionment. For example, in Project 1 partners described

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how their inputs to the project were greater than expected, including supporting seconded staff, providing baseline information, and meeting monitoring and cost-effectiveness requirements.

What works well?

While teething problems were identified across the partnerships, it was recognised that the partner interviews took place in comparatively early days for most projects. It was however possible to identify what had worked well in partnership terms to date, with a series of 'key success factors' emerging as below:

- Basing partnerships on *existing relationships* – in many cases allowing partnerships to develop on the basis of pre-existing understandings and working relationships.

- *Continuity* of representation – where the same staff retained an interest in the project, development was felt to have been hastened.

- *Inclusivity* – involving different partners in different aspects of the development of the projects had helped encourage commitment to the project, such as involving partners in staff recruitment and training.

- Ensuring project co-ordinators have *sufficient authority* to take decisions and drive progress – they must be credible, trusted and respected.

- Ensuring adequate *reporting systems* – ranging from minute taking to ensuring the mechanics for discussion and decision making are in place.

- The existence of an *On Track Champion* – as in the case of Project 2, to introduce the project locally and bring an air of credibility by association.

Key challenges for the future

Finally, looking to the future, it is clear that the On Track partnerships will face a series of challenges in ensuring their project objectives are met. The key challenges for the partnerships include:

- *Sustaining partnerships* – maintaining the commitment of partners, avoiding disillusionment with delays in delivery, dealing with powerful individuals and balancing different agendas will be continuing challenges for the projects.

- Ensuring projects establish and maintain *sufficient priority* with local partners and agencies – likely to be an issue as services in many areas are stretched, and may be only able to deliver statutory responsibilities.

- Finding ways of *balancing conflicting priorities* of staff from different agencies – in particular where 'home' agencies' priorities conflict with those of On Track.

- Ensuring project co-ordinators have *sufficient authority and credibility* to influence mainstreaming – ensuring partnerships have effective links to local decision makers will be key.

- Establishing how partners can *best contribute* to the projects – for example, how agencies such as the police can best contribute to project work.

- Finding *common ground and ways of working* between partners – including addressing potential disputes such as the exchange of personal information, 'turf wars' etc.

References

Home Office, (1999a) On Track Programme: Invitations to Bid December 1999. Unpublished.

Home Office, (1999b) On Track: Guidance Notes December 1999. Unpublished.

6. Involving and engaging the community

Paul Doherty, Kay Kinder and Alison Stott

Introduction

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is the Local Evaluation Team (LET) for the North-east and North-west regions. These regions contain six On Track projects. This chapter contains emerging findings from the evaluation of these projects in relation to the following three key areas:

- Early community involvement and engagement in Delivery Plans.

- Community involvement in the delivery of interventions.

- Redefining hard to reach groups.

The engagement and involvement of communities was identified as an essential feature of On Track in the guidance issued to areas intending to bid (Home Office, 1999). However, from proposing a comprehensive process of involvement and engagement, the Home Office later promoted a more limited exercise, perhaps mindful of the time required (National Evaluation Team, 2001a).

It is important to stress the developmental nature of On Track and to point to the slippage in implementation timetables, referred to in earlier chapters of this report. While progress has and is being made a number of projects are still coming to terms with the pressures to initially staff and then to implement interventions. Thus, project priorities have been shaped by concerns to make progress across a range of areas, only one of which is community involvement and engagement.

Community involvement and engagement in the Delivery Plans

Research suggests that the timing of any community consultation is critical and that early time spent involving and engaging communities enhances implementation (France and Crowe, 2001). The degree of community involvement and engagement during the earliest stages was limited in four of the six projects, being more evident in projects three and five. This reflects two related issues: the strategic level at which the invitation to bid was pitched and the deadline by which the submission had to be made. It is clear that the latter impacted on the extent to which communities could be consulted.

Interviews with those responsible for developing and submitting the Delivery Plan in each area suggests that in four of the six projects, the greatest pressure was time:

> It was very much about: 'Look, we have a bid to submit, we have a tight deadline to do it'. And I think when you have been involved in bidding processes what you actually do is – you do the minimum required to make this effective – to get it through the next stage (Senior Policy Officer, Project 3).

The strategies used to develop the Delivery Plans also limited opportunities for community engagement. The general model was for a small core group of one or two professionals to work on the original submission which then expanded to involve other agencies. Data collected early in the evaluation indicates that during the preparation of the Delivery Plan communities were

identified as *recipients* of interventions rather than *participants* in a collective exercise to reduce crime.

However, in some cases projects created more opportunities for engaging communities by adopting different development strategies. Project 5 paid consultants to contribute to the development of the submission, which had the potential to free up the core group and allow them to engage in far greater community consultation. While the strategic level at which the invitation to tender was pitched was significant, the way in which the invitation was handled by the lead agency was also important.

Project location

The development of the initial delivery plan required crucial decisions to be taken regarding the geographic location of the project. These decisions were not necessarily taken with substantive input from the local community. Once again, most projects cited lack of time as a major constraint, although management of the submission was influential in three of the six projects, where the individual responsible for the Delivery Plan was 'handed' the location:

> *I was the person who had to pull it together. I had no involvement in deciding where the project would take place, I didn't choose the estate where we are now, but I was asked to pull it together (Senior Education Officer, Project 2).*

Some projects responded to the constraints they faced by instigating limited consultation with visible groups. In other projects there was political pressure to avoid concentrating resources in one community and the lack of local involvement in the location of On Track was 'glossed over':

> *That's an area actually in which we didn't do very well and that wasn't particularly smooth – community involvement. It was a cross-cutting area of the plan, obviously, rather than actual intervention (Senior Planning and Policy Development Manager, Project 6).*

The overall pattern during the development of the delivery plan is one of a hastily developed bid, based on limited consultation and/or professional assessments of local needs and priorities. However, though the needs of local communities were externally defined, it was often done on the basis of a shared desire to address some of the difficulties within those communities. In most of the areas, this desire extended from professional groups to community members where they were involved in shaping the Delivery Plan.

Furthermore professionals recognised that the definition of local need provided some of the key challenges facing On Track during implementation. Three of those responsible for Delivery Plans pointed to the challenge of engaging communities in non-stigmatising and empowering ways:

> *I think one of the most difficult ones for me is the bit about engaging with families in a co-operative and empowering kind of way, because I think one of the biggest tensions in the whole approach was that – without being too critical – the Home Office language was extremely – was like 'dosage' – which you are not going to sell to a community (Senior Policy Officer, Project 1).*

When asked to identify the key opportunities provided by On Track, there was considerable emphasis on opportunities for community participation in 'new' or different ways:

> *I think the local populous would say that they are only ever 'done to', they are never 'done with', and I think the only way this will work is in partnership. Therefore, for me, that's the big opportunity – because there's no compulsion, you can't make anybody take up this …*

in other words, the community have got to want it. It has to be something so positive that actually, we don't have to sell it to anybody (Policy Officer, Project 1).

Decisions regarding the location of On Track premises within the targeted area had a significant impact upon levels of community participation. Some 'community locations' such as Family Service Units and community health centres were identified by projects. By locating the On Track premises in an accessible community area Project 6 was able to involve members of the local community in the On Track steering group and the development of interventions early on.

Community consultation

In the Delivery Plans submitted to the Home Office, most projects set out aspirational models of community engagement, intending to build on and develop existing networks, rather than develop wholly new ones. The processes and networks projects planned to build had been used within a range of other initiatives such as Sure Start, Education Action Zones, New Deal for Communities, Youth Inclusion Programmes, Single Regeneration Budget programmes and Communities that Care. Analysis of the Delivery Plans (and subsequent action plans) showed a degree of agency bias to consultation, for example, a proposal led by a Youth Offending Team drew on models of consultation that already existed within a local Youth Inclusion Programme.

Overall, there was a general recognition of the benefits associated with working with existing community groups on consultation and implementation strategies. In addition to the time pressures created by deadlines for submissions, those with strategic responsibility for On Track often identified community involvement and/or engagement as the responsibilities of managers or co-ordinators who were not in post when the Delivery Plan was submitted.

In two projects (three and four), community consultation appeared to have taken place prior to writing the Delivery Plan with the results used to inform the content and focus of the plan. In Project 4, consultation had been sought on a range of issues to support the Delivery Plan's preparation. The issues explored included: community problems and resolutions, domestic violence, education and training, community safety and the environment, young people, and crime. In Project 3, consultation appeared fairly nominal, centring upon some preliminary discussion with community groups and voluntary agencies. The target groups included parents and hard-to-reach groups, such as the homeless, lone parents and young offenders.

This early consultation reflects recognition of the need for local communities to direct and inform the project planning and implementation process, rather than just acting as recipients of interventions. However, delays in planned community consultation sometimes occurred due to slippage in the recruitment of On Track personnel who were responsible for this process.

Children's consultation and involvement

Consultation with children and young people detailed in the Delivery Plans was generally limited to one-off events and surveys. However, projects four and six both highlighted more active involvement of young people in the consultation. Project 4 proposed the development of a 'children's consultation programme', followed by an action plan to take forward recommendations made by young people. In addition, research was to be commissioned in the targeted primary schools to explore children's views about factors which lead to exclusion and isolation. It was proposed that the findings would be used to inform the On Track project, as well as practice within primary schools in the area generally. In Project 6, the interventions themselves were highlighted as allowing children to direct the programmes and make decisions about running the projects, research was conducted and the findings of this research were to shape (or tailor) interventions.

All projects had some voluntary sector involvement noted in their Delivery Plans. However, the level of involvement ranged between areas and included:

- The use of existing voluntary agency provision to engage hard to reach groups. For example, Project 1 was hoping to use a neighbouring social exclusion forum to engage with members of the travelling community.

- Plans to tap into existing initiatives' links with voluntary agencies, for example, Sure Start in Project 3 and New Deal for Communities in Project 1.

- Voluntary agencies to be responsible for delivering interventions. In Project 5 the On Track partner organisations responsible for delivering the interventions (Communities that Care, Parentline Plus, Home Start) were all voluntary sector agencies. The Children's Society was going to deliver an intervention focusing on primary/secondary transition.

- Voluntary agency representatives to be involved in the management of On Track projects and interventions, for example, as members of steering groups.

The active involvement of voluntary agencies was apparent in a number of areas. In two projects they were responsible for developing, delivering, and/or providing support for interventions.

Community involvement in the delivery of interventions

Though there was limited reference in the Delivery Plans to community involvement, where it can be discerned it is not passive engagement but a more active participation in service delivery. Across the six pilots, there was evidence of differing degrees of community involvement in the delivery of interventions, from quite detailed community consultation (Projects 4, 5 and 6), to a more agency-grounded or agency-led approach. Four major factors influenced community participation:

- the strategic level commitment to, or capacity for, community consultation

- the short time-scale between the receipt of funding and the implementation of interventions

- the possibility for consultation within any single intervention

- the operational 'distance' between service or intervention providers and the community.

At this stage it is likely that strategic level commitment or capacity for community engagement has had a disproportionate impact because this occurs in the early stage of initiative development. As projects move towards full implementation, operational distance between service or intervention providers and the community may become more important along with other factors yet to be identified by the research. The challenge for projects now is to engage with the community much more effectively at the level of intervention.

The majority of areas (five of the six) have little or no engagement with community groups specific to particular ethnic groups. Instead they report community and voluntary activity that may engage such groups, albeit less explicitly, or as a specific strategy. This lack of diversity early on may reflect the composition of On Track communities or it may reflect omission or oversight. At this stage it is sufficient to point to the tendency in most areas to focus on the majority population.

Engaging children in On Track

The factors above have a similar impact on the engagement of children. Moreover, where *communities* are more likely to be consulted or engaged at the point of intervention, for *children* this is not necessarily the case. Two of the projects (four and six) had directly engaged in consultation with young people, or intervention recipients. In other areas, this tended to be evident at the inter-agency level, but not beyond it. There are a number of features that are relevant to progress in this area:

- the age of the children targeted within each project

- projects' experience of engaging children, or commitment to engaging them

- the capacity within any single intervention for engagement (related to targeting, but also to agency practice).

Often where projects did attempt consultation they targeted professionals and parents rather than the children themselves. In the case of young children, there is little evidence of consultation. For many service or intervention providers there is an assumption that school teachers, in particular, operate *in loco parentis*, and that schools provide sites of access to young people and teachers (or other adults such as parents) and consent to participation on their behalf.

Parental involvement in the delivery of interventions

Projects planned to involve community representatives and parents in the delivery and management of interventions. For example, in Project 1 it was proposed that parents would deliver some of the programmes and that they, along with representatives of local groups, would also become members of the Programme Management Groups. Similarly, in Project 6 members of the community were to be employed as staff and volunteers on interventions, such as Home Start.

Projects recognised that securing widespread parental involvement might be problematic. For example Project 3 actively sought to consult with male parents to try and maximise their involvement in interventions. Project 5 had successfully involved community leaders but found it more difficult to involve young people and their parents/carers. This project was planning to use a voluntary agency to attempt to build capacity in this area. In other projects, parental involvement did not appear to have progressed further than some initial, informal consultation.

Redefining hard-to-reach groups

Despite the constraints and difficulties outlined elsewhere in this chapter, projects have made some progress towards identifying or engaging hard-to-reach groups. The concept of hard-to-reach is itself undergoing refinement and redefinition within the initiative as projects attempt to both engage those groups who have been traditionally perceived as hard-to-reach and re-examine what constitutes a hard-to-reach group.

Groups traditionally perceived as hard-to-reach

Refugees, asylum seekers and travellers are all groups that have been identified as 'hard-to-reach', due to their distinctive characteristics and situations. Some projects have made efforts to identify and engage these groups, although effective engagement has been hampered by the lack of reliable and comprehensive information about them. Evidence concerning the demographics and location of groups is often largely anecdotal and they often remain invisible to statutory agencies.

Assumptions concerning the definition and targeting of hard-to-reach groups have been undergoing some scrutiny. This has shaped the targeting and delivery of services within certain On Track pilots and offered opportunities for projects to engage wider sections of the communities in their interventions.

For example, Project 3 has defined fathers or male partners as hard-to-reach as the 'traditional' strategies for targeting children's services has had a maternal focus and therefore purposefully or inadvertently excluded men. By addressing this bias the project has opened up opportunities for engaging and involving a wider group of parents and increasing the familial or communal impact of services. On Track interventions are also seeking to confront existing stereotypes concerning familial responsibilities for children.

Another example of how the redefinition can shape service provision is provided by Project 6. The project decided to avoid targeting groups on the basis of their perceived homogeneity such as ethnicity, an approach which assumed that membership of a minority ethnic group correlated with (and in some cases defined) actual need. Such criteria risk alienating those who require a service but fall outside the group identified and failing to recognise diversity and heterogeneity within groups can obscure need. This approach can lead to conflict when distributing services in a highly deprived area with scarce resources. To overcome such risks, Project 6 adopted a 'needs-led' approach, uncoupling the concept of hard-to-reach from its identification with general populations.

Other projects have used 'pre-provision' services and 'assertive outreach' to facilitate engagement. In Project 5 certain interventions include a form of 'pre-provision' where the statutory agencies play little or no role in referral to or provision of the intervention. Voluntary organisations such as Home Start 'hold' the statutory agencies back until the recipient has developed enough confidence to progress into the statutory field. These interventions are often targeted at those who may be unwilling to engage with statutory bodies, such as travellers.

Other interventions in Project 6, such as a telephone help line, serve similarly marginal and potentially reticent groups. However, there remains an issue of data collection, as hard-to-reach groups engaged with non-statutory agencies may be reluctant to provide information. In addition, the transition between 'pre-provision' and further intervention is often dependent upon one or more individuals within the voluntary agency, rather than on an assessment of need made across agencies and with reference to statutory obligation and need.

Conclusion

There are three main areas of progress evident in relation to community engagement:

1. Community consultation and involvement.

2. Children's consultation and involvement.

3. Defining and engaging hard-to-reach groups.

Whilst *community consultation* was limited in four of the six projects, prior to the submission of the Delivery Plan, a range of strategies has since been devised to include the community. Consultation with the community is regarded as a high priority within all areas, linked in part to the disadvantage experienced by the populations and their increasing resistance to policy-level interventions that are perceived to ignore their needs. There is also evidence of recognition that

community consultation is fraught with difficulty and that any engagement with community representatives does not necessarily involve broader community engagement.

Extensive *consultation and engagement with children* is apparent in two projects. The remaining areas experienced difficulties in communicating and engaging with children. This type of consultation and engagement needs to be enhanced if all age groups within the community are to participate fully at all levels.

Community diversity remains a challenge within the majority of On Track areas. Strategies to *define hard-to-reach* groups and to engage with them are bounded by a range of local, agency and intervention specific criteria. Where progress is being made, it is in developing strategies that do not alienate the most vulnerable groups by too close a linkage to statutory agencies. Progress is also evident in the consideration of any stigmatising effect and how an intervention may (even inadvertently) discriminate against or disadvantage individuals. Overall the evidence points to a process of engagement that followed the allocation of resources and, in some cases, the design of interventions.

Despite the progress that has and is continuing to be made, community consultation still 'lags' behind the implementation of interventions. Where projects had remedied any shortcoming in their early strategies, issues of project capacity, relevant strategy and local expectations still remain.

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7. Implementing the On Track Crime Reduction programme: lessons for the future

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Chapters 3 to 6 have given a broad introduction to how local projects, within the On Track programme, have been implementing their Delivery Plans. While each chapter gives a localised perspective, many of the themes and issues that they discuss are reflected within the national picture. The aim of this final chapter is to expand on these key themes and identify the main messages for national and local policy makers and implementers. Evidence has shown that the transfer of knowledge of this kind is critical if learning is to become more integrated and mainstreamed and if difficulties and problems are to be avoided in the future (Ekblom, 2002).

The implementation of the On Track programme has so far been very successful, although it has been slower to achieve delivery than planned. The evidence suggests that all projects are now established and implementing some form of interventions. In September 2001, 53 per cent of planned interventions across the On Track programme had gone live.[3] This figure reached 84 per cent by December 2001. While the programme is clearly now moving at speed, this timetable does not match the original planning set down by the Home Office which anticipated that by September 2001 the majority of projects would be in full implementation (Home Office, 1999).

As the previous chapters show, implementation of programmes such as On Track can be affected by a variety of factors at both the national and local level. This is supported by other research in the field of evaluation (Fulbright-Anderson *et al*., 1999; France and Crow (forthcoming); Ekblom, 2002; Pawson and Tilley, 1998). These factors can be instrumental in impacting upon how far (and at what speed) programmes and projects are able to move towards full implementation. In more extreme cases negative factors can lead to implementation failure if they are not addressed early (Weiss, 1998).

The factors that affect implementation can be separated into three themes:

- how the programme was constructed and managed by the Home Office
- the development and roll-out of national policy.
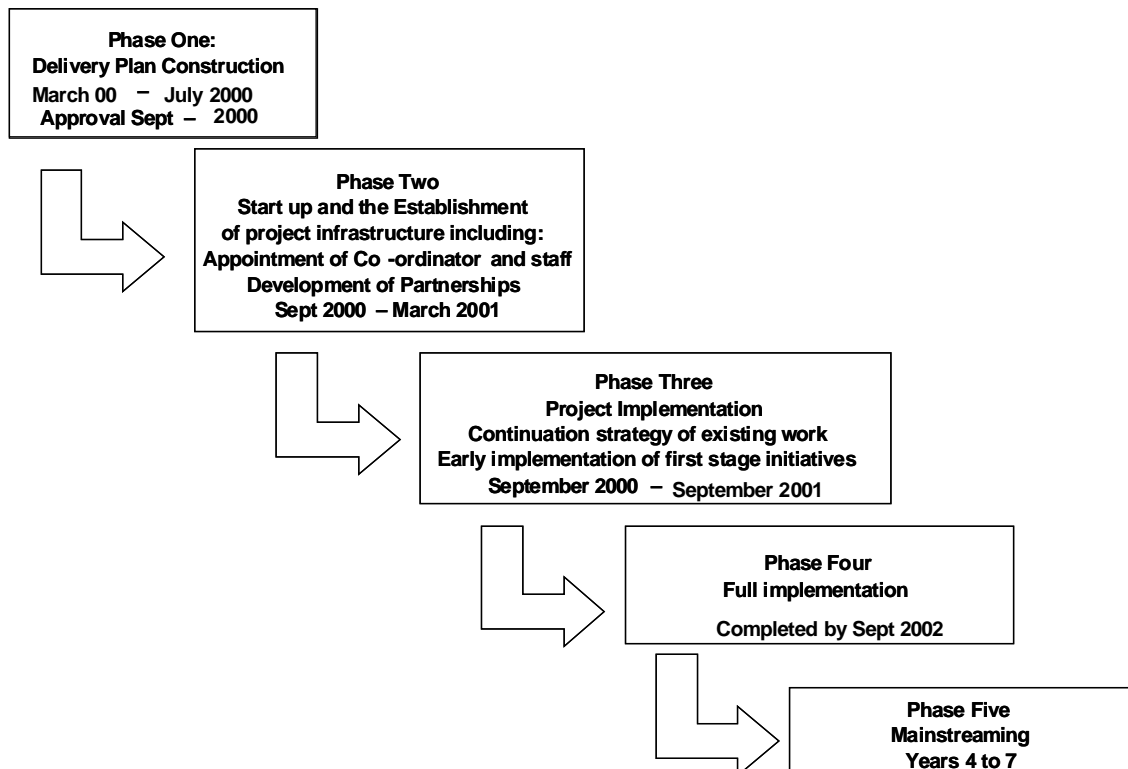- the impact of local circumstances.

Difficulties and problems surrounding implementation may not arise from one single issue. Evidence suggests that a combination of factors may have a greater impact and influence on how programmes such as On Track are implemented (France and Crow, 2001).

The construction of the On Track programme

On Track was described as a longitudinal programme that would last seven years. Its central focus was on high deprivation and crime areas in England and Wales. Figure 7.1 outlines the model of implementation devised for the programme by the Home Office.

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[3] 'Going live' does not mean that the intervention is running at full capacity. Evidence suggests that interventions have the staff and resources in place with referrals being made or proposed.

Figure 7.1: Home Office implementation model for On Track

The implementation model had five key difficulties:

- tensions arose over the use of a bidding document for planning service delivery
- the gap between the presentation of Delivery Plans and Home Office approval of funding was longer than planned, leading to slippage in programme implementation from the beginning
- project set up time was included in the model but this was not realistic in the absence of an existing infrastructure
- transitional time between the planning stage to action was not included within the model, and this disregarded the need for time to reflect and in many cases re-negotiate with partners upon their plans to find the best ways of making partnerships work
- project development support was not clearly defined within the model and it remained unclear whose responsibility this was within the Home Office.

Bidding versus delivery

In the conception of On Track, local areas had to bid for the status and funding of being an On Track area by providing a detailed Delivery Plan before implementation. Difficulties arose from this process in two ways. First, bidding documents are constructed as a means of 'winning funding' and 'selling the area'. Delivery Plans are different in that they focus on the core aims of the plan; the development of delivery mechanisms; and the identification and setting of realistic targets. Bringing these two types of documents together into one is not always compatible. Secondly, many of these bidding documents were constructed either by strategic leaders, senior

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practitioners or consultants.[4] Evidence suggests that this document became problematic as projects tried to move from planning to action because of a growing distance between those who devised it and those who were to implement it. Continuity of personnel was critical if a full understanding of what was being proposed was to be transferred across the project to those responsible for delivery.

Getting approval

The implementation model devised by the Home Office aimed to give local projects approval of their bidding document within one month but in reality this did not happen. Project approval ended up taking between two and six months (Table 4.1 shows the variability in approval dates for 6 projects). This delay arose because Delivery Plans remained problematic and required extensive consultation and feedback. In the Home Office implementation model it was originally assumed that these issues would be tackled prior to approval. The fact that this did not happen resulted in long delays for a number of projects. This then constrained local areas because they were unable to release resources to appoint co-ordinators and local staff. Slippage was therefore built into the model.

Set-up

The model of implementation used by the Home Office allowed for some developmental work to be undertaken on the delivery plans prior to funding being released but there was little recognition that once areas were given approval they would need time to establish the project infrastructure. Each area dealt with this in their own way although as Noaks and Williamson outline in their discussions, all local areas had delays because they needed time to recruit staff, find premises, negotiate with service deliverers and get interventions into place. Not one project was able to meet its own timetable. Slippage was therefore inevitable.

Recognising the importance of transition

Setting up a project is only part of the task. Once local areas receive funding there has to be a reflection and re-negotiation with local partners about how planning can be turned into real action. For example, the need to involve diverse and varied agencies in partnership to deliver multi disciplinary services is in itself innovative and challenging. As Lloyd highlights in Chapter 5 establishing such relationships takes time and effort but within the Home Office model there was little recognition that such issues would have to be addressed before implementation could be achieved. Further problems may exist in the next stages in that funding for the remainder of the programme still needs to be agreed.

Project development

It remained unclear within the Home Office implementation model how project development would be supported. The Home Office built in policy managers at the national level to oversee the implementation phase but the majority of their work focused on monitoring and negotiating with local areas about resources and the shape of Delivery Plans. What many projects required was some clear guidance and access to evidence about 'what works' in setting up projects such as On Track, yet it remains unclear whose responsibility this was and how it was to be achieved. Many projects found themselves making mistakes that could have been avoided.

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[4] Built into the programme were resources for local areas to buy in consultants to help in this process.

The development and roll-out of national policy

A second external factor that has impacted on implementation relates to the development and roll-out of other national policy programmes. It was announced in November 2000 that the Government was to set up, in response to PAT 12[5] on young people, the Children and Young People's Unit. This cross cutting departmental unit was to be located within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and have a preventative budget of £380 million targeted through the Children's Fund. The fund is seen as bridging the gap between the Sure Start programme for 0-to 4–year–olds and the Connexion service for 13–to19–year-olds delivering preventative services over and above those provided through mainstream statutory services.

Given that On Track has similar objectives to the Children and Young People's Unit especially around prevention, it was decided by Ministers, early into the programme, that the On Track projects and central support would move across from the Home Office to the Children and Families Unit at the DfES. Simultaneously, changes were taking place in central government concerning how locally based projects were to be supported by government civil servants. Decisions were made across government that relocated project monitoring and support away from central government in regional offices. At this stage the full impact of these developments remains unclear although evidence that is emerging suggests these changes have had a substantial effect on the implementation of On Track in a number of projects.

The Children's Fund is making money available to all local authorities in England. This is being done in three waves between April 2001 – 2003. Areas are being selected because of the high levels of child poverty which is similar to the criteria used for On Track. The allocation of funding has already been made and includes 13 On Track areas in the first wave and nine in the second wave. The major difference in these areas is that On Track targeted resources at small areas while the majority of Children's Fund money is to be distributed across larger regions i.e. city wide. The roll-out of the Children's Fund programme and the movement of On Track into CYPU has created a series of tensions and difficulties for local projects that have impacted upon implementation:

- There has been confusion locally over how the new policy connected with the existing On Track programme.
- The time and energy of many local co-ordinators and senior managers has been diverted away from the task of implementing the On Track programme. In a number of areas the experience of On Track local co-ordinators was seen as critical for developing a bid to the new Children's Fund.
- In this transition from one department to another, clarity about roles and responsibilities between departments have become clouded. Local projects are unclear about the lines of communication and support.
- Early guidance suggested that On Track would be 'bubble wrapped' within the Children's Fund. Recent evidence shows that this has not always happened. Some On Track areas have developed more integrated programmes of work with the Children's Fund. This is seen as a means of creating more seamless service whilst also dealing with financial disparities.
- The emergence of the Children's Fund is having a significant impact on strategic partnerships. Some On Track partnerships are being put on hold or re-structured to take account of the new Children's Fund arrangements.

For many projects, these types of developments indicate the difficulties of ensuring 'joined up' government. Decisions at this level clearly have a major impact on how programmes such as On

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[5] Policy Action Team 12 (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

Track can be delivered. Such developments can distract and divert energy from one programme to another, limiting the effectiveness of one programme at the expense of another.

The impact of local circumstances

External factors outside the control of locally based practitioners are important but localised factors can also critically influence implementation (France and Crow, 2001; Weiss, 1998, and Pawson and Tilley 1998). In the previous chapters, local evaluators draw attention to factors that seem critical in their projects. For example, in Chapter 5 Lloyd highlights that the successful implementation of partnerships in areas can be greatly influenced by the historical context of existing relationships. If areas have little history of partnership working or have a history of conflict that causes tensions, the ability to establish good partnerships is reduced.

There are a number of core factors that emerge from across the whole programme that can be seen to either help or hinder implementation. These can be explored under three headings:

- project development
- community engagement
- partnership working.

Project development

In a number of areas progress towards implementation has been increased as a result of strong leadership and management. Having a 'champion' early into the programme at the managerial or partnership level is an important factor facilitating successful progress. Evidence shows that if management is inactive in these early stages difficulties would lead to delays in project development.

Three key factors that help set up and move projects towards implementation are having managers or lead persons:

- who take responsibility for progressing the work
- who have an interest in the programme and see how it might connect to their own work or their department's objectives
- who allocate not only time for their own staff but also give their own time.

But setting up complex, new programmes such as On Track also requires a dedicated co-ordinator. Evidence suggests that the earlier projects are able to get co-ordinators into place the quicker they are able to move the project forward (France and Crow, 2001, Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994; Audit Scotland, 2000). As Chapter 3 shows, this did not always happen. Many On Track areas had problems recruiting high quality, full time co-ordinators.

Three issues that impacted on this recruitment were:

- competition between On Track projects. As one project suggested, they were 'fishing from the same pot'. Not only were On Track projects in a region competing with each other, but they were also competing with Sure Start and similar initiatives attempting to recruit staff of the same calibre
- attracting high quality staff. In some of the more isolated areas local labour skills were very limited. Finding suitable candidates from the local area was problematic. The issue of isolation, especially if the project was located in an area that was perceived as unattractive, added to the problem, creating difficulties in obtaining sufficient applicants to shortlist for interview. Some of the delay to appointment arose because of the complexity of local

recruitment processes. These processes are necessary but they also take substantial time to initiate.

Projects tackled these difficulties in one of two ways. First, they could accept delay and see it as something they could do little about. In some cases this seemed to be a solution that helped them deal with the lack of internal capacity or commitment to the programme. Secondly, they could second core staff. A number of projects recognised the need to put into place secondment strategies for a project co-ordinator. For the more innovative ones this approach was used prior to receiving approval and therefore work was able to progress immediately. Others saw secondment as a short-term solution. For example, in one area they seconded a co-ordinator on a temporary basis with a view to advertising the substantive post in the spring. Secondment did not necessarily have to be full time. What was important was that someone was released as a resource to help early start-up.

While secondment is a good method of moving projects forward early it may not always be successful. Two examples from the projects highlight some of the limitations:

- secondment can have limited impact if the time released is minimal
- some of the more remote and isolated projects raised concerns about the impact of secondment on other services. Moving staff around the authority may have solved the problem for On Track but it could be detrimental to other services.

Community engagement

A core requirement for On Track projects has been to involve the local community in the planning and delivery of the programme. In the initial stage, projects were expected to consult and engage the local community in the developmental process ensuring local views and perspectives were included in the planning document. Most areas had difficulties achieving this in the limited time-scale available because their focus was on getting interventions into place. More recent evidence suggests that community engagement within On Track has become more established. Projects are now developing a number of strategies for involving their local community. For example:

- projects are trying to increase the involvement of local people in the meeting structures of On Track
- projects are trying to create more inclusive structures and consultative mechanisms.
- projects are trying to involve local people in the development and implementation of interventions. These may rely upon community representatives as volunteers e.g. mentoring programmes
- projects have been targeting the voluntary sector as a means of involving the community.

Community engagement is not without its challenges. Across the national programme a number of factors have been identified that can increase the success of this work;

- projects such as On Track require substantial strategic and managerial support. If workers are to prioritise this work they must have strong managerial and strategic leadership
- practitioners need time to invest in the identification and involvement of the 'hard to reach' groups
- getting an understanding of the 'community' to be engaged is essential if questions of diversity or difference are to be tackled
- where no history of community engagement exists, time will be needed to focus on building up the capacity and infrastructure for engagement
- need to avoid tokenism and 'consultation overload'. Overload tends to come when co-ordination is absent or very limited. Co-ordinated approaches that link with existing programmes of engagement are more likely to be successful

- incremental approaches are needed especially in areas where community engagement is limited.

Partnership working

As Lloyd outlines, local strategic partnerships are still very much in 'flux' although recent evidence suggests that they are now becoming more established. Projects have managed to engage a range of agencies that have responsibility for children and families although a number of projects seem to have a narrow focus concentrating on involving the core agencies (Social Services, Education and Crime Reduction Agencies).

Almost all projects have operational partnerships or mechanisms in place to support the delivery of the programme although the distinction between strategic and operational bodies is not always clear and in some cases, there is considerable overlap between strategic and operational staff and roles. The degree of separation between the strategic and operational role varies. In most cases, there is a 'lineage extending from the lead agency through the strategic partnership'[6] to the operational partnership or body.

There are at least two factors that will influence the effectiveness of the partnership in helping projects become established and moving towards implementation:

1. If strategic partnerships are not driving the process then their effectiveness will be limited. In other words if strategic partnerships remain passive to the process and only exist for funding purposes they are unlikely to help the project meet its long-term goals.
2. The level of commitment and activity to the On Track project by some key partners is essential if the project is to be successful. In the early stages it is important that those who put the bid together or were influential in the early thinking remain active in the process. If these partners withdraw or change, the focus or direction of the project can be lost.

Although evidence is limited because of the early nature of the work, there are indications that a number of key factors are emerging across the programme that can help strategic partnerships become more effective in their work. The issues Lloyd highlights in Chapter 5 are especially relevant in a number of other geographical areas within the On Track programme. The factors that are emerging as the most important are:

- having agreed strategic objectives between partners. This can help overcome barriers in working between agencies
- building partnerships on existing good working relationships which can help establish good partnerships
- continuity of partners – ensuring those involved in development are able to maintain an active role
- having an inclusive process from a broad range of partners helps partnerships work in delivery
- ensuring co-ordinators have the seniority to negotiate with senior partners
- have On Track 'champions' within the partnerships who encourage the involvement of others in On Track
- tackling issues of communication and reporting systems between partners to ensure limited confusion over roles and responsibilities.

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[6] Quote taken from NFER Interim report 2001.

Conclusion: lessons for implementation

On Track has been very successful in moving from planning to action although the time frame has not matched the expectation of programme designers. The previous discussion has highlighted why this has happened. Nationally, programmes such as On Track are at the heart of the Government's approach to delivering social policy and high quality services to those most at need. On Track is an interesting learning experience for all parties involved and it is these issues that will be discussed to highlight key lessons.

Creating joined-up policy

Implementation is impacted upon by the actions of all parties involved. On Track clearly shows how the actions of national policy makers; policy implementers at the national level, local strategic partnerships and practitioners can have an impact upon the success of project implementation and delivery. On Track highlights the difficulties of creating 'joined-up' policy. A clear learning point from the programme is that closer collaboration is needed between all the different partners involved. Finding ways of understanding both the national and local context is critical to this process. Having joined up policy requires a transparency to exist where both the local and national partners understand both the limits and pressures of each other's work. If a 'gap of understanding' exists across the programme it creates tensions and difficulties that impact upon the success rate of programme implementation.

The importance of realistic and achievable goals

Pressures at the national level to deliver are great but setting down time-scales and frameworks that fail to recognise the context in which policy is to be implemented will only lead to delays and further difficulties. Both national policymakers and those responsible for delivering programmes locally need to set realistic goals that fully take into account contextual factors affecting implementation. Programme plans must have built into them resources and time for those whose responsibility it is to deliver the service. This should include:

- developmental time and resources for early planning and implementation
- set-up time for projects i.e. establishing a base/partnerships and the development of tools/protocols
- recruitment and induction time for staff.

By not allowing for this in the early stages local projects are seen as 'failing' or having slippage. A better infrastructure that recognised this component of project management would lead to better planned and organised projects.

Finding local solutions and developing risk management strategies

Local strategic partners and professionals are also important in this process. They have to recognise their responsibilities in finding solutions to overcome some of these tensions around delivery. It is not enough to locate the problem in the policy model alone. Delivery has to be achieved in realistic time frames therefore it is also the responsibility of local strategic partners and professionals to construct risk management strategies that help overcome delays and deliver within a framework that can be fed into the policy agenda. At the very least this may require local areas to develop clearer intermediate outputs that help inform the policy process showing that value for money is being achieved.

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Supporting implementation

Underpinning all of this is the question of how implementation can be supported and improved. It is clear from the on Track experience that this type of work is both challenging and demanding. Getting it right and making it happen cannot be achieved without resources and effort being put into supporting the programme. This needs to happen in three ways:

1. Programmes such as On Track have underpinning them an evidence base. Project workers need to have access to this and have clarity about how it informs their practice. For example, projects would have found it useful to have more detail early into the programme about what works in terms of intervention implementation and risk reduction programmes. It cannot be assumed that practitioners will have this knowledge or access to this information.

2. This evidence base also needs to include information on what works in good project management and set-up. Historically, much has been learnt about what helps or hinders implementation but this information has not been readily available to those who are responsible for the day to day delivery of projects. An evidence base needs to be constructed that avoids previous mistakes and problems. Finding ways of getting this into the programme or practice remains a challenge for us all but On Track has showed how having this material would have been advantageous in these early stages.

3. Central and regional government needs to construct a framework that offers practical support to project deliverers. Although the Home Office provided early guidance on the aims and objectives of the programme and on what projects could and could not do, these resources became more fragmented when the Children's Fund was established. Project support needs to be available throughout these early stages. It is critical if the message is to remain consistent and accessible to all. If central government want to ensure that delivery is achieved it needs to invest in the development of such a structure.

The implementation of On Track has been a challenge to all involved. Such Community based intervention programmes are not easy to manage or keep focused (Weiss, 1998). But the On Track programme has managed to deliver on its interventions and find ways of moving from planning to action. It is also creating real opportunities to understand how services can be effective in tackling issues of risk in a co-ordinated and planned way. While the full results of this work are still to be understood it is clear that many other lessons can still be learnt about how to set up and manage programmes, such as On Track, in trying to reduce crime in highly deprived areas of the country.

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