



Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru



NIHR Connecting Communities: Building Relationships Project

Keith Bowen, Dan Bristow, Emma Taylor-Collins,
James Downe

NIHR 132734

February 2021

Project aims

- Examine the existing relationship between Cardiff Social Services (focussing on Children's Services) and Cardiff University
- Gauge the enthusiasm of staff and elected members to becoming more research active
- Understand who needs to be involved in developing a research system at the Council
- Investigate resources needed to create a sustainable model
- Explore ways to co-produce research with the people who use services
- Make links with public health and other local authority departments, such as housing, education, and leisure.

What we did

- Established a project planning group (representatives from Cardiff Council, Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP), and Social Care Wales).
- Facilitated three online workshops with representatives from Children's Services, Cardiff University, Social Care Wales, Welsh Government and the third sector (n=22).
- Ran a survey with Children's Services staff (n=42) on approaches to research use and evidence-informed practice at the Council.

NB Cardiff and the Vale UHB were unable to participate in the workshops as previously planned owing to the pandemic.

Headline findings

- Several examples of research use and evidence-informed practice undertaken by staff in Children's Services but this was not always consistent or coordinated.
- There were few existing links between Children's Services and with Cardiff University research centres, or contact with regional or national level work to promote evidence-informed practice.
- Links between Cardiff University and Children's Services were seen as vital to strengthening research use and evidence-informed practice and several 'quick wins' were identified to take this forward.
- A steering group is recommended to build on what we learnt and help establish a Cardiff research system involving initiatives such as knowledge brokers, embedded researchers, research champions, and coproducing small research projects.

Findings



Current practice

- Most staff were engaged in evidence-informed practice in their work and thought it was important, e.g in:
 - Direct work with children and families on issues such as domestic abuse and ACEs
 - Writing assessments and reports (such as s47 child protection assessments)
- High level of reflective practice using evidence, generally through Signs of Safety approach.
- Existing practice in data collection and research use related to quality assurance, early help and intervention, pre-birth and ACE awareness, trauma-informed practice.
- Examples of some teams accessing and sharing research evidence.

Barriers to good practice

- Despite some good examples, evidence-informed practice was often piecemeal and patchy, and relied upon on the interests of key staff rather than being consistently implemented across Children's Services.
- Existing structures and processes inconsistently implemented and poorly coordinated, with no overall framework.
- People did not necessarily know about work in this area taking place within their team or department, or in the wider social services or Council.
- Time and capacity major barriers.
- Need for additional support to increase research literacy among staff, especially in translating research into practice.

Opportunities and proposed ways forward

- **Training** and workforce development important in supporting staff to use research evidence.
- Scope for **Principal and Consultant Social Workers to do more** in this area – e.g. as Research Champions – but time pressures are a challenge and need to avoid single point failure.
- **Embedded researcher model** worth exploring.
- **Commitment from senior leadership** vital in taking any work forward and in aligning with strategic priorities.
- Significant enthusiasm for **Council becoming site for cutting-edge research and practice**, despite few existing links.
- **Bottom-up approach preferred in developing a research agenda**, and range of evidence needs identified.
- **Appetite to work in partnership** with public health, third sector, and academia on progressing this work.

Recommendations: 'quick wins' and longer-term steps



'Quick wins'

01

Develop relationships between Children's Services and Cardiff University researchers in public health and social care.

02

Involve Cardiff University in Children's Services training/workforce development

03

Coordinate Council staff involved in undergraduate/postgraduate study

04

Develop relationships between Social Care Wales and Children's Services, e.g. on research champions

Longer-term steps

Establish a steering group to build on next steps and help establish a Cardiff research system. This group would explore:

- **Potential approaches** such as knowledge brokers, embedded researchers, research champions and coproducing research projects
- **Learning from other NIHR-funded projects** on setting up research infrastructure
- **Integrating this work with Social Care Wales'** activity in this area
- Developing a **theory of change** for a Cardiff research system
- **Who should be involved** in this work (such as Principal/Consultant Social Workers) and what **support** they need
- **Strengthening existing structures and processes** at the Council to support evidence use
- **Identifying support needed from Cardiff University**
- **Understanding 'what works'** at the Council and how this could be scaled up to improve evidence use across Wales

Meeting our project aims

Achieved

- Examine the existing relationship between Cardiff Social Services and Cardiff University
- Gauge the enthusiasm of staff and elected members to becoming more research active

Partly achieved

- Understand who needs to be involved in developing a research system at the Council
- Investigate resources needed to create a sustainable model
- Explore ways to co-produce research with the people who use services

Challenges/areas for future work

- Make links with public health and other local authority departments, such as housing, education, and leisure.



**Wales Centre
for Public Policy**
**Canolfan Polisi
Cyhoeddus Cymru**



www.wcpp.org.uk

Cardiff University, 10/12 Museum Place. Cardiff, CF103BG
Prifysgol Caerdydd, 10/12 Plas yr Amgueddfa, Caerdydd, CF103BG