

TACKLING POVERTY BOARD: THE IMPACT OF EVALUATION REPORTS ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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1 SUMMARY – KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BACKGROUND

Research aims and objectives

- 1.1 Conducted on behalf of the Tackling Poverty Board, this research aimed to explore how evaluation report evidence is used to inform national and local policy development in Scotland. To do so, the research focused on the impact of three national evaluations and two local public health demonstration projects, particularly in relation to their potential to inform tackling poverty and inequality policies in Scotland:

National Evaluations;

- Working for Families Fund 2004-2008
- Multiple and Complex Needs 2006-2008
- The New Futures Fund 1998-2005.

Local Public Health Demonstration Project Evaluations;

- Have a Heart Paisley 2000-2008
- Starting Well 2000-2006.

- 1.2 The research also investigated how other evaluation report findings and sources of research evidence/information are used to inform national and local policy development more generally.

What the research consisted of

- 1.3 The research was structured around eleven interviews with Scottish Government policy officers and external colleagues (NHS Health Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health). Additionally, a survey was undertaken (using Questback) of local authority researchers, policy makers and those working broadly on tackling poverty and inequality. Due to the small sample sizes and the selective recruitment of interviewees, findings should not be regarded as representative or generalisable.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1.4 Interview and survey questions were broadly structured into three sections relating to; policy development processes; awareness and use of the five specific Scottish Government evaluation reports, and; the wider use of evaluation reports and evidence in policy making.

1.5 Policy development:

- Despite the absence of a “*neat policy cycle*”, Scottish Government policy officers highlighted that cross-government and cross-sector work is promoted to assist integrated and collaborative policy making.
- Key national policy frameworks (*Achieving our Potential*, *Equally Well* and the *Early Years Framework*) are drawn together to address complex interlinked social problems.

- Overall, research evidence was regarded as important to policy development. Political imperatives can, however, result in data being bypassed when policies are fast-tracked.
- Policy making has evolved from being a relatively prescriptive, formal and inclusive enterprise into a more collaborative, bottom-up process involving a number of stakeholders from diverse sectors building up joint agendas.
- The Concordat was viewed as pivotal in bringing about this change with local and national policy makers adapting their roles accordingly. Community Planning Partnership structures were also considered particularly important.
- Although “*change at the top*” was assumed by some Scottish Government policy officers, this had proved more difficult to quantify at a local level as the new relationship between national and local government is still in its infancy.
- In response to an increasingly inclusive policy making climate and diminishing resources, there may be a renewed need to marshal evaluation evidence to provide policy focus and defend priority areas.
- Concern was repeatedly expressed about the “*dire budgetary climate*”. It was also implied that restricted resources could result in less progressive and innovative policy making and failure to adopt recommendations.
- Post the Concordat, learning networks are regarded as an effective and necessary way of communicating with partners.

1.6 **Awareness and use made of the five specific Scottish Government funded evaluations:**

- Across all five evaluations awareness was higher than the actual use made or impact of the evaluation reports.
- Levels of awareness were higher for the Working for Families and Have a Heart Paisley evaluations among interviewees, and local authority survey respondents were most aware of Working for Families and its subsequent impact.
- Usefulness was defined as involving learning from and adapting broad principles as much as replication of exact recommendations.
- A number of key models have been applied and embedded elsewhere, for example the key worker model and approaches to partnership working from Working for Families.
- Nationally, learning on mainstreaming from Working for Families, Multiple and Complex Needs and the New Futures Fund has been key to informing *Equally Well* and a new employability policy framework. Have a Heart Paisley learning on targeted primary care interventions and approaches to encourage health behaviour change were mentioned as being influential on *Keep Well*.
- The Working for Families evaluation has informed local authority employability models and financial inclusion practices and contributed to Single Outcome Agreements. Multiple and Complex Needs findings influenced an employability model and development of specific projects for Black and Ethnic Minority communities and people with mental health issues. Starting Well findings influenced one local authority’s anticipatory care approaches.

- When the evaluations were used by survey respondents tackling poverty and inequalities were specific aims of their subsequent policy development.
- The take-up of evaluation findings is affected by; local authority cultures, capacity in terms of time, support and training as well as knowledge of and the relevance of reports.
- Interviewees expressed concern about “*projectitus*” and the proliferation of pilot work which may not be mainstreamed or embedded strategically.
- The importance of effective dissemination was highlighted as was the difficulty of overcoming changes to the policy landscape.

1.7 **The wider use of evaluation reports and evidence in policy making:**

- A strong commitment to evidence based policy making was re-iterated.
- Evidence from local, national and international sources is drawn upon, although where possible there is a preference for Scottish and locally specific data.
- Scottish Government policy officers noted that a wide variety of research sources are accessed. Information is also drawn informally from colleagues, and in more structured ways through consultations and stakeholder groups, for example.
- Concern was expressed about the high volume of research available and the difficulties entailed in prioritising and absorbing this material. Lack of time was repeatedly raised as an issue.
- The significant role played by Scottish Government analysts and key external partners such as the Poverty Alliance was acknowledged by Scottish Government policy officers.
- Whether research could be successfully transferred from one context to another was questioned by some interviewees, as was the counter pressure to start new projects or delay starting in order to pilot and test preferred approaches.
- Evaluation evidence has been used to shape and inform a wide variety of policy development and practice at a local authority level.
- Local authority survey respondents noted that effective use of evidence is dependent on a will to change and accept findings among policy makers. Ownership of the evaluation, linking it to a particular policy response and the ability to engage with external groups were also seen to help.
- Although formal mechanisms through which evidence is channelled did not appear to exist, the role of informal networks and bulletins, and even good luck, was acknowledged.
- The timing of evaluation research, whether it was undertaken as an after-thought and how it is disseminated were all raised as concerns. Some Scottish Government policy officers questioned the adequacy of the Social Research web-pages.
- The impact of evaluation data was also seen to be dependent on the author and institution involved, the scale and quality of the work, and relevance in terms of policy and target population.
- It was emphasised that Ministers use evidence most acutely when they face political challenges. They require data to be prioritised and distilled.

- Skilful and discerning briefing and minute taking are important as the principal means of informing Ministers of report findings.
- Other factors influencing local authority policy development included national and local government policies, consultations and trends, and specific initiatives like Single Outcome Agreements. Local political interest, involvement from managers and frontline staff, strategic partners and elected members were also cited as being important.

1.8 Recommendations relate to what makes a successful evaluation report (and hence evaluation itself), research impact and the institutional processes and relationships which underpin this work.

RECOMMENDATIONS – What makes a successful evaluation report

1.9 Structure and content:

- be **concise**.
- balance **research integrity** with **policy requirements**.
- be **accessible**.
- produce a **robust** monitoring and evaluation framework.
- have **clear** aims, objectives and outcomes.
- ensure recommendations and/or action points and the conclusion are **short and practical**.
- demonstrate **impact** - what has been learned and what has changed as a result of the findings.
- **highlight the way forward** in policy terms.
- demonstrate a **clear understanding of the Scottish context**, systems and structures.
- have – before publication - a period of **reflection** for those involved.

1.10 Timing:

- evaluations should be properly built into the policy planning process and be **responsive** to any changes in the policy landscape.
- the research process should be **iterative** and findings should be produced and disseminated as **quickly and effectively** as possible.

1.11 Dissemination:

- **do not** do the evaluation in order to **simply tick a box**.
- reports should not be an end in themselves but a **“learning resource”** nationally and locally.
- reports should be **followed up effectively**.
- evaluations should be **accompanied by learning notes, short briefing papers** and **“how to guides”** targeted at different audiences.
- reports should be disseminated more effectively through **national and local learning networks**.

1.12 Policy relevance and usefulness:

- have a **pre-implementation stage** to establish ownership, commitment and wider involvement and to clarify aims and effects.
- **prioritise effectively** to ensure relevance.

- have **engaged**, interactive and “hands on” **evaluators**.
- accurately **identify and address the target audience**.
- produce **a useful document** which will not simply “sit on peoples’ shelves.”
- **translate evidence into practice and national strategies/policies into local contexts** (and vice versa).

RECOMMENDATIONS – Practical actions to improve research impact

1.13 From Scottish Government policy officers:

1. Develop and agree (between analysts and policy officers) a **house style and guidelines** on what evaluation reports should consist of, achieve and be presented and disseminated.
2. **Undertake a cross-government check** on who else might be working on a particular policy/evaluation area and examine how the work will impact on other parts of the Scottish Government.
3. **Establish a “policy forum”** on the intranet.
4. Provide **training for policy officers** on how to make the best use of research and evaluation evidence.
5. Produce **a template** for a supplementary **2-4 page policy specific evaluation report summary** (as an alternative to the current Social Research Findings Report template).
6. **Act as a nucleus** for gathering and disseminating local, national and international evidence on specific thematic areas.
7. **Speak directly to the analyst involved** in producing the evaluation in order to gain a better understanding of the data.
8. **Work more collaboratively** with key organisations that focus on the social determinants of health and poverty.
9. **Engage champions** to share evidence and lessons learned.

1.14 From local authority survey respondents:

1. Ensure “**Colleagues value the contribution** and **act upon evaluation evidence**.”
2. **Develop closer working relations** between Scottish Government researchers and local government officers.
3. **Use the opportunities of Single Outcome Agreements** to develop better networking and clearer links to the **National Outcomes**.
4. Develop **more time and opportunities for strategic discussion** and capacity for internal consultancy and project groups.
5. Encourage **ownership and commitment to evaluation work** by ensuring interested groups commission work themselves.
6. Develop **more joined-up and consistent approaches** to research and policy development.
7. Undertake more **longitudinal studies**.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1.15 This research indicates that there is widespread commitment from research and policy officers as well as national and local politicians to evidence-driven policy making. There is also evidence that awareness of evaluation reports may be higher than the actual use made of them or their impact on subsequent policy development. Research participants emphasised how policy making and research activity do not operate in isolation and indicated that at times the effective use of evaluation recommendations could be complicated by the demands of the policy cycle and new political imperatives. Although it was generally felt that the will was there to ensure such work was taken seriously and adopted where possible.
- 1.16 Considerable concern was also expressed about lack of time, resource capacity and funding. Participants feared that a growing institutional commitment to using evaluation evidence would be compromised by the reality of budget cuts. As well as imposing real restrictions on the ability to adopt recommendations, it was also felt that this economic climate might introduce a less progressive policy making culture in more general terms.
- 1.17 Although limited in scope, findings from this research provide a picture of how evaluation material is currently viewed and utilised. Examples of where evaluation findings and evidence more widely have impacted on subsequent policy development were highlighted. Participants identified factors which restrict access to and the adoption of such reports whilst also making a number of simple, practical suggestions for how evaluation evidence can be used more effectively.
- 1.18 While there are more deep seated structural considerations which cannot be directly influenced by local and Scottish Government policy and research officers, it is also clear that many of the recommendations contained in this report could be acted upon and could substantially contribute to the improved adoption of evaluation evidence in the public sphere. It is hoped that this report will provide the impetus to review project reporting more widely and work with relevant partners to improve the use made of this facility.

2 BACKGROUND AND THE RESEARCH

Introduction and background

2.1 The Tackling Poverty Board was set up by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in 2009 to review poverty reduction policy and practice in Scotland. The Tackling Poverty Board published its Statement at the end of January 2011¹. A number of strands of work² were taken forward to inform this Statement and to explore actions undertaken to fulfil commitments made in *Achieving our Potential*³. This report represents the research findings from one strand of that work.

Research aims and objectives

2.2 The purpose of this research was to explore how evidence from evaluation reports is used to inform national and local policy development in Scotland. The research specifically focused on the impact of five Scottish Government funded programmes/projects as follows:

2.3 National Evaluations⁴:

- Working for Families Fund 2004-2008
- Multiple and Complex Needs 2006-2008
- The New Futures Fund 1998-2005.

Local Public Health Demonstration Project Evaluations⁵:

- Have a Heart Paisley 2000-2008
- Starting Well 2000-2006.

2.4 The research also investigated how other evaluation findings (beyond the five above) and sources of research evidence/information are used to inform national and local policy development.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/tackling-poverty/tacklingpovertystatement> - This Statement sets the context for the recommendations of the Tackling Poverty Board which are aimed at Scottish Government Ministers, COSLA elected members and senior local and national leaders across Scottish society.

² Tackling Poverty Board papers and reports can be accessed at:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/tackling-poverty/Initiatives/TacklingPovertyBoard>

³ Scottish Government (2008) *Achieving our Potential: A framework to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland*: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/20103815/0>

⁴ For more information on these national evaluations see their evaluation summaries at:
Working for Families: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/04/20092556/0>
Multiple and Complex Needs: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/10/01090418/0>
New Futures Fund:
<http://www.evaluationsonline.org.uk/evaluations/Search.do?ui=basic&action=show&id=289>

⁵ For more information on these local project evaluations see their evaluation summaries at:
Have a Heart Paisley: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/03/3193441/34423>
Starting Well: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/04/20890/55054>

- 2.5 In so doing, the research examined the manner in which evidence from programme/project evaluations is currently discussed and applied in the policy making process, and explored the ways in which these processes could be improved upon. This report therefore highlights participants' perspectives on: successes, gaps and problems; lessons learned and recommendations on what makes a successful evaluation report and; how to improve the impact of evaluations on policy development.
- 2.6 In addition to informing work of the Tackling Poverty Board, findings could potentially have a wider value for those engaged in commissioning as well as conducting programme/project and policy evaluations and securing their relevance for subsequent policy and practice.

What the research consisted of

- 2.7 The research was structured around the following methods:
- 1) Interviews with national policy officers and external partners to investigate how evaluation evidence and other possible factors and information are used on a national level to inform policy development. Interviews were conducted by Scottish Government social researchers.
 - 2) A (Questback) survey of local authority researchers, policy makers and those working broadly on tackling poverty and inequality in order to assess how they use evaluations and other sources of information to inform policy development locally. The survey was sent out by COSLA through the Tackling Poverty Officers network.

Research participants/respondents

- 2.8 Eleven interviews were conducted: eight with Scottish Government policy officers (including one social researcher) and three with external partners (NHS Health Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health).
- 2.9 Interviewees were recommended by the Tackling Poverty Board because of their depth of expertise and knowledge across the following policy areas; employability, health improvement, health inequalities, the early years, child maternal health, and tackling poverty and financial inclusion.
- 2.10 The survey received 17 responses from local authority colleagues⁶. The majority (82%) had a role which involved tackling poverty/inequality. Most respondents (76%) indicated that their role involved policy making and 35% identified with research work. Other roles included Community Planning, managing front line services and Best Value. Respondents also worked across various local authority departments: social care/work services,

⁶ The survey was in confidence with an option for respondents to identify the local authority in which they worked. Self identifying local authorities included: Shetland; Glasgow; North Ayrshire; Aberdeenshire; Dumfries and Galloway; Renfrewshire; Edinburgh and Fife.

children and families; education; health (inequalities); employability; housing; regeneration and equal communities⁷.

- 2.11 The main findings from the interviews are discussed in chapter 3 and those from the local authority survey in chapter 4. **For key messages in relation to these findings go to the boxed summaries at the end of each section⁸**. The report ends with participants' concluding thoughts and recommendations on what makes a successful evaluation report and how their impact on policy development could be improved (chapter 5, pages 43-46).
- 2.12 It should be noted that due to the small sample sizes involved and the selective sampling approach used to recruit interviewees, the research findings should not be regarded as representative or generalisable.

⁷ Other areas identified included planning, policy, central support services, chief executive's departments, housing and communities, and corporate (research/management/agenda).

⁸ Chapter 3: pages 14, 19, 25. Chapter 4: pages 27, 34, 41.

3 MAIN FINDINGS – SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT POLICY OFFICERS

Introduction

- 3.1 Eleven interviews were conducted: eight with Scottish Government policy officers (includes 1 social researcher) and three with external partners (NHS Health Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health).
- 3.2 Interviews⁹ were concerned with participants' perspectives on:
- a) policy development generally
 - b) awareness and impact of the five specific evaluation reports
 - c) the wider use and impact of evaluation reports and evidence in policy development
 - d) recommendations - what makes a successful evaluation report
 - e) recommendations - how to improve the impact of evaluations on policy development.
- 3.3 This chapter focuses on the findings from these interviews (a-c). Key messages are summarised in the text boxes at the end of each section.
- 3.4 Perspectives on (d) and (e) are discussed in chapter 5.

(a) POLICY DEVELOPMENT GENERALLY

Policy making processes – “no neat policy cycle”

- 3.5 Interviewees were initially asked to explain how they go about developing a new policy. Policy officers highlighted how complex policy making can be. In the words of one officer - “...*there is certainly no neat policy cycle...it does not exist*”. The following components of the policy making process were identified:
- Establishing what the policy is to achieve
 - Scoping exercises and more detailed evidence gathering and review with involvement from external experts
 - Reviewing alternative models and services
 - Identifying the specific focus and putting options together
 - Formulating key objectives and outcomes

⁹ For reporting, where findings have been found across the 11 interviews, 'interviewees' is used to indicate this. Where findings and quotes relate to Scottish Government interviews only, 'policy officer' is used, and where they relate to NHS Health Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 'external partner' is used.

- Assessing impact on people (particularly population sub or minority groups)
 - Engaging, consulting and discussing with a range of stakeholders
 - Involving service users
 - Working collaboratively with (other) relevant policy areas and with Scottish Government analytical services colleagues.
- 3.6 Despite the apparent lack of a “... neat policy cycle”, policy officers used key terms like “cross-sector” and “cross-government” to discuss the above processes. This suggests that effort is made to collaborate and integrate policy endeavours in order to draw together key national policy frameworks and address interlinked social problems. *Achieving our Potential*¹⁰, *Equally Well*¹¹ and the *Early Years Framework*¹² were consistently mentioned in this regard.
- 3.7 Interviewees were also very clear about the importance of evidence to policy development. For example, a typical comment made by Scottish Government policy officers was:
- “I would say that evaluation and evidence feeds into what we are trying to do. I don’t think there is any area of our policy development where there isn’t evaluation and that that helps the evidence. Certainly as we go on if we don’t have that evidence, if we don’t have evaluation how are we going to know how to proceed? It just seems bonkers to me!”*
- 3.8 However, a few policy officers and all three external partners commented that “political imperatives” can sometimes result in evidence/data being bypassed when policies are fast-tracked to keep pace with changing policy landscapes. Here, one external partner indicated how such changes can be difficult to overcome particularly when a current piece of work becomes “old news”. They suggested that - “...you are maybe doing a piece of work that is influencing and then the Government changes or whatever then it just gets thrown out.”
- 3.9 Some of these interviewees did re-iterate how “cross-sector” and “cross-government” collaboration are key to responding to and overcoming changes to the policy landscape.

Policy making an evolving field

- 3.10 When asked to comment on how policy making may have changed in the last five years, interviewees framed their discussions in the context of the Concordat and subsequent changed relationships with local authorities.

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2008) *Achieving our Potential: A framework to tackle poverty and income inequality in Scotland*: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/20103815/0>

¹¹ *Equally Well* and Supporting Papers: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/Inequalities/inequalitiestaskforce/equallywellpapers>

¹² Scottish Government (2009) *The Early Years Framework*: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/13095148/0>

Particular reference was made to the National Performance Framework¹³, Single Outcome Agreements and the Fairer Scotland Fund¹⁴. Community Planning Partnerships were also highlighted as having continued importance.

- 3.11 Policy officers talked in depth about how policy making practice is now a distinctively different enterprise, with older conventions being more prescriptive, formal and less inclusive or collaborative. The new approach is viewed as being a bottom-up process involving large numbers of stakeholders from diverse sectors building a joint agenda together. For example:

“...developing a new policy under the new relationship we have with local government in particular is a much more collaborative cross-sectoral approach based on consensus and agreeing priorities rather than the old top down, prescriptive, dictatorial, legally binding policy style of old” (policy officer).

- 3.12 Whilst policy officers viewed the Concordat as pivotal in bringing about this new approach, with national and local policy makers having to adapt their role accordingly, some policy officers felt the effectiveness of the Concordat is difficult to assess. For example, although *“change at the top”* was assumed, some policy officers intimated that change at a local level has proved more difficult to quantify as the new relationship between national and local government is still in its infancy. In this context, two policy officers commented that formal evaluations – on how local areas are meeting the *“huge expectation”* the Concordat places on them in terms of gathering their own evidence and using evaluations to develop and progress outcome focused policies – are missing.
- 3.13 Overall, post-Concordat, there seemed to be broad consensus that policy making has improved in recent times. Far better use of evaluations, evidence, stakeholder engagement and partnership working, increased user involvement and a more active commitment to equality strands were cited as positive examples of this. As a result, it was felt that whilst policy making is possibly a slower enterprise, this inclusive approach was worth the investment in terms of developing closer relationships and understanding differing needs, and providing more personalised services focused around the needs of specific geographical areas and the individuals involved.
- 3.14 That said, it was conveyed by some interviewees that expectations from Ministers and other commentators may not have moved with the times, and that there remains, for example a preference for - *“what’s been called transformational change, you know fundamental large scale rapid change”* as opposed to - *“lots of pockets of change happening, structures changing, service design changing, a gradual shift in focus ...”* (policy officer). It appears that this tension between satisfying the appetite for evidence of

¹³ See Scotland Performs: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms>

¹⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/fairer-scotland-fund>

large scale transformational change as opposed to localised and longer term impacts will continue to animate and shape national policy making and data gathering practice.

Monitoring arrangements

- 3.15 In turn, this new approach to policy making has affected monitoring practices, with policy officers utilising a mixture of national statistics with data from Single Outcome Agreements and information gained through informal dialogue with Community Planning Partnerships, to draw together a more nuanced and locally specific picture of policy outcomes across Scotland. One policy officer commented that this flexible, informal and co-operative form of monitoring differs markedly from - *“the old way of having very structured formalised monitoring arrangements in place.”*
- 3.16 However, another policy officer thought it more difficult to consistently gauge progress on policy outcomes now than it was when more homogenous, centrally driven and standardised monitoring frameworks were applied. This officer suggested that in such an environment, 32 different local authority solutions to the same policy framework are as likely to emerge as a single national response.
- 3.17 It may be that as the national government policy and monitoring role becomes less prescriptive, there is a renewed need for evaluation evidence (and existing evidence more widely) to be used as a persuasive tool. With this and the current recessionary climate in mind some policy officers indicated that an ability to marshal the relevant evidence to provide policy focus and defend priority areas has become a stronger function for Scottish Government and local authority policy makers.
- 3.18 That said, concern was expressed about the *“dire budgetary climate”* and some interviewees also implied that restricted resources could result in less progressive and innovative policy making and failure to adopt evaluation recommendations. Such concerns were also conveyed in the local authority survey responses (chapter 4).

The role of learning networks

- 3.19 Post-Concordat, learning networks were regarded by interviewees as an effective and necessary way of communicating with partners. For example:

“... they’re [learning networks] our main way of corresponding and speaking to our stakeholders now you know. Before we didn’t use to have that as policy makers and co-ordinators of funds and managers of grants, we had a much more of a hands on role and we could almost you know, we could meet these people regularly and be quite directive about what we wanted to do. We don’t have that [now] so [the] Government’s influencing role now is through this learning network...” (policy officer).

3.20 In particular, one policy officer said that findings from the Working for Families and Multiple and Complex Needs evaluations were channelled through the dedicated collaborative groups associated with the programmes, but once these groups ceased they were replaced by the Regeneration and Tackling Poverty Learning Network. This officer suggested that this information sharing network is an important means of disseminating findings and lessons learned and regarded it as more effective than the original closed groups. However the officer was unclear how much influence learning networks have on the ground and if they are actually more effective in achieving desired outcomes.

Key Messages - Policy Development Generally:

- Although “*no neat policy cycle exists*”, cross-government and cross-sector work is promoted to assist integrated and collaborative policy making and key national policy frameworks (*Achieving our Potential, Equally Well* and the *Early Years Framework*) are drawn together to address complex interlinked social problems.
- Evidence was highlighted as very important to policy making, however, “*political imperatives*” and changes in the policy landscape can sometimes result in policies being “*fast-tracked*”, so by-passing the evidence.
- Policy making has evolved from being a more prescriptive, formal and less inclusive process into a more bottom-up enterprise involving large numbers of stakeholders from diverse sectors building joint agendas together.
- The Concordat was viewed as pivotal in bringing about this change with local and national policy makers adapting their roles accordingly. Particular reference was made to the National Performance Framework, Single Outcome Agreements and the Fairer Scotland Fund. Community Planning Partnerships were also highlighted as having continued importance.
- Although “*change at the top*” was assumed by some, this has proved more difficult to quantify at a local level as the new relationship between national and local government is still in its infancy.
- Policy making post-Concordat has improved with better use of evaluations, evidence, stakeholder engagement and partnership working, increased user involvement and a more active commitment to equalities.
- It may be that as the national government policy and monitoring role has become less prescriptive, there is a renewed need for evaluation evidence (and existing evidence more widely) to be used as a persuasive tool. This and the likely consequences of the current recession indicate that an ability to marshal the relevant evidence to provide policy focus and defend priority areas has become a stronger function for national and local policy makers.
- Concern was expressed about the “*dire budgetary climate*” and it was also implied that restricted resources could result in less progressive and innovative policy making and failure to adopt evaluation recommendations.
- Post-Concordat, learning networks are regarded as an effective and necessary way of communicating with partners but it seems unclear if they are more effective on the ground in achieving desired outcomes.

(b) AWARENESS AND IMPACT OF THE FIVE SPECIFIC EVALUATION REPORTS

Awareness and use made/impact

- 3.21 As a reminder, this research specifically asked questions on awareness and impact of three national evaluations (Working for Families, Multiple and Complex Needs and the New Futures Fund) and two local public health demonstration project evaluations (Have a Heart Paisley and Starting Well).
- 3.22 Across all five evaluations awareness was higher than actual use made or impact of the evaluation reports (see table one below). In the main, level of awareness and subsequent use made were higher for Working for Families and Have a Heart Paisley.
- 3.23 Overall, use was dependent in part on the specific policy area concerned and geographical relevance of the work but also on interviewees' personal level of involvement with the programme/project and subsequent evaluation of it. For example, many of the interviewees work(ed) in health policy/research, one Scottish Government policy officer was strategically involved in developing Working for Families (and commissioning the evaluation) and Multiple and Complex Needs and many of the policy officers had been involved in research advisory groups for one or more of these evaluations.

Table One: Awareness/use of evaluation reports

	Awareness of the evaluation report (number of interviewees)	Use made of evaluation reports (number of interviewees)
Working for Families	6	3
Multiple and Complex Needs	8	2
New Futures Fund	6	1
Have a Heart Paisley	10	6
Starting Well	9	2

Impact

- 3.24 When interviewees were asked specifically if they had ever used any of the five evaluation reports to inform their work it became clear that particular lessons learned/recommendations have been useful in both policy and practical terms. Overall, usefulness was defined as involving learning from

and adapting broad principles as much as replicating exact recommendations.

Embedding key models

3.25 Many interviewees noted that some of the key models “*tested*” in these evaluations have been applied elsewhere and embedded locally. Particular mentions focused on improved approaches to client engagement and interaction with services such as the key worker model and approaches to partnership working (Working for Families), outreach approaches and partnership working (Multiple and Complex Needs) and approaches to health behaviour change and the role of health coaches/support workers and “*door-knockers*” (Have a Heart Paisley).

Mainstreaming

3.26 One policy officer also outlined how they had adopted a lot of good learning from the New Futures Fund evaluation into a new employability policy framework they were developing and, had mainstreamed the programme principles into a more strategic national partnership approach with Community Planning Partnerships.

3.27 On mainstreaming, two different policy officers identified Working for Families as a good example as learning – they said - has been embedded into wider employability practices at a national and local level (for the latter see chapter 4).

3.28 However for all five evaluations, some concern was expressed about “*projectitus*” and the proliferation of pilot work which may not be subsequently mainstreamed or embedded strategically.

3.29 That said, many interviewees acknowledged a move in the right direction in the context of *Equally Well* and the notion of “*space for change*” in the test site approach. One policy officer explained:

“...what we said in the Equally Well and the test site approach [e.g. different to the Multiple and Complex Needs pilot project approach] is that you don't try to do this all at once and you don't generate change top down you create a space for change in amongst local services and you give capacity and a drive to make changes...and actually create more positive outcomes than if we had tried to do a [e.g. short-term, as with Multiple and Complex Needs] tightly designed, centrally driven service change approach.”

Effective Dissemination

3.30 Six interviewees particularly discussed the impact of Have a Heart Paisley¹⁵ on the later Keep Well¹⁶ programme. A key focus of these discussions was

¹⁵ Have a Heart Paisley set out to deliver a targeted programme for the working age population (aged 45-60) and for those with existing heart disease in Paisley and to demonstrate the degree to

around effective approaches to dissemination. For example, the following were mentioned by two external partners:

- working with the Keep Well implementation group to feed in the “*tacit learning*” and “*high obvious learning*” from Have a Heart Paisley
- Keep Well site visits to share learning between project manager/leads (for example on: primary prevention; secondary prevention; and cardiac rehabilitation)
- a series of “*customised learning*” events and open learning days for Keep Well projects
- sharing learning through a number of national groups focused on: practice and learning; workforce development; evaluation; and information technology.

Timing

3.31 Although it is evident that practical learning (client engagement approaches) from Have a Heart Paisley informed planning and implementation of Keep Well, three interviewees voiced their concern about timing. In particular, concern was expressed over the apparent lack of logical policy progression between Have a Heart Paisley and Keep Well - “...it was not a logical progression from doing Have a Heart Paisley, evaluating it, learning from it and then deciding what the successor programme was going to be” (policy officer) rather a change in the policy landscape resulted in both programmes “*dovetailing*” (external partner).

3.32 A Scottish Government policy officer explained this change in the policy landscape as follows:

“...there was just a decision made by the new Chief Medical Officer and we had an NHS White Paper that in effect came along and said we need to do something about health inequalities, it will be the primary prevention programme of health checks in primary care and that went beyond what Have a Heart Paisley was doing so there was a need almost to stop that programme and redesign and start again.”

3.33 Re-iterating difficulties in overcoming policy landscape changes (see 3.8), two external partners intimated that starting again - before the end of Have a Heart Paisley and publication of the final evaluation report - caused some confusion locally and created “*negativity*” and “*cynicism*” from key stakeholders who questioned:

“...why have the Government funded these [Keep Well] projects and let them go ahead without reflecting the [Have a Heart Paisley] evaluations? It was a year down the line before the evaluation [report]

which primary and secondary prevention measures could improve cardiac health (heart health) by tackling risk factors and unmet needs for treatment.

¹⁶ The purpose of Keep Well is to strengthen primary care services in the most deprived areas of Scotland and identify those at particular risk of preventable, serious ill-health and offer health checks, screening and advice. The focus is on cardiovascular disease and its main risk factors.

kind of came out and Keep Well was already beginning to generate more or similar or contradictory findings and there seemed [not] to be much integration in the whole process” (external partner).

- 3.34 Although the external partners had discussed the dissemination approaches noted at 3.30 they felt that *“Keep Well would have been shaped differently”* if the full Have a Heart Paisley evaluation report had been available right at the planning and implementation stage.
- 3.35 Effective dissemination/timing also emerged in another interview when discussing Working for Families and Multiple and Complex Needs. One policy officer conveyed that although their work at the time was related to these two programmes they had not been made aware of the programmes/evaluations until after they had been implemented and consequently were denied the opportunity to input into them. Here concern was expressed about how effectively the reports have been disseminated, particularly when evaluation findings were very positive as was the case, they said, with Working for Families.

Awareness versus impact?

- 3.36 Although Starting Well was mentioned by 9 interviewees there was limited follow-on discussion in relation to impact. Interviewees mentioned their general awareness rather than their knowledge on the impact of learning. For example, two policy officers noted the relevance of Starting Well to their areas of work and said that although they had not directly made use of the evaluation, colleagues in their areas had shown interest in it. However, one said - *“people talk about it [but] it is all kind of anecdotal”* and the other said - *“I don’t think any of us was convinced that from the evaluation that the evidence was particularly strong of any great affect from Starting Well.”*

Impact on poverty and inequality

- 3.37 Interviewees were asked if they were aware of the impact the five evaluations have had on poverty and inequality outcomes in Scotland. Commonly interviewees gave their assumption rather than a response that was based on evidence. For example - *“...my assumption would be that there would be an effect but I can’t say that the evidence is anymore robust than that frankly”* (policy officer).
- 3.38 Overall, it was clear that interviewees found it difficult to extrapolate impact of the five reports on poverty and inequality and many responses were general and vague. For example, it was assumed that Working for Families and the New Futures Fund would have had an impact on poverty and inequality outcomes because of their focus on employment (removing barriers to work) and income and that Have a Heart Paisley *“through all its actions”* would be impacting on poverty and inequality but when such thoughts were conveyed they tended to be followed by sentiments such as - *“...it is probably hard to say”* or - *“it is really impossible to extrapolate”* (policy officers).

- 3.39 Interviewees acknowledged that to be able to answer such a complex question a longer programme/evaluation time period would be required in order to evidence longer term outcomes, for example - *“It needs a much longer project [e.g. than 15 months or 2 years] to be able to say we are reducing poverty”* (external partner).

Key Messages – Awareness/Impact of the Five Specific Evaluation Reports:

- Across all five evaluations awareness was higher than use made or impact of the evaluation reports.
- Level of awareness and subsequent use made were higher for the Working for Families and Have a Heart Paisley evaluations.
- Use was dependent in part on the specific policy area concerned and the geographical relevance of the work but also on policy officers’ level of personal involvement (for example as commissioner or advisory group member) with the programme/project and subsequent evaluation of it.
- Usefulness was defined as involving learning from and adapting broad principles as much as replicating exact recommendations.
- Key models from the programmes/projects that have been applied and embedded elsewhere included: the key worker model and approaches to partnership working (Working for Families); outreach approaches and partnership working (Multiple and Complex Needs); and approaches to health behaviour change and the role of health coaches/support workers and *“door-knockers”* (Have a Heart Paisley).
- Learning on mainstreaming from Working for Families, Multiple and Complex Needs and the New Futures Fund has been key to informing *Equally Well* and a new employability policy framework/strategic national partnership approach.
- Have a Heart Paisley learning on targeted primary care interventions and approaches to encourage health behaviour change (particularly client engagement) were mentioned as being influential on Keep Well.
- Although awareness of Starting Well was mentioned by 9 interviewees there was little follow-on discussion on impact. The evidence was referred to as *“anecdotal”* and not particularly strong or of *“any great effect.”*
- Concern was expressed about *“projectitus”* and the proliferation of pilot work which may not be mainstreamed or embedded strategically.
- The importance of timing and effective dissemination were highlighted with challenges in overcoming policy landscape changes re-iterated.
- Overall interviewees found it difficult to extrapolate the impact of the five evaluations on poverty and inequality in Scotland. Responses were based on assumptions rather than actual evidence of impact.
- Longer-term tracking is required to really demonstrate impact on poverty and inequalities.

(c) WIDER USE AND IMPACT OF EVALUATION REPORTS AND EVIDENCE IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The use of evaluation reports to inform policy development

- 3.40 Interviewees were asked about their use of other evaluation reports (besides the five specific evaluations) and evidence/information to inform their policy development work.
- 3.41 Interviewees re-iterated how imperative they felt research evidence is to policy development. They acknowledged the importance of being subject and evidence aware, however, the unique role of evaluation reports specifically (as opposed to other kinds of research evidence) was less clear. Interviewees did not appear to readily distinguish between different types of evidence but indicated they would use any data/information they found useful and relevant.
- 3.42 One policy officer did suggest that following the adaptations to previous programmes like Sure Start and Changing Children's Services and other funding streams, less programme evaluations are being undertaken. In their words, "*the game's changed.*" However, they did state that where the Scottish Government has direct control of funded programmes, it does continue to embed evaluation arrangements into these.
- 3.43 Overall it appears that evaluation reports (and research evidence) function as a source of reassurance and expertise whilst also giving chosen policy positions a degree of legitimacy which could not be afforded by experiential or political opinion alone.

Sources of evaluation evidence

- 3.44 Interviewees said they used evaluation evidence originating from local, national and international sources. Some interviewees particularly emphasised the importance of Scottish information, and more specifically, local data. However, it was also suggested that Scottish data could not always be relied upon as it could be limited in scope and sample size - "*We can't afford to have a preference for Scottish literature because it is too limited and obviously lots of it is grey literature and not published anyway and probably does not tell you quite enough as it is not on a large enough scale*" (policy officer).
- 3.45 Interviewees indicated that they draw on evaluation reports and research evidence (particularly systematic reviews) from diverse sources. The following were frequently mentioned:
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
 - Fawcett Society
 - Poverty Alliance
 - Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
 - NHS Health Scotland
 - NICE

- British Medical Journal
- Scottish Collaboration of Public Health Research and Policy
- Research Utilisation Research Unit (RURU), Edinburgh University
- Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

Time pressures

3.46 Although policy officers highlighted the importance of being aware of other evaluations and the wider evidence base in relation to their policy areas and the Scottish context generally, it was evident that rewards accrued through background reading are frequently compromised by short-term work pressures particularly in relation to time. Having to scan evaluation reports and research evidence papers and wishing for more time to properly digest findings were commonly mentioned by Scottish Government policy officers.

3.47 In these discussions concern was expressed about the high volume of information available and the difficulties entailed in prioritising and absorbing this material. For example:

“... there’s a lot of data out there and I think the challenge is trying to identify the information that’s of the most benefit to you and that’s why I tend to stick with Scottish and UK, GB stuff...how do you distil it and make the best use of it? Don’t get me wrong, our analytical colleagues are helpful in that kind of stuff but it’s really, it’s hard if you’ve got a hundred and twenty page report and the first thing I do is go to the recommendations, see if there’s a summary...because otherwise reading a hundred and twenty pages is soul destroying isn’t it? I think there should be a law that you shouldn’t be able to publish a report that’s more than thirty pages long” (policy officer).

3.48 Other policy officers questioned whether it is their job to know the detail of evaluations or whether this is a role for external partners (the Poverty Alliance and NHS Health Scotland) and Scottish Government analytical services. For example - *“...there is probably not much point in hammering the hapless policy people with yet more sort of detailed research kind of expertise, that is what we use our analytical service colleagues [for]”* (policy officer). The role Government analysts play in seeking out, summarising and passing on information was widely appreciated, as was their part in acting as a sounding board and providing expertise such as judging whether methodology and results are robust.

“Transferability”

3.49 *“Transferability”* was regarded as a key issue by two policy officers and one external partner when drawing on evaluation reports and the wider evidence base in policy development work. The external partner particularly expressed difficulties entailed in *“taking something off the shelf”* and expecting the findings to translate into the Glasgow context for example. Caution, it was suggested, should be applied when transposing data from one context to another.

3.50 The Triple P Parenting programme was focused on as an example in discussions about transferability. Two different perspectives on whether to engage with “testing” the transferability of successful international programmes emerged, as follows:

“The Triple P, the parenting programme that they are doing in Glasgow with all the different levels of intervention, I mean that is based on programmes that appear to work in Australia and Canada and you can’t hang around for 5 years whilst you test the transferability of that to Glasgow. They need to get on with that” (policy officer).

“...it is actually very difficult to decide to just take something off the shelf and think it is going to work and actually the evidence isn’t good. You know we are seeing Triple P, a very well evidence based parenting programme for example, you know the word on the street is that people aren’t really coming, people aren’t really using it you know and so it maybe doesn’t translate particularly well from Australia to Glasgow...So you really do need some local, even if you had time to change a programme at a local level, to check with practitioners and service users that it is going to be relevant to them you know if you had a bit of that built into your intervention” (external partner).

3.51 Therefore, it would appear that the compulsion to start new programmes in response to either political and/or demonstrable need for the service can cause tension with the analytical impulse to test whether the selected approach actually works in the context it will be applied. Further, the same external partner expressed concern that the interpretation of national policies into policy development at a local level is somehow missing; the practical “how to” deliver at a local level in such national documents was thought to be lacking. They also questioned whether the good practice undertaken by local projects is effectively translated more widely to other local authorities or at a national level for example. It was also suggested that performance management/accountability structures such as Community Planning Partnerships, NHS Heat Targets and Single Outcome Agreements are the driving force for developing local policies and practice rather than the evidence base itself. The status of evidence relative to other imperatives such as performance targets and arrangements is unclear, but it is evident that evaluation data exists within a wider operational climate that frames and affects how it is received and utilised.

Using other sources of information

3.52 Interviewees identified a broad range of alternative sources of information besides evaluation reports and research evidence which they draw on to inform policy development. These included:

- Colleagues (analytical and policy)
- Team meetings
- Ministers and special advisers
- External stakeholders - *“going out and speaking with people”*
- Newspapers, magazines and reports

- Consultations
- Service user involvement
- Strategic boards, stakeholder, steering and lobby groups
- Local government, COSLA and Community Planning Partnerships
- Cross-Party Groups in Parliament
- MSPs
- Key influencers (the Chief Medical Officer particularly mentioned)
- Holding workshops.

Specific processes or mechanisms to help make use of evaluation evidence

3.53 Policy officers struggled to identify any formal mechanisms through which evaluation evidence is channelled. They indicated that awareness is facilitated informally through IDOX bulletins and a plethora of political, local government and non-departmental public body networks. Cross-directorate work, interaction with key external partners such as the Poverty Alliance and, email alerts from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation were also identified as other valued informal means of making use of evaluation evidence. One policy officer hinted that even “... *luck and good fortune* ...” as well as the effectiveness of individual teams played a part.

Particular concerns about evaluation reports

3.54 Interviewees expressed particular concerns about whether:

- Evaluations are conducted at the right time and subsequently whether the information is produced in time to actually inform the ongoing policy development process
- Project evaluations “*can almost be a bit of an after-thought rather than properly built into the way you’re developing the policy*” (policy officer). It was suggested that difficulties relating to the timing of publications could be improved if evaluations were undertaken at the right time
- Evaluation findings are disseminated properly
- Material from consultations and workshops is utilised effectively (this challenge is not regarded as unique to the Scottish Government)
- The Scottish Government social research publication web-pages are effective for dissemination purposes.

The influence of evaluation reports within the Scottish Government

3.55 Interviewees struggled to quantify the effect evaluation evidence has on Scottish Government policy making, although one hazarded a guess at about 4 to 5 out of ten depending on the specifics of the piece. Potential impact was seen to be in part dependent on: the reputation of the author; the institution involved; the scale and quality of the work; timing; relevance to particular policies, areas and/or population sub-groups; whether the report meets policy needs; and whether it can add to the policy cycle.

- 3.56 Three policy officers particularly highlighted how evaluation reports should provide constructive criticism as well as positive reinforcement, and that it is important to allow this balance to co-exist despite the adversarial political and media environments we operate in, for example:

“...it [evaluation reports] should be able to either reinforce what we’re doing and use it as evidence to support delivery and support influencing local partners or Ministers but also I think if an evaluation report comes out that says “hang on this isn’t working”, we should be brave enough to take account of that and say to the politicians we need to stop doing this and do it a different way which is not always a comfortable message that we may have got something wrong that’s cost money” (policy officer).

The impact of evaluation reports on Ministers

- 3.57 When asked what influence evaluation reports have on Ministers’ opinions and decisions policy officers emphasised that the civil service, rather than Ministers, is there to understand the detail and know the key information and policy elements that need to be preserved and promoted. Typical comments were that Ministers do not respond well to - *“fluff, fluff, reports that don’t tell them anything”* or give them valuable information (policy officer). It is important to discriminate as - *“there is not an appetite amongst Ministers to be continually fed data, they want it on a need to know basis”* (policy officer).
- 3.58 Some policy officers indicated that Ministers are particularly interested when evaluations show the impact different policies have on different groups of people (*“what does it mean for the man in the street”*), what *“we get”*, and how much it costs. It was also highlighted how Ministers are much closer to the use of evaluations and evidence in the political arena when they face political challenges and where *“compelling evidence”* can be used as *“a powerful tool”* (policy officer). Thus, skilful and discerning briefing and minute taking are extremely important for distilling the required amount of detail at the right time.
- 3.59 Policy officers suggested a successful briefing/minute should include any - *“strong straplines for political headlines”* and present the issues - *“in a punch[y] understandable way that is honest in terms of pointing out the positives and the negatives”* (policy officer). Therefore, outlining the benefits, *“elephant traps”* and honest clear options are considered important. One policy officer also said that at times it may be necessary to provide Ministers with very robust lines in order to resist evidence which is - *“clearly wrong, inaccurate or non-applicable to Scotland becoming embedded as long term fact when [it is] not”*. In such a way the value attached to bespoke, Scottish specific data was re-iterated.

Key Messages - The Use of Evaluation Evidence in Policy Making:

- Interviewees re-iterated a strong commitment to evidence based policy making. The specific role of evaluation reports, as opposed to other kinds of research evidence, was less clear however.
- Interviewees explained that they use evaluation and research evidence originating from local, national and international sources. Some particularly emphasised the importance of Scottish information, and more specifically local data. It was acknowledged, however, that the latter could be limited in scope and involve small sample sizes and may therefore be of less utility.
- Evaluation and research evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, universities, NHS Health Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health featured prominently as sources to draw on.
- Policy officers expressed concern over the high volumes of information available and the difficulties entailed in prioritising and absorbing this material.
- Interviewees acknowledged the significant role played by key external partners such as the Poverty Alliance and NHS Scotland, and Scottish Government analysts in seeking out, summarising and passing on information.
- Difficulties relating to the “*transferability*” of international good practice into the Scottish context and of national policies into local contexts (and vice versa) featured prominently in three interviews. Pressure to start new programmes can run counter to the analytical need to test the transferability of new models into the Scottish context.
- Interviewees identified a broad range of alternative sources of information they draw on to inform policy development. Other sources included: colleagues (analytical and policy); newspapers and magazines; consultations; workshops; service user involvement and stakeholder engagement; and steering and lobby groups.
- Policy officers struggled to identify any formal mechanisms through which evaluation evidence is channelled. The role of informal networks, bulletins and even “*luck and good fortune*” were highlighted.
- The timing of evaluation research, whether it was undertaken as an after-thought, how it is disseminated and the adequacy of the Social Research web-pages were all raised as concerns.
- The impact of evaluation data was seen to be dependent on the author and institution involved, the scale and quality of the work, relevance in terms of policy and target population, and the timing of publications.
- It was emphasised that Ministers use evidence most acutely when they face political challenges. Data needs to be prioritised and distilled and skilful and discerning briefing and minute taking are important as the principle means of informing Ministers of report findings.

4 MAIN FINDINGS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH AND POLICY OFFICERS

Introduction

- 4.1 Having provided an overview of how Scottish Government and external partner policy officers regard the usefulness of evaluations and evidence to the policy making process, this chapter reports on the views of the 17 local government research and policy officers who responded to the Questback survey¹⁷. For the purposes of reporting, survey participants will be referred to as respondents¹⁸.
- 4.2 As with the previous chapter, the discussion focuses on findings relating to (a) policy development generally, (b) awareness and the impact of the five specific evaluations and, (c) the wider use and impact of evaluation reports and evidence in policy development. Key messages are summarised in the text boxes at the end of each section.
- 4.3 Recommendations on what makes a successful evaluation report and how to improve their impact are noted in chapter 5 alongside those of the interviewees.

(a) POLICY DEVELOPMENT GENERALLY

Policy making processes

- 4.4 Respondents were invited to identify three processes which their local authority has in place to develop new policies. Community Planning Partnerships featured most frequently followed by Single Outcome Agreements. Responses highlighted how pivotal the whole Community Planning Partnership structure is to policy making at a local level. Other planning processes included scenario, corporate and service planning and policy development frameworks.
- 4.5 Engagement with partner organisations and different population sub-groups was also evident as part of the policy development process. Partnership mechanisms and committee processes consisted of:
- Individual local authority partnerships such as the Fairer Shetland Partnership
 - Council committee processes
 - Council policy boards
 - Strategic forums consisting of members and officers led by Assistant Chief Executives
 - City advisory panels

¹⁷ Some respondents did not answer all the survey question so the base number varies at each question. Indication is provided in this chapter where the base number of respondents is not 17.

¹⁸ Surveys were completed by individual research and policy officers. It should be noted that to answer some of the survey questions (particularly on wider use and impact) respondents would have had to consult with their local authority colleagues in order to provide their response.

- Policy teams which provide support to Councils and Community Planning Partnerships
- Joint work with other agencies.

4.6 Forms of community involvement in policy planning included a community engagement network, a citizen's panel and a youth council. One local authority has established a wide variety of consultations and strategic forums which allow staff and users to come together to discuss, share and contribute to local policy issues. Qualitative feedback was also sought from another local authority through reference to local area committees, a public services panel and a community planning conference. Despite such wide input, another respondent indicated that their approach to policy development was pragmatic, driven by what could be funded and has political support.

4.7 In addition to this, a number of standards and scrutiny arrangements were highlighted by respondents. One respondent suggested that their local authority action plans attached to individual strategies were monitored and the lessons learned used in partners' continuous professional development. Other assessment and benchmarking tools included:

- Public service excellence
- Impact and risk assessment tools
- Scrutiny arrangements.

4.8 *Further, the use of research and analysis was mentioned in relation to evidence gathering and review, needs analysis (in partnership with communities and partner agencies) and reviewing lessons learned (alongside user consultation).*

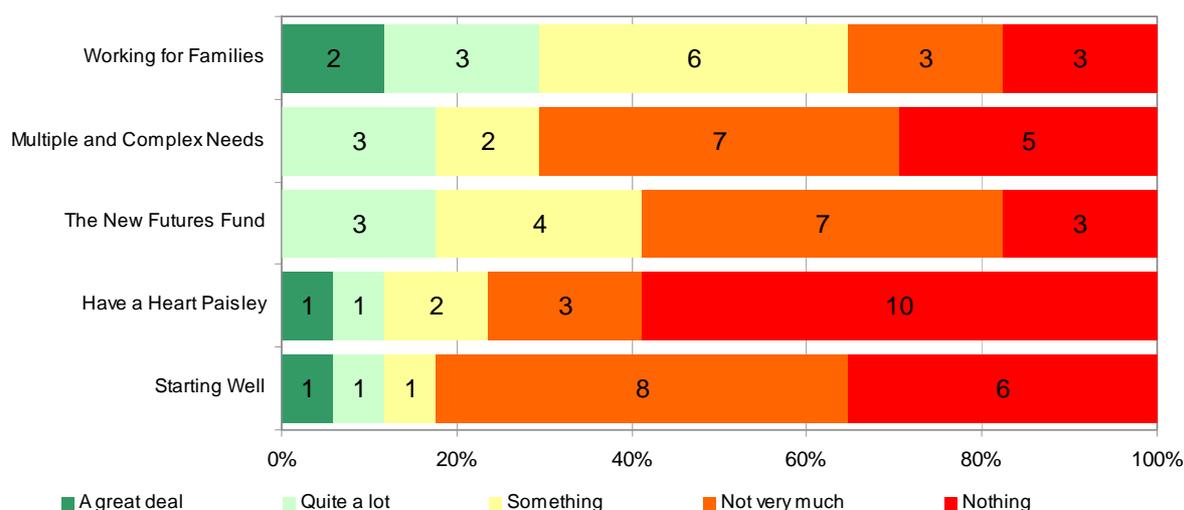
Key Messages - Policy Development Generally:

- Community Planning Partnerships and Single Outcome Agreement structures were considered particularly important to the policy development process.
- There was also evidence of engagement with partner organisations and different population sub-groups.
- Community involvement in policy design is elicited through engagement networks, consultations, strategic forums, qualitative feedback, and public service panels.
- Respondents highlighted a wide range of different local authority committees, boards, teams and panels which they refer to when developing new policies.
- Assessment and benchmarking tools included feeding lessons learned into continuous professional development, impact and risk assessment tools and (unspecified) scrutiny arrangements.
- The use of research and analysis was also mentioned.

(b) AWARENESS AND IMPACT OF THE FIVE SPECIFIC EVALUATION REPORTS

4.9 A specific concern of this research was to examine the ways in which the evaluation reports from five Scottish Government funded programmes/projects have been used to inform national and local government policy making. Table two shows levels of awareness among local government survey respondents of the five different programmes/projects (as opposed to the evaluation reports).

Table 2: Awareness of the five Scottish Government funded programmes/projects



4.10 Levels and degrees of awareness were highest for the Working for Families programme with nearly 30% (5 respondents) knowing a great deal or quite a lot about it and another 6 respondents knowing something about the programme. This was followed by the Multiple and Complex Needs programme, with the New Futures Fund following a similar pattern of awareness, particularly in terms of those who knew a great deal (none) and quite a lot (3 respondents). The New Futures Fund differed from Multiple and Complex Needs in that slightly more (4 as opposed to 2 respondents) knew something about the fund and less (3 as opposed to 5 respondents) knew nothing about it.

4.11 Have a Heart Paisley registered the second lowest level of awareness of the five specific programmes/projects, with 76.4% (13 respondents) stating they knew not very much or nothing about it. This may be in part due to the local nature of the project.

4.12 Knowledge about Starting Well was lowest among the specific programmes/projects enquired about, with 35.3% (6 respondents) suggesting they knew nothing about it and 47.1% (8 respondents) indicating they did not know very much.

Use and impact of the 5 specific project evaluation reports to inform policy development

- 4.13 Of the 14 respondents who answered the question on use, under half (6) said “yes” they had used evidence from the specific evaluation reports to inform their policy development. Respondents who answered “yes”¹⁹ were then asked to indicate – on a scale of 1-5 (1 being a lot and 5 being not at all) - how extensively they had used the evaluations to inform their policy development work. For Working for Families, 44.4% (5 respondents) indicated that they had used the evaluation report quite a lot to inform their subsequent policy development, one respondent indicated they had used this report a few times and three said not at all. Twenty-five per cent (2 respondents) indicated that they had used the lessons learned and recommendations from the Multiple and Complex Needs evaluation report quite a lot or a few times and one said not very often. However, 62.5% (5 respondents) stated they had not used the findings at all.
- 4.14 Responses on use of the New Futures Fund evaluation were less intense, with 50% (4 respondents) registering they had used the report but not very often, and 50% showing they had not used it at all. Of those aware of the Starting Well evaluation, 75% (6 respondents) said they had not used the report at all. While one respondent indicated they had used the findings a few times, the same number suggested they had not used the report very often. The Have a Heart Paisley evaluation report registered the lowest level of impact with 87.5% (7 respondents) indicating they had not used it at all. The one respondent, who had used it, had done so only a few times.

How extensively have local government research and policy officers used the five specific evaluation reports

- 4.15 When asked to provide examples on how they have used possible lessons learned or recommendations from the five specific evaluation reports it was clear – similar to chapter 3 - that such findings have proved helpful in both policy and practical terms. Respondents stated that these evaluations have enabled them to: reflect on what is happening and could happen; set priorities and formulate implementation plans; and develop a strategic approach which pulls together different national and local policy frameworks to address the tackling poverty and inequalities agenda.
- 4.16 In particular, the Working for Families Fund evaluation has been used to help direct services at a specific group of people and deliver services to them in a variety of locations. Further, the Working for Families data has encouraged local authority officers to work in partnership with other services and engage more flexibly with hard to reach users.

¹⁹ It should be noted that more than 6 respondents answered this question in relation to all 5 evaluations, as follows: Working for Families (9 respondents); Multiple and Complex Needs (8 respondents); the New Futures Fund (8 respondents); Have a Heart Paisley (8 respondents); Starting Well (8 respondents).

- 4.17 Similarly (on the latter above), one respondent stated that Multiple and Complex Needs findings were - *“influential in developing specific projects to improve access to financial inclusion advice services for BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] communities and people with mental health issues.”*
- 4.18 The use of findings to inform funding decisions was also evident, as was the usefulness of Working for Families Fund data in shaping the development of one local authority’s Single Outcome Agreement. Here the evaluation was used to build-up area profiles and determine indicators. In addition, elements of thinking from the Working for Families Fund and Multiple and Complex Needs evaluation reports were contained in another local authority’s employability model as were aspects of the Starting Well findings which influenced their anticipatory care approaches.

How the specific evaluation reports informed tackling poverty and inequality policies in particular

- 4.19 When the specific project evaluations were used by local authority staff, in the majority of cases - (85.7% or 6 out of the 7 who responded to this question) - tackling poverty and inequality were the specific aims of their subsequent policy development. Respondents used these findings to: highlight the complexity and limitations of tackling poverty and inequality programmes and the level of partnership commitment required to fulfil them; to underpin local authority employability programmes; and to build-up the evidence base to develop a strategic approach.
- 4.20 Recommendations and lessons learned from the Working for Families evaluation in particular were used to develop and implement the Fairer Scotland Fund in one respondent’s area. An Aberdeenshire example highlighted how the local authority had used the evaluation data, along with other information and policy frameworks, to provide the evidence needed to inform a cross-cutting agenda.

How subsequent tackling poverty and inequality policies have impacted on poverty and inequality outcomes locally

- 4.21 Responses to this question largely focused on the practical actions taken as a result of reading the specific evaluation reports rather than on any tangible outcomes or impacts on poverty and inequality in their areas. For example, one respondent stated that:
- “We introduced the key worker model [from the Working for Families programme] to further develop 1-1 work with our most vulnerable families and subsequently have mainstreamed the team to ensure the work continues. This was seen as an effective way of tackling poverty and deprivation.”*
- 4.22 Another respondent highlighted how tackling poverty and inequality policies in their area, which had been influenced by one of the specific evaluations, had led to the integration of mainline local authority services with other types of services such as community based, specific child and family

services or early intervention initiatives. They hoped this would encourage greater access to and use of the Money Matters advice service.

- 4.23 Other examples included raising the awareness of all frontline staff to employability and child poverty issues and developing an approach which allows partners to operate a policy-led budget. The response which most clearly articulated tangible benefits stated that subsequent tackling poverty and inequality policies had increased income through welfare benefits, reduced problem debt through money advice, reduced outgoings as a result of financial capability advice and, increased access to affordable credit and other mainstream financial products.

Why the specific evaluation reports were not useful to some

- 4.24 Respondents were asked to indicate why they had not found the programme/project evaluations useful for informing their policy development work. A list of suggestions was provided and respondents were asked to tick all that apply.
- 4.25 Nearly 60% of respondents (7 of the 12 who responded to this question) used other sources of information besides the specific evaluation reports to inform policy development. A further 50% (6 respondents) indicated that they had used evidence from other evaluation reports (so not the 5 specific evaluations) to inform their policy development work. An equal number of respondents (25% or 3) stated that: they had not been expected to take the five specific evaluation findings into account; other colleagues had been less willing to take this evidence into account; and that they do not have the capacity to take lessons learned or recommendations into account.
- 4.26 A further 25% cited limited and/or no knowledge of the programmes/projects as an explanation for not using them, that the evaluations would have been part of the “mix”, and that the evaluations were not specifically related to their work. Lack of relevance and not having a mechanism in place for integrating and using lessons learned/recommendations was identified by a further 16.7% (2 respondents) whilst 8.3% (one respondent) highlighted they had insufficient support or training on how to implement findings.
- 4.27 Such findings indicate that the culture of the local authority, capacity in terms of time, support, training and the existence of a structure through which to adopt findings all affect the use of evaluation evidence. Knowledge of and the relevance of reports also appear to be contributory factors.

The influence of the specific programmes/projects on how respondents work locally

- 4.28 Just over half (57.1% or 8 of the 14 who responded to this question) indicated that how they work in their local authority had been influenced by one or more of the five Scottish Government funded programmes/projects. The remaining 6 respondents declared that how they worked had not been influenced by these programmes/projects.

- 4.29 When asked how the specific programmes/projects had positively or negatively influenced or changed the way they work one respondent thought that there was - *“closer working within our own local authority structure”* and another said the programmes had - *“reinforced the importance of childcare and considering the needs of parents in developing employability services.”* However, another respondent thought that - *“These projects have had a limited impact on change”* as while it is valuable to look at what happens elsewhere, to get ideas and learn from others, and to allow critical thinking to take place through such awareness raising, local working practices need to reflect local communities and meet their particular needs.

Knowledge about continuation of the five specific programmes/projects locally²⁰

- 4.30 Over half (58.3% or 7) of respondents indicated that some aspects of the Working for Families programme have been continued in their local authority area. In contrast, the majority did not know whether aspects of Multiple and Complex Needs (83.3% or 10 respondents), the New Futures Fund (71.4% or 10 respondents), Have a Heart Paisley (81.8% or 9 respondents) or Starting Well (90.9% or 10 respondents) had been mainstreamed and continued locally.

Which aspects of the specific programmes/projects have been continued locally?

- 4.31 The Working for Families programme itself, as well as the key worker model and the employability and financial inclusion aspects of Working for Families specifically, were cited most frequently as having been continued locally.
- 4.32 Another respondent indicated that aspects of some initial New Futures Fund projects had been continued although they were not funded to the same extent as previously.
- 4.33 Two others said that some of the previously funded programmes were being continued but they did not specify which ones, and another respondent was not sure as the work was being delivered by other services (employment and training).

How aspects of the specific programmes/projects have been continued locally

- 4.34 Responses to this question were limited and in some cases did not contain enough information to be clear. In one response, Working for Families has become a mainline service in the local authorities Economic Development section and although the number of staff had been reduced they had been made permanent when the ring-fenced funding ended. In three other local

²⁰ The survey asked if respondents knew of any aspects of the 5 programmes/projects that had been continued in their local area. The number of responses in relation to each evaluation was as follows: Working for Families (12 respondents); Multiple and Complex Needs (12 respondents); New Futures Fund (14 respondents); Have a Heart Paisley (11 respondents); Starting Well (11 respondents).

authorities, Working for Families has also been continued through a Workforce Plus Programme and Childcare Access Fund and through the Fairer Scotland Fund. A further respondent indicated their local authority was - *“Still dependent on short term specific funding”* to continue aspects of the specific programmes. While not identifying which programme they were referring to, another respondent stated that the work had been mainstreamed but that it was - *“not funded to continue to the same extent.”*

Why aspects of the specific programmes/projects were not continued locally

- 4.35 Responses were limited to this question as not all respondents had up-to-date knowledge of the five programmes/projects locally, particularly if they were not related to their work. Of those who responded, one pointed out that it was not so much that the programmes had not been continued but rather that they had either been integrated into existing work programmes such as childhood poverty and early year’s plans, or that they had not been funded but may have evolved despite this. Another respondent noted that elements of Multiple and Complex Needs were continued in their local authority by being embedded into the financial inclusion strategy. However another respondent stated that - *“Working for Families was not continued due to funding cuts.”*

Key Messages – Awareness/Impact of the Five Specific Evaluation Reports:

- Levels and degrees of awareness were highest for the Working for Families programme followed by Multiple and Complex Needs and the New Futures Fund. Have a Heart Paisley registered the second lowest level of awareness and respondents were least aware of Starting Well.
- Over half of respondents who were aware of the Working for Families evaluation report had used the findings to inform subsequent policy development.
- The Multiple and Complex Needs report had been used by 3 respondents, although 5 respondents stated that they had not used this evaluation at all.
- The New Futures Fund was used by four respondents, but not very often and the same number had not used it at all.
- Of the two respondents who used the Starting Well report, they had done so only a few times or not very often. The one respondent who had used the Have a Heart Paisley evaluation had done so only a few times.
- When used, findings from the five specific evaluations have proved useful, aiding reflection, priority setting, formulating implementation plans and developing strategic approaches to address the tackling poverty and inequalities agenda.
- The Working for Families evaluation has enabled respondents to directly focus and deliver services, engage more flexibly with users, work in partnership, shape a Single Outcome Agreement and inform an employability model. Multiple and Complex Needs findings influenced an employability model and the development of specific projects for Black and Ethnic Minority communities and people with mental health issues. Starting Well findings influenced one local authority's anticipatory care approaches.
- When using the five evaluation reports, tackling poverty and inequality were specific aims of subsequent policy development for many respondents.
- However, respondents struggled to identify examples of how using any of the five evaluations had impacted on poverty and inequality in their area. Instead they focused on changes to practice such as introducing the Working for Families key worker model.
- Local authority cultures, capacity in terms of time, support and training all appear to affect the take up of evaluation findings. Knowledge of and the relevance of reports were also highlighted as contributory factors.
- Seven respondents indicated that aspects of Working for Families had been continued locally. In contrast, ten respondents were not sure whether aspects of Multiple and Complex Needs or the New Futures Fund had continued. Most respondents were unsure about Have a Heart Paisley and Starting Well in this regard.
- Most frequently cited as being continued locally were the key worker model and the employability aspects of Working for Families.
- Continuation of aspects of the five programmes was secured either by mainstreaming the service or funding it, albeit in a more limited fashion, through other funding sources such as the Fairer Scotland Fund. In other instances the programmes had been integrated into existing work or strategies.

(c) WIDER USE AND IMPACT OF EVALUATION REPORTS AND EVIDENCE IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The use of quality filters to judge the quality of evaluation evidence

4.36 Although a small number of respondents were not aware of any quality filters in place to test the reliability of evaluation evidence, the following examples were highlighted by some:

- The judgement of the reader
- Using research from trusted and reliable organisations
- Guidance from service leads or group decision makers
- A requirement to look at additionality and what is Best Value
- Consultation with partnership working groups
- Considering specific evidence in context and discussing this with the appropriate groups
- Joint tasking
- Triangulation
- Qualitative feedback
- Tracking progress using project monitoring frameworks and early warning indicators.

Conditions and ways of working which facilitate the successful use of evaluation evidence

4.37 When asked to indicate what factors help to make effective use of evaluation evidence, respondents suggested that effectiveness is facilitated when there is a will to change and when policy makers are prepared to accept evaluation findings as significant. Here, ownership of the evaluation and policy area was also identified, as was the need for the evaluation to be linked with a policy response.

4.38 Access to appropriate information and resources as well as the skills range and knowledge of the individuals involved in policy development were also pointed out. The ability to engage with external groups such as COSLA, the Tackling Poverty Officer's Group, the Poverty Alliance and Community Planning Partnerships as well as local communities was also seen as important. Partners could be involved in utilising evaluation findings through strong partnership forums or stakeholder events, for example.

4.39 How evidence is presented was seen to make a difference, with a preference for well targeted, timely and bite-sized chunks of knowledge in short reports. The use of engaging methods such as graphics, mapping, cartoons and video were also recommended. Attention was further given to implementing such findings, with outcome delivery groups and strategic forums suggested as ways of improving use. Officers would also report findings to local authority committees, corporate management teams and cabinets.

- 4.40 It could be assumed that where the above conditions do not exist, the effective use of evaluation reports in policy development can be inhibited. Time (or lack of time) to read and do research, as well as financial and other resource pressures, were also highlighted as inhibiting factors.

Examples of where evidence has informed policy development and made a difference

- 4.41 Survey responses highlighted that evaluation evidence has been used to shape and inform a wide variety of policy development and practice at a local authority level. For example, research into deprivation and social exclusion in Shetland provided the evidence base to assist Shetland to recognise and tackle poverty and social exclusion work in an interlinked manner.
- 4.42 Data on healthy weight enabled strategic decision makers in another local authority to understand the complexity of the obesity problem and how to reverse this trend. Another example showed how Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation evidence contributed to Glasgow's policy on income deprivation and how employability programmes were shifted towards the hard-to-reach sector and the not-job-ready group in response to research on this subject. A further example explained how costs to the NHS were reduced and health outcomes were improved when evidence on increased requests for transport from a community based project were examined by another local authority.

The reasons why evaluation evidence has not been made use of

- 4.43 Given how positively evaluation evidence has been used in many contexts it was interesting to examine what conditions prevent effective use in other instances. Although one respondent did not think project evaluation reports are relevant to informing the development of new policies, this was a minority view. Of the 16 who responded to this question, the following factors (from a suggested – tick all that apply - list) were seen to prevent the use of evaluation evidence:

- Lack of time (6 respondents) and/or resources (4 respondents)
- Lack of awareness (5 respondents)
- Reluctance of colleagues to engage with evidence (5 respondents)
- Lack of a mechanism for integrating findings (3 respondents)
- Technical nature of some reports (1 respondent).

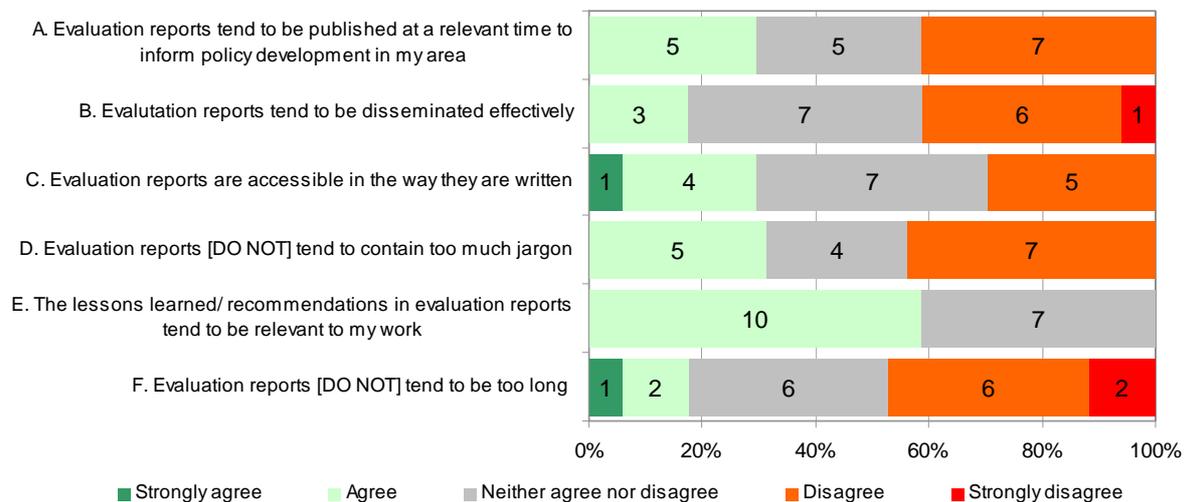
- 4.44 Other comments included:

- The reliability of some reports
- Lack of relevance of reports (such as national or urban reports)
- Absence of a culture of learning and reflection
- Timing of publications after the policy agenda has moved on.

Timing, dissemination, accessibility, relevance and length of reports

4.45 As table three shows, opinion about the timing of evaluation reports was inconclusive, with no-one strongly agreeing or disagreeing that they were published at a relevant time. While five respondents agreed reports were published at the right time, marginally more (7) disagreed with this.

Table 3: Views on timing, dissemination, accessibility, length and relevance



4.46 While nearly half of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that evaluations tended to be effectively disseminated, the same number disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the case. On balance, this shows significant concern exists amongst respondents about both the timing and dissemination of evaluation reports.

4.47 In relation to the accessibility of reports, opinion was equally weighted on whether reports were accessibly written or not, although marginally more respondents (7 as opposed to 5) did not have an opinion on this either way. When asked whether evaluations contained too much jargon slightly more (7 as opposed to 5) agreed that this was the case than disagreed.

4.48 The majority of respondents (10) agreed that evaluation reports tended to be relevant to their work although seven neither agreed nor disagreed that this was the case. Opinion about the length of reports was quite divided, with eight respondents indicating that they tended to be too long and six saying that they were unsure about this. Three respondents stated that they felt reports were not too long.

Which evaluation reports have been particularly influential in informing policy development?

- 4.49 Respondents highlighted a wide variety of evaluation reports as having been particularly influential in informing policy development in their area of work. Examples included key national and local government strategies such as the three national frameworks (*Achieving our Potential*, *Early Years Framework* and *Equally Well*). Nationally, reports and evaluations of the Fairer Scotland Fund, Growing up in Scotland²¹, Better Neighbourhood Services Fund²², Working for Families and More Choices More Chances²³, *Equally Well* and the tobacco plan were highlighted, as was the report²⁴ on the New Deal by Sheffield Hallam University that questioned the transformation aspect of the programme on communities in England.
- 4.50 In relation to regeneration, poverty and social inclusion specifically, evaluations of local investment/approaches and local poverty data featured strongly. Comparative health profiles were also identified as being of use.
- 4.51 A number of financial inclusion reports were also singled out as follows:
- Financial Capability Evidence Review
 - Review of Financial Education in Schools
 - Financial Inclusion Fund Evaluation
 - Review of Citizens Advice Financial Education Pilots
 - Money Advice for Vulnerable Groups.

Other factors and information which influence policy development

- 4.52 The survey also invited respondents to identify three other factors²⁵ and information which influence their policy development work besides project evaluation reports.
- 4.53 National (Scottish and UK) and local government policies, consultations and trends were identified as significant other factors. Specific initiatives such as Single Outcome Agreements and NHS policy were also mentioned. Local political interest, priorities and support were also highlighted as significant factors. As was the involvement of frontline staff and line managers. Input from strategic partners and local managers, senior council management and elected members was also valued. And so, as one respondent put it, were - "*Perspectives from the professional silos.*"
- 4.54 The views of service users elicited through community engagement and feedback and public service panels, Community Planning conferences and local area committees are also sought to influence policy development. Respondents also mentioned that they work with national campaigning

²¹ <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/gus/index.html>

²² for example: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/02/20105742/0>

²³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Life-Long-Learning/16581>

²⁴ A reference for this report was not provided.

²⁵ Thirteen respondents provided 2 other factors; 10 of these provided a third other factor.

organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Poverty Alliance and Save the Children.

- 4.55 Respondents also suggested that national and local statistics, research and administrative data, data gathering and monitoring and the ability to share best practice all influenced how they developed new policies. Factors which inhibit such development were subsequently identified. Again concern about staff time and skills sets, the availability of resources, budget cuts and funding opportunities were cited. The reality of competing needs was also highlighted, or as one respondent put it:

“...defensive performance management to protect positions in a climate of inspection and external review. The heavy hand of inspection looms for many despite [the apparent] “light touch.””

- 4.56 Overall, respondents indicated that these other factors were more influential to their policy development work than evaluation evidence.

Changes in the use of evaluation evidence over the last 5 years

- 4.57 When asked whether it has become easier or harder to make use of evaluation evidence over the last five years, 46.7% (or 7 respondents of the 15 who answered this question) indicated that it had become easier or much easier to do so. Slightly less (6 respondents) thought there had been no change and a further two believed it had become harder to make use of such evidence in their policy making.

- 4.58 In relation to whether it had become harder or easier to use evaluation evidence to influence decision making, responses erred more towards the negative. Six respondents (40%) thought it had become harder or much harder to do so, and the same number believed there had been no change. A further three disagreed and felt that it had become easier to influence decision making through the use of evaluation evidence.

- 4.59 Seven respondents (46.7%) believed that it had become easier or much easier to identify what makes a difference to improving outcomes for disadvantaged people and/or places. The same number thought there had been no change over the past five years in this respect, and one respondent thought it was now much harder.

The reasons why using evaluation evidence has become easier or harder over the last 5 years

- 4.60 Respondents indicated that progress has been made in the last five years on making more effective use of evaluation evidence. Factors contributing to increased ease of use included the:

- increase in availability of evaluation evidence (on the web for example)
- existence of better support networks and dissemination of findings
- existence of the Communities of Practice websites.

- 4.61 The proliferation of such data is counterbalanced, however, by the limited time people have to read and engage with this material (as in chapter 3), as explained by one local government officer:

“People are more aware of the information but time is needed to make sure that the information is relevant, easily accessible and understood before it can be used to inform practice or policy and that foundation is sometimes rushed and therefore not as effective as it could be.”

- 4.62 Less positively, one respondent felt that - *“there was a gap between the evidence base which is improving, and the political will to accept it”*. This view was not shared by all, however, and a more widespread commitment to evidence based policy making was highlighted by other respondents, one of whom said that - *“we’re rightly pressed to have evidenced based approaches”*. It was also pointed out that this demand for evidence can be for more quantitative information.

- 4.63 Another respondent drew attention to the improved quality of evidence gathering and subsequent decision making over the last five years, stating that:

“We have good analysis of need: SNS [Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics], Know Fife Dataset and Community Planning milestones as outcome measures. We also know a lot more about how to feed good evidence into key decisions at the right time. But decision making has become pre-occupied with financial responses to a dire budgetary climate [and] that overwhelms how a more knowledge-able [sic] organisation should ideally work.”

- 4.64 Respondents highlighted that policy makers operate within a wider institutional and political context and they are dependent on the views of others when progressing new policies. As one respondent stated that - *“A lot relies on key individual decision makers. Silo thinking and local politics/elected members influencing decision making is much more difficult when resources are being reduced and this will become much harder in the future.”*

- 4.65 As highlighted in chapter 3, the implication is that restricted resources may result in less progressive policy making. This view was corroborated by another respondent who said that – *“better and more frequent evidence [is] available but in an increasingly difficult financial and political context.”*

- 4.66 Increased pressure on public finances was highlighted as having key influence on the effective take-up of evaluation recommendations and was a common concern among respondents as explained by one officer:

“It is harder for evaluation evidence to influence decision making as funding is far more restricted than it had been previously, therefore it is harder to develop new services to meet the needs identified in evaluations.”

4.67 Further, a fear was expressed that anti-poverty initiatives and the ability to use innovative methods would suffer in the current climate of public service cuts. While the skills, knowledge and inclination is there to use evaluation evidence more fully, time and resource pressures may increasingly prevent this being realised.

4.68 It was also evident from the survey responses (as in chapter 3) that the differing demands of the policy and research cycles can limit the effective use of evaluation evidence, for example:

"[It] is harder to make use of evaluation evidence due to the time pressures of policy development and the time lag in evaluation evidence becoming available. The funding culture has also not assisted, where it becomes a funding pressure and not a lessons learned focus" (local government officer).

Key Messages - The Wider Use and Impact of Evaluation Reports and Evidence in Policy Development:

- Respondents outlined a number of different quality filters they use to assess the efficacy of evaluation evidence. These included using research from reliable/trusted sources, reader judgement, guidance from decision makers and consultation with Community Planning Partnership working groups.
- How evidence is presented was also seen to make a difference to usefulness, with a preference for well targeted, timely and short reports. Ownership of the evaluation, linking it to a particular policy response and the ability to engage with external groups were also seen to help.
- A number of examples were given which illustrated how evaluation evidence has been used to shape and inform a wide variety of policy development and practice (see page 36).
- Perceptions of why evaluation evidence had not been used in some instances included: lack of time, resources, awareness, relevance, and a mechanism through which to engage with material; colleague's reluctance to engage and the absence of a culture of learning and reflection; and the technical nature and timing of some reports.
- Respondents highlighted a wide variety of evaluation reports that had been influential to informing policy development locally. A number of financial inclusion reports were also singled out (see page 38).
- Other factors which influence policy development included national and local government policies, consultations and trends, as well as specific initiatives like Single Outcome Agreements. Local political interest, involvement from managers and frontline staff, strategic partners and elected members were also cited as being important.

Key Messages (continued) – The Wider Use and Impact of Evaluation Reports and Evidence in Policy Development:

- The existence of national and local statistics, data gathering and monitoring and the ability to share best practice also influenced how new policies were developed.
- Opinion about whether it had become easier or harder to make use of evaluation evidence over the last five years was inconclusive with a similar proportion thinking things had either become easier or had not changed and a further two respondents thinking it was harder.
- Views on whether it had become easier or harder to use evaluation evidence over this time period followed the same pattern as above, although slightly more respondents thought it had become harder to influence decision making through the use of evaluation evidence.
- Seven respondents believed it had become easier to identify what makes a difference to improving outcomes for disadvantaged people and/or places. The same number thought there had been no change.
- Respondents indicated that the increased availability of evaluation evidence (and other research) on the web for example, the existence of better support networks, improved dissemination and the existence of the Communities of Practice websites had all contributed to improved use of evaluation data in recent times.
- Widespread commitment to evidenced based policy was noted by respondents, as was the improved quality of evidence gathering and subsequent decision making.
- Concern was repeatedly expressed about the *“dire budgetary climate”*. Respondents feared this pre-occupation could threaten to overwhelm the ways in which more knowledgeable organisations should ideally be working. It was also implied that restricted resources could result in less progressive and innovative policy making and failure to adopt evaluation recommendations (particularly in relation to anti-poverty action). A *“climate of inspection and external review”* was also cited as creating a defensive approach to policy development.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

- 5.1 This research indicates that there is widespread commitment from research and policy officers as well as national and local politicians to evidence-driven policy making. However, there is also evidence that awareness of evaluation reports may be higher than the actual use made of them or their impact on subsequent policy development. Research participants emphasised how policy making and research activity do not operate in isolation and indicated that at times the effective use of evaluation recommendations could be complicated by the demands of the policy cycle and new political imperatives. Although it was generally felt that the will was there to ensure such work was taken seriously and adopted where possible.
- 5.2 Considerable concern was expressed about lack of time, resource capacity and funding. Participants feared that a growing institutional commitment to using evaluation evidence would be compromised by the reality of budget cuts. As well as imposing real restrictions on the ability to adopt recommendations, it was also felt that this economic climate might introduce a less progressive policy making culture in more general terms.
- 5.3 Although limited in scope, findings from this research provide a picture of how evaluation material is currently viewed and utilised. Examples of where evaluation findings and evidence more widely have impacted on subsequent policy development were highlighted. Participants identified factors which restrict access to and the adoption of such reports whilst also making a number of simple, practical suggestions for how evaluation evidence can be used more effectively.
- 5.4 While there are more deep seated structural considerations which cannot be directly influenced by local and Scottish Government policy and research officers, it is also clear that many of the recommendations contained in this report could be acted upon and could substantially contribute to the improved adoption of evaluation evidence in the public sphere. It is hoped that this report will provide the impetus to review project reporting more widely and work with relevant partners to improve the use made of this facility.

Recommendations – What makes a successful evaluation report

- 5.5 The following recommendations are drawn from observations made by research participants (interviewees and survey respondents). Their views primarily relate to what makes a successful evaluation report (and hence evaluation itself), research impact and the institutional processes and relationships which underpin this work. Views concentrated on: structure and content; timing; dissemination; and policy relevance and usefulness.

5.6 Structure and content:

- be **concise** (accompanied by briefing papers, policy specific summaries, learning notes and a maximum 12 page summary as well as a full research report online if required).
- maintain a workable balance between **research integrity and what policy colleagues need**.
- be **accessible**, in plain English and “*not too technical*”; three interviewees particularly mentioned academics writing for academic audiences rather than policy audiences.
- demonstrate that a **robust** monitoring and evaluation framework was in place.
- have **clear aims and objectives** and then **outcomes, recommendations** and/or action points and a conclusion. Recommendations should be short and practical.
- demonstrate **impact** - what has been learned and what has changed as a result of the findings.
- **highlight the way forward in policy terms**.
- demonstrate a **clear understanding of the Scottish context**, systems and structures.
- have – before publication - a period of **reflection** for those involved (e.g. communities, practitioners and national and local policy leads).

5.7 Timing:

- evaluations should be properly built into the policy planning process and be **responsive** to any changes in the policy landscape.
- the research process should be **iterative** and findings should be produced and disseminated as quickly and effectively as possible (as interim findings if possible) in order to inform the live policy development process.

5.8 Dissemination:

- should **not be done to tick a box** in order to say a report has been produced.
- reports should not be an end in themselves but should be used as a “**learning resource**” nationally and locally.
- reports should be **followed up more effectively** for example with direct dialogue/engagement with stakeholders (getting out there, spending more time out of the office, speaking and listening to people, presenting at conferences and so on).
- should be **accompanied by learning notes, short briefing papers, action enquiry groups** and “**how to guides**” targeted at different audiences; thus building dissemination in from the outset.
- reports should be disseminated more effectively through **national and local learning networks**.

5.9 Policy relevance and usefulness:

- have a **pre-implementation stage** – establish ownership and commitment and involving as many stakeholders as possible – ensure everybody concerned is

clear from the outset what the evaluation is intended to achieve and how it will make an impact.

- prioritise effectively and if necessary produce less work that is more relevant. For example, **be clearer with partners about what to prioritise** and encourage them to work together to break cycles of poverty and secure savings.
- have **engaged**, interactive and “hands on” **evaluators**.
- **accurately identify and address the target audience**.
- produce **a useful document** which will not simply “sit on peoples’ shelves.”
- **translate evidence into practice and national strategies/policies into local contexts** (and on the latter vice versa).

Recommendations - Practical actions to improve research impact

5.10 Scottish Government policy officers:

1. Develop and agree (between analysts and policy officers) a **house style and guidelines** on what evaluation reports should consist of, what they should achieve and how they should be presented and disseminated.
2. **Undertake a cross-government check** on who else might be working on a particular policy/evaluation area and examine how the work will impact on other parts of the Scottish Government’s research and policy work.
3. **Establish a “policy forum”** on the intranet through which to briefly post current policy developments, their aims and objectives, target group/s, analytical input, outcomes and possible overlap with other policy areas – this would provide colleagues across government with an accessible overview of current policy developments and related research and avoid duplication whilst ensuring more effective cross-team working.
4. Provide **training for policy officers** on how to make the best use of research and evaluation evidence.
5. Produce **a supplementary 2-4 page policy specific evaluation report summary template** (as an alternative to the current Social Research Findings Report template).
6. Act as a nucleus for gathering and disseminating local, national and international evidence on specific thematic areas – these “**bulletins**” could be disseminated through various professional and strategic networks and would help to inform colleagues and external partners and prevent duplication of effort.
7. Make more effort to **speak directly to the analyst involved** in producing the evaluation in order to gain a better understanding of the data.
8. **Work more collaboratively** with key organisations that focus on social determinants of health and poverty such as the Glasgow Centre for Population Health and NHS Health Scotland.
9. **Engage champions** to share evidence and lessons learned (the Chief Medical Officer and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health were particular mentions).

5.11 Local authority survey respondents:

1. Ensure “**colleagues value the contribution and act upon evaluation evidence.**”

2. **Develop closer working relations** between Scottish Government researchers and local government officers.
3. **Use the opportunities of Single Outcome Agreement**, their links and structures, to develop better networking and draw clearer links to the **National Outcomes**.
4. Develop **more time and opportunities for strategic discussion** and capacity for internal consultancy and project groups.
5. **Encourage ownership of and commitment to evaluation work** by ensuring interested groups commission the work themselves.
6. **Develop more joined-up and consistent approaches** to research and policy development.
7. Undertake more **longitudinal studies**.