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Firstline

Evaluation Report

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**Lisa Holmes, Caroline Thomas,
Georgia Hyde-Dryden and Alison
Williams, Centre for Child and Family
Research - Loughborough University**

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Executive summary

Firstline designed and delivered a prototype leadership development programme for first line managers working in children and families social work. It aimed to enable good managers to become high-performing and influential leaders in social work and wider society. The project was led by the Firstline team within The Frontline Organisation.

The evaluation

The evaluation's key questions related to the experiences of those involved in the prototype; the effectiveness of the prototype in developing the Firstline Leaders (FLLs) as leaders; the effect of the prototype on local authorities, and the effect of local authorities on their FLLs' participation.

The prototype programme was delivered between September 2015 and March 2016. Forty FLLs were recruited from 8 local authorities. Thirty-seven completed the programme. They participated in a Kick-Off meeting; 3 2-day residential modules; 6 2-hour individual meetings with a Leadership Development Adviser (LDA); 3 on-site Action Learning Sets (ALSs) with other FLLs in their local authorities and a Wrap-Up meeting. The FLLs undertook a project, and assessments of their leadership styles and organisational climate. They also had the option to participate in simulated supervision sessions and verbal reasoning assessments.

A process evaluation was undertaken using a range of research methods between October 2015 and July 2016. An action learning approach was applied. The evaluation design evolved during the prototype. Qualitative data were collected from:

- observations of 8 Kick-Off and 8 Wrap-Up meetings; one LDAs debriefing meetings, and 3 2-day residential modules
- in-depth semi-structured telephone interviews with 27 of 37 FLLs, one month post-programme; 22 of 27 previously interviewed FLLs, 4 months post programme; all 6 residential Facilitators; all 10 LDAs; 3 of 4 members of the Technical Advisory Group; and 2 of 3 Reference Group members.
- in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the Firstline team
- focus Groups with the social work teams of 8 FLLs
- secondary analysis of film and other data collected by the Firstline team

Main findings

The FLLs gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about the programme. They were hungry for the opportunities it offered for their professional development. The majority considered that it represented the best training and professional development that they had received as managers and leaders.

Most of the FLLs suggested that their participation had been quite a shock to their systems. They acknowledged that the programme demanded that they examine and explore themselves in unexpectedly personal ways. They viewed the experience as challenging.

Unsurprisingly, given the short timescale for the evaluation, most of the findings relate to the implementation of the programme. Nevertheless, there were signs of the prototype having had a positive impact on the FLLs' leadership capabilities and social work practice.

The FLLs reported that the programme helped them to think more about other people's perspectives and be more reflexive. They learned to reframe issues, act differently, and view difficult situations more positively, and had become more mindful and self-aware.

The FLLs described their improved professional practice being applied to methods for supervision, and the leadership of team meetings, to encourage case discussion (rather than simply the agreement of next actions), and to influence change in their local authorities' policies and systems.

Social workers reported perceived improvements in their FLLs' capabilities for:

- learning and developing others (majority in all 8 focus groups). For example, social workers in 1 focus group described their FLL giving more specific and detailed feedback on practice observations
- holding to account (6 of 8 groups)
- analysis and decision making (4 of 8 groups)
- decision making (4 of 8 groups)

In relation to staff retention, since the completion of the programme, 4 leaders who had been planning to leave their posts had decided to stay. About a third (33%) had secured, or were considering applying for, more senior or new leadership positions.

In terms of the FLLs' impact on their organisational culture and systems, the majority reported using their learning and new confidence to influence their teams and those

working in similar positions within their authorities. A minority also gave examples of influencing senior managers. They described approaching challenging people and difficult conversations in new ways by looking at situations differently and being more aware of other people's perspectives.

Most senior managers had difficulties distinguishing between the Firstline programme's wider impact on their organisations and that of other developments within their authorities, for instance, the restructuring of services. Nevertheless, they reported that they intended to use FLLs' projects to spread the FLLs' learning from the programme across their authorities and, in some instances, for FLLs to contribute to the development of policy and practice beyond their immediate teams.

The recruitment process for the programme was effective in selecting FLLs who were able to respond positively and well to a range of opportunities the programme offered for their learning and development. (The FLLs reacted differently to different parts of the programme according to their different learning styles.) A small minority struggled to respond positively to their LDAs' challenge and feedback, and may not have had the required capacity to change.

Findings related to the programme's core components

The programme was viewed as a whole package. All the core components – the individual sessions with a LDA, residential events, ALSs and project – enabled FLLs to trial new or different leadership skills. All the FLLs particularly valued support and challenge from their LDAs. The LDAs were highly skilled and experienced. The FLLs also appreciated the opportunity that the Firstline programme provided to focus on their learning away from the demands of their usual work and home environments during the residential modules. The opportunities the residential modules offered for FLLs to learn from other FLLs in other local authorities were also universally valued. The Facilitators were judged to be of high calibre.

The experiences of the ALSs were more mixed, with 2 of the 9 groups working well. In future the leadership of ALSs needs to be more consistent, and issues of confidentiality and trust need more careful attention. Nevertheless, most FLLs were inspired by learning within a peer group at a local level to try to continue to meet in local and/or regional group ALSs. The interviews with FLLs at 4 months after the completion of the programme suggested that they may need more local support to do so.

The FLLs and LDAs also had mixed experiences of the projects: some FLLs were quickly able to identify a project aim, which aligned with their personal goals and gained a lot of learning from it, while others struggled to understand what was required. In future, more clarity is needed about whether the primary focus of the

project should be on the FLLs' personal development as a leader or effecting changes within their authorities.

The majority of the FLLs were positive about the diagnostic exercises, even if they had not enjoyed the process of completing the related surveys. Most felt that their reports and verbal feedback had provided them with welcome new knowledge about themselves. They particularly appreciated the insight they gained from the feedback from their social work teams, some of which challenged their self-perceptions. The small number (6) of FLLs who were interviewed and participated in the simulated supervision sessions welcomed an extra opportunity to learn something about themselves and/or their leadership skills as supervisors of social workers.

All the 22 FLLs who were interviewed for a second time reported that they had been able to sustain their learning to varying degrees following completion of the programme. About two-thirds (67%) of them had continued to progress their projects. They acknowledged it was difficult for them to maintain momentum and contact with other FLLs, and required more support to do so. Limitations on the FLLs' time and heavy workloads were cited by half (50%) of them as hindering their continued learning.

Implications and recommendations for policy and practice

The evidence gathered about the experience and effectiveness of the prototype programme suggests that the Firstline programmes should be encouraged and expanded with continuing evaluation. All those who participated in the evaluation agreed that there was a continuing need for leadership development programmes within children and families social work. Within the field, the Firstline programme is targeted at good managers to enable them to become high-performing and influential leaders in social work and wider society. A minority of senior managers from the local authorities expressed concerns that the programme was elitist. The Firstline team, therefore, needs to continue to emphasise its rationale for investing in the already good managers in relation to its mission. The evaluation highlighted the need for a national strategy for leadership development in social work to ensure that the development needs of other first line managers in children and families social work are also met.

The Firstline programme has several unique selling points within the current market for leadership development programmes in children and families social work, which are likely to determine its effectiveness. It offers FLLs an opportunity to learn and develop through a series of individual sessions with LDAs; the Firstline team works with the FLLs' senior managers, and has a focus on systems change. Its future sustainability will, to some extent, depend on the costs to FLLs and/or the local

authorities, and the size of the budgets available for supporting workforce development within children's services, which were reported as currently being under extreme pressure.

Overview of the project

The Firstline team designed and delivered a prototype leadership development programme for first line managers working in children and families social care. It aimed to enable good managers to become high-performing and influential leaders in social work and wider society. It was not designed for all first-line managers.

The Firstline team views first-line managers as agents for 'transformational practice in social work', with significant power to affect the quality of service delivery. Linked to this vision, the Firstline team's broader and longer-term aim was to change the culture within the participating local authorities to be more supportive to, and challenging of, the management of social work practice. It sought to redirect more of the managers' skills and expertise towards the development of excellent practice, rather than the management of processes.

The Firstline team explains:

The Firstline programme is tailored specifically to social work managers, already in post and operating at a good level. The decision to do so was taken after much calculated deliberation which focussed wholly on how to ensure the programme had the greatest possible impact on:

- individual development - by ensuring the cohort is at a similar point in their development and the content is pitched high - so that individuals are driven and challenged
- system wide improvement by:
 - focussing on those already operating within, and therefore maximising the existing knowledge of, the local authority practice system
 - targeting those in the profession that can have the most, and most immediate, impact, thus driving the upward movement of the workforce
- ensuring the best chance of sustainability – by developing an aspirational programme that genuinely stretches Firstline Leaders we improve their reputation and therefore long-term marketability

The initial concept for the Firstline programme and its theory of change¹ was generated by The Frontline Organisation's leadership team, and the funding for the prototype was secured by The Frontline Organisation². The project was then developed and implemented by a dedicated Firstline team based at The Frontline Organisation's head office. The Firstline team created the structure of the prototype programme, and the content subsequently evolved as findings emerged from the research. In the early stages of the programme's development, the team was also advised by a Technical Advisory Group and a Reference Group. The development of the prototype and the implementation process were overseen by The Frontline Organisation's Board.

To achieve its aims, the project was divided into 3 parts:

- research and analysis
- a method to raise partner local authorities' awareness of actions needed to improve and sustain the working environments required for outstanding leadership in children and families social work
- the development and delivery of the prototype of the Firstline leadership programme

Part 1: Research and analysis

To ensure the Firstline programme focused on the factors that have an effect on first line managers, research was undertaken to:

- define outstanding first-line management in a children's social care context
- identify the factors in a local authority context that help or hinder first line leaders
- define what organisations can do to improve effective first line leadership

The research was a collaboration between the Firstline team and the Hay Group³.

¹ See Appendix 1.

² The Frontline Organisation is a charity which provides a new practice-based training route into social work. See: [The Frontline](#).

³ The Hay Group is a long-established global management consulting firm which works with the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, across all major industries. See: [The Hay Group](#).

Part 2: Raising partner local authorities' awareness of actions to support outstanding leadership

The Praxis tools and exercises were designed to help Firstline to work collaboratively with each of its partner local authorities to identify any actions that were needed to improve and sustain the working environments required for outstanding leadership in children and families social work.

Part 3: Development and delivery of the prototype of the Firstline leadership programme

Forty Firstline Leaders (FLLs) were recruited to the prototype from 8 partner local authorities. To be eligible for the programme they were required to be spending the majority of their time managing social workers. The group included a mix of team managers, assistant team managers, senior social workers, and consultant social workers.⁴ They came from different parts of the children's social care system, including referral and assessment, child protection and fostering teams.

The FLLs participated in the programme between September 2015 and March 2016 and during this 7-month period, FLLs participated in:

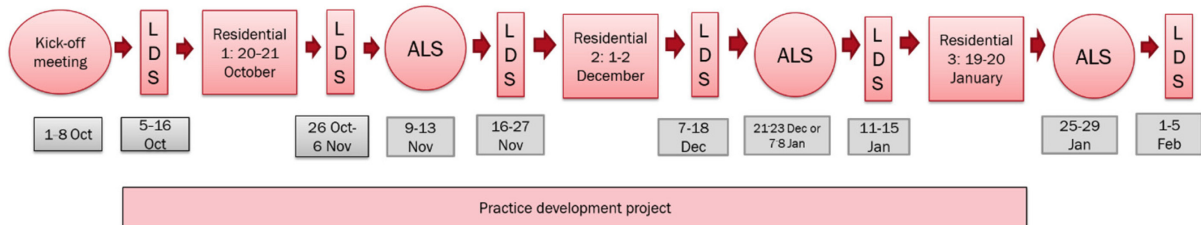
- a Kick-Off meeting
- 3 2-day residential modules
- 6 2-hour 1-to-1 meetings with a Leadership Development Adviser (LDA)
- 3 on-site Action Learning Sets (ALSs) with other FLLs in their local authorities
- a Wrap-Up meeting

The FLLs also undertook a project, and assessments of the leadership styles and the climate they experienced and created within their teams. They were also offered an opportunity to participate in simulated supervision sessions and verbal reasoning assessments.

⁴ A 'consultant social worker' is an experienced social worker leading and/or supervising a small group of social workers, usually reporting to a team manager or equivalent, also referred to as a senior practitioner or senior social worker.

The timeline below (reproduced from the Firstline leadership programme handbook) illustrates the sequence of individual elements that made up the prototype Firstline Leadership Programme.

Figure 1: Programme timeline



Context within which the programme was delivered

The FLLs were recruited from 3 London Boroughs and 5 Metropolitan Borough Councils from across Northern England. The prototype programme did not include any Unitary or County Councils, although this is unlikely to have any significant bearing on the programme's future transferability to such areas.

Overview of the evaluation

The evaluation focused on aspects of the third part of the project, as detailed above. The overarching aims of the evaluation were to explore the implementation and effectiveness of the prototype programme in the 8 participating local authorities at:

- a Firstline Leader level, by examining the extent to which the Firstline development programme enabled good managers to become high-performing and influential leaders
- a systems level, by considering the FLLs' organisational climate

The key evaluation questions were:

- how did the FLLs and those involved in the development and delivery of the programme experience the prototype programme?
- how effective was the prototype in developing the FLLs as leaders, and enabling and supporting them to put their learning into practice?
- what effect did the partner local authorities' have on the FLLs' learning and development from the prototype, and what effect did the FLLs' participation in the prototype have on the partner local authorities?

Methods

A process evaluation was undertaken using a range of qualitative research methods. An action learning approach was applied to support the Firstline team's reflective learning approach to their work, and to allow for the ongoing and future development of the Firstline programme to be informed by emerging findings. There was an open dialogue and exchange of information between the Firstline and the evaluation team. Furthermore, the design of the evaluation evolved over the course of the delivery of the prototype programme to ensure that the data collection and analysis remained appropriate. A mixed methods approach was used for the data collection and analysis between October 2015 and July 2016. This included the collection of primary data, a series of observations, and the secondary analysis of data that were collected by the Firstline team. The following data were collected during and after the delivery of the programme between October 2015 and February 2016:

- observation of a Kick Off and Wrap-Up meeting in each of the 8 local authorities
- observation of 3 2-day residential events in York
- online survey of 27 of the 39 FLLs who began the programme, between the first and second residential

- observation of a large group debriefing meeting in London of the 10 LDAs with the Firstline team at the end of the programme
- in-depth semi-structured telephone interviews with:
 - 27 of the 37 FLLs who completed the programme, 1 month after the completion of the programme⁵
 - 22 of the 27 FLLs who had been interviewed previously, 4 months after the completion of the programme
 - All 6 of the Facilitators of the residential modules
 - All 10 of the LDAs
 - 10 of 14 Senior Managers in partner local authorities
 - 3 of 4 members of the Technical Advisory Group
 - 2 of 3 members of the Reference Group
- in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 4 members of the Firstline team
- focus groups with the social work teams of 8 FLLs⁶

The evaluators also analysed data collected by Firstline, including film from a sample of LDA sessions and FLLs' brief descriptions of their projects, and examined the Evidence Capture Reports from the 8 Praxis exercises⁷.

⁵ The evaluation team knows from discussions with FLLs immediately after Wrap-Up meetings that those who did not participate in interviews felt too busy and/or that they had already provided sufficient feedback on the programme directly to the Firstline team. The evaluation team is confident that the overall views and experiences of the programme of the FLLs who were interviewed were similar to those who were not from their contributions to the Wrap-Up meetings.

⁶ Twenty-seven FLLs were asked at the end of their first interview if, in principle, they would be willing to ask their teams to participate in a focus group. The majority agreed to do so. The minority who did not agree explained that they were working with new teams who would not have observed changes in their leadership since the start of the programme. One social work team was then selected for a focus group in each of 7 of the 8 local authorities. Two social work teams were selected from the authority with the largest number of FLLs. The selection ensured the evaluation included a range of teams who were led by Senior Social Workers, Team Managers or Consultant Social Workers. Subsequently, it was not possible to arrange a group in 1 of the local authorities because of staff turnover.

⁷ See page 33 for a description of the tools and exercises.

Key findings

How far has the innovation achieved its intended outcomes?

The 3 parts of the Firstline project have been completed:

- the research and analysis has been published (Firstline, 2015)
- the Praxis method has been developed and implemented
- the prototype of the Firstline leadership development programme has been developed and delivered

This process evaluation has focused on the outcomes of the third part of the project: that is, the experiences and effectiveness of the leadership development programme, and addressed the key evaluation questions referred to above.

The key findings are that the FLLs were overwhelmingly positive about participating in the programme, and experienced it as thought-provoking, challenging and rewarding. They reported that it had been quite a shock to their systems and acknowledged that the programme demanded that they examine and explore themselves in unexpectedly personal ways. The Leaders provided examples of ways in which the programme had had a positive impact on their professional leadership. Social workers in the FLLs' teams and their senior managers also reported that they had perceived changes in the FLLs' leadership capabilities. The evaluation found particular evidence of improved professional practice being applied to the FLLs' methods for supervision, team meetings and influencing change in policies and systems within their authorities.

These key findings relate to both the experiences and effectiveness of the programme and are presented in more detail below. They are necessarily closely linked: the ways in which the programme was experienced had an impact on the extent to which it resulted in changes in FLLs and their local authorities. They are therefore presented together, first in relation to the components of the programme, and then the FLLs' social work teams, and the partner local authorities.

The experience and effectiveness of the prototype programme⁸

The FLLs regarded the programme as a whole package with the components – the residential modules, LDA individual development sessions, ALSs and projects – complementing each other:

It's almost like a tiered triangle, if you like, that builds from the residential modules. They were the bottom layer. The ALSs were the middle layer for me that brought in lots of learning from the residential - lots of the subject matter and group discussion. The top of the triangle, if you like, were the 1-to-1 sessions with the LDA - they just made sense of it ... It's a piece of learning that has 3 different elements - that build and build - which are quite distinctive but intrinsically linked. (FLL).

Residential modules

FLLs attended 3 2-day residential modules in York, which took place at intervals of approximately 6 to 8 weeks throughout the Firstline leadership programme. Each residential focused on a different theme: creating my personal vision; enabling change, and making it happen; and involved a mixture of formats including presentations, group exercises, role play, and paired and group discussions. The residential modules were led by skilled social work practitioners, systemic practitioners and facilitators specialising in leadership roles. Prior to each residential, FLLs were asked to complete some preparatory work, for instance, reading an article and considering its content before answering a number of questions.

It was evident that the FLLs enjoyed, and were energised by, the buzz of the residential modules. They relished time away from the demands of their usual work and home environments to commit to learning and development. There was a high rate of FLL attendance at all sessions – 1 FLL missed 2 days and 2 others missed 1 of the 6 days. The FLLs were highly engaged, and very rarely used their mobile phones to take calls or check their emails during sessions or in their breaks. Furthermore, Firstline had carefully considered how to reach people in different ways in its curriculum development. The FLLs valued different elements of the residential

⁸ The analysis of the data from the observations of large group meetings did not involve the quantifying of individual participants' views and experiences. Therefore, where the data analysis from these meetings has been combined with that from the interview datasets, proportions rather than specific figures have been provided to indicate the weight of the evidence.

modules according to their learning styles. The facilitators were of high calibre, and reflexive and exceptionally responsive to feedback between sessions and the residential days. They had good preparation and support from the Firstline team.

The residential modules also gave FLLs opportunities to meet and learn from other FLLs in their own and other local authorities. These large group experiences gave the FLLs a strong sense of belonging, which should help to strengthen their identities as leaders in social work and wider society. The Firstline team operated as a well-oiled machine for its organisation of the residential modules. The majority of the FLLs and Facilitators, and the Firstline team, were positive about them and the York location was considered by FLLs to be just the right distance from their homes and offices in the north and south. The hotels were experienced as comfortable with good catering, and the FLLs consequently reported that they felt valued and well looked after.

Leadership Development Advisors (LDAs)

Ten LDAs were recruited to work closely on an individual basis with FLLs to help them develop their leadership styles and skills through a combination of support, challenge and coaching. The LDAs were required to have at least one of the following:

- extensive experience managing social workers and an understanding of children's social work
- a qualification and experience of working with systemic approaches
- a qualification and experience of coaching

To assist the Firstline team in identifying the most appropriate LDA for each FLL, FLLs were asked to complete a short online survey. FLLs were then provided with biographies for at least 2 LDAs and asked to confirm their preference. The Leadership Development Sessions consisted of 6 2-hour meetings where FLLs and LDAs worked together on an individual basis.

The individual development sessions with their LDAs were the most well received part of the programme and it was evident that the FLLs had good relationships with their LDAs following careful matching by Firstline.⁹ The LDAs were perceived as highly skilled and experienced:

She 'got us' after working with us for just 20 minutes. I don't have that with my supervisor. It was such a privilege to work with someone with her intellectual capacity. (FLL).

The FLLs appreciated the LDAs' focus on their learning, and/or constructive challenge, and/or encouragement to reframe information and reflect on others' perspectives.

The LDAs indicated that they were attracted to the Firstline team's clear mission, ethos and values, and were excited by their role, and had good training, preparation and support from the Firstline team.

It was an exciting way to effect change in an organisation – not supervision and not teaching. It wasn't management but helping leaders on a journey. The structure and support and good organisation of the programme helped make it a positive experience for me. And I felt contained in what was challenging, hard and difficult work. (LDA).

The programme was effective in encouraging 19 of the 27 FLLs to use, or plan to use, at the time of the first interview, elements of the LDAs' approaches to their one-to-one sessions in their supervision of their individual team members.

Action Learning Sets (ALSs)

Following each Residential, FLLs participated in a 2-hour Action Learning Set (ALS) with other FLLs from within their local authorities. The ALS were facilitated by LDAs using an agreed framework although it was intended that the sessions should be driven by FLLs to suit each group's needs. The ALS were designed to build on the insights and experience gained at the residential modules and allow FLLs to apply their learning to their own local authority context. It was intended that FLLs would be equipped with the necessary understanding to continue the ALS within their local authorities following completion of the Firstline programme.

⁹ Only 1 FLL changed their LDA during the course of the programme.

The majority of FLLs reported that theoretically the ALSs should have provided a good model for group working and reflection which should have allowed for the discussion of professional dilemmas and action planning. Just over half the FLLs questioned the effectiveness of the ALSs that were delivered during the prototype. The majority of these FLLs would have appreciated more clarity and focus about their purpose. Other challenges with the ALSs were raised, including inconsistencies in the timing of sessions and LDA facilitation¹⁰; difficulties with confidentiality and trust between participants; and tensions created by the inclusion of FLLs from different management levels within the same groups.

The ALSs in 2 of the 8 local authorities worked well, and were experienced as supportive and helped the FLLs to build confidence:

...We worked well together. We had a shared goal or view of what we wanted from it and we had two LDAs that were supportive, challenged, modelled, and focused. The sessions were fun, interesting, challenging, to us all... (FLL).

These positively experienced ALSs were characterised by:

- consistency in the participation of the LDAs
- issues of trust and confidentiality being dealt with well if they arose
- a shared understanding within the group about its purpose

Projects

To apply their learning from the Firstline programme, FLLs were asked to work on a practical project based on a tangible change and improvement they wanted to make in their local authority. LDAs were available to discuss FLLs' ideas and help them design an ambitious yet realistic project. The projects were completed prior to the final residential where a number were showcased at a celebration event attended by senior managers from local authorities.

The FLLs reported that the projects provided an opportunity to do something within their professional lives that they wanted to do. The FLLs used the projects in the following ways:

¹⁰ The LDAs expressed different views about the usefulness of 2 LDAs attending each session.

- to develop their own skills together with developing their team (25 FLLs)
- to develop their own skills to have an impact on the wider organisation (10 FLLs)
- to develop an individual within their team (2 FLLs)

Some projects focused on practice, such as introducing feedback from children and families into a quality assurance process to improve the service, and changing team cultures to improve relationships between teams. Others focused more on management, for example, facilitating systems of peer support for social workers or management groups, and developing supportive models of working with social workers who were struggling with particular aspects of their practice by offering a period of coaching and mentoring.

It was evident that the projects did not work as well as the Firstline team would have liked during the prototype. The FLLs had mixed experiences: some were able to identify quickly a project aim, which aligned with their personal goals for the programme and consequently gained a lot of learning from it. Others struggled to understand the concept and what was required of them. The FLLs wanted more clarity about whether the focus of the project should be on their own personal development as a leader or effecting changes within their local authorities. More clarity was also needed about its links, if any, to the development exercises in the recruitment process and the reports on their areas of development, the diagnostic exercises and the FLLs' wider development of their leadership skills. The timing (the length of time and the fact that the project spanned the Christmas holidays) was a challenge, particularly for those who were trying to have a positive impact on the wider organisation as they developed their own skills and completed the written element of the project, despite the briefest of written reports being required. It was also suggested that the project be renamed.

Twelve of the 27 FLLs who were interviewed described ways in which they were measuring the success of their project by using systems for formal or informal feedback and/or quantitative measures. Others found the measurement of success more challenging.

Diagnosics of Leadership Styles and Organisational Climates

The diagnostics were undertaken by the Hay Group and provided the FLLs with assessments of their leadership styles, the climate they experienced and the climate they created for others, and their personal motives and values. They involved FLLs and their team members completing online surveys. The data were used to create reports for each FLL. The Hay Group discussed the report feedback with FLLs individually.

The Leadership Styles Feedback Report provided FLLs with feedback on the measurement of their use of 6 leadership styles (Directive, Visionary, Affiliative, Participative, Pacesetting, and Coaching). It compared their own perception of their leadership styles with their behaviour as experienced by their teams. The feedback included quantitative scores which compared the FLLs' performance with a representative sample from the Hay Group's global database and comments from FLLs and their teams. Depending on the scores, the report then suggested actions that could be taken to improve their performance in each leadership-style category.

The Organisational Climate Feedback Report used 6 climate dimensions (Flexibility, Responsibility, Standards, Rewards, Clarity, and Team Commitment) to measure and compare participants' own perception of the organisational climate they create with that experienced by their teams. The feedback included quantitative scores (in figures and diagrams) which compared performance with a representative sample from the Hay Group's global database and comments about the scores attained in each dimension. Depending on the scores, the report then detailed the next steps that could be taken to improve the participant's organisational climate.

The majority of the FLLs were positive about the externally administered diagnostic exercises. They valued the individual feedback they received from the Hay Group. Most of the FLLs felt that their reports and verbal feedback had provided them with welcome new knowledge about themselves. They particularly appreciated the insight they gained from the feedback from their social work teams, some of which challenged their perceptions of themselves.

It showed me I was practising more styles than I thought. I didn't realise I was coaching and pace-setting as much as I was. (FLL).

Two-thirds (67%) of the 27 FLLs who were interviewed one month after the completion of the programme identified positive changes that they had made in their practice, or were planning to make, which they directly linked to the feedback on their leadership styles.

It increased my confidence. I've been a manager for 5 or 6 years and only been on a generic management course. I was feeling in the dark and trying to balance things. But it said there were things I was doing well and my style was effective, and helped me to develop new and different styles. (FLL).

Two-thirds (67%) of 24 FLLs¹¹ reported that they had used, or were planning to use, the feedback on their climates in discussions with their managers and/or senior managers, and/or in team meetings.

The process of completing the surveys that underpinned the diagnostic exercise was experienced by half (50%) of the 27 FLLs as challenging, with people using words such as 'tedious', 'laborious' and 'time consuming' to describe the process. This may in part have been related to the exercise being undertaken in the run up to the Christmas holiday when FLLs reported that they were feeling particularly pressured. A minority of FLLs wanted more guidance about whom in their teams to ask to complete the surveys. They also found their written feedback, particularly the diagrams relating to their climate, difficult to make sense of without seeing them in advance of their individual feedback session. A minority indicated that they had wanted more time to try to digest the content of the report before the feedback session.

There were mixed views on the most appropriate timing for the diagnostic. One LDA suggested that it had been useful to receive the diagnostic feedback at the end of the programme, as it reassured FLLs about their own understanding from their reflexive thinking. Another would have liked the report findings to have been available earlier, to use in individual development sessions. There was also a suggestion that, in the future, completing the diagnostic at the start and end of the programme would provide a useful form of benchmarking. In considering their own role in relation to the diagnostic, there was a suggestion that in the future, LDAs could be provided with more advanced information to enable them to better understand and discuss the report with FLLs.

¹¹ 24 of the 27 FLLs who were interviewed 1 month after the completion of the programme responded to questions about the diagnostic exercises relating to their climate.

Simulated supervision sessions

The simulated supervision sessions were an optional element of the programme. The FLLs were invited to take part in them during the second residential event. They were facilitated by the University of Bedfordshire. The FLLs and actors, who played the role of social workers, discussed case scenarios within a simulated supervision environment. The sessions were filmed and then assessed by the team at Bedfordshire. Personalised written feedback was then provided to the FLLs. The sessions and feedback were intended to provide FLLs with opportunities to reflect on, and review, their leadership skills as supervisors of social workers.

The 6 FLLs who were interviewed one month after completion of the programme, and had also chosen to participate in the simulated supervision sessions, welcomed an extra opportunity to learn something about themselves and/or their leadership skills as supervisors of social workers, in particular:

...To actually have someone external give you feedback on your supervision, it is something which is a bit of a privilege and something which you don't often get the chance to do, so I thought it to be useful. (FLL).

Those that declined the offer reported that they did so for a range of reasons including anxiety about the nature of the assessment, uncertainty about what they would learn, and competing demands on their time.

The sessions were offered at a point in the programme when the FLLs had recently completed their verbal reasoning assessment; and leadership styles and climate surveys, and received feedback from the diagnostics. The timing was unavoidable, given the overall timescale for the delivery of the programme.

Verbal Reasoning Assessments

The verbal reasoning assessments were another optional part of the prototype programme, introduced part-way through its delivery.

About four-fifths (80%) of the 27 FLLs who participated in the interviews a month after the completion of the programme had chosen to be assessed. About a quarter

(25%) of them thought it was a compulsory part of the programme. The FLLs did not receive feedback from the assessment.¹²

The Firstline team's internal analysis of the verbal reasoning scores for FLLs who were assessed found no link between the verbal reasoning results and the FLLs' scores in the development exercises. Analysis indicated that there was no link between the FLLs' scores in the selection process and the LDAs' assessment of their learning and development during the programme.

Continuing learning post programme-delivery

All but one of the 27 FLLs who were interviewed one month after the completion of the programme had considered how to continue their learning and development as a leader without the support of their LDA, and most had taken measures to do so. Just 3 FLLs mentioned in their first interviews being worried or concerned about the future of their learning and development without the support of their LDAs.

All the 22 FLLs who were interviewed for a second time¹³ reported that they had been able to sustain their learning to varying degrees following completion of the course. About two-thirds (67%) of them were able to identify progress with their projects since the end of the programme. They said it was difficult for them to maintain momentum and contact with other FLLs. Limitations on the FLLs' time and heavy workloads were cited by half (50%) of them as hindering their continued learning:

Because at the moment it's so busy and it doesn't seem to get any better. It's quite impossible to even sit and have time to reflect, let alone consider the learning. (FLL).

FLLs reported mixed experiences of continuing ALS sessions with colleagues after the prototype. Regular sessions had continued in one authority where the prototype ALS had worked well, and the Assistant Director had made systemic changes to allow time for FLLs to attend. There appeared to have been less success in continuing ALSs in other authorities. The FLLs explained this in terms of other

¹² The Firstline team was trialling the usefulness of the verbal reasoning assessments as a measure of leadership, and found that they offered no additional valuable insights. Without any qualitative feedback being available and/or any obvious benefits, the provision of comparable scores was judged to be potentially demotivating.

¹³ At approximately 4 months after the completion of the programme.

demands on their time rather than of the challenges involved with the prototype ALSs. FLLs in 2 of the 8 authorities were intending to run sessions in future.

Two FLLs, in their follow-up interviews, described having had contact with FLLs from other local authorities. The FLLs interviewed for a second time had found little use for the email group or online platform, which appeared to be due in part to technical issues¹⁴, which had prevented them from using it.

Effectiveness of the recruitment process

The recruitment process was led by a member of the Firstline team together with a qualified social worker holding a senior management position in each local authority, who had previous knowledge of the applicants. The process included a written assessment, reflective group discussion and individual interview. The questions in the development exercises were based on a capability framework developed by the Firstline team in collaboration with the Hay Group. The framework is a detailed description of the key behaviours and underlying skills, knowledge, abilities and attributes required for the role of a first line leader in children's social care. It covered moral purpose, holding to account, analysis and decision making, impact and influence, inspiring others, professional authority and resilience, and self-reflexivity. A scoring system was linked to the capability framework. The development of both the framework and its scoring system was informed by the Firstline team's research exercise (Firstline, 2015).

The Firstline team's standardised recruitment process was fair and transparent, and thorough and rigorous. It was effective in selecting FLLs who were able to respond positively and well to a range of opportunities which the programme offered for their learning and development. The FLLs reacted differently to different parts of the programme according to their different learning styles.

The process was generally effective in selecting FLLs who could use the support of their LDAs to put their learning into practice. The LDAs interviews and analysis of filmed LDA sessions suggested that a small minority struggled to respond positively

¹⁴ The FLLs' access to the email group was blocked by some local authorities' computer systems so they could only access the group via their home computers. Consequently, Firstline set up an online platform, and encountered similar problems to a lesser degree. Subsequent work has taken place via Frontline's Fellowship (alumni) and in the future the team will maintain contact with those who have completed the Firstline programme via this network.

to their LDAs' challenge and feedback, and may not have had the required capacity to change (Kegan and Lahey, 2009)¹⁵.

The use of a scoring system during the development exercises the FLLs undertook, related to the capability framework¹⁶, worked well to determine who should be invited to take part. The evaluation did not include any comparison groups of FLLs. It was therefore unable to assess whether the FLLs invited to take part in the programme were more able to put their learning into practice than a randomly selected group. Nevertheless, there was a clear and consistent gap in the average scores between the FLLs who were invited and those who were not. Analysis of the FLLs' group scores showed that their mean average scores were higher for some capabilities ('professional authority' and 'analysing and decision making') than others ('impact and influence' and 'learning and developing others').

The group scores for future cohorts of FLLs could be used to inform the curriculum development of future programmes. The FLLs' individual scores could also be used to inform the focus of their individual sessions with LDAs.

A minority of senior managers from the local authorities expressed concerns that the programme was offered exclusively to those FLLs who had been assessed as being good to enable them to become outstanding. As a result, they were concerned that the programme might be viewed as elitist. This highlighted the need for the Firstline team to continue to emphasise its rationale for investing in the already good in relation to its mission.¹⁷ It also drew attention to the need for a national strategy for the provision of leadership development programmes to ensure that the development needs of other first line managers in children and families social work are also met.

Further findings on the effectiveness of the programme

The effectiveness of the programme in developing the FLLs as leaders within their local authority was also considered by exploring the FLLs' social work teams' perceptions of the impact of the prototype programme and the impact on the FLLs' local authorities

¹⁵ Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey have developed a framework for thinking about the adaptability and ability of the workforce to respond to challenge and feedback, and embrace change within complex contexts. The framework categorises individuals into three categories of 'mindsets'.

¹⁶ See Appendix 2 for a description of Firstline's leadership capabilities.

¹⁷ See page 12 for the Firstline team's rationale.

FLLs' social work teams' perceptions of the overall impact of the Firstline programme

The Firstline team and evaluators agreed that it was unlikely that all the changes in the FLLs' capabilities were going to be visible to others within the timeframe of the evaluation, and in respect of the development of the prototype. There was agreement that changes were likely to take at least 6 months to begin to embed. It was also agreed the FLLs were only likely to change in relation to some of the Firstline team's leadership capabilities, and that some changes were likely to have been small and/or subtle given that the FLLs recruited to the programme were already good. Social workers from the FLLs' teams were, nevertheless, able to identify a number of positive changes in relation to 6 of the 8 capabilities as part of the focus group discussions.^{18 19} They did not identify any negative changes.

Impact and influence: Social workers in 2 of the 8 focus groups reported that their FLLs had become markedly more confident since completing the Firstline Programme: for instance, in influencing working relationships with other teams. Social workers in another authority, which was experiencing a period of significant change, noticed that since the prototype programme, their FLL had spoken to the Head of Service on behalf of the team:

She's really championed us and some of the things that we've been anxious about ... (FLL).

Others described a FLL returning from the programme with an increased understanding of the standards in other teams; and a FLL being more open in their approach and better able to reframe critical information positively.

Learning and developing others: The majority of social workers in the 8 focus groups were positive about the ways in which their learning and development were supported by their FLLs, although unable to identify any specific changes in how their FLL supported their learning and development. Social workers in one focus group described their FLL giving more specific and detailed feedback on practice observations. This FLL had also introduced regular meetings to provide social workers with a safe space to discuss their team, which has had a positive impact:

¹⁸ Further information about the leadership capabilities is available in Appendix 2.

¹⁹ The evaluation team suggests two possible explanations for changes not being observed in the other 2 capabilities. The FLLs' 'moral purpose' may have been less visible to the social worker teams than the other 6 capabilities referenced as being observed. Conversely, the teams may have been especially aware of how good the FLLs were at inspiring others before the programme started, which may have made it difficult to detect any small improvements in this particular capability.

This is what we're doing well; this is what we want to sustain but actually this isn't working so well for us'. I suppose we never had that space before and I think we really appreciated it. (Social worker).

The same FLL promoted new ways of thinking about and exploring cases. Social workers in a different authority described their FLL stepping up to drive forward the use of research following the departure of a Consultant Social Worker, earning the respect of social workers. Another FLL was described as increasingly allocating cases to help social workers develop their skills, sometimes suggesting someone else in the team with more experience who could provide support.

Holding to account: Social workers in 6 of the 8 focus groups were able to identify changes in the way their FLLs communicated their expectations to ensure staff met their goals. Social workers in 4 authorities described FLLs becoming clearer about their expectations of staff: for example, in creating deadlines. One social worker described liking their FLL's clearer approach:

I think it creates a better working relationship between you and your manager so it just makes everything a lot more organised and a lot less stressful.
(Social worker).

These social workers found that their FLLs could strike a balance between adopting a more directive style and being open to discussion and negotiation with social workers.

Professional authority: In 3 focus groups social workers had detected some change in how their FLLs carried their professional power and authority following completion of the Firstline programme. For example, one FLL appeared to be more confident and less confrontational in their approach. Another focus group suggested their FLL worked with social workers to encourage and support them to make decisions, recognising that social workers had the most detailed knowledge about families. Staff in a third (33%) suggested that their FLL had found a new and better balance between their use of power and authority, with use of the former reducing and the latter increasing.

Resilience and self-reflexivity: It was possible for social workers in most of the focus groups to identify some examples of FLLs becoming more reflexive in their approach. For instance, one FLL had acknowledged that the way the team worked should reflect its current members and not social workers who had left the team. Social workers in another group felt their FLL listened more when challenged and had become more accepting of their actions provided they were doing their best.

One FLL had specifically introduced the idea of reflexivity during supervision and team meetings and would employ certain words or techniques to enable social workers to find solutions to dilemmas for themselves.

Analysis and decision making: Social workers in 4 focus groups suggested that they had seen some changes in their FLLs' decision making since the Firstline programme. In 2 authorities, social workers thought their FLLs had become more open to discussion and challenge as part of the decision making process, although there was some uncertainty in one focus group about whether this was due to social workers putting forward better plans as they themselves became more experienced. In one authority increased clarity around thresholds for providing services and the FLL's ability to make quick decisions was viewed positively both for the team and when working with other agencies. A social worker in another focus group described their FLL's increased ability to commit to a decision as making them feel more secure.

In 3 authorities social workers reported receiving some form of feedback in relation to the leadership styles and climate surveys they had completed, and subsequently noticed some changes in their FLLs: for instance, being more supportive and less directive or abrupt in their approach.

The effect of partner local authorities on the FLLs' learning and development from the programme

The evaluation's main sources of evidence for the effect of the partner local authorities on the FLLs learning and development from the programme were the Praxis tools and exercises, and the Kick-Off meetings.

Praxis

The Praxis tools and exercises were designed to give Firstline an overview of the context within which FLLs were operating. Their development was informed by the research project undertaken by the Firstline team in collaboration with the Hay Group in spring 2015 (Firstline, 2015). The Firstline team piloted them with the Hay Group, and subsequently adapted and streamlined them to suit their own approach. The diagnostic tools and exercises helped the Firstline team to work collaboratively with each of its partner local authorities to identify any actions that were needed to improve and sustain the working environments required for outstanding leadership in children and families social work. They enabled the collection of qualitative and quantitative data using online staff surveys, interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups with front line practitioners, and team observations. Outputs from the Praxis included Evidence Capture Reports which the Firstline team shared with the local authorities. The reports addressed 5 conditions within the local authorities relating to leadership, learning, autonomy and decision making, clarity and capability, and continuous improvement. Local authorities were encouraged by the Firstline team to take ownership of the Praxis and had a choice of research activities to help them understand their local climate.

Very few of the 10 senior managers who were interviewed were able to express views about their experiences of completing the Praxis because they had arrived in post after it had been completed. One senior manager described the process as being really helpful and a further 3 reported that they found it satisfactory. The Firstline team reflected that they would have liked more time for the process in some authorities and have adapted their approach to ensure sufficient time in the future.

The evaluators' examination of the 8 Praxis Evidence Capture Reports suggested that the exercises effectively enabled the Firstline team to work closely with their partner authorities to identify the what enabled the relationships (for example, clear lines of communication between staff at all levels) and what blocked them (for example, frequent changes of managers at all levels) for outstanding first line leadership within each local authority. The reports clearly communicated to senior managers the various ways in which each local authority could enable and support their FLLs to put their learning into practice.

The reports showed that the exercises were generally informed by a good range of perspectives, including front line staff, children's social work teams, first line managers, senior managers, and Assistant Directors. In some local authorities the online survey was completed by a very small number of frontline staff which limited the reliability and usefulness of this data.

Senior managers who participated in the interviews generally considered that the Praxis Evidence Capture Reports had helpfully confirmed what they already knew to be enabling and preventive to outstanding first line leadership as a result of their working experiences, other evaluations and feedback processes. The managers did suggest that the reports offered little new information to the local authorities, but those who took part in the process were clear that they valued highly the process of working collaboratively and closely with the Firstline team on the Praxis exercises. The senior managers also reported that the outputs from the Praxis exercises had had to fight for priority within local authorities with other evaluations and sources of feedback. The evaluators found little evidence from the interviews with the senior managers of the Evidence Capture Reports effecting organisational change, which may be related to the turnover of managers at this level within the timeframe of the evaluation.

Kick-Off meetings

The Firstline team's Kick-Off meetings aimed to set out what was expected from FLLs, LDAs, local authorities and the Firstline team during the delivery of the prototype programme. Information was also provided by the Firstline team for senior managers to circulate via email within the local authorities to raise general awareness of the FLLs' participation in the prototype.

All 8 meetings were well attended by the FLLs who had been invited to join the programme and their senior managers, despite the competing demands on their time. There were only 2 FLLs in 2 different partner local authorities who were unable to attend due to annual or maternity leave. The high attendance may reflect the FLLs', and their senior managers', hunger for, and commitment to, the programme.

Six of the 10 senior managers who were interviewed had attended and were therefore able to comment on the meetings. They experienced them as having offered clear and thorough information about what was expected of the FLLs and themselves during the delivery of the prototype, and particularly recalled being alerted to the issue of covering FLLs' posts during the residential modules.

The evaluators observed that the FLLs used the opportunities within the meetings well, to express directly to the Firstline team and their senior managers any concerns they had about their participation. They noted that the other concerns most frequently related to:

- support for making travel arrangements for attending the residential modules

- the coordination of room bookings for their individual development LDA sessions
- the sustaining of their learning beyond the end of the programme

Senior managers were often not immediately able to suggest ways in which the FLLs' concerns could be addressed, particularly in relation to covering their posts while they attended the residential modules, but expressed their commitment to do so. They tended to respond to the issues raised by drawing on the authorities' existing and general policies for arranging cover for leave, and the administrative arrangements for booking travel and making room bookings. The evaluators were unsure whether these would have covered the unusual circumstances of several FLLs within each authority, some of whom were from the same team, being on leave for Firstline team's residential modules concurrently, or whether additional, discretionary, support measures were needed.²⁰

²⁰ The cover arrangements were judged by a senior manager in 1 authority to be inadequate after the first residential, and extra cover was arranged for the second and third. A minority of FLLs reported that they had felt the need to continue to support their teams while away on the residential by responding to emails during the late evening or night. A lack of comment from the majority suggested that the issue was addressed in a satisfactory way in most of the authorities.

The effect of FLLs' participation in the programme on the partner authorities

The evaluation's main source of evidence for the effect of the FLLs' participation in the programme on the partner authorities was the Wrap-Up meetings and interviews with local authority senior managers.

The Wrap-Up meetings marked the end of the formal delivery of the programme but also explicitly encouraged FLLs to continue with their leadership learning and development. The first part of the meetings provided FLLs with opportunities to provide additional feedback on their views and experiences of the programme directly to the Firstline team and their senior managers. The second part allowed the Firstline team to give senior managers feedback related to the Praxis exercise that had been prepared in collaboration with the LDAs.

The first parts of the meetings were well attended by FLLs. The Firstline team encouraged the FLLs to be open and honest in their feedback. The FLLs were overwhelmingly positive about their overall experience of the programme. The evaluators observed that they also appeared very comfortable in sharing directly with the Firstline team their reflections on the aspects of the prototype programme that had not worked well, and giving constructive suggestions for its future development. They also observed that, generally, the senior managers present simply listened to the FLLs' feedback. If they did say anything, they were cautious and restrained in their responses to the FLLs' enthusiasm for the programme.

During interviews, a small number of senior managers gave feedback on the second part of the meeting and expressed varying views. For instance, one welcomed the way in which the Firstline team had 'quietly challenged and gave us another window on to our services and culture'. Another had wanted more specific and detailed feedback.

At the time of interviews, most senior managers had difficulties distinguishing between the Firstline programme's wider impact on their organisations from that of other developments within their local authorities, for instance, restructuring or other reviews of services. Nevertheless, one reported that their local authority had used the Praxis process to develop a workforce plan, which the authority regarded as beginning to have a positive impact on staff retention. Another has subsequently introduced elements of the Firstline team's selection process into their recruitment of team managers. The senior managers reported that they intended to use FLLs' projects to spread the FLLs' learning from the programme across their local authorities and, in some instances, for FLLs to contribute to the development of

policy and practice beyond their immediate social work teams. Almost all the senior managers recognised the positive impact of the programme on FLLs' personal and practice development.²¹

In relation to staff retention, since the completion of the programme, 4 leaders who had been planning to leave their posts have decided to stay. About a third (33%) had secured more senior or new leadership positions. These figures are difficult to interpret because there are no national data available on the career progression of FLLs. The FLLs, however, reported that the programme had given them valuable opportunities to develop their leadership and decision-making skills, and reflect on their careers, which had informed their decisions either to remain in their current posts or apply for new positions.

Evidence of the innovation's impact on the Innovation Programme's objectives and areas of focus

Professional practice and methods of social care

Within the timeframe of the evaluation, as noted above, the Firstline prototype programme began to show signs of having a positive impact on the FLLs' capabilities and practice. There was descriptive evidence from the FLLs themselves and a small number of their teams, that the programme had helped FLLs to think more about other people's perspectives and be more reflexive. There was similar evidence that they had learned to reframe issues and view difficult situations more positively, and had become more mindful and self-aware. The evaluation also gathered particular evidence of improved professional practice being applied to their methods for supervision and the leadership of team meetings to encourage case discussion, rather than simply the agreement of next actions, and to influencing change in policies and systems within their authorities.

²¹ At the point of their interviews, they were less certain about its impact on the organisations' management and strategies: some reflected that they felt it was simply too early to comment on the impact of the programme on their organisation.

Organisational and workforce culture in social care

The Firstline programme's curriculum offered FLLs opportunities to reflect on, and share, their values and the motivation for their work, and included a session at the last residential on Public Narrative²². It also encouraged the FLLs to draw on their own creativity, and promote a culture that valued creativity within their teams. It similarly demonstrated the importance of fostering a learning culture for themselves and within their organisations. As noted above, there was evidence from the FLLs themselves and a small number of their teams, that this in turn had a positive impact on learning cultures within the FLLs' teams and the FLLs' approach to supervision of the teams' practice.

National systemic conditions

The Firstline team recognises the importance of 'understanding performance in context' (Munro and Hubbard, 2011), and aims to address the national systemic conditions of over-bureaucratisation and managerialism within children and families social work. It aims to do so by promoting a systemic approach to the delivery and management of services and direct work with children and families. It emphasises the importance self-reflexivity²³ and relationships²⁴. The evaluation found evidence that the prototype programme had promoted these aspects of the FLLs' social work practice by increasing the FLLs' awareness of their own personal strengths, potential and areas for future growth; understanding of how their behaviour impacts on others, and practising difficult conversations. The diagnostics also confirmed or increased the FLLs' awareness of their systemic conditions, and stimulated FLLs to discuss them with their managers.

²² Public Narrative is a tool which uses stories to motivate others to action. FLLs explored their own stories, considering what it was that motivated them to enter the profession; what was happening within their organisations and teams; and what it was that they wanted to change. FLLs then shared their Public Narrative with the group.

²³ Self-reflexivity enables focus and tenacity when faced with increasingly challenging circumstances. It involves the ability to respond appropriately, manage uncertainty and bounce back even in the most trying situations (see Appendix 2).

²⁴ Ruch (2011) also stresses the importance of equipping social work managers to respond effectively to issues of risk, uncertainty and anxiety. She outlines how complex reflective management practice is facilitated by reflective organisational contexts which embrace diverse knowledge sources, promote relationship-based skills and ground themselves in reflective values.

What lessons have been learned about the barriers to this programme?

The evaluation of the prototype suggests seven main barriers to the programme. The Firstline team will need to continue to address, compensate for and/or overcome these barriers as the programme scales and grows:

- turnover of senior managers in the partner authorities meant that senior managers in authorities who led the introduction of the programme had left their posts.²⁵ With them went early messages from the Praxis exercises and Kick-Off meetings about the need for organisational changes within their authorities and the support needs of the FLLs²⁶
- restructuring processes within partner authorities meant that there were uncertainties about the future of FLLs' and senior managers' posts. Such uncertainties diverted some of the energy FLLs' gained from the programme away from their efforts to embed their learning into their practice
- timing of the programme in relation to Christmas and other holidays put additional competing pressures and demands on FLLs' time
- challenges with the ALSs affected the FLLs' efforts to sustain their learning and implement changes within their local authorities
- challenges with the projects affected the FLLs' efforts to link their projects to other aspects of the development of their leadership skills
- short length of the prototype programme limited the length of time the FLLs were supported to embed changes in their practice
- FLLs' heavy workloads, and the competing demands on FLLs' time, inhibited their continuing learning beyond the end of the programme

What lessons have been learned about the facilitators to this programme?

- implementation of a systematic and rigorous recruitment procedure ensured that generally those FLLs who were selected could benefit from the programme

²⁵ There are no national data currently available which capture the movement of senior managers between local authorities to enable the evaluation team to assess whether the turnover was higher than average in Firstline's 8 partner authorities.

²⁶ In response, the Firstline team is providing additional briefing for senior managers to keep them updated and inform any new managers to the partner local authorities about Praxis and the programme. The future delivery of 2 programmes per year will increase the team's day-to-day contact with the majority of local authority managers. A page on Firstline's website is also being set up specifically for senior managers.

- recruitment of highly-skilled and experienced residential Facilitators and LDAs meant they had the skills to quickly earn the trust and respect of, and inspire, the FLLs
- preparation and support of Facilitators and LDAs meant they were clear about their roles and the Firstline team's expectations
- rapid and positive responses to feedback by the Firstline team during the programme delivery improved the FLLs' experience of, and the effectiveness of, the prototype
- use of good and comfortable venues allowed participants to focus on their learning and gave them a sense of being valued
- bringing together of FLLs across local authorities facilitated the sharing of knowledge and experience from different organisational contexts and parts of children's services

Limitations of the evaluation and future evaluation

How appropriate was the evaluative approach for this programme?

The action learning and process approaches were appropriate for this evaluation of Firstline's prototype programme. They allowed the evaluators to support the Firstline team's reflective learning approach to their work, and the sharing of findings as they emerged, informed the team's plans for future programme delivery. As noted above, the Firstline team also conducted its own very detailed and thorough internal data collection throughout, and after, the delivery of the prototype programme. The evaluators' access to this data for secondary analysis also helped to minimise the burden of participating in the evaluation on the FLLs and those involved in the delivery of the programme.

Limitations of the evaluation

- the anticipated outcomes for children and families fell outside the scope of the evaluation
- there were no before-and-after measurements of the FLLs' capabilities: we have 'before' but not 'after' scores relating to the capability framework, and 'after' but not 'before' social worker teams' views of their FLLs' capabilities
- the timeline for the evaluation did not allow FLLs' much time to embed their improved practice and to influence their social work teams' practice. The research report (Firstline, 2015) identified and anticipated that these changes would be likely to be evident approximately 6 months after the completion of the programme. The focus groups with the FLLs' social work teams were conducted about 4 months after the end of the programme
- the prototype cohort, and consequently the evaluation samples, were small, which limited the comparisons that could be made between the Firstline team's partner local authorities
- a detailed comparison with other leadership development programmes was not included
- an exploration of comparison cohorts of FLLs to test Firstline's theory of change was not included

Outline any capacity building for future evaluation and the sustainability of the evaluation

For internal monitoring of future programmes, the Firstline team includes a member with skills and expertise in data management, both to collate new data and carry out secondary analysis of existing national and local datasets. The Team can also draw on similar expertise embedded within The Frontline Organisation.

Further evaluation

As the design of the Firstline programme is firmed up, and new cohorts of FLLs are identified, potential sample sizes for evaluation purposes will increase. It will be important for future evaluations (internal and/or external) to focus on quantifying changes in the FLLs' actions and behaviours, and measuring the impact of the programme on the FLLs' organisational context.

It is evident from the evaluation of the prototype that many of the FLLs valued the contact with colleagues from other local authorities. To strengthen this aspect of the programme, the Firstline team could consider drawing on, and linking to, existing regional or sub-regional working relationships and partnerships. In particular, the team could make use of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) website which gives details of regional sector-led improvement work and activities that are being carried out within regions²⁷.

Measuring impact

The Firstline team and the evaluators have had some preliminary discussions about the nature and future availability of impact or outcome indicators. Distinctions have been made between capturing organisational and workforce related outcomes, and those in relation to the children and families that are served by the children and families social care system. The feasibility of initially focusing on the following key staff-level outcomes, and the availability of appropriate data indicators, has been considered:

- staff retention
- staff sickness
- staff morale
- leadership stability and quality

²⁷ The ADCS website includes a directory of hyperlinks ([ADCS Sector Led Improvement Index](#)) of sector led improvement work within each region.

An aspect of measuring the impact of future programmes relates to measuring changes in FLLs leadership behaviours using the social work leadership capabilities. The evaluators recommend a more sensitive scoring system for the Capability Framework²⁸ during the selection process to try to better reflect the quality and detail of the assessors' decision making. The scoring system used for the prototype could be further developed to better capture the quality and fine detail of the Firstline team's and local authority senior managers' decision making process. A more sensitive and nuanced scoring system could potentially be useful to capture and measure changes in the capabilities of future cohorts of FLLs for evaluation purposes.

Linked to this, the evaluators recommend repeating the initial assessments - or parts of them - after the programme has been completed. A more sensitive scoring system would help the measurement of the scale of change, which in some instances, and in relation to some of the capabilities, might be quite small but potentially significant. The potential for linking these scores to the diagnostics could also be explored.

Consideration should also be given to including the FLLs' line managers, as well as their senior managers, in future evaluations to explore their perceptions of the changes in FLLs' capabilities. It may be difficult to engage them due to the other demands of their workloads. Nevertheless, the Firstline team could embed this source of feedback into the programme and its evaluation by establishing, at the start of the programme, an expectation that FLLs' managers will be contacted for their reaction and assessment of the outcome (Ward and Bailey, 2015).

Value for money

The evaluation of the Firstline prototype has not included an analysis of value for money, but has involved some preliminary work to inform the future development of a cost proforma. This would be created in Excel by the Firstline team to explore the cost effectiveness of the Firstline programme. It is envisaged the proforma would provide a standardised framework to capture the cost inputs associated with the Firstline programme, and the outcomes that could be attributed to the programme which could then be off-set against the cost inputs. It is proposed that the cost proforma would distinguish between the following different types of costs associated with the implementation of new innovations (Saldana et al., 2014; Holmes, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015), such as:

²⁸ See Appendix 2.

- ongoing costs associated with the innovation itself
- costs associated with implementing the new innovation
- costs associated with being part of a pilot programme

The cost proforma would capture the changes in expenditure associated with the various stages of the implementation process for social innovations (Fixsen et al., 2005; Holmes, Westlake and Ward, 2008). Distinguishing between these different types of costs would enable a comprehensive understanding of the overall costs of the Firstline programme and allow for economic transparency as the Firstline team worked towards programme sustainability.

Implications and recommendations for policy and practice

Evaluative evidence, or lack of, for capacity and sustainability of the programme

Capacity

The evaluation found that the prototype programme was developed and implemented by a strong Firstline team. The team was considered to have outstanding leadership and members were generally experienced as knowledgeable, skilled, efficient and effective by those involved. Since the completion of the programme, 2 members of the team who were in their early careers have moved to new posts to broaden their professional experience. Their replacements have been recruited from strong fields of candidates.

The 6 Facilitators and 10 LDAs were recruited for the prototype on a freelance and sessional basis. All were judged to be at least good and the majority were of high calibre. All of them, except for one of the LDAs who felt they had not performed as well in the role as the others, expressed much enthusiasm for being involved in the delivery of future programmes, if their other work commitments allow. The Firstline programme will, therefore, potentially be able to benefit from employing Facilitators and LDAs who they have previously developed and who have experience of the roles.

Sustainability

Implementation science suggests that it takes between 2 and 4 years for a new social care intervention to reach full implementation, and longer for it to be sustained. (Fixsen et al., 2005). The literature refers to implementation stages to conceptualise and evaluate the implementation process (Ghate, 2015). The number of stages included in models varies, from 4 (Fixsen et al., 2005) to 8 (Saldana, 2014), but it is generally accepted that the stages include exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, and sustained implementation (see Appendix 3). In relation to this 5-stage model, the Firstline team has completed the first 2 stages and is now embarking on the third. It then has to reach full implementation before it can move to sustainability. The evaluation of the prototype nevertheless identifies several characteristics of the Firstline programme which are likely to enhance the programme's future sustainability:

- the need for the programme: The need for improvements in the leadership in children and families social work continues to be recognised at a national policy level (Ofsted and Schooling, 2016). All those interviewed for the evaluation agreed that there was a strong and continuing need for a leadership development programme(s) for first line managers in children and families' social work
- the Firstline team's reputation: The prototype has laid firm foundations on which a good reputation can be built. The evaluation found that, collectively, the FLLs and those involved in the delivery of the prototype generally thought positively about the Firstline team and the programme. In relation to its products and services, the prototype was judged to be of high quality and the Firstline team to have fulfilled their promises. The Firstline team were thought of as innovative and agile, well-led, efficiently run and socially responsible²⁹
- the Firstline programme's unique selling points in the market: As noted above, the Firstline programme is not designed for all first line managers – it is aimed at good managers to enable them to become high-performing and influential leaders in social work, and wider society. Information set out in Appendix 4 suggests that other features may represent unique selling points for the Firstline programme in the current marketplace for leadership training for children and families' social workers:
 - Leadership Development Advisers: The Firstline programme appeared to be the only 1 of the 5 programmes with which it was compared to offer participants the opportunity to learn and develop through a series of individual sessions with LDAs. The Leaders for London programme referred to a single one-to-one discussion session to help participants shape their personal learning plans, but then moved to group coaching sessions
 - the Firstline team's work with senior managers: It appeared that the ways in which the Firstline team engaged with its partner local authorities' senior managers, particularly through the Praxis exercise before the start of the programme and the feedback at the Wrap-Up meeting to mark the end, distinguished it from the other forms of provision with which it was compared. The other providers appeared to focus more on their engagement with each programme participant's individual manager

²⁹ The Reputation Institute, co-founded by Drs Charles Fombrun and Cees van Reil, have developed a framework for the measurement of reputation with 7 dimensions - products/services, innovation, leadership, performance, citizenship, workplace and governance. See: [The Reputation Institute's Rep Trak Framework](#).

- a focus on systems change: Related to the Firstline team's work with senior managers, the Firstline team worked to support senior managers to make systems changes through the thorough explorations of the FLLs' organisational climates, in addition to supporting the FLLs' personal development. This seemed to distinguish Firstline from the other 5 providers who focus more on the progression of individual participants

The funding of the Firstline programme through DfE's Innovation Fund meant that the individual FLLs and partner local authorities did not incur fees for their participation in the programme during the prototype. The costs associated with the set up and running of Firstline prototype programme were estimated by The Frontline Organisation as part of their application for funding from the Innovation Programme. The Firstline team is now in the process of developing a fee schedule for new cohorts from partner local authorities as part of their plans for scale and growth. The future sustainability of the programme will depend on the costs to FLLs and/or the partner authorities, and the size of budgets available for supporting workforce development within children's services, which were reported as currently being under extreme pressure.

During their interviews, the senior managers indicated they would consider partnering with the Firstline team again, and were also considering alternative training and development programmes. They anticipated that future Firstline programmes may be more expensive than the other more generic management and leadership development programmes that were available, and may not be affordable, given recent cuts to local authorities' budgets. They indicated that they were considering offering similar programmes to the Firstline programme on a local authority or regional basis. Nevertheless, 2 of the senior managers who expressed these uncertainties have subsequently committed to continue to partner with the Firstline team.

These findings echo those of York Consulting's evaluation of the Scottish Leading to Deliver programme (York Consulting, 2008). This national programme had some similarities to the Firstline programme and was funded by the Scottish Government. York Consulting found that Leading to Deliver was perceived to have been beneficial for social services in Scotland, but some local authorities had commissioned their own versions of the programme independently which were delivered in-house, or had sent employees on other programmes (p.55). These, however, were 'generally deemed to be poorer substitutes in comparison' (p.60).

Conditions necessary for the programme to be embedded

- a continuing recognition within the system of the need for a leadership development programme for good first line managers in children and families social work
- a continuing hunger for a development programme from good first line managers in children and families' social work
- a growing good reputation for the Firstline programme in partner local authorities and the wider sector
- good support and buy-in from senior managers within the Firstline team's partner local authorities, with stability within the senior management teams being helpful
- good support and buy-in from the FLLs' line managers
- good support from the Firstline team and senior managers for FLLs to maintain contact with other FLLs beyond the formal end of the programme
- good support from the Firstline team and senior managers for FLLs to sustain and use their learning within their local authorities
- a programme schedule which takes account of the FLLs main holiday periods and allows sufficient time for the FLLs to be supported in embedding their learning into practice

Recommendations for the future development of the programme

The evaluators' recommendations which support actions already taken, or which are planned by the Firstline team, are marked with an asterisk. The evaluators recommend that the Firstline team considers:

- including a measure of capacity to learn and change in the recruitment of FLLs*
- including an assessment of adult learning styles to guide FLLs' and their LDAs in their choices of learning and development opportunities during the programme
- offering the programme over a longer period to allow more time for FLLs to be supported to embed changes in their practice*

- including in each of the Kick-Off meetings for year 2 at least one FLL from the prototype programme^{30*}
- including additional short written statements for FLLs and the local authorities setting out mutual expectations after the Kick-Off meetings
- splitting the year-2 cohort during the residential modules according to the FLLs' length of experience in their roles, and adjusting the delivery of the programme to attend to their differing needs for direction and structure in small-group discussions
- providing feedback on all the residential days to the full group of Facilitators
- offering more formal supervision to LDAs, and observation and feedback on a sample of their early individual development sessions with FLLs*
- supporting the development of a more formal Firstline Network and/or Knowledge Exchange Forum for Firstline programme graduates to support their continued learning and development – perhaps arranging occasional meetings and/or learning events - and potentially engaging with others in the sector³¹

Action Learning Sets

The evaluators are aware that the Firstline team are using the learning from the prototype ALSs to introduce significant changes to the programme's local authority group-based learning and development. As a result, many of the issues highlighted in the key findings are already being addressed as part of this review. The evaluation team understands that one option the Firstline team is exploring is the suitability of a model that involves active practising of difficult conversations as a way of developing relationships. They recommend that a wide range of alternative reflective practice group models in social work be carefully considered (Jones et al., 2014; Burgess et al., 2014). The evaluators also suggest that consideration be given to the findings from research which examines the use of role play in training and assessment in occupational settings, referred to below in relation to simulated supervision sessions (Jones et al., 2014; Kirkwood et al., 2016; Stokoe, 2013). The possibility that FLLs may need specific coaching in the skills for leading ALSs should also be discussed with LDAs (Burgess, 1999).

³⁰ It may also be helpful to consider the routine involvement of at least 1 LDA at the 'Kick Off' meetings given their key role in the delivery of the programme, although there are obviously cost implications that need to be considered. The involvement of LDAs in the prototype meetings was not always possible given the short time period between the dates for the meetings being set and the meetings taking place. The value of the LDAs' occasional involvement was also difficult to assess.

³¹ Such a network was judged to be a 'hugely valuable' outcome of the *Leading to Deliver* programme in Scotland, providing 'a sector specific network that are enthused about their own development and have improved their leadership capabilities' (York Consulting, 2008).

Projects

The evaluators understand that the Firstline team is planning to make significant changes to the project element of the programme. The Firstline team's plans are being influenced by the learning from the prototype's projects. The evaluators also understand that a new name is likely to be 'Development Focus', and that this focus will be specific to their personal, as opposed to organisational, development, will require a clear purpose, and will span across a longer time frame. Consideration could be given to linking the Development Focus closely to the goals and areas of development identified by each FLL during the selection process. Also, it may be possible for researchers involved in the evaluation of future programmes to provide advice to FLLs on how to measure their individual project outcomes.

The evaluators also recommend that the Firstline team considers:

Diagnostics

- exploring alternative and less expensive ways of assessing the leadership styles and climates of the FLLs and whether assessments could be closely integrated and/or aligned with the assessment of FLLs' core capabilities*
- involving LDAs in future diagnostics to inform their individual development sessions with their FLLs

Simulated supervision sessions

- using LDAs to observe examples of FLLs' live supervision sessions within the first few months of the start of the programme and provide FLLs with feedback that can be built on during the course of the programme³²

Verbal reasoning

- concentrating on its assessment of the core capabilities (detailed in its Capability Framework), and exclude verbal reasoning assessment*

Wrap-Up meetings

- consulting with FLLs to explore whether the written feedback the Firstline team provides to senior managers in local authorities could be more specific

³² This recommendation takes into account recent research which questions the value of the use of role play in the training and assessment of communication skills in occupational settings. More particularly, the research challenges the authenticity of simulated encounters and questions whether they sufficiently mimic 'real' encounters.

and the recommendations more detailed, and if the process of anonymising the feedback for local authorities results in a lack of detail. Some FLLs may allow potentially identifying information to be included and shared

Conclusion

We had always seen 2 of the FLLs as stars and used them. They're now more impressive and that reflects how good the programme was. (Senior manager).

The FLLs gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about their experiences of the prototype programme. The majority suggested it represented the best training and professional development they have received as managers and leaders. The FLLs provided examples of ways in which the Firstline programme had improved their professional leadership. Social workers in the FLLs' teams and senior managers also reported that they had perceived positive changes in the FLLs' leadership capabilities.

In relation to their impact on their organisational cultures and systems, the majority of FLLs described using their learning and new confidence from the programme to influence their teams and those working in similar positions within their authorities. A minority also provided examples of influencing their senior managers. About a quarter (25%) have also broadened their potential sphere of influence by securing new and/or more senior leadership positions within local authorities since joining the programme. More generally, the FLLs expressed a desire to continue to work together to effect systems and organisational change on a local authority and/or regional basis, particularly by meeting in ALSs, but need more local or regional support to do so.

The evaluators' overall conclusion is that the evidence the evaluation gathered about the experience and effectiveness of the prototype programme suggests that the Firstline programme should be encouraged and expanded with continuing evaluation.

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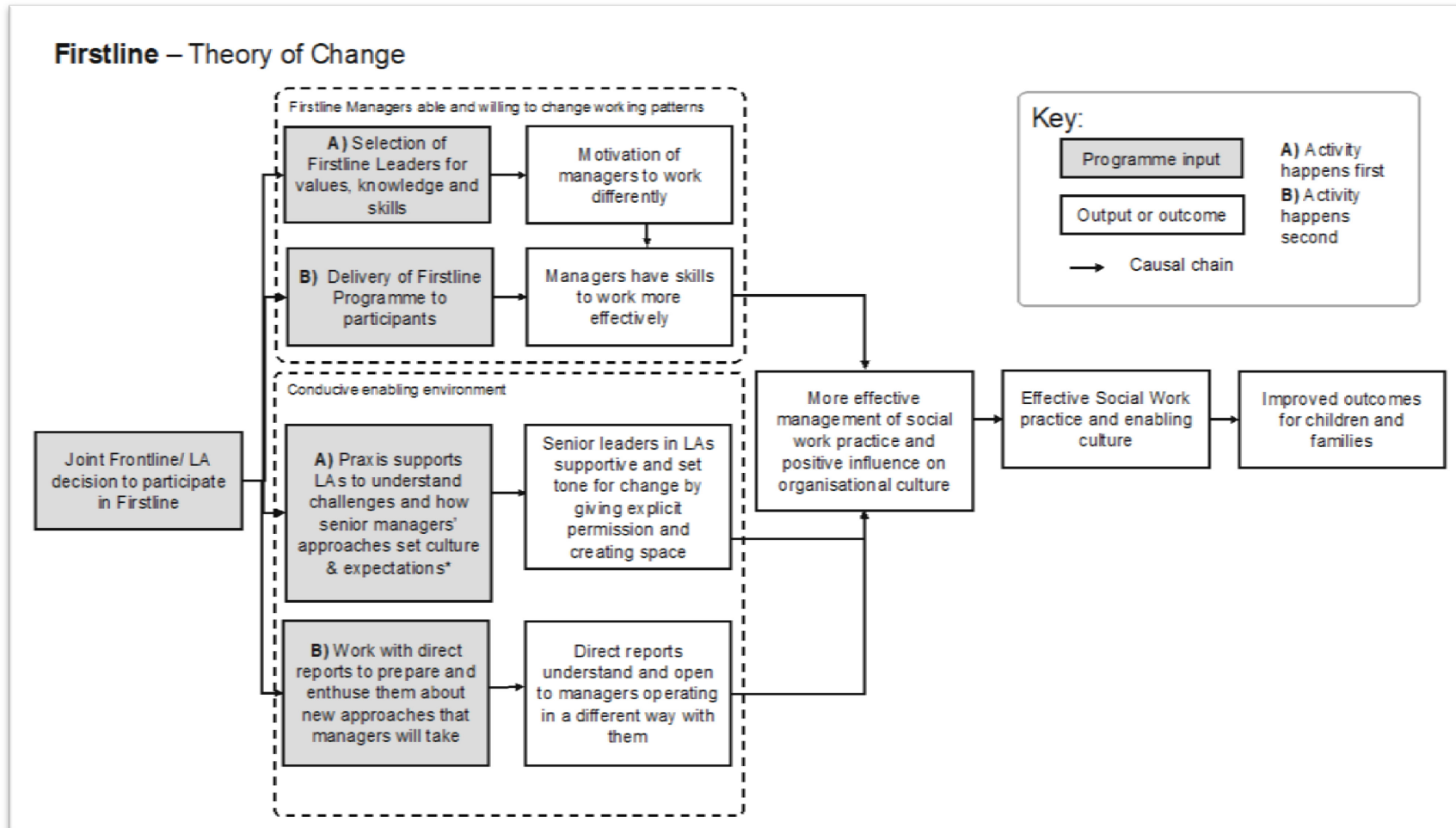
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Appendix 1: Firstline Theory of Change Model

Figure 2: Firstline Theory of Change Model



Appendix 2: Firstline capability framework

There are a number of critical capabilities and experience which Firstline Leaders will be required to evidence in order to take part in the development programme, these are outlined below and will not be the key focus of the development programme.

Moral purpose

Acts in a principled way based on a clear set of personal values and makes decisions with the best interests of children at heart. Contributes value as a first line leader and is passionate about affecting positive change in the lives of children and families. Has an unswerving belief that social work can play a crucial part in changing lives and improving life chances and believes wholeheartedly that with the right support, families are able to change.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Relevance
<p>No articulated desire to improve social work or life chances of young people</p> <p>Concentrates only on their immediate environment</p> <p>Focuses on how programme will aid their own progression</p>	<p>Wants to do good and give something back</p> <p>Wants to improve leadership of social workers</p> <p>Talks positively about young people</p>	<p>Goals are targeted at having a positive impact on families' lives</p> <p>Understands the significance of their role in improving social work practice and outcomes for young people and families (as a direct result)</p> <p>Describes the importance of first line leaders in social care</p> <p>Is guided by a genuine respect for children and families and a desire to work alongside families</p>	<p>Firstline Leaders need to have a motivation for their role that is fuelled by the desire to see all young people reach their full potential. Through their commitment to creating a movement of outstanding and influential first line leaders, they will not only impact the quality of practice in their teams but influence the wider practice system</p>

Analysis and decision making

The ability to spot patterns between potentially unrelated concepts and use this information to make informed decisions. At higher levels, this involves simplifying complex issues, being innovative, taking a broader view and considering additional information to support decision-making whilst driving others to do the same.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Thinking is narrow, too focused on detail and largely reliant on established precedents and/or set procedures</p> <p>Demonstrates little interest in how decisions are made</p> <p>Thinks in a linear fashion; can be rigid and too certain in decision making</p> <p>Does not demonstrate that they are open to alternate views or input from others</p> <p>Does not register gaps in their own or</p>	<p>Employs basic reasoning, judgment and their own life experience to identify trends or patterns between issues</p> <p>Applies simple rules, common sense, procedures or processes, and past experiences to identify potential problems and solutions</p> <p>Asks questions which enable a better understanding of the children and families with whom the team is working</p>	<p>Draws on prior experience to spot similar patterns, trends or inconsistencies</p> <p>Clearly articulates their thinking on decisions relating to social work practice, taking account of different perspectives and hypotheses</p> <p>Able to make considered decisions under pressure</p> <p>Work with team to consider decisions relating to specific families, when necessary</p>	<p>Thinks broadly on a topic in order to make sense of more complex issues and effectively communicates these with others</p> <p>Creates space and environment for others to consider risk broadly (and in detail) to contribute to good decision making and effective planning</p> <p>Encourages disciplined thinking to explore hypotheses, strengths and risks to inform decisions,</p>	<p>Draws on a variety of perspectives, including practice experience, research, theory and feedback to create unique solutions</p> <p>Develops innovative ways of doing things that are not apparent to others</p> <p>Solicits input from people, to assist with decision making</p> <p>Provides continual challenge to maintain focus on children and families</p> <p>Creates climate in which social workers</p>	<p>First line leaders are required to make sense of a range of complex information (which can be varied in nature and limited in detail) and use this information to make considered decisions, often within a high-risk context</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>their team's knowledge</p> <p>Struggles to hold a confident decision in the face of complexity and uncertainty</p> <p>Can't articulate the rationale behind a decision taken</p>		<p>Helps team to develop practical and effective evidenced based plans for children and families</p>	<p>then translate into decisive plans</p> <p>Asks probing questions to elucidate the likelihood and seriousness of risk and create space for social workers to make considered decisions</p>	<p>can take risks for the best long-term result</p> <p>Defends sound risk-taking over risk-averse approaches</p> <p>Is recursive in their decision making, using outcomes from previous decisions to inform future decision making</p> <p>Thinking is circular and reflexive (rather than linear) and decisions are made understanding the uncertainty of complex situations</p>	

Learning and developing others

A curiosity and willingness to develop or acquire new knowledge, skills or experience, and develops and empowers their team to do so, to ensure they experience real, significant professional growth. Makes the most of opportunities to learn from mistakes, modelling this within the team to encourage curiosity and avoid the development of a blame culture. Uses initiative and creativity to create opportunities for learning and discovering different ways of doing things, personally and for others, through long and short term strategies. Sees the Firstline programme as an opportunity to satisfy hunger to learn, and develop themselves. Continually seeking out opportunities to develop colleagues through activities such as mentoring, coaching, championing and guiding, in order to bring out the very best in them.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Does not see developing their own repertoire of knowledge, skills and experience as a priority</p> <p>Misses opportunities to develop themselves or others</p> <p>May overdo learning at the expense of applying it</p> <p>Intends to develop others but comes across as critical or</p>	<p>Eager to develop and learn from others</p> <p>Motivated and energised by the prospect of building own knowledge and experience</p> <p>Openly expresses confidence in the abilities of others</p> <p>Looks for opportunities to help others to grow</p> <p>Shows intent to help</p>	<p>Takes up continuous professional development opportunities</p> <p>Learns from previous experiences (both positive and negative)</p> <p>Uses available resources to expand their knowledge and experience and recognises gaps in these areas</p> <p>Looks for ways to develop their</p>	<p>Looks to further professional expertise by developing skills complimentary to current role (for example, budgeting, systemic approaches)</p> <p>Applies learning from mistakes to engender curiosity within the team</p> <p>Interacts with knowledge to further knowledge and skills</p> <p>Looks beyond social work to identify new</p>	<p>Rarely misses opportunities to learn something new</p> <p>Takes on challenges when there is a risk or outcome that isn't certain</p> <p>Establishes ongoing ways to continually grow</p> <p>Models curiosity and creativity to promote accountability whilst eradicating blame</p> <p>Empowers others to</p>	<p>First line leaders need to be exemplars of self-development and demonstrate a genuine commitment to developing others</p> <p>They will actively seek out opportunities to develop their own knowledge, skills and experience, whilst supporting and empowering</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>condescending</p> <p>Delegates activities based on who is available rather than who would benefit the most</p> <p>Does not take time to accurately assess the strengths and development areas of others</p>	<p>others</p>	<p>professional expertise</p> <p>Provides practical support to help others to accomplish tasks</p> <p>Gives reasons and rationale to help others learn from their mistakes</p> <p>Recognises strength and areas for development within the team and organises work to reflect this</p>	<p>ways of doing things</p> <p>Demonstrates a strong understanding of individuals' strengths and development needs</p> <p>Gives clear and balanced feedback to encourage ongoing development, including specific suggestions for performance improvement</p>	<p>take ownership of their development and create a clear plan for addressing their needs</p> <p>Allocates work based on needs of families, while at the same time maximising learning and development opportunities</p>	<p>others to reach their full potential</p> <p>To do so they will create a culture of continuous learning to effectively lead and develop the team</p>

Holding to account

The ability to clarify expectations, set high standards for others and ensure that goals or objectives are achieved. This involves holding others to account for performing in line with expectations. Part of this will also involve using one's own position, or authority, to get others do what has been asked of them, and at times, this will involve making tough or unpopular decisions. These choices of actions will always be instigated with children and families in mind.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Lacks drive for delivering results</p> <p>Doesn't demonstrate they challenge waste and mediocrity</p> <p>Misses opportunities (or is slow) to manage performance when standards slip below what is expected</p> <p>Overly focused on performance indicators</p> <p>Is quick to blame and pass responsibility to others</p> <p>Aims to control an</p>	<p>Tells people what they need to do</p> <p>Delegates tasks or activities appropriately</p> <p>Clearly communicates what is expected of others</p> <p>Pays attention to timescales and performance indicators</p> <p>Organises work to meet organisational expectations and team capacity</p> <p>Takes responsibility</p>	<p>Clarifies expectations as well as standards required</p> <p>Allocates tasks or objectives based on who is best placed to deliver them</p> <p>Checks in with individuals to ensure they understand what is expected of them</p> <p>Manages the team and their workload to meet statutory timescales and targets</p> <p>Shares responsibility with the team whilst</p>	<p>Introduces new, different or higher standards of performance</p> <p>Effectively recognises poor practice and addresses this</p> <p>Clearly articulates the impact of not meeting standards and expectations</p> <p>Regularly monitors the team's progress against objectives</p> <p>Understands the team's strengths and allocates work to achieve best</p>	<p>Consistently demands high performance and holds others to account, understanding the differing needs within the team</p> <p>Challenges and confronts underperformance and links this to outcomes of families/children</p> <p>Intervenes swiftly and enforces consequences when performance levels drop</p>	<p>First line leaders provide clarity on what needs to be done, who needs to do it, by when, and ensure the team is clear on what outcome will indicate success</p> <p>They need to monitor progress and ensure social work standards do not drop – this is critical to creating a high performing team environment and maintaining high organisational</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
unnecessary level of detail	<p>for the quality of the team's social work practice</p> <p>Leads on decision making and planning and has a good understanding of the work of the team</p>	remaining accountable	<p>outcomes for families</p> <p>Understands organisational pressures and ensures the team are not unduly affected by these</p>	<p>Understands the value of organisational measures and uses these to improve practice</p> <p>Takes ownership for leading the team, whilst delegating to encourage individual accountability</p> <p>Understands the different audiences to which social care is accountable (including political, organisational and families)</p>	standards

Impact and influence

Has a positive impact on their teams and partners within the practice system through persuading, convincing and bringing others round to their perspective. Understanding others' perspectives and priorities will enable the first line leader to tailor their communication to suit their audience.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Tries to force decisions through</p> <p>Is polite and considerate without offering an opinion</p> <p>Takes an insular, inward-looking approach to managing the team</p> <p>Overly invested in power and hierarchy</p> <p>Uses performance indicators or compliance in a simplistic way to try to motivate good practice</p>	<p>Uses limited actions to persuade, whatever the audience or context</p> <p>Uses direct persuasion when interacting with others</p> <p>Appeals to reason and others' self interest</p> <p>Holds the attention of an audience when presenting or leading a discussion</p> <p>Develops good connections across Children's Services</p> <p>Has a good</p>	<p>Makes use of carefully prepared and understood data in persuading others</p> <p>Uses more than one strategy in an attempt to influence others</p> <p>Takes multiple actions to persuade and gain support</p> <p>Collaborates effectively with partner agencies and ensures active involvement with relevant families</p> <p>Takes a lead in establishing</p>	<p>Tailors approach according to audience and the calculated impact of actions and words</p> <p>Listens to others and adapts approach to best suit</p> <p>Develops strong and effective working relationships with influential partners</p> <p>Adapts style which engenders a sense of confidence and respect</p> <p>Collaborative and challenging in all relationships, irrespective of</p>	<p>Uses a mixture of direct and indirect influence to gain support from key people</p> <p>Understands the need to, and uses others to, influence third parties</p> <p>Develops influential partnerships between the team and partners</p> <p>Draws on relationships with partners to design creative solutions for families</p> <p>Promotes collaborative,</p>	<p>First line leaders must be able to influence senior managers, social workers and partners, in an appropriate and considered manner, through understanding others and adapting their approach to create the desired impact</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
	<p>understanding of the role external partners play in work with families</p>	<p>connections</p> <p>Models a collaborative approach to leadership</p>	<p>hierarchy</p> <p>Influential within all professional spheres, does not shy away from challenge</p>	<p>recursive working practices across the organisation, and avoids over-valuing hierarchy</p> <p>Maintains constant curiosity on how decisions are made and by whom, with a view to effectively shaping others' thinking</p>	

Inspiring others

The intention to inspire through motivating and energising social work teams, colleagues and partners, uniting them around shared goals or objectives. Create a motivating and energetic context within which social workers are driven and supported to work directly with families to improve their life experience.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Rarely takes the lead on issues and misses opportunities to share their views</p> <p>Lacks spark and charisma in front of others</p> <p>Focuses too much on tasks at the expense of clarifying decisions</p> <p>Does not articulate the importance of values central to good social work practice</p>	<p>Leads by example</p> <p>Demonstrates to others what is possible</p> <p>Explains reasons behind decisions</p> <p>Ensures teams are clear on the organisation's value base</p> <p>Ensures the vision and mission of the team are understood by all (and remembered)</p>	<p>Makes work interesting and engaging for others</p> <p>Unites others around common goals or objectives</p> <p>Generates energy and enthusiasm when working with others</p> <p>Has confidence and credibility</p> <p>Understands the organisational ethos and ensures management style is aligned</p>	<p>Takes a strong leadership role which engenders respect from the team</p> <p>Provides direction and communicates clear lines of responsibility</p> <p>Gets specific – breaks down broad vision of the future into concrete plans and actions</p> <p>Draws on live research and evidence to inspire and motivate</p> <p>Tailors broader vision to appeal to individual needs and</p>	<p>Articulates a compelling vision</p> <p>Engages others in long term plans for raising standards, quality of practice and life chances of children and families</p> <p>Creates a climate which encourages creativity and ensures mistakes can be made (and learned from) without fear of blame</p>	<p>It is fundamental that first line leaders inspire social workers and peers to create an energising environment in which excellent social work practice can thrive.</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
			responsibilities Shields the team from organisational pressures which do not have a direct impact on them Creates culture predicated on strong commitment to children and families		

Professional authority

The ability to build relationships and engender confidence by understanding the thoughts, emotions and feelings of staff and colleagues, and identifying reasons for why others behave the way they do. Using excellent interpersonal skills, first line leaders are able to empower others to achieve, building a strong rapport to create a culture which has children and families at its heart.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Has limited interest in understanding what is going on with others and rarely translates this into appropriate actions</p> <p>Is judgmental or jumps to conclusions without taking time to understand others</p> <p>Uses power in a manner which shuts others down</p>	<p>Recognises the emotions in others</p> <p>Reads body language, facial expressions and tone of voice</p> <p>Treats others with care and respect</p> <p>Builds rapport with social workers, colleagues and partners</p> <p>Accepts they are in a position of power and authority</p> <p>Challenges ideas they do not agree with</p>	<p>Understands poorly expressed thoughts, concerns and emotions</p> <p>Infers meaning beyond what is being said, taking into account issues of power and difference</p> <p>Takes time to form relationships with social workers, colleagues and partners</p> <p>Actively listens to others to understand different contexts, constraints and concerns (for example, differences</p>	<p>Builds positive relationships with others across diverse backgrounds</p> <p>Demonstrates understanding of others and acts accordingly</p> <p>Exercises power and authority thoughtfully</p> <p>Influences and convinces partners based on social work position</p>	<p>Shows an in depth understanding of ongoing reasons for behaviour or emotion in others</p> <p>Carries their authority confidently and engenders trust and commitment</p> <p>Has awareness of their power and skilfully draws on this to strengthen relationships</p> <p>Is aware of the role they play in their team and the wider professional system</p>	<p>First line leaders need to be acutely mindful of the role that power and authority play in social workers' work with families and in all interactions with professional partners</p> <p>They are also consistently considering how to use their power and authority to best effect when developing relationships with</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
		<p>arising from gender, race, and other issues of power)</p> <p>Uses appropriate authoritative power in situations where decisions need to be made</p>			colleagues and partners

Resilience and self-reflexivity

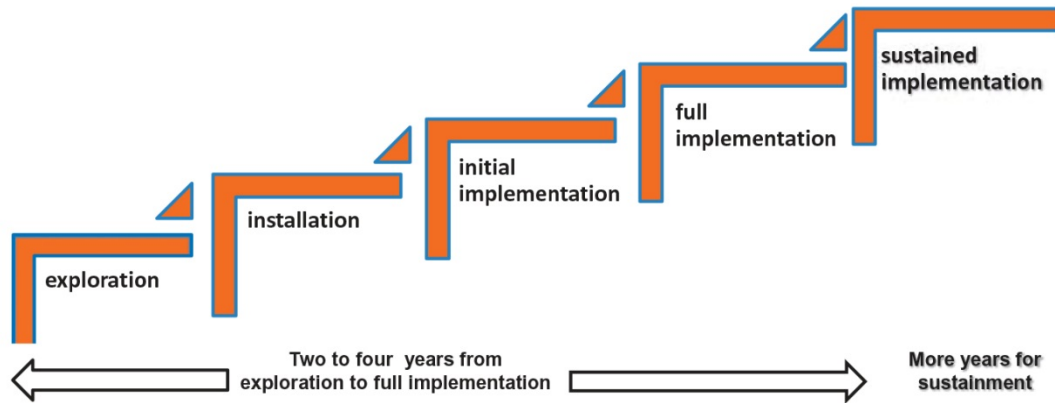
Demonstrating self-reflexivity that enables focus and tenacity when faced with increasingly challenging circumstances. The ability to respond appropriately, manage uncertainty and bounce back, even in the most trying situations. To do so leaders must be aware of their own personal strengths, potential, and areas for future growth, and understand how their behaviour impacts on others. This involves being aware of emotional triggers, biases and prejudices and identifying ways to manage these effectively.

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
<p>Sees setbacks as a disappointment and struggles to see how they can learn from them</p> <p>Seems to lack motivation and may lose focus in terms of everyday stress</p> <p>Does not take the time to evaluate own strengths and development areas</p> <p>Behaves or reacts impulsively, without due care or concern for the likely impact on others</p>	<p>Manages own emotions well</p> <p>Recognises the importance of learning from setbacks</p> <p>Avoids impulsive decisions when under pressure</p> <p>Is aware of own feelings and how these impact themselves and others</p> <p>Takes time to evaluate own thoughts and behaviour</p>	<p>Behaves calmly and professionally when under pressure</p> <p>Learns and bounces back from adversity</p> <p>Listens to negative feedback and reacts appropriately</p> <p>Identifies situations that elicit strong emotions in themselves</p> <p>Expresses thoughts and emotions in a way that takes into account impact on others</p> <p>Explores how</p>	<p>Stays optimistic in the face of setbacks</p> <p>Understands why situations elicit strong emotions</p> <p>Seeks out and acts on constructive criticism</p> <p>Adjusts future approach based on learning to continually improve</p> <p>Strikes a balance between confidence and self-awareness</p> <p>Makes decisions based on understanding of</p>	<p>Sees the benefits of personal criticism or setbacks and uses these as motivators for improved practice</p> <p>Epitomises optimism and confidence in the face of challenging situations</p> <p>Remains motivated and determined despite being faced with ongoing uncertainty</p> <p>Reflects on underlying reasons for feelings and behaviour</p>	<p>First line leaders work in a high pressured and challenging environment</p> <p>Resilience and self-reflexivity are key when dealing with potentially challenging situations. Leaders need to understand their own strengths, weaknesses, biases and potential as well as how they impact on others, so that they are</p>

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Relevance
	<p>Recognises that their emotional well-being impacts their work</p> <p>Uses supervision to think through emotional responses</p>	<p>difference (for example, gender, race, culture, life experience) affects relationships with families, colleagues and partner agencies</p> <p>Makes good use of supervision as a reflective space</p>	<p>own strengths and limitations</p> <p>Understands which situations or relationships influence decision making and how biases or prejudices might affect these</p> <p>Is not deterred by difficult or strong emotion within the system and is curious about how to translate this into learning</p>	<p>Actively seeks feedback to become more self-aware</p> <p>Continuously seeks to understand themselves and how they impact on others</p> <p>Identifies barriers to effective social work practice and creates a culture within which more reflective decision making takes place</p> <p>Encourages others to think reflexively about own beliefs, attitudes and biases and how these might be impacting on relationships with colleagues and families</p>	<p>more adept at making good decisions that lead to high impact</p> <p>First line leaders need to be resolute in the face of adversity, learn from mistakes and stay motivated to recover from setbacks</p>

Appendix 3: Stages of implementation

Figure 3: Stages of implementation



Source, Ghate, 2015, p.6. Used with permission.

Appendix 4: Firstline in the marketplace

Introduction

To inform the development of the second year of the Firstline programme, the evaluation team began to consider the position of the programme in the marketplace. The evaluation team has explored publicly available online information about alternative leadership development programmes and courses that are currently available to local authorities. We have particularly focused on the programmes that were mentioned to the evaluation team by the local authority senior managers during their interviews, and a small sample of university-based programmes. We have also identified those features which may help to distinguish Firstline from other leadership development programmes.

Data sources

To provide an indication of Firstline's position in the marketplace, the evaluation team explored the provision of 5 other providers. We have not had the resources to undertake a systematic or exhaustive review of the current market.

The preliminary analysis of Firstline's place in the current market drew on the following sources of data:

- interviews with 10 of 14 senior managers
- desktop research into programmes referred to by senior managers
- desktop research to identify the range of leadership courses available at higher education institutions

Other available provision

The evaluation team collated information about 3 providers (Leaders for London; West London Alliance; and Institute of Family Therapy) that were referred to by the SMs and two further providers (University of Bedfordshire and University of Central Lancashire) which were identified by the evaluation team as examples of established academic courses.

The evaluation team has gathered information across a number of categories, for example, course aims, duration, structure/content and fees. Table 1 provides comparisons of the 5 programmes. It should be noted that limited information was available publicly for 2 providers as their websites required members to provide login details. A third provider gave limited information as courses were bespoke.

Key and distinct features of the Firstline programme

The information set out in Table 1 suggests that the Firstline programme's focus on first line managers in children's services, combined with its structure and approach make it distinctive in the marketplace in the following ways:

Leadership Development Advisers: The Firstline programme appears to be the only one of the 5 programmes to offer participants the opportunity to learn and develop through a series of one-to-one sessions with LDAs. The Leaders for London programme refers to a single one-to-one discussion session to help participants shape their personal learning plans, but then moves to group coaching sessions.

Firstline team's engagement and work with senior managers: It appears that FL's emphasis on engaging with the local authorities' senior managers throughout the programme distinguishes it from the other 5 forms of provision, which appear to engage only with each programme participant's individual manager.

The focus on systems change: FLL's focus on creating systems change through its Praxis exercise and exploration of the FLLs' organisational climate, in addition to the programme's focus on the FLLs' personal development, seems to distinguish it from the other 5 providers which appear to focus on progression of the individual.

The delivery of most of the Firstline programme within the FLL's practice environment, rather than a classroom, differentiates Firstline from courses provided by academic institutions.

The aims to bring together FLLs from different local authorities and encourage shared learning and networking, appear to be another distinctive feature of the Firstline programme.

Recommendation

The evaluation team is confident that Firstline will have carefully considered the protection of its intellectual property. This limited and preliminary analysis of Firstline's place in the current market place, and the identification of features that may be distinctive, highlights the need for protective measures.

Table 1 Course provision comparison June 2016

Provider	Leaders for London	West London Alliance (WLA)	Institute of Family Therapy	University of Bedfordshire	University of Central Lancashire
Course title	Leaders for London Programme	Development of Leadership and Skills in First Line Managers	(1) Bespoke short courses and workshops (2) Leadership and Management Training	MA/ Professional Cert/ PG Cert/ PGDip Applied Social Work Practice: Leadership and Management.	PGCert Leadership and Management in Social Work and Social Care Practice
Course aims	Develop London's potential leaders; create a learning community; create a common language and leadership culture.	WLA offers a bespoke range of skills based leadership programmes to increase the competence of existing managers, and prepare those who wish to become team managers in the future.	(1) Not known (2) To enable Service Managers and Heads of Service to interact with team managers and practitioners who are using systemic approaches in their supervision, decision making and practice delivery.	Increase understanding of social work leadership and management; improve critical reflection skills; focus on the individual's skills and career path; develop decision making and communication skills.	Develop skills for effective professional leadership and management; understand the theoretical models, skills and frameworks underpinning practice; focus on high quality supervision and critical reflection; consider a practitioner's organisation and their role within it; and recognise the contribution of research informing practice.
Target audience	Emerging/ potential leaders	Existing managers and those wishing to become team managers in the future	(1) Tailored to needs of recipient (2) Service Managers and Heads of Service	Practising social work managers or those expected to progress to management during the course.	Practitioners working in social care with adults, children and young people.
Admission criteria	Not known	Not known	Not known	Honours degree (2:2 or above) expected (non-standard entrants with suitable experience considered). Must have a professional qualification in Social Work.	Degree at 2.2 or above in a relevant subject, but non-standard entrants with suitable experience considered.
Course duration	Approx. 10 months	Not known	Not known	Part-time course typically over 36 months but up to five years.	One year full-time or two years part-time (Taught)
Fees	Not known	Not known	Not known	MA - £8,250	Full-time £6,000; Part-time £1000 per 20 credit module.
Theoretical approach	Not known	Not known	Systemic	Underpinned by the Professional Capabilities Framework (CoSW 2012) and current evidence from research. Course takes an experiential approach to learning.	Not known
Content/ structure	Launch; needs assessment using 360 self-evaluation; 1:1 follow up discussion; shape personal learning plans; 5 x group coaching sessions; mid-point learning session; close session; optional masterclasses.	Content/ structure developed on a bespoke basis.	(1) Short courses and workshops in specialist areas of systemic practice structured following consultation and planning with the recipient organisation. (2) An introduction to overarching systemic ideas used by team managers and practitioners in their supervision, decision making and practice delivery.	The course offers the following modules: Leading and Managing in Social Work (Core); Supervising for Quality and Performance in Social Work (Core); Strategic Leadership (Option); Systemic Leadership for Social Workers (Option); Practice Education (Stage 2) (Option); Applying Knowledge to Work Based Learning (Option); Applied Research Skills in Social Work (Core); Dissertation for Social Work Leaders and Managers (Core).	Course includes: CORE MODULES - Leadership for Innovation and Integration; and Leading & Inspiring through Professional Supervision PLUS One FROM - Management Coaching Skills; Responding to Contemporary Issues in Social Work and Social Care; Inclusion and Community; Social Pedagogy: theories and practice.
Teaching methods	1:1 session; group coaching sessions	A variety of teaching methods are used including expert speakers, seminars, mentoring and tailored action learning sets	Not known	Lectures; case studies and scenarios; role play; self-directed study in the form of reading, research and application to practice; final dissertation; e-learning, collaboration, blogs and a wiki.	Keynote lectures; seminars; tutorials; material for self-directed learning; e-learning; group discussions; presentations; and practice learning opportunities.
Nature of assessment	Not known	Not known	Not known	A variety of methods will be used including assessment of presentation skills; skills in practice; report writing; and group work.	Assessment methods will include written analyses, presentations, reflective writing, report writing, observations of practice and personal development files.
Other	The publicly available information available about courses is limited as areas of the organisation website require members to provide login details	The publicly available information available about courses is limited as areas of the organisation websites require members to provide login details. Courses are also bespoke.	Limited information publicly available online about bespoke courses or Leadership Management Training.	Professional Cert/ PG Cert/ PGDip are available as intermediate qualifications leading up to a Masters.	



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

richard.white@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

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