research
in practice

Learning from the Greater Manchester Scale and Spread Programme: Spreading innovation across a city-region

Executive Summary: Final Overview Report

August 2021

Rebecca Godar and Sue Botcherby, Research in Practice

Dartington
Trust

Introduction

The full learning report provides an overview of the learning gained in Greater Manchester city region (GM) through a programme of scaling and spreading innovative services across the city region. The learning was captured by Research in Practice throughout the project and reflects the views of practitioners, managers and leaders at various points over 18 months (April 2019 to September 2020). Research in Practice's role as a learning partner was not to undertake an evaluation, but rather to enable and support the exploration of emerging themes and reflections at various points in the Programme's journey. This is a summary of the overview report on the learning generated up to November 2020. Many of the challenges identified in this report have been, or are being, addressed as the project continues.

About the project

The ten local authorities and the GM Combined Authority (GMCA) worked collaboratively to spread four innovations:

> **Achieving Change Together** (ACT) embedded within a complex safeguarding approach, developed by Rochdale and Wigan.

> **Stockport Family and Team Around the School** (TAS), developed by Stockport.

> **Strengthening Families** (SF), developed by Salford.

> **No Wrong Door** (NWD), an innovation developed in North Yorkshire and imported into the Greater Manchester city region in 2018.

The Scale and Spread Programme was designed to support other local authorities in GM to adopt one or more of these innovations, adapt these models to their own local context, and to build a community of authorities to work together on design and delivery. The Programme aimed to generate learning for GM as a whole about how to lead, adapt, collaborate and learn together, and how to put the Public Service Reform principles into practice in work with children and families (see fig 1). As such, the Programme sought to explore how to bring about change in a complex adaptive system, taking into account key features of such systems, such as interconnectedness and relationships; responding to changing circumstances; context and the capacity of parts of the system to learn and adapt to experience. These ideas underpinned the development of a strategic approach to scaling and spreading innovation at an unprecedented scale.

There are now 25 iterations of these innovations across the ten GM authorities, a significant achievement in such a short time. This scaling and spreading was achieved through the originating GM authority (where there was one), led by the DCS in a strategic leadership role, and by appointing innovation leads to bring together a cluster of local authorities interested in adopting that way of working. The innovations spread at different paces; some are now in place in some form across all ten, while others are only in one or two additional authorities. This is not surprising, since the innovations started at different stages of development and the arrangements for exporting and supporting other authorities to import varied considerably across the four.

Putting principles into practice

The four innovations share some underpinning theory and principles of practice that are aligned with the Public Service Reform principles. They all use practice approaches that are relational, strengths-based and trauma-informed and are delivered by multi-agency teams of professionals supported by structures and processes designed to help practitioners work in this way. At the time of writing, the quantitative evidence of impact on costs and outcomes by the GMCA Research Team was not available. The ongoing learning activity summarised here provided opportunities for practitioners and managers to report their emerging perceptions about the difference they were making. They report that these new ways of working are having a positive impact on children, young people and families, and believe there is scope to work in this way with a larger group of people. Through the Scale and Spread Programme, stakeholders in GM have learned a significant amount about these ways of working and how to support them, key aspects of which include:

> A degree of autonomy for practitioners to work flexibly with families.
> Support to think about research evidence and theory.
> Access to expert advice and support when faced with particularly complex challenges.
> Reflective spaces, both individual and collective
> The support and attention of senior leaders to provide momentum and resources.

An overview of learning from *putting principles into practice* can be found at the end of this document.

Adopting innovation

Local authorities chose which of the innovations to adopt based on local priorities, their capacity to introduce the innovation and their own understanding of how the innovation could help. System conditions for innovation locally identified by local authorities in the Programme include:

> A practice and management culture that supports experimentation and with values aligned to those underpinning the innovation.

> Strong local partnership arrangements that can provide both strategic and operational oversight of multi-agency teams and budgets and enable the embedding of new approaches within existing local systems.

> Leaders willing and able to commit resources, time and management capacity to the innovations, as well as 'business as usual'.

> Staff at all levels with the skills, capacity and values to work both autonomously and collaboratively, to try out new approaches and build an alliance around a shared vision.

> Stability of leadership and a stable local context to maintain commitment to the goals of the Programme and the shared vision for the Greater Manchester city region and to retain the organisational memory of lessons learned.

The extent to which the relevant system conditions were in place at the outset of the Programme varied significantly across local authorities, and within authorities over time, and this affected progress towards implementation. This wide variety of circumstances provides a rich source of learning about how to scale and spread in the future.

Key features of the exporting and importing process include:

> **Codification:** The process of articulating the core features of the model – supporting those at the heart of the work to make tacit knowledge and experience explicit, including articulation of a theory of change and situating the innovation in the wider evidence base. Setting out the systems and resources required and the underpinning values and principles gave both exporters and importers a common language and set of expectations.

> **One-to-one support:** Authorities valued the support provided by the innovation leads in helping them think through design challenges in context and support with securing senior level and partnership buy-in into the local project.

> **Coaching:** Both innovation leads and local project leads benefited from the experienced coaching provided by the Innovation Unit to help them develop the skills and behaviours to experiment and to work collaboratively.

> **Reflective spaces:** Bringing together people grappling with similar issues, to share their experiences in real time and to learn together helped to generate trust and mutual respect, and the development of supportive relationships within the cluster.

> **Senior level support:** Strategic support at GM and local level provided the resources, guidance and momentum behind implementation, bringing in other parts of the system through championing the innovations and sharing the vision.

Adapting innovation

Significant adaptation to the original models occurred through the life of the Programme, both by individual authorities and by clusters as a whole. While local authorities are mostly keeping to core features and principles for each innovation, they are adapting the role descriptions, composition of teams and design of services based on:

> The resources available to fund ongoing delivery, including both local and external funding streams.

> A desire to build on existing strengths in the local system.

> Aligning the innovation to wider strategic objectives of local partnerships.

> Identifying unmet or emerging needs and seeking to meet them through embedding, or making connections to, other professionals.

Examples of these adaptations include:

> Delivering aspects of the core offer first when this builds on existing service provision while other elements are still being developed (NWD).

> Embedding a range of wider functions into the teams working alongside specialist workers (ACT / TAS).

> Working through existing team structures, rather than creating a dedicated team (TAS / SF).

> Extending the scope of the innovation to include a wider age range, or lower levels of need (TAS / ACT / SF).

> Moving qualified social workers into early help roles and vice versa based on local approaches to practice (ACT / SF/ NWD).

Through the connections between innovations, both locally and at a GM level, leaders have identified opportunities to combine and integrate two innovations to provide a more coherent and holistic form of support. Co-working of cases between complex safeguarding teams and a No Wrong Door service has allowed young people to access a broader range of specialist advice and support. In another example, the Team Around the School approach has been used in a pupil referral unit, drawing on the expertise of the Complex Safeguarding team's ACT worker to prevent and identify young people being exploited.

As local authorities begin to think about scaling-up an approach to reach more children, young people and families, there are concerns about the resources required for protected caseloads, highly-qualified practitioners and the clinical expertise needed to provide the core features of some of the models to large numbers of families. Local areas are developing a range of approaches which aim to retain the innovation's principles and approaches to practice, driving further adaptation and variation in the system.

Further key messages and *adopting and adapting innovation* can be found at the end of this document.

Learning together

There is much interest among GM local authorities and GMCA in understanding the impact of these adaptations on projects' effectiveness, but this extensive adaptation increases the complexity of Cost-Benefit Analysis. It also underlines the importance of GM authorities continuing to share learning and the results of experimentation with each other after the Programme ends.

Key to delivering these innovations at this pace has been the significant time and energy put into collaboration across GM. The Programme has required the swift development of a range of relationships and connections between individuals, teams, authorities and organisations. Groups in GM took part in collaborative activities that built trust over time and this has resulted in a rich network of connections at all levels of the system. Communities of learning and reflective spaces are particularly valued for supporting the development of a shared language, providing opportunities for peer support and for generating new collective knowledge. Participation in these collaborative activities is not uniform, due to varying capacity locally, and those who have more connections and participate more in the system have the most influence over future direction. Maintaining collaborative activities requires resource and dedicated roles to facilitate and provide direction.

Key messages about *making connections* and designing and using reflective spaces can be found at the end of this document.

Leading innovation

Leadership of the Programme is distributed across the system. Some leadership tasks are undertaken at a GM level, working alongside those in local leadership roles, while others are undertaken locally, by people in local leadership roles working alongside partner agencies. Leading in such a collaborative system requires different leadership behaviours to traditional management as it requires the balancing of providing a sense of direction and pace with respecting the autonomy of individual organisations and teams. This is a facilitative role, based on negotiation and persuasion. These roles require agility, passion, resilience and a willingness to learn and experiment. In effective leadership, there is substantial mirroring of the practice principles underlying the innovations: Focusing on relationships, developing strengths and "*walking alongside*" (DCS) local authorities on their improvement journey are all seen as critical.

As well as leaders, scaling and spreading requires infrastructure to manage the extensive requirements of organising multiple projects, reporting and monitoring, and evaluating effectiveness. GM drew on both the shared resources of GMCA and external sources of expertise and capacity. The contribution of these additional sources of support cannot be over-stated and it is critical in moving forward that GM considers how to retain the significant expertise, experience and relationships formed by people in these roles.

Key messages about *leadership in a collaborative system* can be found at the end of this document.
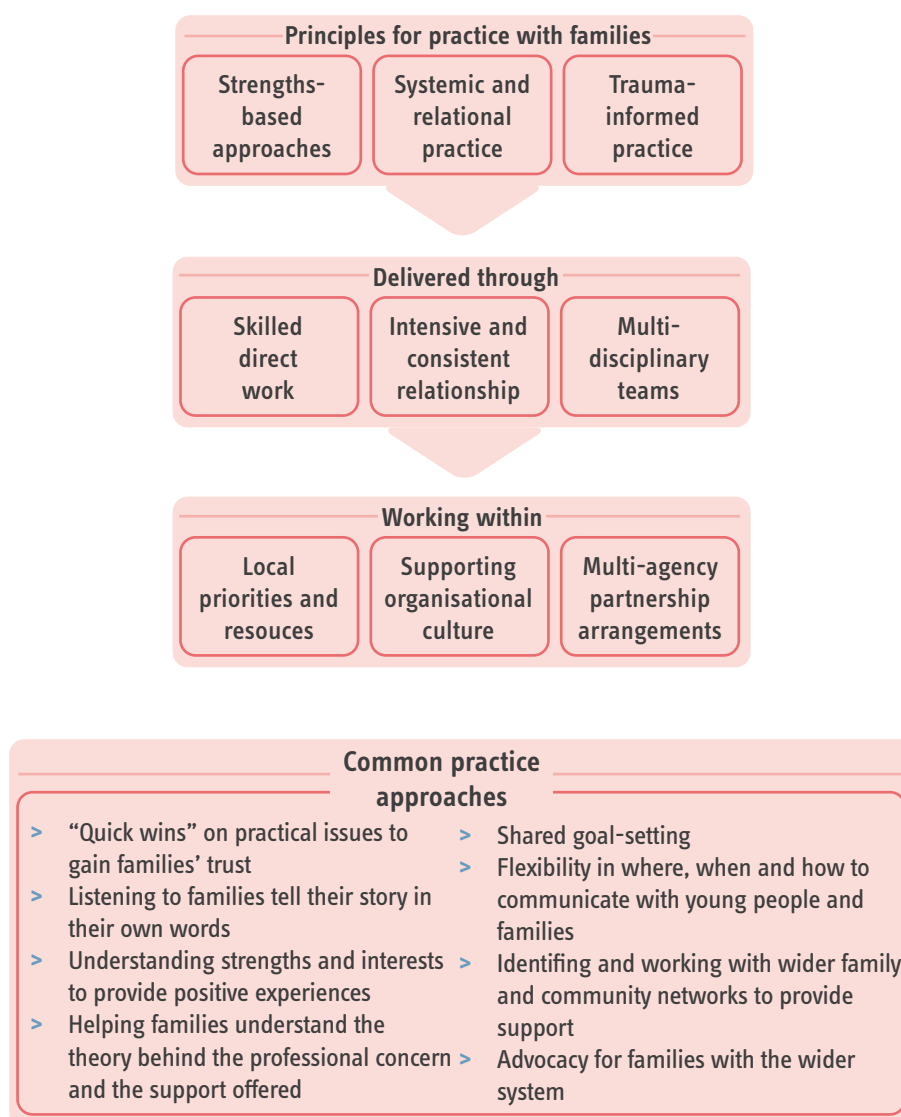
What next?

The Programme has left a significant legacy in GM, including changes to practice, leadership and collaborative activity. There is some evidence that the ways of working to develop and embed these new ways of working are having 'ripple effects' into the wider system, though these effects are fragile and require nurturing. The work is ongoing, with most authorities committed to continuing the innovations they have started, and many looking for new innovations to continue to enhance the service offer to children and families. The future is uncertain, given that the short term funding for the Programme is now at an end and the social, economic and financial impact of Covid-19, but the innovations have demonstrated their value in adapting to such an uncertain time. Below we offer a series of reflective questions to help GM think about "what next?"

1) How will GM authorities come to a shared position about future investment in, and development of, the individual innovations, based on both the cost benefit analysis and wider learning captured to date?

2) How can GM maximise the learning from ongoing experimentation and adaptation across GM?

3) How can the experience of the innovations contribute to the development of wider strategic approaches to early help, vulnerable adolescents and supporting potential and new parents?

4) How can GM use the tools and approaches developed through Scale and Spread to support authorities to think strategically when adopting innovations?

5) How can GM support the development of organisational culture that supports relational and strengths-based working for more children and families?

6) How can GM use the expertise and experience of the innovations to inform the ongoing response to Covid-19 and the economic and social impact on children, young people and families?

7) How can GM collectively resource the infrastructure needed to underpin future collaboration and mutual support?

8) How can GM secure the capacity and capability to lead and support future innovation and ongoing learning and adaptation from with the city region?

9) How can GM bring partner agencies into the conversation at a GM level?

Putting principles into practice

The four innovations share some underlying practice principles, which are aligned with the Greater Manchester ambitions for Public Service Reform and the features of effectice practice identified in the DFE Innovation Programme (Sebba et al., 2017). By developing these innovations in different contexts, Greater Manchest authorities have generated significant learning about how to develop and support practice that is strengths-based, relational and trauma-informed. Practitioners describe a "way of being" that is supported by a range of enablers within their team, organisation and in the innovation clusters. They talk passionately about the impact this way of working has had on the children and families that they work with, and on their own practice, while leaders describe a range of positive effects on their organisations and the wider network. Impact across the ten authorities varied and was perceived to be accelerated by the presence of the enablers below.

Principles for practice with families

| Strengths-based approaches | Systemic and relational practice | Trauma-informed practice |

Delivered through

| Skilled direct work | Intensive and consistent relationship | Multi-disciplinary teams |

Working within

| Local priorities and resouces | Supporting organisational culture | Multi-agency partnership arrangements |

Common practice approaches

> "Quick wins" on practical issues to gain families' trust
> Listening to families tell their story in their own words
> Understanding strengths and interests to provide positive experiences
> Helping families understand the theory behind the professional concern and the support offered

> Shared goal-setting
> Flexibility in where, when and how to communicate with young people and families
> Identifing and working with wider family and community networks to provide support
> Advocacy for families with the wider system

Enablers

Getting started

> Evidence-informed training
> Recruitment for values and skills
> Coaching and mentoring
> Permission to work differently and outside of statutory processes

> Functioning partnership working at a strategic level
> Established vision for local families
> Shared values, principles and evidence base
> Willingness to experiment

Keep going

> Practice tools
> Time and capacity
> Opportunities to reflect
> Access to expert advice
> Access to resources
> Cooperation of the wider system

> Engaged and consistent leadership
> Active nurturing of partnerships
> Championing new approaches to practice
> Access to additional funding
> Producing robust evidence of impact

Working together

Supported by

> Common leadership on practice issues
> Shared training and development
> Communities of learning and reflective spaces
> Shared tools and approaches
> Leadership support and challenge
> Securing engagement and momentum
> Organisational diagnostics
> Deep dives and peer reviews
> Shared evidence and data

Impact

Children and families

I think sometimes we help simply by being there, walking with them in their pain (Practitioner).

> Incremental progress towards measurable outcomes
> Increased self-esteem
> Increased willingness to ask for help in a crisis
> Building/repairing trust in professionals and public services
> Having a model of a reliable and stable relationship

Practice

This is the kind of work I came into social work to do (Practitioner) .

> Increased job satisfaction
> Increased understanding of challenges facing children and families
> Increased knowledge of evidence and theory and confidence in applying them in practice
> Increased understanding of the roles and services in other agencies

Local systems

We are starting to have some good strategic discussions about the future shape of early help (Project Lead).

> Local evidence of cost savings and improved outcomes
> Improved inter-agency processes and communication
> Improved strategic relationships with partner agencies
> "Ripple effects" on wider practice and culture
> Increased appetite to innovate

GM system

I think we have understood that this is not about consistency, it [is about being] the best thing for that place (GMCA).

> Increased capacity and infrastructure for innovation and collaboration
> Improved understanding of system conditions for innovation
> Increased connections and collaborative activity between authorities

Adopting and Adapting

Importing innovation

Adapting for local context

> Selection based on local priorities.
> Developing local partnerships.
> Building on local strengths and resources.
> Consulting with children and families.
> Recruiting and developing practitioners.
> Developing local leaders and culture.

Originating teams

Consultative groups of young people and families

Innovation teams

Strategic DCS

Partner agencies and governance

Exporting innovation

Originating teams

Innovation teams

Strategic DCS

Articulating the model

> Codification
> Theory of change
> Evidence base
> Principles and values
> Organisational requirements

Communicating the model

> Communicating values
> Coaching
> Learning with peers
> Walking alongside
> Practical advice
> Professional development

Making links between the innovations

NWD / ACT — Broadening the offer while keeping consistent relationships.

ACT / TAS — Supporting young people at risk of exploitation in education settings.

TAS / SSF — Supporting child development in the early years by supporting parents.

ACT / SSF — Recognising adolescent trauma and impact on future relationships and parenting.

Responding to emerging need

> Special educational needs
> Mental health
> Housing
> Adult social care

Responding to Covid

> Drawing on knowledge of research evidence and theory.
> Practitioners empowered to respond flexibly and according to need.
> Building on existing partnerships and relationships.

Developing approaches to prevention and to working at scale

> Building wider strategy around the principles of the innovation.
> Extending practice approaches and principles to earlier help to prevent escalation.
> Embedding specialist roles in other teams working with different types of need.
> Disseminating training and tools to the wider workforce.

Ripple effects on wider practice and systems

> Practitioner advocacy for individual children and young people.
> Practitioners championing ways of working with colleagues.
> Championing of values in the wider organisation.
> Wider use of reflective spaces and communities of learning.

Making connections

Leadership roles

> Recognising the DCS from the exporting authority as the strategic lead for the innovation.

> Appointing one or more innovation leads, to develop the innovation for "export" and support authorities with adoption.

> Forming a Programme Team within GMCA to support both exporting and importing authorities.

> Appointing learning partners to support collective learning and feedback loops.

Collaborative activity

> Local leaders contributing to collective leadership activity across the system.

> Bringing local authorities adopting a particular innovation together into a cluster to work together.

> Project leads forming steering groups and stakeholder groups with partner agenicies, and within authorities.

Building Trust

The Scale and Spread Programme increased the quantity and quality of connections between authorities and individuals through:

> Developing a shared vision based around shared principles and a shared evidence base.

> Developing relationships with and between members of the group, understanding their strengths and where they need support.

> Collective problem-solving and sharing of resources to address common challenges.

> Safe, reflective spaces for sharing experiences and learning together.

> The exchange of peer support between members of the group.

> Continuing to expand the shared evidence base, through shared data collection and case studies.
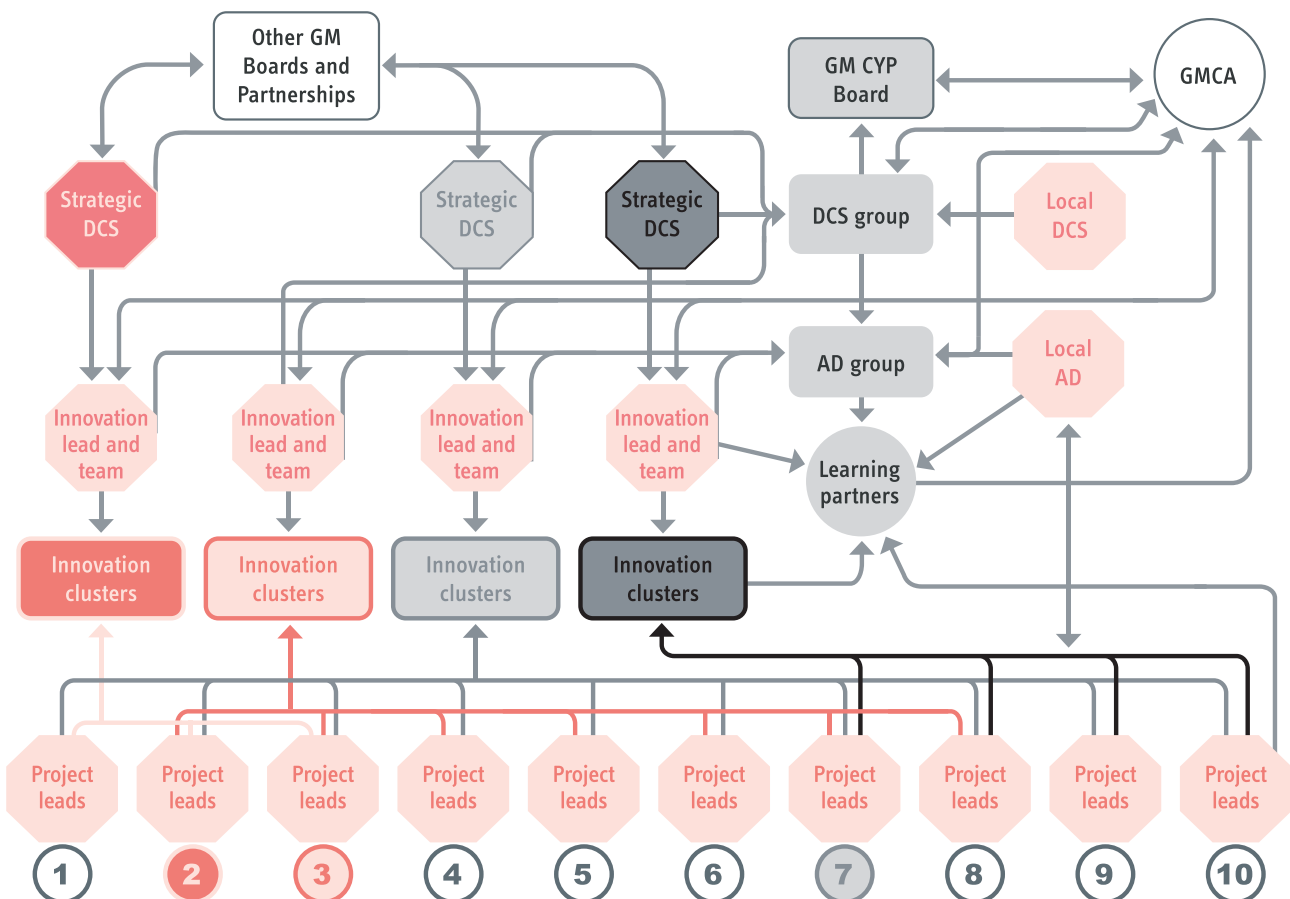
Reflective Spaces

Learning a new skill and way of being requires the time and space to reflect.

Reflective spaces are a critical part of the development of new ways of working, both in practice with children and families and in designing and implementing innovation.

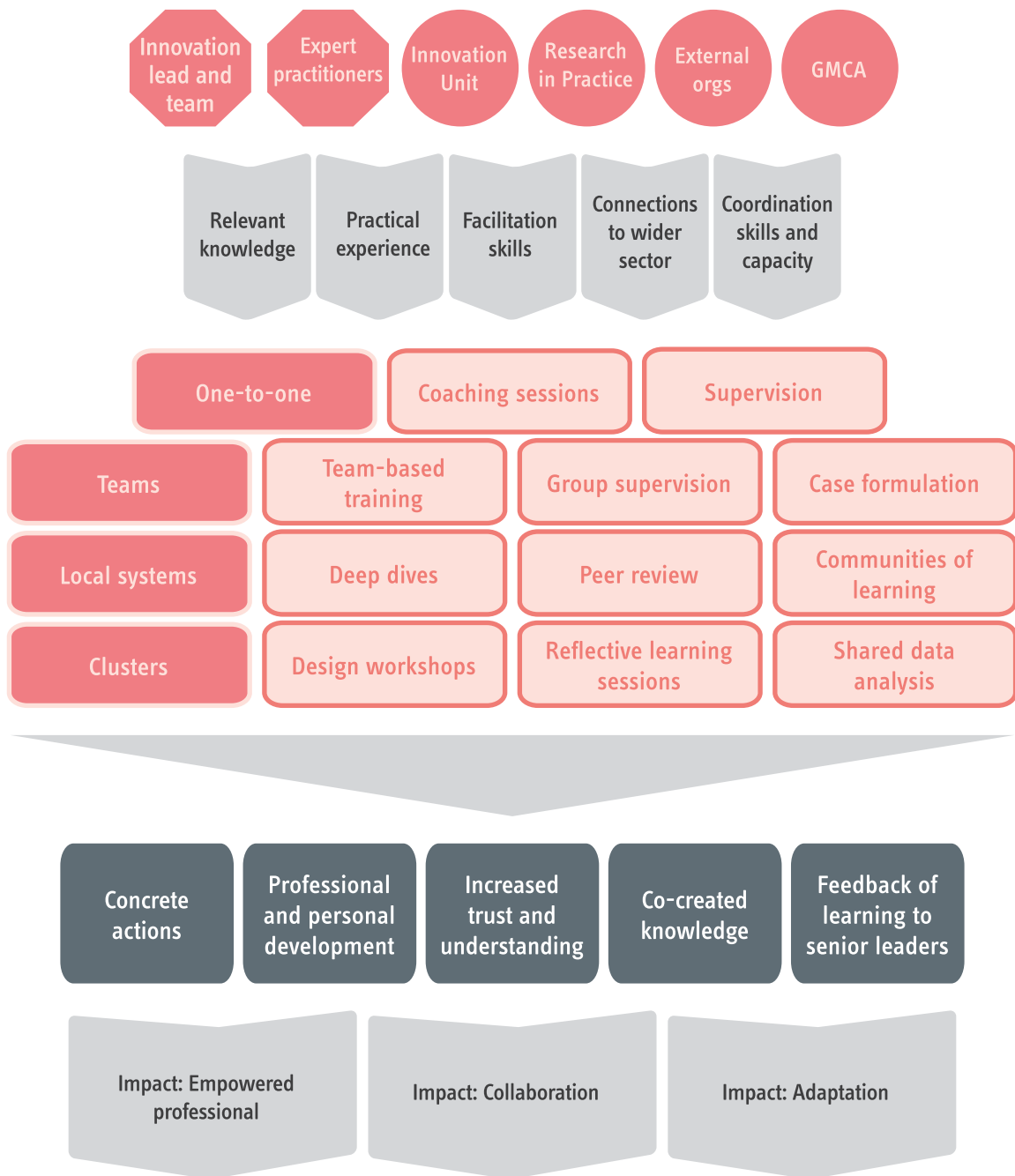The explicit purpose of reflective spaces within the Scale and Spread programme included:

> Learning and **embedding new knowledge** or a new skill into practice.

> **Making explicit tacit knowledge** held by the group.

> **Understanding multiple perspectives** to identify next steps.

> **Collective problem-solving** and action learning.

> **Containing and reflecting on the emotional responses** elicited by new ways of working and working in ambiguity.

In participating in reflective spaces, groups became more coherent, as they worked and learned together. In the course of the activities above, groups:

> Build **mutual understanding** and trust.

> Share **knowledge and resources** among the group.

> Explore and **enact the core principles** underlying the innovations and the Scale and Spread Programme.

> Develop a **shared language and mental model** of the problem they are trying to solve.

Designing reflective spaces

> Reflective spaces require **time and resources** to coordinate and manage.

> Facilitating reflective spaces requires leaders to 'let go' of the agenda and give control to the group - this is a **different set of behaviours** to those used to drive progress.

> Facilitators need to have the **trust of the group**, with clear guidance about what will be shared outside the group, with whom and for what purpose.

> Ability to access reflective spaces relies on **local capacity and permission from those in leadership roles** to commit to time away from 'business as usual'.

Innovation lead and team | Expert practitioners | Innovation Unit | Research in Practice | External orgs | GMCA

Relevant knowledge | Practical experience | Facilitation skills | Connections to wider sector | Coordination skills and capacity

One-to-one | Coaching sessions | Supervision

Teams | Team-based training | Group supervision | Case formulation

Local systems | Deep dives | Peer review | Communities of learning

Clusters | Design workshops | Reflective learning sessions | Shared data analysis

Concrete actions | Professional and personal development | Increased trust and understanding | Co-created knowledge | Feedback of learning to senior leaders

Impact: Empowered professional | Impact: Collaboration | Impact: Adaptation

Leadership

Distributed leadership

The key leadership roles in the Scale and Spread programme were:

> **The strategic DCS**, leading the export of the innovation and links to wider strategy.

> **The innovation lead**, bringing together the local authorities adopting the innovation and providing pace and momentum.

> **The local DCS and AD,** providing local strategic and operational leadership and making links to the local system.

> **The local project leads,** leading on design and implementation, and the formation and management of multi-agency teams.

> **The GMCA programme lead,** providing the overarching vision, oversight and connections across the innovations and into governance processes.

Leading in a collaborative system

Leading in a complex system of autonomous organisations requires leaders to provide a sense of direction, without being directive.

They do this through:

> **intentionally nurturing relationships** with each other and those they work alongside.

> **adding pace and momentum** to collaborative activity and facilitating collective reflective spaces.

> **making connections** with the wider system and publically celebrating the work of GM.

> **providing high support and high challenge** to individual members of the group.

> **publically celebrating the work of the group** and individual authorities outside of GM.

This requires agility, passion, resilience and a willingness to listen, learn and experiment.

Supporting leaders

> **Senior, strategic support** to provide vision, resources and challenge.

> **Professional development** through coaching and reflective activities to develop new behaviours.

> **Supporting infrastructure** to coordinate collaborative activity.
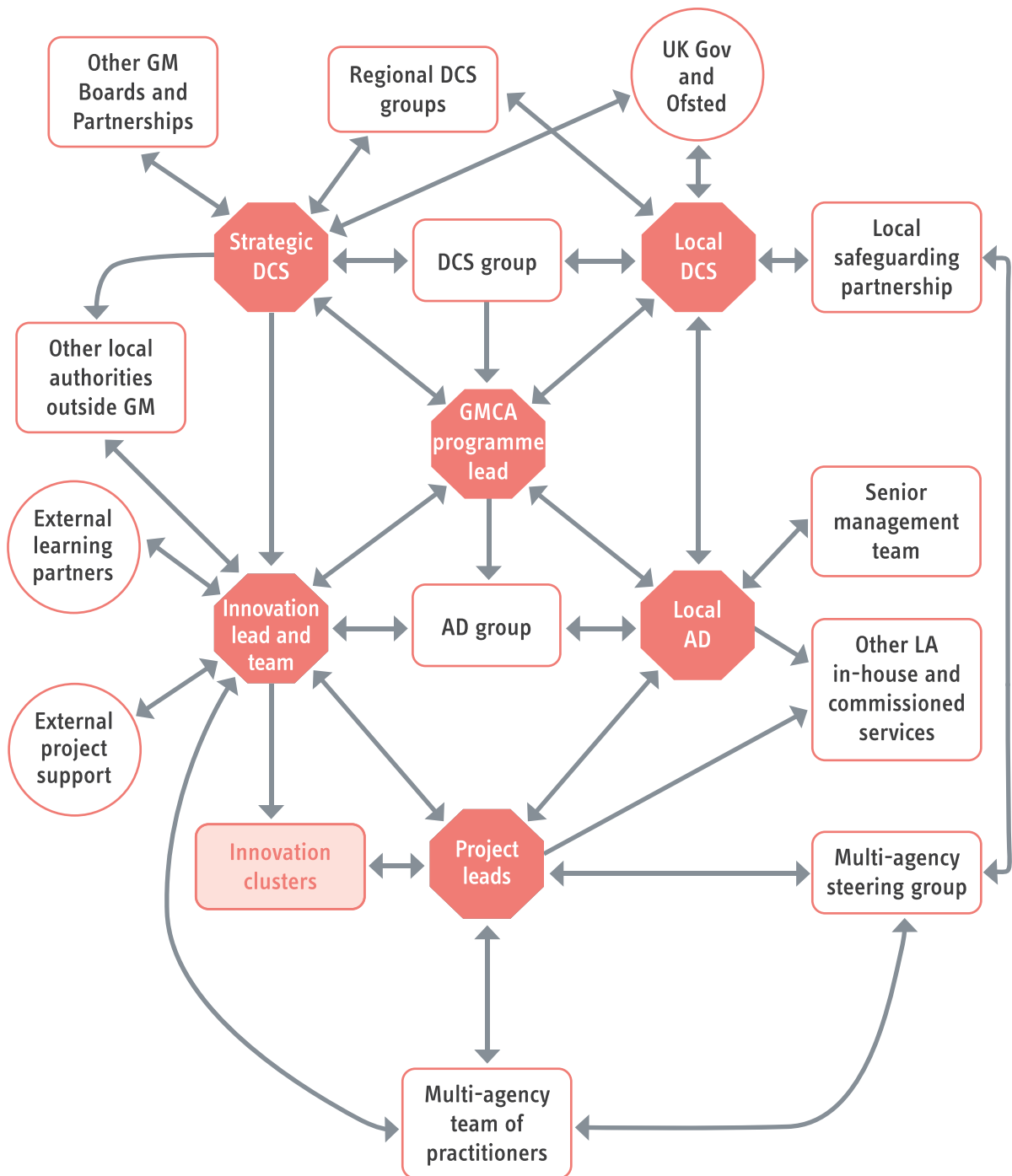
© Research in Practice August 2021

www.researchinpractice.org.uk