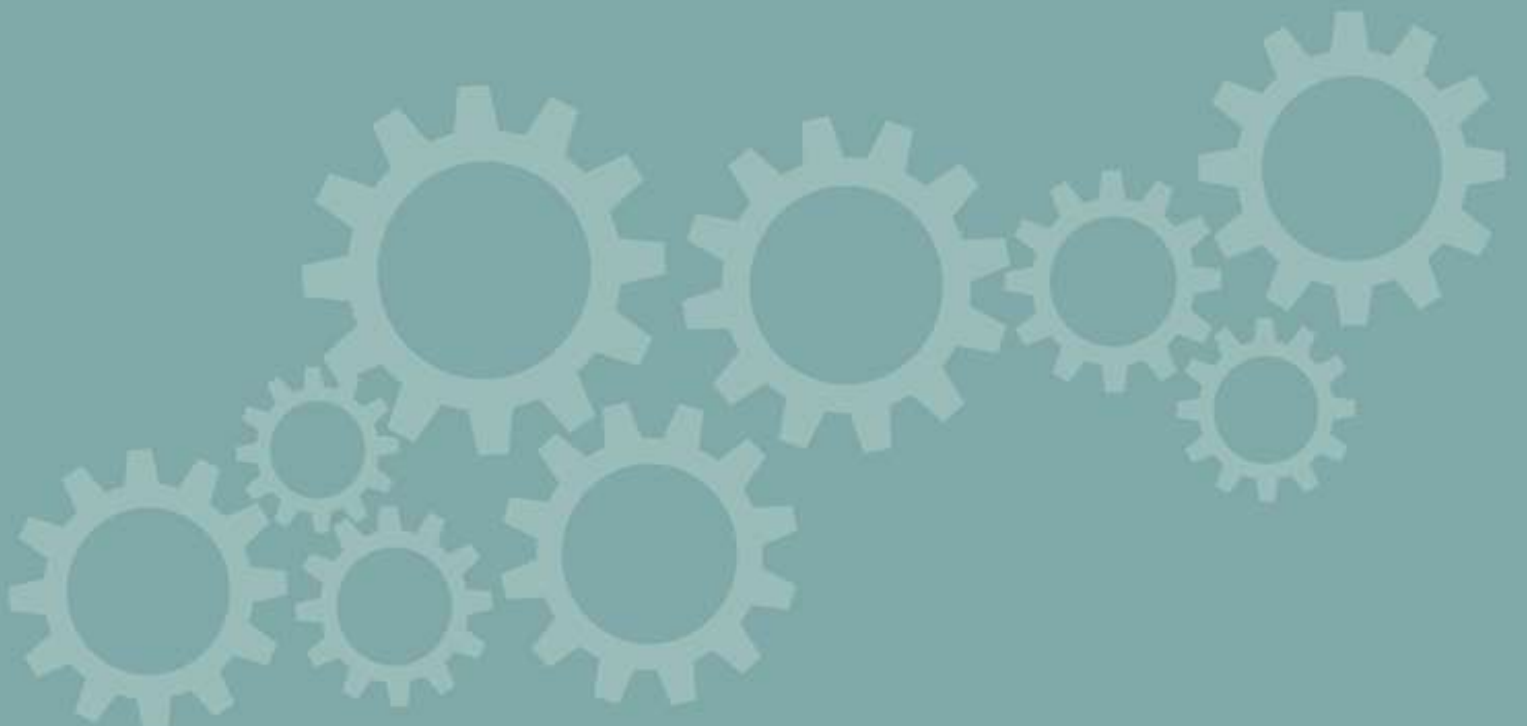# Fife Collaborative Action Research Programme: An overview of the process

Dr Hayley Bennett, University of Edinburgh
and What Works Scotland

What Works Scotland (WWS) aims to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

We are working with Community Planning Partnerships involved in the design and delivery of public services (Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) to:

- learn what is and what isn't working in their local area
- encourage collaborative learning with a range of local authority, business, public sector and community partners
- better understand what effective policy interventions and effective services look like
- promote the use of evidence in planning and service delivery
- help organisations get the skills and knowledge they need to use and interpret evidence
- create case studies for wider sharing and sustainability

A further nine areas are working with us to enhance learning, comparison and sharing. We will also link with international partners to effectively compare how public services are delivered here in Scotland and elsewhere. During the programme, we will scale up and share more widely with all local authority areas across Scotland.

What Works Scotland brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, other academics across Scotland, with partners from a range of local authorities and:

- Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Improvement Service
- Inspiring Scotland
- IRISS (Institution for Research and Innovation in Social Services)
- NHS Education for Scotland
- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Health Improvement for Scotland
- Scottish Community Development Centre
- SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

This is one of a series of papers published by What Works Scotland to share evidence, learning and ideas about public service reform. This paper relates to the What Works Scotland **collaborative action research** workstream.

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www.whatworksscotland.ac.uk

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Additional thanks and acknowledgement go to Kevin Lowden for providing peer support and for taking on additional tasks and work at various points throughout the process. Finally, thanks to What Works Scotland colleagues who also contributed to some of the Fife activities or attended meetings (in alphabetical order): Nick Bland (Scottish Government), Chris Chapman (Glasgow University), Oliver Escobar (Edinburgh University), James Mitchell (Edinburgh University), Christina McMellon (Edinburgh University), and Sarah Morton (Edinburgh University).

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Contents

1. Foreword

I am writing this document shortly after completing my in-person involvement in the Collaborative Action Research (CAR) work with a range of practitioners working in Fife. As part of What Works Scotland (WWS) I was one of four university-based research fellows, each piloting collaborative action research with a community planning partner in one of the four case sites across Scotland. Working solely with Fife, I decided to write and share this document as a way to record and reflect on the work that took place from 2015 to 2017, and to provide the contextual information for the associated coproduced Fife collaborative action research inquiry reports. Throughout the document I refer to "we" or "our". In other What Works Scotland documents "we" may refer to the What Works Scotland team. In this document "we" means the practitioners and I who have been working to co-produce what I term the "Fife CAR programme". The choice of language is intentional; although I am the author of this report, we (the practitioners and I) co-produced the programme, shaped the processes, and shared the learning experience. The activities I describe in this report reflect the nature of the work, the realities of the context, and some of the challenges we faced and sought to overcome.

I hope by reflecting, learning, and sharing this information the Fife collaborators and I can contribute to improving and developing the knowledge on using a CAR approach in public service reform. It is no secret that Action Research is "more demanding and more difficult" (Dick, 1993; 12) than many other research approaches. CAR involves commitment, enthusiasm, and an emphasis on the process. As such, this report is not simply an end product or a record of time spent. The action of producing this document serves as *part* of this collaborative work and learning process. By collating and reflecting on our activities all of us involved in the work can advance our learning. We can also share our insights to others who may be interested in undertaking a similar approach. For this reason I outline the resources I provided as the professional researcher piloting CAR on behalf of What Works Scotland, and I outline some of the collective actions from the process. However, this document is not a blue print of 'how to design CAR'; CAR is not an 'off the shelf tool' for workforce development or social research. Instead, it is a longstanding *research position* built on key principles regarding practice, positionality, and a willingness and ability to understand the values of others. In practice, it is a complex combination of knowledge generation, action, reflection, and relational work.

As you work through this document you will see the distance between the original What Works Scotland offer to community planning partnerships (CPP) and the CAR programme that emerged and played out over the two years in Fife. This difference is due to resource demands, expectations, opportunities, pressures, and various organisational shifts which shaped and changed the work. Such changes may be part and parcel of CAR, reflecting the "designing the plane while flying it" (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 69) character of this approach. However, as you will see, trialling a CAR approach in the multi-agency and multi-

professional context of community planning reveals a number of interesting adaptational complexities and resource implications. Not only does the final Fife experience substantially differ from the original What Works Scotland offer, the pilot work in all of the four case sites differ in terms of relational practice, resource demands, principles, processes, and outcomes. As such, it is important to avoid generalisations across the four case sites; this Fife overview document outlines the experience and outcomes of this particular place, and the contributions of the particular people involved in the processes that took place here.

The practitioners embedded the inquiry and CAR activities in their working context and heavily shaped and built on existing skills, capacity, micro politics, and knowledge. As such, there is no simple final research report or set of recommendations. Whilst our inquiries produced research findings and recommendations (outlined in the associated inquiry reports) and I offer some key learning points at the end of this document, these are *not the only* actions or learning points from this process. Individuals and groups have learnt, reflected, and implemented change as they go. Furthermore, if each of us involved in the work asks "what did I learn" or "what did we learn," we would not all provide the same answers as our knowledge develops and changes in relation to our professional values and practices. What we learnt and gained from engaging in the work will also depend on what each of us contributed and sought to develop. Employing a CAR approach with a variety of practitioners and diverse professional backgrounds will always lead to different learning experiences, which each of us will share through different mediums. As the professional/university researcher this document serves as one of the ways that I will share some of the knowledge and learning captured from across the CAR programme. Others involved in the work will no doubt have their own ways of sharing their learning that meets their professional needs or organisational processes.

Before you read about the detail of the Fife CAR programme, it is worth briefly highlighting that the collaborative nature of this work has multiple tiers and is complex. There is the collaboration between different types of practitioners and professionals in the inquiry groups, as well as across departmental and organisational boundaries in Fife. There is also my collaboration, as the professional university researcher in this space; I worked with specific individuals, with each group, and across the programme. I am also an employee of the University of Edinburgh, and part of What Works Scotland (What Works Scotland) project. What Works Scotland is a multi-disciplinary collaboration between Edinburgh and Glasgow universities, combining individuals of various academic backgrounds and specialisms, different types of collaborative research experience, and located in multiple departments and office locations. Members of the What Works Scotland team design and deliver numerous workstreams, activities, and events exploring public service reform and policymaking in Scotland. At the same time as supporting the case sites, the four What Works Scotland research fellows (each working with a different case site to pilot CAR in public service reform) regularly came together to translate the theory of CAR into practice, design and deliver collaborative national retreats, find solutions for pragmatic difficulties,

and provide peer support. Although I am the author of this report (and responsible for its content), collaboration and co-production underpinned nearly all aspects of the inquiry work. As such, what I present here is the output of many hands and heads.

Underpinning all of this work therefore is continual and complex collaboration in all aspects of the project, from seeking resources and support from administrative colleagues based in Glasgow, to forging working relationships with the Fife practitioners, whilst always trying to balance professional requirements to engage in the academic community. My experience in Fife, and my What Works Scotland colleagues' experiences in other case sites, can offer rich insights into the issues and advantages of undertaking collaborative research across institutions, and between different types of academic and non-academic organisations. As well as providing a descriptive overview of the work undertaken in Fife, this document also shed light on the "distance between the academic and practitioner worlds" Orr and Bennett (2012)[1], the challenges this creates, and how we overcame some of the difficulties.

Finding ways to balance, understand and present the different views is something that has taken much time and energy throughout the process. By being responsible for our own learning and acknowledging that this work is a continual process, each of us has the space to reflect on our individual roles within this work and our contributions. By doing so, we can seek to continually improve our practice. Hopefully we can illustrate some of the relational skills and co-produced processes required to bring these worlds closer together.

1.1   Purpose and audience

The purpose of this report is to:

- provide an overview of the Fife CAR programme that took place between 2015 and 2017
- outline the details and specificities of the Fife CAR programme to practitioners involved in this work in Fife, their colleagues, and What Works Scotland colleagues
- provide insight and details to encourage and enable better adaptation and spreading of a CAR approach
- give insight to other professional researchers seeking to initiate or attempt similar CAR projects
- contribute to the learning in Fife and influence their ongoing work into organisational change, community planning, and partnership working

There are three main audiences for this document:

1. **The practitioners and those involved in the Fife work**. These collaborators may be interested in the collated overview of all the activities and tasks that helped create

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[1] *Let's get together: the hidden politics of 'co-production' in research*. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2012/jul/18/politics-coproduction-research-academics-practitioners

the space for their inquiries and support parts of their learning process. The document is not a standalone item; it functions as part of the CAR learning process, providing individuals and groups with an overview of the process they contributed to, and some ideas and understanding of what may be involved if they would like to establish and adapt a CAR approach in future learning. As is the nature of complex collaborative arrangements, some of the Fife collaborators will have only come across some of the items or events listed below, or have a particular understanding of the work that differs from what I outline here. As such, the document serves to pull the different activities into one coherent overview and share the insights from my vantage point (as the critical friend and professional researcher attached to the work).

2. **Professional social researchers and research managers** may gain insight and learning from the description and reflections on the activities, tasks, and workload that contributed to this particular CAR programme. Such researchers are likely to already be familiar or interested in collaborative research and the principles of action research. This includes colleagues within What Works Scotland piloting CAR in other case sites or using alternative collaborative arrangements. I also envisage that the contents of this document will be of interest to those working within government, universities, and third sector research organisations who are increasingly seeking to develop collaborative research projects.

3. **Those connected to the What Works Scotland project**, such as What Works Scotland colleagues and our funders, may be interested in getting a more detailed understanding of the work that took place in one of the case sites and the innovative development of the CAR methodology in the context of public service reform.

This document provides an overview and some details of the overarching programme. I recommend that you consult the accompanying CAR inquiry reports from the Fife programme for further information[2] on the specific activities and learning within each inquiry group.

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[2] See What Works Scotland website at whatworksscotland.ac.uk/casesites/fife

2. Summary

This document provides an overview of the Fife CAR programme, a collaboration involving What Works Scotland, and (led by Fife Council) a range of practitioners and organisations involved in community planning in Fife between March 2015 and December 2016. As part of the What Works Scotland project, the What Works Scotland research fellow piloted collaborative action research as a way to bring knowledge generation and knowledge use together.

The Fife CAR programme involved three inquiry groups and an overarching strategy group; each inquiry group undertaking an inquiry project based on collecting data, their working context, and combining discussions and analysis of their context with evidence and data from elsewhere (subject to capacity). Collectively the Fife CAR programme strengthened the capacity to use evidence and research to persuade others, better understand different types of evidence and data options to respond to new problems and support individuals to have a better understanding of how to producing local evidence and research. Unlike the other case sites where What Works Scotland research fellows piloted CAR as part of the What Works Scotland CAR workstream, the Fife CAR programme involved the practitioner teams working together on all aspects of the inquiry (identifying a research problem, collecting data, analysing, interpreting, and acting) for a prolonged period of time. The What Works Scotland research fellow worked with 87 individuals over 90 weeks.

What Works Scotland initially offered to assist practitioners to access and use evidence. The What Works Scotland research fellow sought to provide expertise and guidance on undertaking research, using evidence, and adopting an inquiring stance. The co-production process and a range of contextual factors reshaped the original What Works Scotland offer; the Fife CAR programme focussed predominately on local, experiential knowledge, and improving working relationships and the skills required to undertake collaborative governance. The Fife CAR programme involved a wider range of activities than initially offered, including creating the pre-conditions for undertaking inquiry work, including support for group work, programme management, facilitation, and relational tasks.

The Fife CAR programme demonstrates the nature and activities involved in sustained engagement with organisations in public, private or third sector using research to inform policy and practice. Pursuing a CAR approach to bring together the academic and practitioner worlds requires careful consideration of the relational work, programme management, and unevenness of understanding of research, university resources, and evidence use between individuals and organisations. To improve evidence-based policymaking in multi-agency contexts and across organisational boundaries, we need to give more attention to developing the collaborative ways of working in these spaces.

CAR can offer insight into collaborative governance in practice, and a detailed understanding of public service reform in Scotland. However, it drastically reframes and reshapes the university researchers' roles and remit. Future research projects may benefit from better understanding of the scope and volume of additional support demands and requirements, and the various skills and resources required for CAR to successes in complex multi-agency and multi-professional environments.

3. What Works Scotland: Collaborating for knowledge production and knowledge use

This section provides a brief overview and background to the What Works Scotland initiative and some of the key aspects that underpinned the Fife CAR programme. There are different approaches and activities within the wider What Works Scotland work plan and projects, all of which are underpinned by a shared position to explore and support evidence-based policymaking, work closely between university researchers and non-academic partners, and a belief that collaborative approaches to research can provide greater insight into the areas of key importance and the shifting environment of public service reform. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Scottish Government, What Works Scotland is a temporary research collaboration between multi-disciplinary researchers at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. It has an overarching aim to increase and improve the use of evidence in policymaking and public service reform activities. Our approach to undertaking research in public service reform centres heavily on an ethos of collaboration, albeit involving a variety of activities and interactions with different types of actors[3].

One of What Works Scotland intentions is to ensure collaboration underpins all our knowledge generation and knowledge use activities. Collaborative research is a "deliberate set of interactions and processes designed specifically to bring together those who study social problems and issues (researchers) with those who act on or within those societal problems and issues (decision-makers, practitioners, citizens and so on)" (Denis and Lomas, 2003, S2:1). From this perspective, collaboration is widely understood to mean not simply a range of researchers working together, but specifically an arrangement whereby professional researchers work with non-researchers to conduct research and use research findings. Ideally such collaborative arrangements enrich the research process by increasing and varying our understandings of problems and research topics, whilst embedding action and practice into the research process. As such, the process of collaborating can change the thinking and behaviour of both researchers and practitioners. Notably, advocates of collaborative approaches contend that bringing together knowledge generation and knowledge use can create transformative changes regarding power and social justice (Smith *et al*, 2010).

Whilst nearly What Works Scotland activities operate in collaborative ways, you should not treat the approach I outline in this report as either typical or generalisable to other research projects or arrangements within What Works Scotland. Nearly all our activities involve elements of co-production between academics and non-academic partners and there are basic similarities in terms of the public service reform context and collaborative ethos,

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[3] See What Works Scotland website for information on the workstreams, partners, and approaches. whatworksscotland.ac.uk

however there are also great variations in collaborative form, power-relations, research ethos, and relationship intensity. This report refers to a programme of work in one case site within the collaborative action research workstream. Within the collaborative action research workstream there is much variation between practice, structures, and types of outcomes in each of the four case sites. Furthermore, other activities within What Works Scotland involved, for example, practices from improvement science, evaluation methodologies, and relationships based on contracted research partnerships or practitioner secondments.

Within this collaborative research paradigm, the concept of co-production is gaining prominence supporting a move towards professional researchers working with, instead of working on research subjects. Whilst many policymakers reserve the term "co-production" for exclusive use to describe the shift towards public servants working with communities and citizens (rather than with fellow practitioners or professionals), I intentionally use the term "co-production" to describe the working relationship between myself as the professional researcher and the practitioners in the creation and implementation of the Fife CAR programme.

"*Those who work in co-production often speak of serendipity – chance encounters, anecdotes, snippets of learning leading to unintended impacts. The small things – for example, an unplanned conversation over coffee – sometimes lead to large shifts. Serendipity is not just about chance; there are conditions that underpin serendipity which can be fostered*"

(Pain et al, 2015; 7)

Drawing on Durose *et al* (no date, 6), my approach to working with the Fife partners reflects a concerted effort to create "interactive knowledge production" by developing a shared "thought style"" (Pohl *et al* 2010; 271), by creating space for dialogues to test and question existing knowledge and power relations between different professions (including the university researcher). It is important to note that, compared to many other collaborative research arrangements, adopting a CAR approach affects the role of the professional researcher and the associated resource demands and provisions. There are also different ways to understand impact and action.

4. Collaborative action research

Kurt Lewin's work in the 1940s underpins and influences much of the work within the action research tradition. His work, and much of that which has followed, positions action research as a participative approach to create knowledge and social change. In contrast to traditional scientific approaches which may separate knowledge generation and non-researchers, action research "*seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities*" (Reasons and Bradbury, 2006;1). Furthermore, literature adopting an action research position often states that emancipatory approaches and critical thinking are the means through which individuals and groups can transform organisations, services, and systems (Denis & Lehoux, 2009; Bartels & Wittmayer, 2014).

Collaborative action research is not a well-defined research approach, with much scope for variation in the way that it is utilised and which parts of the process feature most heavily (Dickens, and Watkins, 1999). However, for many, adopting a CAR position means privileging local voices, culture, and wisdom throughout the process. In this way, CAR can "offer the potential to create knowledge that does not simply reproduce the worldviews, values and interests of dominant groups" (Smith *et al*, 2010; 408). A crucial part of the theory and practice of CAR is that the work (learning, action, and knowledge generation) prioritises collaboration between different individuals. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988; 5) argue that "the approach is only action research when it is collaborative….[and] a form of collective self-reflective enquiry". For this CAR project I drew on Townsend (2014) understanding that:

> "*The 'collaborative' aspect of the phrase collaborative action research places an emphasis on the **social, relational and interactive aspects** of the conduct of action research…the distinctive features of this approach are in the mutual benefit of people, with differing but complementary knowledge, skills, responsibilities and sometimes social status, working together in trying to achieve change in a shared aspect of their work and life*"
>
> *(2014: 117, emphasis added).*

The literature explicitly using the term 'collaborative action research' tends to be aligned with improvements in educational practice or with individual practice within an education setting (see Platteel *et al*. 2010; Bruce *et al*, 2011). The most easily available 'how to guides' and associated grey literature aimed at supporting practitioners to undertake CAR are also primarily aimed at educationalists (Sagor, 1992). However, we can see a growing body of scholars applying action research approaches in different settings or workplaces outside of education (Westling *et al*, 2014; Noga *et al*, 2015;). There are a number of differences between some of the traditional applications and debates from an education context and the public service reform context of our work here. I briefly highlight three matters.

First, some of the approaches in education use a CAR approach to work with small numbers of co-researchers or collaborators. There is a tendency for small inquiry groups comprising of less than five continual inquiry partners. These partners may be existing colleagues with established working relationships (e.g. Avgitidou, 2009). Second, the university researcher aligned to educational research tends to also be an educationalist. That this, they are often training to become a teacher (in which CAR is their dissertation approach), are working with colleagues within their own schools (as such doing a CAR inquiry is part of their ongoing professional development), or they work in a university and are an expert on a particular topic of interest to teachers (Bruce *et al*, 2011; Ainscow *et al*, 2007). Third, there is an increasing tendency within the education context for CAR to be utilised by those concerned with small scale workplace improvements or larger service transformation (Chapman & Hadfield, 2010: Chapman *et. al*, 2015). In this approach, the emphasis is often on measurable improvement strategies and, arguably, less on some of the key principles of empowerment and challenging existing boundaries, practices, and values.

As CAR is not a strict methodology but an approach based on underpinning principles, there are various approaches to undertaking CAR. Different professional researchers, or co-researcher teams create and develop context-specific work based on a range of factors including capacity and the extent to which professional researchers prioritise principles of co-production, empowerment, and power-sharing in collaboration.

4.1 Designing the plane while flying it

Adopting a CAR approach based on key principles of empowerment, engagement, and social and relational practice, creates a different research design process than traditional social research approaches. Traditional research processes offer somewhat clear stages of design, collection, analysis, and writing; researchers often undertake clear tasks before entering the field. However, a CAR approach creates a
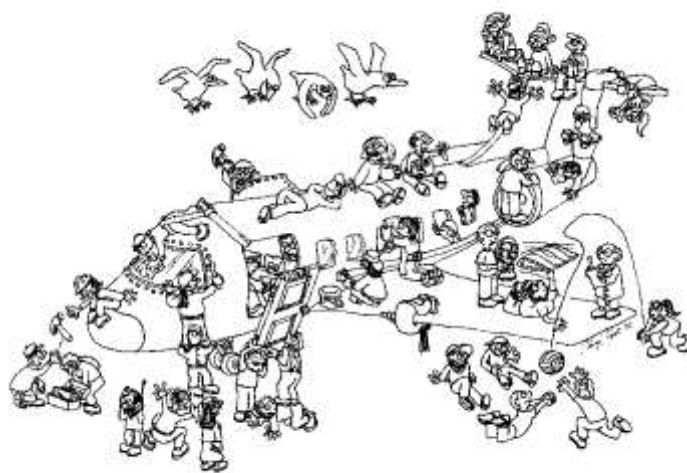
Illustration 1: Designing the plane while flying it

different type of research relationship, requiring different skills, flexibility, and timings (McArdle, 2014). The "designing the plane while flying it" (Herr and Anderson, 2005, 69) nature of CAR creates opportunities whereby a range of collaborators can engage in setting the parameters and shaping the focus of the work. However, whilst we can seek guidance

from previous CAR projects, transferring models from other contexts may not be suitable, and practitioners may not welcome such blueprints within their own context.

Both collaborative action research and co-production place an emphasis on *process* as much as *outcome*: The research process itself is a form of learning and change. The approach I adopted in the Fife CAR programme was influenced by the work of Pain *et al* (2015) whose work on measuring and understanding impact in social research is extremely useful for conceptualising potential action and change within the Fife CAR programme. The authors argue that research impact and the co-production of knowledge should not be conceptualised as a simple transfer process appended to research projects. Instead, they contend that "the changes that take place during and after co-produced research may not be linear, one-way or quantifiable" (ibid; 4). To these authors we should not limit our understanding of impact and research outcomes but instead conceptualise impact as a "collaborative process of critical reflection on reality in order to transform it" (ibid; 5). Thinking of impact in this way means "rejecting the hierarchies that often exist concerning who undertakes these three practices, and how they do so. Impact, then, is at the centre of co-produced/participatory research processes. Impact is co-defined, co-pursued and co-evaluated in collaboration" (ibid; 5).

It is useful, and arguably necessary, to be explicit about the position underpinning this work. Unlike some of the more structured "off the shelf" approaches to CAR, this programme followed an approach where impact, learning, and action were co-produced; occurring throughout, at the end, and beyond the research interactions covered in this overview report (2015-2017).

5. The research context: Collaborating for public service reform

This section provides a brief introduction and discussion of the public service reform context.

5.1 Collaborative governance

Modern debates about policy design and implementation increasingly centre on the importance of collaboration. Debates and research on public service reform often place collaboration between different public actors, private organisations, citizens, elected politicians, professional bodies and a variety of third sector organisations as a requirement for future public policymaking and implementation. In this context, collaboration can be defined, "as the process through which a plurality of actors aim to arrive at a common definition of problems and challenges, manage conflicts in a constructive way, and find joint solutions based on provisional agreements that may co-exist with disagreement and dissent" (Torfing, 2013; 305).

Policy design and implementation based on collaboration, partnership, and joint-working dominate public service reform agendas across the world (Keast *et al*, 2007), particularly as a response to public sector funding reductions since the global financial crisis in 2008 (Peters, 2011; Lyall and Bua, 2015). In the UK such ideas pre-date this event; partnerships and collaborations featured heavily in the former Labour Government's governance reforms between 1997 and 2010 (Huxham *et al*, 2000; Newman, 2001). During this time numerous legislative changes, performance agreements and funding requirements transformed public services and normalised collaborative and partnership--centric working. Multi-agency local partnerships became "a common feature in the changing landscape of local governance in each of the four UK nations" (Sinclair, 2008, 374). The discourse of many public service systems continues to reflect this period, with most practitioners and public sector organisations conversant with joined-up working, cross-cutting reviews, outcome-based agreements, and notions of shared responsibility. Such shifts support claims that a broader notion of *public services* is replacing traditional ideas of *public sector.* Under the rubric of "collaborative governance" (Ansell and Gash, 2008), this notion of public services includes public, private, third, and hybrid organisations operating within a complex multi-actor decision making process.

The shift towards collaborative governance is not without tensions and difficulties. Despite 30 years of investment and the discursive shift towards partnership working, there are stubborn difficulties aligning and effectively engaging *across* organisational and professional boundaries (Huxham *et al*, 2000; Cook, 2015). There are also tensions w*ithin* organisations between former directive and hierarchical forms of governance (Newman, 2001), and their

associated ways of working. Furthermore, alternative reform agendas utilising privatisation instruments (including the use of quasi-markets or competitively procuring services from non-state actors) has led to a fragmented public service system and a multiplicity of organisational arrangements and networks across localities and policy fields. As such, some scholars argue that complexity and fragmentation have become the key challenges in public service delivery (Osborne and Brown, 2013), claiming that further development of collaborative governance - based on structures and processes that bring together and cut across different organisational and institutional boundaries – can best address this problem (Torfing *et al*, 2012; Osborne 2010).

Increasingly, (alongside senior management from a range of public sector organisations) community groups, community leaders, and non-state professionals are influential actors in the public policy process. This disruption to traditional ideas of 'control' in public policy making creates and relies on networks, collaborative relationships, and shifts in power arrangements. In this context, collaborative decision-making involves different spaces and process of interaction. New systems, which seek to create a shared understanding and responsibility around problem identification and solution, are increasingly necessary. Collaborative governance therefore, requires new skills, competencies, tools, and ways of working than previous differentiated professional and organisational forms.

One reason for pursuing a collaborative approach to public service reform centres on the notion of 'wicked issues'; whereby stubborn social issues or challenges involve complex systems of sub-issues woven together. In brief, wicked issues or wicked problems are those public policy issues that are difficult to clearly define, are not stable, have no clear solution, have many interdependencies and are multi-causal, and are socially complex. Furthermore, efforts to address them may lead to unforeseen consequences (Clarke and Stewart, 2003). Echoing collaborative governance debates, addressing wicked issues requires consideration of all elements and multiple perspectives, ensuring collaborative dialogue and discussion in problem identification and diagnosis (Grint, 2008). Importantly, "key ingredients in solving or at least managing complex policy problems include successfully working across both internal and external organisational boundaries and engaging citizens and stakeholders in policy making and implementation" (Briggs, 2012, no page). Consequently, major policy debates around public service reform centre on the belief that collaboration is key to improving public services and tackling complex social issues.

5.2 Collaborative governance in Scotland

Over the past 14 years, local government modernisation and public service reform have featured as high priorities for the Scottish Executive and Scottish Government. Echoing the debates and language of collaborative governance, in 1997 the Scottish Executive introduced the notion of community planning partnerships (CPPs). Community planning refers to statutory partnership working between local agencies, and representatives from

public, private, third, and community sectors with the aim "to improve local services through coordinated working between local public service providers; to establish a process through which public agencies and the voluntary, community and private sectors could agree a strategic vision for their area and the measures to implement this; and to create a means through which the views of communities could be identified and delivered in policy" (Scottish Office, 1998: para. 7; *quoted in* Sinclair, 2008, 374).

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 made it a statutory requirement to establish CPPs in all 32 local authority areas. Early statutory guidance indicated that CPPs should become the overarching partnership and means to coordinate initiatives within a locality. CPPs would also be the principal connection between national and local priorities and policies (Scottish Executive, 2004a). According to Sinclair (2008; 373), "The Act made the creation and maintenance of CPPs a local authority responsibility, and participation in Partnerships a duty of the other main local public agencies: Health, Police and Fire service joint boards, Scottish/Highland and Island Enterprise, and regional transport partnerships". In 2007 The Scottish Government introduced reforms which made CPPs accountable for the delivery of services through Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs), which were aligned to a National Performance Framework (NPF). Each SOA involved 16 national outcomes to be met by 2017. The community planning governance arrangement also included the establishment of new Third Sector Interfaces to act as a formal point of contact between the collective representatives of the local third sector and local government. (Alcock, 2014). Through this process the Scottish Government "increased the role of community planning in coordinating, delivering and reforming local services, reinforcing the centrality of strategic partnership working in local governance" (Matthews, 2014; 452)

In 2015 the Scottish Government introduced a number of changes to the community planning arrangement. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 makes substantial changes to existing community planning legislation and requires CPPs to create a Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) which sets out priorities and outcomes, identifies smaller areas within the local authority area which experience the poorest outcomes and agrees priorities to improve outcomes in these areas. The Act requires CPPs to review and report publicly on progress towards LOIPs and locality plans. The recent revisions to community planning also expanded the number of public sector bodies required to participate in community planning, for example including Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Authority, and the new Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards. Echoing earlier ambitions for community planning, the Act places specific duties on community planning partners, including a requirement to co-operate with other partners in carrying out community planning and contributing funds and resources as appropriate to improve local outcomes in the LOIP[4].

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[4] Further information can be found at http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/CommEmpowerBill

The former Scottish Executive and now Scottish Government have sought to reform public services through various acts, policies and organisational reforms (such as community planning). On the whole, reform has centred on issues such reducing bureaucracy, streamlining funding streams, encouraging the sharing of public sector functions, and mainstreaming community engagement into local policymaking (Scottish Executive, 2004; Sinclair, 2008; Mitchell, 2015). In 2011, as part of the modernisation and reform agenda, the Scottish Government set up the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (the 'Christie Commission') to inform future policymaking. The Commission stated that, "the public service system is often fragmented, complex and opaque, hampering the joint working between organisations which we consider to be essential", and will require a "fundamental overhaul of relationships within and between those institutions and agencies – public, third sector and private – responsible for designing and delivering public services" (Christie Commission[5]). The Commission suggested a number of public service reform priorities based on four pillars: prevention, participation, performance, and partnership[6].

Partnership working concerns three main areas: partnership between local authorities and the Scottish Government based on agreed outcomes; between multiple public bodies and organisations at the local level; and between these agencies and local communities. The Christie report emphasised that working in partnership goes beyond the collaboration between agencies at local level and should include local communities, stressing the importance of engaging with communities, integrating services, and increasing the role of the third sector in the delivery of public services (Alcock, 2014; Matthews, 2014). Some contend that such shifts to policymaking and public service reform indicate that there is an emergent "Scottish model" (Mitchell, 2015; Cairney, 2016). Mitchell (2015;4) identifies the key features as:

- "Reforms must aim to empower individuals and communities receiving public services by involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.
- Public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve.
- We must prioritise expenditure on public services which prevent negative outcomes from arising.
- And our whole system of public services – public, third and private sectors – must become more efficient by reducing duplication and sharing services wherever possible".

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[5] Christie Commission report - Key messages. Available on the Scottish Government website http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/06/27154527/2
[6] Further information can be found at http://www.gov.scot/About/Review/publicservicescommission

The shift to collaborative governance, specifically the community planning governance arrangement and public service reform priorities outlined in the Christie report, provide the backdrop and context for the CAR work outlined in this report. Undertaking CAR within the community planning context brings a number of organisational and public service reform activities to the fore. The following sections go into the specific detail of the Fife CAR programme.

6. Research design

6.1 Background

In the previous sections I outlined the broad background and public policy context for the What Works Scotland initiative. Within What Works Scotland there are numerous workstreams, research projects, and knowledge exchange activities. In this section I move to focus specifically on the collaborative action research workstream. I briefly outline the research structure and context in regards to the work that What Works Scotland would pilot and undertake as part of this workstream.

There were four What Works Scotland research fellows working to develop and deliver the CAR workstream between 2015 and 2017. The What Works Scotland research fellows are all professional social researchers with academic specialisms in various areas of public policy and extensive experience working in social research and/or public and third sector organisations. This research team joined What Works Scotland in January 2015, six months after the original What Works Scotland academics set up the work and selected the four case site partners. Shortly after joining What Works Scotland, the research team began to work through and design the broad parameters of the CAR workstream, drawing extensively on existing literature and research projects, pooling our knowledge of the public policy context, and drawing on and engaging with What Works Scotland colleagues to understand the aims of the CAR workstream in relation to the What Works Scotland overarching objectives. Subsequently, by combining our academic expertise and research knowledge, our approach to piloting CAR in the community planning context followed a two-pronged approach; we created a broad framework involving first order and second order research. This approach would enable the What Works Scotland research fellows to co-produce and work with partners in each case site on the inquiries (first order), whilst drawing on our cross-site data, knowledge and experience, to undertake our own academic research into public service reform and policymaking (second order). Within the second order lens we would also collect information and data on how the CAR approach to improvement and knowledge generation translates from contexts where it has an established role (such as in education).

The important thing to note at this stage is that the practitioners were only required to engage in and contribute directly towards the first order inquiries. This part of the design reflects more traditional CAR activities and inquiry processes. For ethical reasons, in Fife I also openly communicated that my role included collecting second order data and that I was looking to research and write about these issues once my in-site CAR work was complete.

	First order	Second order
Research question	Practitioners' inquiry topic	1. What Works Scotland themes around public service reform 2. University researchers' specific academic expertise (e.g. policy reform) 3. Collaborative Governance in practice
Data collection	Designed and undertaken by practitioners to answer their inquiry question. What Works Scotland researcher as critical friend or knowledge broker	Observation, secondary analysis of some inquiry data (e.g. populated templates)
Who is the researcher?	Practitioners (with critical friend guidance from University Researcher)	University researcher to answer What Works Scotland research questions
Co-production	Yes, heavily	Primarily within the What Works Scotland research team, some issues crossing first and second order
Outputs	Inquiry reports, practitioners sharing learning locally, actions throughout the process.	Research reports, academic articles, policy briefs.
Timing of outputs	2015-2017 (quicker process, immediate actions, and on-line research reports)	Post 2017 (slower process through academic writing)

Table 1: First and second order elements in the Fife CAR programme

The first order inquiries centre on the topics the practitioners put forward to What Works Scotland in their application or subsequently developed. It was the practitioners' responsibility for identifying and undertaking these inquiries, with guidance from What Works Scotland. As outlined in more detail in each of the associated inquiry reports, each PIT identified and collected data to answer their inquiry question (first order). Over the three inquiries data collection, for example, included notes and transcripts from focus groups, survey, interview notes, and reflections from the events.

To address the second order research with consent I also collected and stored:

- Emails from practitioners
- Populated templates (used to progress with the inquiry reports but also the second order research)
- Feedback and information gathered at retreats

- Notes from phone conversations
- My reflections
- Formal practitioner reflections such as the contributions to the 'learning report.'
- Audio recordings at facilitated table discussions in home retreats

In the Fife CAR programme I also encouraged the practitioners to reflect on and take ownership for their learning about using a CAR approach to developing collaborative ways of working. Through the second order research activities I will contribute to wider debates and discussions regarding public service reform, and undertaking CAR in complex multi-agency environments. It is likely that outputs relating to the second order work with take into account cross-site learning. Time depending, the four research fellows may seek to share and produce insights once we have completed our work relating to first order activities and CAR programme tasks in each site.

6.2 Research ethics

This section is primarily aimed at university researchers or research managers seeking to undertake similar CAR activities. However, it may be of interest to those engaged in the Fife CAR programme as it provides further background and insight into some of the ethics and data collection practices discussed in Fife CAR meetings and events.

The first order and second order distinction requires a deeper consideration of ethics and consent than many other social research approaches and data collection methods. Ethical dilemmas and considerations are a key area of discussion in the action research literature (Locke *et al*, 2013). In part because institutional ethics procedures often reflect traditional 'scientific' approaches to conducting research and may not offer thorough consideration and space for CAR and more practice-oriented research approaches. Yet there is a growing understanding that "everything's ethics" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2007; 24) in CAR approaches which are relationship intensive and combine knowledge generation with knowledge use. Whilst the work in each case site within the What Works Scotland CAR workstream broadly followed the first order-second order approach, the activities in each case site produced a different research arrangement, CAR structure, data collection process, and ultimately ethics process. As such, each professional researcher (What Works Scotland research fellow) adopted a case site-specific approach to considering ethics and designed different ethics process[7].

Due to the co-produced approach it was not appropriate to predetermine the exact research in advance of embarking on the research relationship with practitioners in Fife; I did not fully know their interest and activities in relation to the inquiry topics (first order), or

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[7] The information in this section therefore only relates to Fife and should not be understood as applicable to the other case sites or research activities within What Works Scotland.

the relationship and access I would experience and be able to utilise to collect public service reform data (second order). In such co-produced research arrangements the university/professional researcher cannot foresee and truly understand the possible issues and tensions prior to engaging in the research and they do not have 'control' over the whole programme design as the research is being played out. However, I considered a number of key issues in early 2015 as I began the research relationship and as the inquiries started to develop. I considered characteristics such as the nature of the participants, potential interaction with vulnerable adults, protected information, and so forth.

I made a number of conscious decisions regarding my ethics practices throughout the collaborative work. I based these decisions on two main issues. First, that the intensity of the research relationship, and the blurring of outsider and insider compared to more traditional social research practices posed new ethical considerations. Second, the first order and second order aspects of the research framework offered an additional layer of complexity; as I was supporting the practitioners with their inquiries I was also able to gather insight and data on my second order research into public service reform and the CAR approach.

For the Fife CAR programme I undertook a number of ethical practices.

- I adhered to **institutional practices regarding research ethics**. This involved outlining and applying for ethical approval to the University of Edinburgh. I undertook the self-assessment process of the University of Edinburgh's SSPS ethics review in May 2015 and found the research to be classified as a level 1 meaning that there are no reasonably foreseeable ethical risks.
- In early 2015 I also **wrote an internal What Works Scotland ethics working paper** to consider some of the main areas and tensions with regards to our ethical position as case site researchers, the multiple roles we may fill, and the data collection process. This document helped frame my thinking and prioritise ethical behaviour as part of the process.
- In an effort to reduce ethical dilemmas I was **vocal and open about consent during interactions** with practitioners. I asked all participants in the strategy group and PITs to sign a consent form.
- I adopted an **approach of consent as process (Dewing, 2007; Higgins, 2013)** whereby I sought to gain informed consent and ensure to revisit initial consent and re-establish this discussion frequently.
- I explained and shared a (blank) consent form with the practitioners and stored it on the online system (Knowledge Hub), so that it was **readily accessible**. They could also share it with new members.
- I **repeated consent** processes at all national and home retreats, collecting and explaining consent forms for new attendees or non-regular participants.
- I **scanned and stored** all consent forms securely on the university server, as required by the University of Edinburgh data management policy.

- I **encouraged and supported practitioners to design and use ethics forms** and consider consent in their own data collection processes for their first order inquiries. They were able to use the ethics form I provided as a template, and I was available to give critical friend advice and feedback.
- On all consent forms I outlined that data will not be attributable to any one individual. In practice **anonymity** is more complex in CAR than traditional qualitative research approaches (such as interviewing). For example, in the Fife CAR programme, I name the co-researchers on reports (co-authors), but there is not individual attribution to specific comments or quotes. However, in the inquiries some quotes involve job titles so that the readers make particular themes and issues applicable to their own settings (or take action based on the inquiry findings).
- **I discussed** with practitioners if and how they wanted to be named as co-authors on inquiry reports.
- When the practitioners populated the report templates towards the end of the inquiry period (end of 2016), they **passed this information on to me in an anonymised form** (replaced names with numerical identifier).
- I anonymised all second order data and when discussing second order insights with colleagues sought to maintain anonymity.

6.2.1 Consent

As this report demonstrates and encourages us to reflect on, CAR creates and leads to a number of opportunities and benefits, but also a wide range of work tasks, interactions, and dilemmas. My consent forms covered traditional notions of consent regarding information-sharing and what I would do with the research. However, it is important that university researchers or research managers in other sectors who embark on CAR also consider a *broader notion of consent*. Not only should we ask whether they consent to providing information, but we should also as ask whether practitioners or community members to undertake particular work tasks and commitments. Both university researchers and CAR collaborators commit time and energy to the process. I sought to encourage managers or potential contributors to consider their contributions to the process and only participate if they felt comfortable and able. Yet, the context included existing power relations and management arrangements between practitioners and as such some practitioners shared with me in person and over email a lack of interest in CAR or comfort with the work. Although I tried to encourage them to consider what and how they could contribute and keep this within a realm that they were comfortable with, I did not have the same authorising power as their immediate line managers and could not relinquish them from contributing to the work. However, I regularly reminded individuals that they could withdraw traditional consent for comments made or specific interactions (by stating that things were off the record) at the time.

6.2.2 Outsider or insider?

Reflecting on the ethics of this work draws attention to how collaborators and their colleagues (who may not be directly linked to the work) identify a university researcher when in "the field". I sought to introduce or reintroduce myself throughout my time, highlighting that I am a university researcher working for the University of Edinburgh (as well as What Works Scotland), and briefly explaining that I am involved in the CAR work whilst also collecting research. Despite this, there were occasions where individuals would mistake me for a Fife Council employee or not realise I was there in a research capacity. This is a difficult tension when undertaking collaborative work which requires the researcher to contribute to a complex range of work place interactions. For example, as part of the CAR approach I engaged in providing What Works Scotland resources and connections to support wider community planning activities. This included attending meetings regarding a community planning event led by the practitioners. My involvement was not in a strict academic capacity, but as a gatekeeper of other academic resources to support the learning and development associated with the community planning inquiries. As such, some practitioners invited me into spaces and meetings that I might not have had access to if only wearing a 'research hat'. My expanded role and the 'many hats' (see Section 8:Support and resources provided) differ from traditional expectations of university researchers. Furthermore, some practitioners did not automatically recognise that I was a university researcher, or an 'outsider' to the local authority. Some of these mistakes were somewhat harmless, such as a caretaker berating me for not booking a room when I arrived for a meeting or a receptionist stating visitor parking is "not for council employees".

Other aspects required more consideration and I gave much thought to my practice outside of the university, specifically potential power relations between knowledge generator and knowledge user. However, in the Fife CAR programme I found the opposite to be the case; some practitioners seemed to frame my role as akin to their own work areas or as someone there to 'assist' their work (translated into their pre-existing understanding of the work of an assistant). Not only did this cause an issue at times about limiting the added value of the time with a university researcher or the resources of What Works Scotland, but I was also concerned that there may not be a clear understanding that I was an outsider and the aspects that this would entail regarding second order data collection (despite explaining this part of my work frequently). In some of the other case sites the professional researchers managed the tension regarding reframing the professional researcher as an assistant by creating formal contracts about interactions, roles, and responsibilities. I did not go down this route, however for future CAR work in this context I would consider creating a co-produced formal contract about roles and responsibilities, expectations, communication, and relational practices in the early relationship building stage of the project. This would not only improve the working parameters and help manage demands, it would also ensure a clear understanding regarding data collection and purpose with regards to the research relationship.

7. Collaborative action research in practice

This section provides an overview of how the CAR work played out in Fife, and reflects on how existing ideas of undertaking CAR differed in this particular multi-agency context. In short, the original idea (providing support through the retreat model with critical friend advice within the case sites) quickly met a number of barriers. Primarily, these barriers centred on the need to undertake additional areas of work

before the inquiry groups could start their inquiry process or start to working through the cycle (first order research). This additional work continued throughout the process, although there was a gradual reduction over time of some of the disparities between individuals and groups regarding their capacity to undertake inquiry work.

7.1 Original offer

In this section I describe the original plan for how the practitioners and What Works Scotland researchers would work together, and the What Works Scotland support offer. The original What Works Scotland funding bid to the ESRC and Scottish Government involved the identification of four 'case site partners'; Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire. The idea was that four CPPs would work with What Works Scotland to explore three identified 'wicked issues' in each site. What Works Scotland would offer access to evidence to help practitioners undertake evidence-based change. The What Works Scotland offer was to support the inquiries into wicked issues through designing and delivering national and local retreats. These retreats would provide information on the CAR process, support identifying research questions, and feedback and guidance on progress. Through the retreat format, the CAR enthusiasts from each site would receive support and contribute to forging a community of practice across localities and with What Works Scotland members.

> The original What Works Scotland offer to all the case sites included **support to access a range of evidence including**:
>
> - recommend readings
> - academics with relevant expertise
> - Find existing review and translate to local context
> - Conduct a bespoke review (through the Evidence Bank)

Box 1: Resource offer from National Retreat, June 2015

In each site the practitioners would undertake inquiries in practitioner-led groups, with the opportunity to use What Works Scotland resources to improve the understanding and use of evidence and research. Originally this resource involved a What Works Scotland researcher (university researcher) aligned to each case site acting as a critical friend and knowledge broker; 20% of the university researcher's weekly What Works Scotland work-time was available to work with the CPP partners between Jan 2015 and December 2016. This equates to a budget of just under seven hours per week and clear expectations regarding roles and responsibilities as outlined in Box 2. The university researcher, acting as a critical friend would engage in supporting the inquiry groups by questioning and challenging assumptions and activities.

Phase 1: Preparing the ground
Where are we now?
What are our key concerns?
What would success look like?

Phase 2: Exploring the evidence
How do we exploit internal and external knowledge?
What further evidence do we need?
What new insights do we have?

Phase 3: Testing change
What changes do we need to make?
How do we lever and embed change?
How do we know we have made a difference?
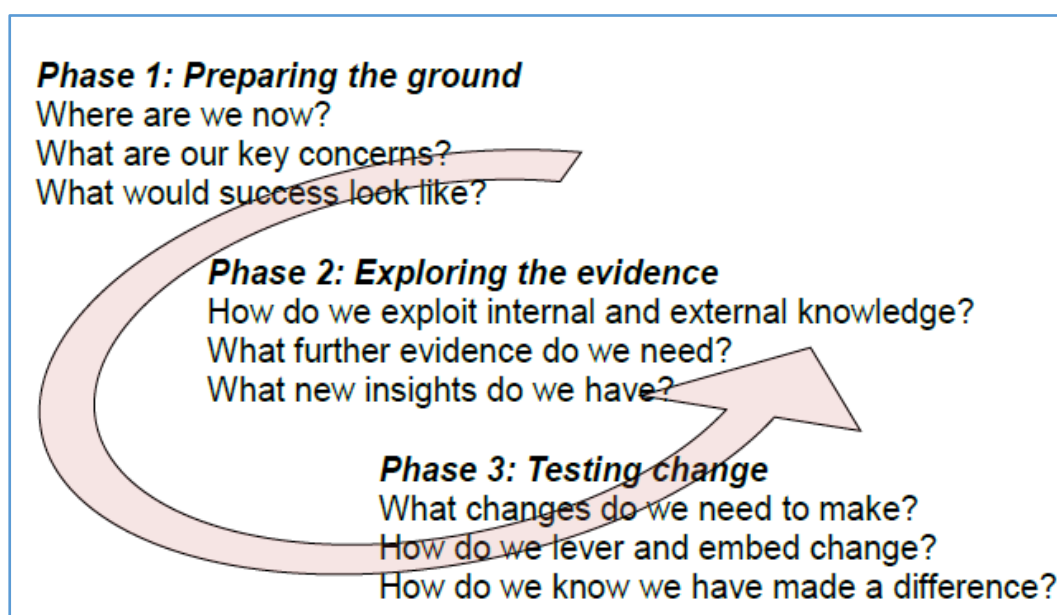
Illustration 2: Model of the What Works Scotland collaborative action research process

In brief, to undertake first order inquiries:

Practitioner teams would:

- identify their topic
- use an *existing group* to undertake an inquiry *or* identify and invite team members from their working environment to *create a new group* to explore the topic (creating a multi-agency membership reflecting the makeup of community planning)
- identify a research question and research process (using existing data, existing skills, or looking to learn new research skills)
- identify evidence and support needs (areas of interest to investigate)
- discuss and learn through dialogue and collaborative sense-making the different professional knowledge, experiential knowledge, perspectives and barriers,

facing the different professions and organisational representatives around the table

- **What Works Scotland would** provide access to a university researcher who, acting as a critical friend, would: offer critical friend advice (in person and on the phone)
- help create the spaces to support the work through home and national retreats
- offer knowledge brokering services (such as an evidence review) or recommend readings

The university researcher would also collect second order research through observation, discussions, and a field diary on public service reform and the inquiry issues.

In practice, the Fife CAR programme would involve:

Collaborative = practitioners working together in all aspects of problem identification, data collection, analysis, and dialogue. Also, collaboration between practitioners and What Works Scotland team.

Action = Complex and messy. Including direct group actions based on research findings, individual actions after meetings or through new relationships and ways of understanding their social worlds. Reflective practice leading to change.

Research = Groups would undertake a basic research project, based on experiential evidence and knowledge, collecting data and analysis based on existing skills and capacity. Could supplement and advance this research using secondary evidence and knowledge from research reports.

Box 2: How the Fife CAR programme operated in practice

In the national retreat in June 2015 What Works Scotland provided each case site with information and guidance on the inquiry cycle approach, how to identify a research question, how to create an inquiry team, and introductory information on data collection methods. In this process the co-production of knowledge generation and use centred on the identification of research topics, the parameters of evidence, and pooling experience and knowledge across organisational boundaries. However, as the following sections show, when we attempted to start the inquiry process, the arrangement became much more complex than the original plan. The demands and resource needs went beyond brokering evidence from university or research sources, to include intensive resource to manage the overarching programme, a variety of support needs and expectations, and time and assistance engaging or leading group socialisation tasks. Notably, such additional work substantially expanded the time commitment and skill requirements, including additional writing support stretching beyond the 2016 end date.

I discuss some of the tasks, activities, and areas of new work in the subsequent sections. In the key recommendations I suggest ways for future research projects and collaborative arrangements to acknowledge and respond to similar contextual demands.

7.2 Fife CAR programme: structure and participants

To undertake the inquiry work and the collaborative relationship we established a structure for the CAR activities in Fife. The Fife CAR programme notably differs from the other What Works Scotland CAR case sites with regards to the organising structure and the relationships between the three inquiry groups. Fife was the only case site to set up a formal structure and operate three PIT inquiries at the same time, and it was the only case site where the groups operated over a long period of time (approx. 90 weeks).

7.2.1 Strategy group

At the June national retreat in 2015, some of the Fife applicants discussed the benefits of creating an overarching strategy group. The group would be responsible for developing and overseeing the creation of inquiry groups, and supporting their inquiry work. For What Works Scotland creating a strategy group offered a number of benefits. First, the group would be a formal space for us (as outsiders) to connect and co-produce the programme and work with practitioners over the upcoming months. It could also act as the main space through which we could communicate with the practitioners, invest What Works Scotland time, and agree processes. Second, having interested managers involved in the strategy group could help the PITs to identify and access new members, and ensure that there was sufficient buy-in and interest in their work throughout the process. Finally, the strategy group could act as a way to tackle emergent dilemmas and issues faced by PITs or individuals, and thus act as a supportive and engaged space. The strategy group members could offer connections and opportunities to share the learning, connect to workplace and local agendas, and offer a different perspective and set of actions and reflections based on the inquiry work. During the course of the work, the strategy group met eight times between March 2015 and December 2016[8] and covered issues such as group membership, influencing the wider context of the inquiry work, sharing issues and concerns about inquiry progress, identifying future actions, and hearing feedback and updates from inquiry leads. In practice, the strategy group process required dedicated support; the Fife policy coordinator took on much of this work including organising meetings and following up on in-house actions.

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[8] Prior to the formal meetings some of the Fife applicants had met with What Works Scotland colleagues on two separate occasions regarding initiating CAR in Fife (October 2014).

7.2.2 Partnership Innovation Teams (PITs)

Across all four case sites, this CAR workstream involved creating action research groups, known as Partnership Innovation Teams (PITs). The intention was that these groups would operate in a collaborative way, self-organising and defining their work area and interests. Existing literature on CAR demonstrates that these groups can offer participants spaces of sanctuary from their existing working systems, power relations, and decision-making hierarchies (Dickens and Watkins, 1999).

Driven by the PIT leader, PIT meetings in Fife could become spaces where practitioners of different professional backgrounds and organisational responsibilities would be able to discuss different viewpoints and ways of understanding complex social issues. By focussing on an inquiry topic as a group, each PIT would work through a process together, and unlike many traditional social research projects, they themselves would be able to shape and define the focus, activities, and parameters of work.
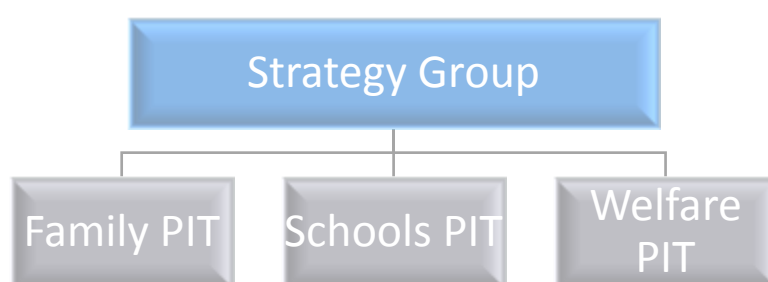
Illustration 3: Structure of strategy group and PITs

All groups went through a process of developing an inquiry topic, starting work and changing focus, and reshaping their aims. The following sections explain what the three groups had explored by the end of the process.

1. Welfare PIT

How can we improve our knowledge of what data is available across partner agencies in Fife? How can we use this to prevent people from being sanctioned? Or better support those who have been sanctioned?

This inquiry involved a team of practitioners from a range of professions, departments, and organisations. By working through an inquiry together the group questioned, challenged, and explored the viewpoints and activities of other organisations and professions operating in the same locality or with the same citizens who experience welfare reform such as benefit sanctions. The group comprised of Department for Work and Pensions/Jobcentre Plus, Local authority community learning and development, policy, research, CARF, Fife Gingerbread,

Housing, What Works Scotland, and met over 22 times. We explored DWP Stat Xplore, produced local Kirkcaldy level briefings to inform decision-making, and upskilled local staff to continue to use the database in the future. We held an event in May 2016, with 42 attendees from various organisations and professions in Kirkcaldy to explore data sharing, examine evidence on the impact of welfare sanctions (Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on deprivation, Child Poverty Action Group early warning system, local evidence on welfare reform), communicate available support services, and build working practice and relations. The group developed vignettes (and the skills to continue to use this method) as a way to discuss and collect data on difficult subjects with diverse practitioners.

2. Schools PIT

"How can we improve partnership working with schools to support young people in need?"

The group explored partnership working between high schools and other services in Kirkcaldy. Using an instrumental case study of Kirkcaldy High School they explored the different perspectives, barriers, and difficulties to establishing and maintaining partnership working and referral systems for at-risk young people and those requiring support. In the process they improved their previous working arrangement by opening communication and building relational practices with different practitioners. The group involved CLD, education, third sector, and teaching staff. They undertook a survey with school staff and facilitated two focus groups using KETSO (facilitation technique). The focus groups involved school employees, employees from community learning and development (CLD), social work, the NHS, and education officers (Fife Council).

3. Family PIT

"Why do families participate in Family Fun sessions?"

The group undertook a series of interviews with parents and staff to understand best practice around Family Fun sessions where parents and their children could enjoy doing activities together after school. This included the impact on the relationship between parents and children, and parents and schools. They explored how best to introduce these sessions in other localities. The group involved practitioners from Kirkcaldy and Glenrothes (CLD, policy, research, neighbourhood officers). By developing the skills to research and explore the design and implementation of programmes across localities some of the PIT members have been able to share best practice and improve their understanding of what works to transfer information between places.

7.2.3 Types of participants

Reflecting the nature of community planning context over the course of the Fife CAR programme I engaged with 87 individuals as part of the inquiry work. The length of time individuals participated varied, with a number of individuals leaving the work due to

changes to their employment position. A number of individuals engaged in some part of the work but choose not to join or continue working with an inquiry group. Employers included NHS, Fife Council, Police Scotland, and third sector organisations including Fife Gingerbread and Citizens Advice and Rights Fife. Headed by the PIT leaders, participants adopted the role of 'insider researchers', adopting an inquiring mind to explore their chosen topic or research problem.

Illustration 4: The practitioner mix, drawing on Welfare PIT membership in 2016

For those reading this report and interested in starting or undertaking similar work, it is worth noting that:

- The strategy group provided a space for managerial buy-in and support.
- There was an intention that the strategy group would be the main communication and support space from What Works Scotland to the practitioners, however in practice this was not the case and much support was needed outside of these meetings.
- Not all practitioners understood or valued the role of the strategy group[9], however overall I think it was important for maintaining momentum and supporting systems change.
- All the inquiry teams were new and it took a number of months for the some of these groups to form.
- Creating the structure and building the teams takes time, resource, and dedication from a range of individuals.

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[9] Home retreat 2016 report

7.3 Establishing pre-conditions

Undertaking CAR required substantial investment in **establishing the pre-conditions** for the principles of the approach, particularly in terms of the collaborative nature of the work, adopting an inquiring stance and creating spaces for dialogue. As the PIT groups did not exist in other forms prior to starting the CAR work in Fife, setting up groups and creating a shared aim and understanding of the work took much time and required much additional resource (from myself but also some of Fife policy team). I also created new and specific resources to meet the demands in Fife, and received requests to undertake extended critical friend, programme management and mentoring tasks. Unsurprisingly, some groups needed time to work through an idea, test its importance in their environment, scope out new members, or identify issues with competing operational or decision-making processes. As such, it took time to narrow down to a workable research question, and the groups were not ready to outline an evidence request at the stage What Works Scotland expected. Across the group previous experience of undertaking similar work was very uneven, with some practitioners fully on board and familiar with the work, and others needed more time and guidance to comprehend and adapt to what might be ahead[10]. Some practitioners had little or a conflicting understanding of What Works Scotland, CAR, my role, their own role, and the reasons for undertaking an inquiry. Some practitioners stated that their interests did not centre on an evidence review or academic resources but instead focussed on generating local and experiential knowledge and evidence to shape change and action within their own working context. As such, a combination of new resource demands and different interests meant that by October 2015 the original What Works Scotland offer was no longer relevant to the practitioners' context, interests, and capacity. Very quickly the co-production process reshaped the practitioners' support needs and capacity gaps[11] and the expectations and requests to What Works Scotland.

I attempted to maintain a national and home retreat format for engaging with the practitioners and creating the space for the practitioners to undertake their inquiries. In part, this was a pragmatic approach to supporting a large and varied range of individuals, and three PITs operating simultaneously. During the period between June and October 2015 (the national retreat to the first home retreat), I received a number of emails and phone calls regarding additional support for relational aspects of the work and group leadership. Some of this work centred on project management or socialisation tasks, others included creating bespoke Fife resources and being a contact for each individual involved in the process[12].

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[10] Populated template reflections; home retreat 2015 and 2016; PIT meeting notes, researcher diaries
[11] This experience was mirrored in all case sites depending on access arrangements, priorities, and capacity
[12] Over time I was able to hand back some of these tasks to others in the group

Following the first home retreat in October 2015 (a time when the practitioners were creating their inquiry teams), I undertook a survey of the attendees. In this survey I asked a number of questions regarding preferred ways of working with each other and with the What Works Scotland team, enthusiasm towards the work, views on the use of evidence, collaborative practice, and their role within their workplaces. This information helped me to understand the different demands and expectations, existing capacity, and ways of working, to provide insight into the pre-conditions for undertaking CAR. Not all attendees responded to the survey. Of 27 attendees, only 15 completed the survey. However, I list some key findings from this survey below.

When asked about undertaking CAR:

- All respondents scored between 6 and 10 (out of 10 where 10 is high) that they felt that collaborative working was an essential part of their job. There was the same score for whether they thought using evidence, data and research knowledge was an essential part of their job.
- Only three people stated that they were very enthusiastic about undertaking CAR.
- One person selected that they were very successful working with individuals outside of their own organisation and did not require any improvement in this area. However, the majority of respondents were slightly less self-assured and scored their own practice between six and nine.

When asked about evidence use and What Works Scotland evidence brokerage offer:

- Only half were interested in seminars from guest speakers, or workshops on data collection or data sets.
- Less than half showed an interest in a learning trip to other sites.
- 10 people were interested in online resources .

When asked about their capacity to undertake an inquiry:

- Twelve people stated that they had already received research training via formal academic education, certified providers, or on the job as part of their work roles.
- Only one respondent felt uncomfortable identifying research questions, collecting qualitative data, or analysing research findings. The majority felt comfortable but interested in improving these skills. Two people stated that they were very confident and enjoyed all aspects of undertaking social research and did not require additional training.

This information helped shape my understanding of the context and provided a revised, co-produced starting point for this work.

Main issues to note:

1. Some individuals had existing research and data collection skills and competencies. This suggested that individuals within PITs would be comfortable and confident to

undertake and design an inquiry and support their peers with research skills and support.

2. There was interest in working with experiential knowledge and local data sources. Less interest in evidence from elsewhere.

3. Few respondents wanted to take part in additional meetings than they already did as part of their day-to-day jobs. This suggested that the traditional PIT format, based on regular meetings and dialogue, may be less suited to this context than it is to professions or workplaces where meetings are less dominant in the existing ways of working.

4. Existing literature highlights the importance of undertaking CAR with activists or enthusiasts (Hadfield and Chapman, 2009). The continued involvement of individuals who did not want to be part of the work, or were not enthusiastic about CAR raised some concerns about the unevenness of the groups and the different approaches and attitudes to being involved, and what impact this may have.

7.3.1 Introduce collaborative action research

One of the main issues regarding the use of CAR in this context compared to education (for example) is the lack of familiarity of some (but not all) practitioners with the language and idea of action research and trying to introduce and work with some individuals who had no pre-understanding or experience of critical reflection, collaborative dialogue, or working in inquiry teams. As such, the original expectation for the university researcher did not include extensive investment in establishing the preconditions for practitioners to design and undertake their inquiries. However, as many individuals shared their discomfort with the CAR model[13] this was a very noticeable issue in 2015 that required intensive support outside of the prearranged retreats and expected tasks.

It is important to note that not all practitioners found CAR difficult or new[14], some quickly identified how they could influence and use the space to explore and improve an area of their work. However the diversity of experiences and knowledge prior to starting this work (and thus the wide variety of anxieties and demands) added an extra dimension of difficulty. As a consequence, part of undertaking this work involved investing time at the beginning (but also throughout the two years) to ensuring that the practitioners had information to better understand the principles underpinning the model so that they could:

a) Understand how this may differ from other approaches (both research and workplace development).

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[13] CAR presentation (May, 2015), June National retreat 2015, October home retreat 2015.
[14] Reflections in populated inquiry templates

b) Understand how CAR may need different approaches to collaborate and communicate (e.g. in the designing of meetings) compared to some existing, organisational ways of working.

Originally, I sought to use existing CAR tools and approaches (see Sagor, 2005; Education Scotland 2015). For example, we attempted "What does success look like?" at the 2015 June national retreat, and in subsequent PIT meetings. Visualising and creating a shared understanding of the aims and outputs of the group work is a key part of collaborative action research. This was not a very successful experience across all the groups[15]. With some additional facilitation support one of three PITs did successful undertake visioning work relatively early on in the process. I also subsequently provided links to 'how to do CAR' guides for inspiration to those who continued to struggle to visualise what they would be involved in, and shared a '9 steps' document with the group which the PIT leads could use to shape their meetings[16].

Introducing and building understanding and confidence about CAR and the inquiry process involved a range of activities and discussions. This included (but was not limited to):

1. Introductory presentation (May 2015), by Professor Chris Chapman on the inquiry cycle.
2. Detailed discussed of CAR and inquiry approach (June 2015 national retreat).
3. Repeated the information to a wider group in Fife at the October 2015 home retreat.
4. Held a separate meeting explaining CAR to the policy and research team to help them to understand their potential roles within the process.
5. Signposted all practitioners to existing CAR how to guides (such as How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research[17] by Richard Sagor).
6. With What Works Scotland colleague Kevin Lowden, adapted and shared a nine-step inquiry document to provide reassurance as to what the process may look like and the stages involved (Oct 2015).
7. Invested additional time providing mentoring and CAR support to the policy and research team (throughout 2015 and early 2016).
8. Sourced extra facilitators for the two Fife home retreats so that there was support in each PIT as well as for the whole event.
9. Provided bespoke reflections document following the February 2016 home retreat,
10. Brokered a speaker who uses CAR with young people to provide information and insight from elsewhere to build knowledge and capacity to manage own PIT problems (June 2016).
11. Created bespoke facilitation tools reflecting some of the issues they had encountered working in their context for PIT meetings, and for Fife home retreats.

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[15] June national retreat evaluation forms
[16] Based on Robert Owen Centre, SIPP 9 steps document
[17] *How to Conduct Collaborative Research*. Available at
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/61193011.aspx

7.3.2 Group work

The original What Works Scotland design centred on each PIT undertaking independent group work. The use of inquiry teams offers a number of benefits as "group work provides a context in which *individuals help each other*; it is a method of helping groups as well as helping individuals; and it can enable individuals and groups to *influence* and *change* personal, group, organizational and community problems" (Brown 1992: 8. Emphasis in the original). Theoretically, group work creates social spaces and ways of collective working that can create change. Lewin (1951), argued that group work centres on interdependence, which is particularly powerful when members of the group are dependent on each other to achieve shared goals[18]. Pragmatically, the inquiry groups can take into account a number of views and positions to adapt and embed knowledge to suit the multiple actors within the context of community planning. Thus, as a group approach brings practitioners together to focus on a shared goal and reduce communication and organisational barriers, inquiry groups (PITs) should offer a space for evidence and knowledge to become action. In the original What Works Scotland offer practitioners created their inquiry groups and undertook all related group work. The university researcher/professional researcher *could* attend some of the meetings of those groups to act as a critical friend, broker evidence, or collect second order observation data. However, there was no expectation or designated role that the researcher would lead or facilitate all inquiry meetings.

For most practitioners working collaboratively in groups was familiar and quickly understood. However, I noted in some meetings that there was no shared understanding across different professionals about *how* to work in groups such as the PITs. For example, some were uncertain of their role, unfamiliar with meetings based on dialogue (rather than pre-determined agendas and prescribed actions), or unfamiliar with an inquiry space that they could shape or lead[19]. Group work involves understanding and valuing the inquiry space, engaging with the processand acknowledging the work and skills involved in working collaboratively. Yet, this work can be 'a confusing, complex and demanding experience, both mentally and emotionally' (Crosby 2001: 60).

Moving straight into the inquiry cycle was not as easy as expected due to the nature of the context and the additional work required to bring together those working in different departments, organisations, localities, and backgrounds. Some individuals had not worked together before, many were not co-located (and so did not naturally run into each other in between meetings and help each other to make sense of previous meetings or tasks) and some did not have established working relationships. As such, *group coherence*, a key factor in successful group working, took longer to establish for some of the PITs than the original

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[18] See http://infed.org/mobi/kurt-lewin-groups-experiential-learning-and-action-research/
[19] Practitioner emails

design and I was required to engage more heavily in this part of the process than originally anticipated. PITs progressed well when people were familiar with each other, leadership was clear and members understood group work skills[20].

Piloting CAR in the community planning context demonstrates how developing collaborations within and across groups requires particular skills, resources, and time allowances. I received facilitation training and facilitated some PIT meetings, however due to the volume and scope of demands in Fife I was unable to facilitate all meetings. Furthermore, some individuals (although not all) were not familiar with facilitated meetings, particularly where the leadership of the group was unclear[21] and this created confusion regarding expectations and contributions to the inquiry process. Engaging in group work and facilitation also reduced my capacity and time within the programme to act as the traditional university researcher and it was very difficult to undertake facilitation tasks (or observe the groups to understand what facilitation might be useful), whilst also acting and engaging as a critical friend, collecting second order data or looking for opportunities to engage in knowledge brokering (the original purpose). Where groups were not functioning well or did not have members with the skills and capacities to improve group work, CAR can create an additional range of tasks and anxieties for some practitioners and the university researcher. It is worth considering at an early stage when setting up CAR the resources required to support the development of group work and employing an additional resource working only as a facilitator to support the early stages of inquiry work.

We reflected on and discussed collaborative practice in strategy group meetings, at the end of the programme we had a shared understanding of the importance of facilitation skills for collaborative working[22]. From this research programme appreciating and working in a dialogic approach, and understanding leadership and group work skills appear to be important and perhaps previously overlooked skills for undertaking CAR and putting collaborative governance and co-production into practice. Collaborative working relies on the existence of individuals with sophisticated skills for managing complex group work and the associated social interactions during the inquiry process. The original offer did not envisage the university researcher leading and developing this part of the process and it did not resource for the time required to form and manage a programme within the case site or to and forge a collection of individuals into a functioning group. I'd recommend future CAR programmes invest time in the early stages to identify or further develop the skills of the inquiry members in regards to these areas of the work.

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[20] Populated inquiry templates, inquiry reports
[21] My research field-diary notes, 2015
[22] Final strategy group meeting, Dec 2016

7.3.3 Reflective practice

"Reflection is a window through which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of her own lived experience in ways that enable her to confront, understand and work towards resolving the contradictions within her practice between what is desirable and actual practice. Through the conflict of contradiction, the commitment to realize desirable work and understanding why things are as they are, the practitioners is empowered to take more appropriate action in future situations".

(Johns, 2000; 34).

An important property of action research is the fundamental role of reflexivity in developing new organizational forms and social arrangements (Cullen, 1995). Alongside group work skills and resources, CAR requires an openness and familiarity with learning through an inquiring stance and improving practice through reflection. A key element of CAR is the ability, enthusiasm, and skill to engage in such critical reflection or reflective practice. Many professions include reflective practice as a key skill development and requirement in day-to-day work. For example, training for health professionals social workers, or community development workers often centres on reflective practice. Research suggests that techniques that encourage reflection can enhance learning (Blackwell, *et al,* 2001).

Reflective practice refers to 'the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it' (Dewey, 1910; 6). In practice, this involves questioning why things are as they are, and how they might be. According to Finlay (2008; 1), reflective practice "involves examining assumptions of everyday practice. It also tends to involve the individual practitioner in being self-aware and critically evaluating their own responses to practice situations. The point is to recapture practice experiences and mull them over critically in order to gain new understandings and so improve future practice".

Underpinning the CAR inquiry cycle is an assumption or expectation that those undertaking the inquiry engage in reflective practice, and are familiar with an inquiring stance towards ones' work. However, for some this approach was a new idea and unfamiliar territory; it appeared to be contrary to some existing ways of working[23]. The key feature here is the unevenness and difference between different ways of working and approach to exploring new ideas with this context. Within the Fife CAR programme a number of practitioners employed critical reflection skills as part of their professional practice, for example some of the community development workers. However, as previously outlined, there was great variation between the backgrounds, everyday practices, and ease and familiarity with

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[23] Practitioner emails, populated templates

critical reflection or individual reflective practice across departments, professions, and organisations. Some of these issues impacted on the early stages of undertaking the inquiry work, such as producing the contextual report (reflecting on how their systems work). There is a need to understand the different pre-conditions and resources involved in multi-agency and multi-professional inquiry work at both an individual and group level.

This unevenness was not wholly surprising; reflective practice is not a shared area of practice development across public service professions or routinely embedded into organisational management systems within organisations. Social learning environments (such as peer groups) where individuals see other points of view are not habitually part of organisational change or training processes. There are also ongoing debates about how best to undertake reflective practice and when it is appropriate (Finlay, 2008). Furthermore, the context and organisational environment contains a number of other approaches to managing and undertaking work tasks, such as project management approaches, improvement science, and traditional forms of bureaucratic or hierarchical delegation structures which may prioritise different behaviours and processes. As university researchers adopting an inquiring stance to explore social problems is pivotal to our professional roles and we should take more care when introducing CAR into a context to understand the different norms and approaches in the context; CAR may not be a suitable approach in all instances.

I actively adopted some key behaviours during my interactions with the Fife practitioners and produced resources to help to create the conditions suitable for CAR:

1. Modelling critical reflection and reflective practice during and between meetings. For example, by reflecting openly on what I had learnt in the meeting, or how I would change a particular part of the process.
2. Attempting to provide critical friend advice and questioning assumptions during email conversations and at key points within the process.
3. Prompt individuals and groups to review their working situations; identifying what is known, what is not yet known, and what has been learned. For example, through incorporating contextual reports process, and through the final reporting template (below Appendix 2: Reporting template)
4. Suggesting practitioners keep reflective journals or diaries[24] to develop awareness of opposing positions and difficulties, and to function as a 'safe space' for individuals to identify and reflect on the weaknesses of their own positions, or difficulties and challenges they experience.
5. Viewing specific events or interactions as 'critical incidents' (Brookfield 1987) whereby a What Works Scotland meeting, session, or part of the process may trigger thoughts and reflection about themselves or their role in the system. In practice, I

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[24] I did not make diaries a requirement, however some practitioners did start diaries; these were for personal reflections and did not formally contribute to first or second order data collection processes.

introduced reflection worksheets at national retreats, altered post-event forms to include questions to prompt reflection, and encouraged independent learning at the home retreats. I also incorporated sections for practitioners to engage in reflection in the templates for the final report (Attached as Appendix 2: Reporting template).

6. Briefly introducing a discussion on critical reflection in the final home retreat.
7. Spent time trying to broker external speakers to provide a workshop on critical reflection but we could not achieve within the time period.

My approach to encouraging reflection drew from the CAR literature but also the experience within the site in the early stages of undertaking the work. I sought to encourage individuals to become responsible for their own actions and contributions to the work, and to help to strengthen the understanding of the importance of the different views within the dialogue processes in the inquiry groups. I adopted Kemmis (1985; 139) position that although many consider reflection as individual, personal, or quiet, it is instead, "action-oriented, social and political. Its 'product' is praxis (informed, committed action), the most eloquent and socially significant form of human action".

The inquiry reports available on the What Works Scotland website therefore contain learning and reflections from individual practitioners and the inquiry teams, providing additional insight into learning and action. Through this Fife CAR programme we can identify the preconditions or building blocks required to underpin a successful inquiry and add to our understanding of what is involved in transferring CAR across contexts.
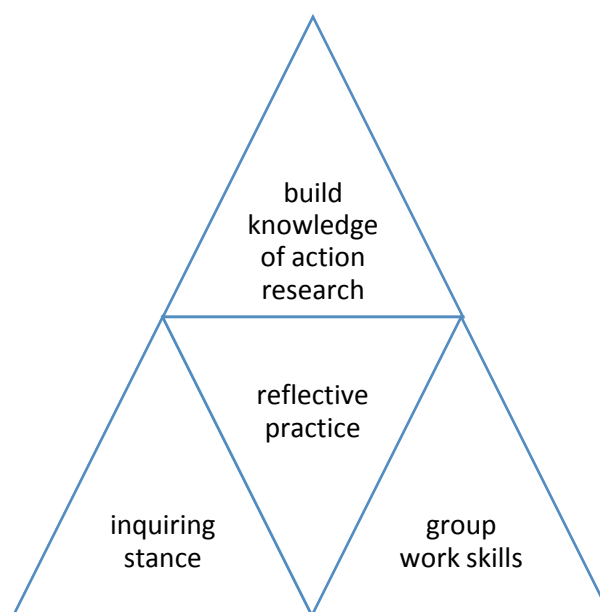
Illustration 5: Preconditions or building blocks required to underpin a successful inquiry

8. Support and resources provided

This section provides an overview of the resources created for or provided to the Fife CAR programme[25]. As previously stated, although the original plan was for the same support in each of the four case sites, the CAR activities in each What Works Scotland case site substantially differ depending on aims, capacity, and pre-conditions for undertaking the work. Unlike the other case sites, in Fife all three PITs were operating at one time and over the course of approximately 90 weeks that the What Works Scotland researchers were working in the sites (Jan 2015-Dec 2016). The structure of the Fife CAR programme also differed from the other case sites. Fife was the only site with a strategy group and a programme that created links between inquiry groups. In this way, the Fife CAR programme sought to bring together inquiry work and create systems change in and around the inquiry groups (including through the strategy group). Between March 2015 and Jan 2017 I (and others in What Works Scotland) worked on 30 separate meetings or events (excluding PIT meetings and strategy meetings) to create systems change or as a response to capacity needs around the inquiry process. The other case sites primarily operated somewhat autonomous inquiry groups working on inquiries in a more opportunistic manner than the structured approach I present here. This partly reflects the contexts and capacity differences across sites, and highlights the different types of resource demands and skills required to pilot CAR as an approach to supporting evidence use.
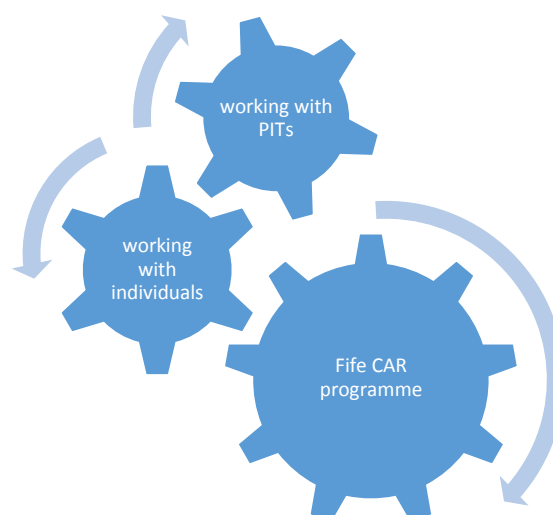
Illustration 6: The three different areas of resource support

There were three different areas of resource support; direct support to PIT inquiries, support to individuals within the programmes, support for Fife CAR programme.

As well as the additional work and time I expended, some of the practitioners also worked hard to support the inquiry teams and share the learning from their work. For example, the policy and research team worked with each PIT, and often undertook tasks such as arranging meetings, populating the final reporting templates, and keeping notes within the meetings. The Policy Coordinator (Fife Council) acted as the main contact with What Works Scotland and undertook a lot of 'invisible work' in the programme, including addressing relational issues within the PITs, organising meetings, and linking the work into existing CPP

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[25] Please note, unless explicitly stated, this list does not cover the resources created or spent in the other three case sites (West Dunbartonshire, Aberdeenshire, or Glasgow) or resources involved in the national retreats.

activities. Some of the PIT leads and PIT members undertook much of the inquiry activities and group work. As I stated at the start of this document, the Fife CAR programme involved many hands and heads on the ground. It is outside of the scope of this document to present detailed information from the practitioners involved, but I am confident that many individuals also contributed many more meetings, activities, and resources than I am able to capture to ensure the work progressed and was beneficial to their work areas. This includes individuals within the strategy group, the policy and research team, the PIT leaders, previous members and current or final members. To provide insight on future resourcing of CAR programmes or initiatives in similar contexts, I provide the following information on the impact of the resource demands and processes of undertaking CAR in this context. At the end of January 2017, my individual participation in the CAR work involved[26]:

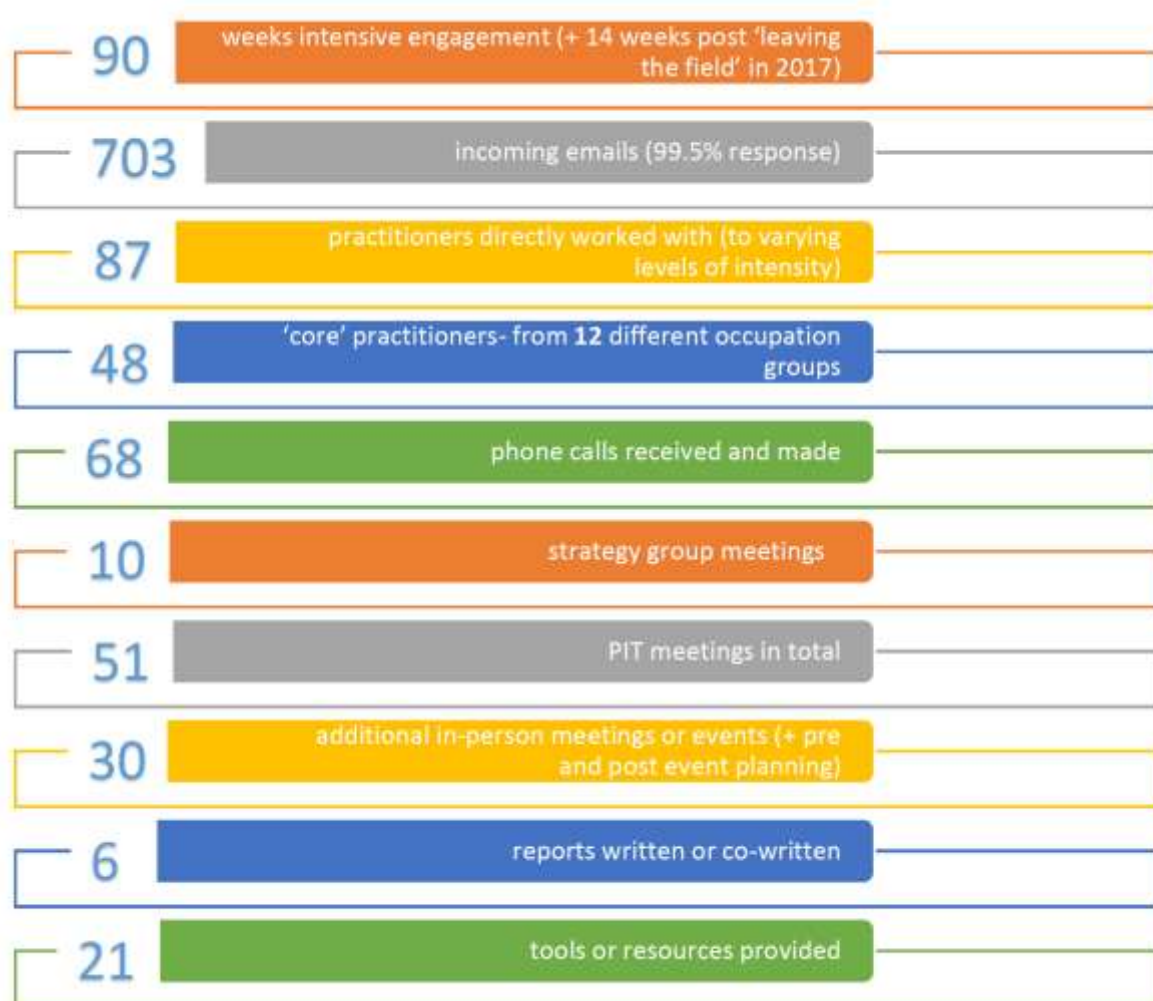| 90 | weeks intensive engagement (+ 14 weeks post 'leaving the field' in 2017) |
703	incoming emails (99.5% response)
87	practitioners directly worked with (to varying levels of intensity)
48	'core' practitioners- from **12** different occupation groups
68	phone calls received and made
10	strategy group meetings
51	PIT meetings in total
30	additional in-person meetings or events (+ pre and post event planning)
6	reports written or co-written
21	tools or resources provided

Illustration 7: Summary of research fellow's interactions and activities during the Fife CAR programme

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[26] Notes, preparation, travel, attendance, and post-meeting notes and actions of just one meeting (two hours long) used the original seven hours per week resource offer.

There was also much background activity within the What Works Scotland initiative, including hiring and managing a temporary research assistant (to support with the growing workload), What Works Scotland research fellows who provided ad-hoc in-site facilitation support[27], Kevin Lowden who supported and attended some strategy group meetings and PIT meetings, and What Works Scotland event support colleagues who provided administrative and logistical support for the retreats. This information[28] strongly contrasts with the expectations from the original What Works Scotland offer to support the practitioners by providing a small number of arms-length critical friend advice to the case-site, providing CAR support via the retreat programme, and providing knowledge or evidence brokerage. It also differs substantially from CAR projects in education (for example, see Platteel *et al*. 2010; Bruce *et al*, 2011)

Establishing and progressing with the inquiries created new tasks. I provide some of this information here for consideration for future research projects and reflect on what collaborative research arrangements mean for skillsets for researchers undertaking this work, and the nature of wearing 'many hats' when working in one space with a wide range of people. There were different expectations regarding my direct involvement in undertaking the inquiry research work.

A critical friend can be defined as "*a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.*"

(Costa, A & Kallick, B, 1993).

The original offer centred on the following elements.

My first order tasks included:

- Being a critical friend
- Some social research guidance and advice
- Support to access evidence and research

My second order research tasks included:

- Designing, collecting, and analysing second order data
- Managing data collection and data storage

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[27] We worked in a reciprocal fashion; if they supported in-site Fife work, I would expend hours supporting their in-site work
[28] Specific details can be found in Appendix 1: List of tangible provision

Although outside of the original offer, as a university researcher and public policy academic I also had some expertise to offer practitioners on:

- Public service reform (particularly third sector)
- Welfare reform, anti-poverty policies, and international social policy
- Qualitative social research methods
- Some statistical data sets
- Connections and relationships with others working in this area
- Multi-level approaches to tackling poverty and inequalities

However, undertaking CAR in this programme increased the traditional role of the professional researcher, significantly increased the working hours, breadth of guidance, and broadened the understanding of 'support' on offer. This led to a range of additional responsibilities and tasks on top of the roles outlined and offered above. It is important to highlight these aspects of the work; much CAR literature focuses on the inquiry cycle with little consideration for the processes and systems surrounding the work. In large, and complex multi-agency contexts such as community planning, we need to acknowledge and prepare for the wider range of tasks and interactions that accompany CAR.

8.1 Programme management

There was an increasing role for programme management tasks and resource required to support the wider CAR programme (as well as the inquiry groups).

First, relatively early in the process (whilst the PITs were identifying inquiry topics and potential members), some of the policy team requested overarching programme information such as key deadlines, information on a reporting process and a final output expectation. In response to these demands I provided a number of 'approximate' outlines and guides throughout the process to help those individuals within the process who were more comfortable with pre-determined plans. It is a difficult process, as the outsider and university researcher I did not want to be overly prescriptive as this would limit the opportunities and value of co-production. It may also reduce the practitioners' feelings of ownership and responsibility for the work. It is worth highlighting that some other practitioners involved in the work were not keen on timelines, deadlines, or plans (despite these being requests from their colleagues)[29].

Second, shaping the work into a coherent CAR programme rather than evidence brokerage support for the individual inquiry groups created a range of additional tasks. However, it made some aspects of the work more manageable and helped to create a community of practice (PIT members could share their experience and knowledge across inquiry groups and offer support to colleagues). It also helped individuals involved in one part of the work

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[29] Populated inquiry templates

to better understand work taking place elsewhere within their system. Often these activities were discussion in the strategy group's meetings.

Third, there were different understandings and expectations about my role and responsibilities. This led to additional demands or requests to undertake programme management or administrative work as part of the programme.

Illustration 8: Screenshot of the Knowledge Hub area for the Fife CAR programme

There were also times when some practitioners expected me to hold others accountable within the inquiry teams or negotiate with managers or departments about their involvement. Within the What Works Scotland structure this created tasks including identifying additional requirements and needs, coordinating and designing solutions to problems and developing innovative activities to ensure continuity during difficult times.

Finally, I also found that I also needed to draw on management skills (despite not having a formal management role in the structure) to supervise a diverse range of staff through different parts of the process. This includes temporarily coordinating and supervising What Works Scotland colleagues when they supported home retreats, the production of outputs, or event organisation. In a less straight forward way, much of the work with practitioners involved drawing on skills and taking responsibility for various mentoring or supervisory work (with less clear power relations), to shape and progress activities. As time went on, demands for these skills and responsibilities[30] decreased due to changes to PIT leadership, increasing confidence and clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities

There was a range of practical management issues that are worth briefly mentioning as they highlight some key aspects of undertaking CAR in this context. Working together in dialogical ways relies on face-to-face meetings (PIT meetings), communication, and sharing of work and ideas (in meetings and between meetings. As part of the Fife CAR programme, we set up a Fife Knowledge Hub to assist in this area of the work. What Works Scotland provided initial training, and some of the policy and research team (Fife Council) took responsibility for managing, populating and teaching others how to use it. As an outside partner unable to access the internal Fife Council computer storage facilities and network, I found Knowledge Hub offered a way to help store and share documents and resources. As a library it offered a space for individuals and groups to store minutes, documents, research,

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[30] Populated templates, practitioner emails

and information. The policy and research team regularly contributed minutes and notes from PIT meetings, details on upcoming CPP events, and some inquiry groups shared information between members on specific policy topics (for example the welfare PIT members shared information from other work events and activities that they thought would be of interest to their welfare PIT colleagues). Some of the practitioners felt that it was not equally used across the programme, and although I provided a lot of information to individuals and stored it in KHub (all the CAR event information, links to useful resources, training programmes, wider What Works Scotland events), I did also feel as though some practitioners did not proactively engage with the information held on the system. I would, however, use this website again and recommend it for similar work as it is a useful mechanism for communication and information storage across organisational boundaries.

8.2   Stakeholder management

Programme management related tasks also included a range of stakeholder management activities. Commitment is key to building trust (Fledderus, 2015), and engendering trust is important for collaborative work. To effectively establish and set up the inquiry groups and CAR system in Fife, I needed to establish new relationships and build trust. Due to the nature of the context and the original range of anxieties and difficulties setting up the inquiry work, it was increasingly important to be empathetic, listen, and respond to concerns and problems, and operate with an awareness of divergent feelings and agendas. I was acutely aware of the stresses and strains that some of the practitioners experienced trying to create the inquiry teams and find a common inquiry topic. I received a number of additional support demands, and whilst these were well outside my original remit and purpose, it can be difficult to engage in work that disrupts the working environment (by creating these new spaces and ways of working) and not offer support regarding the socialisation and management tasks. Furthermore, some practitioners did not fully recognise the parameters of a 'critical friend' role.

Although I outlined that my role would be to act as a critical friend for the inquiry process, this was also a difficult line to maintain when working in a group environment. For example, I took on much more of the workload than expected for the welfare event as I felt uncomfortable with the additional stresses the event created for those within the group and I was keen and engaged in the inquiry they were undertaking. It was very difficult to not 'pitch in' when people were busy or struggling and, as such, sitting at a table only as a critical friend can be difficult and may damage fledgling relationships. However, doing so can create difficulties. Not only does the extra work create strains, other PITs that were less well developed expected that I would also take on more administrative or leadership tasks within their group, despite the dynamics, expectations, and pre-conditions requiring a different stance. When working with three different groups it is difficult to balance a one rule for all approach to building relationships and providing support, with ensuring that the actions suit the understanding and expectations of each group.

8.3   Knowledge broker and What Works Scotland resource broker

Over the course of the two years, I offered, supported or directly provided a range of evidence of knowledge brokerage. Where possible I tried to undertake this in a way that suited the existing capacities (for example, where PITs had skills for finding evidence and knowledge from elsewhere I sought to find ways to add to these, rather than replacing them). The PITs outline how they used evidence or data in their inquiry reports on the What Works Scotland website.

I offered the following:

- Evidence review
- Learning trips to other localities
- Seminars to familiarise and improve knowledge of research methods
- Academic expertise on the inquiry topics
- Examples of similar activities in other localities to use to stimulate dialogue

An important thing to note is that some inquiry groups may have accepted more of these offers. However, throughout the two years I had to balance the requests and additional work tasks, with offers and opportunities to those PITs and individuals who could engage, with the resource demands of those struggling to progress with the work. Balancing the needs of three different groups and covering three different inquiry topics was a challenging aspect of the work. It is worth considering how best to work with three different types of groups, focussing on different policy areas, and requiring different support needs, at the same time.

Some practitioners involved in the Fife CAR work took up an additional What Works Scotland offer to attend a learning trip in Paris (with the Glasgow case site) to explore participatory budgeting (PB). This work sat outside of the inquiry work (as PB was not the focus of our Fife inquiries) however, it contributed to the Fife CAR programme as it demonstrated and encouraged reflective practice, using evidence to make changes, learning from elsewhere, and building relationships across places (both Paris and Glasgow)[31].

8.4   Support with facilitation and encouraging dialogue

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[31] More about the Glasgow case site including information from the Paris PB study trip http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/casesites/glasgow/

The important aspect of these activities is the way that the different tasks and support requests played out simultaneously. CAR is not a linear process but instead involves layers of work to create the conditions to encourage groups and individuals through a complex and messy learning process.

In this research programme I provided support to different layers of activities. These included creating the structures and parameters for the inquiry groups to work through an inquiry process. The design of the CAR programme created a number of spaces for the inquiry groups to seek support. For example, the strategy group meetings and the home retreats.

Specific activities also included designing and facilitating activities in home retreats, including specially designed Fife-specific tools, sharing and promoting relevant links and resources, such "Dialogue in Public Engagement: A Handbook,[32]", creating bespoke inquiry templates promoting group work. I shared links to courses and activities run by other organisations, such as university-provided MOOCs, ULab (Scottish Government), and various courses delivered by Workforce Development Scotland.

Cover of 'Dialogue in Public Engagement: A Handbook' by Wendy Faulkner. Published by the Beltane Public Engagement Network

What Works Scotland also provided a "Training for Trainers in Facilitative Leadership" course to the four case site partners at the end of the in-person support in CAR. This course offered practical methods of dialogue and deliberation (D+D) in community engagement, using methods developed through a long standing collaboration between Dr Oliver Escobar and Dr Wendy Faulkner.

8.5   Supporting and contributing to systems change

By working in inquiry groups, plus creating a community of practice in Fife through the Fife CAR programme, it was possible to help provide space for inquiry work, and encourage collaborative reflective practice around knowledge and evidence use. To create wider change and impact on the system in which the practitioners operate, I (and practitioners in Fife) sought to influence the wider working environment. For example, this includes (but was not limited to):

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[32] Available from Beltane Publications http://www.beltanenetwork.org/resources/beltane-publications/

- In early 2015 Professor Chris Chapman (Glasgow University and What Works Scotland), attended and presented work to the Fife Partnership Executive Group, a key part of the Community Planning context, to get wider institutional support for the work
- Brokering and funding an international seminar speaker to discuss ideas of 'distributed leadership' by Professor Jim Spillane[33], (Northwestern University)
- Support designing and providing resources for the Community Planning team's event, "Making the change: delivering a better and fairer Fife" and post-event blog to share and publicise the work taking place locally[34]
- Co-produced and attended a session presenting learning and activities to Kirkcaldy elected members (January 2017)

Whereas the original What Works Scotland bid expected each inquiry group to write their own inquiry reports, a number of practitioners stated that they were uncomfortable with this (in terms of style and time requirements), and it was not possible for each PIT to produce a completed contextual report in the early stages of the work (2015). Although some of the Fife practitioners (including the strategy group) desired the final inquiry reports, this involved creating and piloting reporting templates to ensure that the process did not create additional stress or confusion. Nevertheless, reflecting the unevenness of the context, the co-produced inquiry templates still caused some difficulties for one PIT at the end of the process[35]. As such, the Fife CAR programme included the creation of writing support tools, engagement in the co-production process of these tools, and three months of additional writing at the beginning of 2017 to cover the inquiry reports, this document and other learning reports.

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[33] Profile of Professor James Spillane at http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/profile/?p=49
[34] Written by temporary What Works Scotland research assistant, Cleo Davies.
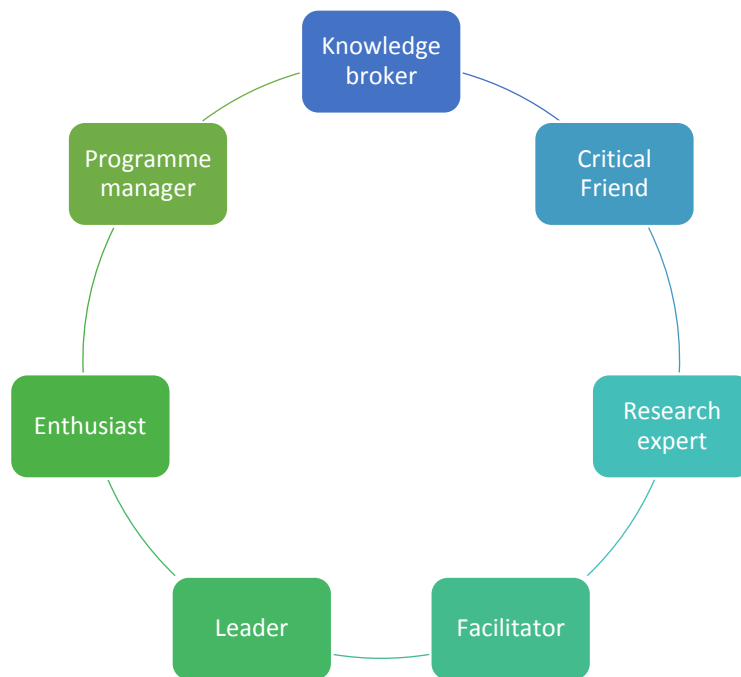[35] Populated template 3

Illustration 9: The diverse roles of the What Works Scotland researcher in the Fife CAR programme

8.6   Managing diverse expectations

Whilst I went beyond the scope and role to contribute to the development of CAR structures, develop capacity and pre-conditions, and offer more involvement in inquiry groups than originally expected,[36] there were areas where I had to push back or manage expectations. Some practitioners had different understandings and expectations of how to interact with the university researcher. These ranged from those who contacted me as though I was a personal administrative assistant, those who thought I would audit and police others' behaviour within the groups, to those who wanted to share interesting workplace developments and opportunities. On the whole it appears that some of these issues related to different understanding of "support". I found managing the variety of competing expectations and demands challenging due to the volume of requests,[37] variation of opposing support needs, and unexpected nature of some of the communications. Not all individuals worked in this way or requested additional or unsuitable tasks. Many practitioners within the PITs and wider work area understood and progressed with their inquiries. Whilst I chose to work with some flexibility regarding reshaping my role and remit with the sites, I pushed back on some demands or expectations.

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[36] Over time, I gradually withdrew my involvement from all PIT meetings to encourage dependency and to create more manageable working hours.
[37] Researcher diary

Actions or roles I specifically pushed back on where possible:

Request	Reason for push-back
Leading the PITs or dictating the inquiries	The inquiries needed to be appropriate to the practitioners work areas and interests. The purpose of the co-production process was to reduce the dominance of professional researcher's interests.
Being responsible for group membership on behalf of the inquiry teams	As an outsider it was not appropriate for me to decide who was in or out of PITs. Also, if I engaged in this work it created unrealistic expectations that I had responsibilities as the PIT lead.
Policing or auditing others' behaviour	This issue arose a few times. I could not intervene directly if individuals didn't do the work they had offered to do. Instead, the strategy group was the appropriate space to discuss these issues with those who had the appropriate internal influence and responsibilities.
Delegated tasks, such as administrative and 'assistant' work	This was not the role of the university researcher/critical friend.
Doing work for others	Similar to the above, individuals with responsibilities from their PIT meetings would subsequently email them across to me to complete. As above, this was outside the remit of the university researcher and too many competing activities to undertake specific tasks on behalf of individuals.
Telling people what they have learnt (outside of facilitated sessions)	The learning was individual and group-based, and for each individual it differed. It would be inappropriate for me to identify the learning on behalf of others and present this in the format of council reports.

Table 2: Requests and reasons for push-back

There were also areas of the work that I chose to highlight or question where I felt that activities, structures, or behaviours ran contrary to the ethos and principles underpinning CAR:

- Individual employees who took PIT actions and learning back into council structures where their managers (outside of the process) edited or re-wrote inquiry or CAR programme work. This could undermine the inquiry process and be exclusionary for those working for other organisations. It also extends one organisation's power structures and relations to others (non-Council and What Works Scotland).

- Whilst we encouraged individuals and groups to identify problems and difficulties, it was important to challenge or influence where individuals engaged in criticism rather than critical reflection or taking ownership for solving problems. Particularly where it created discord within groups.

9. Outcomes

"We have to see ourselves less as transmitters of expert knowledge and more as facilitators of critical learning and perspective transformation"

(Redmond, 2006, 226).

The Fife CAR programme reports encourage and stimulate ongoing learning and reflections on the work we undertook. Many actions and changes occurred throughout the process, in messy and complex ways. A key characteristic of the Fife CAR programme is that it became embedded action. Many outputs continue post-What Works Scotland involvement. Short-term and immediate actions from inquiry processes combined with existing or new activities in the wider work areas. By practitioners embedding the work in their daily worlds and linking the inquiries closely to their ongoing work activities, it is unsurprising that some practitioners and groups continue to work on their inquiries and share their learning. Such activities do not require What Works Scotland involvement, or outsider influence. Actions, impact, and change therefore continue to occur once What Works Scotland direct interventions have left. By explaining and exploring CAR, building the pre-conditions, gaining trust and buy-in, the work can continue and become more suitable to the practitioners' environment.

"The success of action research is measured by its capacity to bring about long-term change in organisations beyond the timeframe of a given research initiative."

(Denis and Lehoux, 2009; 365).

You can find further details and specific details on inquiry outcomes in the inquiry reports on the What Works Scotland website. Here I outline three broad types of outcomes from the Fife CAR programme:

1. Improved knowledge on CAR, critical reflection, collaborative governance, shifting skillsets. Better understanding of inquiry processes and ways to explore experiential evidence, and evidence from elsewhere.

2. Improved relationships[38]: One of the main aims of the Fife CAR programme was to improve the relationships and understanding of those who worked in the central policy and research functions of the community planning system, and those who worked in local, often programme-specific activities. As outlined in more detail in the co-produced learning report on the Fife CAR programme, many practitioners agreed that these relationships had improved and there was a much better understanding of others' role and activities within

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[38] See Fife learning report and inquiry reports on the What Works Scotland website

the community planning system in Fife, particularly in Kirkcaldy. There was also a new relationship with What Works Scotland academics (myself included), which can offer the potential for future collaborations.

3. Tangible outputs:

i. **Three inquiry reports:** outlining the inquiry process, research, and learning in each of the PITs. These reports provide specific details on policy and programme learning regarding the inquiry topics. They also include learning and reflections from working collaboratively.

ii. **A reflections and learning report:** outlining key learning on issues such as group work, practice and organisational change within the community planning context in Fife, and how insider researchers (practitioners) can undertake and survive CAR.

PIT topic	Actions	Link to What Works Scotland aims
Data sharing and welfare reform	Immediate actions to date include the improvement of working relations between organisations, and embedding the learning into the Fairer Fife recommendations and activities. There is a greater awareness of the geographical impact of sanctions in the area and the needs for resources to support younger people.	• Supporting collaborative research and evaluation • Understanding and getting evidence into action • Governance and partnership • Prevention of negative and unintended consequences
School partnership working	Actions to date include a better link between central policy and research skills and frontline service planning, and improved relations between practitioners and KHS. There are practical changes to programmes to align between systems and ensure smoother referral processes and access to existing services for young people in need	• Supporting collaborative research and evaluation • Leadership capacity and change • Governance and partnership arrangements
Engaging with families	The group members used the learning to influence the development of a family fun approach in Glenrothes and to	• Supporting collaborative research and evaluation • Governance and partnership

	advocate for the roll out of Family Fun sessions across other areas in Fife.	arrangements

Table 3: Outcomes from the PIT inquiries

10.   Key considerations

In this section I outline key considerations regarding undertaking CAR and the Fife CAR programme that may be of interest to the three audiences for this report:

1. The practitioners and those involved in the Fife work
2. Professional social researchers and research managers
3. Those connected to the What Works Scotland project

10.1 Practitioners (as co-producers and co-researchers)

The Fife CAR programme sought to bring together local and central practitioners involved broadly in community planning in Fife. In relation to the Christie Commission principles which underpin What Works Scotland activities, the Fife CAR programme focussed on issues of partnership working and exploration of ways to engage at the local level in services that emphasise prevention and reducing inequalities.

Although this document highlights some of the difficulties we collectively faced getting the work underway, there are a number of positive aspects to the work that are important to highlight:

- The Fife applicants committed to providing resources and supporting the work throughout the process.
- Many practitioners demonstrated commitment and dedication to the work, even during difficult times.
- Nearly all of those involved were able to identify problems, and by the end of the process, had found constructive ways to improve group work and understanding of the inquiry process.
- It is likely that the PITs can operate independently with support from the strategy group if there is interest in continuing with the work.
- There were a variety of actions, improved relationships, and increased understanding of how other parts of the system or practitioners undertook their work.

From a What Works Scotland perspective there were some areas that may require future consideration if the practitioners seek to continue with a CAR approach:

- Find ways to encourage and utilise communication and peer support: there were a wide range of skills and strengths across professions, departments, and organisations. However, some practitioners did not feel comfortable, confident, or perhaps that it was their place, to directly support colleagues.

- Leadership takes many forms. Hierarchical power or leadership arrangements may need to be revised when working across agencies, departments, and organisations. Group work (such as leadership or facilitation) requires sophisticated skills and expertise. It is worth considering how these skills could be developed across professions or organisations to help improve and realise collaborative governance
- Working collaboratively involves relationship building, strong sense of purpose, and the engagement of key individuals from different positions. Over the course of the work restructuring was taking place in a number of organisations. Furthermore, many practitioners engaged in frontline work (both for the council and in third sector organisations), were employed on temporary contracts (some only for 12 months). On the whole, this instability can make cross-agency working difficult; relationships take time to develop and individuals leave their posts. This is not a Fife-specific issue and is mirrored in many community planning contexts where projects and programmes have annual funding cycles. Similarly, organisational restructuring is taking place in nearly all public bodies in Scotland as part of wider public agency reforms. What new approaches might help support cross-agency collaborative working in this context?

10.2 Professional social researchers and research managers

The Fife CAR programme advances the existing knowledge on CAR models and approaches. Table 3 outlines some key considerations for undertaking this work: The opportunities and strains of CAR, and reflections and advice. This table pulls together the experience outlined in Section 6 to Section 9 of this report.

	Opportunities	Strains	Reflections and advice
Practicalities	CAR can be flexible and adaptive to context and capacity	No outline or plan for people to recognise, or trust in process, so it can be difficult to get authorisation/permission to participate when starting the work	Invest time in building trust and making the role and responsibilities clear at the start: Repeat, repeat, repeat!
Combining knowledge generation and use	CAR can change existing ways of thinking or working	CAR can cause anxiety for practitioners and involves time developing new relationships	Facilitation training, hire facilitators as extra resource. Identify and acknowledge pre-conditions required

Offers space for plurality	CAR can bring together a mix of values and views in same work or discussion- (change and action)	Bringing together a mix of people leads to unevenness of understanding across groups and between individuals. This can create large demands	Multiple teaching materials, different mediums, develop champions who can share information when you are not there. Set boundaries.
Exploring complex systems	CAR enables researchers to "see" more of the world leading to more informed research into reality of public service reform (second order)	Undertaking first order and second order work involves increased time and resource demands	Ensuring ethics and consent cover this 'insider' role. Repeat throughout that you are collecting data.

Table 4: Key considerations for undertaking CAR work: Opportunities, Strains, Reflections and advice

The Fife CAR programme offers numerous lessons and insights. Here I list just five key issues that I, (as the university researcher) feel are important when setting up and working with co-researchers who are a mix of public service practitioners.

1. Understanding micro politics can be very difficult when starting CAR in complex environments. I'd suggest creating a minimum six-month reconnaissance period before outlining and starting a CAR model. This provides time to explore the working relationships, get consent for the emotional and time resources required, and ensure that the expectations and roles are clear. It is likely that negotiation will still be difficult, however, the working relationship will be better developed to enable more constructive and fair discussions about demands and workloads. Understand the context you are starting the CAR work in before identifying the staff and budget requirements. You may want to budget for separate facilitator, researcher advisor, critical friend, and traditional research assistant.

2. The most important part of the process is the setting-up stage. This is the time where individuals start to frame their understanding of their role and potential contributions in the work, and also the university researcher. Develop a short intensive course for PIT leaders at the start of the process. In this course, outline not only the inquiry process, but also the roles and tasks associated with group work, introduce CAR, and clarify the skills and time required to lead an inquiry. Ensure responsibility and ownership is clear. Provide space for participant to share concerns and capacity issues. Be clear how other professions or organisations translate and understand words such as 'support' or 'assistance' as this may differ and create a variety of different expectations.

3. Running three PITs, seeking to create systems change, and develop the pre-conditions creates huge time demands and challenges. This includes simple things such as clashing meetings, and competing time demands. One option to improve the approach I outlined in this report, may be to create one inquiry group, develop their understanding and skills so that they become experienced champions who can communicate and lead their colleagues through inquiry processes. The original group would engage in transferring CAR in their context and raising immediate barriers or issues in a manageable way. Once there are a range of champions with CAR experience, you could then work together to expand and create subsequent inquiry groups and the system to support them

4. There is an assumption in much of the action research literature that non-academic partners will understand and know the value of working with university researchers or academic partners. This is not always that case. As such, it may be worth introducing and providing an introductory guide on different university and academic professions and organisations. Many practitioners did not seem to know what they could ask for or what we had access to. This includes basic information on how evidence and research is undertaken, different roles and knowledge production and output opportunities, and the expertise of university researchers. As part of this introductory guide it would be useful to outline what is and isn't appropriate to ask the university researcher to contribute to.

5. Be flexible, empathetic, and supportive when individuals raise issues. Yet, be clear what you can help with and what is outside of your remit. Expectation management is an ongoing task; it will take time and require different skills than traditionally expected of a university researcher or knowledge broker.

6. Finally, CAR is challenging. If working across different sites, create peer support between researchers and ensure that there are ways to end processes and collaborative relations that are not productive.

10.3 Those connected to the What Works Scotland project

As discussed in The research context: Collaborating for public service reform, policymakers increasingly support and introduce legislative structures to encourage public service reform based on partnership working and multi-agency collaborations. Drawing on second order research, I intend to draw out some key reflections and learning regarding public service reform. A detailed discussion of this work is outside the scope of this report. However, drawing off the information I provided in the previous sections, there are five points to briefly highlight:

1. Change is the only constant. That is, the practitioners and their workplaces experience ongoing change and action, based on a variety of approaches and agendas. For example, there are a large number of organisations providing guidance or change models to practitioners. This includes management consultants, organisational development professions, project management doctrines, and government organisations piloting a variety of programmes and approaches. Public

service practitioners from a range of backgrounds are constantly making sense of the different approaches and ways of working.

2. Partnership working and collaboration is not a medicine for all problems. Most practitioners want to work with others, are committed to exploring new ways of working, and keen to develop their workplace skills and practices to solve issues of inequality and provide good public services. Collaborative governance involves investment and development in cross-organisational skills development, resources, and support.

3. Collaborative research projects take time to develop and grow. However, they offer rich knowledge generation and impact opportunities. Funding bodies and university structures may need to reframe existing structures and expectations to take into account the wider range of activities and intensity of approaches such as CAR (compared to 'traditional scientific' research approaches).

4. Exercise caution when transferring approaches or models across different contexts. What works in a stable system with similar professions may come up against barriers and create difficulties in contrasting contexts. CAR approach to service improvement has its strengths, but also raises issues regarding the time, resource, and role within complex multi-agency systems or with individuals unfamiliar with inquiry work.

5. Finally, CAR can help unite knowledge generation and knowledge use, but we should air caution about whether the co-produced evidence process leads to equivalent standard of evidence and knowledge; not all people have the skills, capacity, and space to develop research competencies.

11.   Conclusion

In this report I provide an overview and discussion of the Fife CAR programme that formed part of the What Works Scotland initiative's work on public service reform. The report provides information on the background, research structure, collaborative action research activities, outcomes, and key considerations for various audiences and stakeholders. Whilst the practitioners focus on the first order inquiries process and their localised learning and embedded action, in this document I share our learning from across the whole programme of work.

This CAR programme is comparatively large, intense, and complex. It involved a range of complexities, not least the uneven nature of understanding regarding CAR, inquiry work, and working with university researchers and evidence. The "designing the plane while flying it" nature of CAR creates opportunities whereby a range of collaborators can engage in setting the parameters and shaping the focus of the work. However, it also means that tried and tested models or tools from other contexts may not be suitable as blueprints for action within the new context.

As the professional researcher attached to the Fife CAR programme and responsible on behalf of What Works Scotland for piloting CAR in this case site, I wrote this document to share some of the learning, and overview of the process and activities that took place. Our work and the recommendations demonstrate how we developed the CAR programme. In this document I emphasise the role of the university researcher in this process, and the skills and resources required to develop methods and approaches. I also outline the work, time, and skills involved in project-managing or coordinating the research activity, the extent to which and the ways that university researcher might be engaged in supervising the research activity. It is important to understand the *different support needs* when discussing and engaging in evidence use. At the end of the co-produced programme of work there are a number of insights and key aspects worth highlighting. First, despite difficulties there are clear convergences regarding the benefits of framing practice with the underpinning CAR principles of critical reflection and reflective practice, dialogue, ownership, and collaboration across boundaries. Such aspects meet the demands and needs of collaborations between and within organisations, whilst also demonstrating ongoing process of reflection and action. Second, the difficulties we experienced highlight the extent to which policymakers increasingly develop and map structures of collaborations in public sector and beyond (such as community planning). Yet, the *ways of working within these structures*, and the principles of interacting within collaborative spaces is less well developed and requires much consideration regarding the skills of *all professions and types of practitioners*. University researchers engaged in CAR often write about the distance between academic and non-academic worlds. Based on the work here, I argue that this frame is too simplistic; in the context of public service reform we need to start talking about working across and unearthing the distance between *multiple worlds*.

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13.   Appendix 1: List of tangible provision

March 2015 - March 2017 (non-exhaustive)

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
Retreats					
First National Retreat 2014	December 2014	Original (across What Works Scotland)	No	Meeting other case sites, presenting topics	One-day introductory event in Edinburgh
National Retreat 2015 (Edinburgh)	June 2015	Original (across What Works Scotland)	Practitioner-led sessions included	Facilitation, brokered and provided access to experts in different areas of public service reform (PSR)	Two-day retreat, combining representatives from four case sites and across What Works Scotland
National retreat 2016 (Perth)	February 2016	Original (across What Works Scotland)	Practitioner-led sessions included	Facilitation, brokered and provided access to experts in different areas of PSR	Two-day retreat, combining representatives from four case sites and

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
					across What Works Scotland
Home retreat 2015 (Cluny Clays)	October 2015	Demand-led (Fife only)	Practitioner led sessions included	Group facilitation, four What Works Scotland facilitators	One full-day retreat
Home retreat 2016 (Adam Smith Theatre)	November 2016	Demand-led (Fife only)	Yes (purpose, aim, and some sessions)	Group facilitation, four What Works Scotland facilitators	One full-day retreat
Support for planning for home retreats and national retreats	Ongoing/throughout	Demand-led (Fife only)	Yes		In person and online
Seminars and guest speakers					
Distributed Leadership: Prof Jim Spillane, Northwestern University (Kirkcaldy Town House)	September 2015	Original offer (broker academic expertise) and demand led (systems change) – Fife only	No	Organised, attended, and brokered international speaker on distributed leadership	Professor in Learning and Organizational Change at the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University
Introduction to	May 2015	Demand-led (Fife	No (response	Organised, attended, and	Chair of

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
Collaborative Action Research Prof Chris Chapman (Kirkcaldy Town House)		only)	to demands and needs)	brokered	Education and Public Policy and Practice at the University of Glasgow
Dr Christina McMellon: (Kirkcaldy Town House)	June 2016	Response to difficulties understanding CAR in practice (Fife only)	No (response to demand and needs)	Organised, attended, and brokered speaker on undertaking CAR with young people	Seminar
What Works Scotland Pre-Meeting	10 May 2014	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
What Works Scotland Case Study Meeting	30 October 2014	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Formal strategy Group meetings					
Strategy group meeting	19 March 2015	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Strategy Group	6 May 2015	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
					format
Strategy Group	23 June 2015	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Strategy Group	1 September 2015	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Strategy Group	23 November 2015	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Strategy Group	28 April 2016	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Strategy Group	7 September 2016	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Strategy Group	December 2016	Original offer, additional	Yes		Standard meeting format
Formal PIT meetings					
51 PIT meetings (What Works Scotland attended	March 2015 – December 2016	Demand-led (additional)	Yes		Various

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
most but not all)					
Contact outside of meetings					
703 emails received (responded to 98.5%)	March 2015	Some within critical friend offer, many demand-led	n/a		
68 direct phone calls with CAR practitioners	March 2015 - April 2017	Some within critical friend offer, many demand-led	n/a		
112 weeks engagement and regular contact	March 2015 - April 2017	Demand led	n/a		
Training					
Knowledge Hub Training (Edinburgh University)	October 2015		No (Improvement Service, What Works Scotland national partner)	Brokered places for two Fife policy officers attended a What Works Scotland group KHub training session	Speaker from Improvement Service (IS)
Links to MOOCs, training courses and additional resources or activities	Throughout	Additional	Yes, response to requests for formal training	Posted links on Khub, emailed to specific individuals	Sign-posting

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
Facilitation for facilitators training: Dialogue and Deliberation in community engagement	April 2017	Additional (response to co-identified skills gap across four case sites)	Response to identified need across What Works Scotland	RF Brokered and supported process on What Works Scotland facilitation training What Works Scotland arranged and funded	Training arranged and delivered by What Works Scotland colleagues (Claire Bynner, Oliver Escobar) and Wendy Faulkner
Resources provided					
Consent forms	March 2015	Original, (Fife only)	No	Covering second order research (What Works Scotland)	
Contextual report template	May 2015	Original	No	Including an additional example of a fictitious project (Fife only)	
What Works Scotland evidence request tool (original offer)	June 2015	Original	No		
9 steps document	October 2015	Additional/demand-led (Fife only)	No	Adapted from Robert Owen Centre (ROC) and School inclusion project	

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
				resource (Education Scotland)	
Inquiry cycle	May 2015 (repeated throughout)	Additional/demand-led	No	Adapted from ROC and School inclusion project resource (Education Scotland)	
Critical friend reflections from Perth retreat	March 2016	Additional, (Fife only)	No	Suggestion and guidance for addressing issues	
CAR reporting Template	Summer 2015	Additional, demand-led, (Fife only)	Yes	See appendix 2	
Individual reflection templates	Throughout	Additional	No	At retreat events and within reporting template	
Worksheet guidance on 1st PIT meeting	July 2015	Additional, (Fife only)	No		
Vignette guidance document	Welfare PIT, Spring 2016	Additional, (Fife only)	No	Basic information on undertaking vignettes. Practitioners supplemented with other knowledge and skills	
2016 outline (for discussion in strategy meeting Feb 2016)	Feb 2016	Additional, Demand led, (Fife only)	No		

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
Dialogue handbook	Throughout (KHub)	Additional, (Fife only)	No		
Action Planning worksheet	November 2017	Additional, (Fife only)	No		
Connections worksheet	November 2017	Additional, (Fife only)	No		
Reflections of the strategy group tool	November 2017	Additional, (Fife only)	Yes		
Events and additional meetings					
Evidence to Action event	November 2015	What Works Scotland colleague (parallel workstream). Fife only	Yes	Presentations on putting evidence into practice	One-day event
Planning meeting for community planning event	October 2017	Additional (demand-led), Fife only,	Practitioners' event		
Fife event: "Making the change: delivering a better and fairer Fife" (Community Planning)	November 2017	Demand led, Fife only, Fife only	Practitioner led (Research fellow involved in planning)	Attending and support working sub-group, What Works Scotland speakers (Oliver Escobar), Cleo Davies produced blog	One day event

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
Welfare data collection event	May 2016	Demand-led (shifting inquiry approach). Fife only	Practitioner-led (RF involved in planning and delivery)		
Paris learning trip	November 2016	Demand-led/original offer (learning from elsewhere). Fife and Glasgow	No, What Works Scotland planned, practitioner contributions during	Learning trip to Paris to explore PB. What Works Scotland arranged and funded the trip. Three Fife practitioners attended. Blogs and learning logs on the What Works Scotland website	What Works Scotland colleague Richard Brunner organised and delivered
Elected members session	January 2017	Demand-led. Support to share learning locally and influence working environment, Fife only.	Yes, co-designed with policy coordinator, PIT presenters	Presentations from PIT members to Kirkcaldy elected members sharing learning.	Half-day session
Brokered and funded transcription services for Welfare and Schools PITs	2016	Additional, Fife only.	Practitioners collected data and analysed the	Brokering and funding transcription services	Transcripts

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
			transcripts		
Write up three action research reports	January - March 2017	Demand-led, Fife only	Co-produced (practitioners submitted populated templates)	Analysing, editing, and revising into outward facing documents	Online action research reports
Meeting with Education, Fife Council	September 2015	Additional	N/A	Support creation of Schools PIT	Meeting
Three, 1-2-1 meetings to better understand aims of applicants to programme	April 2015	Additional (relationship building)	N/A	Better understand key activists' vision and aims	Meetings
Kirkcaldy presentation on What CAR is? Chris Chapman	April 2015	Demand-led (additional)	No	Presentation to wider range of practitioners about CAR process	Presentation event
Policy Meeting: Tailored presentation introducing CAR to policy team: Hayley Bennett	May 2015	Demand-led (additional)	N/a	Brainstorm and work through barriers, including tailored presentation and group mind-mapping	Meeting

Name	Date	Original offer or additional/demand-led?	Co-produced?	Including	Format
Fife Partnership Executive Group meeting	July 2015	Additional	Yes	Chris Chapman and Danny Cepok	On agenda for Fife Partnership Executive Group (FPEG)
Meeting to discuss social networking analysis	October 2016	Demand-led and additional		A practitioner wanted to try to record her social networking.	Meeting to discuss additional work
Pre-strategy meeting	November 2015	Demand-led and additional		Mentoring and programme support catch-up with What Works Scotland contact	

14.   Appendix 2: Reporting template

I co-produced and piloted this template over a period of months in 2016 in response to practitioners' requests for guidance for the reporting process. The information here excludes the template formatting.

Fife CAR reporting Template

Introduction

CAR is a process of deep inquiry into professional practice. What Works Scotland are supporting practitioner-led collaborative inquiries to research how community planning addresses 'wicked issues.' What Works Scotland believes that services and community planning processes can be improved through research, evidence use, and improving shared practitioner knowledge.

Undertaking Collaborative Action Research and creating inquiry teams can be socially complex and require more involvement from a wider range of practitioners than alternative research arrangements. However, a CAR approach can:

- Help ensure that the research focus is locally owned and suited to practitioner needs
- Build capacity and develop long lasting working relationships and partnerships
- Create pragmatic change and improvements throughout the process
- Create wider change and improvements from the inquiry report

This document is designed to help practitioners engaged in the Fife CAR activities to take stock, reflect, and capture the details of their inquiry processes. This document acts as a tool through which those involved in the inquiry work to date can consider their activities and can be used for discussion within the Fife case sites. Alongside practitioner reflections the information captured in this document will form the basis of the final reports.

Tips:

- Whilst one person may lead on populating the final document, it should still remain a collaborative process with inputs from all members of the PIT. This ensures that a range of views are captured.
- As such, each individual may want to attempt to complete a version with the lead writer or PIT lead drawing on these to populate the one version that represents the group's work
- Try to avoid answering sections with bullet points. Write fully and draw on reflections and learning.
- The information compiled in your interim report should build on the **contextual reports**
  produced in 2015 and any other work the PIT has done throughout the process.

- There is no requirement to complete every section in this template at the same time. You may not have got to a particular part of the process yet. However, it may be useful to attempt and reflect on the sections which are more challenging as by doing so may highlight parts of the inquiry process which have not yet taken place or require further attention.
- Whilst writing this report you may find it useful to refer to the 9 steps, CAR cycle, and the strategy or PIT group meetings notes. These documents can be found on the Knowledge Hub Fife What Works Scotland group page.
- Please note, the populated templates will not be shared more widely in this format. But the information collected in here will form the basis of the reporting documents which will likely feature on the What Works Scotland website and shared with partner organisations including What Works Scotland funders; Economic and Social Research Council, and The Scottish Government.
- It is the PIT's responsibility to populate this document. This is the write up of your inquiry and your CAR experience. This template is a guide and as such, if you would like to add sections, or expand on particular aspects, please do so.
- What Works Scotland will assist in teasing out some of the inquiry process and assist in the editing of the final reports (which will carry the What Works Scotland logo and be shared with What Works Scotland partners and available to the public).

Section 1: Inquiry description and background

- What is the name of your inquiry group?
- What is the original 'wicked issue' your inquiry is seeking to address?
- How typical is the topic for community planning or delivering public services? What might other areas or practitioners learn from

your inquiry and research into this topic?

Section 2: Working collaboratively and establishing an inquiry team

- Please list all the members, job title, employing organisation
- How did you form the PIT group? Who are the intermediaries who helped you to form the group? How did you identify members?
- How often do you meet and how many times have you met?
- Please reflect on the group membership, including who isn't part of the group and the impact this might have on the change process

Section 3: Inquiry research design

- What is the inquiry question(s)?
- What is your identified research process and data collection plan?
- What data have you collected? How did you do this? How long did it take?
- How did you analyse it? Was this a group session or individual?
- What external data or evidence have you drawn upon in this process?

Section 4: Findings

- What are your main research findings from your inquiry?
- What did you learn whilst going through the process?
- What changes have been implemented based on the PIT's work to date?
- In what ways has this inquiry process changed the working practices of the members of the group? Has the inquiry process changed the design and/or delivery of services? Have new relationships or projects started outside of the PIT group?

Evidence use

- What evidence did you draw on through the process? (Please reflect on whether there was any difficulty accessing evidence, how this was overcome, whether there are areas you would like more evidence on?)

Section 5: Future plans

- If you have completed a cycle and implemented changes, how will you monitor or evaluate the success of these changes?
- Will the group continue post What Works Scotland involvement? If so, in what form? What would change from the current arrangement? If not, why not?
- If you have been unable to complete the inquiry process please explain why and reflect on what changes need to take place for this work to be completed?

Individual reflections:

Please use this space to record your reflections. Each PIT member should have had a different experience as each of you has a different role in your organisation, personal and professional interests for being part of the work, and different skills to offer the group.

When reflecting on your role in the PIT it might be worth thinking about:

- What your day to day job is, your ways of working, and professional values.
- Whether your own practice and ways of working were challenged or affirmed through the process?
- The times where you felt uncomfortable with the process or any parts of the work that you found difficult
- The parts of the inquiry work which you felt you could contribute to
- Whether you have noted any changes in relationships and network