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# Social Bridging Finance Model Evaluation

**Final Report**

Prepared for

**The Robertson Trust**

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## Summary

This is the final report in Iconic Consulting and Glasgow Caledonian University’s evaluation of the Social Bridging Finance (SBF) model, undertaken on behalf of The Robertson Trust (TRT), which assessed the implementation and impact of the model from April 2019 to June 2022. SBF aims to enhance the sustainability of public services, particularly those of a preventative nature. It involves the delivery of an evidence-based service by a third sector organisation which a public sector partner guarantees to sustain, via a legally binding contract, if mutually agreed success criteria are met by the end of an independently grant funded demonstration phase.

From the outset, TRT defined the model in their SBF Guidance for interested parties, as involving five key stages: design, contract, demonstration, evaluation, and sustainability. TRT also developed a two-page [summary](#), which identified and described the five key stages of the SBF model as shown below.

<b>DESIGN</b>	A working partnership is formed between a public sector agency, a third sector organisation and an independent funder to replicate an existing evidence-based model which has been trialled successfully elsewhere or at a small-scale in the existing geography. This service should enable a move from reactive to preventative services and meet an identified need which the public sector body is prepared to fund longer term. The partners need to agree success criteria in advance.
<b>CONTRACT</b>	A binding contract is signed between the partners to commit the public sector organisation to sustaining funding for the service for a specified period of time, if the agreed success criteria are met.
<b>DEMONSTRATION</b>	After an allowance for an initial set-up phase the service is delivered for an agreed period of time, usually 2 to 3 years. During this trial stage, which will be grant funded (this can be from a range of sources, including Trusts and Foundations, public sector, individual philanthropists etc...), partners can adjust how the interventions are delivered, in order to ensure the best chance of meeting the agreed success criteria. A Project Board is established with senior representatives from all the partners to ensure strategic level oversight of progress.
<b>EVALUATION</b>	An audit is commissioned by the partnership and paid for by the independent funder at the outset of the trial period. This evaluation will make an informed judgement as to whether or not the agreed success criteria have been met at the end of the trial.
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	If the external evaluator determines that the agreed success criteria have been met, then the contract determines the length of time for which the public sector organisation will sustain the service. If the trial period has not been successful, all partners ensure that they take learning from the process and walk away, thus the public sector commissioner faces no risk from the trial as this is carried by the grant funders.

The evaluation set out to understand the strength and challenges of implementing the SBF model, whether it achieves the intended outcomes, and, if so, what elements of the model enable these to happen. In doing so, it sought to answer three main questions at programme-level: identify the barriers and enablers to implementing SBF; the extent to which the SBF trial phase achieved its intended outcomes; and to establish the lessons to inform the on-going development of SBF.

The evaluation primarily draws on evidence from the implementation of the SBF model in two demonstration projects in Dundee and East Renfrewshire. It has also been informed by evidence from South Ayrshire where partners considered, but did not apply, the model.

- In Dundee, TRT invited organisations they had already worked with to tender to deliver the Pause UK programme, with Tayside Council on Alcohol (TCA) successful. TRT and Dundee Council already had trusted relationships established with TCA. Pause UK provides comprehensive support to vulnerable women who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, repeat removal of babies from their care. Intensive support enables the women to focus on their needs and prevent further children being taken into care.
- East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and East Renfrewshire Council worked with Children 1<sup>st</sup> to trial a new bespoke service, providing intensive support to families with a young person experiencing emotional distress who presented at a local GP practice. The service provided a ‘whole family’ approach aimed to improve the young person’s mental wellbeing and reduce further GP presentations.
- In South Ayrshire, the local authority worked with Place2Be to develop plans for a service to provide counselling, support, and signposting to improve the mental wellbeing of Carrick and Girvan Academy pupils and their families. Proposed support included individual counselling, drop-in, and group work with pupils and their families during term time as well as school holidays.

Each of the five stages through which the SBF model is deployed include a number of key components. Overall, however, all of these stages are underpinned by what we regard as the most important components: good partnership working and trust between the organisations. The funder also played a key role at each stage.

The evaluation has generated substantial learning on each of the five stages of the SBF model.

## **Stage 1: Design**

### **Development Phase**

- The development phase is vital in building trust, refining the service model, clarifying goals, and defining suitable success criteria that address these goals. Essentially, this stage sets the tone for good partnership working.
- The early involvement of elected members is a distinctive part of the SBF model, and this builds understanding and ownership which is beneficial, particularly for later in the process around decisions to continue funding when SBF ends.
- TRT had an important facilitation role during the development phase. TRT’s solid reputation and credibility were seen as crucial in bringing partners together. TRT also committed substantial resources, time, and money, to supporting partners throughout and future funders should be aware of the level of commitment that may be involved during this stage.
- Clarity of purpose is vital so that all partners agree about what they are committed to achieve and the role they each play. It is also vital in setting appropriate success criteria.

### **Procurement**

- The model, as implemented to date, does not have a prescribed or preferred procurement route.
- The evaluation highlighted that it would be beneficial for TRT and other funders to ensure partners identify all procurement requirements at the outset, including at the end of the initial public sector partner funding period, so that confusion does not arise and procurement becomes a potential barrier to the model.

## Success criteria

- Evidencing impact, in the form of success criteria, is one of the most important elements of the SBF model. Defining SMART success criteria that link directly to partners' goals at the outset is essential.
- Pause UK used their wider evidence established in England and Wales to define six clear success criteria around levels of engagement, completion of the programme, feedback, impact, improved wellbeing and that the service would cost the same or be less than the predicted costs avoided by the Council. In East Renfrewshire, three clear success criteria were defined focused on reducing repeat GP presentations, responding rapidly to support families, and levels of engagement.
- The process of defining the success criteria encouraged partners to agree on realistic and measurable goals, strengthening the partnership.
- In South Ayrshire, partners could not agree on the success criteria, denoting differing priorities and lack of partnership approach.
- The inclusion of the success criteria in the contract or having clear and agreed goals for partners to achieve from the outset is important, as this emphasises that meeting these goals, should commit the public sector partner to sustain the service.
- The involvement of monitoring and evaluation specialists in defining success criteria in East Renfrewshire was helpful and should be an option available to partners in the future. However, should sustained evidence of success be already available, as shown in Dundee, this is not always needed.
- The resource implications of gathering the evidence set out in the success criteria should be considered at the outset and additional funding provided if necessary to ensure it is gathered.
- The evaluation found no evidence of partners attempting to 'game' success criteria or manipulate the process, which had been a concern raised by TRT.

## Stage 2: Contract

- The contract has an important role at the outset in terms of forcing partners to address sustainability, being clear about their goals, and defining success criteria that addressed these goals.
- The contract was referenced in the final budget decision-making process by the public sector partners to sustain the services.
- Evidence that the service had been a success, having conversations about sustainability at the outset, and the leadership of senior officers in the public sector were also identified as important factors in sustaining services.
- The legal status of the contract was acknowledged but seen as unenforceable. It may also discourage some organisations from using the SBF model.
- There are examples elsewhere of organisations building in sustainability at the outset without the use of a contract.
- We recommend that, ideally, a contract be retained as part of the SBF model. However, a flexible approach should be adopted that enables partners to use a partnership agreement should they be more comfortable with this option.

## Stage 3: Demonstration phase

### Partnership Working

- One of the most enlightening findings to emerge from the evaluation was the positive impact the SBF model can have on partnership working. The evaluation has shown that

in East Renfrewshire and Dundee participation in the SBF model helped strengthen existing relationships and in Dundee helped build new ones. However, in South Ayrshire the model did not have the same positive impact on partnership working.

- Partners in East Renfrewshire and Dundee reported that relationships were more equitable than their experience of other settings and funding models. Relationships were built around trust, honesty, and openness.
- Key individuals, particularly lead officers from the public sector partners, were significant in providing leadership.
- Existing relationships help but are not a pre-requisite to application of the model.

### **The Project Board**

- The Project Board allows partners, including the key individuals, to meet on a regular basis, promoting ongoing communication and all partners to share responsibility to deal with challenges that arose.

### **Funder's role**

- The funder has a key role in the SBF model at all stages. They are important in engaging partners, developing ideas, and facilitating discussions.
- The importance of the funding should not be overlooked.
- TRT took on a project management role in Dundee and East Renfrewshire at times and their input to the SBF pilots was resource intensive. This raises justifiable questions on replicating the model.
- It is recommended that partners clarify their roles and responsibilities from the outset. Having a third party broker to support delivery and ensure evaluation and monitoring could also be considered.

## **Stage 4: Evaluation**

### **External Audit**

- Pause UK use a robust system for reporting and evaluation. An external audit, to review case files against the reported success criteria and interview women felt unnecessary, considering the trust established between partners and also ongoing reporting at the Project Board Meetings. Instead, a 'light touch' audit was carried out, which involved a review of anonymised files.
- Partners in East Renfrewshire felt robust evidence had been gathered and decided an audit was not required. However, partners did request a letter from the funder confirming the success criteria had been met, and TRT obliged.
- Funders will only be in a position to provide a confirmation letter in the future, where they have been actively involved in the partnership. Without this level of involvement they would not have the same knowledge that TRT had regarding progress and trust between partners.
- It is recommended that an external audit is not seen as essential part of the SBF model and should only be considered where partners agree at the outset that external verification is required.

## **Stage 5: Sustainability**

- Both services in Dundee and East Renfrewshire fulfilled the success criteria, despite the unexpected impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The services in both Dundee and East Renfrewshire have been sustained beyond the demonstration phase. However, neither

service has been sustained with long-term mainstream funding.

- The decision by Dundee City Council was made to provide mainstream funding for 18 months in line with the expectations set out in the contract.
- East Renfrewshire has secured two year funding, not the three envisaged in the contract, and this has been sourced from an underspend and top-up from monies allocated from Scottish Government, rather than mainstream resources.
- The public sector partners used the SBF model to drive system change but this was viewed in terms of improved efficiency not financial savings. Organisations seeking to use the SBF model in the future for a similar purpose should consider where these efficiencies or savings will be achieved – which organisation or budget will benefit.
- Senior officers' belief that the services were effective solutions to identified needs in their area gave them confidence the success criteria would be met and the services would be sustained at the end of the pilot periods. This confidence was expressed to elected members throughout the process and helped engage and reassure them that the services were worthwhile.

### **Enablers and barriers to implementation**

The evaluation has shown that there are numerous enablers to implementation of the model.

The critical factors in our view are:

- Public and third sector organisations that are open to working together collaboratively to address an identified need.
- Commitment from senior staff and elected members from the public sector, third sector provider and funder.
- Clearly defined SMART success criteria that link directly to partners goals which are set out in a formal agreement between partners.
- Robust monitoring arrangements that gathers evidence of impact.
- Significant funding and ongoing staff resources from the funder.

### **Outcomes**

The evaluation shows that:

- The presence of independent funders adds credibility and weight, which helped the third sector partners to engage the public sector on equal basis. Third sector partners feel a shift in traditional power dynamics towards greater equality
- As a result of discussions about sustainability from the outset, a greater responsibility of all partners was promoted towards making the project successful, rather than this being down mainly to the delivery partner. Third sector partners get more assurance of the likelihood of sustainability. However, the degree of uncertainty, although reduced, made long-term planning challenging.
- The model minimised financial and reputational risks to the public sector allowing them to trial a service and test its effectiveness with the aid of external funding.
- Third sector partners made a positive impact on individuals and communities in Dundee and East Renfrewshire.
- SBF-funded services in Dundee and East Renfrewshire have been sustained, albeit the funding arrangements are short-term and insecure. The contract was a useful vehicle to denote the level of commitment from partners from the outset but is not the only way in which this could be achieved, such as through a partnership agreement. Other factors were found to be important, such as the evidence of impact and drive of lead officers in the public sector.

## Conclusion

Overall, we conclude that the SBF model puts sustainability at the forefront, shifting the power dynamics so that the success of the project is a shared responsibility between all partners, rather than being down mainly to those delivering. Both projects in Dundee and East Renfrewshire have been sustained, though not long term and in East Renfrewshire, not from a core budget, and therefore questions remain, at this stage, about the extent of the sustainability. The evaluation has evidenced the potential challenges and limitations of the model and we would recommend it is used selectively and with caution. We would also recommend that SBF is viewed as an approach rather than the very fixed model it was presented as at the start of the evaluation.

Consultees were very positive about their experience of the model and would be interested in applying it again in the future, and there was consensus that this is well suited as a means of influencing systems change, that is moving from reactive to preventative services. Systems change is complex, and we recommend that partners are very clear about whether systems change means improved efficiency, financial savings or something else. It was also suggested that two to three years may not be long enough to evidence systems change. The model has the potential to be used by TRT as part of their work on early intervention, public sector reform, and social investment. In conclusion, this evaluation has shown that the SBF model can enhance the sustainability of public services, mainly because it forces partners to consider sustainability at the outset. It is shown that the relationships between partners, the trust established, shared focus and evidence of impact are all elements promoted by the model and that contribute to its successful implementation. The SBF model could be applied elsewhere if partners consider its use cautiously. Future use would help generate more learning, which would help refine the model further.



# 1 Introduction

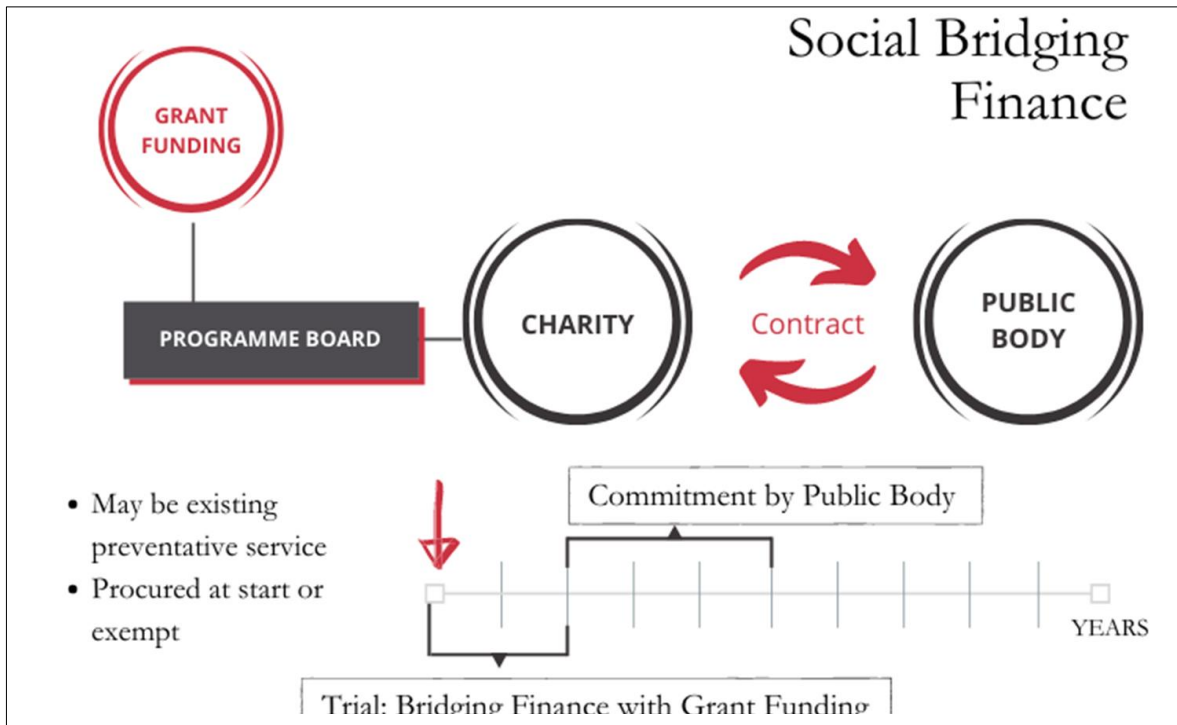
This is the final report from Iconic Consulting and Glasgow Caledonian University’s evaluation of the Social Bridging Finance (SBF) model. Undertaken on behalf of The Robertson Trust (TRT), the formative evaluation assessed the implementation and impact of the model during the trial phase from April 2019 to June 2022. This final report builds on the findings presented in our previous reports - an Initial Report in April 2020, an Update in Autumn 2020, and an Interim Report in January 2022 (including an Addendum in September 2022).

TRT developed the SBF model as Scotland’s public sector tried to respond to the Christie Commission’s roadmap for public service reform and the increased focus on preventative spend. However, the public sector faced the challenge of finding ways to sustain funding for existing service delivery while simultaneously testing new ways of working. Innovative social financing models were developed to support a move to preventative delivery including Social Impact Bonds in England and Wales and Public Social Partnerships in Scotland. Although TRT incorporated some of the principles of these models into SBF, it differed in some key aspects. TRT stated the SBF model ‘intentionally involves third sector delivery partners earlier and more deeply in the commissioning of services, and works on the expectation that those which evidence their success will be sustained, with no requirement for payback to the investor. The model also requires the inclusion of a contractual commitment from the public sector to sustain services which successfully achieve intended outcomes during an initial trial phase’.

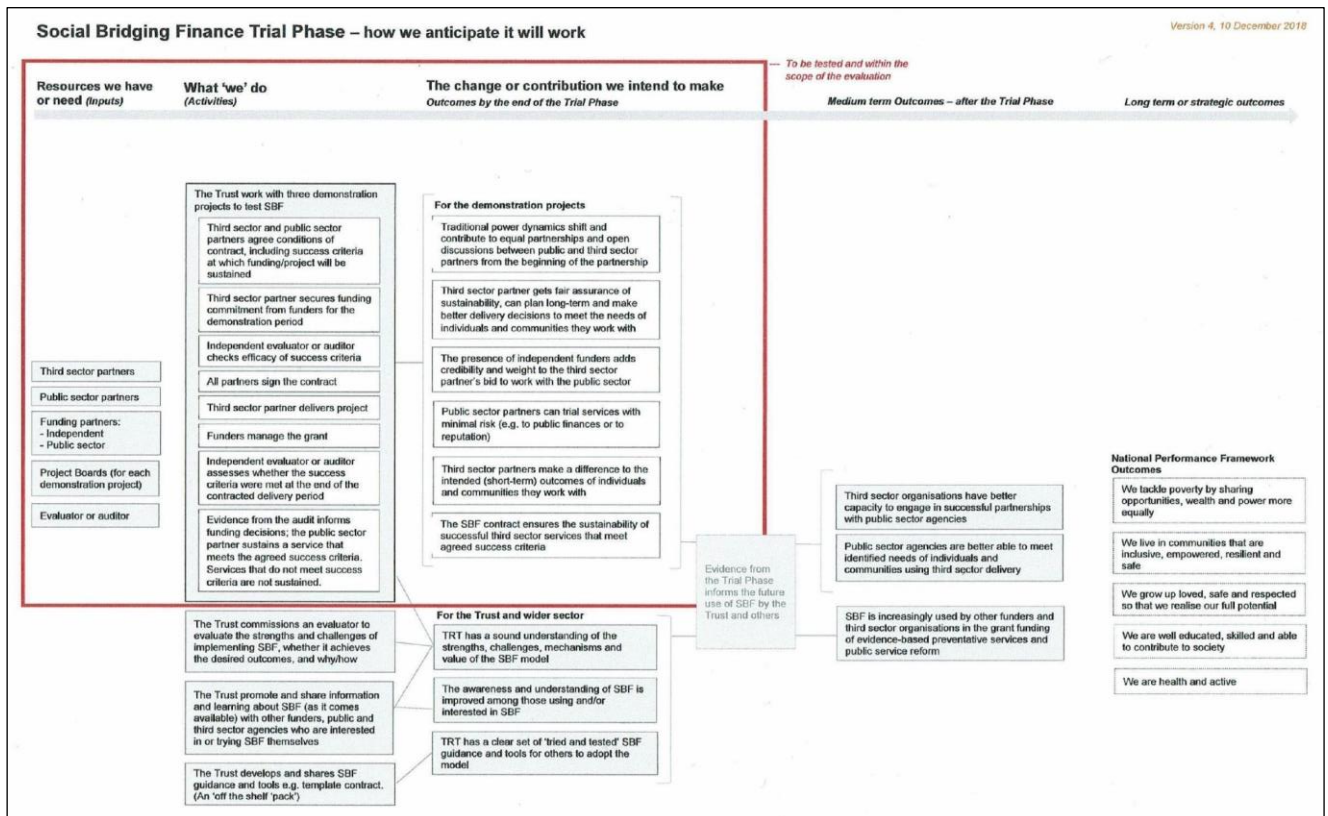
The SBF model aims to enhance the sustainability of public services, particularly those of a preventative nature. It involves the delivery of an evidence-based service by a third sector organisation which a public sector partner guarantees to sustain, via a legally binding contract, if mutually agreed success criteria are met by the end of an independently grant funded demonstration phase. TRT developed SBF Guidance for interested parties. The detailed Guidance provided background on the model, how it works and how to identify which interventions and partnerships might be suitable for the approach. TRT also developed a two-page [summary](#), which identified and described the five key stages of the SBF model as shown below.

<b>DESIGN</b>	A working partnership is formed between a public sector agency, a third sector organisation and an independent funder to replicate an existing evidence-based model which has been trialled successfully elsewhere or at a small-scale in the existing geography. This service should enable a move from reactive to preventative services and meet an identified need which the public sector body is prepared to fund longer term. The partners need to agree success criteria in advance.
<b>CONTRACT</b>	A binding contract is signed between the partners to commit the public sector organisation to sustaining funding for the service for a specified period of time, if the agreed success criteria are met.
<b>DEMONSTRATION</b>	After an allowance for an initial set-up phase the service is delivered for an agreed period of time, usually 2 to 3 years. During this trial stage, which will be grant funded (this can be from a range of sources, including Trusts and Foundations, public sector, individual philanthropists etc...), partners can adjust how the interventions are delivered, in order to ensure the best chance of meeting the agreed success criteria. A Project Board is established with senior representatives from all the partners to ensure strategic level oversight of progress.
<b>EVALUATION</b>	An audit is commissioned by the partnership and paid for by the independent funder at the outset of the trial period. This evaluation will make an informed judgement as to whether or not the agreed success criteria have been met at the end of the trial.
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>	If the external evaluator determines that the agreed success criteria have been met, then the contract determines the length of time for which the public sector organisation will sustain the service. If the trial period has not been successful, all partners ensure that they take learning from the process and walk away, thus the public sector commissioner faces no risk from the trial as this is carried by the grant funders.

TRT also produced the following diagram summarising the model.



TRT’s development of the SBF model was informed by learning from two projects TRT previously funded. In Glasgow, TRT funded MCR Pathways to deliver a mentoring programme for young people on behalf of Glasgow City Council. In Dundee, TRT funded Includem to deliver a school-based service to raise attainment among disadvantaged young people on behalf of Dundee City Council. These two projects applied elements of the approach now encapsulated within the SBF model, and served to refine its current iteration.



TRT set out to test the SBF model in a trial phase during which the model was applied in a small number of demonstration projects. TRT developed the following logic model for the trial phase. The logic model identified the anticipated outcomes for TRT and the wider sector, and the demonstration projects during and after the trial phase. It also highlighted the elements of the model that were within the scope of the evaluation.

The SBF evaluation addressed the following questions:

***Programme-level***

1. What were the barriers and enablers to implementing SBF (see key components/ activities of SBF in the logic model)? In particular, The Robertson Trust was keen to understand the implications of SBF for:
  - a. Legal contract and procurement processes.
  - b. Timing and adequate speed in securing a contract and funding.
  - c. The potential for ‘gaming’ of the success criteria.
  - d. Identifying and evaluating the success criteria.
  - e. Flexibility of the contract.
  - f. The role of the Project Board and the usefulness of its oversight role.
2. To what extent did the SBF trial phase achieve its intended outcomes? What elements of the model enable these to happen? Were there any unintended outcomes – positive or negative?
3. Overall, what lessons should the team consider to inform the ongoing development of SBF and its future use, including the guidance on how others might use it? Including:
  - a. What resources does it require of the Trust or others to implement SBF in future as an ‘off the shelf’ model?
  - b. What are the roles required of the various stakeholders in implementing SBF, including the third sector partner, public sector partner, funder, project boards, evaluator/auditor (i.e. responsibilities, attitudes, behaviours, capabilities, capacity)?
4. What do success criteria need to look like to improve the chances of “success”?

***Project-level***

5. Assessing and reporting on whether each demonstration project met its agreed ‘success criteria’ at the end of the contract delivery period?

The evaluation draws on evidence from three demonstration projects in Dundee, East Renfrewshire, and South Ayrshire. However, while the SBF model was implemented in Dundee and East Renfrewshire, in South Ayrshire partners considered, but did not apply, the model. The findings presented in this report are therefore limited by the availability of evidence from only three areas and implementation in only two of them. Details of the SBF model’s use in these three areas is summarised below.

East Renfrewshire Family Wellbeing Service	
Public sector partners	East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and East Renfrewshire Council
Third sector partners	Children 1 <sup>st</sup>
Contract status	Contract signed July 2019
Delivery period	A six-month mobilisation period began in June 2019 followed by a two-year delivery period from 1 December 2019 to 30 November 2021. A six-month transition / winding up period built into the contract was taken up by the provider due to the challenges of delivering during the COVID-19 pandemic and to allow further time for the sustainability decision making process.
Contract expiry date	31 May 2025
Service	The service provides intensive support to families containing a young person experiencing emotional distress who presented at a GP practice in East Renfrewshire. A whole family approach aimed to improve the young person's mental wellbeing and reduce further GP presentations.
Demonstration phase funders	The Robertson Trust and East Renfrewshire HSCP.
Success criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In year 3, 66% reduction in the number of repeat presentations to GPs for young people during first six months since referral to the Family Wellbeing Service (Target: 50% by the end of the 2 year service).</li> <li>● In year 3, 79% of families referred to the Family Wellbeing Service were contacted within 2 weeks of referral being received from the GP (Target: 90%).</li> <li>● In year 3, the service supported 326 children/young people and their families (Target: minimum of 178 per year).</li> </ul>
Sustainability	In January 2022, East Renfrewshire HSCP agreed to sustain the service from April 2022 until the end of May 2024 using an underspend from Scottish Government funds allocated for school counselling and improving young people's mental health.

Pause in Dundee	
Public sector partners	Dundee City Council
Third sector partners	Pause and Tayside Council on Alcohol
Contract status	Contract signed August 2019
Delivery period	A six-month mobilisation period began in May 2019 followed by an 18 month delivery period from 1 November 2019 to 30 April 2021. Six month extension agreed in January 2021 due to the challenges of delivering during the COVID-19 pandemic and to allow further time for the sustainability decision making process.
Contract expiry date	31 October 2022
Service	The service provides comprehensive support to vulnerable women who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, repeat removal of babies from their care. Intensive support enables the women to focus on their needs and prevent further children being taken into care.
Demonstration phase funders	The Robertson Trust, and National Lottery Community Fund. Six-month extension in 2021 utilised an underspend from the initial grants, additional funding from The Robertson Trust, Pause UK, and an in-kind contribution from Dundee City Council.
Success criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 22 women engaged with Pause (Target: at least 20).</li> <li>● 95% of women who became open to Pause completed the programme (Target: at least 80%).</li> <li>● 100% provide positive feedback about Pause as a service (Target: at least 70%).</li> <li>● One woman became pregnant during their time with the programme (Target: maximum of 1 woman).</li> <li>● Women improved wellbeing scores and reported reductions in domestic abuse, substance misuse and housing instability (Target met).</li> <li>● The cost of the Pause service was estimated at £300,000 less than the predicted costs avoided by the Council over a five year period (Target: cost of the service is the same or less than the predicted costs avoided by the Council).</li> </ul>
Sustainability	In September 2021, Dundee City Council Children and Families agreed to sustain the service for 18 months until the end of March 2023.

Place2Talk Carrick	
Public sector partners	South Ayrshire Council
Third sector partners	Place2Be
Contract status	Contract not signed
Delivery period	<p>The process in South Ayrshire started in 2019. Despite the challenges experienced by partners in reaching workable solutions, Place2Be was tasked to deliver the service for an initial six month period during which evidence gathered was to enable all partners to agree indicators and set realistic targets. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was to formalise these arrangements. It is important to state that the project was not applying the SBF model as such although that was the aim of all partners. In 2021, a decision was made to cease participation. It was challenging for partners to come to an agreement and to proceed with the implementation of the SBF model for a number of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● agreeing both the indicators and the targets for the success criteria;</li> <li>● additional Scottish Government funding for school-based counselling which complicated service model;</li> <li>● different level of resources required by Place2Be to deliver in Carrick (a rural area) compared to other areas where they have delivered;</li> <li>● South Ayrshire Council's demands on monitoring and evaluation of the service;</li> <li>● the level of understanding and trust among partners.</li> </ul>
Contract expiry date	Not applicable
Service	The project aimed to provide counselling, support, and signposting to improve the mental wellbeing of Carrick and Girvan Academy pupils and their families. Proposed support included individual counselling, drop-in, and group work with pupils and their families during term time as well as school holidays.
Demonstration phase funders	William Grant Foundation funded preliminary work. Other funders had indicated support for the project if it proceeded (The Robertson Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, North Carrick Community Benefit Company, and South Ayrshire Council via Scottish Government funding for school-based counselling).
Success criteria	Not established
Sustainability	Not applicable

The evaluation gathered evidence throughout the trial phase through an extensive series of interviews with senior representatives from TRT, the William Grant Foundation, and the public and third sector partners in each of the three demonstration projects. For this Final Report, this included two elected members from Dundee City Council and East Renfrewshire Council who were involved throughout the pilots. The evaluation also involved attendance and review of Project Board meetings in East Renfrewshire and Dundee, review of reports and data, and a 'Reflect and Learn' session with funders and partners at the interim stage.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- Sections 2 to 6 consolidate the findings on the five stages of the SBF model generated throughout the evaluation, presenting learning on key issues at each stage as well as identifying enablers and barriers.
- Section 7 assesses the outcomes as set out in the SBF logic model.
- Section 8 draws together our conclusions and recommendations.

## 2 Stage 1: Design

### Development phase

Throughout the evaluation, stakeholders have referred to the importance of time at the beginning of the process that partners spent developing the service, funding, and partnership arrangements. Having this time helped partners build trust, refine the service model, clarify goals, and define suitable success criteria that addressed these goals. Building trust was particularly important at the outset as the strength of relationships helped partners address challenges later in the process. The involvement of senior managers throughout the development phase was vital as it demonstrated to other partners the level of commitment each one was making to the project and allowed decisions to be made.

Our recent consultation with elected members found that their involvement in discussions at the outset was also important. In Dundee, where negative publicity about one element of the Pause project threatened the project, elected members were instrumental in progressing plans, supported by senior council officers. Elected members in both areas reported that this early involvement helped build understanding of the services, the contract and the success criteria, which was beneficial later in the process when deciding whether to sustain the service or not. Public sector officers agreed that the involvement of elected members at the outset was vital as it builds understanding. One of the public sector consultees highlighted the challenge that a change in the political make-up of the local authority could have on the decision making process if new individual members or a new administration were in place that had not made the initial commitment. This consultee noted that they were fortunate that this had not occurred during the pilot.

TRT had an important facilitation role during the development process with stakeholders reporting their independence helped bring the public and third sector partners together. TRT's solid reputation and the seniority of the representatives was crucial as, stakeholders reported, they had the right experience and skills to fulfil the role, and gain the respect of the other partners. Other funders seeking to replicate the model should be aware that TRT committed significant resources to the development phase, as well as the implementation of the model as a whole.

*“The fact that you’ve got a grant funder like Robertson and providing that level of expertise in at the beginning. They were really good at doing that. For example, they were very clear on the success criteria about not making it too hard, make it simple but effective. It wasn’t as if they were just wanting us to succeed either because the criteria were still very ambitious.” (Third sector consultee)*

Our Initial Report highlighted the importance of there being a shared clarity of purpose among partners. In East Renfrewshire, the public sector and service providers jointly identified a need as well as an evidence-based solution which would lead to benefits to the public sector as well as participants. Although project initiation was different in Dundee, where TRT played a part in bringing the main partners together, there was mutual understanding of need and the benefits of the proposed service. The lack of clarity in South Ayrshire was one of the main barriers to progress, in our view. Clarity of purpose also aids the development of success criteria.



### Learning

- The development phase is vital in building trust, refining the service model, clarifying goals and defining suitable success criteria that address these goals.
- The early involvement of senior managers and elected members builds understanding and ownership which is beneficial later in the process.
- TRT had an important facilitation role during the development phase. TRT's solid reputation and the seniority of those involved was seen as crucial in bringing partners together.
- Clarity of purpose is vital.

### Enablers

- Clarity of purpose at the outset which reflects the aims of partners, particularly the public sector partner. If the purpose is to drive system change, partners should be clear whether this is improved efficiency or financial savings, and also consider which organisation or budget will benefit.
- Trust among partners and a willingness to work together to achieve joint goals.
- Planning takes account of the operating context and assesses risks, including potential changes in the operating context such as national policy developments/funding or local service reorganisation.
- Ownership within the public sector partner including senior officers and local politicians to understand and feel invested in the project from the outset, as they ultimately decide whether or not to sustain the service.

### Barriers

- Risk aversion within the public sector.
- Lack of clarity, commitment and understanding of impact, particularly within the public sector partner.

## Procurement

East Renfrewshire and Dundee City Council used different procurement routes and this showed that the SBF model, as applied to date, does not appear have a prescribed or preferred approach to third sector commissioning.

East Renfrewshire Council made a significant financial contribution to the overall costs of the pilot and procurement was an important consideration. Following discussions with TRT, the service was classified as 'research and development' on the basis that it would be trialled and assessed over a number of years. Public sector procurement legislation allows public authorities to exempt research and development services, under a financial limit, from competitive tendering. This enabled East Renfrewshire Council to negotiate directly with the third sector partner. In Dundee, the Pause service was grant funded by TRT and the National Lottery Community Fund. With no financial input from Dundee City Council there was no requirement for the Council to undertake a procurement exercise. However, as the lead partner the City Council did conduct such an exercise in order to identify a local delivery partner to work alongside Pause. To streamline the tendering process, a small number of selected organisation were invited to bid on the basis of an existing positive relationship with TRT and previous experience in working with vulnerable women. In both areas, the public sector procurement team were involved in discussions during the development phase. This was important in ensuring the

procurement process satisfied the public sector partners own procedures.

In East Renfrewshire, partners reported that the procurement process contributed to a more equitable relationship compared to the commissioner-provider one. It should be noted however that the development of the service was very collaborative and the procurement process mirrored this approach and was very appropriate for the circumstances. In other words, the research and development procurement route did not create the collaborative approach but it did allow it to continue.

Some consultees in East Renfrewshire and Dundee were unclear about the future procurement process beyond the funding extensions agreed in 2021/22. In our experience, this is likely to be a matter for each public sector organisation and their own procurement processes. Therefore, TRT is unlikely to be able to provide definitive guidance on this issue however, they could in future applications of the model ensure that partners identify all procurement requirements at the outset.

### Learning

- The SBF model does not have a prescribed or preferred procurement route.
- Local partners should choose the approach which is most appropriate to them.
- The research and development procurement route worked well in East Renfrewshire as it allowed partners that had identified need together to continue to collaborate and implement the project.
- There was some uncertainty about the need for procurement in the future or what form this would take.

### Enabler

- A procurement route that suits local circumstances.
- The public sector procurement team in involved in discussions during the development phase.

### Recommendation

- TRT and other funders should ensure partners identify all procurement requirements at the outset, including at the end of the initial public sector partner funding period.

### Success criteria

The evaluation has shown that evidencing impact, in the form of success criteria, is one of the most essential elements of the SBF model. The inclusion of the success criteria in the contract is essential as it reinforces their role in the sustainability decision making process. Pause UK used their wider evidence established in England and Wales to define six clear success criteria around levels of engagement, completion of the programme, feedback, impact, improved wellbeing and that the service would cost the same or be less than the predicted costs avoided by the Council. Partners in East Renfrewshire worked together to define three success criteria around the level of engagement, reducing the number of young people with emotional distress presenting at local GPs, and responding to young people in a timely manner. Our Initial Report showed the importance of defining SMART<sup>1</sup> success criteria that link directly to partners' goals. The

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<sup>1</sup> SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

difficulties partners in South Ayrshire faced in defining success criteria that linked directly to partners' goals was a critical factor in the pilot not progressing.

Partners in East Renfrewshire reported that input from an external monitoring and evaluation specialist was helpful in defining the success criteria. This support was also available in Dundee and South Ayrshire. Pause's existing well established monitoring and evaluation process meant the support was not required in Dundee. Significant support was provided in South Ayrshire and partners reported it was useful. However, partners were unable to agree on indicators or targets for the success criteria.

The evaluation has shown that monitoring the success criteria in East Renfrewshire has been challenging. The public sector partner stated that evidencing the success criteria was critical. The third sector partner reflected that monitoring was resource-intensive and suggested that an alternative, less-resource intensive approach, would have been preferable. Our reflection is that the success criteria were well defined and there was no alternative means of gathering it available to partners. The learning therefore is that resource implications should be considered at the outset and additional funding provided if necessary to ensure evidence can be gathered. There is a danger, in our view, that in the future partners may seek to identify success criteria that are easier / less resource-intensive to gather but not as closely aligned to partners goals. It is very important, in our view, that this does not happen. Input from monitoring and evaluation specialists during the development of the success criteria was shown to be important in East Renfrewshire and should continue in the future with their recommendations recorded and considered by partners, however, as shown in Dundee, this is not always needed.

Consultees in East Renfrewshire, including an elected member, reported that the success criteria were vital and the service would not have been sustained without evidence that showed they had been met. The evidence showed that the Family Wellbeing Service had led to a 62% reduction in young people re-presenting at GPs (exceeding a target of 50%) and there had therefore been a systemic change which led the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) to agree to sustain the service for another two years. Similarly in Dundee consultees, including an elected member, reported the success criteria were a vital part of the decision making process although our Interim Report showed that a broader range of evidence was used to demonstrate impact. As discussed later in this report, although the success criteria were important in the decision making process, other factors such as the support of senior managers and the availability of funding were also vital.

We found no evidence that partners attempted to 'game' or manipulate the success criteria for their own benefit, a question raised by TRT from the outset of the evaluation. For example, we did not find that third sector partners defined success criteria that they could easily achieve, the public sector partners set targets that were impossible to achieve, or that third sector partners were selective or even underhand in how they gathered or interpreted evidence. The Interim Report also concluded that an external evaluation was not necessary for the purposes of the SBF model, if success criteria are agreed that reflect partners goals. However, we did conclude that partners may wish to commission one for their own purposes, particularly third sector partners.

### **Learning**

- Evidencing impact, in the form of success criteria, is one of the most essential elements of the SBF model.
- The inclusion of the success criteria in the contract is important as it enforces their role in the sustainability process.
- Defining SMART success criteria that link directly to partners' goals at the outset is essential.
- Resource implications in gathering evidence for the success criteria should be considered at the outset and additional funding provided if necessary to ensure evidence can be gathered.
- There was no evidence of partners attempting to game success criteria.

### **Enabler**

- The public sector takes the lead in defining SMART success criteria that set out how the service will be assessed. The success criteria should be clearly linked to the purpose and partner aims.
- The involvement of monitoring and evaluation specialists in defining success criteria in East Renfrewshire was helpful.

### 3 Stage 2: Contract

The contract, as a vehicle for clarifying the partners commitment to the project and that the service will be sustained if the success criteria is met, was an important part of the SBF model design. It is a legally binding contract signed by all partners which, in our experience of funding models, is unique.

The evaluation found that views regarding the importance of the contract varied depending on the stage of the pilot and, in part, which sector consultees worked in.

In East Renfrewshire and Dundee there was broad consensus regarding the importance of the contract at the outset of the SBF process. Consultees from the public and third sector reported the contract helped partners focus on what was important and what they wanted the pilot to achieve (which were articulated through the success criteria). The requirement to agree a contract had a significant role in achieving buy-in from senior public sector officers and elected members and building trust among all partners. It also had a symbolic importance as it affirmed openly that the public sector was committed to sustaining the service if its success could be evidenced. However, in South Ayrshire where the SBF model was considered but not implemented, questions were raised by the public sector at the outset about the requirement for a contract that was legally binding. The Council was concerned about being “locked in” to an agreement should there be a change of administration following local elections; there were also concerns about attribution and the influence of other funding, services and external factors on the success criteria. South Ayrshire partners recognised that the contract provided a useful starting point, but suggested flexibility would be needed to reflect the diversity of each context. Partners in all three areas welcomed the existence of the SBF contract template developed by TRT. They reported this streamlined the legal process.

During the delivery phase, consultees in East Renfrewshire and Dundee reported that the contract was not discussed at Project Board meetings and was not something that partners felt the need to refer to. The use of a codicil in East Renfrewshire to amend the success criteria after it was signed off by partners demonstrated that a flexible approach was possible. One consultee noted that the contract could be important if the key individuals changed during the delivery phase, particularly within the public sector partner. They felt, in such circumstances, the contract could be useful in reminding someone new what the organisation as a whole had committed to.

Later in the SBF process, at the sustainability decision making stage, the evaluation found that interviewees had varying views about the importance of the contract. Generally, third sector consultees did not identify the contract as a significant factor in the sustainability decision making process. They acknowledged that the contract was a useful vehicle to have conversations about sustainability at the outset, but suggested it was evidence that the service had been a success, and the leadership of senior officers in the public sector that were the key factors in decisions regarding sustainability. Public sector consultees also reported these factors were important. Some public sector consultees suggested the contract was an important part of the process, however others were more circumspect in their views. It was noteworthy that the contract was referenced in the Dundee City Council Committee papers and the Chair of East Renfrewshire IJB referred to the contract when reminding members what they had signed up for. Some of the elected members involved in East Renfrewshire and Dundee reported the contract played a

significant part with the inclusion of success criteria clearly setting out a commitment to sustain the service if it is shown to be a success.

*“The contract was important. Sustainability was always going to be an issue given the cost of the service. The contract demonstrated a commitment to continue it if the evidence showed it was a success – it wasn’t just a case of OK we’ll do this and we’ll look at how to sustain it if it’s a success. The important part of the contract is the commitment to sustain the service if the evidence shows it’s been a success – having the evidence is crucial.”  
(Elected member)*

Throughout the evaluation, the legal status of the contract was a moot point. While partners agreed it was a legally binding contract, consultations repeatedly showed that none of the partners expected the legality of the contract to be tested and they acknowledged that had the public sector not sustained the service, the third sector partner would not have taken legal action. The value of the contract therefore is questionable in terms of sustainability. However, we do conclude the contract was a useful vehicle at the outset in terms of forcing partners to address sustainability, being clear about their goals, and defining success criteria that addressed these goals. The contradictory status of the contract is captured in the following comment.

*“It helped us to remind them what they had committed to. However, the reality of the situation is if they didn’t have the money and the commitment and the evidence and the leadership, they could still have said no we are not doing it, we cannot afford it, we’ve just been through a pandemic... At the start, the process of formalising the contract was quite helpful, at least in setting out for all the partners this is what we are committing to – if we do this, this is what will happen. That process at the start was quite useful. If we hadn’t done that I don’t know if there would have been that much focus at the end but between the start and the end we didn’t really discuss the contract at all. If the public sector had decided not to do it, we are not going to take them to court over it, there is no real weight behind it. It is more like we are all committed to it.” (Third sector consultee)*

Consultees shared their experiences elsewhere about building in sustainability without the use of a contract. One third sector consultee reported that in other areas, learning from this model, they have had conversations about sustainability with public sector partners at the outset, and set out their expectation that the service would be sustained if it proved successful but without the use of a contract. Instead the third sector organisation has included this as a condition for their involvement and not used a contract. This consultee also reported that the contract could put off some public sector organisations that were unwilling to take the risk of being tied into a legally binding contract and in this scenario the contract may be counterproductive. The funder highlighted an example of partners in another area pursuing a similar approach to the SBF model without the use of a contract but with a minuted commitment from the public sector partner to sustain the service if it is successful.

Overall, the evaluation has shown that evidence regarding the contract is not clearcut and in some cases appears contradictory. On the one hand, it can play a key role at the outset in driving agreement, building trust, and later in the process can be an important reference point during the decision making process. On the other hand, it is not viewed as an enforceable contract and could put some potential partners off. There were suggestions that a partnership agreement could have the same effect without the legal status and this may be an option for some partners

in the future. Our view is that the legal status of the contract brings added focus to the discussions at the outset that may not be achieved by a partnership agreement and we recommend that, ideally, the contract be retained as part of the SBF model. However, we also recommend that a flexible approach is adopted and a partnership agreement could be used rather than a contract should partners be more comfortable with this approach.

### **Learning**

- The contract is a useful vehicle to have at the outset in terms of forcing partners to address sustainability, being clear about their goals, and defining success criteria that addressed these goals.
- The contract was referenced by the public sector partners during the sustainability decision making process.
- Evidence that the service had been a success, having conversations about sustainability at the outset, and the leadership of senior officers in the public sector were also identified as key factors in the sustainability decision making process.
- The legal status of the contract was acknowledged but seen as unenforceable.
- There are examples elsewhere of organisations building in sustainability at the outset without the use of a contract.

### **Enablers**

- The existence of a SBF contract template was welcomed by partners and streamlined the legal process.

### **Barriers**

- Some organisations may be put off using the SBF model by the use of a contract.

### **Recommendation**

- We recommend that, ideally, a contract be retained as part of the SBF model. However, a flexible approach should be adopted that enables partners to use a partnership agreement should they be more comfortable with this option.

## 4 Stage 3: Demonstration phase

### Partnership working

One of the most enlightening findings to emerge from the evaluation was the positive impact the SBF model can have on partner relationships. The development phase was seen as a key driver of this. In Dundee and East Renfrewshire this mostly, although not exclusively, built on existing relationships. The Family Wellbeing Service in East Renfrewshire was designed in a very collaborative way by the public and third sector partners to suit local circumstance and the model provided the opportunity for partners to work together, building on existing strong relationships. Excellent partnership working was also evident in Dundee, where good relationships existed between TCA, Dundee City Council and TRT. Although Pause had not previously worked with TCA or the City Council, they did have an existing relationship with TRT so they were not entirely new to the partnership. In addition, negative media attention regarding the proposed service in Dundee reinforced partner's commitment to the project and helped strengthen existing relationships or build new ones where they had not previously existed.

In South Ayrshire, although the funder and the local authority had an existing relationship the third sector partner had not worked in the area previously. During the development phase the local authority and the third sector provider struggled to agree joint aims and success criteria, despite the funder's attempts to broker agreement, and the relationship between the two was very different to that observed in Dundee and East Renfrewshire. Understanding and trust were less evident. The local authority reported this "was a new way of working" and the absence of a pre-existing relationship between the local authority and the third sector partner may have contributed to the challenges faced in implementing the service in South Ayrshire. However, other factors were also important – such as clarity of purpose, the Council's concerns about being locked into a contract and the Council's monitoring and evaluation requirements - and we do not conclude that existing relationships are a pre-requisite for the application of the SBF model. Undoubtedly, existing positive relationships would help SBF's application but they are not essential if trust and understanding can be built up during the development phase. Where new partnerships are being established, time and mutual respect will be required to allow relationships to develop.

Partners in Dundee and East Renfrewshire compared their positive experience of partnership working with the SBF model to their experience of other funding arrangements, particularly the traditional commissioner-provider approach. They emphasised SBF had been characterised by a much more equitable approach built around trust, honesty and openness.

*"It was an equal partnership. It wasn't the local authority directing the third sector to do this and that. The third sector and the local authority worked together to look at what the ultimate outcome was... Not having to be a commissioning authority and truly working on the relationship with the third sector has been fantastic... We weren't there to count the beans. We were there to work alongside them to find the solutions." (Public sector consultee)*

*"One of the other things about social bridging was it didn't feel like a commissioner-provider relationship. It felt like a partnership. I don't know if that was to do with the contract, social bridging, the partners we've got but there was certainly something that felt different about*



*this... There was honesty and trust in the relationship ...Where we saw challenges, we were clear about where some of the challenges were. And where they saw challenges they would let us know what they were and we would work through them with them and develop where we needed to develop. We just developed that level of relationship where we could have honest conversations with them.” (Third sector consultee)*

*“It is that conversation up front about sustainability, it allows people to come in and feel as though there is a more equal partnership. I felt the difference, I am not thinking ‘I better not say that’ because I will have to come back to them to ask for future funding. It allows you to be freed. I think the conversations and dialogue with people at the very senior level, I would not be dealing with people in that position with a normal grant. I would be having it with a locality manager, someone at a less senior level. So as a senior officer of my organisation I’m having that relationship with someone who has a position within the Council that is more equivalent. This also has had benefits for us more widely in establishing those relationships.” (Third sector consultee)*

As noted earlier, public and third sector consultees emphasised that SBF is a three-way partnership with the funder, TRT having a crucial role.

*“When you’ve got the expertise of the grant-funder around the table it can make a big difference. They can bring such a lot of experience.” (Public sector consultee)*

*“The Robertson Trust, as funders held us to account as they should do, but were also very facilitative and helpful and also made us feel like equal partners.” (Third sector consultee)*

Several consultees highlighted the important role key individuals had in the whole process. The lead officers from East Renfrewshire HSCP and Dundee City Council were identified by partners as vital in terms of engaging and maintaining relationships and support among stakeholders including elected members. Some consultees suggested that without the leadership these individuals showed, the services would not have been sustained; they also suggested there could have been additional challenges if these individuals moved on during the pilot period. The absence of a clear senior officer lead from the public sector in South Ayrshire during the development phase contributed, in our view, to its failure to progress. The importance of key individuals in the SBF model is similar to our experience of Public Social Partnerships where key individuals also had a vital role.

*“It was sheer force of will from (the lead officer) that got us to the finishing line.” (Public sector consultee)*

*“As much as we’d like to say it was a huge team effort, some people had really big roles in achieving that. That buy-in from senior leaders, and keeping that buy-in, was critical.” (Third sector consultee)*

*“Leadership was crucial. In both Dundee and East Ren, the leaders were amazing advocates for this work and that is really critical. Someone who really gets it, believes in it and can do that influencing from inside and is at a certain level within the organisation that they’re able to do that. And that they can take people along with them is really critical.” (Funder)*

Consultees in Dundee and East Renfrewshire also emphasised the importance of senior staff from TRT. Their involvement at the outset of the pilots was significant as they were passionate about the model and instrumental in TRT taking it forward. They also helped engage and support partners.

### Learning

- The SBF model can help partners create and develop strong relationships.
- Relationships were built around trust, honesty, and openness, and were more equitable than partners' experience of other settings.
- Key individuals, particularly lead officers from the public sector partners, were significant in providing leadership.

### Enabler

- Existing relationships help but are not a pre-requisite to application of the model.
- Confidence in an evidence-based service which addresses partners' aims.
- Confidence in the ability of the third sector partner to deliver the service.
- Partners, particularly the public sector partner, demonstrate a commitment to sustainability from the outset.
- An equitable partnership where partners have strong relationships built on trust, respect, and understanding.
- Clarity from the outset about roles and responsibilities, including project management, and the sustainability decision making process and timescale.
- Stability among the key individuals from all partners throughout the period.

### Barriers

- Changes to the operating context which impact on the demonstration project, other services, or funding.
- Political change either among the elected members involved in the project or authority-wide.

## Project Board

The evaluation has also shown that the Project Board is an important part of the SBF model that helps enable the strong partnership working evidenced in East Renfrewshire and Dundee. The Project Board allows the key individuals from the public and third sector partners and funder to meet on a regular basis to review progress, and address challenges. The evaluation also showed that the Boards were less successful at forward planning and TRT was at times the driver of discussions around sustainability.

### Learning

- The Project Board allows partners, including the key individuals, to meet on a regular basis.

### Enabler

- The third sector partner takes the lead on service design but also on the operational details, holding documents like the risk register and managing the Project Board.
- A Project Board is established and meets regularly with senior representatives from

the third sector provider, the funder, and all relevant parts of the public sector including, where appropriate, finance.

### Funder's role

The evaluation has shown that the funder, TRT, has played a vital part in implementing the SBF model. As well as providing funding and the possibility of trying the innovative model, TRT has had a key role throughout. At the start this was facilitating discussions, and finalising the contract. From then TRT took on the role of project manager when neither the public nor third sector partners volunteered to do so or necessarily saw it as their role. Our earlier reports have considered where the project manager role should sit, and we conclude that ideally this should be with the public sector as they are the organisation that needs to decide whether to sustain the service or not. TRT has also had an important role in gathering evidence on the model's implementation and we suggest it has a future role in sharing the learning more widely with other funders and public and third sector organisations interested in the model. TRT consultees reflected that their role had been resource-intensive, and greater than TRT envisaged at the outset. This led to justifiable questions about replicating the model either within TRT or by another funder.

The evaluation has focused on assessing the various elements of the SBF model to address the questions posed by TRT at the outset. In addition, it is important not to overlook the availability of significant funding from TRT during the demonstration phase when assessing the SBF model. Third sector consultees stressed the importance of the additional funding in engaging the public sector, especially the size and multi-annual nature of the funding available. Public sector consultees reported that the funding allowed them to establish or expand services which they may not otherwise have been able to do, and most significantly to reduce the risk of doing so. TRT also showed it was flexible in its funding when additional finance was made available in Dundee in 2021 and this was very much appreciated by partners.

*“The funding allowed us to take something to scale, to develop something of significant enough size and length to actually evidence impact which we don't always get through other funding models. The scale of the funding and what that allowed us to develop, is something I hadn't experienced elsewhere... There was a carrot – officers could say to their elected members, if we all engage in this there's substantial money coming in that might not be there if we don't. That helped corral elected members, other senior leaders. When we had those meetings elected members were thanking us for thinking about them, and grateful that Robertson was thinking of investing the money there. I'm not sure we would have got the same buy-in from them if we were just pitching for investment solely from them.” (Third sector consultee)*

*“It was a really great way to kickstart a service that we knew was crucial, that we knew could make a difference. Without the Trust's funding we would not have been able to deliver a service like this across the whole area. It allowed us to very quickly expand the service. It also allowed us to achieve better outcomes - the pressure it took off health professionals - than we could not have achieved without the funding.” (Elected member)*

*“The theory of the funding model to let us test something, it allows us to take that chance without the financial risk.” (Elected member)*

**Learning**

- The funder has a vital role in the SBF model. They are important in engaging partners, developing ideas, and facilitating discussions.
- The importance of the funding should not be overlooked.
- TRT took on a project management role in Dundee and East Renfrewshire when neither the public nor third sector partners volunteered to do so or necessarily saw it as their role.
- TRT's input to the SBF pilots was resource-intensive. This raises justifiable questions on replicating the model.

**Enabler**

- The funder takes a critical friend role, bringing partners together and supporting the implementation of the model.

**Barrier**

- Other funders may be unable or unwilling to commit the level of resources TRT did to the SBF pilots.

**Recommendation**

- Partners clarify their roles and responsibilities from the outset. Having a third party broker to support delivery and ensure evaluation and monitoring could also be considered.

## 5 Stage 4: Evaluation

### External audit

An external audit was designed as part of the SBF to verify whether the success criteria had been met. The Robertson Trust included the audit as a means of independently verifying that progress reported by partners in relation to the success criteria was accurate and that decisions about sustainability could be taken with confidence. Dundee was the first of the demonstration projects to reach this stage and an external audit was undertaken. The process provided very valuable learning for the model.

Pause UK has a robust system for reporting and evaluation. An external audit, to review case files against the reported success criteria and interview women felt unnecessary, considering the ongoing progress reporting at the Project Board meetings and the level of trust established between partners. A 'light touch' audit was carried out, which involved a review of anonymised files and a review of outcomes evidenced by partners. The Dundee partners reported that the audit process felt unnecessary. There was also considerable confusion throughout the process about the role of the external auditor, despite several explanations, with some partners believing the service was being evaluated. It was also not a very comfortable role for the auditor as through attendance at Project Boards and through quarterly reports the numbers and progress of the women had been reported throughout, and to have an 'audit' of these final outcomes seemed undermining.

Learning from the audit experience in Dundee was shared with partners in East Renfrewshire and TRT. Concern was also raised about the potential challenges of verifying evidence of repeat presentation at GP practices among young people experiencing emotional distress in East Renfrewshire. Following discussions, partners in East Renfrewshire agreed an external audit was not required as they had full confidence in the evidence presented by Children 1<sup>st</sup> which had been reported throughout the delivery phase. An audit did not take place in East Renfrewshire. It was noteworthy however that partners in East Renfrewshire later requested confirmation from TRT that the success criteria had been met and this was submitted as part of the papers submitted to the IJB requesting continuation funding.

Based on the experience of both Dundee and East Renfrewshire we conclude that an external audit of the success criteria is not an essential part of the SBF model. It should only be included where partners decide at the outset of a future SBF-funded service that external verification is required. Similarly, confirmation from the funder that the success criteria have been met should also be optional and used where partners feel it would bring added value to the information presented to the public sector. It should be noted that funders may only be in a position to confirm success criteria have been met if they have been as involved in throughout the process as TRT was in East Renfrewshire and Dundee.

**Learning**

- An external audit of the success criteria was challenging in Dundee and partners felt it was unnecessary.
- Partners in East Renfrewshire felt robust evidence had been gathered and decided an audit was not required. However, partners did request a letter from the funder confirming the success criteria had been met, and TRT obliged.

**Enabler**

- For robust monitoring and evaluation systems to be in place to gather relevant information for the success criteria, plus evidence of the service's broader impact on beneficiaries and partners, if relevant.

**Barrier**

- Challenges gathering monitoring information from the organisations involved in delivery, including referrers.
- Funders will only be in a position to provide a confirmation letter in the future, where they have been actively involved in the partnership.

**Recommendation**

- An external audit should not be an essential element of the SBF model, and should only be used if partners agree at the outset that external verification of success is required.

## 6 Stage 5: Sustainability

The pilot projects in both Dundee and East Renfrewshire have been sustained beyond demonstration the stage and the SBF model has provided some proof of concept. However, it is noteworthy that the funding arrangements are short-term and insecure. Neither service has secured a long-term commitment from mainstream budgets. In East Renfrewshire the source is external, and somewhat opportune, coming from a reserve of Access to School Counselling funding allocated by the Scottish Government to all local authorities which had built up during the pandemic due to a delay in the commissioning the service, and a small top-up from Children and Young Persons Mental Health Framework funding, also allocated by the Scottish Government to all local authorities. There is greater security in East Renfrewshire with a two year commitment than Dundee's 18 month arrangement. Dundee has however secured a commitment from the local authority's Children and Families budget, and there is potential for it to be continued depending on progress and budgets. As noted earlier in this report, East Renfrewshire's two-year commitment is a year less than envisaged in the contract. Dundee's 18 month funding commitment is in line with the contract. One of the public sector consultees pointed out that it was very difficult for local authorities to provide longer-term commitments because of the short-term nature of their financial settlements with the Scottish Government and subsequently their own budgets. Some of the TRT consultees were disappointed the projects had not been more securely sustained although they very much appreciated the financial context.

It was noteworthy that the public sector partners used the SBF model to drive system change but this was primarily viewed in terms of improved efficiency rather than financial savings. In East Renfrewshire, the Family Wellbeing Service reduced demand on GPs directly from young people experiencing emotional distress. Similarly, in Dundee, the Pause service is likely to have reduced the demand on social work, and other services, directly from the vulnerable women supported. The capacity created among GPs and social workers by these efficiencies will have been taken up by other patients/service users and the overall cost to the public sector of providing GP and social work services was not reduced. The SBF-funded services did not reduce the number of GPs or social workers or their hours, neither did they seek to do this. The driver therefore for the public sector was improved efficiency not reduced spend. Dundee did include cost avoidance among its success criteria but this was not an aspiration to reduce spending. In addition, the public sector partners also stressed that improving the lives of vulnerable women and young people experiencing emotional distress were also really important drivers as well as system change. These observations reinforce the importance of clarity of purpose in the future application of the SBF model and where this includes system change partners should consider whether they are seeking to improve efficiency or achieve direct financial savings. They should also consider where these efficiencies or savings will be achieved – which organisation or budget will benefit. It would appear where the organisation that leads the service is the main beneficiary of these efficiencies, as was the case in Dundee, that organisation is more likely to sustain the service than where these organisations are different, as was the case in East Renfrewshire where the main beneficiary of these efficiencies were GPs.

Throughout the evaluation, partners in both East Renfrewshire and Dundee have been confident that the service in their area would be sustained. They explained that this was the result of their own absolute confidence in the services, that they were as sure as they could be that they would meet the success criteria and would prove their worth. In East Renfrewshire, this stemmed from

the fact the partners had collaboratively developed the service to specifically address the needs of young people and their families in the area – the “authenticity” of the model as one consultee stated. In Dundee, it stemmed from the success of the service elsewhere and the needs of vulnerable women in the city.

*“I had confidence, maybe a naive confidence, that we’d get the money without necessarily knowing where from. With my experience of designing services, robbing Peter to pay Paul as they say, I knew I would get something from somewhere and I had the relationships to do that.” (Public sector consultee)*

Planning from the outset has shown to be important in the sustainability decision making process. We recommended that roles and responsibilities are clarified from the outset and a plan produced by the public sector setting out the timetable for the decision making process to ensure evidence is available to be presented to the relevant council committee or external body making the decision. The Project Board also has a role in ensuring the ongoing and focused discussion around sustainability. A third party to act as a broker and ensure there is effective monitoring and evaluation could also be considered.

### **Learning**

- The services in both Dundee and East Renfrewshire have been sustained. However, neither service has been sustained with long-term mainstream funding.
- Dundee has secured mainstream funding for 18 months in line with the expectations set out in the contract.
- East Renfrewshire has secured two year funding, not the three envisaged in the contract, and this has been sourced from an underspend and top-up from monies allocated from Scottish Government, rather than mainstream resources.
- The public sector partners used the SBF model to drive system change but this was viewed in terms of improved efficiency not financial savings. Organisations seeking to use the SBF model in the future for a similar purpose should consider where these efficiencies or savings will be achieved – which organisation or budget will benefit.
- Partners' belief in the services gave them confidence they would be sustained at the end of the pilot periods.

### **Recommendation**

- The public sector organisation produce a plan setting out the timetable for decision making. All partners should agree on roles and responsibilities. The Project Board plays a strategic role in ensuring the plan is being fulfilled and sustainability being an ongoing consideration. A third party broker could be considered to ensure effective management, evaluation and monitoring is in place.



## 7 Outcomes

This section assesses the outcomes achieved against those identified by The Robertson Trust in the SBF logic model. Our assessment covers the outcomes for the demonstration projects, TRT and the wider sector and is based on all of the evidence gathered throughout the evaluation.

### Demonstration projects

The table below summarises our assessment of outcomes achieved, identified in the SBF logic model, which relate to the demonstration projects.

Outcomes by the end of the trial period	Review	Assessment
Traditional power dynamics shift and contribute to equal partnerships and open discussions between public and third sector partners from the beginning of the partnership.	Consultation with partners and observation of meetings in Dundee and East Renfrewshire areas has shown a shift in power dynamics with greater equality for the third sector. Third sector partners benefitted most from the power shift and reported this as one of the main reasons why they would readily consider being part of another SBF-funded initiative in the future.	Achieved fully
Third sector partners get fair assurance of sustainability, can plan long-term and make better delivery decisions to meet the needs of individuals and communities they work with.	Consultation with partners and document review in both areas have shown the contractual commitment provides the third sector partners with an improved sense of sustainability, allows them to make better delivery decisions and, as reported previously, helped attract quality staff at the outset. However, the degree of uncertainty, although reduced, made long-term planning challenging. The public sector partners could only make a decision near the end of the demonstration period and were limited by their own budgets and financial pressures in the commitments they could make.	Achieved Partially
The presence of independent funders adds credibility and weight to the third sector partner's bid to work with the public sector.	Consultation with public and third sector partners in both areas found that funding and the presence of The Robertson Trust added credibility and weight which helped the third sector partners to engage the public sector. The continued presence of TRT throughout the project helped maintain public sector engagement. The presence of the William Grant Foundation added credibility and weight to discussions in South Ayrshire and they were instrumental in attempts to find a way forward that both the third and public sector partners agreed on.	Achieved Fully

Outcomes by the end of the trial period	Review	Assessment
Public sector partners can trial services with minimal risk e.g. to public finances or to reputation.	Consultation with partners, including elected members, in both areas showed the SBF model minimised financial and reputational risks to the public sector allowing them to trial a service and test its effectiveness with the aid of external funding.	Achieved Fully
Third sector partners make a difference to the intended (short-term) outcomes of individuals and communities they work with.	Partners gathered comprehensive evidence which demonstrated the positive impact on individuals and communities in Dundee and East Renfrewshire.	Achieved Fully
The SBF contract ensures the sustainability of successful third sector services that meet agreed success criteria.	SBF-funded services in Dundee and East Renfrewshire have been sustained. Although the contract was a factor in both areas, consultation with partners and document review suggest other factors were more important. These other factors were evidence of impact, the drive and determination of lead officers in the public sector partner, and the availability of additional funding in East Renfrewshire.	Achieved Partially

### For TRT and wider sector

The table below summarises our assessment of progress towards the outcomes identified in the SBF logic model that relate to The Robertson Trust and the wider sector.

Outcomes by the end of the trial period	Review	Assessment
The Robertson Trust has a sound understanding of the strengths, challenges, mechanisms, and value of the SBF model.	The Robertson Trust has been very closely involved in the demonstration projects and led the evaluation process. TRT has continually demonstrated an openness to learning and understanding the strengths, challenges, mechanisms, and value of the SBF model and how this influences their future plans.	Achieved Fully
The awareness and understanding of SBF is improved among those using and/or interested in SBF.	Awareness and understanding among those using the model has been improved through participation in the evaluation process, including a Reflect and Learn session in February 2021, and dissemination of the reports. To date, awareness and understanding has not been greatly improved among those potentially interested in the model although The Robertson Trust has shared findings	Achieved Partially

Outcomes by the end of the trial period	Review	Assessment
	with some other funders. The third sector partners have also applied their learning to their own work in other areas.	
The Robertson Trust has a clear set of 'tried and tested' SBF guidance and tools for others to adopt the model.	The Robertson Trust has not updated the SBF guidance or developed additional tools or learning materials since the start of the implementation phase as it became clear that it would be important to learn from experience of implementing the SBF model in Dundee, East Renfrewshire, and South Ayrshire before sharing the lessons.	Not yet achieved

## 8 Conclusions and recommendations

Our evaluation of the Social Bridging Finance model's application in Dundee, East Renfrewshire and South Ayrshire has generated significant evidence for The Robertson Trust and the partners involved. The findings will also be of interest to other funders, and public and third sector organisations interested in the SBF model. Overall, we conclude that the SBF model can enhance the sustainability of public services which it was designed to do. This goal has been achieved in Dundee and East Renfrewshire, although questions remain, at this stage, about the extent of the sustainability. As such we would recommend use of the SBF model. However, the evaluation has also evidenced the potential challenges and limitations of the model and we would recommend it is used selectively and with caution, and that funders are aware of the commitment in terms of time and resources that may be required. We would also recommend that SBF is viewed as an approach rather than the very fixed model it was presented as at the start of the evaluation.

The evaluation has shown that there are numerous enablers to implementation of the model. The critical factors in our view are: public and third sector organisations that are open to working together collaboratively to address an identified need; commitment from senior strategic staff and elected members from the public sector, third sector provider and funder; clearly defined SMART success criteria that link directly to partners goals; robust monitoring arrangements that gathers evidence of impact; and significant funding and ongoing staff resources from the funder.

One of the most noteworthy findings to emerge from the evaluation was the positive impact SBF can have on partnership working. In East Renfrewshire and Dundee it helped strengthen existing relationships, and in Dundee it helped build new relationships. SBF promoted equality between partners and more trusting relationships, particularly among senior officers who were very involved in the process throughout. Third sector consultees in particular welcomed these benefits which they compared favourably to their experience with other funding approaches including traditional public sector commissioner-provider relationships. Although the strong partnership working evident in East Renfrewshire and Dundee built, mainly, on existing relationships, we conclude that this is not a pre-requisite for application of the model. Where new partnerships are being established, we suggest that time and mutual respect will be required to allow relationships to develop. Without the pressure of application deadlines that apply to many other funding models, the SBF development phase allowed partners the time and space to develop their relationship and trust, as well as the proposed service, and appropriate success criteria. TRT had an important role in promoting positive relationships which required time and resources that other funders may find difficult to replicate.

The contract is one of the defining features of the SBF model and was subject to detailed scrutiny. It was clear that the contract played an important role at the outset in driving agreement, building trust, and, significantly, forcing partners to focus on sustainability. The availability of a SBF contract template, developed by TRT, helped streamline the process and it should continue to be useful in any future applications of the model. Later in the process the contract was shown to be an important reference point for some public sector stakeholders during the decision making process although the services' impact, the determination of the lead officers from the public sector partner, and public sector finances were also important factors. However, throughout the evaluation partners viewed the contract as unenforceable and, it was suggested its legal status could, potentially, put some organisations off applying the model. Some partners

suggested a partnership agreement could have the same effect without the legal status and examples were given to support this. Our view is that the legal status of the contract brings added focus to the discussions at the outset that may not be achieved by a partnership agreement and we recommend that, ideally, the contract be retained as part of the SBF model. However, we also recommend that a flexible approach is adopted and a partnership agreement could be used should partners be more comfortable with this approach.

External auditing of the success criteria is one element of the model that the formative evaluation has already influenced. Partners in Dundee found the process unnecessary and the sharing of this experience led partners in East Renfrewshire to proceed without an audit. It was noteworthy that partners in East Renfrewshire felt a confirmation letter from the funder would be useful when seeking agreement from the IJB to sustain the service. Based on the evidence gathered during the evaluation we conclude the audit is not an essential element of the model and should be used only where partners deem it necessary at the outset. A confirmation letter from the funder should also be an option should partners decide it would help.

The SBF model ensured public sector partners considered sustainability at the end of the demonstration periods and the services were sustained in both areas. This was significant not only because other funding models we have experience of have not achieved this outcome but also given the context where COVID-19 added to existing pressures on public sector finances. Although the services were sustained the evaluation highlighted the challenges faced by partners, including timing. Both areas benefitted from additional time to allow the public sector partner to make a decision that fitted in with their budget setting timetable. We recommend that in future, the public sector partner produces a plan setting out the timetable for the decision making process to ensure evidence is available to be presented to the relevant council committee or external body making the decision. All partners should agree on roles and responsibilities. The Project Board plays a strategic role in ensuring the plan is being fulfilled and sustainability being an ongoing consideration. A third party broker could be considered to ensure effective management, evaluation and monitoring is in place.

Consultees involved were very positive about their experience of SBF in Dundee and East Renfrewshire and this applied across the public and third sector partners and the funder. They reported they would be interested in applying SBF again in the future and would also recommend it to others considering its use; this was also the view of some of the South Ayrshire consultees. There was a consensus that SBF's use should be selective, and was well suited to use as a means of influencing system change, as illustrated by the following comments from one of the public sector consultees.

*“When we asked elected members to sign up, and directors, there was a level of healthy cynicism about why are we doing this, why are we taking money from grant funders that we can’t sustain. But for us it was the only way we could prove to the system, that the system was not responding in the right way for people. We have now established that and no one debates that with us anymore. We’ve won that argument... No public sector provider is ever going to walk away from it if it works. They are just not going to do it. They might not have all the money but they’ll find ways of doing it. It would be completely irresponsible of them.” (Public sector consultee)*

As discussed earlier in this report, system change is complex. While the SBF model can have a role, we recommend that partners are very clear about whether system change means improved efficiency, financial savings or something else. There were also suggestions that two or three years may not be long enough to evidence system change, although that was not the case in Dundee or East Renfrewshire where impact was evidenced during the funding period.

TRT has been a very active and supportive partner in Dundee and East Renfrewshire as well as a strong advocate for this evaluation. The findings reported so far have helped TRT critically assess the model and clarify how they may use it in the future. The model has potential to be used by TRT as part of their work on early intervention, public sector reform, and social investment. TRT has committed substantial resources, time, and money to supporting partners throughout and future funders should be aware of the level of commitment that may be involved.

*“It probably is part of a range of solutions that a mix of third sector funders and public sector can get into. But it isn't a panacea... It is a really useful intervention that could be used in some circumstances really well, but you have to pick and choose those circumstances well enough to apply it in the right place.” (Funder)*

In conclusion, this evaluation has shown that SBF can enhance the sustainability of public services, mainly because it forces partners to consider and commit to this issue at the outset. SBF could be applied elsewhere if partners consider its use cautiously and in a more flexible way than the model originally developed by TRT. Further use would help generate more learning which would help refine the SBF approach further.