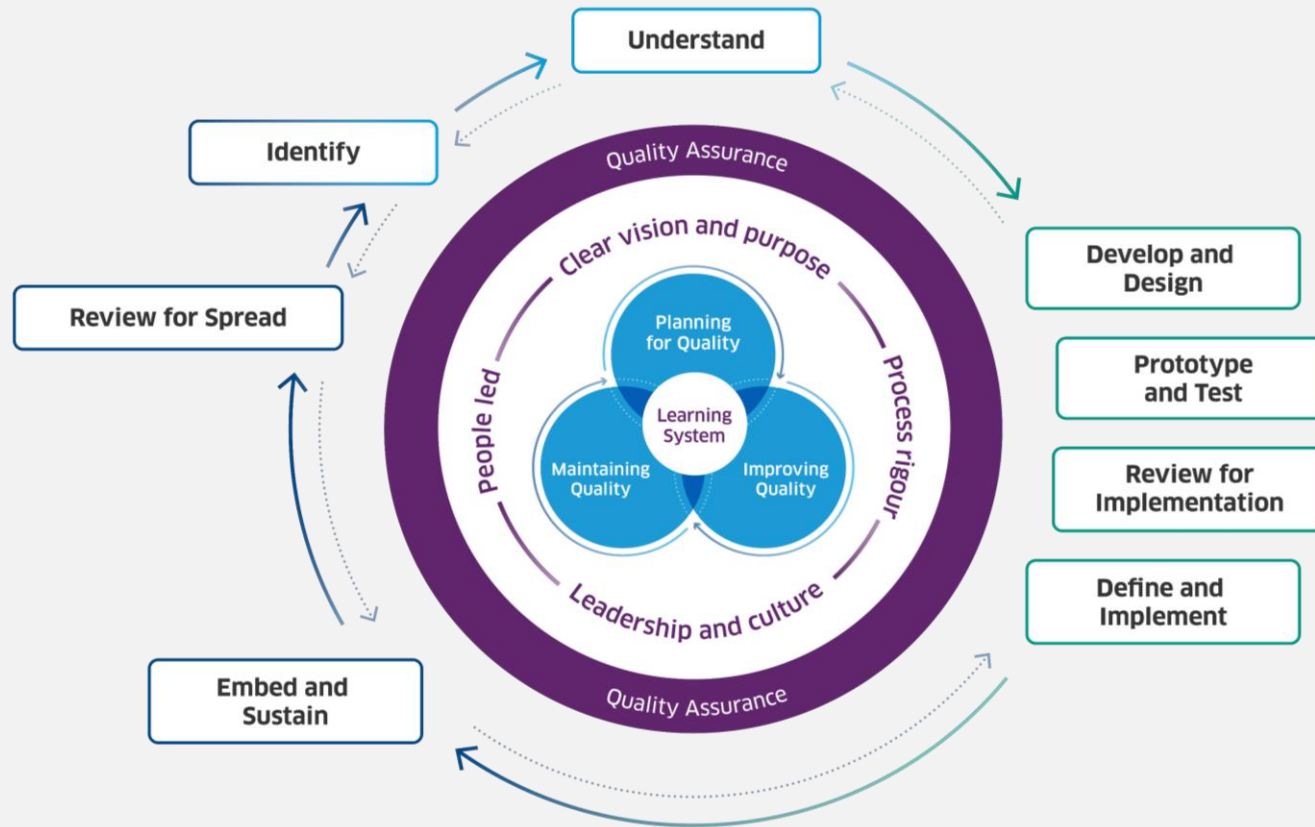


Scottish Approach to Change

Case Study: Early Learning and Childcare
(ELC) Improvement Programme

November 2025

The Scottish Approach to Change



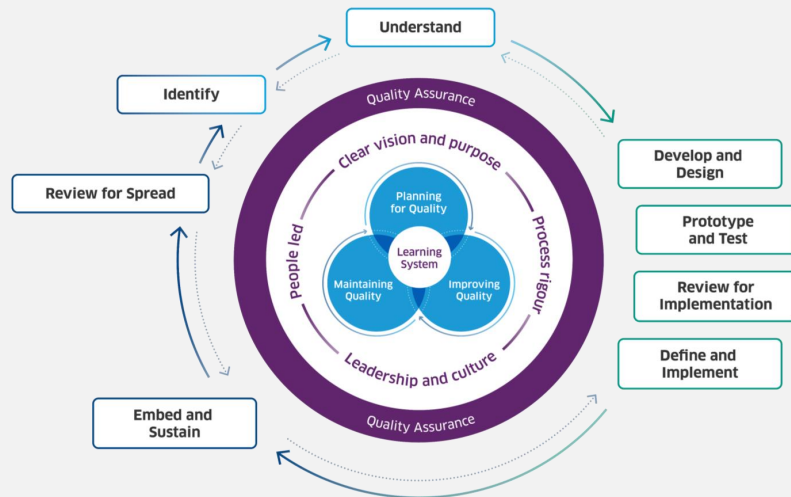
The Scottish Approach to Change includes two aspects:

- the **Steps of Change** – which outline the process that should be undertaken when delivering change
- the **Enablers for Change** – the other aspects that are essential to enabling successful change

The Scottish Approach to Change is integrated with the HIS Quality Management System Framework. It explains how to use a quality management system approach through a change process.

Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Improvement Programme

This Case Study provides an example of the Scottish Approach to Change, showing how the steps of change and the enablers of change can be used in practice to deliver change.



The **Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Improvement programme** is led by the **Care Inspectorate**. The programme aims to:

- Support funded settings across Scotland to **improve the quality of ELC and meet the National Standard**.
- Provide **targeted support** for those **settings currently, or at risk of, not meeting the National Standard** through a programme of sessions and peer support opportunities.

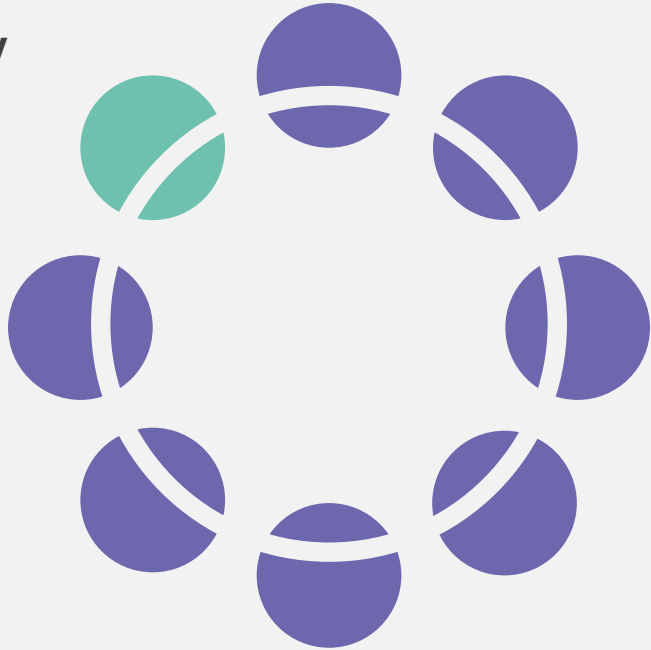
This approach supports work undertaken by local authority teams.

The Steps of Change

How did they make the change?



Identify



The ELC programme identified the problem.

- A significant number of early learning and childcare (ELC) settings across Scotland were **not meeting the National Standard, particularly in disadvantaged areas.**
- There was a need for **targeted support to improve quality and outcomes for children**, especially in services rated as “adequate” or lower.

Understand

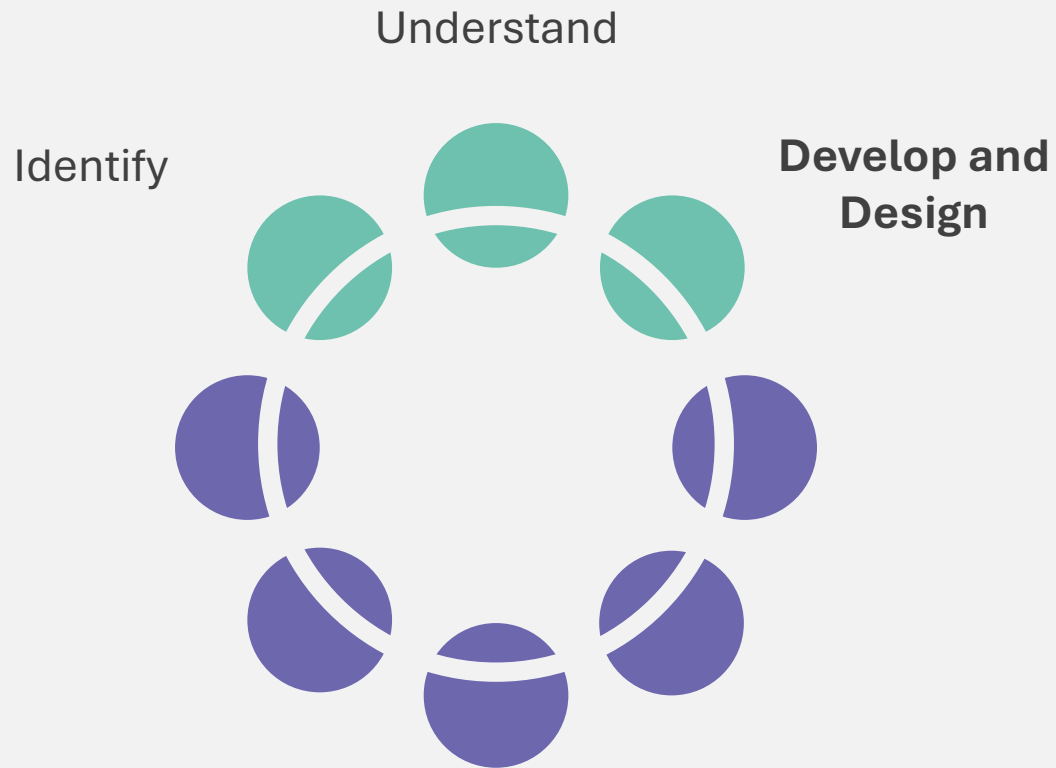
Identify



To further understand the problem an evidence review and needs assessment were completed.

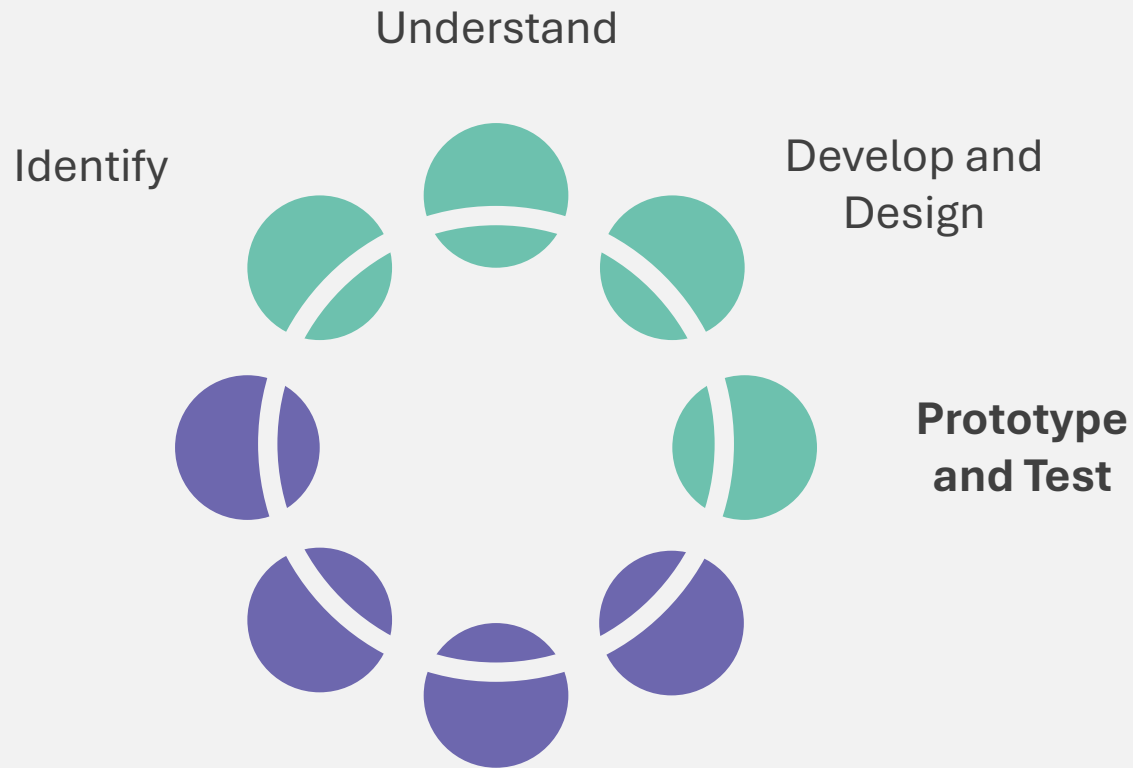
- The Care Inspectorate, in collaboration with local authorities and stakeholders, **identified settings most in need of support.**
- Data from inspections and performance indicators highlighted **gaps in quality and consistency.**

The programme was designed to address these gaps through targeted and universal support.



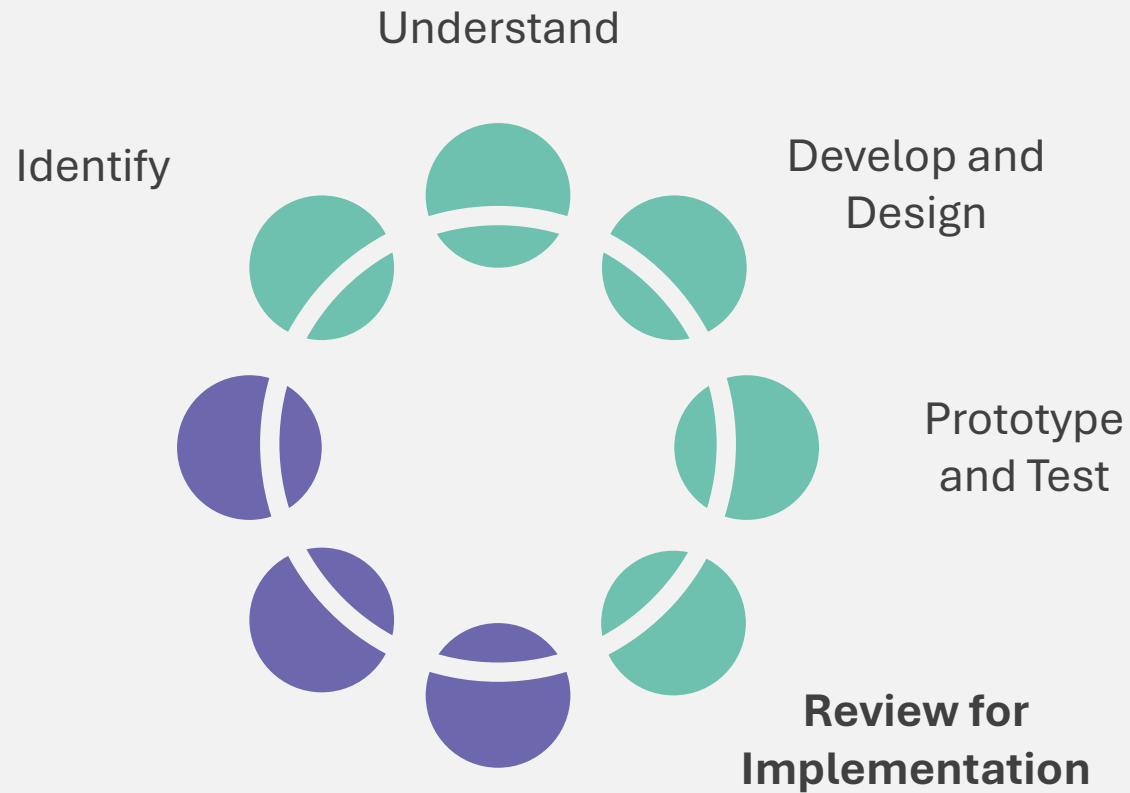
The ELC programme used service design approaches to develop and design a solution.

- Developed a **structured 10-week programme** alternating between teaching and “reflect and review” sessions.
- Included **one-to-one support** and **peer learning opportunities**.
- Created **universal resources** (e.g. bitesize videos, toolkits) accessible via the ELC Improvement Hub.
- Designed **bespoke face-to-face sessions** tailored to local authority needs.



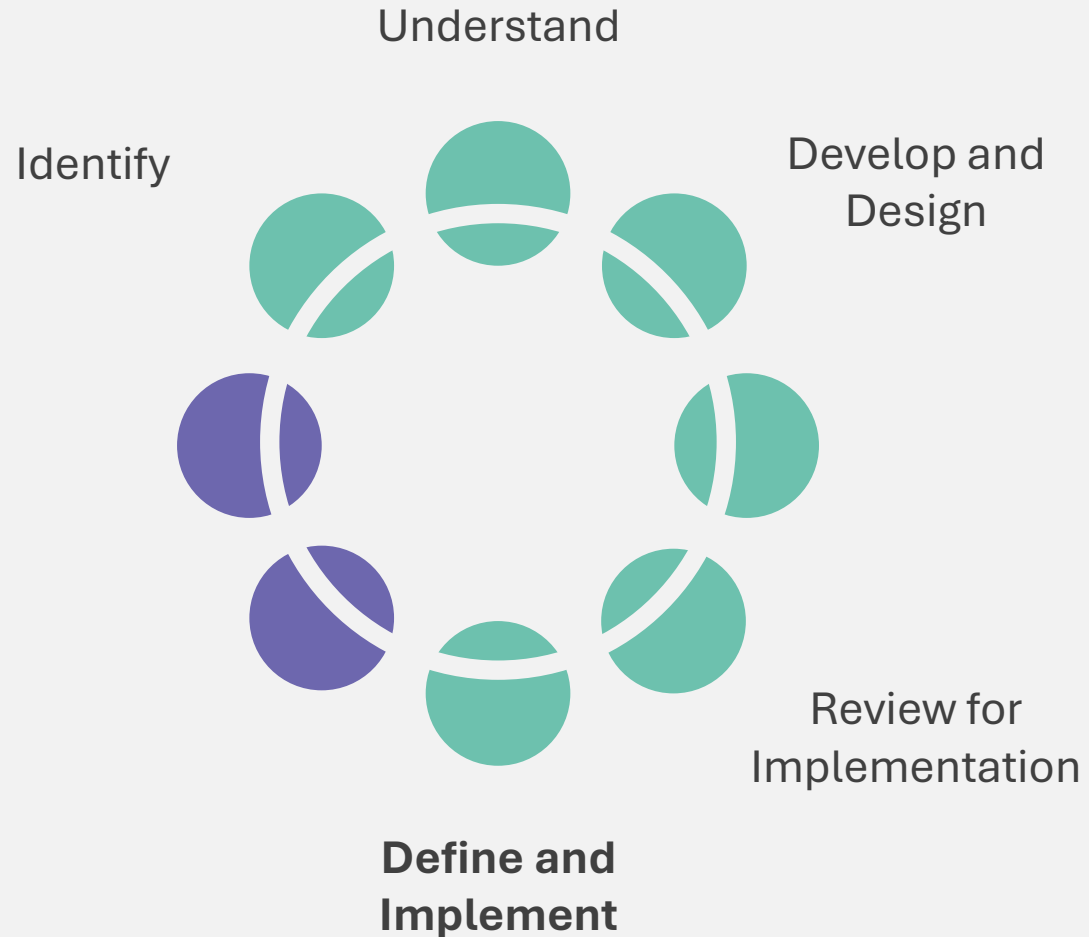
Improvement support was prototyped and tested.

- **Piloted the programme** with nominated services across Scotland (Cohorts 1–9).
- **Delivered sessions** to over 500 participants, impacting over 30,000 children.
- **Introduced peer support sessions** and closed social media groups to sustain learning.
- **Tested new formats** for universal resources, including childminder-specific content.



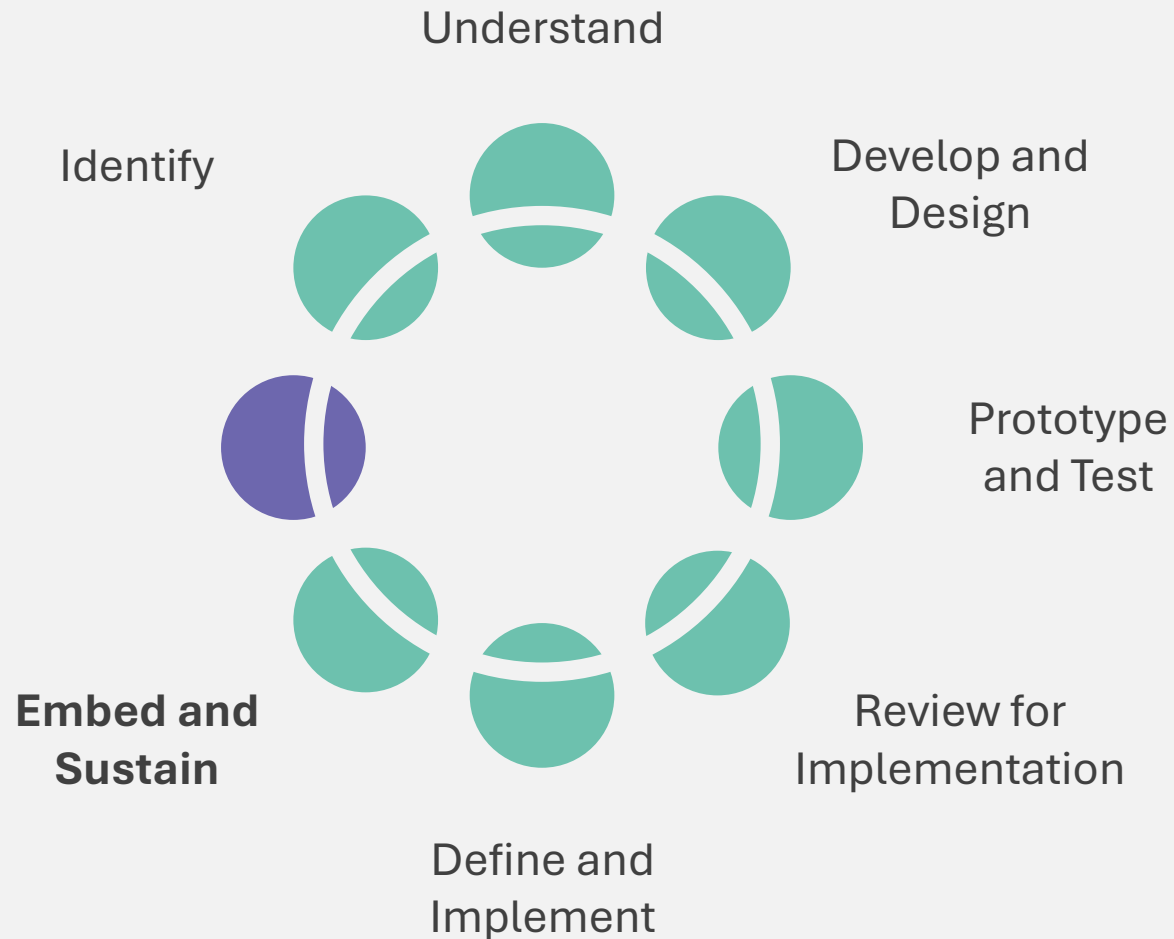
The programme was reviewed for impact.

- **78% of services completing the programme met the National Standard**, compared to only 28% of non-participants.
- **Confidence in using quality improvement methodology rose from 48% to 90%** post-programme.
- Feedback from participants and inspectors confirmed **improved leadership, staff engagement, and outcomes for children.**



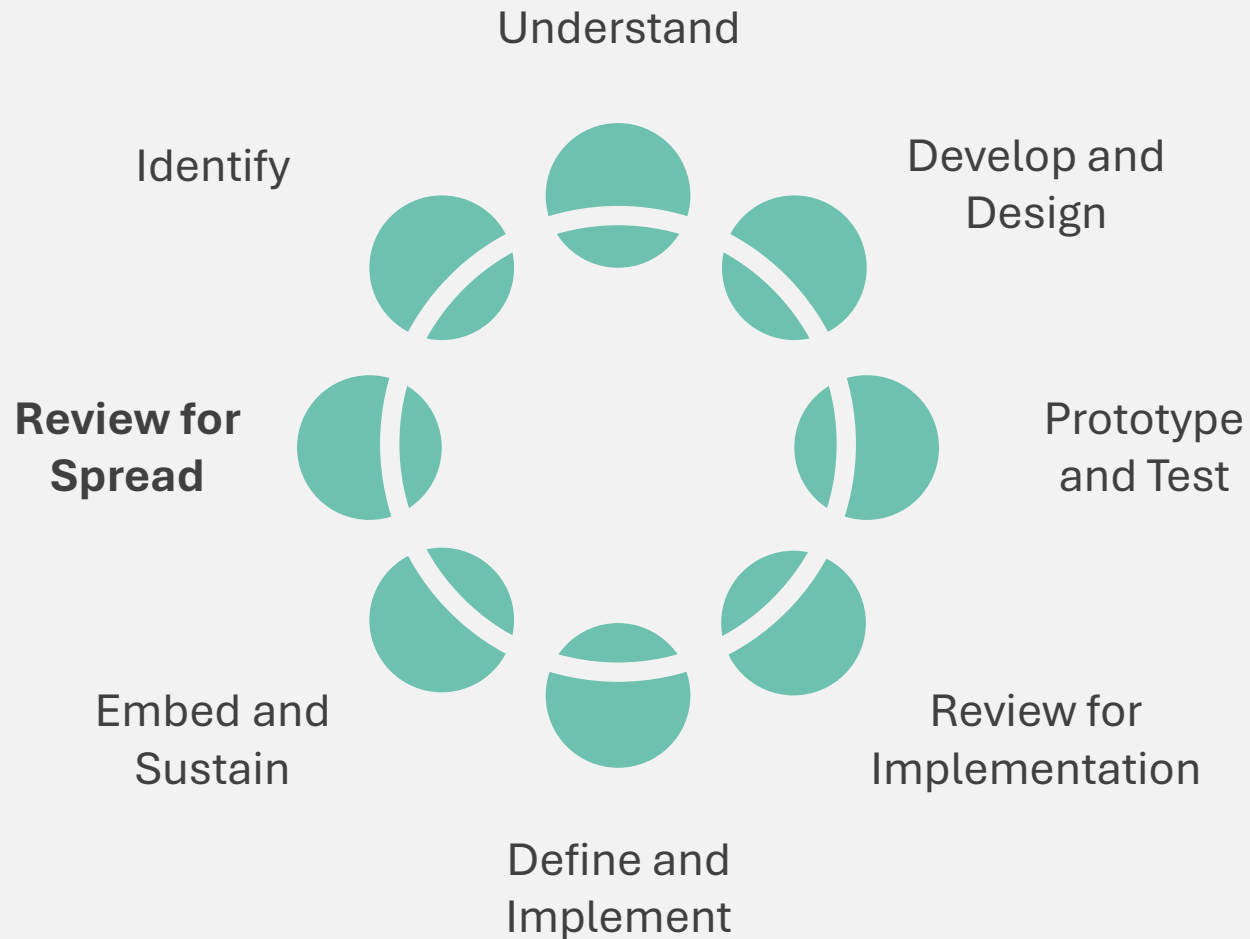
An iterative approach to implementation was adopted.

- **Continued delivery** through three annual cohorts.
- **Prioritised services** based on risk, rurality, and size.
- Expanded **face-to-face training** to 12 local authorities.
- Developed a **structured nomination and evaluation process**.



Sustainability of improvement was supported.

- **Peer support sessions and revision opportunities** offered to past participants.
- **Universal resources updated regularly and tailored** to different service types.
- Local authority collaboration ensures **alignment with inspection and improvement goals**.
- Plans to re-engage past cohorts for **refresher sessions** to reinforce learning.



Preparation for spread and wider adoption has been undertaken.

- **Recommendations made to extend the programme** to all ELC, childminder, and school-aged childcare settings.
- **Demand for the programme exceeds current capacity**, with waiting lists for each cohort.
- **Strong stakeholder support** for scaling the programme nationally.

Process rigour

People led

Leadership and culture

Clear vision and purpose

The Enablers for Change

Why did it work?

Process rigour

People led

Leadership and culture

Clear vision and purpose is necessary to provide direction, motivation, and alignment for everyone involved, ensuring efforts are focused and effective.

- Within the programme there was a **shared goal** to improve quality and outcomes for all children in ELC settings.
- The programme had **strategic alignment** with the National Standard and “Funding Follows the Child” policy.



Clear vision and purpose

Leadership, culture, and a whole system approach are key to ensuring changes are sustainable.

- The programme ensured **strong collaboration** with local authorities and scrutiny teams.
- The programme focused on **empowering staff and leaders** through training, coaching, and peer learning.
- The programme created **psychologically safe spaces** for reflection and growth.



A people led approach to change is crucial to ensuring the result of the change is also people led.

- The programme ensured a people led approach through **shaping content through participant feedback and local needs**.
- **Peer support** and **lived experience** were central to programme delivery.
- The programme ensured **inclusion of childminders and school-aged care** in universal resources.



People led

Leadership and culture

Clear vision and purpose

Process rigour means deliberately and systematically going through a structured process to ensure high-quality and reliable outcomes are achieved.

- In order to ensure a rigorous approach to change the project used **quality improvement methodology**
- The programme tracked **outcome and process measures** (e.g. inspection results, confidence levels).
- The programme delivered **structured, evidence-based sessions and resources**.



What outcomes have been achieved?

The following outcomes were achieved:

- 78% of services completing the programme met the National Standard, compared to only 28% of non-participants.
- Confidence in using quality improvement methodology rose from 48% to 90% post-programme.
- Feedback from participants and inspectors confirmed improved leadership, staff engagement, and outcomes for children.