



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 5th MARCH 2019

EVALUATION OF EARLY HELP SERVICES

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the findings in relation to an evaluation of the Supporting Leicestershire Families (SLF) team, introduced in 2013 as a result of the Troubled Families (TF) Project. The report also highlights a number of areas of current performance.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The proposal to introduce a multi- agency SLF team, focused on providing intensive support to families encountering defined difficulties, was considered and agreed by the Cabinet in April 2013.
3. The SLF team forms part of the Children and Families Service, and is directly linked into supporting the priority within the Children and Families Service Plan to provide early intervention through working with families to build strength, resilience and confidence, and the priority in the Children and Families Partnership Plan to support children and families to be resilient.

Background

4. During 2012 the Government introduced the national TF programme. This provided a framework for a number of partner agencies, notably local authorities, Police, Health and the Department for Work and Pensions, to work with families with complex problems. The programme attracted national funding for agencies working with families who have a combination of three defined problems - unemployment within the family, a child in the family with poor school attendance or are involved in crime or anti-social behaviour.
5. In 2014 the TF unit extended the project for a further five years from 2015 and allowed greater flexibility in enabling regions to determine the criteria for working with families. In Leicestershire this was extended to include families affected by domestic abuse or mental health or containing a child who was broadly defined as needing help. In addition to national funding, the SLF project in Leicestershire attracted £100,000 funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner and £30,000 from each of the District Councils annually, to both co-work on and support the project. The national project is due to finish in 2020 and funding from partner agencies and the national TF unit will end by this date.

6. The approach adopted by SLF has been to provide one to one intensive support to families through a keyworker. The worker provides practical hands on support, can often have an assertive and challenging relationship with the family, agrees desired outcomes and assists the family to reach the goal of self-sufficiency.

Research and Findings

7. The evaluation project involved an analysis of 787 closed cases supported by SLF dating back to the start of the project, and included a review of case management data, questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with service users, interviews with staff and feedback from stakeholders. The evaluation report is detailed and lengthy and the findings are outlined in six separate evaluation reports focussing on different elements of the project. In addition, there is a summary report drawing together the main areas of learning (Appendix A). The evaluation and current performance in relation to payment by results (PBR) provides strong evidence in relation to the success of the approach. The summary of the findings are as follows:
- The majority of families (72%) of the closed cases, made positive progress in one or more of the ten key domains used to assess family progress.
 - In relation to these domains, families made most progress in improving boundaries and behaviour (72%), adult wellbeing (70%), social networks (65%) and children's emotional needs (64%).
 - The impact of SLF support in relation to referrals to Social Care is significant. Notably 68% of families had involvement with social care prior to SLF intervention; this drops to 25% of families during SLF intervention and 33% of families after the case is closed to SLF.
 - The TF funding is allocated to individual projects based on the amount of families reaching positive outcomes. Leicestershire remains a high performing PBR local authority, both regionally and nationally. To date, ten claims have been submitted under the programme. Claim 11 was submitted at the end of January 2019. Through these claims, Leicestershire has delivered positive outcomes for 1596 families. This equates to 58% of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) target of 2770 families.
8. The evaluation also gives a detailed breakdown of the impact SLF intensive support has on families suffering from different types of difficulties and along with this the findings identified a number of underlying themes:
- There are notable results in relation to groups of service users categorised as;
 - i. Single parents reliant on benefits
 - ii. Teenage parents requiring support around parenting and child development behaviour.

Half of this group of service users made the most positive progress. Interestingly, however, in contrast the half that did not make progress were more likely to require social care involvement.
 - Families with three or more adult females living in the household made significantly less progress than other categories of service users.

- Families categorised as having less complex needs and requiring support around a child's mental health and behaviour started from a high starting point. However this group still made significant progress where financial difficulties were identified and supported from the outset.
- The research highlights issues in relation to the impact of domestic abuse on families. Around 52% of adults and 32% of children had been victims of this type of abuse. There was a strong correlation between domestic abuse and poor adult mental health, and parenting difficulties and behaviour issues relating to the children, particularly with aggressive behaviour, bullying and mental health.
- Families with children with learning disabilities and special educational needs made mixed progress. Some families fared better than others as a result of SLF intensive support. The research highlighted that early identification of families not yet in receipt of formal diagnosis, or where children are transitioning between schools, could lead to improved outcomes in this area.
- The research found that families have a better chance of success when they acknowledge their issues and accept support from networks including family, friends, other community networks and partner agencies. Building resilience in and around families to achieve sustainable outcomes has been a key area of learning from the project.
- It is of particular note that SLF achieved very positive results in supporting adult family members into employment. Around 55% of families report achieving progress in this area and significantly, Leicestershire is the second highest performing local authority in achieving progress through to a continuous employment outcome. Of the 1596 families claimed to date, 642 have entered and sustained employment for either 13 or 26 weeks, dependent on the type of benefit that they were initially claiming. The highest performing local authority is Liverpool.

9. The evaluation report also highlights the following:

- That there is an evidence base to highlight the benefits of the troubled families approach and there are therefore clear financial implications associated with reducing early help services.
- Service users provided extremely positive feedback after intervention with SLF workers. Additionally SLF staff have high levels of confidence that their work will affect change in families.
- That early help work with partners should be further developed and communication with partner agencies could improve. Additionally the TF evaluation of Leicestershire recommended that more support for families from the voluntary sector could also be developed.
- The report also makes a series of recommendations linked to developing support from parents in relation to children with mental health issues and special educational needs and supporting children affected by domestic abuse in the household.

Resource Implications

10. In considering the national picture, the Local Government Association (LGA) highlighted the stark situation in relation to funding for early intervention work in a November 2018 briefing paper. This highlighted that since 2013, early intervention grants had been reduced by £500 million, and it was anticipated that this would equate to a 40% drop in early intervention funding by 2020. The LGA warned that reductions in funding for preventative work could lead to a £2 billion funding gap by 2020, unless some form of action was taken to reduce the numbers of families requiring statutory children's services. The report highlights that many Councils have diverted spending on preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at an immediate risk of harm; an area where demand has grown steadily since 2007.
11. The national Troubled Families funding is due to end in November 2020. In preparation for this, and in light of the results of the evaluation, the intensive family support previously led by the SLF team (working in partnership with a number of district councils) has been mainstreamed within the newly formed Children and Families Wellbeing Service. This has led to a number of staff who had worked within the SLF team from Melton Borough Council and Blaby District Council being TUPE transferred into the Service. However if the Department for Education nationally does not provide any follow on funding from troubled families for early intervention work, there will be a shortfall in funding to the Children and Family Wellbeing Service from November 2020. The evidence from the evaluation indicates that this may have implications on both positive outcomes for families, and place increased demands on statutory children's services.
12. The local evaluation into early help work provides evidence that investment in early support to families encountering difficulties can have both benefits to families and to local authorities by reducing demand on statutory children's services, and through supporting families to become independent by increasing employment prospects

Conclusions

13. The evaluation report is comprehensive and draws in findings from research into 787 Leicestershire families. There are some notable success factors around the progress a large percentage of families with complex problems have made and evidence shows that this has a positive impact on reducing the number of families requiring specialist intervention from social work teams.
14. The evaluation report has significantly influenced the Early Help Review, providing an evidence base for integrating youth related services, SLF and 0 to 5 focused children's centre programme. Although there have been financial challenges linked to the review of Early Help Services, intensive one to one support for the most complex families has been preserved within the new integrated Family Wellbeing Service. This has been as a direct result of evidence from the evaluation. The evidence has also provided the platform to progress developments notably in triage, assessment, emotional wellbeing support, the response to domestic abuse and working with partner agencies including schools, health and district councils.

Background Papers

None

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

15. None

Equality and Human Rights Implications

16. There are no direct equality and human rights implications under the current funding arrangements. If, in the future, funding is reduced to early intervention services then this could lead to an adverse impact on children and families with disabilities or other protected characteristics.

Appendices

Appendix A – Early Help Evaluation Summary

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