**The ‘Troubled Families’ Programme in Warwickshire**

**Introduction**

An *Independent Evaluation of the first Troubled Families Programme* was published on 17th October 2016. Commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and carried out by ECORYS, the evaluation analysed Phase 1 of the programme (April 2012- March 2015). There were several strands to the evaluation, and an overview and summary of the findings are provided in a Final Synthesis Report.

The report has subsequently triggered a series of negative media reports that have focussed on a specific paragraph within the report that has suggested that the evaluation was unable to evidence that any significant and systematic impacts for families are directly attributable to the Programme. This was at the expense of the many achievements that were cited within the report and disregarded the caveats that were applicable to the methodology the report itself.

This briefing aims to summarise the actual findings of the published evaluation (including concerns over methodology employed); and provide greater context to the findings of the evaluation by setting them against the backdrop of what has been achieved and is being achieved for vulnerable families living in Warwickshire.

**Summary of Evaluation Findings**

Evaluation Report

The Synthesis Report summarises the findings of the national evaluation of the Troubled Families programme. The first strand of the evaluation focused upon a ‘Process Evaluation,’ stating that Phase 1 provided an important catalyst for developing and investing in family intervention. The report, therefore acknowledges that the Programme has made some solid achievements particularly around the concepts of ‘one worker one plan’, the need for a ‘whole family approach’ and multi-agency working. More detailed achievements include:

* A national ‘spotlight’ focus and additional Government funding raised the profile of family intervention and achieved strategic buy-in at a local level.
* Encouragement of new ways of working that genuinely tackles years of intergenerational issues within families and communities. This has led to beacons of good practice and fostered genuine innovation.
* Increased capacity for family intervention. This has proved increasingly valuable in both preventing escalation to Social Care and helping the sustainable de-escalation of cases that had previously been within Social Care.
* Providing additional impetus for adopting whole family working and for mainstreaming the key worker approach.
* Enhanced partnership working and reduced silo working – with partners across professions sharing data, working more collaboratively with families, and reducing service duplication.
* Raising the quality and capacity of local data management systems across agencies. Driving quality improvement for local Management Information, data collection and information sharing.
* Influencing a more outcomes focussed approach to family working.
* Significant impacts on families’ satisfaction with the service, their confidence, and optimism about being able to cope in the future.

In any national programme of this magnitude there are always lessons to be learnt and the Evaluation also identified where nationally the programme was less successful:

* Wide variations in local practice. It was felt that the manner in which the programme had been set up encouraged such variations and the adoption of some idiosyncratic practices by certain Local Authorities. In a climate of restricted resources it has been argued that resources from the Programme have been used to ‘backfill deficits’ rather than employed for the benefit of families. It was felt that the Payment by Results mechanism in particular encouraged such behaviours by encouraging data matching and working with low-moderate level families to encourage income maximisation.
* There is a need for an improved theoretical understanding of family interventions and better use of ‘evidence based’ interventions, particularly those deemed therapeutic (mental health, domestic abuse, parenting)
* There appeared to be relatively little progress in addressing health issues – although this was acknowledged at a policy level and factored in to the expanded programme.
* Questions over whether deep and sustained improvements were achieved.
* Mixed evidence regarding the extent to which scaling up was achieved without sacrificing some level of quality of family intervention practice.

Comments on Methodology Used

The key issue raised in the Phase 1 evaluation was a reported lack of evidence that the programme had resulted in an impact on the outcomes it sought to affect for families. This was based on the analysis that was carried out in the ‘Impact Evaluation’ strand of the overall evaluation. However, the evaluation stated that there were several caveats that needed to be taken into account with regards to the findings. It reported that ***“There were major limitations imposed by data quality, resulting in a recommendation that the administrative data analysis in isolation cannot be taken as conclusive evidence the programme had no impact at all.”***

Key issues in relation to methodology employed relate to:

* No recognition of the level of family support the control group had already received / was receiving.
* Several omissions. For example, national school attendance data excluded information on children in alternative provision, specialist provision, out of the area, or being home educated. The crime data in the national analysis only captures formal outcomes from criminal activity. It would have excluded data identified through other methods by Local Authorities e.g. ASB interventions recorded on Housing District databases. Therefore the national analysis was missing a large amount of locally identified data on families.
* The survey was carried out on families nine months after starting on an intervention, looking at impacts only six months after an intervention had commenced. Therefore the survey’s focus was only on short term changes. This could explain why the survey analysis did find such a significant impact on the attitudinal and behavioural measures of families interviewed but less clear on longer term outcomes and impact. The evaluation concurs this stating that “*This may imply that the Troubled Families Programme is generating changes amongst these families, but that the interview was too early to detect those impacts.*

Crucially, the ‘impact evaluation’ analysis admits that it is “experimental” with several issues and caveats to consider. The evaluation recognises these limitations and warns against generalisation, concluding that *“large scale impacts would not necessarily be anticipated for the TF programme”* as *“it was managed through 152 local change programmes, with considerable discretion afforded to local authorities in how they identified, prioritised and worked with their families. .. it was recognised there would be “challenges in terms of generating measurable impact.”*

**The Warwickshire Priority Families Programme – Phase 1**

Phase One of the programme ran from April 2012-March 2015. Local authorities were given the autonomy to design and deliver their local response, resulting in an array of different approaches. The recent evaluation has grouped them into broad types of approach, ranging from those who created or expanded an existing team of workers to those who embedded their provision within the workforce or were on a journey to transform the whole workforce to adopt whole family working. Warwickshire’s approach, as with the majority of authorities in the evaluation sample, adopted a ‘hybrid’ delivery model. This resulted in family intervention being delivered by a combination of a dedicated team and those who were already working in existing services and agencies. This approach recognised that even with the £4000 available there were not sufficient resources to employ a dedicated family support worker to work intensively with the each family that we were required to work with.

Government indicated that there were 805 ‘troubled families’ in Warwickshire but did not indicate who they were or how the calculation had been made. Instead Local Authorities were tasked with identifying families through a combination of data matching and referral. In order to be eligible for the programme, a family was identified through national criteria including crime / ASB; children not in school; an adult on out of work benefits; and families causing a high cost to the public purse. There needed to be evidence of families meeting all of the first three criteria, or two of the first three criteria and one locally determined criteria relating to costs to the public purse. Local criteria within Warwickshire included ones based on crime/ASB; children on a child protection plan; financial exclusion; health issues, deprivation and domestic abuse.

Within Warwickshire, Local Co-ordinating Groups (LCG) were developed across five districts to be able to regularly discuss the cases identified / referred in to the programme and establish what appropriate support was in place for each family. These were multi-agency meetings attended by relevant services able to provide information on families and offer support e.g. police; social services; schools; support workers; children’s centres; housing providers; DWP; youth services.

In Warwickshire it was quickly apparent that there was a time lag in using data matching to identify families with issues. In reality, the workers on the ground had ‘live’ knowledge of families needing support. It was a constraint to wait for recorded data to filter through official systems before a family was flagged up as a Priority Family. In response to this, a more ‘bottom up’ approach was introduced and superseded early data matching efforts. Professionals referred in families using a Priority Families Notification Form. These families were then checked for eligibility, attached to the programme, and included for discussion at the next multi agency LCG meeting. This bottom up approach has continued in Phase 2 where families are referred via frontline expertise and knowledge rather than a central data matching exercise.

As a result of the Warwickshire approach, out of the 1,305 families eligible, 930 families were recorded as being ‘worked with,’ i.e. they had an active plan of support in place. Out of these families, Warwickshire was able to successfully submit Payment by Results claims for 805 families, meeting the maximum target available. In order to claim for a family, the programme needed to provide auditable evidence that:

* There was a 33% + reduction in crime / ASB within the household over the last six months
* All children of school age within the household had at least an 85% attendance rate in education over three consecutive terms

Alternatively, a claim could be submitted where it was proven that a member of a household had come off out of work benefits and gone into work.

In Phase 1 Warwickshire made 770 claims for progress against the national criteria; 33 claims for families making progress towards work; and 51 claims where a family member had come off out of work benefits and sustained employment. The total number of claims is higher than 805 due to being able to submit more than one claim for a family. All claims were fully audited locally before being signed off and submitted to central government.

The number of claims submitted for progress to work and sustaining employment were not as high as had been anticipated and this was echoed nationally. The problem in part was due to duplicated effort at national level where both DCLG and DWP sought to tackle ‘troubled families’ without liaising with each other as to how this might best work in practice locally. As a result whilst LA’s have substantial control over the DCLG element of the Programme, the DWP element was centrally driven and locally outsourced to a 3rd party contractor who had little knowledge of Warwickshire and therefore it was not a surprise that this element failed to deliver.

 Recent media reports have negatively portrayed the national programme as falsely claiming a 100% success rate in turning families around. The Warwickshire PF Programme claim is that it achieved a 100% success rate in meeting the target number of claims for Phase 1. In both Phase 1 (and Phase 2), Warwickshire’s PBR process was and is clear and robust, developed with and verified by Warwickshire County Council’s (WCC’s) internal audit team.

During Phase 1 of the programme, there was the opportunity to claim a maximum of up to £4,000 for each family within the programme. As a result, Warwickshire successfully secured £1.741m in attachment fees, and £837,900 in PBR claims, a total of £2.579m.

Another recent media claim is that the funding secured by the programme has been diverted to fund existing services within local authorities. Within Warwickshire, there is a transparency in the funding secured by the programme and its reinvestment into support for families that need it the most. All attachment fees and payment by results received from Government are employed to support a Family Support Workers Service that includes 34 frontline workers and this is further supplemented by investment in the delivery of other holistic services for these families, including the School Attendance, Compliance and Enforcement (ACE) team; Targeted Youth Support and Systemic Therapy. Management, Co-ordination and Data Analysis for the Programme are wholly funded through a separate Service Transformation Grant that DCLG provides separately and in recognition of the resource intensity and demands of the Programme.

**The Warwickshire Priority Families Programme - Phase 2**

Due to the successful performance of Warwickshire in Phase 1, it was invited to be an ‘early starter’ for Phase 2 of the programme from 1st September 2014. Phase 2 officially commenced in April 2015 and will conclude in March 2020. Although nationally the programme is planned until 2020, locally the commitment is until 2018 (Due to the One Organisational Plan1). The commitment beyond this will require review and confirmation by WCC in conjunction with its partners.

The programme has significantly developed since Phase 1. Government recognised that the Phase 1 criterion was far too restrictive and thus defined a new, broader set of six headline criteria. For Phase 2, a family must meet at least two or more of the following to be eligible for the Programme:

1. Parents and children involved in crime and anti-social behaviour
2. Children who have not been attending school regularly
3. Children who need help
4. Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness
5. Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
6. Parents and children with a range of health problems

The Government also developed a set of principles for Phase 2 of the programme that all attached families must meet:

* There needs to be an assessment that takes into account the needs of the whole family
* There is an action plan that takes account of all (relevant) family members
* There is a lead worker for the family that is recognised by the family and other professionals involved with the family
* The objectives in the family action plan are aligned to those in the local PF Outcomes Plan

During Phase 2, Warwickshire has a target of 2,790 families to attach and ‘turn around’ over five years. At the same time, the funding for the programme is significantly lower than for Phase 1. In Phase 2, the amount of monies available has been more than halved for each family – with £1,000 available for each family in attachment fees, and a further £800 for a payment by results claim.

One of the concerns of Phase 1, as identified in the evaluation, was the extent to which scaling up was achieved without sacrificing some level of quality of family intervention practice. Certainly, as mentioned above, the amount of funding available has never been sufficient to employ the number of Family Support Workers required to deliver intensive support to all the Priority Families who need it. The dilution of capacity presents an increasing challenge in Phase 2, with a reduction in potential funding available for each family to less than half of that during Phase 1. In Warwickshire we have sought to address this challenge by seeking to mainstream the Programme within existing business as usual whilst at the same time preserving the intensive family support worker model for the most complex families. What mainstreaming has enabled us to do is to explore a ‘stepped approach’ to intervention that ensures that families who meet the criteria but may have less complex needs get the help and support they need at the right time and from the right service which can be from alternative interventions and/or partner agencies. Conversely this also ensures that those complex families that most need intensive support are prioritised accordingly. This model is wholly consistent with the principles of the Programme which seek to embed think family principles within the business of all agencies and not solely the County Council.

Underpinning the structural changes is the introduction of the new MOSAIC I.T. system which brought together existing systems across Early Help and Social Care into one solution. MOSAIC has significantly improved the data capturing and monitoring of progress for Priority Families on the programme and in the future could be the catalyst towards a sustainable information sharing approach between partners on families that are of common concern.

As of October 2016, 1,302 families had been identified and ‘attached’ to the programme in accordance with the Phase 2 criteria and principles. The programme has always had to balance an inherent tension between the government’s aims of the programme to provide early intervention on the one hand and yet to focus activity on the most complex and financially burdensome on the other Within Warwickshire, only those families that are identified as eligible and appropriate for support are attached to the programme (currently over 50% of families attached to the programme meet four or more of the eligibility criteria). From evidence supplied in the form of the Annual Summary and Performance Dashboards it is obvious that the balance in Warwickshire is towards complexity rather than the ‘quick wins’

As a result, although our PBR returns have been lower than initially anticipated (again a national rather than solely Warwickshire issue) to date, 182 claims have been successfully submitted in Phase 2. Not only are we confident that we have applied due rigour and verification before submitting claims but we are also confident that the Programme is working with families who were envisaged as requiring this type of support when it was established.

**Summary and Next Steps**

This paper has sought to address recent findings in balanced manner and set it within the context of working with families in Warwickshire. As mentioned the media reports failed to present balanced coverage of the Evaluation Report and failed to refer to the fact that the methodology employed by the evaluation itself was not comprehensive and therefore any findings resulting thereof required qualified consideration.

Within Warwickshire, the overall impact of the Programme has been positive on the 805 families that were worked with under Phase 1 and is having an impact on the 2790 families that we are and will be working with under Phase 2. In delivering the Programme, it should be noted that Warwickshire had already the Family Support Worker model in place and we were therefore well placed to ensure that the approach not only adheres to the requirements of the Programme but is also outcomes focussed in its emphasis. The evidence for this has been our refusal to be overly driven by prescriptive targets for length of engagement with families or completely disengaging from families completely once a claim for payment has been made.

In adopting such an approach and transforming the lives of families within Warwickshire, recognition must be given to the industry and commitment of our frontline workers who are engaged with families on a daily basis. The evaluation and recent media reports should not detract from their individual and collective achievements, or from the collective engagement by partners whose co-operation has ensured that this is a multi-agency endeavour. The wealth of qualitative case studies that have been produced to show the journey of families is testament to this.

Looking forward we will be looking to build on our success and improve delivery in line with local and national expectations. Given that there will be no extension of the Programme beyond 2020, focussed active around mainstreaming the service will centre upon the following core areas fundamental to the successful delivery:

--Single Assessment, Single Worker, Single Outcomes Focussed Plan (ie FSW model) that is based on whole family principles and an outcomes framework that is holistic and recognises the importance of employment and school attendance as sustainable pathways to progress

--Genuine Multi Agency Approach to Children and Families

--Information Sharing supplemented by information sharing systems where possible

--Recognition that robust data and performance management systems need to be in place to ensure that the right families are identified, tracked and evaluated

**References**

For further information on Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Priority Families Programme, and access to performance reports and case studies, these are all published externally on the Priority Families website at: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/priorityfamilies>

Warwickshire County Council’s One Organisational Plan: <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/businessplan>

The independent evaluation of Phase 1 of the Troubled Families Programme: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-first-troubled-families-programme>

Also, all Troubled Family published Government documents can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/support-for-families>

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