

**PART 2: CHILD POVERTY NEEDS
ASSESSMENT REFRESH 2012**

**BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE
(CHILDREN'S)**



Business Intelligence (Children's) Consultation 2012

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This is Part 2 of the Child Poverty Needs Assessment Refresh undertaken by Warwickshire County Council during 2012

It supports the Emerging Issues paper compiled by the Warwickshire Observatory and makes use of available research and consultations with a variety of Warwickshire residents. It includes an assessment of seven identified vulnerable groups at risk of child poverty and the impact of poverty on these groups.

The final part, Part 3, is the executive summary detailing where the areas of poverty are in Warwickshire, recommendations for each vulnerable group and new measures to better understand the scale and nature of child poverty in Warwickshire.



*Working for
Warwickshire*

This update refreshes the report published in November 2010 to support the Child Poverty Strategy published in March 2011. It does not aim to revisit all the issues covered in the previous report; rather it focuses on priority geographical areas and groups.

The priority geographical areas have been identified in the Emerging Issues Paper of this Needs Assessment refresh and consultation was undertaken in those areas. Interviews were conducted across Warwickshire but specifically interviews took place in the following Wards with high levels of deprivation:

- North Warwickshire Borough – Atherstone Central Ward
- Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough – Camp Hill Ward, Abbey Ward and Heath Ward
- Warwick District – Brunswick Ward and Crown Ward.

The priority groups identified by the author of the Child Poverty Strategy were as follows:

- 'Troubled Families' – encompassing crime, anti-social behaviour (including domestic violence), attendance and exclusion issues and worklessness.
- Looked after children and those who have left care
- Teenage parents
- Youth unemployment
- Disabled parents and children
- Offenders and their families
- Service families and families of ex-service men and women.

Business Intelligence (Children's) Consultation Methodology

Young people, parents and professionals were interviewed by Business Intelligence (Children's). Children's Centres, CSWP, Children in Care Council, the Integrated Disability Service and voluntary groups were also included in the consultation to ensure as many views as possible were considered.

The interviews took one of two forms; either semi-structured, led by an interviewer, with participants invited to describe their situation in their own words or a "storyboard" with six questions which participants were asked to fill in and return to the project team.

All quotations are verbatim but identities have been suppressed to preserve anonymity.

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Troubled Families

Government Definition

The term 'Troubled Families' is defined by the Government as households who:

- 'Are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour
- Have children not in school
- Have an adult on out of work benefits
- Cause high costs to the public purse'¹.

The recent government 'Troubled Families' initiative aims to 'turn around' 120,000 families across the UK by the end of the current Parliament to avoid the children in these families 'repeating the cycle of disadvantage'². Local Authorities are required to identify the families in their area that fall under the category of 'troubled families' using the following criteria;

'Crime/anti-social behaviour

Identify young people involved in crime and families involved in antisocial behaviour, defined as:

- Households with 1 or more under 18-year-old with a proven offence in the last 12 months

AND/ OR

¹ *The Troubled Families Programme Financial Framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities, March 2012, Communities and Local Government*

² *The Troubled Families Programme Financial Framework Ibid*

- Households where 1 or more member has an anti-social behaviour order, anti-social behaviour injunction, anti-social behaviour contract, or where the family has been subject to a housing-related anti-social behaviour intervention in the last 12 months (such as a notice of seeking possession on anti-social behaviour grounds, a housing-related injunction, a demotion order, eviction from social housing on anti-social behaviour grounds¹).

Education

Identify households affected by truancy or exclusion from school, where a child:

- Has been subject to permanent exclusion; three or more fixed school exclusions across the last 3 consecutive terms;

OR

- Is in a Pupil Referral Unit or alternative provision because they have previously been excluded; OR is not on a school roll;

AND/OR

A child has had 15%³ unauthorised absences or more from school across the last 3 consecutive terms.

Work

Once you have identified everyone who meets one or both of criteria 1 and 2, you may identify households which also have an adult on Department for Work and Pensions out of work benefits.

³ *As per DfE definition of 'persistent absence', July 2011*

Local discretion

Use this local discretion filter to add other families who meet any 2 of the 3 criteria above and are a cause for concern. Those who are high cost and those with health problems could include:

- Families containing a child who is on a Child Protection Plan or where the local authority is considering accommodating them as a looked after child
- Families subject to frequent police call-outs or arrests or containing adults with proven offences in the last 12 months, such as those who have been in prison, prolific and priority offenders, or families involved in gang-related crime
- Families with health problems (see below)

The experience of family intervention projects and other similar services is that many troubled families have underlying health problems. Often these are not fully recognised until intensive work with the family is underway. However, where these issues are known, they may be important factors in identifying your local troubled families. Particular priority health problems which you should consider include:

- Emotional and mental health problems
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Long term health conditions
- Under 18 conceptions'.⁴

⁴ *The Troubled Families Programme Financial Framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities, March 2012, Communities and Local Government*

Government Initiative

The Government's Troubled Families initiative encompasses a wide and broad range of family issues including crime/anti-social behaviour (including domestic violence), schooling issues and worklessness. Local Authorities are being offered financial incentives to identify the families that fall into the category of 'troubled families' in their area and to work with them to help them to turn their situation around so they are no longer classed as 'troubled families'. It is likely that, in Warwickshire, work will already be being done with these families but the Government are challenging local authorities to 'to develop new ways of working with families, which focus on lasting change'⁵

In Warwickshire 805 families have been identified who meet the criteria for the Troubled Families programme, 196 families have been identified as meeting both the crime/anti-social behaviour and education criteria. Warwickshire aims, through partnership working, to help these families to reach positive outcomes both now and in the future.

Whether poverty is a cause or effect of a Troubled Family is to be determined. Undertaking qualitative interviews with professionals working with families who are likely to be eligible for the programme and parents within these families, it was possible to gain a greater understanding of how poverty affects these families.

⁵ *The Troubled Families Programme Financial Framework Ibid*

Children's Centre staff state anecdotally that they are seeing an increase in the number of children being placed on a child protection plan, with poverty playing a key role in this;

"We've got an increase in families that are going towards child protection... basically money is at the heart of it. The children are being neglected because they can't afford decent food, they can't afford decent clothing, because they can't do that they don't want to send them to nursery so educationally they're classed as educationally impoverished and that is only going to get worse." (Children's Centre Worker)

Children's Centre staff are also reporting an increase in domestic violence since the recession began and accredit this in part to people's strained financial situation;

[Referring to an increase in domestic violence] "I think it's a direct impact of the economic downturn but also indirectly just in terms of reduced benefits." (Children's Centre Worker).

A family can become a troubled family due to the mental ill health of the parents but the difficulties families face due to poverty can also be the cause of mental ill health;

"Because of financial deprivation, isolation becomes a part of that, then mental health issues become a major issue and then you get to the point where they just can't physically go out of the front door

because it's a knock on effect, so increasingly mental health is another issue." (Children's Centre Worker)

"I think there's a lot of pressure on parents these days... a lot of parents get depression because they can't do what they want to do. You've got children pressurising you 24/7 for new trainers or whatever it's really difficult." (Parent of young offender)

Mental health problems such as depression compound a person's ability to cope with the issues they are faced with;

"It's difficult when they have got depression to cope with everyday life." (Parent of young offender)

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

Within Troubled Families, disadvantage / poverty can become a generational cycle with children following the example set by their parents of a life on benefits or crime. It is important that work is done with both parents and their children to raise aspirations and encourage all of the family to engage in education, employment or training to ensure positive outcomes for them in the future and break the cycle of poverty.

"Trying to raise their aspirations - you know there is more to life than sitting on your bum." (Children's Centre Worker)

"It's a cycle, because their mum and dad haven't worked, they don't work and they don't think that their children should have to work...it's actually frowned upon to go and get a job." (CAF Worker, 2010)

Worklessness of both parents can affect the whole family as the role modelling by the parents can lead to low aspirations for the children. In a rural Children's Centre, one parent explained that because of the generational issues within families and small communities, anyone who achieves anything moves out of the area. Those who go to university out of the area move away and don't come back. The parent believes that families in the area construct a future which is achievable so the children are 'not set up to fail'. From a young age the children are *"set up to be told that's out of reach and the parents don't know they're doing it"*. If the parents don't let their children see they have a choice to aspire to something better, outside their small community, then the families are kept together as whole units. To break this family attitude to achievement, work should be done to manage aspiration in the whole family and whilst the children are still young.

Children's Centres are in a good position to work with the whole family as they can work with both the parents and the children and are in a position to monitor the families to pick up on any issues. They are also in a good position to build up trust with the parents as they may attend the centre for many different reasons, such as to get their baby weighed or for a mother and baby group. Some

centres also operate an outreach service where they will go out to families who need support in the community. This is an important way of encouraging families to engage and means that when they do attend the centre for the first time they will already have a relationship with a worker which will help to reduce the anxiety experienced by walking into a room and knowing no-one.

"Our family outreach support is so important because a lot of our families won't walk through the door." (Children's Centre Manager).

Parents can look inwards and blame themselves for problems with their families. Whether or not this is the case parents need help to have their confidence built so they can cope better with the challenges they face, be it moving out of debt or dealing with the difficult behaviour of a child.

"I used to blame myself a lot" (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Parenting programmes such as Triple P are important as they support parents and help to build their confidence and self-esteem. Courses such as these also teach parenting skills and how to deal with their children with confidence which helps parents to control their children's behaviour effectively. Parenting support and parenting programmes are important and should be introduced early in families where issues are showing to ensure that parents

learn how to control their children's behaviour before they get into trouble.

If parents are not supported to manage their children's behaviour then the poor behaviour of one child can be copied by siblings. Again courses such as Triple P would teach parents how to manage this situation;

"It did rub off he used to say (his brother) didn't go to school so I don't have to" (Parent of a young person with behavioural difficulties)

"I've got a 9 year old and he tries to imitate what his brother is doing." (Parent of a young person with behavioural difficulties)

"I've still got my STEPS folder and I still go through it now at home, I did a self-esteem course and I just did a confidence building one as well." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

It is essential that parents of children who have behavioural difficulties or are involved in crime etc. have support in place to help them to manage this situation and reduce the effects on the rest of their family. Whilst the support through parenting courses etc. seems to be welcomed and appreciated it has been identified by parents that the support they receive disappears once their child turns 16. Just because the child has turned 16 does not mean that any problems have stopped and that the family are now coping. It is important to remember that families that need support when

their child is under-16 may need continued support once they are over 16.

"Once they get to 16 everything stops, all the help stops." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

There are a number of barriers parents face regarding entering employment. Some of them are perceived, based on other people's experiences, and some are actual. Often parents do not know where to go to get the correct information and therefore rely on second hand information from equally uninformed friends and family. This can lead to parents making decisions based on incorrect information which may mean the family is worse off. One parent was not applying for certain jobs because she thought she would lose all of her benefits if she began working in them. Whereas the reality was she would be even better off overall applying for them over the ones she had been applying for, despite the loss of some benefits.

Parents have concerns about loss of financial help such as free school meals and may opt out of working as a result;

"Because they're working they can't get tax credits they can't get free school meals, they're not entitled to the funding pots and the benefits...some will jack their jobs in because it's easier for them to get the resources." (CAF Professional, 2010)

Many of the families spoken to in 2012 cited childcare as one of the biggest barriers to them returning to work. This is mirrored across all of the groups included in this report. Families see that the cost of childcare limits their opportunities to move into education, employment or training as they believe they cannot afford to pay someone to care for their child whilst they go out to work,

"I would like to better myself but with the situation I'm in at the minute, childcare, I can't really do a lot about it." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

"You've got to think about childcare when you want to go back to work and it's really hard." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

When faced with many barriers, a lack of motivation or aspiration can become the final barrier to employment or education;

"Why when you can sit on benefits and get everything you want out of life and not work why would you want to get a job...This is what we're up against." (CAF Professional, 2010)

Children's Centres play a key role in raising the aspirations of the families that they work with;

"I think Children's Centres can play a vital part in getting parents back into education." (Children's Centre Worker)

One Children's Centre involved in discussions advised that they run both vocational and softer courses at the centre such as baby signing. These courses get parents used to attending on a regular basis, some courses have homework and all courses provide parents with a certificate once they have completed them.

"We're finding that those courses more and more are actually channelling parents into going on to then do things like adult literacy and numeracy courses, key skills courses and then higher education access courses so we are seeing a progression." (Children's Centre Worker)

All of the Children's Centres we spoke to ran courses for parents and one recent course on parental self-esteem was run at a rural centre due to parental demand. The course covered giving the parent the self-belief to feel confident in their parenting so their child could gain confidence themselves. It also aimed to help parents back into part-time or full-time employment once their child was at school.

Living rurally was seen as a barrier to employment due to the cost of the bus service, the bus not always going where the jobs were and also the high cost of petrol rurally. Anecdotally driving to a rural Children's Centre, the petrol stations in the area were 2-3p per litre more expensive than in the urban areas. With longer distances to travel between home and services, this soon begins to add up.

For young people it is important that once they have completed school that they are directed towards a viable route for their future, for example a realistic college course that suits their skills, ability and interest;

"It's better for him to do something he wants to do rather than going and sit in a class doing a business course, maths and English. He's not going to go and do it." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Previous discussions with NEETs has unveiled that awareness of suitable courses is often low and without parental encouragement or parental awareness of where to go for information, young people can drift along without direction. A bored young person can then find themselves getting into trouble and a criminal record then makes it even more difficult to find future employment or training.

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

'Troubled families' are often known to a number of different agencies often before those agencies realise they are all dealing with the same family. The CAF, the FIP project and the Troubled Families initiative do and will help increase collaborative working practices to tackle the root of the issues, not just each individual agency's issue. Children come to the authorities' attention often through absenteeism from school, exclusion or anti-social behaviour.

Schools are a wealth of information on the children and play a crucial part in the CAF process. However, not all parents appreciate the efforts schools go to. Parents appear to hold a lot of animosity towards schools with a view that;

"Schools have a lot to answer for." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

They feel as though schools do not listen to them and do not take the time to talk to parents about any concerns around their child;

"I kept going up the school saying that my son needed statementing and they kept going no he doesn't and I'd say yeah he does, I've got two other kids that are already statemented... it was only the last 3 months of him being at school that they sent it through and statemented him." (Parent of child with behavioural difficulties)

It was felt that the views of children and young people were also ignored by schools;

"Take time and talk to the children... they should be heard" (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Sometimes parents feel frustrated at the perceived lack of progress schools are making with tackling issues at school;

"I said in the end for me to get any further forward you have to expel him." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

"It took 6 months (of her son not attending school) for them to put something in place for him to go" (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

There is a perception among parents that schools have certain expectations of siblings of older children who have displayed behavioural issues. Schools should be mindful of 'labelling' children and should not assume all siblings will display the same problems / issues;

"Because your name's the same you're labelled." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Parents would like to be informed of absences at school so they can take action earlier. However, one parent was not aware her child was not attending school as he was taking forged notes in to the teachers.

Often schools are doing everything they can to help children but the issues can lie outside the school. This is where the CAF process is invaluable;

"I didn't realise I could ask for a CAF to be opened." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

There are often a number of services available that will provide support to young people, parents or both however parents seem to have a lack of awareness of these services;

"There should be more information out there for parents of children with behavioural problems." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Whilst it would be ideal for a service to become involved with a family at the first sign of problems and deal with them before they escalate this is not always possible. Even if parents are aware of services and are trying to encourage their children to access support it is up to the child or young person, they have to want the support in order for intervention to be successful;

"They're not accepting the help, they don't want the help... to her all the badness and everything that was going on and the crowd that she'd got in with – that was more exciting." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Young people can be easily led by their siblings (see [Taking a Whole Family Approach](#)) as well as the neighbourhoods they grow up in. Work needs to be done to ensure that children are not influenced from an early age by the environment in which they live and the activities that go on in these neighbourhoods;

"The kids see neighbours selling drugs and things like that and nothing ever comes of it so they think if they can get away with it I can get away with it." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Ultimately though it is the child's future that is at risk from the decisions they make when they are young. One young offender said if he could change one thing in his life it would be to not have offended and he would tell that to his little brother to stop him making the same mistakes. Naïve choices as a child impact on long term outcomes;

"That's what counts, what works for the children, because at the end of the day it's the children you have to support, they're the ones that are going to get older and have to live with the consequences and all of the decisions they've made; whether they're good or bad they have to live with it." (Parent of young offender)

Parents acknowledged that when help is first offered they may not be prepared to take it;

"The parent has to be ready to accept the help." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

However it is important that parents have the knowledge about the services that they can turn to for support so that when they acknowledge that they need help they know where to turn. Increasing parents' knowledge about services may also mean that parents who want support but are not receiving it can access services early instead of waiting for support to be put in place once they have reached a crisis, thus allowing services to be proactive rather than reactive.

"There needs to be more information out there about where parents can go for help with their child" (Parent of child with behavioural difficulties)

Some parents feel that children's services should take a more active role in sign posting parents, especially if children's services themselves are unable to help the family or the family do not meet the criteria for children's services to be involved. Equipping children's services with information about services would allow them to signpost parents when they first reach out for help.

"I think social services have got a role to play, if you're ringing them up saying you need help and their saying to you well we can't help you but they're not giving you any other information about where we can go." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

In July 2012 the Jobseekers Claimant count in Warwickshire was 8,052 which represents a decrease of 37 claimants from June 2012 and 1,050 from July 2011. The current count of 8,052 is a rate of 2.4% of the resident working age population and 3.0% of the economically active population.⁶

Many families who are trying to live on a low income either from low paid work or benefits can struggle to make ends meet especially if they are trying to care for a family as well. Teaching

⁶ Sub Regional Economic Briefing, July 2012, Warwickshire Observatory

families how to manage their money and prioritise their spending is essential to ensure that families do not move into debt. For those who are already in debt it is important that they are made aware of those services which are in place to help them to work their way out of debt as the consequences of debt can be vast and devastating for a family;

"We've had 2 suicides in this local area, well 3, we had a couple that committed suicide and then we had a dad of 4 that committed suicide... they were 2 extreme cases of poverty... the dad of 4 that was financial, just couldn't cope, four children, he had a household to keep and he just couldn't cope." (Children's Centre Worker)

Financial difficulties are also being held responsible for developmental delays in children;

"We're finding increasingly children are developmentally delayed and that is down to a lot of financial implications, children not being able to access nurseries..." (Children's Centre Worker)

Since the recession services who work with families, such as Children's Centres, are seeing an increase in families who are struggling to make ends meet. It has been observed that families are turning increasingly to high interest doorstep / payday loans.

"Mobile phone loans – text and you can have £300 instantly... they are becoming more prevalent." (Children's Centre Worker)

It is important that families are made aware of the dangers of accessing these services and that they are educated in how to manage their finances so that they do not need a quick fix to help them make ends meet. Families understanding that, whilst these loans may appear attractive they are not helping them in the long term may encourage them to turn to more appropriate sources of financial assistance. Taking on unaffordable debt in the form of a loan or a mobile phone contract is becoming more prevalent;

"The biggest thing at the moment where I'm struggling to get families to understand the impact is mobile phone debt, it sounds bizarre but I've got several families that repeatedly take out new contracts for new mobile phones because they want a new phone they sell on the phone but still have to pay the contract so I've got families that have got ten mobile contracts out." (Children's Centre Worker)

Services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) are essential in helping families who are dealing with debt. The CAB teaches people about managing their finances through budgeting, how to prioritise spending and how to manage debt through financial literacy courses. Where people are facing the consequences of their debt the CAB may be able to negotiate on their behalf to find solutions and offer advice regarding benefit entitlement and how to claim as some families do not realise that they are entitled to extra benefits. However, anecdotally access to CAB is becoming harder due to cuts in numbers of advisors and increases in waiting times. If parents are not able to access professional free information quickly, they

may turn to less professional sources that may not provide the most appropriate advice.

It is essential that when helping families financially early intervention is considered so that services are not simply stepping in when a family reaches a crisis but are educating people and supporting them early on before, for example, they have to sell their home;

"I get no support because I own my own home, it doesn't help that my house is mortgaged and I can only afford to pay interest only." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

"I went to Citizens Advice and they did nothing, because I'm not in arrears with my mortgage." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

It is understandable that in the face of reduced resources, CAB and other advice providers are focusing on the crisis situations first. However, early intervention to help issues escalating to crisis would be of great benefit to families.

Helping families to learn to manage their money and maximise their income is essential to help them move out of debt. A family under stress from financial worries can find that once they have managed to find a solution to this that other areas of their life improve also, most importantly their mental health;

"Can you help me get out of debt? And that in terms of mental health as well is a big thing, it's just a weight off their shoulders." (Children's Centre Worker)

e) Housing Needs

"A lot of families need housing support of one form or another." (Children's Centre worker)

Children who grow up in social housing are at a higher risk of being in poverty. However, living in social housing and overcrowding is likely to be a consequence of poverty rather than a cause.⁷ Families in poverty are more likely to live in rented accommodation rather than owner occupied homes. 27% of children living in severe poverty (those in the very poorest households) live in a house owned by their parents compared to 39% of children living in non-severe poverty and 83% of children who do not live in poverty.⁸

Whether living in social housing, overcrowding and poor living conditions are a cause or effect of poverty the fact is that there can be negative outcomes for the children. Children's physical health suffers as a result of poor/overcrowded housing. Essen et al (1978) found that children living in overcrowded conditions miss more

⁷ Cited in Smith, N. and Middleton, S. (2007) *A review of poverty dynamics research in the UK*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁸ Magadi, M. and Middleton, S. (2007) *Severe child poverty in the UK*, London: Save the Children

school than other children for medical reasons.⁹ Children have an increased likelihood of contracting life threatening illnesses including tuberculosis and meningitis. Slow growth can occur which leads to heart problems in later life and babies being left in their prams can lead to skull deformities.¹⁰ Harker reports that 'the evidence is particularly strong on the effect of cold, damp and mould,'¹¹ these effects include increased respiratory problems including wheezing and coughing.

Troubled families face a number of issues with regards to housing, including housing debt, being unable to pay bills, overcrowding, poor living conditions, and problems with / complaints from neighbours.

"Families are living very much on the edge in terms of housing debt, they've been threatened with eviction so it's getting quite tough." (Children's Centre Manager)

"At the minute my next door neighbour is complaining about everything, I've been reported 3 times for noise now, the last 2 times there's been no noise whatsoever." (Parent of young offender)

⁹ Essen, J., Fogelman, K. and Head, J. *Children's housing and their health and physical development, (1978) Child: care and health development, 4, 357-369*

¹⁰ Harker, L ((2006) *Chances of a lifetime: the impact of bad housing on children's lives, Edinburgh: Shelter*

¹¹ Harker Ibid

Families can face eviction from their property for a number of reasons including debt but also due to complaints from neighbours about problem behaviour. Depending on the family circumstances moves can be forced due to the actions of the family members, for example one family had moved a number of times because the neighbours had lodged complaints about the behaviour of one of the children, this family had moved all over the country;

"I've moved 17 times since XX was 6 (he's now 24)... a lot of it was because of their behaviour, complaints to the landlord." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Families who are reliant on social housing have limited choice in the type and size of house in which they can move to and the area in which they live as they have to live where there are available houses. Even if a family is not overcrowded when they first move into a property they may become overcrowded if they go on to have children, or more children;

"Families think that they can come in and go oh you know we need a bigger house. We've got lots of big families." (CAF Professional, 2010)

Families' expectations need to be managed to ensure that they are aware that just because their family has increased in size that they will not immediately be able to move to a bigger house and that there are a limited number of larger houses available.

Not all families are housed by the council, some families who own their own home face housing difficulties, for example if a family have a mortgage but the main earner loses their job they may struggle to pay their mortgage, some families report that they do not feel there is support for them especially if they are not currently in arrears with their mortgage even though they are struggling.

It is essential that Troubled Families are not isolated in the community and have the support of those around them however some parents report that instead of supporting them their neighbours appear to have purposefully antagonised their already vulnerable situation;

“And when you’ve got a behavioural problem child neighbours that have got children, they’ll say go and wind that child up to see how far they can fly. It happens and the police turn up and it’s the child that’s kicked off that has got into trouble and the other people just laugh.” (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

It is important that families have all round support such as from their local community to help them remain in their homes. Provocation of children with behavioural difficulties is an issue not just for the parent who must manage their child’s behaviour, but also for members of the community who feel it is appropriate to provoke a child.

Looked After Children & those who have left care

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

Children who are in care have both their birth family and their foster family influencing their opinions and behaviour. Often children who are looked after have multiple foster placements and so don't feel confident enough to ask for help;

"Don't be scared to ask for help when you need it and don't be embarrassed because I think they're the main reasons that get in the way. You either get too scared to ask for it or too embarrassed because you feel like you're going to be judged on it" (Care Leaver aged 20)

It is important that young people are not made to feel as if they are being judged for asking for help and that their social worker and foster carer gives them the confidence to know that they can ask questions and turn to them for support.

Where a looked after child's birth family is still in their life, consideration must be given to the influence the birth family has on the looked after child. One looked after child had regular contact with her parents and they had a very close bond;

"My parents never really let you free. They never let you go and do your own thing. They've always kept you close to them, like their little baby." (Looked after child aged 20)

Recognising this close relationship both with a looked after young person's foster carer and their birth family requires a fresh interpretation of a 'whole family approach.'

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

Following on from previous observations that looked after children often have multiple foster placements, this can mean opportunities to learn key skills can be missed. In August 2012, Warwickshire County Council achieved the From Care2Work Quality Mark Award which recognises those local authorities which demonstrate a commitment to improving employability and helping care leavers into work. Recognising that looked after children do not always have strong family networks to call on for work experience, the Care2Work scheme acknowledges that local authorities have a responsibility as corporate parents to provide that network and support endeavours to gain work experience.

There are a number of barriers that looked after children face or perceive they face regarding education, employment or training. Some of them are personal barriers such as confidence;

"Confidence in myself mostly, because I was always in a special needs school I was very enclosed in a safe environment but the big wide world is not safe, mainstream schools and colleges used to scare me, they still do." (Looked after child aged 20)

There are some barriers which are external such as a lack of funding for education after a certain age;

*"They'll only fund 16 – 18 year olds after that you're on your own."
(Looked after child aged 20)*

Other barriers are caused by young people making a choice at some point in their life and ending up on the wrong path, not necessarily realising the consequences this will have for their future;

"I've got convictions so it's harder to get a job at the moment – nobody wants to employ a criminal." (Care Leaver aged 20)

It is important that whatever the reason that young people are struggling to find the right educational opportunity or having difficulties gaining employment that they receive the right support and are signposted to the right services, such as CSWP (Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership – more information about this service can be found in [Youth Unemployment](#)).

All of the looked after children and care leavers included in this needs assessment had goals for their future and knew what they wanted to achieve even if they were unsure how they were going to get there;

"Ideally I'd like to have two part time positions in targeted youth support" (Care Leaver aged 26)

"I'd hope to think university... it's one of those I've got to get to college and sort that out first but it's something I'd always like to look into." (Care Leaver aged 20)

One young person that we spoke to had decided on the career she wanted and was volunteering in that role one day a week to gain experience, however she had not gained the qualifications she needed to train in the area and was at risk of having to stop volunteering due to her circumstances with regards to benefits etc.

"I got a voluntary placement... I enjoy it I've been doing it over a year and a half now... they said I can do more days if I wanted but with all this part time thing and having to get a college course it's going to be a nightmare, I just hope I don't have to drop it because I really love doing it." (Looked after child aged 20)

This young person had not gained Maths and English qualifications that she needed to be accepted on the course she wanted. She had previously received private tutoring outside of school but due to her age there was no longer any funding available for this;

"There's no funding out there to give me home tuition" (Looked after child, aged 20)

The looked after child felt if she had been able to gain funding for private tutoring she may have got the required levels of Maths and English. She is now having to reconsider her future and is facing

changes to her financial situation as a result of the fact that she was unable to attend the full time course she was hoping to;

"It sounds like unless I can get a full time course or a job somehow then I'm going to be stuck on job seekers allowance which means my income and housing benefit would stop." (Looked after child, aged 20)

A common barrier for all young people to employment is transport. However in the case of looked after young people they may not have parents who they can rely on for lifts, especially if they have left their foster placement and moved into independent living. For looked after children and young people who are reliant on buses it can be difficult to get to and from work and they may have to rely on taxis (which are expensive), lifts from friends or walking home late at night if they finish work after the buses have stopped running;

"I always found it hard getting back from work at night. I think it's quite dangerous because if you can't really afford a taxi then you've got to walk back late at night". (Care leaver aged 20)

One young person we spoke to advised that when she was in college she received money towards her transport costs;

"When I was going to college I got £12 a day to travel to and from college." (Looked after child aged 20)

When looked after young people are first starting out and looking for employment it would be beneficial if they too were supported in some way with their transport costs. It is also important that the transport systems run at the times needed by young people to ensure they are able to travel safely to and from work and that they do not miss out on jobs because they are unable to travel. Supporting looked after children and care leavers with driving lessons and passing their driving test would mean that they could have the independence of their own car which would not only mean they could travel to and from work safely but would make it easier for them to travel to job interviews;

"I think if I was driving it would give me a better chance to get a job actually. It limits me in what I can do with my work, because if I could travel a lot easier it would be a lot more accessible to me." (Care Leaver aged 26)

One young person who participated in the research advised that she had previously had a job on good money but had left because she felt the training they had promised her did not happen;

"I just didn't stay there that long but it was good while it lasted. I didn't really enjoy it that much because I was expecting more from it than I got and I wasn't happy then, I was going to progress in that job and it didn't happen and I wasn't very happy about that." (Care Leaver aged 26)

It is important that young people are given realistic expectations of work and that they are supported whilst in their jobs to understand that whilst their job may not be perfect that it is good to be in employment and building up skills in the workplace and that if they choose to leave a job then they should have another job to move onto rather than viewing benefits as a viable alternative to working.

Involvement in the Children in Care Council (CiCC) provides young people in care and care leavers with opportunities to gain life skills which can be highlighted on their CVs. The CiCC encourages young people's voice to be heard and the members make representations at a senior level within the county council. This gives members the experience of putting their views across in a professional, persuasive manner which is invaluable when young people are interviewed for jobs or college places. The CiCC works as a team which provides members with experience of team working. Many future employers will see this as a real asset to their business. Young people reported how useful they had found being involved with the CiCC and how far the Council has come over the last year under new guidance through a positive role model.

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

When looked after children experience many placement changes over the course of their lives, the advice and support they receive from the foster carer may be inconsistent, not received or conflicting between foster carers. It is important that looked after children receive consistent advice about health, education, finance

and budgeting, employment and independence so that when they move to independent living they are prepared and have realistic expectations.

When looked after children turn 16 they will get a Get Ready for Adult Life Worker. The Get Ready for Adult Life Service will support the young person up to their 21st birthday and possibly longer if they are in full time education, for example at university. The Get Ready for Adult Life Worker will work with the young person to develop a Pathway Plan. A Pathway Plan is put in place for all looked after children aged 16 and over, the plan is developed with the young person and aims to set out:

- 'Where you might want to live in the future;
- Who is around to support you;
- Your plans for your career;
- What money you have coming in and what money you have going out;
- What you need to learn to be able to look after yourself well;
- How you are going to make sure you keep yourself healthy and enjoy yourself.'¹²

Health assessments are an important part of monitoring the health of looked after children. However, these are not always welcomed by looked after children. The reasons for this vary but include the assessments taking place somewhere the looked after child doesn't

¹² <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/leavingcare#8>

know or feels uncomfortable attending, not being conducted by someone familiar to them e.g. their own doctor and the information gleaned from the assessment not being of interest to the looked after child. Further work to understand the reasons for refusal and how the uptake can be increased is taking place on behalf of the County Sexperts group by Business Intelligence (Children's) with the report due by Christmas 2012.

This research project will also aim to understand why young people who have been looked after are more likely to become parents early with a view to delaying parenthood for them. By intervening early before the looked after child becomes a parent, children's services aim to improve the outcomes for the young person. Topics discussed will include contraception, information sources, information held by children's services on looked after children, reasons for becoming a parent (where the looked after child has already become a parent) and health assessments.

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

When looked after children move to independence at age 16/17 they lose their entitlement to money for holidays, activities and clothes. The contributions to their long term savings also stop and some will not be entitled to claim benefits. However those who aren't do receive reasonable costs towards accommodation and a living allowance from the Leaving Care team which is paid directly

into their bank account. This is at a rate slightly higher than Job Seekers Allowance.¹³

If a looked after child or care leaver is not working by 18 then they must apply for benefits, either Income Support if they in education or Job Seekers Allowance if they are looking for work. Those young people who are on benefits or a low income will need to apply for housing and council tax benefit. However they will still receive a birthday and festival gift (often at Christmas) and may receive an incentive payment for achievements based on their Pathway Plan.¹⁴

Whilst young people are still supported when they leave care it is felt by some that there is a large drop in income when they reach the age of 18 which they are unprepared for;

"I just think that like from having all the financial support from whatever age up until 18 and then it completely stopping I just think that's really bad it goes up in age. They don't think you're used to having that money when you get to 18 and it's all stopped. I think that's like where depression and stuff come into it in a way."
(Care Leaver aged 20)

However looked after children did report being supported to ensure that they are receiving the benefits that they are entitled to and, at least in some cases, their worker helps them to 'sign-on';

¹³ <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/leavingcare#8>

¹⁴ *Ibid* Warwickshire.gov.uk

"They said that now you've come up to 16 you had to sign, get job seekers allowance and all that to pay your way – they helped me get onto it... you fill out some forms, you go down to see them and fill out more forms and then in a couple of weeks you go on it... Tracy from Barnardo's took me down and helped me fill them in" (Looked after child, aged 20)

It is crucial that looked after children are educated about finance so that they know how to budget and manage their money from an early age and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to know what to do or who to turn to if things go wrong. As looked after children can change placements and therefore schools regularly it is important that this information is given by a person who is consistent in their life so that they don't miss out on receiving information. It is also important that young people are made aware of the changes to the financial support they will get as they get older and are supported to prepare for these changes and a potential decrease in the money they receive so that it is not a shock when it happens.

There is a perception that if young people ask social workers for help with finance then they will be judged. One person commented that she thought if she went to her social worker because she was struggling financially or had run out of money one month her social worker would think;

"She's an adult, where's her money gone? Why is she not budgeting it properly? Things like that I don't know." (Care Leaver aged 20)

This perception of being judged was reinforced when social workers had asked questions about where the young person's money had gone;

"Sometimes they do ask questions like where has your money gone? Why haven't you been budgeting it properly?" (Care Leaver, aged 20)

These questions may have been asked so that the social worker could understand how best to support the young person. If this is the case this needs to be made clear to the young person so that they know they are not being judged;

"It would be nice if social workers just said you know we are around if you need us a bit more." (Care leaver, aged 20)

Young people not wanting to ask for help, particularly with finances, can mean that they are secretly struggling with managing their money. Debt may start to build up because they do not know how to manage their debt and do not want to ask for help;

"I just kept putting my letters in a drawer worrying about them, not knowing what to do, and letting my debt build up and up and up and up and up and it just all come to a head that I was in court". (Care Leaver, aged 20)

Looked after children and care leavers need to be made aware that they will not be judged if they are not managing and that there are

people who can help them with debt. This may include giving them information about services such as CAB who they can contact if they do not wish to admit to their family or social worker that they are struggling.

e) Housing Needs

Looked after children who are on a full care order must remain in foster care until they are aged 18. Those who are on a voluntary care order are able to discharge themselves from care and move into independent living at age 16 if they wish. Some make this choice and others decide that they are not ready for independent living until an older age;

“Considering being on my own and in a place on my own is quite frightening and being with other people you’ve got to trust them and if anything goes missing or anything you can lose your friendship if you go and accuse them and living in a flat with a load of youngsters outside your flat making a load of trouble isn’t good. Independence isn’t for me yet.” (Looked after child aged 20)

Work being carried out with young people who feel unsure or frightened about living on their own is not always achieving its fullest potential as young people report not feeling ready to live independently. To ensure that the transition is smooth and successful when looked after children do eventually move into independent living, providing them with the right support and helping them be prepared can really make a lot of difference.

When looked after children decide to move into independent living there are a number of options for them to choose from;

- ‘Higher support accommodation: you rent a room and share bathroom and kitchen with others. You commit to getting support at least once a week from a key worker, although the staff team are on site and available throughout the day and most of the night.
- Medium support accommodation: you might share a flat with others, have key work support once a week and staff are available on site 9-5 pm.
- Accommodation lower support: you might live in your own flat and are visited at least once a week by your key worker.

Independent tenancy: If you can demonstrate a degree of independence skills and you are supported by your leaving care team you may be able to apply for your own housing.¹⁵ Some young people found that they could not manage in their first choice of accommodation, in this case care leavers appear to be encouraged to move into a more supported independent living placement to help them build up the confidence and skills they need to live independently;

“It was really difficult at the time because I wasn’t really prepared for it and I just wanted to get out of my situation so I rushed to get

¹⁵ <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/leavingcare#8>

out of that and that fell through quite quickly so I ended up going into a hostel but they did used to have courses like skills for life courses.” (Care Leaver, aged 20)

Despite the level of support offered to young people when they leave care some young people perceived that they received less support than others they knew who had left care at an earlier age;

“I turned 19 and got my flat and I got like no support.” (Care Leaver aged 20)

A suggestion for how this support could be offered was social workers contacting those in independence on a regular basis to ‘check – in’ and make sure that the young person was coping. This would be a good way to pick up any problems at an early stage, for example someone who was not coping with budgeting;

“I think they need to make an effort and try at least once a week to check how you’re coping and how you are and maybe do little spot checks.” (Care Leaver aged 20)

However what works and is welcomed by one person is not always welcomed by everyone and young people have admitted that they find it difficult to ask for help – this may be the case even with a social worker checking in on them regularly. It is important that on leaving care young people are prepared for living independently so that the level of support that they require is reduced. Managing expectations about the support they will receive and creating

realistic expectations of the struggles they may face living independently would benefit young people preparing to leave care.

Those who do move to independent living tend to live in council owned properties or privately rented properties. These tend to be unfurnished and so young people face the challenge of affording furniture and white goods to make their new accommodation liveable. This can be a struggle for some young people especially if they are not working and are relying on benefits.

“It’s a bit chaotic because, I don’t know, just getting it all sorted, decorating and furnishing it, paying all my bills at the same time and obviously at the moment I’m on income support and it’s just up and down, up and down.” (Care Leaver aged 20)

It is important that care leavers are supported in applying for available grants to help them with the costs of this to avoid them putting themselves under unnecessary financial pressure and possibly ending up in debt;

“I think social services gave me a community care grant... I got a cooker and a fridge freezer but they didn’t do it for a big enough amount so that wasn’t too good.” (Care Leaver aged 20)

Young people expressed that it can be difficult to get hold of housing officers and to be put through to the right team when you do get hold of someone. This was a recurring theme when

speaking to both looked after children / care leavers and young parents.

"For 9 months we just couldn't get hold of the right people to get it changed and then I don't know." (Care Leaver aged 20)

Not being able to get hold of housing help when it is needed can cause undue stress to young people if they have housing issues that need to be sorted out. For example one young person reported that it took nine months to get someone from housing to change the locks on their property, during this time they had to find alternative accommodation due to anxiety. It would benefit care leavers if children's services had closer links with housing or if there was a dedicated or priority resource or contact within housing so they knew who they needed to speak to.

"I think social services should have someone who helps just with housing cos it would be a lot more better cos they'd know what they're doing and there'd just be that one person. It is quite difficult to get hold of someone in housing you know even my social worker tried for 8 months to get hold of the housing officer." (Care leaver, aged 20)

For children who are still looked after, greater consideration needs to be given to where they are placed in relation to their birth family. It is not always appropriate to house the young person near their birth family and even when it is, the availability of appropriate foster carers may place limitations on where young people end up

being housed. Young people may be placed a distance from their birth family for good reason but if they are still to have contact there needs to be adequate transport provision in place to allow for this to happen easily;

"I used to have to get the bus to get to see my parents... it took two and a half hours there and two and a half hours back so that was like five hours out of the day." (Looked after child, aged 20)

Tools developed by the Dartington Social Research Unit, which is working with Warwickshire County Council on a project to reduce the numbers of looked after children in Warwickshire whilst improving or maintaining outcomes, set out certain criteria which are indicators for whether a looked after child is more likely to be able to return home. These indicators include maintaining a positive relationship (including with siblings) and regular contact with the birth family. With great distances to travel, the regularity of the contact is likely to be reduced and therefore the contribution of this indicator to helping the child return home (in conjunction with the others) is likely to be reduced. Provision to ensure regular contact, where appropriate, would benefit the young person and also could help reduce the looked after population in the longer term. For further information on this project please contact Business Intelligence (Children's) quoting 'The Dartington Project'.

Teenage Parents

Being a parent whilst still a teenager is a risk factor in itself, but teenage parents often also have other co-existing factors which put them at even higher risk:

- 63% increased risk of being born into poverty for children of teenage mothers compared with babies born to mothers in their twenties.¹⁶
- Teenage mothers are 22% more likely at age 30 to be living in poverty than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over.¹⁷
- Teenage mothers are 20% more likely to have no qualifications aged 30, than mothers giving birth aged 24 or over.¹⁸
- They are also much less likely to be employed or living with a partner.¹⁹
- Approximately 70% of teenage mothers aged 16-19 are not in education, training or employment²⁰ with the same percentage claiming Income Support.²¹

¹⁶ Mayhew E and Bradshaw J (2005) 'Mothers, babies and the risks of poverty' Poverty, No.121 p13-16.

¹⁷ Ermisch J (2003) Does a 'teen birth' have longer term impacts on the mother? Suggestive evidence from the British Household Panel Study ISER Working Papers No. 2003-32; Institute for Social and Economic Research.

¹⁸ Ermisch Ibid

¹⁹ Ermisch Ibid

²⁰ DfES (2007) Teenage Parents, Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts.

²¹ DfES Ibid

- Teenage mothers are more likely choose partners who are poorly qualified and more likely to experience unemployment.²²

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

Teenage parents are often the children of parents who were teenagers themselves. Raising aspirations and understanding the emotional and financial responsibilities of having a child may help break this cycle.

*[When asked what you wish you had known about pregnancy?]
"How hard it would be coping with a baby on your own at a young age", "How lonely it can be" and "How scary it all was."²³*

Having a child when you are still a child yourself can be an isolating and scary experience. It is essential that for the young parent to be able to face the challenges of parenting that they have a strong support network around them. Some young parents are lucky and have the support of their family, others are either no longer welcome at home or have to move out because their living situation with their family is not suitable for them and their child;

"At home my mum is an alcoholic and my step dad is an alcoholic so I just wanted to get out." (Young Parent, early 20s)

²² Ermisch Ibid

²³ Young female parents quoted in Browne D (2010). BIGMOUTH! Revisited. Respect Yourself Campaign. Warwickshire County Council.

"I'm homeless at the minute. Social Services put me in a B&B because I'm pregnant and my mum kicked me out." (Pregnant girl aged 16, NEET, 2010)

If the teenage parent has siblings, there could be work undertaken with her family to ensure that her sisters do not become teenage mothers and that her brothers do not become teenage fathers.

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) takes a holistic approach to supporting teenage mothers (see more in [Early Intervention](#)). Part of its remit is to reduce the number of subsequent pregnancies, with greater intervals between births. Other outcomes include:

- 'improved early language development, school readiness and academic achievement
- improvements in antenatal health
- reductions in children's injuries, neglect and abuse
- improved parenting practices and behaviour
- increased maternal employment and reduced welfare use
- increases in fathers' involvement
- reduced arrests and criminal behaviour for both children and mothers'²⁴

Warwickshire is fortunate to be part of the FNP pilot and is already seeing positive outcomes for the young mothers currently involved

²⁴http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_118530

with the programme. As the programme is still in the pilot stage, not all eligible young mothers are included in the programme and so should the randomised control trial provide the evidence for its efficacy, rolling out the programme to all eligible young mothers would be of great benefit to many more young families.

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

When considering why teenage parents do not work it is important to remember that many older mothers choose not to work so that they can stay at home and raise their children. Whilst these mothers may have a partner who is working to support them, teenage mothers should not miss out on spending the important early years with their children if they make a positive choice to do so. What is important is ensuring that the decision to remain at home is a positive choice and that there are not barriers preventing the young mother from going out to work. It is important to ensure that when young mothers are ready to return to work or education, whenever this is, that they have the support in place to enable them to do so.

Teenage parents identify many barriers for them returning to or entering employment. These include childcare, transport, finance and education.

Young parents are reticent about leaving their children in childcare, instead preferring to leave the children with family and friends or people they know and trust.

"I've never felt comfortable leaving him with someone that I don't know so it's always been my mum or my sister or his dad's mum, but I know I will have to do it one day." (Young parent, aged 16)

However often the support that family and friends can offer is limited and does not allow for parents to easily return to work. It is important that young parents are introduced to the idea of childcare in a gradual way allowing them to build up trust with the childcare provider, for example being able to attend childcare sessions and observing the child-minder's interactions with their child may help convince them that child-minders and professionals can be trusted to care for their child.

Another barrier to accessing childcare is the cost. Whilst there is financial support for young parents returning to education, for example Care2Learn and support through the college;

"I've been lucky when I was at college my daughter was paid for... but when I was working I was paying a friend just a small amount but even that was quite hard." (Young Parent, early 20s)

Young parents perceive that there is no support with the cost of childcare if they enter work until their child is aged 3 and this prevents them from returning as early as they might want to. All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free early years education for 38 weeks of the year;

"There's no funding (for childcare). Your child has to be 3. I feel that all young parents that have to go on benefits get kind of stereotyped but what else are we supposed to do? We're lone parents, we don't have any childcare, we can't afford childcare off benefits." (Young parent, early 20s)

Depending on the number of hours parents work they may be entitled to child tax credits to help towards the cost of childcare to may be able to enter a salary sacrifice scheme to buy childcare vouchers through their employer. However if a parent is already on a low income they may not be able to afford to sacrifice part of their salary to buy vouchers and this may mean that they are financially worse off than if they did not work and received benefits. The employer also has to make the employee aware of the voucher scheme and guidelines introduced in 2005 aimed to make it more attractive to employers to inform their employees.

For more information on the criteria for child tax credit please see the following website:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits/start/who-qualifies/children/childcare-costs.htm#4>

Some young parents want to go to college to gain skills to help them to move into work or simply to enable them to help their children better with their homework but they struggle to know where to go to access support and can struggle to find financial support to support them with study. Where funding is available it is age limited therefore if a young parent takes time to decide the

right path to follow or to build the confidence to enter education again they may find that the funding is no longer available to them;

"If you wanted to do a course at college you need to know where you can get the funding from... what are people supposed to do if they haven't got disabilities? That's the only way I can go to college" (Young mum with learning disabilities)

Some young parents wanted to return to education or employment and had goals and ambitions for their future;

"I've just been to college to do an access course... I'll hopefully start this care job because I want to go and do nursing at university." (Young mum, early 20s)

However, if they needed further study which would incur a cost this can put them off realising their aspirations as they were conscious that they need to be able to provide for their child;

"The thing that puts me off going to uni is not having no money behind me." (Young mum, early 20s)

It is important that young parents get the support that they need to follow their goals. This helps to ensure that they create a positive future for themselves and their children and can be a positive role model for their children rather than remaining on benefits in the long term. This support may be as simple as someone spending time with them assessing their options with regards to courses, routes into the career that they want and how they can finance

childcare or education or help with identifying funding streams and grants to support them financially.

The Respect Yourself Campaign commissioned CSWP and Business Intelligence (Children's) to undertake a joint research and intervention project to understand why NEET young parents stay NEET. By encouraging and supporting young parents to return to education or find employment, the parent will be setting a good example to their child. This will then encourage the child to have aspirations themselves, improve the family's finances and boost the teenage parent's confidence. CSWP no longer provides a dedicated teenage parent NEET resource. The project asked the question – can money for this resource be found as a joint venture between the partners of the Children's Trust?

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

The Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, launched in 1999 required all local authorities to have measures in place to meet local targets: reduce the under-18 conception rate and engage 60% of teenage mothers in education, employment and training. The Government wants to ensure that young women who do become pregnant, and decide to go ahead with the pregnancy, receive the support they need to make successful futures for themselves and their children.²⁵

²⁵ *Teenage Pregnancy Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts (DfES 2006)*

Positive for Youth: A new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19 (2011) supports the approach to reduce teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and improve outcomes for teenage parents. It does this by encouraging local authorities to give young people a voice in local decision making. It states that Positive for Youth should form a key part of local areas' work to tackle child poverty and address health inequalities. There is a strong evidence base on successfully preventing under-18 conceptions and supporting teenage parents.

Warwickshire county has a teenage pregnancy strategy that is delivered by a partnership of agencies to ensure services work together to meet the needs of young people under the umbrella of the Respect Yourself Campaign. The partnership wants to provide young people with the skills to resist the pressure to have sex too early, and to make positive, informed choices about their sexual health and relationships. This includes engaging young parents in education, employment and training.

Looked after children are shown to have an increased likelihood of becoming teenage parents. Data suggests that if a young person has been in care they are 2.5 times more likely to become a teenage parent compared with those brought up by both natural parents.²⁶ Whilst work is done with young people in care around contraception use and teenage girls are encouraged to have the

implant it is believed that once they leave care some teenage girls stop using contraception. In these cases it appears that the early intervention techniques put in place are not effective. A piece of research is currently being carried out in Warwickshire by Business Intelligence (Children's) on behalf of the County Sexperts group to ascertain the reasons that young care leavers go on to have children and to identify what early intervention methods might be effective in preventing these pregnancies and delaying parenthood.

Once teenagers have become pregnant, early intervention is crucial to ensure the best possible outcomes for mother and baby. Services such as Children's Centres, health visitors and the Family Nurse Partnership have a large role to play in this as these are the services that are likely to be involved with young parents.

After the birth of their child young mothers attend Children's Centres to have their babies weighed and to see the health visitor – this is an excellent opportunity for Children's Centre staff to try and engage young mothers with the Children's Centre;

"The staff are really friendly and you get a timetable and a welcome pack...they are there to help...I will definitely go back. The staff are really nice, really approachable. When I came in they remembered who I was and I hadn't been for a good 3 or 4 weeks so I was really surprised. They were just really great." (Young mum, aged 19)

Young mothers have the opportunity to meet the staff and other parents and realise that they are not the only one suffering from

²⁶ *Teenage Parents Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts (DfES 2007)*

sleepless nights etc. However many young parents feel that the older parents at the centres judge them and look down on them. This is why young parents groups are so important because they give young mothers the chance to socialise and share their experiences;

"It's just support... being a lone parent is quite stressful sometimes, you can come here and just blow out, they'll support you regardless." (Young mum, early 20s)

The Family Nurse Partnership Programme runs across Warwickshire with young parents that meet the following criteria;

- 'Aged 19 years and under at their last menstrual period
- Live in Warwickshire
- First pregnancy (can be referred if previous pregnancy ended in termination of pregnancy, stillbirth or miscarriage)
- Enrolment and participation in the programme must be voluntary 60% of clients should be enrolled by 16th week of pregnancy and 100% no later than the 28th week'²⁷

The programme is a home visiting programme that runs from 16 weeks of pregnancy until the child's 2nd birthday. Families will receive a maximum of 64 home visits over the course of the programme. The aim of the programme is to improve self-efficacy,

²⁷ Warwickshire Early Years Health Directory, December 2011, <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/earlyyearshealthdirectory>

change behaviour and build attachment.²⁸ FNP works on the premise that holistic early intervention work reaps the most benefits for the young mothers and children involved.

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

Young parents may have little experience of living independently and managing their own money. Many young people have limited experience of managing outgoings and bills. If the first experience of managing money is budgeting their outgoings when they have a child then this can be difficult. Mixed messages were received from young parents as to how they were coping financially; some seemed to be doing better than others with some parents reporting that they after they paid their bills and bought food they had little or no money left and if they ran out of something in the week they had to wait until they next received their benefits to replace it as they had no spare income. Others seemed to be managing better and were even acting as informal lenders to their peers. However many young parents had relied on finance at some point in time to help them make ends meet or to furnish their property;

"I can't really say much about budgeting because I'm rubbish at budgeting anyway. I got loads of things out when I was younger, finance and things." (Young mum, early 20s)

²⁸ Warwickshire Early Years Health Directory Ibid

Those parents who were working found that this helped them financially;

“Working and things obviously help so when I get paid I just make sure I’ve got food, gas and electric and the bills are paid and the rest is just for me and my son to do whatever we want with really.” (Young mum, early 20s)

However one mum had struggled when she went from full time hours to part time hours. She found that she was living outside her means as she did not adjust her spending to fit her reduced income;

“I was on full time so I was on like £500 per week so I was like I can get what I want when I want so now going down to part time is a bit of a struggle – I can’t have what I want – I’m living a champagne life on lemonade money.” (Young mum, early 20s)

Most young parents involved in this needs assessment recognised the importance of prioritising their spending and ensuring that their bills were paid and they had food before spending what was left over and were determined to be ensure that their children did not miss out on opportunities due to lack of money;

“My biggest fear is not having electric and stuff for my daughter so I’d never do that... I’ve got finance up to my ears but I know I’ve got priority bills... I don’t want to be the one saying to my daughter

sorry you can’t go today (on a day out) because I can’t afford it.” (Young mum, early 20s)

Children’s Centres can play an important role here as they offer a free place for young parents to go and meet with other young parents. One mum praised Centres for running young parents groups as it enables them to ‘talk over issues together’ which she feels is very valuable. Children’s Centres also put on events and activities which are free or inexpensive for parents to take their children to meaning that children are able to socialise with other children and enjoy activities without young parents having to worry about expensive costs.

Whilst the young parents involved in this needs assessment were not completely overwhelmed financially, as mentioned, many were in debt. The 2010 Child Poverty needs assessment highlighted that some young parents are not able to prioritise their money appropriately and would buy treats for themselves before ensuring that their bills were paid, they had food to eat and that their child had the necessary clothes etc. that they needed;

“They just want something nice for them, and you can understand that but it’s working with the families and making them understand that actually what’s more important is new shoes for the child, new trainers or whatever and River Island bags are lovely but that isn’t appropriate right now.” (CAF professional, 2010)

“Younger mums they get so frustrated and so fed up that people around them have got nice things and ‘why can’t I have it’, and we try to explain that right now this is the priority and you have to prioritise this, this and this.” (CAF Professional, 2010)

Young parents would greatly benefit from being taught how to budget their money so they know how to prioritise what they are spending and are able to make the right choices to ensure they can provide for themselves and their families. This would help prevent them from getting into debt in the first place and learning the hard way. Many young parents in this needs assessment had previously experienced debt problems and had either overcome them or were still battling them.

Unfortunately if young parents did not have good role models at home, their family for example may have relied on loans to make ends meet, then they will not have been taught budgeting at home. One young parent had been kicked out of home at the age of 16 and she moved to a hostel where they used incentives to encourage young people to be sensible with their money;

“I got kicked out at 16 and I went into a lodge and there were little incentive things where they’d show you how to spend your money and everything.” (Young mum, early 20s)

It is important that budgeting and finance are taught from an early age before young people pick up bad spending habits and, as it cannot be guaranteed that all young people will learn budgeting at

home, schools may have a role to play here to ensure that all young people learn financial literacy. Children’s Centres, Family Nurse Partnership and other services involved with young parents may be able to support young parents with finance and budgeting but if a young parent is not involved with any services, was not taught budgeting and prioritising at home or at school then they will have to learn from their mistakes as they go along which is not ideal when they may be learning to live independently for the first time and learning to raise a child.

Improved access to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB) was mentioned as something which would help young parents overcome their financial difficulties. As resources become scarcer, CAB access is likely to be further reduced. This is a risk to young parents who may not be able to get the help they need at the best possible time.

e) Housing Needs

Children born into poverty are more likely to become teenage parents, with particular risk for teenager females living in workless households when aged 11-15. This perpetuates the poverty cycle for themselves and their children. Teenage parents often experienced poorer living conditions or inappropriate accommodation when they were growing up and then experience similar issues when they become parents themselves;

"I've had problems galore at that house... when we first moved in there we had all sorts of problems... the fireplace had a big gaping hole, it wasn't capped properly so there were fumes coming out of it the garden hadn't been properly done for our son... and we had to wait over 6 – 8 months before we actually got a fireplace in." (Parent with learning difficulties, aged 27)

Adaptations that are needed to help make council properties suitable for children and are promised to young parents when they move in are reportedly slow to be done;

"When I moved in I had a wet room and when I moved in my housing officer promised 'I'll do this to make it more safe for the little one and do that and I'll put in a bath'... you put her under the shower and all she does is scream, kick... loads of professionals have written letters." (Young mum, early 20s)

It is important that properties that young parents live in provide a safe environment for the children as there are higher levels of infant mortality in areas with high deprivation. Children aged up to 14 from unskilled families are 5 times more likely to die in an accident than children from professional families, and fifteen times more likely to die in a fire at home²⁹.

One young parent was waiting to have the front door of her council property fixed because it did not shut and lock properly so her son

was able to run out onto the street. When young parents are learning to be parents and possibly living independently for the first time housing issues will cause unnecessary stress and anxiety. Properties should be safe for children before tenants are allowed to move in and issues that are reported need to be taken seriously and dealt with quickly and efficiently.

Many young parents rely on the council to provide them with housing. This is often cheaper and more secure than renting privately, however does have its draw backs. Young parents report that often when a tenant moves out of a property the property is emptied of furniture, carpets, white goods etc. by the council so upon moving in young parents are faced with the task of completely furnishing their property. Young parents may not be able to afford essential items such as a washing machine or appropriate bedroom furniture.

When applying for a council property tenants have limited choice over where they live, this can mean that young parents have to move away from their friends and family who provide them with support;

"She used to come here every day with her children but now she's got moved to Warwick." (Young mum, early 20s)

It is difficult for young parents if they go on to have more children to be moved to a larger property so they are not overcrowded;

²⁹ <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/why-end-child-poverty/the-effects>

*“A lot of them have had problems where they’ve had another child, they’re in a one bedroom flat and they can’t move to a two.”
(Professional working with young parents)*

From April 2013 children of both sexes under ten will be expected to share a bedroom. Children of the same sex under sixteen will be expected to share a bedroom. Each adult or couple will be entitled to their own bedroom. No extra rooms will be allowed for when someone visits, including when a child comes to stay with a parent that they do not normally live with. Only when these parameters are exceeded would a household be classed as overcrowded and the family prioritised to be moved to a bigger house.

One young parent reported that she had to move into a privately rented property because the council were unable to house her until her son was born and she was unable to remain in her home environment due to issues with her family. When she had to move out of her privately rented home she struggled to be re-housed by the council and reportedly was advised to squat in her privately rented accommodation and ‘sit out’ the letters from bailiffs;

“When I moved in it was all fine went all through then moving out they said that I’d be able to have my deposit back which was £90. I wasn’t allowed my deposit back... I was meant to be kicked out in February and I got a council place in October... the council told me I had to pretty much squat there... I was scared everyday... They told me I had to wait to go to court. The council said I didn’t have a choice about where I got to live.”(Young parents, early 20s)

Whilst it may be council policy not to house someone until they are homeless, there were a number of reported incidences where consideration for the welfare of the individual and their family did not appear to have been fully considered. Situations such as this put families in difficult situations living under extreme pressure; this young parent reports that she now suffers from anxiety.

Youth Unemployment

The effects of being NEET can last for a life time with the statistics for this making very stark reading. In particular for young men, the long term effects are as follows:

- Six times less likely to have qualifications which means lower potential earnings and loss of tax revenue
- Five times more likely to have a criminal record which costs the criminal justice system
- Four times more likely to be out of work which costs the benefits system and means a loss of NI contributions
- Three times more likely to have depression which costs the NHS³⁰

Men who face unemployment early on in life are 20% more likely to be unemployed later in life.³¹ Some groups are more vulnerable to becoming NEET (for six months or more) than others. These are:

- Being NEET at least once before - 7.9 times more likely
- Pregnancy or parenthood - 2.8 times more likely
- Supervision by youth offending team - 2.6 times more likely
- Fewer than 3 months post-16 education - 2.3 times more likely
- Disclosed substance abuse - 2.1 times more likely
- Responsibilities as a carer - 2.0 times more likely.³²

³⁰ 1970 British Birth Cohort, 1999

³¹ Arulampalam, Booth and Taylor (2000) *Unemployment Persistence*, Oxford Economic Papers 52 p43.

Groups at risk of becoming NEET need encouragement not to fall between the cracks of education and employment.

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

Professionals report that some young people actively choose to be unemployed and live on benefits because this is what previous generations of their family have done before them.

"We get quite a few...CAFs where, when we look at it, none of the parents are working and what we're having to do is work with that young person to break that mind-set." (CAF Worker, 2010)

If a young person is living within the family home and they have few or no essential outgoings then the money received from benefits can be seen as a bonus;

"It's sick. You just get free money!" (Male, 16, Warwick, 2010)

It is important that young people are encouraged to aspire to more than a life on benefits. Raising parent's aspirations and encouraging them to move into education, training or employment would set a positive example for their children. As mentioned in the [Troubled Families section](#) Children's Centres carry out a lot of work with families to encourage them to move off benefits and into employment, however they only work with parents who have a

³² Audit Commission, *analysis of Connexions data from fieldwork areas (approximately 24,000 young people)*, 2010

child under 5. There is therefore a gap in similar work being done with parents of older children. Some of this work will be carried with specific families through the Troubled Families initiative. However consideration needs to be given on how to support those families who do not quite meet the criteria for Troubled Families and also to identify those families who are not currently known to services, but who may be struggling.

If young people want to break the cycle of unemployment they may lack the support from their family on matters such as what to include in a job application, how to answer interview questions and even what to wear for an interview;

"I wasn't very composed for the interview and I didn't dress smart or anything. I just kind of went there and didn't know what I was supposed to say either." (Male, 18, Rugby, 2010)

"I'll give you my [email] address, it's really embarrassing my address. It's tramp..." (Female, 17, Stratford)

The NEET female was disappointed in the lack of responses she was receiving back from potential employers and it wasn't until a CSWP worker pointed out to her that her email address was the first impression she was giving that she thought about a more professional sounding one. She was still living with her parents and they had presumably not advised her to use a more appropriate email address.

Research by the Princes Trust in 2010 found that regarding the support that young people felt their parents could offer them with getting a job, 25% from workless households strongly agreed/agreed that their parents did not have the knowledge to help them find a job compared to 16% of other respondents.³³

If young people are not going to receive the necessary information from their family then it is important that schools provide this information or signpost them to a service that can. Once they have left school they should still be able to access services that help them with regards to returning to education or entering employment. This is so that if they do not follow this path straight from school they are still able to access support from services so that they do not fall through the gaps and get lost. Places such as CSWP where young people can go for advice and support in looking for work are invaluable, one young person said of CSWP;

"The team here [at CSWP] are lovely people and they give you great feedback." (Male, 23, Nuneaton)

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

There are many barriers back into work faced by young people who are unemployed, these include among others; lack of aspiration, as

³³ *Destined for the dole? Breaking the cycle of worklessness in the UK, (2010) London, The Princes Trust*

mentioned in the previous section, lack of education/ qualifications and lack of transport.

Lack of aspiration has previously been mentioned in [Taking a Whole Family Approach](#). However research by the Princes Trust in 2010 showed that 49% of young people in an area where most people are unemployed or deemed to be in 'dead-end jobs' strongly disagreed/disagreed that they have a role-model in their local area whose career they look up to compared to 38% of other respondents.³⁴ This research shows that it is not only family but the neighbourhood and community in which a young person lives that can have a strong influence over their aspirations. If a young person lacks role models within the home they may look to the neighbourhood or local community and a lack of positive role models can lead to the belief that they will not be able to achieve more for themselves thus leading to a lack of aspiration.

Some young people who are unemployed may have left school with no qualifications. They may have dropped out of school and never taken their exams or failed their exams. For the majority of courses or jobs at least a Maths and English qualification is required. Services such as CSWP work with young people who have left school to support them in gaining these qualifications. They then advise them on suitable college courses or routes into employment. Many young people accept that they need to help themselves

when trying to get a job but appreciate the support services such as CSWP offer;

"I could help myself but need help from careers advice to seek more help to get in to employment." (Male, 23, Nuneaton)

However some young people who are struggling to find work do not feel that there is adequate help available to them or do not know where to go for help;

"I am currently unemployed and I feel as if no help is available to me." (Female, Nuneaton)

It is important that young people are made aware of the services that can support them possibly by advertising services in places that are most likely to be accessed by young people and in a way which is likely to be appealing to them. The use of social media to advertise these services as well as courses and jobs should be given strong consideration. It is also important that information on services is available to parents of young people as parents are in a good position to influence their children and point them in the right direction.

A lack of feedback from unsuccessful job applications and interviews can be a barrier to young people learning from the mistakes they made on previous applications so that they do not repeat these mistakes in the future. Not hearing back about applications can be a cause of frustration for young people and can

³⁴ *Destined for the dole? Breaking the cycle of worklessness in the UK, (2010) London, The Princes Trust*

lead to them being disheartened and de-motivated about making future applications;

"It's annoying when they say they'll ring you back and they don't. Really frustrating. It puts a real downer on your day." (Female, 17, Stratford)

It would be of benefit to young people if those to whom they submitted applications provided them with feedback on why their application was not successful so that they can implement changes for the next time they apply for a job.

A lack of transport can make it difficult for young people to travel to job interviews and can limit the areas in which they are able to look for work. As mentioned in the [Looked After Children](#) section young people acknowledge that having your own transport such as a car is greatly beneficial when looking for work. However young people are less likely to be able to afford to take driving lessons and buy and run a car until they have found employment.

"I've got no money to get a [mo]ped to get to other places like to get from A to B and that and until I get a job I can't afford a ped. No wheels = no job and no job = no wheels." (Male, Rugby, 2010)

If their parents do not have a car or are not willing or available to give them a lift then young people must rely on public transport;

"It's not just getting a job it's getting transport to get to the job as well" (Male, Rugby 2010).

"It is annoying because the prices keep going up and it's like for goodness sake. Only last month a return to Stratford for was like £5.80 and now all of a sudden its £6.40." (Female, 17, Stratford)

Public transport, especially for those living in the more rural parts of Warwickshire, does not always go where the job or course the young person wants is and can be more than an hours wages.

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

With regards to youth unemployment and ensuring young people are engaged in education, schools have a key role to play. It is vital that young people are engaged in education and given the best possible chance to succeed. It is important that the focus is not only on those children who are good attenders, are engaged and do well at school but also on those young people who are at risk of dropping out of education.

"Pretty much non attending from year 7 till year 10 they didn't much notice whether I was there or not – I was left to my own devices – they didn't give a monkeys about me so why should I?" (Male, Rugby, 2010)

If these children could be identified earlier in their school life or shortly after entering a new school then work could be done to try and ensure they stayed engaged with the school system. The children may also benefit from being monitored so if problems such as low attendance do occur, interventions can be put in place to

support the child and, if necessary, the parents as soon as possible. As mentioned in the [Troubled Families](#) section it is important that the school and the parents communicate with each other so that non-attendance does not go unreported to the parents.

One young person involved in this needs assessment reported that she had left school at age 15. She did not believe that the Educating Children Out of School (ECOS) service had had any input in her case and advised that as far as she was aware the school did not offer any support until her mother contacted them. She is now involved with CSWP who are helping her with her Maths and English and discussing her options for the future. If there had been improved communication between the school and parents earlier on, and there had been intervention earlier, it may have been possible to support this young person to stay in school.

If children do drop out of school or stop attending it is important that services such as ECOS get involved at as early a stage as possible so that the young person does not miss out on the education they are entitled to. As reported in the introduction to this [Youth Unemployment](#) section, males are 2.3 times more likely to be unemployed later in life if they have fewer than three months post-16 education³⁵. This highlights the importance of post-16 education.

³⁵ Audit Commission, *analysis of Connexions data from fieldwork areas (approximately 24,000 young people), 2010*

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

Young people who are out of work and who do not receive financial support from their parents, are reliant on benefits as their only source of income. As mentioned previously in some families this is seen as the norm, however this generational reliance on benefits needs to be broken.

In a 2010 research study by the Princes Trust it was found that 18% of young people from workless households strongly agreed/agreed that they expected to have to rely on benefits because that is what other people in their area had done compared to 8% of other respondents.³⁶

Young people reported there being a social stigma attached to receiving benefits that can lead to social exclusion which in turn may mean that young people find it harder to ask for help.

“There are five of us in our house. We lived mainly on disability allowance because that was the bigger source of income we had. We survived but there is a very big label for it. I used to get free school meals at school and deep down, coming from a well brought up background with quite a bit of money, the situation had to change to go to that. I felt quite embarrassed if I am honest. To stand to get my free school meals was like “Oh by the way I’m not paying for that, I’m getting free school meals – can you take me off

³⁶ *Destined for the dole? Breaking the cycle of worklessness in the UK, (2010) London, The Princes Trust*

that list" and walk away with it... then they [other pupils] expect me not to turn up to school and stuff and everyone insinuating like I'm rough... there is a big stigma." (Female, North Warwickshire, 2010)

Social exclusion has a strong relationship with other problems such as mental ill health. Young men with mental health problems are at increased risk of dropping out of education or employment, of becoming involved in crime and are at especially high risk of committing suicide.³⁷ Up to half of all adult mental health issues start in childhood³⁸ so it is imperative that good mental health is promoted in adolescence. High risk subgroups for neurotic disorder include lone parents, the unemployed, people with disabilities, the economically inactive and those who left school aged 15 or under.³⁹ With early school exit a marker for increased likelihood of future neurotic disorders, engaging young people with education and keeping them engaged post-16 is vital.

The Government is raising the age of participation in education or training, to require young people to continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015. Raising the participation age will prolong the requirement to be in education or training but may not necessarily prolong that young person's interest in being there. Attendance in

³⁷ Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Mental Health and Social Exclusion*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

³⁸ J Kim-Cohen, 'Prior Juvenile Diagnoses in Adults with Mental Disorder', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 60 (7) (2003): 709-717.

³⁹ D Melzer, T Fryers and R Jenkins (Eds) *Social Inequalities and the Distribution of the Common Mental Disorders*, Maudsley Monograph 44, (Hove, Psychology Press, 2004).

education is technically currently compulsory until the young person's 16th birthday but from the young people included in this needs assessment's perspective, this is arbitrary and young people report little being done to active engage them back into education.

In terms of those young people who have left school, college or university and are actively seeking work, the latest figures for Warwickshire show that the number of JSA claimants aged 18 – 24 had risen in July 2012 to 2,335 from 2,255 in June 2012. The numbers are lower than the 2,665 seen in July 2011 suggesting that things may be improving. These figures are subject to variance by the numbers leaving school, college or university.

e) Housing Needs

Young people who are struggling to find employment and so are out of work or education have limited options with regards to their housing. They can, if possible, remain in the family home or may be eligible to receive housing benefit. However, from 1st January 2012 a single person under the age of 35 can only get Housing Benefit for bed-sit accommodation or one room in shared accommodation.

Remaining in the family home can mean that a young person is living in unsuitable accommodation such as overcrowded accommodation or poor living conditions. As mentioned in the [Troubled Families](#) section there can be many negative consequences of this.

Disabled Groups

"I think it would be a good plan for people that make these decisions to maybe actually be a carer for a day, live our lives to see what it's actually like." (Carer of a child with a disability)

A 2008 disability Poverty report states that, 'Disabled people face extra costs related to managing their impairment that amount, on average, to approximately an extra quarter above normal expenditure compared to nondisabled people. The extra costs can result, for example, from paying for adaptations to the home, social care support, mobility aids or communication aids.'⁴⁰

In addition to the extra costs associated with being a disabled parent, there continues to be a disparity in employment levels between those who are disabled and those who are not.

- Nearly one in five people of working age (7 million, or 18.6%) in Great Britain have a disability.
- Only half of disabled people of working age are in work (50%), compared with 80% of non disabled people.
- 23% of disabled people have no qualifications compared to 9% of non disabled people.
- The average gross hourly pay for disabled employees is £11.08 compared to £12.30 for non disabled employees.

- Disabled people who are in work are at a substantially higher risk of in-work poverty, on average earning less than their non-disabled peers and being more likely to work in low skill, low paid jobs.⁴¹

Counting the Costs 2010⁴² survey of over 1,100 families with disabled children shows:

- Almost a quarter (23%) are going without heating. This is up from 16% in 2008.
- Almost three quarters (73%) are going without leisure and days out. This is up from 55% in 2008.
- One in seven (14%) are going without food. This is a slightly better picture than in 2008, when one in six reported going without food.
- More than a third (34%) have fallen behind with repayments, mostly for credit cards or loans.
- More than half (51%) have borrowed from family or friends to keep financially afloat or pay for essentials. This is up from 42% in 2008.
- Almost half (42%) have applied for a charity grant. This is up from 25% in 2008.
- Almost 90% said that financial worries had a detrimental impact on their family life.

⁴⁰ Disability Poverty in the UK. Guy Parckar, Leonard Cheshire Disability, 2008

⁴¹ Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey, Jan - March 2009

⁴² Counting the Costs 2010: The financial reality for families with disabled children. Contact a Family July 2010.

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

A member of a family having a disability can affect the whole family in many ways. Parents of disabled children often find that one or both parents have to give up work to care for their disabled child putting financial pressure on the family or, if the parent themselves has a disability again they may be unable to work. Siblings of children with disabilities can find that they are required to take on caring responsibilities for their sibling or that they receive less of their parent's time and attention.

Parents of disabled children

The role of being a parent of a child with disabilities presents many challenges that parents of a non-disabled child do not face. No parent plans to have a child with disabilities, they expect, like any parent, for their child to develop normally and, as they get older, to become independent and able to care for themselves. This is not always the case for children with disabilities;

"At nearly 17 for every single thing he's dependant on you and I think that becomes really, really draining because you think when's this ever going to end? But it's not is it?" (Parent of a disabled child)

However, although their child's needs do not decrease parents feel that there is a decrease in the services that are available as their children get older.

"Then you're going to start getting thrown into adult services that have got nothing." (Parent of a child with disabilities)

"That's scary I think from listening to things, the transition [to adults services], it sounds frightening. We've got to do something about that." (Parent of a child with disabilities)

It is essential that there is still adequate support available as disabled children grow up into disabled adults and that the role parents play as a carer is not forgotten or diminished. Parents report that once their child turns 18 as parents they are excluded from the decision making process. Whilst is it understandable, as their child has legally become a young adult, some young adults are not suddenly able to make informed decisions for themselves just because they have had their 18th birthday. Parents believe that the transition between them being involved in making decisions for their child and being excluded is too abrupt. There is also less support from adult social care than young adults would have got from IDS;

"When [son] left Exhall Grange School that was the end of the support. Just because somebody's 18 now and they don't have to go to Exhall Grange School doesn't mean to say they're not disabled." (Parent of a young adult with disabilities)

It is important that the support is in place to help families throughout their child's life. Some parents report that whilst they access the Short Break service they are having to use it for things

such as attending medical appointments rather than having quality time for themselves;

"I've used my "Take a Break" so much for me to be able to attend hospital appointments where it should be actually for me to have a bit of chill out time." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Some parents also report that, due to their child's disability and their care commitments, that they have been unable to prioritise their own health and have had to put off having important operations;

"I put off going to the hospital myself, I put off having a big op I needed for 2 years because I just couldn't find time to recover and keep up a process that I'd started with him." (Parent of child with disabilities)

Siblings of disabled children

It is important that the effects of having a disabled sibling on other children in the household are acknowledged and adequately addressed to ensure that all children in the household receive the level of attention, time and support from their parents and services involved with the family as they need;

"They must feel something even if it's only ignored or not loved as much, or think the other one's the favourite because of how much attention they got." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Siblings often have a detailed understanding of their sibling's illness and the effect this has on the sibling and the pressure that it puts on their parents. The older the siblings are the more detailed their understanding of their brother or sister's condition becomes⁴³.

Siblings of children with disabilities can also have to take on the role of carer to support their parents with the care of their sibling. This can mean that they are mature beyond their age and also, if they have to care for themselves more due to parents time being consumed with caring for their sibling, can become independent much more quickly than other children the same age. 64% of parents who have a child with a life limiting condition report that they have little time left to spend with their other children⁴⁴.

"It's not physically possible to spend as much time and attention on one who doesn't need it as one who does." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Services such as Short Breaks and the Babysitting Services for disabled children are essential to ensure that parents can take a break from caring for their disabled child and are able to spend some quality time with their other children;

⁴³ Malcolm, C., Adams, S., Anderson, G., Gibson, F., Hain, R., Morley, A. & Forbat, L. (2011) *The symptom profile and experience of children with rare life-limiting conditions: perspectives of their families and key health professionals*. Cancer Care Research Centre, University of Sterling

⁴⁴Malcolm et al Ibid

"[The sitting service] meant that we could go out once a month with the boys which has been fab." (Parent of a child with a disability)

It is important that the role of siblings is not overlooked and that they have the opportunity to be involved in activities alongside their sibling with a disability. For example parents comment that a lot of parent groups and summer activities are specifically for their child with a disability and it is felt that their siblings should have the opportunity to be involved in these groups also. This gives siblings of disabled children the chance to support each other and also to spend time with their own sibling in a fun capacity;

"The professional play schemes in the summer were for the disabled children. We wanted disabled children and their brothers and sisters. We didn't want to exclude our other children." (Parent of a child with disabilities)

Parents with disabilities

Parents who themselves have disabilities can struggle with areas that other parents may find easier. For example, they may be unable to work because of their disability which puts financial strain on the family. This will be looked at in further detail in [Financial Inclusion](#). Children of parents with disabilities can struggle with their parents' illness as they become older and may even feel embarrassed about their parent;

"She went through a stage of me being in a wheelchair. She was embarrassed of me; she wouldn't be seen with me." (Parent of a child with behavioural difficulties)

Work needs to be done with young people to help them to accept and understand their parents' disability and why they cannot necessarily do everything that able bodied parents can do.

Parents with learning disabilities may face difficulties knowing where to go for support or how to find out about support either for themselves or for their children. This can mean that they and their children miss out on the services that could support them;

"Some parents have got learning difficulties themselves and they have children with learning difficulties... They haven't got a clue. They don't get the help and their children, what hope is there for their children and their future if they're not getting the best service and the best chance to develop their children to their full potential? It's those people that need targeting really and we do need more key workers to make sure that these families get the help that they need." (Parent of child with a disability)

It is important that these families are identified and receive the information and support that they need to ensure the best outcomes for the whole family.

Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities can suffer from a lack of opportunities to socialise with other children from a young age especially if they have to spend a lot of time in hospital due to treatment, operations etc. This can mean that they do not develop the skills required to socialise with others which can lead them to become socially isolated as they get older;

"We were there for him to socialise but he didn't have the skills. He didn't know how to play really." (Professional who works with children with disabilities)

They can also find it difficult to socialise because of their condition;

"They really want to see each other out of school. They look forward to seeing each other but actually when they are in each other's company it's just sparks and snot and tears" (Parent of a child with a disability)

It is important that children are able to socialise with other children their own age in a supported environment so that, if they are late developing social skills, they can be supported to do so. Professionals should also be aware of the importance of children with disabilities spending time with other children their own age and provide them with these opportunities where possible.

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

"I had to give it up (work) so I have to live on income support and I'd much rather be working so money's always tight you know you live hand to mouth as they say." (Parent of a disabled child)

Many parents of children with disabilities and parents with disabilities find that they are unable to work, have to give up work due to care commitments or their own health, face added pressures at work because they are taking time off due to ill health or require a flexible employer who will allow for their child's care needs. All of these factors are barriers for families with disabilities with regards to working. Childcare for children with disabilities can also be problematic due to the specialist care needed and the range of after school activities can be limited. It is also harder as a disabled child gets older to find suitable and affordable childcare arrangements. Being unable to work coupled with the increased costs faced by families where there are disabilities can lead to families experiencing extreme financial difficulties. This will be looked at in more detail in [Financial Inclusion](#), however it is essential that families are supported and that services are in place to help families remain in or return to work to avoid the financial strain unemployment places on a family.

Many parents of children with disabilities who have high care needs struggle to remain in employment due to their care commitments. It may be that their child needs 24 hour care or, if their child is at

school, they may have to be constantly on call if the school needs to get hold of them;

"I can't work because I'm a single parent and I have to give 24 hours care to my son and I'm also on call all the time he's at school." (Parent of a child with a disability)

In some cases one partner is able to remain in employment whilst the other commits full time to being a carer for their child. For obvious reasons this is not possible for single parents and, due to extremely high care needs, sometimes both parents must leave their job;

"It's a full time job looking after them [children] so neither of them [parents] have been able to go back to work and like I say he's been in and out of hospital having various things anyway so you know it's been a real struggle for them." (Disability Worker, 2010 Needs Assessment)

For parents of children without disabilities childcare is an available, if expensive, solution if both parents need or want to return to work after the birth of their child. When the child reaches school age they can drop their child off at work and, if available and required, use child care or after school clubs to care for their child until they are able to leave work at the end of the day. When necessary parents can be contacted if there is an issue or an emergency however with a non-disabled child the likelihood of such issues or emergencies arising is higher. With a disabled child

many parents remain on call even if their child is attending childcare or at school meaning their employer would need to be flexible in allowing them to take these regular 'emergency' phone calls;

"I get 5 calls a day at work because mainstream school can't cope with him. It's literally things like, he won't take his jumper off, he doesn't like the sunlight – I wish I knew what you wanted me to do about that." (Parent of a child with disabilities)

Those parents who are not necessarily 'on-call' to the same extent suffer difficulties returning to work due to a lack of after school provision for children with disabilities;

"I would like to work... but obviously I couldn't take a job because there's no after school provision at all." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Even if a school does provide after school clubs there can be other issues such as transport which limit whether children are able to attend;

"They won't allow the transport to come back and pick them, if you don't have your own transport. If you want them to do an after school club you've got to pick them up yourself." (Parent of a child with disabilities)

There is a need for after school provision for children with disabilities to be in place at both mainstream and special schools and transport issues need to be addressed alongside this to ensure that the provision is accessible by all.

Children without disabilities grow up, mature and gain independence meaning that by a certain age they are able to be left at home on their own. This is not always the case with children with disabilities, as mentioned previously, they can remain dependant on others throughout their life. As children with disabilities get older, however, parents report that their access to childcare decreases further and what is available is very expensive;

"You won't get a childcare take him on because he's over 16 so he's got to be CRB checked and also because he's so big and they're worried he'll kick off they would only ever do it on a one to one so nobody will do it because they're actually financially, for them, much better off looking after three or four children." (Parent of a child with disability)

This lack of childcare provision leads some parents to rely on "Take a Break" to allow them time to work when this service should be used to allow parents time for them to relax;

"I think that's true of work as well because I've relied on "Take a Break", short breaks and all sorts of other things to actually then work especially during the holidays, school holidays." (Parent of a child with a disability)

The core purpose of the "Take a Break" service is not to provide childcare provision so that parents of disabled children are able to go to work or attend their own appointments etc. A service which did provide this would be of great benefit to parents as it would allow them to use the "Take a Break" service for time to themselves. However, creating this as a separate service in itself would pose problems as it can take children a long time to build a relationship with someone and agree to spend time with them.

"Mine won't go with a complete stranger, it would take months before he'd go off with somebody." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Creating this as an extension of the "Take a Break" service would be the ideal as it would provide continuity of care for children whilst providing additional support for parents to keep their jobs and attend to their own health needs.

Parents who themselves have a disability may struggle to work or may have to leave work due to their health deteriorating. Those who were not born with a disability may have to leave work when they become ill. If people become unable to perform the duties of their role due to their disability they can feel that they are being forced to leave their employment and move onto benefits;

"I can't do manual work now so my boss phoned me the other day and she was sort of saying to me there's a couple of ways we can go

now you can hand your notice in... I've got 14 years' service."
(Parent with a disability)

To help support these families and avoid them having to leave work and move onto benefits it would be beneficial if employers could work with employees to adapt their roles and provide support as needed to help people with disabilities to remain in employment

Those who have left a previous role due to their disability may lack the confidence to apply for jobs if they become able to work again believing that employers will overlook their skills and focus on the potential cost to the company due to their health issues;

"You're not going to get a flexible employer in today's society... when you've got 2 people going for a job and they see me stuck in a wheelchair and then they see somebody else who's not they're going to take the able bodied person that's not going to have time off and cost that company money." (Parent with a disability)

Work could be done with people to build their confidence when returning to the job market to help them to realise that they do have skills and knowledge to offer employees and to help them see that they have a lot to offer an employer. There is also a need to help people with disabilities such as MS to identify low stress jobs / careers to move into as stress and pressure in the work place can aggravate the symptoms of some conditions;

"It's the pressure... if I could go back to work now I'd prefer an easy job." (Parent with a disability)

The Child Poverty Strategy should look into joined up work between those working with parents with disabilities or parents of disabled children and those looking at creating jobs within Warwickshire to ensure the needs of this willing-to-work population are taken into account.

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

Children with disabilities are, in the main, not going to see their condition or disability "improve"; they are likely to need to cope with their disability for the duration of their lives. This means that early intervention to help parents help their children manage their disability is time invested in improving both the parent's and the child's quality of life.

A key issue which parent's continued to raise from the 2010 needs assessment to the 2012 needs assessment is that services do not get involved in the child's life early enough. Parents aren't always aware of what help and services they are entitled to access and by the time they access the help the child (and the parent/family) has missed out on many months, if not years, of support.

"I think the younger the children are and the more broad a range of services they can access the more they're going to get from it

because it can be a drip, drip, drip and it literally can take years".
(Parent of a child with a disability)

Some parents involved in this needs assessment firmly believed that early intervention was key to helping their child to cope better in the future. One parent advised that she was hoping to expose her son to as many different experiences as possible whilst he was young in the hopes that this encourage more flexibility in their lives as he got older;

"If I can expose him to as many situations as I can while he's young hopefully some of these things that he'll meet later on in life won't be such an impact on him and I will have a degree of flexibility which some of these parents don't have." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Whilst many disabilities cannot be "cured" the quality of the young person's life can be improved by early intervention. In the case of children with an autistic spectrum disorder, early diagnosis and intervention is crucial to their mental health and wellbeing in future life:

"Lots of people with autism develop a mental health condition purely because their needs are not met." (Parent of child with ASD)

"It was too late by the time the diagnosis came through. His school life had been ruined." (Parent of child with ASD)

Monitoring children with a disability is important from a young age as the side effects and impact of many illnesses on a child can take their toll and lead to mental ill health. Depending on the illness and the other children they mix with it may be that children are experiencing the death of friends from a young age;

"It sort of built up, losing friends at a young age... I still suffer from depression now. I'd be lying if I said it hadn't left a lasting impression." (Young adult with a disability)

It is essential that support is in place for children to deal with the loss of friends and that they have professional support from an early age to help them deal with any psychological issues caused by their illness or disability;

"An assessment of the child's emotional/psychological needs should be in place for each child at point of diagnosis. Then any potential problems can be identified and dealt with before they become an issue and any issues arise can be dealt with swiftly." (Professional working with children with disabilities)

Schools have an important role to play in identifying disabilities, developmental disorders and mental health issues at as early a stage as possible. Training in identifying issues is essential to early intervention, as is awareness of what services are available to schools to use. The trading of certain services adds additional risk as schools may delay calling in professionals to avoid the cost of the traded service.

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

Families where one or more member is disabled can face extra financial pressures to those families where no member has a disability. As mentioned in the [Jobs and Skills section](#), families can find it difficult to work / may have to leave work due to their disability or caring responsibilities. Families also face extra costs due to disabilities. This can include increased washing, the need for their children to use nappies for longer than children without a disability and even not being able to take advantage of special offers because their child / children will only eat particular foods or brands or have to be on specific diets;

"I can't think "you know that's on special offer I'll do this or do that" because he only eats the same things day in day out, week in, week out." (Carer of a child with a disability)

"Especially when he's on a gluten free diet as well, that's not a cheap option." (Carer of a child with a disability)

These extra costs coupled with the fact that they may be unable to work leaves many families struggling to manage on benefits and having to choose which activities their children can access. For example, the cost of swimming is not just the cost of accessing the pool;

"It costs me £28.80 to send him (swimming) because he needs 2 hours support cos he can't change, he can't go to the toilet, he'd

run around naked he wouldn't care." (Parent of a child with a disability)

The extra costs of activities mean that parents start to choose what they can afford for their children to access. These may be pragmatic choices on the parents' part and not necessarily the activities the child would enjoy most;

"You start choosing, well we won't do that but we'll do this because this is better for him, you know, learning to swim is a life skill but cheerleading, you can take it or leave it." (Parent of a child with a disability)

Whilst this is the case for many families who do not have children with disabilities with regards to early intervention it is crucial that children with disabilities have the opportunity to have as many different experiences as possible to understand what their abilities are rather than focusing on their disabilities.

The benefits to which children with disabilities are entitled to are often complicated for their parents, who may have disabilities themselves. The 2010 needs assessment highlighted the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) form itself as a barrier to receiving help as there are 31 pages of guidance on how to fill it in before 41 pages which must be filled in, requesting information about the child's circumstances. Then the form needs renewing at different intervals depending on the child's condition. This puts strain on parents to ensure they put down all their difficulties, which is often hard to

focus on, to ensure their child is assessed at the appropriate level of need;

"A lot of them get the forms and just think ah I can't do this and you're asking them to, I guess that's their life, that's what they do, that's how they look after their children and you're asking them to write it down on paper worst case scenario and it can be really quite upsetting for them." (Disability Support Worker, 2010)

Some parents reported having their needs reassessed and their DLA reduced which put them under great financial strain;

"One family... were claiming DLA, they had to go through a whole DLA assessment when she's obviously, she needs to claim that, her mobility is very greatly reduced and her partner is a registered carer so claims carer's allowance." (Children's Centre Worker)

Whilst it is necessary for there to be a great deal of scrutiny to avoid people making false claims it must be appreciated that the people being asked to complete the forms are already under pressure and completing these forms is a daunting and onerous task for them. The support from Disability Support Workers and other people who support families with completing these forms and ensuring they receive what they are entitled to is invaluable to families.

Even when families are receiving their full benefit entitlement workers reported that any change to a person's details such as a

change of address can leave families without money from tax credits for long periods of time;

"Because they stop the payments whenever you make a change and they leave the family without tax credits for weeks and weeks." (Disability Support Worker, 2010)

Carers also report that their carer's allowance can be stopped once they start to draw their state pension;

"I don't get carer's allowance because I'm an old age pensioner." (Carer of a child with disabilities)

The Direct Gov website states that 'If you receive Carer's Allowance and start receiving State Pension at a higher rate than Carer's Allowance, you may stop receiving Carer's Allowance.'⁴⁵ Services such as CAB are important as they can explain benefits allowance and how the benefit system works. However it would also be beneficial for those working with families with disabilities to have a good up to date knowledge of benefit entitlement so that they can support families within the home and carers do not need to find time to access another service.

Budgeting for a child with disabilities is challenging as parents do not know when an unexpected expense will arise e.g. a specially

⁴⁵

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/CaringForSomeone/MoneyMatters/DG_10038111accessed22/08/2012

adapted car which provides their lifeline breaks down or a vital piece of equipment breaks/stops working. Parents have praised personal budgets as it allows them to spend the money on what they feel is important to improve their child's quality of life. One family wanted to take their child to a faraway holiday resort for a once in a lifetime holiday. They needed to convince the IDS team that it was a good use of the personal budget but after putting forward a good case for how it would strengthen the family's resilience they were allowed to use the money for the holiday. The outcome for the family was very positive and the family which was on the verge of breaking up became much stronger as a result.

e) Housing Needs

Families with a disabled child often have little choice in where they live as houses have to be specially adapted for the child or their children do not respond well to change and so need to remain in familiar surroundings. This reduces their choice in environment and should relations with neighbours breakdown, it leaves families vulnerable to bullying. For example, the tragic case in Leicester of Fiona Pilkington who killed herself and her disabled daughter Francesca after a long campaign of harassment and anti-social behaviour by local youths⁴⁶. A greater understanding by the Police of disability related hate crime and antisocial behaviour would help support families where one or more members has a disability to remain in their homes.

⁴⁶ http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/news/Pages/pr_240511_pilkington.aspx

Families who need adaptations to their house often struggle to seek out grants or sources of financial support which could help with the cost or the strings attached to the support prevent the grant being used for the greatest benefit. More pragmatism from grant providers in what constitutes a benefit to the disabled child would help parents adapt their homes to make their child more comfortable:

"A lot of it is little things but it's bigger things as well like adaptations to your house and things like that. You know we sort of investigated the possibility of getting some sort of grant and we were told if you spent £100,000 on an extension that was just for him we might consider giving you a little bit." (Parent of a child with a disability)

"It's a council property, so we put in an application for a dropped curb and a driveway which was agreed so then we've got to find the funding to pay for it and we've had quotes at three and a half thousand pounds... it's a lot of money and it's not subsidised at all if there's any disabilities by the local authority" (Disability worker 2010)

Parents have reported being forced to give up their house because they are unable to afford their mortgage after their child is born disabled and one or both of them has to give up work to be the carer;

*“They’re only a very young couple, but they were young professionals and they had their own house with a mortgage and they had really quite good jobs and they had cars and then they had the twins and for the first, most of the first year they were in hospital... and they ended up both of them losing their jobs, then they lost their house and they just were absolutely desperate.”
(Disability Support Worker, 2010)*

Support from CAB and other agencies working to help families stay in their homes and manage their mortgage payments would reduce the number of repossessions by families where one or more members has a disability.

Prisoners and their Families

It is estimated that there are around 160,000 children with a parent in prison each year. This is around 2.5 times the number of children who are in care and more than 6 times the number of children on the Child Protection Register.⁴⁷ Whilst at school it is estimated that 7% of children will experience their father's imprisonment.⁴⁸ In 2006, more children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce⁴⁹. Detailed data about the numbers of children in Warwickshire who have one or both parents in prison is not available but it is hoped work being undertaken in this area will provide the missing information to understand the scale of the issue. Crucial to this is agencies working together to share information and to prevent prisoners' families from serving hidden sentences.

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

"It [member of the F.A.S.T.] was the first person who said they will do something and then do it" (21 year old prisoner speaking to professional working with prisoners' families)

⁴⁷ Ministry of Justice and Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Children of Offenders Review*, June 2007

⁴⁸ Department for Education & Skills, (2003) *Every Child Matters*, London: Stationery Office

⁴⁹ *Action for Prisoners' Families, CLINKS, Prison Advice & Care Trust, Prison Reform Trust, The children and families of prisoners: recommendations for government*, 5 Dec 2007

A new project managed by the Family Advice Support Team (F.A.S.T) has been set up in Warwickshire with the aim of supporting prisoners and their families. It takes a whole family approach by offering family advice and support during difficult times. Staff members offer a variety of help tailored to individual needs and aim for prisoners to maintain good communication and positive relationships following separation within families.

*"Our aim is to catch children who are falling through the net."
Professional working with prisoners' families)*

Families tell us when a parent/family member is incarcerated it is a sensitive issue. Feelings of shame and isolation prevent the lone parent/family from asking for help. They are therefore left to cope in situations which are alien to them or they have no experience of;

"It's only through relationship building that I found out one of the mum's partners had gone to prison and the school didn't know, we didn't know we weren't informed and that particularly group of families where one person is in prison we are struggling to engage with because we are not informed statutorily that that person's gone to prison." (Children's Centre Worker)

"They'd been in prison that whole time and nobody was supporting that family. Nobody knew she had 2 children, one under 5 one at school at the local primary. The school didn't know because she openly admitted that. I asked her if I could share the information with the head just so they were aware but you know nobody knew,

the nursery didn't know. Nobody was supporting her to claim benefits because obviously the income that was being generated however legally had suddenly ceased and she was claiming nothing and she struggled and struggled and struggled". (Children's Centre Worker)

Any length of time spent away from family can seem like forever and over time families' change, children grow up and the lone parents become more independent;

"You've got a guy that's come out of prison and his partner is in a different place to where he is. He's going to have the frustration, he is going to expect his wife/partner and children to be doing what they were doing when he went inside. When he comes out he finds his son is now 6ft 2 inches, his daughter is wearing skirts around her neck and is going out with boys. That's not his family; it's a completely differently family. At a time of slotting back in it causes friction, it causes anxiety, he's back on the drink and drugs, relationships break down, he reoffends because it's the only thing he knows or he goes back to his old crowd who he felt secure with; he's back reoffending." Professional working with prisoners' families)

"Dad goes in when the partner is pregnant and if they get a four year sentence they have a toddler when they get out" (Professional working with prisoners' families)

Research shows that family ties have a positive effect on prisoner rehabilitation especially with regard to finding employment or housing.⁵⁰ If the prisoner and their family are supported through their issues and the integration back in to the family by the prisoners is managed appropriately it may help reduce the risk of family breakdown as well as reducing recidivism.

"The other element that is going on that has happened at Rye Hill is around parenting courses, so actually putting on parent training for the dads who are incarcerated so effectively they come out of prison better parents than when they went in." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

"Dads wonder what their role will be when they get out. They see themselves in the "male provider" role but then the mother starts dressing differently or social services get involved. You hear stuff like "Help! How do I act when I go home? What do I talk about to my children?" (Professional working with prisoners' families)

It's important to both prisoners and their children that the absent parent still plays a role in their child's lives. Not seeing them can create anxiety and a feeling of loss, similar to that experienced after bereavement.

⁵⁰ Niven, S and Stewart, D (2005) Resettlement Outcomes on Release from Prison, Home Office Findings 248

"The prison has got a really good project set up about Storybook Dads where the dads read a story on a tape, it's copied on to DVD/CD, it's then sent with the book to the child so the child can listen to the story being read by the dad and they can follow the book. Which is probably something these dads may not do on the outside but you're getting bonding so the child can say "yeah my dad still loves me"." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

The Warwickshire Family Information Service is hoping to replicate what they offer to families, to prisoners within the prison library;

"Running drop in centres in the library so if they have questions, spoken to their other half or they are worried their child is being bullied they can come in and find out some basic information. We can give them the info that they can pass on to their families so if we have not seen them directly, they can, so suddenly they have a role again. "Yep I have spoken to the local service and they said if you contact these people they will be able to help". It gives them a role back and will reduce the anxiety, stress and hopefully we will see less incidents of them starting fights etc helps maintain relationships and will run alongside other services." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

"Dads are dads even if they are locked up, they are still part of the family and they still have a right to have that information as well and also there is a real gain for them to have access to that." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

If support services for drug, alcohol and anger management were offered to both prisoners and families at the same time, it would give both partners the opportunity to be at the same level of support at the same time the offender returns home, therefore enabling them to support each other and their family through a time of transition;

"If we get the families working together they have a better chance of having a successful relationship on his release" (Professional working with prisoners' families)

From an adult's point of view visiting a prison can be a daunting prospect, however for a child this can be a very scary prospect as they are not child friendly places;

"Just to get in through the visitors centre to the hall where you meet the person you are coming to visit you have to register in, then go through, clear all belongings and stuff, you're not allowed to take, keys, mobile phones aerosols etc., It's worse than going through airport security. You go through 2 air locked doors, there's never a situation where both sides are open at the same time, never a possibility that anyone can get through and you know in a rush. It's literally you go in to a holding area, the door behind you gets shut, once that one is secured the one in front of you opens and you go through and then you're through the scanners and pat downs and all those sorts of checks. Once you are in the heart of the prisons you are like 3 layers of locked in"(Professional working with prisoners' families)

A child visiting their parent in this environment is likely to be affected by what they have experienced and work being carried out with other agencies involved with the family such as school or CAFs will help mitigate the impact of these experiences.

There are a sizeable number of Gypsy/Roma travellers who are incarcerated and further work is currently being set up with the help of Gypsy and Traveller (G & T) peer supporters to meet the needs of this community. Traveller prisoners hold monthly meetings supported by a diversity officer. The aim of peer supporters and the diversity officer is to 'forge links with community members who are in prison already'. By working closely with the F.A.S.T, the F.A.S.T can ensure the questions they ask the G & T community are appropriate and likely to get to the heart of issues. Anecdotally, professionals say that traveller prisoners perceive that being identified as a member of the G & T community in prison can be a risk and can therefore be at a disadvantage. F.A.S.T aims to work with the diversity officer and peer supporters to reduce these perceived risks and disadvantages to both the traveller prisoners and their families;

"There's another traveller that's coming in who we were not aware of. What we want to do is be able to link in to all new prisoners so we can talk to all the Gypsy/Roma travellers. [A peer supporter] can link in with workers so we can then access this group which is quite a sizable number. They won't open up to anybody and if we can start linking in with them we might start to get something."
(Professional working with prisoners' families)

"We have got a lot of work with a Muslim group, we have got 2 fantastic Imans in the prison, really nice blokes. I pointed out I do not have a great deal of knowledge of Islam, much to my shame, I should do, but working with them we can get, we can create a link."
(Professional working with prisoners' families)

F.A.S.T also works with the prison chaplaincy to provide holistic support when the team is not in the prison. Building up a network of all round support is key to the success of the F.A.S.T. Working with the charity Inside Out has helped the local authority in assisting those who are 'hard to reach';

"Families who do not trust statutory services, that's where Inside Out come into their own." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

Professionals report that prisoners find it difficult to find work once released from prison because of the stigma of a criminal record. Prior to 2001⁵¹, regulation of the security industry was less stringent and so those with criminal records were able to work as door security or 'bouncers'. Now this industry requires a licence, strictly issued by the Security Industry Authority, ex-prisoners who may previously have been employed as doormen, no longer have that job as an option;

⁵¹ Private Security Industry Act 2001

“Years ago they could have got cash in hand or door work. Now there’s CRB checks it’s more difficult” (Professional working with prisoners’ families)

Brick laying qualifications such as the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) are becoming more popular as ex-prisoners find they are more likely to get employment in the construction industry with a criminal record than other industries e.g. door security.

Many prisons provide prisoners with employment to enable them to find employment after leaving prison;

“All prisoners can have employment whilst in prison, textiles, construction and child care, hairdressing, library work, orderly work etc. There are agencies out there that support prisoners to get in to employment.” (Professional working with prisoners’ families)

The literacy levels in prisons are lower than that of the non-prison population with half of all prisoners being at or below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11-year-old) in reading, two-thirds in numeracy, and four-fifths in writing.⁵² Research shows that these are the skills required for 96% of all jobs.⁵³ Other research demonstrates that having poor literacy and numeracy skills directly

⁵² Home Office, *Prison statistics England and Wales 2000, 2001.*

⁵³ *Comparison between the basic skills levels found in Home Office, Prison statistics England and Wales 2000 and the audit of skills required for jobs in Basic Skills Agency and Institute for Employment Studies, Basic Skills and Jobs, 1993.*

increases the risk of offending⁵⁴. In 2010/11 17.5% of Travellers of Irish Heritage and 10.8% of Gypsy/Roma ethnicity achieved 5 or more GCSEs including Maths and English. This is compared with 58.2% of all pupils nationally.⁵⁵ This puts G & T prisoners at increased risk of recidivism and lower likelihood of employment.

Poor literacy can prevent prisoners from accessing information such as that relating to their families e.g. leaflets produced for benefits information or for themselves e.g. potential courses to attend. This should be borne in mind when providing prisoners with information in a written form.

Professionals identified an additional potential barrier to employment of ex-prisoners which was that of substance misuse. Whilst the prisoner may have successfully stopped misusing a substance in prison, once they are released there is always the chance of a relapse. Reasons professionals gave for ex-prisoners relapsing included ‘difficulty finding a job with their criminal history’, ‘being of no fixed abode’, their ‘head being all over the place’ and ‘having contact issues with their children’. Difficulty finding a job can be both a cause and an effect of substance misuse which leads to a vicious circle of circumstances. One ex-prisoner hoped to get his fork lift driver’s licence but was on methadone and thus not safe to be on a training scheme operating heavy machinery.

⁵⁴ *Basic Skills Agency, Basic Skills and Crime, 2002.*

⁵⁵ *DCSF. (20010/11). GCSE Attainment by pupil characteristics, England*

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

"We have already, in just the few weeks we've been running, made a major impact on several families where we've increased their safety, we've reduced the risk of offences against them and we've increased the safety of the local area by informing local agencies." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

The Family Information Service facilitate a drop in session at the visiting centre at HMP Onley and through this session visiting families can be signposted to schools, Children Centres and Health services within their local area, and any other service appropriate to the needs of the family;

"A family with a young child under 5, they weren't engaged with the health visitor they'd had problems with them. They were not engaged with the Children's Centre. They were not accessing any childcare. They were completely off the radar but really needing support and we picked it up through the FIS brokerage service basically to work with them did a home visit talked through options with them, told them about different services, supported them to get back engaged with the health visitor." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

Anecdotally, professionals working with prisoners' families have found there are often mental health issues which impact on the parent's ability to parent their children;

"Parent support can come in different ways and will depend on what the family needs. If it is a very specific issue then there may be a very specific service that deals with that. For example if a parent's got mental health issues then we would actually dial in mental health services ... You know it's about dealing with the root cause and not plastering over it" (Professional working with prisoners' families)

However, professionals also believe parents can hide behind labels in order to avoid dealing with the issues at the core of their problems;

"I am surprised the amount of people who say they are bipolar. It seems to be flavour of the month. I say to them "explain bipolar to me" and they can't...and it's a case of "I can get money if I say I'm bipolar"." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

Often prisoners have high anxiety levels because they believe not enough information is being passed to them or they don't understand the processes which are taking place. If a child of a prisoner is being adopted or under a Child Protection order, prisoners can become so anxious that they act out within the prison;

"I think I would probably have kicked off by now" (Prisoner speaking to professional working with prisoners' families)

The F.A.S.T professional helped explain the seriousness of the situation to the prisoner and facilitate a final contact meeting between the father and the child. This helped the father's wishes and feelings to be put across in a way he hadn't been able to previously. The father had thought he would be getting his child back when he left prison and work by the F.A.S.T professional ensured that the father and the child were able to say goodbye to each other. The father also agreed to 'letterbox contact' so he could be kept up to date with his child's progress. The chaplaincy worked with the F.A.S.T professional to maintain support throughout this time.

Many of the issues caused by parents being in prison is a lack of awareness by the parent of the effect it may have on the child regardless of if the child knows they are in prison or 'working away'. It is entirely the prisoner's prerogative to try and protect their child from the truth but children can access the internet and find out if what they have been told is true. Also, gossip often has a habit of coming to the attention of children and if a child finds out this way they can be left very hurt and feel betrayed.

*"It has caused problems, we do know of one family, where the kids found out as it was in the local newspaper and their friends at school found out from the paper, so they found out from a completely different route and the family had not told them."
(Professional working with prisoners' families)*

The F.A.S.T supports parents telling their children where their parent is to avoid these feelings of betrayal. One child had been told by her father that he was in rehab for four years and asked "Daddy are you feeling better yet? When are you coming home?" Her mother had already died through alcohol misuse so her father thought it was the right thing to tell her.

Professionals said that parents often also hide the fact their partner is in prison from schools and they believed it was due to the potential stigma attached to the child. However, schools often see the impact of a parent being in prison through the child's behaviour at school, particularly around visiting days. In addition to this, because family visitor passes are difficult for offenders to obtain, they may be issued on school days and so their child has to miss school in order to visit them. This creates issues with absenteeism if the school is not aware that the child has a parent in prison;

*"The child is playing up and the school is going to see some impact and it is likely they will see a difference in their school work as well as their behaviour because of the massive change in the family home. It is going to have an impact and it is likely they will pick up something is wrong whether they know what, is a different matter. And I guess it is going to come down to how good a relationship the parent has with the school whether or not they trust them to be supportive or not. Some families have great relationships with the school some have terrible; it is all a factor in that."
(Professional working with prisoners' families)*

Schools have a key part to play in safeguarding children who are in contact with ex-prisoners. It is in schools where children are every day that behaviour changes are most likely to be noted by professionals who know them best;

"A young man who was released who was extremely violent was released to a house under license. When I did a few checks there were quite a few extended truths told and downright lies. I've had to do a bit of digging and we've finally had to put in a child protection report in case there's an incident in the house, red flagged. We've notified the children's schools that this guy has moved in, watch out for any change in them. And if there is any slight deviation from this guy's license he is recalled immediately. He is not the children's father." Professional working with prisoners' families)

Due to the location of the prison it may take families all day to travel to and from the prison for a 1 hour visit. This has implications for the child spending time out of school. There are also financial implications to the cost of public transport/taxis to which the family may not be able to meet and may not be aware of schemes to assist prisoners' families with travel costs. Additionally these schemes do not cover unmarried partners wanting to visit except where they are deemed to be acting as escort for the child of the prisoner⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Prisoners' families and friends service: information sheet No.1. Assisted Prison Visits: getting help with travel costs, July 2009.

"There are problems with visiting in the sense that they can often be a long way from the prison. If you are trying to get even from Warwickshire to Hewell which is only just over the border in Worcestershire, well it's in the middle of nowhere. In fact it isn't exactly on a usual route through, you are going quite out into the sticks to get to it. If you are on public transport you are going to be taking a long time to get there. If you are trying to get to Hewell and you started from Warwickshire you are probably talking about a couple of hours each way, probably having to go into Birmingham and out again, catch a bus and the bus will drop you at the end of the drive which I think is about a 1 mile to walk to the visitors' centre. So if you have a buggy then it not the most realistic, or you're paying for a taxi which is £7 - £8 from the train station each way." (Professional working with prisoners' families)

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

Sometimes the main source of income for a family has been the proceeds from the offender's crimes. When the offender is then imprisoned, the partner on the outside can then be left with no income and little knowledge of where to go for help.

"Finance can be an interesting one. Depending on what they have been locked up for it may well be that may be their primary source of income prior to them being caught. So you've suddenly got a family who have no income and there is often a lack of trust of services, so they won't necessarily want to talk to what is perceived as a formal service. Obviously a lot fear of social services tends to

*exist everywhere. They can get themselves in to a real muddle.”
(Professional working with prisoners’ families)*

“Families where they are more likely to have someone end up in prison are also likely to live in low income areas and more than likely to be vulnerable in other ways.” (Professional working with prisoners’ families)

The Family Information Service (FIS) in Warwickshire offers outreach information within the prison visitors’ centres to provide families with the information they need to claim benefits they may now be entitled to. As the family’s circumstances have changed, they may also be entitled to additional benefits to the ones they were claiming while the offender was living with the family. The FIS can also signpost families to this information.

e) Housing Needs

Depending on the offence for which the offender was incarcerated, there may be instances where social care professionals recommend the offender does not return to the family home. This then creates a housing need for the offender. Professionals anecdotally report that;

*“Most of the people we talked to today will be homeless when released. They will be on the housing priority list as homeless.”
(Professional working with prisoners’ families)*

One instance of a father’s incarceration leading to housing issues was where his partner was assaulted at their child’s school due to ongoing gang conflict and the child witnessed the assault. The child was then no longer attending that school so both the mother and child could avoid the perpetrators. Nacro worked with the F.A.S.T. professionals to support a move to a new house and get the child into a new school. The mother was supported to access benefit claims in the new house and link with the Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

Sometimes prisoners’ families can be targeted by their communities which may require them to be rehoused. Bullying of children is one of the main reasons prisoners ask for help from the F.A.S.T. Alternatively it may be necessary to rehouse the family to prevent domestic violence when the prisoner is released.

The remit of the F.A.S.T. is primarily to help those who are resident in Warwickshire. However, in certain circumstances they are able to offer assistance to those families who have a family member in a Warwickshire prison but are not resident in Warwickshire. HMP Onley for example has a high number of prisoners who are originally from London;

“We’ve been involved with a Turkish family in London to try and find them accommodation. We’ve got a church group involved, we’ve had the police involved, and we’ve had social services involved. I think we’ll get the work done through the church group because they don’t trust anyone else.” (Professional working with prisoners’ families)

Service families and families of ex service men and women

When the 2011 Child Poverty Strategy was published “Dependent children in a Local Authority who live in households whose equivalised income is below 60% of the contemporary national median”⁵⁷ were those National Indicator 116 deemed to be “in poverty”. Children who live in service families do not fall under this measure of poverty as servicemen/women are paid in excess of this threshold. However there are a number of ways of understanding “disadvantage” which service children come under the umbrella of. Social exclusion is the key one as “children of armed services personnel ... are disproportionately represented at schools in rural areas. Due to the high mobility of many households of armed services personnel, pupils repeatedly show gaps in their education and are often not adequately catered for if they have SEN.”⁵⁸

The article goes on to say “Children from armed services backgrounds are also frequently living in quasi lone-parent households, often in isolation from civil communities and other sources of support which would reinforce any experiences of social exclusion, particularly in times of crisis.”⁵⁹ The mobility during service children’s education and their social isolation from support

⁵⁷ http://data.gov.uk/dataset/ni_116_proportion_of_children_in_poverty

⁵⁸ <http://www.atl.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policies/poverty-and-social-exclusion-in-rural-areas.asp>

⁵⁹ ATL Ibid

sources make service families vulnerable to being disadvantaged. They face many challenges and changes in their lives not experienced by children of non-service or civilian families. These include having to move on a regular basis, possibly every 2 to 3 years, leading to a new house, a new area, a new school, having to leave friends behind and start to build relationships with new people again. If their family are moved abroad they may struggle with language barriers with children outside of the barracks. They may also have to cope with one parent being away from home for long periods whilst they are actively deployed. This will be a cause of worry and stress for the whole family and the parent left behind will have to learn how to cope as a ‘single parent’ temporarily.

The Department for Education (DFE) state that around 0.5% of the school population in England are service children however the Ministry of Defence estimate from their personnel records that there are between 38,000 and 175,000 dependants of military personnel in education.⁶⁰ These variances in figures show a need for accurate recording of the number of service children. The school census, a return made to local authorities three times a year, does ask schools to indicate whether a child is a service child in the collection in January. However ‘only current members of the regular armed forces that have been assigned Personal Status Category 1 or 2 by the Secretary of State for Defence are recorded.’ Also if a child’s parents are divorced and they no longer live with

⁶⁰ Report Summary, *Children in Service Families, The quality and impact of partnership provision for children in Service families, OFSTED, 2011*

the parent who is a member of the armed forces then they would not be recorded as a service child on the school census.

In 2011 the Ministry of Defence requested OFSTED carry out a survey to 'examine educational and other outcomes for service children and to evaluate the quality of provision made for them whether living abroad or in England.'⁶¹ The report highlighted the following areas where schools and local authorities could improve:

- 'Problems with school admissions; a small proportion of the families interviewed had siblings in the same key stage in different schools because of unsuccessful applications and a lack of availability of school places
- Children missing parts of, or repeating areas of, the curriculum
- Poor transfer of information about pupils between schools, with particular difficulties with the transfer of statements of special educational need
- Slow assessment and support for service children with special educational needs or a disability
- A general lack of awareness of service families and their additional needs.'⁶²

⁶¹ Report Summary, *Children in Service Families, The quality and impact of partnership provision for children in Service families, OFSTED, 2011*

⁶² Report Summary Ibid

a) Taking a Whole Family Approach

Given their unique circumstances, it is understandable that service families face a number of challenges that non-service families do not face. As mentioned previously these include often having to move area and therefore not having a choice on where they live, possibly having to move abroad, facing the challenge of having a partner actively deployed, the challenges faced by personnel returning from a period of active duty and in worst case scenarios facing the challenge of the serving partner being injured or killed whilst on active duty.

Due to service families having to move around the country and possibly abroad families do not have the choice of where they live. This means that unlike non-service families they do not have the option, for example, to move to live closer to parents for their support when they start a family. They could be living a long way from their family and support network which can take a period of adjustment to get used to. Not having family nearby for support may be noticed more if one parent is actively deployed meaning the other parent must manage as a 'single parent' temporarily;

"We've got families here from Nepal but with the British people Ireland, Scotland, Wales so they're living in this community but they don't have mum and dad down the road or siblings within the same area or fairly close by that can provide assistance... that's something that takes a good few years for a newly married spouse

to get used to as far as the army is concerned.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

A main worry and concern for service families is understandably the thought of their partner being injured or killed whilst on active duty.

“If it’s a married soldier and they’ve got family then there used to be, one of the big worries a wife will have is what if this happens to my husband while he’s away? What happens to me? What happens to my married quarter and all the rest of it?” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

The Ministry of Defence have many support systems in place to ensure that service personnel and their family are taken care of in such a situation. In the case of a serving partner being injured arrangements are made to ensure that their family can easily visit them;

“If it’s a serious injury or an injury the Casualty Visiting Officer will make the necessary arrangements for their family to visit the injured person once the injured person gets back to the UK, they all go into Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham and up there, there is accommodation there where family can stay.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

In the case of bereavement the surviving partner and their family are supported by the Ministry of Defence emotionally, financially

and with regards to their housing. The emotional support is on-going and it is ensured that the support continues until it is no longer needed by the family;

“Where a bereavement happens, whether it’s a serving person or not, the first thing that happens is that every unit has to have a number of qualified people, people qualified to act as Casualty Notifying Officers and Casualty Visiting Officers. The Casualty Notifying Officer is the person that goes to the home and informs the next of kin what’s happened, that’s the initial notification and within 24 hours the Casualty Visiting Officer will go to the family, the Casualty Visiting Officer is the person who will become a sign poster and the main support to the family... Invariably the Visiting Officer will take responsibility for the organisation of the family’s issues... The Casualty Visiting Officer stays involved and in contact with that family until that family no longer needs it.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

The support around housing and finance will be looked at in Financial Inclusion and Housing sections of the report.

Support is also offered to families who are facing marital difficulties or whose marriage has broken down;

“If there is a family or marital break up the non-serving partner would be allowed to stay in the barrack married quarters for 93 days from the time that the break up is formally announced. During that 93 days that spouse needs to be given a great deal of support

to find somewhere else to live, assistance with applying for social housing or whatever other assistance is needed in order for them to be able to leave here and probably go back to their home town. But both members of the marriage would get assistance from an Army Welfare Support worker.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

This support is beneficial, especially if there are children in the family, because it allows for the transition to civilian life to be planned over a period of time so that decisions do not have to be rushed and the best decisions can be made for the parents and the children to ensure positive outcomes for the whole family.

The Ministry of Defence employ Community Development Workers to support the army unit and the station to support the service community at the barracks and to develop activities for the community to enjoy. This includes activities for the children who may not be able to access such services elsewhere. Due to personnel moving on so frequently, these activities are not developed with longevity in mind and rely on the skills of those currently based at the Barracks. If these people are posted elsewhere then the skills are lost and the activities cease;

“We’ve got a swimming pool in the barracks. Earlier this year we had two people posted in to the barracks who have got swimming teacher qualifications and they are now running swimming classes for the children at the camp. But in two years’ time if they are posted or they go there may not be anybody to take that over so

that’s something that falls by the wayside unless we can get the funding with which to be able to pay somebody to continue to do that type of thing because they tend to do it on a voluntary basis.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

As service families can face issues with transport (see [Housing](#)) and can feel isolated it is crucial that activities take place on the barracks to bring the community together and to ensure that the children do not miss out on the opportunity to socialise with other children. It would be beneficial if these initiatives could be maintained long term to ensure consistency or if improvements were made to transport so that activities for children could be accessed more easily off site.

If a service family leaves the armed forces for whatever reason the transition to civilian life can be difficult. The armed forces provide families with homes that are maintained by the Ministry of Defence and they often have access to Welfare Officers who can provide advice and signposting services making it easier for families to find out information and receive support. Once they have left the armed forces they no longer have this support and therefore it is essential that when service families move into civilian life that they are supported during the transition to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and support to make the transition successful;

“When somebody dare I say it leaves the ‘bubble’ that is the armed forces community and goes outside and suddenly find themselves middle of winter early in the morning the boiler’s packed up I’ve got

to arrange for that to be fixed or fix it myself. Who do you call? You can't call somebody else who will come because married quarters are maintained for free." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

"There are big pluses and minuses in terms of the support we try to give the families but what happens when they go outside the service?" (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

b) Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

Whilst those serving in the armed forces are already in employment their spouses may not be. For a non-serving spouse there may be many barriers to employment including the fact they may have to move area regularly meaning they are unable to have a job long term. As many service couple marry at a young age they may not have had the opportunity to gain further education and if they are stationed abroad there may be language and culture barriers. All of these barriers, coupled with the other stresses faced by service families, may lead spouses to choose to not work.

Only being in one place for two to three years presents many barriers to employment. Anecdotally professionals working with service families reported a perception that the spouses of members of the armed forces may be overlooked for jobs;

"Speak to some of the wives and they might say to you "we can't get work locally because as soon as they're aware that we are part

of the service community at Bramcote they know that they're only going to have us as employees for 2, maximum of 3 years and they will take somebody else in preference"... I'm not saying that is fact, it's the perceived impression." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

Because they have to move regularly, spouses are often unable to build up the benefits received from long service with a company;

"They're not going to get the benefits that people get from stopping in employment in one place for a long period of time and it's just soul destroying you just get to know the job and then you've got to go again... some get used to it and some just hate it and I think that's why a lot of the army wives don't work." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

Some employers such as the NHS may be able to transfer the employee to a similar job in the area they are moving to but this is only practical if there is a position available in the new location. If not then as soon as they know where they are moving to they have to start applying for job and attending interviews to try and ensure they have a job to move to;

"If they're in the NHS or something like that sometimes they can get transferred but they start writing for interviews and applying for jobs as soon as they know." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

It is not always going to be possible to find a job before they move or straight away after they have moved and so there can be periods of unemployment. If a job is not found for the first year then the spouse may only have a year in their job before they are moving on again;

"It's hard because you've got to start a new job, you've got to learn the routines all over again. Sometimes it's hard because you can't get a job for 6 months to a year then you're only going to be there for a year." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

Some careers do lend themselves to a certain extent to people who move around regularly. As mentioned in the previous example sometimes it is possible to be transferred in companies such as the NHS but teaching, especially supply teaching can lend itself to regular changes of location;

"A lot of the British mums have got a career either within the NHS, there are a lot of teachers who do supply and things like that so they just sort of fit in where they can." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

Many spouses of service men and women volunteer within the service community, for example in the nurseries, and are sometimes supported to gain qualifications so that if positions come up they can move into them;

"There are a lot of the Nepalese community on here. They tend to go for the carer work or we've put a lot of them through their childcare qualifications here cos most camps have got a childcare facility within the area. What they tend to do is start off as a volunteer and then hope a gap appears for them to step into." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

If families have to move abroad this can pose further issues with finding work. If the family does not speak the language of the country they are moving to then it can be difficult to find work within the local community;

"Sometimes it's abroad and then you've got language barriers and culture issues. But if it's a barracks of course that's all British and there's British schools and that all set up ready for them but again it's the employment for the other half. I mean we have got a lot of mums that are in the MOD." (Worker from nursery on army barracks)

Lack of education or further education can be a barrier to employment for the spouses of service men and women. In order to qualify for accommodation on barracks a couple has to be married. This can mean that couples marry young and as they then move around they miss out on the opportunity to gain further education qualifications;

"Again because a lot of them get together from a young age the further education isn't there... I think because they have to move

around so much and we get a lot of the mums wanting to, after they've had the children, start their further education which we try and help them with. We've got a lot of them going to college, trying to sort out childcare whilst they're at college." (Worker from nursery on army barracks)

In the cases of courses these can sometimes be transferred between colleges when families move and there is also the option of Open University where location is not a factor;

"Sometimes it can be transferred to a college where they move to or there's Open University. We've had a few who have moved half way through their level 3 childcare and they've been able to transfer it over to a college near them." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

Children from service families may face barriers to higher education for financial reasons especially if they have lost a parent. We have been advised of the following scheme being introduced to try to mitigate against this;

"There is a new scheme that's just been brought out the full details of which I don't know but it guarantees bursaries for the children of serving soldiers who've have been killed in action to be able to go to further education, university." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

c) Early Intervention in specific areas

As discussed, service families face a number of issues due to moving around. As well as the issues previously mentioned, the impact of moving on service families can be problems with regards to health and their child's education.

Access to health services can be affected by families moving regularly. This can include issues such as not being able to access an NHS dentist;

"Dentists, that's always a problem, getting a dentist." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

And also a lack of consistency with medical care;

"One of the problems that service families get when they're moving from place to place, if they're already receiving treatment for something in a primary care trust somewhere else, getting that treatment or that specialism transferred with them is very difficult and they quite often end up back on the bottom of the waiting list." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

It is important that service families receive consistent treatment and that this treatment is available to them in whichever primary care trust they are based.

Lack of transport can also affect a family's ability to access medical care. Many barracks are in rurally isolated locations and if a family does not have transport or the transport provision in the area they are based is not adequate then they can struggle to get off site to access medical services. At some barracks, including Gamecock Barracks in Bramcote in Warwickshire a local surgery goes on to the Barracks and runs a family clinic. This provision should be considered at other army barracks to ensure that families can access services;

"As far as medical is concerned we're very lucky here in that Revel surgery who are based in Brinklow run a families clinic here on a Monday morning and Friday morning and that's very handy again for the families a. that don't drive and b. also a good number of the families on these barracks are Ghurka families and the majority of Ghurka wives do not drive at all." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

A child's education or access to education can be affected by service families moving around. The Ministry of Defence highlights a number of issues that families may face regarding their children's education when moving around both Great Britain and in other countries:

- Differences in age ranges of phases of education
- Different examination and assessment systems
- Different curricular structure and content
- Different admission systems

- Different statutory approaches to meeting children's special educational/additional support needs.
- Higher Education funding routes and arrangements.⁶³

It is important that provision is in place to ensure that their education is disrupted as little as possible so that they achieve their full potential. Schools should actively work with the previous school the child attended to ensure a smooth transition to the new school. This is especially necessary where the child has additional needs.

A Ministry of Defence boarding school is available for families to send their children to. Whilst this avoids children having to change schools and provides them with consistent, uninterrupted education, it does mean that they are away from the family unit;

"There is an option of boarding schools, the MOD boarding school, which offer very good services, but a lot of parents don't want to go down that route because the children are away a lot." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

If boarding school is discounted by parents then the only option for their children is to move with the family and subsequently change schools on a regular basis. However this means that their education is disrupted so, as discussed, some young people may end up

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<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceFor/ServiceCommunity/Education/EducationInTheUnitedKingdom.htm>

repeating parts of the curriculum or missing parts of the curriculum which is especially problematic when studying for GCSEs. They also have to leave their friends behind and start all over again making new friends at their new school;

"The child is changing school every 2 years which is very disruptive to their learning. Again new friends have to be made especially as they get a little bit older and they're coming up to GCSEs. Teenagers you know their friends are very important to them." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

The Ofsted report carried out in 2011 highlighted some parents have had difficulty with school admissions. These problems may be compounded by the fact that families often do not know where they are moving to until February. In Warwickshire the deadline to apply for a school place in primary, infant and junior schools for September 2013 is 15th February 2013 for families moving into the area⁶⁴ and for a secondary school place the deadline is 4th February 2013⁶⁵;

"The main time of year when service families tend to move tends to be around July, August, September. If the service family do, and they should, get 6 months' notice of move so if they're moving in August they should be told in February, they should be told in February. Quite often that doesn't happen they often only get 3 or

4 months' notice. By the end of February the local education authority and the local schools have already done their allocations of children for September so finding a school can sometimes be very difficult." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

The admissions policy does allow school class sizes to be larger than 30 in order to accept a child whose parents are members of the armed forces but there are likely to be only a limited number of places in schools and parents may have reduced options with regards to the school that their child can attend. Also, depending on how many service children are moving into an area at that time, there may be no way all children can be accommodated at the nearest school. This could, and does, mean some parents will end up in the situation where their children do not all attend the same school.

It is important that children are able to be settled in a new school as soon as possible after they move to their new location as this will help them to feel settled and will avoid them missing out on education. It would be beneficial for service families if the admissions system allowed for the lack of notice they have as to where they will be placed and if there was a way in which they were able to find places for their children more easily.

Ensuring the good mental health of service families is imperative and it is important that any issues are identified early and interventions are put in place to prevent problems escalating. The Ministry of Defence are currently working to be more pro-active in

⁶⁴ <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/primaryschool>

⁶⁵ <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/secondaryschool>

identifying and supporting service men and women with their mental health especially when they have experience traumatic events;

“As you may have heard and seen in the media a great deal of effort and emphasis is being put into identifying people who have a potential to develop mental problems.... where the person has been involved in a traumatic scenario they're always debriefed and explained where help can be gained... trying to be more proactive.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

Work is carried out with every member of service personnel who has been on active duty both before they go, before they return and when they are back to help them to readjust to normal life. During this process those who may be at risk of developing mental health problems are identified and support is put in place;

“Every soldier who's been on an operation there is a brief before they go, a brief before they return as part of the transition from operations back to normal life, a brief when they return and then if there is any potential identified then they're referred to the medical centre and every month all units in the army are required to conduct a unit health conference and anybody that's got any difficulties are discussed at that conference and where intervention is required what intervention is needed and then it's monitored throughout.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

A current pilot of an online support and early intervention service for service people in psychological distress, offers 2,400 free places to service personnel, their families and veterans. 'Early analysis of service usage for the first three months of the pilot shows that of the 1,500+ people using the service, 40% (of a study of 604) are service personnel, 37% (of a study of 559) veterans and 23% (of a study of 348) family members. Of the family members, the majority (87%) were women.'⁶⁶ This suggests that there is a need for mental health services to be made available to the family members of service personnel.

It is important that the spouses of service personnel are supported, especially when their partner is deployed to active duty and they temporarily have to cope with being a single parent whilst managing the worry that they and their children must experience for the serving partner. They also need to be supported if their partner is injured or dies as these are stressful times for all of the family. It is important that they have information on where they can go for help and that spouses are encouraged to ask for help rather than suffering in silence.

The children of service personnel also need to be able to access support with their mental health needs to ensure that the stress and anxiety that they can feel due to moving or a parent being

⁶⁶ *Unsung Heroes, Developing a better understanding of the emotional support needs of service families, Matt Fossey, May 2012*

actively deployed does not lead to them developing mental ill health.

d) Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

When deciding on the pay of an army job the Ministry of Defence compares the role with the pay you would receive for the closest matching civilian job and weigh this up alongside the extra challenges faced by members of the armed forces. The Ministry of Defence advice that soldiers usually take home an extra 14% compared to the nearest matching civilian job.⁶⁷

A regular officer without a degree will earn a starting salary of £16,073 rising to £24,615 when they become a second lieutenant. For those with a degree the starting salary is £24,615 rising to at least £29,586. After 5 years an officer may be promoted to a captain and could be earning £37,915. A regular soldier receives £272 per week during their initial training which rises to £17,514 depending on the job role they take in the army. If they became a sergeant, after five years, they could earn £32,756.⁶⁸

Whilst these amounts may at first appear to be good salaries there are a number of additional financial challenges involved with being a member of the armed forces which need to be considered such as

the fact that the non-serving partner may have difficulties building a career of their own ([see Jobs and skills](#))

If a service person dies in the line of duty their family is provided for by the Ministry of Defence. The serving person's pay will continue to be paid for 6 months or until their pension and compensation has been paid to the family;

"A lot of the problems that civilian families have in those circumstances do not affect service families. The serving persons pay does not stop when the person dies... they're paid at full rate of pay for 6 months or until the pension and compensation is finalised and available to be paid." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

The pension of the serving person is paid to their surviving spouse unless the spouse remarries. In this case they would no longer be paid the pension of their service spouse. In the case of any children they will receive an element of the pension until they reach age 18 or leave further education. This means that they are supported financially until they leave education;

"If there are children involved, there are 2 elements to a deceased service man's pension: the pension that the wife receives and there is also an element for the children and that is paid until, if the non-serving partner remarries they lose their element of the pension but the children's element of the pension continues to be paid until the

⁶⁷ <http://www.army.mod.uk/join/20097.aspx>

⁶⁸ Army.mod.uk Ibid

child is 18 or they leave further education.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

e) Housing Needs

Services families are provided with accommodation and houses are allocated to service families based on size and the ranking of the officer;

“Accommodation is allocated to families probably similar to social housing on size of family. It’s also allocated, there is an element of rank involved in that as well but basically the size of the property you get depends on the number of children you’ve got.” (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

The Ministry of Defence provides varying sizes of houses to accommodate differing sized families and individual service men and women;

“I know they’ve got a number of houses on camp that accommodate just a single married couple and then a couple with one or two children and then it goes up to four bedroom houses with more than two or three children and then there’s single accommodation.” (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

This means that there are houses to accommodate any family size but the size of house necessary to accommodate a family may not be available when the family needs to move in. Young couples who

are not married are not provided with accommodation on army barracks but they are able to rent army accommodation off-site. However this can be more expensive which can lead to couples tending to marry younger;

“A lot of the mums are young because they can’t live on camp unless they’re married... and they tend to have children younger.” (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

Anecdotally it is suggested that the divorce rate in the armed forces may be higher than that of civilian couples. This may be due to couples marrying younger or may be due to the stress of army life and the impact active service can have;

“I’m not sure what the divorce rate is but I would expect it’s a little bit higher than civilian.” (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

However, welfare officers do provide relationship advice and support to encourage couples to work through their marital difficulties.

Moving from place to place and having to make new friends in each new location can be a difficult and daunting experience for service families;

“I think it is hard especially if you’re not a parent or a mother that is outgoing because there are things on camp like coffee mornings but it is very daunting if you’ve just come onto a camp where you don’t

know anybody to just arrive at a coffee morning, it is very daunting for them.” (Nursery worker, Warwickshire).

It is important that families are supported when they arrive in a new location to ensure that they feel comfortable meeting new people and are supported in doing so. Following the example set by some Children's Centres in encouraging new mothers to attend and introducing them to the centre gradually may help to support mothers when they arrive on a new army base.

A family struggling to socialise in the area that they move to may have an impact on their children as the children may then struggle to make friends meaning that the whole family could become isolated;

“Mums that don't fit into the circle find it very difficult to make friends and therefore their children find it difficult to make friends because they're not having conversations or getting into that circle with other families so there are the odd families that feel left out.” (Worker from a nursery on an army barracks)

It is reported by those who work with service families that the biggest problem and stress that they face with regards to housing is the fact that they are having to move every two to three years. Whilst they are aware of this when they start their life in the army the impact of this may not be realised until a family are actually living that life. Moving may begin to have more of an impact as couple start a family and or their family increases in size;

“The whole moving situation is very stressful but that is part and parcel of what they sign up for in the MOD, they know that's going to happen.” (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

When families leave one service family home to move to another they have a pre move out advisory visit up to two months before the date they are due to move out. This visit is mandatory and it is during this visit that families are advised of the 'agreed move out standard'.⁶⁹ These standards include things such as;

- 'The kitchen fluorescent light diffuser must be removed, cleaned and refitted.
- If you have pets you will be required to provide evidence that the floor coverings and/or soft furnishings have (in the case of cats and dogs) been professionally cleaned or that you have self-administered an appropriate pesticide and/or deodorising treatment applied prior to moving out.
- Taps and the showerhead must be thoroughly de-scaled.'⁷⁰

It is possible for families to use a pre-payment cleaning scheme however The Ministry of Defence (MOD) only approves one scheme and so families do not have the option to 'shop around' for a cheaper quote to help them to save money. This pressure to leave

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<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DIO/WhatWeDo/Accommodation/SfaMovingOut.htm>

⁷⁰http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/87B7ADE1-81AF-483C-81A5-8411BC5C7C90/0/pmoa_leaflet_england.pdf

the property in such a high standard adds to the stress of moving for families. It would also be difficult, whilst still living in the property, to achieve some of the standards expected;

"I think the biggest problem they face is the stress of moving, packing up and cleaning the accommodation when they leave. It's quite a big fine, if the house isn't to the standard that the MOD expect when they leave then they'll get a fine. There's an option they can pay for a company to come in and clean it which is £350, £400 or they do it themselves which a lot of the time they plump for." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

When service personnel are posted to a new location the move is not always a smooth one. Families can sometimes be separated for a period of time if accommodation is not ready or may be accommodated in a hotel whilst they await the availability of a suitable service home. This is disruptive for the whole family, especially children;

"There can sometimes, as is happening at the moment, be a gap between a soldier arriving and his family arriving due to non-availability of service provided accommodation." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

"Sometimes they get a posting order but the accommodation's not ready wherever they're going and then they have to get a date where they've got to go and live in a hotel for a while." (Nursery worker, Warwickshire)

"It is important that families, as much as possible, families are able to move together and able to move straight into the service family home to avoid separation and the anxiety this could cause." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

As covered in [Taking a Whole Family Approach](#) and [Finance](#) if a service member dies the family are supported with regards to their accommodation;

"The Armed Forces are very much aware that in the event of a bereavement or something serious like that all of the support organisations say that you should not make any life changing decisions within the first 12 to 24 months. Consequently the family of a bereaved soldier or the bereaved family are allowed to stay in their married quarter for a minimum of 12 months. If they decide that they want to settle somewhere else in the country or go back to where they come from, we will make an application for what is called surplus married accommodation in the area that they want to settle, move them at public expense to that new area, help them settle in the new area and then they're still in service families accommodation but it gives them that extra breathing space and a base within that community to look for alternative accommodation when the time is right." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

This level of support and time given to families allows them to make decisions over a period of time rather than having to move out of their home soon after suffering the loss of their spouse. It is important that these families are supported not only by the MOD

but by the community of the area that they choose to live in to ensure that they are supported with their transition into civilian life and that they receive the support, help and advice of services to ensure the transition is successful.

Gamecock Barracks in Bramcote in Warwickshire currently has approximately 230 married corporals within the perimeter of the barracks. In addition to that there are private properties rented in the local area of which there are currently 30. However, due to limited accommodation availability some families are being offered houses that are some distance from the barracks where they are stationed;

"Because there are some shortages of accommodation at the moment we are having people being offered properties as far away as Kineton" (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

At Gamecock Barracks there are many issues faced by families due to the location of the barracks and the transport system provided in that area;

"We're what we like to describe as an isolated station. The bus service to the barracks or past the barracks is abysmal. There are probably 3 buses a day one early morning, one midday, one in the evening. So there's no public transport so if you don't drive or don't have friends who drive who are prepared to take you to wherever you want to go then you are stuck on the barracks. It's difficult to

get to anywhere locally if you don't have any transport because there are no footpaths around here. I think the nearest footpath going that way into Nuneaton starts 2 miles away. The nearest one in Wolvey village again is about a mile and a half away but to get there is a very narrow lane and that's where the school is." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

This lack of an adequate transport system will leave many families isolated to the barracks as they cannot access other areas. It could affect spouse's ability to find work in the local community and limits the number of activities children can access off-site. Addressing this transport issue would allow the families to be able to access services more easily. With regards to school transport there are buses that take the children from the Barracks to school and back;

"There are buses that come in in the morning to take the children to school and return them at the end of the school day. And it's the same with the senior school children." (An Officer, Gamecock Barracks, Bramcote)

A similar model could be considered to allow families to access the local towns for work etc.

Recommendations

Taking a Whole Family Approach

- Children do not get into poverty by themselves. Child poverty is family poverty and adult services should be more involved with children's services to help break family poverty. Work needs to be done with whole families to break the cycle of poverty caused by parents discouraging their children from working or going into higher education. Confidence building of both parents and children is key.
- Where a family has one child who has, for example got into trouble with the police, support needs to be put in place for the parents to help them ensure that any other children in the household do not follow the same path.
- Undertake further work to recruit more foster carers so that, where appropriate, looked after children are able to stay in the area where their friends, school and support network are.
- Transitions between children's and adults services should be better managed to ensure young adults are not left on a 'cliff edge' when they turn 18.
- After school and holiday provision for children with disabilities does not have to be exclusively for only those with disabilities. Better integration of provision between abled bodied and disabled children would help abled bodied children understand disability better and enable disabled children to socialise with a wider variety of peers.

Jobs, Skills and removing the barriers to employment

- More work undertaken to ensure that people with disabilities have the same access to employment as able bodied people and to ensure that they would not be overlooked for a job based on the fact that they have a disability.
- Unemployment amongst Warwickshire's young people remains a worrying issue. Whilst numbers have dipped below a peak of 3,400 in February 2010, numbers are still well above pre-recession rates. Work undertaken by CSWP to reduce the number of NEETs must be conducted in partnership with other agencies to ensure barriers to employment are tackled holistically.
- Look into joined up work between those working with parents with disabilities or parents of disabled children and those looking at creating jobs within Warwickshire to ensure the needs of this willing-to-work population are taken into account.
- Young people and parents should be supported to follow their goals and to have aspirations. This would help to break the generational cycles of poverty.
- Transport to college or work remains a barrier to attending a course which young people are interested in, and therefore likely to complete, or being employed in a job with prospects.

Early Intervention in specific areas

- Consideration could be given to how best to help families who don't quite meet the 'Troubled Families' criteria but who may do so in future without early intervention. Those sometimes called the 'hard to reach' should be encouraged to ask for help when they need it rather than waiting until problems become entrenched. This includes thinking about how best to engage with these families e.g. through social media.
- More work needs to be done with looked after children before moving into independence to ensure they have the skills to manage living on their own e.g. managing their finances. They may benefit from a higher level of support upon moving into independence to ensure that they are actually managing.
- Transitions between schools by children in service families could be better managed to ensure a smoother continuation of education and to reduce the risk of gaps in learning.
- Early identification of parents with learning disabilities would help them to receive the information and support they need to fulfil their role as a parent to the best of their ability.
- Working holistically with families of prisoners e.g. through the F.A.S.T. at as early a stage as possible enables both the prisoner and their family to come to terms with the sentence, to develop a plan of how to manage throughout the period of separation and develop resilience to leave them all stronger when the prisoner is released.

Financial Inclusion (advice, capability and maximisation)

- Budgeting should be taught in school from an early age to ensure that children have the skills to manage their finances when they live independently.
- Work needs to be done with families to ensure they fully understand the risks of 'doorstep loans' and 'mobile loans' to help families before they commit to loans with very high interest rates.
- The services that can help families with financial issues need to be advertised more to ensure that everyone knows where they can go for help rather than just those that attend support groups where they are provided with the information. The advertising should be where families are likely to see in e.g. use of social media and in an engaging and impactful style.
- Timely access to support is crucial to avoid problems escalating into crises. Cuts in services present a real risk to this timely access and these risks need to be better understood.
- The support given should match the level of need so issues are tackled at their root cause and families are left with the life skills to prevent the recurrence of future problems.

Housing Needs

- Housing expectations need to be managed more effectively so those on waiting lists or looking to move properties understand why there have been delays or why they are not able to access the property they want.
- Problems with housing need to be addressed quicker to ensure that families are living in a safe environment that suits their needs
- More financial support needs to be given to families with children with disabilities to enable them to make the necessary adaptations to their homes.
- Support could be given earlier to help families facing difficulties to remain in their homes rather than to only focus on crisis cases where repossession is imminent. This would reduce the stress and anxiety facing families who are beginning to feel they cannot cope and prevent problems escalating.
- The impact of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 will begin to be felt from April 2013 with regards the 'bedroom tax'. People are already concerned about how it will affect them and so advertising where advice and support is available between now and its launch would be strongly recommended.