

People and Health Overview Committee

24 March 2022

Safeguarding Families Together: new model

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Members are invited to comment on the Safeguarding Families Together model and support the implementation of a pilot project in Chesil (Weymouth and Portland).

Reason for Recommendation:

As part of the Delivering Locally priority within our Children Young People and Families plan 2020-2023, we committed to 'embed whole family approaches, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of children living with parental substance use, mental ill-health or domestic abuse'. The evidence base of this whole family approach is strong, and this project is part of our wider Transformation Programme within the Children Service's Directorate.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Nationally there has been an increase in the demand for children's services over recent years and this has increased further following the Covid impact. There is a well-managed system in Dorset and we are not seeing the same level of increase in demand, however we are seeing an increase in complexity with the families that we are working with and a sustained need for support for families experiencing multiple and complex challenges. The Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) model will provide a planned strategic

approach that will help address this and deliver better outcomes for children and their families.

- 1.2. The main aspect of Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) project is creating specialist Multi-Disciplinary Teams working alongside social workers on Children In Need/Child Protection/Children In Care to support children and parents by integrating the specialist workers tackling domestic abuse, parental mental health, and substance misuse to improve children's lives through whole family working.
- 1.3. 80% of our child protection work in Dorset is related to families experiencing domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and/or poor parental mental health. All of these areas of challenge have been an increased area of concern due to the pandemic and an increased need for partnership involvement and support to our families. There has been increased investment in perpetrator programmes and domestic abuse offer and we want to enhance this further to ensure these are more readily available and effective within the child's timeline. These parental issues and fragmentation of support available for families are a significant cost driver in demand for children's social care and placement costs.
- 1.4. Similar models to SFT have already been embedded across other local authorities and demonstrated significant impact and value for money and significant impact on practice and culture change. The models have been evaluated by the DfE to be effective and good practice. It aligns with the current strength-based practice model; the Dorset Children Thrive model with an emphasis on working positively with parents to enable them to keep their children at home when safe to do so.
- 1.5. This model will enable us to further skill up our workforce, through a more collaborative way of working where we motivate parents to identify the changes needed within their own families. The SFT approach seeks to change the way social workers engage with parents, working with them to facilitate their own change of behaviour. This will help achieve better outcomes for children.

2. Financial Implications

The application of this approach has been evaluated nationally and shows a strong return on investment. Funding has been secured for this pilot programme through the Council's Transformation programme and forms part of the Children's Services Five Year Budget Strategy. Financial benefits realisation will be tracked and reported corporately.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

Offering seamless pathways of whole family support has been shown to improve wellbeing and health outcomes.

4. Climate implications

None identified

5. Other Implications

In order for this model to be effective the council will need to work with partners in the Police, Probation, Health Services including Public Health and the community and voluntary sector.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

An EqIA has been completed for the Children Young People and Families Plan. A project level equalities impact assessment is in the process of being undertaken alongside developing the plans and strategy.

8. Appendices

None

9. Background Papers

Children Young People and Families plan 2020-2023 – Delivering Locally priority [Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024](#)
Family Safeguarding Evaluation - 2020
Family Safeguarding – Hertfordshire 2017

10. Introduction and background

- 10.1. This project is part of a comprehensive Transformation Programme within the Children Service's Directorate. As part of the Delivering Locally priority within our Children Young People and Families plan, we committed to 'embed whole family approaches, with a particular focus on addressing the needs of children living with parental substance use, mental ill-health or domestic abuse'.
- 10.2. Nationally there has been an increase in the demand for children's service over recent years and this has increased further following the Covid impact, this is also reflected locally (Chesil) including a continued projected increase in demand. The Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) model will provide a planned strategic approach that will help manage the high levels of demand, whilst also delivering better outcomes for children and their families.
- 10.3. 80% of our child protection work is related to families experiencing domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and/or poor parental mental health. All of these areas of challenge have been an increased area of concern due to the pandemic and an increased need for partnership involvement and support to

our families. There has been increased investment in perpetrator programmes and domestic abuse offer and we want to enhance this further to ensure these are more readily available and effective within the child's timeline. These parental issues and fragmentation of support available for families are a significant cost driver in demand for children's social care and placement costs.

- 10.4. A transformation proforma was submitted to the Performance Leadership Group for transformation funding, it highlighted; although decreasing, our rate of children in care (65 per 10,000) is still higher than we want it to be. Need is seen in all parts of the county, however the greatest need and challenge is in the Weymouth and Portland area, where 40% of our looked after children and child protection cases and 1/3 of our CIN cases come from/ most of our CIN (68%) and CP (74%) cases are children aged 12 and under.
- 10.5. Half of our children in care are under 12 (Based on August 2021 performance data) and this intervention is key to reducing the number of younger children in the care system.
- 10.6. Similar models to SFT have already been embedded across other local authorities and demonstrated significant impact and value for money and significant impact on practice and culture change. The models have been evaluated by the DfE to be effective and good practice. It aligns with the current strength-based practice model; the Dorset Children Thrive model with an emphasis on working positively with parents to enable them to keep their children at home when safe to do so.
- 10.7. This model will enable us to further skill up our workforce, through a more collaborative way of working where we motivate parents to identify the changes needed within their own families. The SFT approach seeks to change the way social workers engage with parents, working with them to facilitate their own change of behaviour. This will help achieve better outcomes for children.
- 10.8. SFT is designed to provide rapid, proactive support to children and their families. It is delivered by multiagency teams who are trained in a range of highly effective interventions.
- 10.9. The principle underpinning this model is to ensure that families open to statutory services can receive interventions from Mental Health, Substance Misuse and Domestic Abuse, if required, once a case is open to children's social care. The model will enable parents to receive the right support and intervention, in a coordinated way, to enable greater chances for children to remain with parents and prevent children becoming subject to Child Protection plans.
- 10.10. The main aspect of Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) project is creating specialist Multi-Disciplinary Teams working alongside social workers on Children In Need/Child Protection/Children In Care to support children and parents by integrating the specialist workers tackling domestic abuse, parental mental health, and substance misuse to improve children's lives through whole family working. We will work in partnership with safeguarding, Domestic Abuse and Mental Health and Substance Misuse services to create

a common language around screening, risk assessment and interventions, underpinned by regular lines of communication.

10.11. **Safeguarding Families Together aims**

- Increase engagement with professionals, leading to more help and support. This approach will focus on increasing the engagement of families with professionals and information sharing between professionals will be strengthened.
- Health and education outcomes for children will be improved
- Provide a multi-disciplinary approach that addresses both parents' and children's needs.
- Deliver more responsive support, reducing drift and delay.
- Keep more "high-risk families" together safely, when safe to do so.
- Improve children's health and educational outcomes.
- Enabling professionals to do more direct work with families
- Families will be offered the right support at the right time, to help them to reduce the risks to their children and enable children to stay at home where it is safe to do so
- Schools and local community partners will play a key role in identifying and supporting families who need early help
- Using the whole family approach, to reduce the number of children coming into care, and being taken away from their families
- Increase social workers' capacity enabling them to spend more face-to-face direct working with families - and less time on administration
- High-quality services will continue to be provided at a reduced financial cost to the council and partners and provide better outcomes for children.

10.12. **Project outcomes and aspirations**

Strengthen relationships with partner agencies by providing evidenced based multi-agency practice and:

- Reduction in risk and need to increase the number of families stepping down to early help services
- Reduction in number of repeat referrals

CIN and CP

- Reduction of Child Protection and Children in Need Plans
- Increase in the take up of family network meetings
- Reduction of cases in care proceedings
- Evidence of families contributing to joint co-produced plans

Children in care

- Reduction of Children in Care

- Reduction in children placed at home with a care order
- Reduction in placement costs

We want to work with partners to identify KPIs, the following are examples and not exhaustive:

Education

- Reductions in exclusions from schools

Health

- Reductions in A and E visits due to Domestic Abuse
- Reduction in IHA and review requirements

Police

- Reductions in repeat visits by police to DA incidents
- Reduced resource requirement at child protection conferences

Team Managers will lead the creation of a change in culture.

- Increase in numbers of Motivational Interview skilled workers in workforce demonstrating competence in Motivational Interviewing
- Relationships with parents will be improved and parents will feel supported by the changes and provide feedback about how they have benefited from support

11. Links with other programmes and work

This approach is intended to work alongside and offer additional capacity to other important areas of work including:

- The national 'Supporting Families Programme', formerly known as Troubled Families, which has been extended for 3 years from 1st April 2022. We are awaiting an announcement from the government on the programme outcomes that this will seek to deliver.
- The delivery of the Dorset Domestic Abuse Strategy, which recognises that working together to ensure that there is a system of support locally for supporting those affected by domestic abuse and tackling offenders
- Family Pathfinder Programme – a new model for supporting separating families through the family courts
- The Children's Services Transformation Programme and delivery of our 5-year financial plan
- Delivery of the Children, Young People and Families Plan (2020-2023)

12. Recommendation

- 12.1. Members are invited to comment on the Safeguarding Families Together model and support the implementation of a pilot project in Chesil (Weymouth and Portland).

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Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.