

Health and Wellbeing Board

26 June 2024

Safeguarding Families Together Evaluation

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

All

Executive Director:

T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The purpose of this report is to share the outcome of a formative evaluation undertaken by the University of Bedfordshire in respect of the Safeguarding Families Together (SFT) pilot, in Chesil, Dorchester and West Localities within Children's Services.

SFT is based on the Family Safeguarding Model developed by Hertfordshire County Council in 2015. There have been numerous independent evaluations completed and the model has been complimented by Ofsted. Its success was hailed in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care published in 2022. The model is in use and being implemented by at least 21 other English local authorities (some with financial investment from the DfE). Key to its success is the initial intensive support provided to both children and the adults in their families. In providing this timely response and relationship-based approach, adult specialists were found to be crucial. Furthermore, the adult practitioners helped

to support a different way of thinking about risk and ways of working with families.

SFT aims to reduce children in need of child protection and those coming into care by using co-located multi-disciplinary teams, consisting of specialist adult practitioners and Children's Services social workers. The team provides wraparound support to the family to focus on and enable sustained change in key parent/carer challenges that impact on the safety of the children (Substance misuse, Domestic Abuse and Mental Ill-Health). The use of Motivational Interviewing and group supervision within the model addresses and overcomes barriers to reaching these families and enabling the change required for safety.

Recommendation:

To receive and review the evaluation report and to consider what the partnership commitment to the wider roll out and any further expansion is, for example to care leavers.

For consideration, the partnership commitment could also include a review of commissioning arrangements that supports this way of working and could contribute to the model. Agencies not directly involved in SFT may also wish to consider how we track and evidence wider impact and what commitment can be offered by all partners to support this initiative being able to continue past March 2025

Reason for Recommendation:

To allow full consideration of the wider benefits of SFT in improving the outcomes for our children and young people and how as a partnership we can go further. The Board needs to advise how the partnership wishes to proceed post March 2025 and agree how funding can be secured or commitments to existing/new commissioning arrangements.

1. Report

- 1.1 The Formulative Evaluation was planned and undertaken during the period of September 2023 – December 2024 and included researchers from the University of Bedfordshire spending time in Dorset, interviewing families and practitioners. This has enabled the voice of our families to be represented in the evaluation findings. The final report was shared in March 2024.
- 1.2 The evaluation evidenced that SFT had been successfully implemented in the pilot areas. Key findings from the report are:

- Successfully implemented
- Shared aims & hopes for longer term preventive impact
- Created a new shared value-based language across professional groups & with families
- Improved information sharing & understanding of disciplinary perspectives for professionals
- Provided a more holistic, accessible & responsive service for parents
- High demand, recruitment challenges, social work caseloads and statutory deadlines create logistical barriers
- Opportunities to expand geographically and towards a wider partnership

1.3 The evaluation made recommendations for further positive enhancements to the service offered within Dorset, as well as planned widening the reach to include the North, East and Purbeck localities and to consider other service user groups who would benefit from this approach, such as Care Leavers. The recommendations and actions from the report to address are being overseen at the newly established 'Implementation Board' which also is overseeing the roll out to the other localities. The board is chaired by Lisa Reid, Corporate Director and promotes a partnership approach with membership from health, adult services, community safety, along with substance misuse services, mental health and domestic abuse partners. The Board reports into the Safeguarding Partnership through Strengthening Services.

1.4 There is good evidence during the first year of the pilot of promising outcomes for both families and practitioners, in particular around sustained engagement with families that had not previously been known to core adult services. This is in line with the trajectory of previous local authority roll outs and national evaluations.

1.5 SFT will continue within the three pilot localities (Chesil, Dorchester, and West) with Dorset Council Children's Services having funded since the launch in November 2022 and continued funding beyond the end of the pilot phase from April 2024 for one further year (2024-2025). This will also include all posts in the planned roll out across North, East and Purbeck from October 2024 (for 6 months) to enable SFT to be delivered to families in all locality areas. Funding post March 2025 is yet to be established.

2. **Financial Implications**

SFT aims to produce significant benefits to the partnership by reducing the numbers of children and young people coming into care and who are subject to long term statutory interventions. The services provided to adults who are parents and carers by SFT would reduce demand within the core services for adults. Albeit what we know with Domestic abuse services they aren't always being accessed by families under the core contracts due to different ways of working and reliant on families making the contact/engaging first time. Similarly with other services the repeat referrals and long waiting times are impacting access to resources. As a result, Public Health were able to make a contribution of 85K to support this model but other agencies have not yet contributed. It is expected, in line with outcomes in other Local Authorities, that significant cost benefits are experienced by partners such as reduced A&E attendances for mental health and domestic abuse, and a reduction in repeat police call outs/999 calls for incidents related to Mental Health, Domestic Abuse and Substance misuse. Currently the committed spend for the roll out is 1.7m for 2024-2025.

3. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None.

4. **Well-being and Health Implications**

SFT aims to improve the health and wellbeing of parents and carers within Dorset by addressing three key factors, Mental Health, Substance misuse, Domestic Abuse. Successful outcomes demonstrate reduction or abstinence in these areas and service users report better health and overall improved emotional wellbeing.

5. **Other Implications**

None to consider.

6. **Risk Assessment**

None to consider.

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

SFT offers a service which seek to reduce inequalities caused by the impact of Substance misuse, Mental Health and Domestic Abuse.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Safeguarding Families Together Evaluation report

9. **Background Papers**

None

10. **Report Sign Off**

- 10.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)