

Appendix 12 - Children's Safeguarding & Early Help – Budget Statement 2017

Introduction:

Over recent years, Local Authorities across have Britain have faced an unprecedented surge in demand for children's social care support, and that this is showing little sign of abating. More than 170,000 children were subject to child protection enquiries in 2015/16, compared to 71,800 in 2005/06 – a 140 per cent increase in just 10 years.

In Telford & Wrekin:

- There are round 43,900 people aged 0-19 in the borough, and around 55,800 in the 0-24 age bracket.
- The number of young people aged 0-24 is set to increase to around 62,200 by 2031 – an extra 4,800 0-15 year olds and an extra 1,700 16-24 year olds.
- Telford and Wrekin is estimated to have 1,000 children aged 5-10 and 1,400 aged 11-16 with a mental health disorder.
- Between 2012 and 2016, the proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has grown from 13.0% to 18.7%.
- There remain challenges for some children and young people around levels of deprivation, with 23.9% (8,335 people) of children aged 0-15 live in income deprived households.
- The proportion of children (under 16) in low income families has fallen from 25.9% in 2011 to 23.5% in 2014. However, this proportion is worse than England for each of these 4 years.
- Families made up the majority of homeless acceptances in Telford and Wrekin, with more than two thirds (69.7%) of all acceptances being for those with dependent children.
- The most common reason for safeguarding intervention is 'neglect'.
- The most common risk factors identified in family assessments are domestic violence, mental health and drug misuse.
- ***There were 1519 children in need at year end (2016-2017).***

The Challenge:

The challenge for everyone in children's services is how to achieve positive outcomes for children and families in the context of rising demand and reductions in resources.

Current strategic planning for children's services is reflective of both demand and demographic pressures, where rising numbers of children particularly in areas of deprivation, continue to grow. In spite of this, we need to respond creatively by reviewing and re-modelling services and finding new and innovative ways of doing more for less.

Whilst doing so, our foremost priority is to promote the wellbeing and safeguarding of vulnerable children and young people, and to meet our statutory responsibilities.

Our Approach:

New Services and Interventions:

We have developed a Family Solutions and Family Group Conferencing Service that will support families to identify their own solutions where they are able to care for children and young people safely within their own family networks. These services will mean that children and young people who no longer need safeguarding but still need support will be able to access good quality intervention services at an earlier stage, reducing demand on safeguarding services.

These new approaches have already had a considerable positive impact in 2017/18 and the proposed savings resulting from them over the next two years significantly outweigh the investment of £445,000 in 2018/19 and £353,000 in 2019/20 to establish the service, as follows:

	2018/19 Proposed saving	2019/20 Proposed saving
Family solutions	£1,116,000	£1,097,000

Innovative Practice:

We are working on the Department of Education's 'Partners in Practice' programme to make system changes to the way we work with children and young people. The programme has enabled consideration of whole family approach - working with both adults and children and taking into account family circumstances, responsibilities and strengths. The objective we are working towards will enable our workforce to work intensively with families to empower them to solve their own problems and change behaviours instead of referring out to others.

These practices take some time to embed, but savings are anticipated in 2019/20 as follows:

	2019/20 Proposed saving
Systemic practice	£312,000

Reducing Spend and Delivering Better Outcomes:

We are increasing internal fostering capacity and developing an intensive fostering offer for more complex placements to avoid placing children and young people outside of the borough wherever possible. We are also further developing our internal parenting assessment team to reduce the number of high cost community based parenting assessments completed by external contractors.

There is a very large difference in the average costs of internal placements compared to those outside the borough and with outside agencies. Agency foster care is on average more than twice as costly as internal foster placements and external residential placements are several times as costly again.

Part of the strategy to avoid such placements is the investment in family solutions described above, but work is also underway to increase internal fostering capacity through better recruitment and more intensive support of existing foster carers where this can support and sustain placements. Proposed savings from these initiatives are as follows:

	2018/19 Proposed saving	2019/20 Proposed saving
Internal fostering capacity	-	£87,000
Intensive fostering support	£86,000	-

Workforce Investment:

One of the biggest enablers within children's services is the workforce. Ofsted reported that the staff we have "know the children and young people they are working with well. They are committed to ensuring positive outcomes for them". Our staff are committed, and are leading and embracing innovation and creativity in terms of an approach that will deliver the best outcomes for children and families.

As in other local authorities, recruiting and retaining appropriate social work staff is challenging, which has led to a persistent need to supplement permanent staff with agency staff. The cost of agency staff is significantly more than those directly employed and there are a number of strands of work underway to reduce our reliance on agency workers. These include developing progressive career pathways for social workers, monitoring of caseloads to ensure that they are not excessive and thus a disincentive for staff to stay or join, and focussed recruitment practices.

The resulting proposed net savings in 2018/19 from a reduced reliance upon agency staff are as follows:

	2018/19 Proposed saving
Staffing	£183,000

Another area where there has been a strong reliance on outside agency is family and parenting assessments. By bringing this work in-house, including the legal work associated with the assessment process, significant savings are possible.

A number of other initiatives are also planned, including a reduction in general legal costs associated with safeguarding, possibly by greater use of internal staff, and a general review of sufficiency to ensure that provision is appropriate and represents value for money.

	2018/19 Proposed saving	2019/20 Proposed saving
Internal parenting assessment	£164,500	£10,000
Internal legal support for the assessment process	£51,000	£15,000
Other initiatives	£166,000	£103,000

Our Approach

- We are working towards a whole-system approach to improve experiences for children, young people and families.
- We are creating common practice, language and understanding that will support multi-disciplinary working and promote consistency in families' experience.
- We are empowering professionals to use their own judgement in approaches that they believe will be the most influential.
- We are adopting a whole family approach where adult needs and behaviours are seen as important to address - alongside those of the child.
- We are taking a strengths based approach and working with whole families, where families and their networks are actively brought in to co-develop solutions with professionals - with the. seen as part of the solution and not as part of the problem, being We are prioritising relationships over transactions, and the strength and qualities of relationships promoted within families must be mirrored in those between families and services, and within practitioner teams.

The best option for children and young people is for them to be looked after at home or within their family network where it is safe for them to do so. Where children and their families are at a point where the children are at risk of becoming looked after, we will ensure that families have access to additional support to prevent this happening wherever possible.

Our service is working dynamically and innovatively to manage demand and work differently in areas where pressures are high, but more importantly we are working to deliver the best outcomes for our children and young people in Telford.