

Appendix 10 - Children's Safeguarding & Early Help

Introduction:

Over recent years, Local Authorities have faced an unprecedented surge in demand for children's social care support, and that this is showing little sign of abating. The number of section 47 enquiries within this year alone has increased, from 185,680 in 2017 to 198,090 in 2018, an increase of 6.7%. There has been a significant hike across England with only 142,500 in 2013-14 – a 39 per cent increase in just 4 years.

In Telford & Wrekin:

- T&W is a town with a growing population. The population of the borough is projected to grow at a faster rate than the England population (T&W 13.4%, England 10.2%) and is projected to grow to 196,900 by 2031, an increase of some 23,300 people.
- 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 living in income deprived households.
- The proportion of children (under 16) in low income families fell from 25.9% in 2011 to 23.5% in 2014. However, this proportion remained worse than England for each of these 4 years.
- The most common Mosaic Group in Telford and Wrekin is 'Family Basics' – families with limited resources who have to budget to make ends meet, with this group making up 16.8% of all households in the Borough.
- Families and vulnerable young people made up the majority of homeless acceptances in Telford and Wrekin in 2016/17, with more than two thirds (62%) of all acceptances being for those with dependent children or pregnant and a further 17% being 16 or 17 years old or a care leaver under 21;
- A total of 1,071 international migrants arrived in Telford and Wrekin in the year before the 2011 Census. This is in addition to the 5,507 migrants moving from elsewhere in the UK.
- 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 1379 children in need at year end (2017-2018).**

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, complexity 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 are now in our second year of developing Family Solutions which incorporates an Edge of Care, Family Group Conferencing and Changing Futures offer.

Family Solutions ensure that wherever possible children and young people have the chance to grow up in their family environment by offering a timely and effective family based intervention to keep families together where it is safe and reasonable to do so. As part of the offer, we have developed a respite/short breaks provision to provide planned, time-limited respite nights for children and young people who are considered to be at risk of entering local authority care while work is undertaken with the family to resolve underlying problems.

As part of Family Solutions, we use Family Group Conferencing to deliver voluntary family led decision making meetings which encompass the entire family network of blood relations, friends, neighbours and members of their community. The purpose of a FGC is to build on family resources and knowledge to better understand how they function, where their strengths are and where they may need a little support.

The Service also includes Changing Futures, who work with parents of children who have had a child or children removed for adoption. These parents are often vulnerable and likely to go onto have subsequent pregnancies with a poor outcome. Where parents under these circumstances have received this specific service, they are more likely to successfully delay a subsequent pregnancy or have been able to keep a child successfully in the future addressing the cycles of behaviour for the parents.

The Family Solutions Service offer means that children, young people and families have access to good quality interventions at an earlier stage, reducing escalation and demand on safeguarding services. These new approaches have already had a considerable positive impact in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

	2019/20 Proposed saving £'000s
Family solutions	2,000

Innovative Practice:

Systemic Practice:

We are now in the second year of working with the Centre for Systemic Social Work to make system changes to the way we work with children and young people. The systemic practice model is family-focused, and strengths-based, to build families and/or young people's capacity to address their own problems more effectively.

Telford and Wrekin are nearing the end of the second year of whole service implementation of the systemic practice model: with practitioners, managers and leaders having completed training through the Centre for Systemic Social Work. The practice model 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 £'000s
Systemic practice	312

NSPCC Reunification:

Returning home to a parent or relative is the most common outcome for children in Care. However, around a third of those who return home are back in care within five years. So for almost a third of the children who had returned home, evidence shows that the arrangements often do not last.

There is a high cost to local authorities of failed reunification of children returning home from care both in terms of the child and financial impact (£300 million a year). We are in the early stages of implementing the NSPCC Toolkit, an evidence informed framework for return home practice that supports practitioners to make structured decisions about whether or not a child should return home to the care of their parents or birth families. The framework outlines a staged approach to working with families and professionals, mandating that the needs of the child be kept paramount throughout the process.

Volunteers

We know that in the right circumstances, volunteer services can effectively contribute to delaying or preventing entry to more expensive systems of care and support and provide an effective mechanism for support for families through stepdown from practitioner led services. We have recently launched a new volunteer scheme made up of three volunteer roles:

Child and Family Ambassadors will provide one to one support and encouragement to families receiving support from our Early Help and Safeguarding Services. The Ambassadors will support families either alongside Practitioners or as part of an exit strategy to provide our families with additional support.

FGC Ambassadors will support the Family Group Conference (FGC) service in promoting the voice of the child, helping them prepare for the FGC and supporting them during the FGC.

Rights and Reps Ambassadors will support VOICE co-ordinators during meetings, seasonal activities and regional trips.

Reducing Spend and Delivering Better Outcomes:

We are increasing internal fostering capacity and have now embedded a 'Fostering Plus' offer following a successful pilot. We are continuing targeted recruitment of skilled and experienced foster carers to care for those children and young people who might have previously been harder to place within an internal foster care placement.

The 'Fostering Plus' carers also support children and young people moving from residential provision with the aim of children and young people living in family settings wherever possible. We have also further developed our internal parenting assessment team to reduce the number of high cost community based and residential 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:

	2019/20 Proposed saving £'000s
Internal fostering capacity and Intensive fostering support	412

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.

We are in the second year of 'Frontline' (a program of intensive practical and academic social work training for high potential graduates and others). The 'Frontline' initiative enables the Council to 'grow its own' social workers by recruiting newly qualified social workers to work at the Council. The four students from 2017-18 qualified in September 2018 and have now commenced in permanent social work positions at the Council. There is an up-front investment required in these staff as their caseloads must be lower in their first year than an experienced social worker. However, by improving the supply of social workers to the Council, the intention is that it will reduce the overall cost of staffing safeguarding by reducing the need to employ agency staff. On average, agency staff are almost 50% more expensive, around £20,000 per annum, than permanent employees.

The resulting proposed net savings in 2019/20 from a reduced reliance upon agency staff are as follows:

	2018/19 Proposed saving £'000s
Staffing	100

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.

	2019/20 Proposed saving £'000s
Internal parenting assessment	100
Internal legal support for the assessment process	15
Other initiatives	103

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.