

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

20 SEPTEMBER 2022

SUPPORTING FAMILIES FIRST UPDATE

Summary

1. The Panel is asked to consider the update provided on the Supporting Families First (SFF) Service.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families has been invited to attend the meeting.

Background

3. SFF was first developed in January 2020 as a multidisciplinary service providing intense support to families to prevent family breakdown and thus preventing the need for care.
4. The service is managed by the Director for Early Help, Children in Need and Family Front Door and has a dedicated Group Manager. The three locality teams are each managed by a Team Manager supported by three Advanced Social Work practitioners who manage and supervise the front line multidisciplinary team that includes Outreach Workers, Money Mentor, Emotional Health and Well-being workers for children, Substance Misuse workers and Youth Workers.
5. The first-year evaluation report was presented to the Panel in July 2021.
6. The SFF service was further developed in its second year to adopt the learning and effectiveness of the “Edge of Care” model into prevention of escalating risk and need for child protection and as such to use this as a model of approach for the Children in Need cohort.
7. From May to September 2021, this multidisciplinary approach to ways of working with Children in Need was piloted. Following the pilot, the service was implemented in September 2021 as the model of intervention for Children in Need (CIN) i.e Edge of Care and Edge of Child Protection.
8. The new staffing structure allowed for both progression and new skills and opportunities for the workforce within Worcestershire Children First (WCF) as well as external recruitment, supporting retention of staff. The full permanent establishment of SFF was appointed to by December 2021 with geographical alignment to the Family Front Door (FFD) and locality services to ensure seamless services for children and to build on professional partnerships.

Summary of Outcome for Children and Service User Feedback

9. The Supporting Families Overview report for Quarter 4 is attached as Appendix 1.

10. As of March 22, the team are working with 322 children and the table in Section 2 of Appendix 1 shows quarter on quarter increase in demand reflected across the service.

11. In respect of the chronological age, children aged 1-10 years equates to 135 children. The largest proportion of children are teenagers aged between 13 – 16 years old and the climb in numbers starts aged 11 years and peaks at 15 years. This data correlates with young people who will be experiencing adolescence and the challenges for the child and parents/carers at that time. 4-year-olds are the lowest numbers of children the team works with, and 15-year-olds are the highest.

12. Mental Health is the predominate risk factor identified but financial challenges and substance misuse are also significant contributors to family breakdown.

13. As of March 2022, 8% of children became Looked After or escalated to Child Protection (CP). This equates to 29 children being escalated to Child Protection and 6 becoming looked after, giving a positive intervention outcome rate of 92%.

14. There has been an increase in the complexity of cases and a small increase in cases escalating to child protection in Q3 from Q2. This is reflective of the increased risk and need seen generally in children's social care resulting from the impact of Covid-19 on families, including the well reported impact of inconsistency in school attendance, financial hardship and poor mental health.

15. WebStar is implemented to measure impact and outcomes for children and parents/carers. The Webstar focuses on 8 key questions which are scaled between 0-10. Children and parents are asked individually to talk to staff about how they feel and where they would score themselves at the beginning and end of intervention in terms of their;

- Happiness, Health and Safety
- Education, Work and Community Engagement
- Emotional Health & Well-Being
- Substance Misuse and Finances

Webstar data for Children March 2022

- 40% of children told us they felt happier.
- 32% of children told us they felt safer, with 48% reporting no change.
- 40% of children told us that their access to Education/Training had improved.
- 28% of children told us their financial situation had improved.
- 48% of children felt more in control of substance misuse, 12% by 5 or more scores

Webstar data for Adults March 2022

- 61% of adults said their happiness had improved.
- 54% of adults reported feeling safer.
- 54% of adults reported their physical health had improved.
- 35% of adult reported no change, which is a comparable percentage with the feedback from children (32%).

- 57% of adults told us their Emotional Health & Well-Being had improved.
- 50% of adults said substance misuse was less of an impact in their family.
- 43% of adults reported improvements in their financial position.

16. In May 2022, WCF undertook a targeted feedback survey with parents on their experiences of the Supporting Families First Service following case closure to the service. In total, feedback was gained from **59 parents**; this report (attached at Appendix 2) summarises their feedback on the overall impact and biggest improved change. The majority of families identified a range of positive outcomes having been supported by the service, the most significant were parent/child relationships, improved whole family relationships and emotional wellbeing.

17. Demonstrating the effectiveness and sustainable outcomes in the original work with Edge of Care tracking, of the 51 original Edge of Care cases **twenty-five months on from the original outcome** there is overall, a high percentage of cases with sustained outcomes. **35 remain closed to social care, a 69% sustained success rate.** 8 children are open to social care at a CIN/CP level and 8 have become “looked after” during this period.

18. As the new SFF model works with a much larger and more diverse cohort, new quarterly tracking is being conducted for a new group of the first 50 Children in Need from May 2021 (the “control group”) to monitor long-term sustainability in prevention of escalated risk. At February 2022, (8 months after SFF allocation), 20 children’s cases successfully closed, 1 became looked after and 6 escalated to Child Protection. This again provides evidence of sustained positive outcomes for children and young people.

19. It is recognised that the relationship between home and school is significant for children and the risk of family breakdown can impact upon their education, but also challenges in school can impact not only on relationships at home, but parenting capacity. Risk and vulnerability for children not in school can be significantly increased; therefore, the learning will strengthen the approaches taken in SFF and education settings.

20. The SFF team have worked on a “Education project” with the Virtual Headteacher, looking at the education needs and experiences of CIN and edge of care children and how these impacts upon the child at home and in education and the correlations between this; and what as a partnership can be learnt and developed in terms of understanding and practice. The evaluation of this project is underway but the data on children missing in education shows an improving picture of those who are open to social care and missing education reducing, with only 1 child open to CP or CIN being missing since April 2021, when there were six.

21. Given the high demand WCF have invested £96k in 2022/23 as part-year funding and for 2023/24 the figure will be £165k as three additional Advanced Social Work Practitioners (ASWP) have been added to enable them to effectively manage a workable caseload of 45 children per ASWP using the pod management approach.

Purpose of the meeting

22. The Panel is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the approach and effectiveness of the SFF services
- Determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1: Quarter 4 Supporting Families First service outcome report March 22

Appendix 2: Supporting Families First Service User feedback report May 22

Specific Contact Points for this report

Emma Brittain, Director of Early Help, Children In need and the Family Front Door.
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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and Minutes of the Children and Families O&S Panel July 2021.
Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel 16th July, 2021.

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)