

Cabinet
Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
Council

9 March 2021
11 March 2021
16 March 2021

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources - Councillor R Brown
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor P Seaman

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Childrens Services

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title: Strengthening Families – Family Valued Programme

Is this a key decision?

Yes - The proposal involves financial implications in excess of £1 million.
The total amount is 4,062,295 for two years commencing 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2023.

Executive Summary:

Family Valued is a Leeds City Council system change programme designed to spread restorative practice across children's services. A key element is the expansion of the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) service to a scale not previously seen in the UK, including for families experiencing domestic violence.

There are 2 core strands to the programme;

- Awareness raising and deep dive training to embed restorative practice across social work, Children's Services and the wider workforce for children, families and communities.
- Expansion of FGCs to more families, including those affected by domestic violence and with a new model prior to Initial Child Protection Conferences.

An evaluation was undertaken 16 months into the Leeds programme which found that almost all of the Family Valued outcomes had been achieved. There were statistically significant reductions in;

- Number of looked after children
- Rate of LAC per 10,000 population
- Number of Child Protection Plans
- Number of children in need

Other outcomes were also identified at the time of the evaluation such as improvements in school attendance, number of children leaving care and returning to their families, and rates of re-referrals for domestic violence.

The Leeds Family Valued approach reflects the 'Coventry way' - children are at the centre of practice. This reflects the values of the Leeds model which places families in control and enables them to reduce dependency on specialist services, develop resilience and capacity and take the lead in decision making and ownership of their plan.

The Coventry approach encourages workers to establish a relationship-based method to working with children and families. As a Signs of Safety local authority social workers are already working to a strength based and restorative framework. Existing approaches would need to be developed further to take account of the Leeds Family Valued model.

Coventry is on a journey to good or better and is committed to achieving this. Working with and alongside Leeds Local Authority this proposal would enhance the pace of change and further improve outcomes for children in Coventry.

The cost to implement the Leeds Family Valued programme for the first two years will be met fully by the DfE Grant of £4.1m commencing 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2023.

- 2021/22 £2.0m
- 2022/23 £2.1m

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

- 1) Recommend that Council accepts the grant funding of £4,062,295 from the Department for Education for the two-year period to support the change programme to spread restorative practice across Children's Services.

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) is recommend to:

- 1) Support the acceptance of the grant funding of £4,062,295 from the Department for Education for the two-year period to support the change programme to spread restorative practice across Children's Services.
- 2) Receive a briefing on the Family Valued programme and further reports on progress of the project.

Council is recommended to:

- 1) Accept the grant funding of £4,062,295 from the Department for Education for the two-year period to support the change programme to spread restorative practice across Children's Services.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

Yes - Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) - 11th March 2021

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

Yes - Council - 16th March 2021

Report title: Strengthening Families – Family Valued Programme

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Family Valued is a Leeds City Council system change programme designed to spread restorative practice across children's services. A key element is the expansion of the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) service to a scale not previously seen in the UK, including for families experiencing domestic violence.

There are 2 core strands to the programme;

- Awareness raising and deep dive training to embed restorative practice across social work, Children's Services and the wider workforce for children, families and communities.
- Expansion of FGCs to more families, including those affected by domestic violence and with a new model prior to Initial Child Protection Conferences.

- 1.2 Coventry is on a journey to good or better and is committed to achieving this. Working with Leeds Local Authority will enhance the pace of change and further improve outcomes of children in Coventry.

- 1.3 Coventry wants all children and young people in the authority to achieve the best possible outcomes. The pressure of numbers of children looked after, lack of local placement availability, has made it challenging to the service. The opportunity that Family Valued brings is significant and will strengthen Children's Services.

2. Leeds Family Valued Programme Model recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Leeds Family Valued approach reflects the 'Coventry way' - children are at the centre of practice. This reflects the values of the Leeds model which places families in control and enables them to reduce dependency on specialist services, develop resilience and capacity and take the lead in decision making and ownership of their plan.

- 2.2 The Coventry approach encourages workers to establish a relationship-based method to working with children and families. As a Signs of Safety local authority social workers are already working to a strength based and restorative framework. Existing approaches would need to be developed further to take account of the Leeds Family Valued model. An example of this would be by ensuring that a family group conference always take place before the initial child protection conference (ICPC). The Leeds Practice Principles are similar to those utilised by Coventry which would enable an effective synergy, allowing for strong foundations to embed the Leeds Family Valued model to maximum effect.

- 2.3 Coventry already mirrors Leeds in terms of locality-based teams of workers and is keen to expand the FGC service, in line with the Leeds Family Valued model to ensure that families have access to FGC at the point of statutory intervention. As part of this, the relationship between statutory and children's services and families will need to be redefined and will be framed around the restorative approach, strengthening of the voice of the child and increased involvement of families in care planning which is central to the Leeds model.

- 2.4 Family Valued is informed by an 'Outcomes Based Accountability' (OBA) approach to Children's Services – that at all levels there needs to be a clear focus on whether individuals, services or the child welfare system as a whole is improving the lives of children and families.

2.5 The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme is similarly focused on outcomes – principally on whether the programme is helping services to change the way they work to enable more children to stay safely at home within their families, and less needing to become looked after.

3 Result of consultation undertaken - Shared Review and Plan findings

3.1 As part of the implementation of the Leeds Family Valued model, the Family Valued team from Leeds City Council undertook a joint review of children's services in November 2020. The review is a 'critical friend' exercise to assess Coventry's strengths and areas of priority.

3.2 The review included four stages:

- **Information gathering and analysis;** this involved requesting information and data documentation to help inform the work programme and to allow the Leeds Team to build a richer picture of Coventry children's services.
- **Case Review:** this involved experienced social work leaders from Leeds reviewing a sample of cases – across Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection and Child Looked After. This was undertaken online and involved a detailed analysis of the full history or work with the child and their family.
- **Local Authority Engagement;** this involved a number of virtual meetings with the Children's Services Leadership team; focus groups with managers and staff to understand what it is like to work in Coventry and also included an observation of a child protection conference and a Looked after child (LAC) review.
- **Evaluation and Review;** following the local engagement, the Leeds programme team reviewed and evaluated the findings based on three key questions:

-What is the current level of quality and impact of practice?

-What improvement is required?

-What are the areas of practice to be targeted by Family Valued and how will this be delivered?

3.3 A summary of the recommendations is highlighted below:

- *Coventry and Leeds to work together to continue to strengthen practice across Early Help, with a particular focus on: relational challenge in management oversight and supervision; improving the engagement of families in developing quality shared plans; and developing ways of working with the expanded Family Group Conference (FGC) teams.*
- *Leeds and Coventry to work together to undertake a more detailed joint review of the Front Door once face to face working returns*
- *Coventry and Leeds to work together on improvement work to continue to strengthen the Front Door, particularly in improving recording and management of consent; improving active engagement of fathers; balancing the structure and rigour of Signs of Safety (SoS) with more analysis of context and complexity.*
- *Leeds and Coventry to work together closely to develop and implement an intensive leadership, culture and practice development programme.*
- *Coventry and Leeds to work together to agree further work to review these arrangements and collaborate on improvement where required.*

3.4 There is an opportunity to review the outcomes of these positive interventions at the end of the joint programme with Leeds, which will inform decisions regarding the continuation, sustainability and scale of the programme beyond 2 years.

Any budget requirement to deliver the programme ongoing will be met by savings achieved via a reduction in both looked after children and child protection cases, by releasing costs from case holding workforce and looked after children placements.

The programme provides opportunities to deliver savings beyond the budget required to achieve sustainability by producing additional savings within looked after children and child protection budgets.

4 Timetable for implementing the Family Valued Programme

4.1 The joint shared review and plan was finalised by Leeds and Coventry and submitted to the DfE for funding approval to support the programme on 11th December 2020. The funding proposal includes:

- Developing a relationship-based practice in all service areas
- Expanding the Family Group Conference Service
- Undertaking a Reunification Project
- Strengthening Connected Persons/SGO's
- Promoting participation and influencing the voice of the child

4.2 The Department for Education confirmed approval to the funding on 20th January 2021 to implement from 1st April 2021.

4.3 The Family Valued Coventry Programme Board will be chaired by the Director of the Strengthening Families – Leeds Family Valued programme. The joint Action Plan will be implemented and managed through the Family Valued Programme Board. Chaired by the Director of Leeds Family Valued. The Vice Chair will be the Coventry DCS. The Project Sponsor will be a member of the Senior Management Board who will also be a member of the Programme Board. The terms of reference, including membership will be finalised and agreed between Coventry and Leeds once the programme and funding have been approved by Cabinet and Council.

4.4 A Project Team will be established to provide support across both local authorities. The team will work with senior leaders to develop, monitor and evaluate the shared plan. The project team will also include an apprenticeship role for a young person who has experienced care. Subject to approval of funding the broad timescales will be as follows:

- **March-July:**
 - Recruitment of new staff to services (recruitment to commence from March 2021 onwards)
 - Initial engagement – workshops with managers, staff and partner agencies to provide a background in the Family Valued ethos, approach and rationale
 - Restorative practice awareness training begins
 - Restorative Leadership programme for senior managers
 - Management oversight and supervision action learning sets for front line managers begin
 - Joining up local leaders of key Family Valued reform projects in Coventry with 'Leeds Link Leaders' – experienced managers and practitioners with expertise in the relevant area who will provide support and challenge to develop and implement shared detailed project plans.

- **April – September:**
 - New staff in post, supported by training and mentoring where necessary from Leeds
- **September-December:**
 - Management oversight and Restorative Practice Awareness programmes completed
 - Restorative practice training for schools
 - Restorative leadership programme for middle and frontline managers
 - Restorative ‘theory to practice’ training for social workers and other key practitioners
- **December-February:**
 - Restorative practice intensive training for local trainers and practice champions
 - Relational action learning sets for social work teams

5 Comments from the Director of Finance and the Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

The cost to implement the Leeds Family Valued programme for the first two years will be met by the DfE Grant of £4.1m commencing 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2023.

- 2021/22 £2.0m
- 2022/23 £2.1m

It is expected that by April 2023 the fundamental principles of this system change programme will be embedded into the organisational culture of Children’s Services.

The continuation and scale of this programme beyond 2 years depends on the success criteria and quality of the outcomes, as well as savings delivered through the programme via a reduction in both looked after children and child protection cases, by releasing costs from the case holding workforce and looked after children placements.

The financial objectives and ambitions of the programme are to produce savings beyond the budget required to achieve sustainability and deliver additional savings within looked after children and child protection budgets. The opportunity to review the concept and financial impact in 2 years means there is no financial risk to the Local Authority.

If the programme does not achieve the reduction in costs required to support the programme ongoing, then the Director of Children’s Services will review the viability of continuing at a reduced scale or exiting the programme.

5.2 Legal implications

The Children Act 1989 places a general duty on local authorities to provide services for children in need and their families.

This duty requires a local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children’s needs.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)

This decision is consistent with the Council's aim to support vulnerable families helping services to change the way they work to enable more children to stay safely at home within their families, and less needing to become looked after.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Risk will be managed by the Family Valued Coventry Programme Board. The board will provide robust challenge to the delivery of the targets set against the project. A Project Team will be responsible for implementing the Family Valued Coventry Programme and reporting on progress.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

An additional 33 staff will be employed to implement the Family Valued Coventry Programme. The opportunity that Family Valued brings is significant and will strengthen Children's Services and enhance the pace of change and further improve outcomes for children in Coventry.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

The Family Valued Coventry Programme will contribute to the outcomes for looked after children. The model places families in control and enables them to reduce dependency on specialist services, develop resilience and capacity and take the lead in decision making and ownership of their plan regardless to any needs they may have around race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and disability.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The implications of additional resources to deliver the Family Valued Programme services will change the way the service work with local partners to enable more children to stay safely at home within their families, and less needing to become looked after.

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