
To: Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 21st December 2023

Subject: Family Valued Programme

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To update the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) on the progress and impact of the Family Valued Programme during the funded period, and to outline next steps.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) Note the current progress and impact for children, young people and their families.
 - 2) Note the next steps in relation to sustaining and growing Coventry Family Valued.
 - 3) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 Family Valued was introduced in Coventry Children's Services as part of the national Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) Programme; a 5-year programme funded by the Department for Education (DfE), focussing on safely reducing the number of children entering care, through implementing one of three programmes: Leeds Family Valued, Herefordshire Family Safeguarding, North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door.
- 3.2 Coventry City Council were one of the adopter local authorities of the Family Valued Programme; a Leeds City Council whole-system change programme seeking to create a shift in culture towards working 'with' families rather than doing things 'to' or 'for' them. The overall aim was to support more children to live safely at home with their families and within their communities, through introducing restorative practices and services.
- 3.3 Coventry Children's Services received grant funding of £4,204,141 over a 2.5-year period. Coventry Family Valued launched in April 2021, with the funded period ending in September 2023. The grant funded 36 full-time equivalent (FTE) additional posts in Children's Services to support the implementation of Coventry Family Valued. These additional posts have seen the significant expansion of the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service, additional capacity within the Connected Persons Team and Participation Team, the implementation of a Reunification Project and the creation of a Restorative Practice Team.
- 3.4 Alongside the additional posts has been an implementation plan consisting of six workstreams: 1) Sustainability, Finance and Performance, 2) Embedding Relationship-Based Practice, 3) Expansion of Family Group Conferencing and New Restorative Services, 4) Promoting Connected Persons and Permanence through Special Guardianship Orders, 5) Reunification Project, 6) Voice and Influence.

3.5 Coventry Family Valued branding and communications across Children’s Services and the partnership has centred around the three spires of Coventry Family Valued, to support practitioners, managers, and partners to connect with the aims and objectives of the programme: Spire 1 - A child friendly city, Spire 2 - Family-led decision making, Spire 3 - The Coventry Way.

4 Child Friendly Cov

4.1 The Child Friendly Cov campaign has been the main driver under Spire 1 – A child friendly city. Child Friendly Cov has been developed alongside children, young people, partners, and local businesses, aspiring to make Coventry the best city in the UK for children and young people to live and grow-up in. Child Friendly Cov launched in February 2023. The four key priorities for Child Friendly Cov are that all children and young people in Coventry should: be and feel valued, be and feel safe, be and feel healthy, and have opportunities.

4.2 Since the launch of Child Friendly Cov there has been considerable progress made against these priorities, including the Early Help Strategy centring around them, an ongoing pilot of peer led mental health champions in schools, the development of safe spaces in the city being progressed, the creation of a Pupil Parliament and numerous events and activities taking place across the city. There are currently 34 official supporters of Child Friendly Cov, each of whom are actively working to support Child Friendly Cov in various ways. There is ongoing engagement activity to encourage further supporters across the city.

5 Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

5.1 FGC is central to the Family Valued approach, empowering families to lead on the decisions which affect them whenever safe to do so (Spire 2 – Family-Led Decision Making). Prior to the launch of Coventry Family Valued, there was a small FGC Service in Coventry (consisting of 1 x Team Manager and 5 x FGC Co-ordinators). Coventry Family Valued has seen a significant expansion of the FGC Service, with an additional 16 FTE posts created. This has enabled more families to benefit from having an FGC, with an increasing number of initial FGCs taking place year-on-year since the launch of Coventry Family Valued.

	FGC Referrals	Initial FGCs	Conversion Rate
2020/21	230	116	50%
2021/22	333	174	52%
2022/23	570	230	40%
April 2023 – September 2023*	255	146	57%

*NB: April 2023 – September 2023 data covers a 6-month period rather than 12 months for previous data.

5.2 Extensive work has taken place to establish where the FGC offer should be targeted, with a pilot taking place between May 2022 – August 2022, in the South Help and Protection Service Area, offering families an FGC at the earliest opportunity (during the Child and Family Assessment stage). The aim was to support family-led plans being developed from the outset of Children’s Services intervention, to reduce risk at this stage and avoid any escalation in risk, which could lead to statutory intervention. However, the findings of the pilot demonstrated targeting FGC at the assessment stage was not as effective as had been hoped, and despite a peak in referrals during the pilot, there was a low conversation rate to initial FGCs taking place, with many families not wanting to share their involvement with Children’s Services with their network at a time when the outcome of the assessment was not known, and could result in closure to Children’s Services regardless of an FGC taking place.

5.3 The learning from this pilot, as well as ongoing discussions with colleagues from Leeds City Council, informed an FGC Priority Criteria, positioning the targeting of FGC where there is a

risk of significant harm. The priority criteria was agreed in April 2023, with FGCs being seen as an entitlement for families where there is a risk of children becoming looked after; to support children to return home from care; and for children where there are child protection concerns, recognising that this is where family-led decision making will have the most impact and lead to improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

- 5.4 There are already many examples of where FGC has made a difference for children, young people and their families. However, there is much to do to continue to drive family-led decision-making forwards, and to fully recognise the benefits of FGC. There is an agreement in place with Leeds City Council that they will continue to support Children’s Services in this area until March 2024.

6 Reunification Project

- 6.1 The Reunification Project launched in June 2021 (Spire 2 – Family-led decision making), with 6 x FTE additional posts created to support this work. Since the launch, 32 children and young people have returned home from care to live with their families, with 29 remaining at home following reunification. Of the 3 children who were reaccommodated, 1 has subsequently turned 18 and is accessing the leaving care service, 1 will remain accommodated, and for 1 of these young people the plan is still reunification with some further work with the young person and their family.
- 6.2 The Reunification Project has made a real difference to many children, young people and their families with their improved outcomes being the biggest success of this project. Alongside these improved outcomes for children and young people, the Reunification Project has made considerable financial savings through placement cost avoidance, with further projected savings.

	Placement Cost Avoidance				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Through Care - Cohort 1	£738,621	£1,653,659	£1,228,893	£690,317	£205,746
Through Care - Cohort 2		£883,678	£1,449,888	£1,187,945	£960,700
Looked After Children		£47,511	£129,634	£129,634	£129,634
Through Care – Cohort 3			£1,131,678	£1,844,588	£1,785,099
Total	£738,621	£2,584,849	£3,940,094	£3,852,485	£3,081,179
Less costs - £11,430	-£143,0101	-£503,645	-£569,834	-£569,834	-£569,834
Net impact	£595,611	£2,081,204	£3,370,260	£3,282,651	£2,511,345

- 6.3 The success of the Reunification Project led to further expansion in in July 2022, with 4 x FTE additional posts created (all funded through Children’s Services core budget). The achievements of the Reunification Project have been recognised not only within Coventry, but nationally, with the project shortlisted for two national awards (Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022 and Frontline Awards 2023). The project has also generated keen interest from other local authorities, with Coventry colleagues supporting Newcastle, Darlington and Sefton in relation to implementing similar projects.

7 Connected Carers and Special Guardians

- 7.1 Work has been undertaken to support more looked after children and young people to be cared for by someone connected to them, and to increase the proportion of looked after children who achieve permanence via special guardianship, rather than remaining in care (Spire 2 – Family-led decision making). In July 2021 the Initial Assessments for Connected Persons (previously completed by the child’s allocated social worker) transferred to being completed within the Connected Persons Team, who also complete the full Connected Person Foster Carer Assessments. Both aspects of the fostering assessment being undertaken within the same team has led to a greater consistency in the initial assessments

and fewer negative full assessments (as where applicants are unsuitable to meet the fostering regulations they are ruled out at an earlier stage). This improvement in practice has been well received, particularly by the Family Court. There has also been a shift to Connected Person Foster Carer Assessments being initiated prior to children becoming looked after, which has supported more timely decision making in relation to children being able to live with someone who is connected to them.

7.2 Consultation has taken place with Connected Carers and Special Guardians to explore their experiences and consider how the support they receive could be strengthened. This has resulted in an increased training offer, as well as invitations to celebration events and support groups, which build peer relationships with other Connected Carers and Special Guardians.

8 Restorative Practice Leads

8.1 There has been significant work undertaken over the course of the programme to develop the practice approach in Coventry (Spire 3 – The Coventry Way), introducing restorative and relational practice alongside Signs of Safety. The Restorative Practice Leads have been instrumental in supporting the implementation and embedding of restorative practice across Children’s Services, through offering training and workshops, supporting reflective spaces to consider more restorative ways of working with children and families, and supporting the workstream leads to progress the implementation plan.

9 Overall Impact

9.1 The aim of the Coventry Family Valued was to support more children and young people to live safely at home with their families and within their communities, wherever safe to do so, with the overarching measures of success being:

- Safe reduction in the number of looked after children.
- Safe reduction in the number of children on child protection plans.

Definition	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	September 2023	December 2023
Number of children who are looked after by the Local Authority (excluding UASC)	735	683	652	647	642
Number of children who require a Child Protection Plan	461	511	508	508	465

9.2 Coventry Family Valued has delivered against a challenging backdrop, with national issues in relation to social work recruitment and retention, rising numbers of looked after children nationally, and a placement market which is untenable. Despite these challenges, culture and practice in Coventry has shifted; becoming more relational and restorative, and this is reflected in the improved outcomes for children and young people, with a reduction in the number of children who are in care. Practice improvements and improved outcomes for children, young people and their families in Coventry were recognised by Ofsted (inspection dates 20th June – 1st July 2023), with Coventry Children’s Services receiving a ‘good’ grading in all areas of judgement, with the report recognising that ‘relational social work and restorative practice are embedded across services’.

9.3 It was recognised that as we begun to reduce number of looked after children our number of children who require child protection plan would initially spike as we held risk in a different way. However, we are now beginning to see the impact of Coventry Family Valued at this

stage as well and further work is needed to support, challenge and shape practice and services, to lead to less children requiring statutory intervention.

10 Next Steps

10.1 Grant funding was fully utilised part way through 2023/24. Many programme posts continue to be funded through the Children's Services core budgets for the remainder of 2023/24. Looking forward, Children's Services is considering options for a sustainable Coventry Family Valued model for next year and beyond, building on the restorative practices that are being embedded across the service, with a commitment that Coventry Family Valued will continue. The following 9 priorities have been agreed for Coventry Family Valued in 2024, to build upon the achievements of the funded programme, and continue to drive Family Valued forwards in Coventry:

- **Priority 1: Introducing and embedding Re-Think Formulation**

Re-Think Formulation to be introduced and embedded within Children's Services and across the partnership as a group supervision approach, to assist in slowing down our thinking and building a shared understanding regarding children's circumstances.

- **Priority 2: Rollout of The Coventry Way – Practice Approach**

Embedding The Coventry Way across Children's Services and the partnership so that there is a shared approach to practice, with shared valued, and shared language, providing a scaffold for practitioners and managers, on which relational and restorative practice can flourish, and wherever safe to do so, children remain within their family and within their community.

- **Priority 3: Family-Led Decision Making – One Family, One Plan**

Ensuring that family, wider family and family networks are considered as early as possible to be part of the solution, embedding family-led decision making in practice across all social work teams.

- **Priority 4: Turning the curve and sharpening our understanding of risk of significant harm in Children's Services and across the partnership.**

Sharpening the focus on what constitutes risk of significant harm and ensuring that children and families are supported through intervention which is proportionate. Turning the curve in relation to the number of children who require Child Protection Plans and reducing the period of time children need to be subject to a Child Protection Plan for.

- **Priority 5: Pre-Proceedings (Families Together)**

Developing practice and intervention with children, young people, and families in pre-proceedings, through the use of high-challenge and targeted intensive support. This will include supporting the expansion of the Edge of Care Service to cover 0-8, to be able to support struggling families, regardless of the age of their children, aligning pre-proceedings work with Edge of Care, therefore reducing the length of pre-proceedings, recognising the role of the Child Protection Chairs in driving timely pre-proceedings, and diverting more children from care, wherever safe to do so.

- **Priority 6: Front Door**

To strengthen the Front Door and the management of consent. Ensuring that "Think Family" starts within MASH, and working with families and partner agencies is promoted at this early stage. This includes high-support and high-challenge conversations at the Front Door, helping to ensure that referrals made are for children in need and in need of protection.

- **Priority 7: Child Friendly Cov**

Continuing to embed Child Friendly Cov in Children's Services, across the City Council, the partnership and with local businesses, so that all children and young people in Coventry be and feel valued, be and feel safe, be and feel healthy, and have opportunities.

- **Priority 8: Supervision and InterVision**

Improving the quality of reflective supervision offered across Children's Services, and support peer learning spaces to develop supervision practice among managers.

- **Priority 9: Voice and Influence**

Further develop how children, young people, parents, and carers feed into Service Development in Coventry and regionally.

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