



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

Date: 17th October 2024

Subject: Family Valued and Reunification Project

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 This note is to update the Education and Children’s Scrutiny Board (2) on the impact of Coventry Family Valued, including the Reunification Project, to date, and to outline next steps.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children’s Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) Read this note in conjunction with the ‘Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next -Steps (April 2021 – March 2024)’ – Appendix 1
 - 2) Note the current progress and impact for children, young people and their families.
 - 3) Note the challenges highlighted in relation to financial sustainability post funding and how this has been addressed.
 - 4) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 Family Valued was introduced in Coventry Children’s Services on 1st April 2021 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 introducing restorative practices and services.
- 3.2 Coventry City Council received grant funding of £4,204,141 over a 2.5-year period (April 2021 – 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 posts saw 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.
- 3.3 Over the funded period, the Coventry Family Valued Programme delivered against a challenging backdrop, with national issues in relation to social work recruitment and retention, rising numbers of children in care nationally, and a placement market which

is untenable. Despite these challenges, culture and practice in Coventry shifted; becoming more relational and restorative, and this was reflected in the improved outcomes for children and young people, with a safe reduction in the number of children who were in care, year-on-year, over the funded period, as well as practice improvements and improved outcomes for children, young people and their families being 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’*.

Definition	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024
Number of children who are looked after by the Local Authority (excluding UASC)	735	684	659	613

3.4 The SFPC Programme has now ended, but Children and Education Services remains committed to Coventry Family Valued, having seen the impact this has had for children, young people and their families, with Coventry Family Valued now being seen as the practice approach ‘with’ children, young people and families, rather than a programme.

4 Financial Sustainability

4.1 It was envisaged, that the posts created through SFPC funding, would financially sustain themselves, post funding, due to the projected financial savings which would be made through to the safe reduction of children in care. However, while a safe reduction of children in care was achieved year-on-year, over the same period, the placements market spiralled, thus the projected financial savings were not achieved. This resulted in the difficult decision to delete numerous Family Valued posts, as these could not be funded through the core Children and Education Services budget.

4.2 However, it should be noted, that while financial savings were not achieved, if Coventry Family Valued had not been introduced, it is likely that there would have been increased pressures on Coventry City Council’s budgets, due to the number of children likely to have been in care, without this change in approach.

4.3 Due to significant financial pressures, post-funding, the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service was reduced from 3 x Team Manager FTE posts to 2 x Team Manager FTE posts, and from 15 x FGC Co-ordinator FTE posts to 8 x FGC Co-ordinator FTE posts. The number of Restorative Practice Leads (now known as Family Valued Practice Leads) was also reduced from 9 x FTE posts to 2 x FTE posts.

5 Family Group Conferences (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. As stated previously, the FGC Service was significantly expanded with SFPC Funding, which enabled more families to benefit from FGC. The Service has since been restructured, with less posts, however there are still more posts than pre-Family Valued.

- 5.2 Further developmental work has taken place in FGC, supported by Leeds Relational Practice Centre, to deepen FGC practice. This has included a focus on developing relationships with referrers, increasing the number of attendees at FGCs (and therefore the size of the family and friends network) and focussing on what true family-led practice looks like.
- 5.3 In addition to this developmental work, the referral criteria for FGC have been modified, both reflecting the reduced capacity within the FGC Service, and to ensure that FGCs are taking place ‘with’ families where the greatest impact can be achieved. The referral criteria for FGC is currently:

- To avoid children on the edge of care from becoming looked after
- To explore children returning to family from care
- To explore family support as an alternative to Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC)
- To support a child who has returned home from care.
- Referrals are no longer accepted to support with de-escalation of Children’s Services involvement (i.e. closure or step-down to Early Help).

- 5.4 The number of families who have benefitted from an Initial FGC has increased year-on-year since Coventry Family Valued was introduced.

	FGC Referrals	Initial FGCs	Conversion Rate
2020/21	230	116	50%
2021/22	333	174	52%
2022/23	570	230	40%
2023/24	479	242	51%

- 5.5 Examples of the difference that FGC has made to children and their families is included within the Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next Steps (April 2021 – March 2024). The success of FGCs is measured 12 months following the FGC process ending based on the reason for the referral, and if the FGC process achieved this. The data from 2023/2024 shows positive outcomes for children and families where the FGC process had been completed 12-months prior (2022/2023) with the rates of success outlined below:

- De-escalation – 80%
- Explore alt to ICPC – 94%
- Avoid care – 78%
- Explore return home or support return home – 74%

- 5.6 The 2023/2024 FGC data also shows that 36% of children either contributed or were involved in their FGC, with an increase over Q2 and Q3 of this year. This is an area which the FGC Service are further increasing, with actions in place to address this.

- 5.7 In addition, there has been an overall increase in feedback from children and young people for 2023/2024, which is overwhelmingly positive, as well as positive feedback from network members.

6 Reunification Project

- 6.1 The Reunification Project commenced on 31.05.2021, with 6 x FTE additional posts created through the SFPC funding to support this work. The project was developed with the aim to reunify children in care into the care of their family, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. The project provides intensive support to children and families which includes out of hours and at the weekend. The support is intensive, responsive and consistent.
- 6.2 Due to the success of this project, both in relation to improved outcomes for children and young people, as well as placement cost avoidance, the team was further expanded in July 2022, with 4 x FTE additional posts created (all funded though Children's Services core budget).
- 6.3 There continues to be success for children, young people and their families through this project, with 44 children and young people having returned home from care to live with their families as a result. The Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next Steps (April 2021 – March 2024) contains examples of the impact that this project has had to the lives of children and their families.
- 6.4 As well as the improved outcomes for children and young people, the project has made considerable savings due to placement cost avoidance. The table below outlines the placement cost avoidance to date, as well as projected placement cost avoidance, associated with the children and young people who have entered the project to date.

Placement cost avoidance	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
C1 21/22	738,621	1,653,659	1,228,893	690,317	205,746
C2 22/23		1,126,685	1,443,788	1,107,338	888,232
C3 23/24			900,941	1,608,406	956,163
C4 24/25				426,265	515,676
Total cost avoidance	738,621	2,780,344	3,573,623	3,832,326	2,565,817
Less costs - 11430				-	-
Staffing	- 142,010	- 414,750	- 396,772	- 428,700	- 428,700
Non-staffing	- 1,000	- 23,995	- 29,089	- 30,000	- 30,000
Corporate overheads		- 64,898	- 70,154	- 31,495	- 31,495
Total costs	- 143,010	- 503,644	- 496,016	- 490,195	- 490,195
Net impact	595,611	2,276,701	3,077,607	3,342,131	2,075,622

7 Family Valued Practice Leads

- 7.1 As stated earlier, there has been a reduction in the number of Family Valued Practice Leads, post SFPC funding, from 9 x FTE posts to 2 x FTE posts. While this is a significant reduction, and less than ideal, it is recognised that less Family Valued Practice Leads are needed to embed Coventry Family Valued, than were needed in the implementation phase.
- 7.2 The Family Valued Practice Leads are key to embedding the Coventry Family Valued approach to practice, both within Children and Education Services and across the partnership. They continue to offer learning events and facilitate reflective spaces to

consider more restorative ways of working 'with' children, young people and families, and deepening practitioners and managers understanding of relational and restorative practice, as this is further embedded across the service.

- 7.3 The Family Valued Practice Leads are driving the implementation of Rethink Formulation, as a tool to support practitioners to slow-down their thinking, to rethink their practice, and to support family-led solutions wherever possible. Practitioner feedback highlights that Rethink Formulation is supporting a deeper, richer understanding of the presenting issue(s) which has supported the development of a hypothesis to work from and develop next steps. There have been examples where the next steps have assisted conversations with parents and other professionals to strengthen alignment on progressing plans for children, such as enabling the ending of a Child Protection Plan, focussed discussions about thresholds for Child Protection or Pre-Proceedings to determine if this is appropriate next step and providing high support and high challenge for staff when working with complex issues. Rethink Formulation appears to be strengthening working 'with' children and families whilst enabling workers to reflect upon and make adaptations when needed to their relational and restorative practice.
- 7.4 The learning offer in relation to Coventry Family Valued has been updated, reflecting a move away from the Signs of Safety approach, and the implementation of Rethink Formulation, as part of the Coventry Family Valued approach to practice, as well as no longer having input from the Leeds Relational Practice Centre in relation to training, with this now being delivered solely by the Family Valued Practice Leads.
- 7.5 Updated Coventry Family Valued Learning Events commenced in May 2024, with 33 full-day sessions being delivered since this time, with 259 Children's Services staff having attended to date (as of the end of September 2024). There are a further 22 sessions planned between October 2024 – January 2025, at which point all of Children's Services staff will have had the opportunity to attend a learning event, and the offer will then be extended across the partnership.
- 7.6 In addition to these learning events, the Family Valued Practice Leads have facilitated 8 Rethink Formulation Learning Events, for managers and practitioners who wish to further deepen their understanding of formulation, and who then champion the use of formulation across the service as part of the implementation plan. The Family Valued Practice Leads have also facilitated 62 Rethink Formulations with practitioners and managers across the service.

8 Overall Impact

- 8.1 The aim of Coventry Family Valued is 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	March 2024	August 2024
Number of children who are looked after by the Local Authority (excluding UASC)	735	684	659	613	638
Number of children who require a Child Protection Plan	461	511	528	578	482

- 8.2 Since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, the number of children in care has safely reduced year-on-year, with more children living at home safely with their families. There has been a recent spike in the number of children in care, and this is being explored internally to gain a better understanding of the reasons for this, so that appropriate actions can be put in place, to support the continuation of the improved outcomes for children and their families which have been achieved to date. The increasing number of children in care, does correlate with the FGC Service and Family Valued Practice Lead team being scaled back, and further exploration is needed in relation to if this has contributed to the recent rise in numbers of looked after children.
- 8.3 The number of children who require a Child Protection Plan continues to require a specific focus, and improvement activity is taking place in this area, to support a safe reduction. It is pleasing to see that these numbers have started to reduce, and it is envisaged that through the focussed improvement work in this area, that this will continue.
- 8.4 Further information about the impact that Coventry Family Valued has had for children, young people and their families can be found in the Coventry Family Valued Report and Next Steps (April 2021 – March 2024). (Appendix 1)

Appendix 1: ‘Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next -Steps (April 2021 – March 2024)

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