



**One Council  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
12 June 2012**

**Report from the Director of  
Strategy, Partnerships &  
Improvement**

Wards Affected:  
ALL

**Working with Families Initiative - Update**

**1.0 Summary and Recommendation**

- 1.1 The following report will introduce and outline the development of a suite of four new One Council projects that will collectively deliver a 'Working with Families' Initiative for the borough. Whilst the four projects are all currently at the early stages of development, it is anticipated that the Initiative will generate significant and lasting positive change to the way that public services are delivered Brent's most vulnerable families. This report will also describe the necessary synergies between the Initiative itself and the national Troubled Families programme.
- 1.2 Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and consider the contents of this report.

**2.0 Introduction: What is the Working with Families Initiative?**

- 2.1 The Working with Families Initiative aims to fundamentally change the way that Brent council and its partners identify and deliver services to its most vulnerable families. Underpinned by the national 'Troubled Families' agenda, the Initiative recognises that there are significant financial and non-financial benefits that can be generated from changing the way that the public sector delivers services to families with complex needs. These benefits can only be realised as a result of a whole systems change, a significant shift in attitude and approach including a shift to a family focus, and genuine partnership working across agencies.
- 2.2 It is currently proposed that the Initiative is delivered through a series of four distinct but interdependent One Council partnership projects. A Working with Families Strategic Board has been convened to oversee the early development of these projects and to ensure that the dependencies between the projects are carefully managed (this high level governance is outlined in appendix 1 below).

**3.0 Rationale for change: Why do we need to the Initiative?**

3.1 On one level the Initiative can be viewed as Brent's response to the national Troubled Families Programme. The Initiative does however also represent wider and more sustainable change for the borough, and has been created to tackle a number of significant and longstanding issues that exist at both a local and national level. These include:

3.2 **A lack of early help services in Brent:** The Initiative recognises that there is currently a paucity of robust 'early help' services for families in Brent. This is true across a range of departments and services (i.e. within both Adult's and Children's Social Care)

- This has resulted in significant pressure being placed on Children's Social Care who are often dealing with referrals that are either below the social care threshold or have reached this threshold because of gaps and shortfalls in 'early help' provision. This can result in an inefficient and sometimes ineffective response to meeting need as well as an inappropriate and expensive use of professional resources.
- A range of recent academic and government reports have advocated the importance of an early help approach, both within the early years settings (Allen, Field et al), and early on within a child's journey into the care system (Munro). Adopting a more pro-active approach to early intervention prevents later escalation of problems and builds resilience within families.
- On the back of Munro's recommendations Ofsted, in their next inspection round, will assess the degree to which an LA has tried an early help approach with families before in-care episodes.
- The Working with Families Initiative is underpinned by the view, and supported by evidence –based research, that the development of preventative, 'early help' services for vulnerable families will significantly improve outcomes for some of the borough's most vulnerable residents whilst simultaneously making better use of scarce public resources.

3.3 **A lack of co-ordination between departments and agencies has often led to a fragmented approach to meeting family needs leading to gaps, shortfalls and sometimes duplication in provision.** The Working with Families Initiative is based on the premise that effective interventions need to be multi-agency and this requires a whole system approach that works effectively across organisational boundaries, to provide:

- responsive and efficient access arrangements for services based on robust information-sharing protocols
- evidence-based interventions that can be evaluated in terms of the benefits to children and their families and the efficiency of resource usage by Brent and its partners.

3.4 **Balancing demand and resources:** There is also an economic and financial justification for undertaking the Working with Families Initiative. It faces up to the reality that the current financial climate requires a change of approach so that priority demands can be met within a reduced financial envelope. This means that the system will need to change fundamentally. The Working with Families Initiative aims to address this issue by:

- Prioritising an early help approach to working with families that will reduce the subsequent demand for expensive statutory services.
- Adopting a holistic family focus that will focus on tackling the root cause of the problem.
- Adopting a more targeted approach by prioritising interventions that are proven to work, and ensuring that the packages of support that are delivered to families are tailored to their specific levels of need. This will require a whole system's approach to establish a continuum of care which will incorporate 'step-up' and 'step-down' arrangements to address the changing needs and circumstances of families.
- Working with partners to provide a more efficient multi-agency response and avoid duplication in service delivery.
- Exploring options for pooled/community based budgets across key agencies in order to maximise the resource base.

3.5 If these issues and challenges can be addressed effectively, the benefits to families can be considerable in terms of sustaining the stability of families over time and improved parenting. This will, in turn, lead to improvements in, for example, the welfare, behaviour and school attendance of children and young people. At high levels of need, interventions can work to keep children on the edge of care out of the care system while meeting their needs within the family unit.

3.6 From a financial point of view, it is difficult to establish the savings to Brent and the local public purse generally. However, local areas that have prioritised an Early Help approach (Westminster, Manchester etc.) have reported significant financial benefits. The impact, as evidenced for example in the Allen report, is that the savings from working with families with young children are achieved in the medium to long term; the children as they become young people do not require intensive and more costly interventions. More quantifiable savings can be realised in the shorter term from keeping children on the edge of care out of the care system. A key objective for the 'edge of care' project will be to model the net savings from the proposed outputs. Evidence from elsewhere indicates that a significant level of savings can be realised in the short and medium term from effective 'edge of care' interventions.

3.7 **Responding to the Troubled Families programme:** In March 2012 Brent Council formally provided a commitment to deliver the Troubled Families programme on a local level. The Department of Communities and Local Government are defining 'Troubled Families' as households who:

- Are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Have children not in school
- Have an adult on out of work benefits
- Cause high costs to the public purse

The delivery of the Troubled Families programme will be embedded in the Working with Families Initiative while providing an impetus for improving the way early intervention services are organised and delivered. This will include using the Troubled Families' monies to invest in new services, and 'pump prime' the development of four new Working with Families projects.

## 4.0 The approach

- 4.1 A high level mapping of the territory has been carried out to establish the most appropriate approach to deliver the Working with Families initiative whilst meeting the requirements of Troubled Families programme. The matrix below shows the 4 projects and their relationship to levels of need and the age groups of children/young people.
- 4.2 The CLG recognises that implementation of the Troubled Families programme is likely to lead to a reconfiguration of services. The root and branch changes that will emerge from the Working with Families Initiative is likely to result in a business model that will have major structural implications for the way family-based services are organised and delivered.

Figure 1: Mapping of territory of the four new Working with Families Projects.

CYP Age Range	LEVEL OF NEED				
	1. CYP needs are met	2a. Families in which CYP has an additional need	2b. Children with multiple needs	3. Complex – There are welfare concerns about CYP/ families have complex problems.	4. Acute – CYP in need of protection
			1. Multi-agency front door development project		
0-4 years			2. Early Help Project (Families with young children)		4. Edge of Care project (all ages)
5-10 years					
11-15 years			3. Early Help Project (Families with adolescents)		
16+ years					

Note: Whilst all of the projects will help Brent to meet its Troubled Families commitments, it is expected that the territory within the red dotted line will be where the majority of families that directly meet the Troubled Families criteria will be worked with.

## 5.0 Who will deliver the project?

- 5.1 The success of the Working with Families Initiative critically depends on the strategic and operational engagement of all the relevant council departments and key partner agencies. Partners from Health, the Police, Schools, Jobcentre plus and other local service providers will therefore need to be involved in strategic and operational developments. This whole systems

approach, together with the impetus provided by the Troubled Families Programme, provides a real opportunity to qualitatively change service delivery for the benefit of both families and Brent's public service providers.

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Appendix 1: Working with Families high level governance structure.

