



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

The first Troubled Families Programme 2012 to 2015

An overview



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Introduction

The original Troubled Families Programme was the first national, systematic approach to driving real change in outcomes for families with multiple problems and to change the services that worked with them. Families who participated in the first Troubled Families Programme have seen significant improvements in their lives, with children back in school, reduced youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and for thousands of those families, adults into work.

The independent evaluation of the programme found widespread evidence of service transformation: the programme had scaled up family intervention provision, had begun to mainstream a 'whole-family working' approach (so that practitioners considered all the problems experienced by a whole family rather than focussing on individuals) and stimulated multi-agency working¹. Families were hugely positive about the service with a large majority (76%) saying the help they received through the programme had made more difference to their lives than previous help they had received². They also said they valued the trust, honesty and persistence of keyworkers³. However, the short-term nature and methodological challenges of the evaluation mean it has been unable to attribute improvements in families' lives to the programme.

The new programme and its evaluation has learnt lessons and built on the strong delivery and data infrastructure created by the original programme. For example:

- Family intervention remains at heart of the new programme with a whole family approach being central to the way work is done with complex families.
- Local authorities are working with a broader range of families than before and outcomes are measured by the progress families make against all their problems rather than prescribed outcomes.
- The new evaluation has been designed to address the limitations of the first project and is able to track outcomes systematically over the course of programme until its completion. The evaluation will report match data at six month intervals during the lifetime of the programme and will follow families for five years to track their progress.

¹ Day, L. *et al* (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme; Final Synthesis Report*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

² Purdon, S., and Bryson, C. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Technical report: impact evaluation using survey data*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

³ Blades, R., Erskine, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Families' Experiences and Outcomes*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

Aims of the first Troubled Families Programme

Public services have previously failed families who have multiple problems because they operate in a siloed and mostly reactive fashion. Services have tended to respond to a problem that individual family members exhibit without either understanding or tackling underlying root problems or the inter-connectedness of other family members' problems.

For example, in a case from Leicestershire, efforts by education welfare services to tackle the poor school attendance, disruptive and violent behaviour of four boys in a family were not working because they were not coordinated with support their mother needed for her mental and physical health problems and her spiralling debts. The mother was reluctant to leave the home and this compounded her struggle to find work and to make sure her children attended school.

The Troubled Families Programme family intervention worker established a productive working relationship with the mother and the whole family. The family worker navigated all of these inter related issues, provided one to one support and brought in specialists, such as mental health services, where necessary. In this case, the family worker accompanied mum to a meeting with a Job Centre Plus worker who showed her how much better off she would be financially if she went back to work and encouraged her to attend courses that would help. This helped with her confidence and made her determined to find a job. The family worker helped her to create a payment plan so that she could get her debts under control. The family worker was also able to help her with other small practical tasks to help get control of her life – for example giving her a calendar so she could keep track of all her appointments and begin to start attending school meetings and health appointments. The family worker also worked with the children, to get to grips with why they were struggling with school and explained the consequences of them not attending. She also got medical assessments for the younger son who was displaying really difficult behaviour.

As a result, the mother was offered a job in a care home and her eldest son's school attendance has improved so much that he is on course to receive 10 GCSE grades A-C and plans to go to college to do a sports course. Her youngest son, who has been diagnosed with a mental health problem and is now on medication, has also improved his attendance. He has also attended a number of football trials with various clubs and there are no longer any violent incidents.

The original Troubled Families programme was launched in 2012 and aimed to “turn around” the lives of 120,000 families with multiple problems across England by May 2015. Its premise was that there was a better way to work with families with multiple problems by identifying the underlying and interlinked problems that a family faced and dealing with them as a whole in order to initiate change in that family.

The failure to operate in this way was not only damaging for families but came at a huge cost to public services with an estimated £9 billion a year spent on largely reacting to their

problems rather than intervening early⁴. A sum equivalent to 2% of that estimated annual cost was allocated to the Troubled Families Programme by five Government departments - a total of £448 million over three financial years (2012/13 to 2014/15) to be made available to 152 upper tier local authorities.

The headline problems being tackled through the programme were: children not attending or being excluded from school; children involved in crime and children and adults involved in anti-social behaviour; and adults out of work. A further 'high cost' criteria was included to allow local authorities to address other problems such as domestic violence, relationship breakdown, mental and physical health problems.

Every upper tier local authority agreed their share of the national estimated total of 120,000 families with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and then worked with Job Centres, the police, schools, and other services to identify families with multiple problems in their area who would be targeted by their local programme.

The programme encouraged a 'family intervention' approach that had a positive evidence base from earlier intensive family intervention projects⁵. The family intervention model is of a nominated key worker being assigned to each family who gets an understanding of the whole family's inter-connected issues and of the family dynamics. S/he adopts a persistent and assertive approach, establishing a relationship with the family and working closely with them to 'grip' the family and their problems as well as the agencies that will typically have been dipping in and out of the family's lives. The key worker agrees a plan of action, with clear outcomes, with the family and with relevant services. S/he will offer both practical assistance in the home (routines, domestic tasks) and help the family address issues such as ill health, debt and addiction, bringing in specialist services where necessary.

Outcomes were prescribed by DCLG as a reduction in youth crime or anti-social behaviour, improvements in attendance at school over a three term period or an adult in the family back in work.

Government funding was primarily made available via a combination of per-family 'attachment fees' and payment by results designed to incentivise an outcomes-based approach⁶. Areas were able to claim an attachment fee for families they started working with and to claim a results payment when prescribed outcomes were met. It was expected that areas would work with some families for whom they would not be able to claim a result within the timeframe of the programme and so local authorities would need to work with more than their target number of families.

The maximum amount of funding per family that could be claimed via payment by results (PBR) was £4,000. It is important to recognise that, unlike traditional PBR schemes, this payment did not represent the full estimated costs of the intervention necessary to achieve the desired results. Rather it was a contribution (estimated to be 40%) towards that total cost designed to provide sufficient incentive for local authorities and their partners to

⁴ DCLG (2013) *The Fiscal Case for Working with Troubled Families: analysis and evidence on the cost of Troubled Families to Government*

⁵ See for example White, C. et al (2008) *Family Intervention Projects – An evaluation of their design, set up and early outcomes*. London: Department for Education

⁶ DCLG (2012) [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#)

contribute matching investment into interventions that were evidenced as likely to be successful with this client group.

Providing a reduced level of results funding in this way provided the government with more than adequate cover against the possibility of paying overall for what is termed 'deadweight' i.e. paying for outcomes that would have occurred naturally without the need for this programme. Further assurance against this prospect was provided by agreement with local authorities that payments would only be made for five-sixths of all families claimed for.

A coordination grant was also paid which would allow a Troubled Families Co-ordinator in each area to co-ordinate local services and manage the local programme – the amount of grant funding depending on the number of families to be worked with in each area.

A national independent evaluation was carried out try to understand how the programme had affected services for families, how families themselves had experienced the programme, and to attempt to estimate the net impact of the programme on family outcomes using comparison groups. The research was conducted by a consortium led by Ecorys UK Ltd.

The programme was developed at pace and aimed to generate a culture shift in how complex families were worked with; a central DCLG team was put in place to work closely with areas, and support and challenge local authorities as they undertook delivery of the programme with their partners.

What has the first Troubled Families Programme achieved?

The Troubled Families Programme was the first national, systematic approach to driving real change in outcomes for families with multiple problems and to change the services that worked with them. More than 116,000 families who participated in the programme have seen significant improvements in their lives.

The programme has made other significant achievements which underpin this progress made with families. The programme has been a catalyst for service transformation in family support services; driven greater understanding and resourcing of whole family working and created a strong cross-service local delivery and data infrastructure which creates a solid platform for the future.

The independent evaluation of the programme⁷ found widespread evidence of this service transformation and concluded that the programme had:

- enabled local authorities to scale-up their family intervention provision,
- driven innovation in working with families,
- stimulated multi-agency working, and
- begun to mainstream a 'whole-family working' approach.

The independent evaluation found that families supported by the programme valued the support provided by their keyworker and the advocacy they provided in accessing services. In particular families appreciated the trust, honesty and persistence of keyworkers⁸.

However, for family outcomes the analysis was unable to detect a direct, attributable impact to the programme when measured by certain national administrative datasets or by survey data within the limited period in which it was possible to observe progress (predominantly 12 months from the start of intervention)⁹. The survey results did, however, find that the programme had already had an impact on family attitudes and confidence though not on other outcomes (although it also found that most families were still receiving interventions when interviewed so it may have been too soon to detect an impact on outcomes).

The evaluation findings do not mean that there were not positive changes in the families' circumstances, but that changes achieved could not be isolated solely as being the

⁷ White, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Process Evaluation*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

⁸ Blades, R., Erskine, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Families' Experiences and Outcomes*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

⁹ Day, L. *et al* (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme; Final Synthesis Report*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

product of the programme itself. While this is disappointing given the wider findings of the evaluation, we accept that as with other areas of social policy the impact study found it difficult to attribute change in families directly to the programme. It is important, however, to take note of both the experimental nature of this part of the evaluation, the major limitations around data quality and other caveats as acknowledged by the independent contractors, and indeed of those caveats that we believe deserved greater prominence in their report. We discuss this in more detail below.

Improvements for 116,000 families

More than 116,000 families on the first Troubled Families Programme saw improvements against a set of outcomes related to employment, youth crime and school attendance. Getting children back into school to achieve 85% and higher attendance sustained over three terms, sustained employment and reduced youth crime are outcomes that are unlikely to have been achieved if other family problems (such as health problems, debt or domestic abuse) were not also successfully tackled. Schooling and employment are recognised as vital outcomes in terms of future life chances.

These changes are significant when set against the complexity of the families. A study of the characteristics of over 16,000 families entering the programme found that they had many problems in addition to those determining programme eligibility¹⁰. Families in this representative sample had an average of seven different problems including physical and mental health, domestic abuse and debt which confirms the underlying premise of the programme that problems around school attendance, crime or being out of work rarely exist in isolation

While this is a significant achievement, it is important to emphasise that this does not mean there was a 100% 'success rate' for the programme. Most areas will, of course, have worked with more families than their local target in order to achieve that number of successful family outcomes (as set out in the programme's Financial Framework¹¹ which described how the programme should operate).

It's likely that some families could not be helped by the programme; others families may have seen improved outcomes but not have met the 'turned around' criteria for a claim to be made within the time frame for the programme. In other cases an area may have already reached its maximum agreed number of claims for payment. Though it is likely that some families initially engaged with under a local programme will not, for a variety of reasons, have achieved successful outcomes, there is no evidence to suggest that such families will have been given up on. Services will, of necessity, still be in contact with such families and the incentives for them to maintain whole family interventions remain high in order to seek to reduce ongoing costly demand pressures. For example, Newcastle has developed a network of Family Support Volunteers that receive over 50 hours of intensive training provided by voluntary sector partners (Barnardos, Action for Children and Children North East). Volunteers are based within the same communities as the families and work alongside the key worker to deliver the outcomes for the family and continue to do so after

¹⁰ Whitley, J. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Family Monitoring Data*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹¹ DCLG (2012) [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#)

families have been stepped down from the programme. This both enhances their offer of support to vulnerable families and provides a route towards achieving and sustaining employment for local people.

Families' experience of the programme

Families interviewed through the evaluation were hugely positive about the services they received. Almost nine in ten (86 per cent) reported that the key worker's involvement had been very (66 per cent) or fairly (20 per cent) helpful. Overall, seven in ten (72 per cent) main carer respondents reported feeling better about their future than they had before the involvement of the key worker¹².

For a programme that set out to improve the way services worked with families, it is notable that three quarters (76 per cent) felt that the difference the key worker had made to their families' lives was 'much more' (58 per cent) or 'slightly more' (18 per cent) than that made by previous support.

A catalyst for change in local authorities

The evaluation identified the programme as a lever or catalyst for change, helping local authorities to integrate local public services and drive workforce reform. The programme was described by a local authority as hitting the 'zeitgeist', both reflecting and driving changes in the way that services for complex families are delivered. For local areas already on this path the programme has helped to 'accelerate, reinforce and embed existing activities, through additional resources and developing an infrastructure'¹³.

The evaluation reports evidence of whole family working, a central feature of the programme, becoming 'business as usual' in many local areas with evidence of it also starting to influence service delivery with families at lower levels of need. The evaluation also reports that the quality of whole family working seemed to improve although there remain challenges for example in cases of domestic abuse or violence and in the practicalities of working with many different family members.

*"In the Youth Offending Team [change] is probably the greatest, because if you'd of come here two years ago and asked Youth Offending Team workers to talk about their work, in half the cases they wouldn't even know what the family make up was or they would have never of met with the parents. Now they're adopting a whole family approach with all of the cases that are within [Troubled Families service]."*¹⁴

¹² Purdon, S., and Bryson, C. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Technical report: impact evaluation using survey data*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹³ Day, L. et al (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme; Final Synthesis Report*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

¹⁴ White, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Process Evaluation*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

Scaling up family intervention services

The programme has also increased the scale and use of family intervention services across England¹⁵. Prior to the programme there was no national approach to improving outcomes for complex families, instead there were a few small scale projects. The factors which characterised family intervention are in widespread use. These are a worker who is: dedicated to the family; provides practical, 'hands on' support; takes a persistent, assertive and challenging approach; who considers the family as a whole and who agrees with other services a common purpose and agreed action for that family. These factors were generally accepted as vital components of the approach whether or not services described them as family intervention.

Overall, the programme has provided a huge boost to family intervention practice, 'enabling key workers to work intensively with all family members, to dig deeper than other professionals and to get to the roots of deeply entrenched problems, understand the whole family more effectively, being more closely aligned with partners, taking a more assertive and challenging approach and incorporating training and employment as part of the intervention'¹⁶.

The scaling up of family intervention practice has led to some concerns about the fidelity to the family intervention model particularly where families have less intense needs or where support was delivered by a 'lead' worker (who typically took on case responsibility in addition to other responsibilities) rather than a key worker (where working with families is a core responsibility). There were wide variations in practice across local authorities. This may have been a product of the pace of expansion in service capacity.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

What lessons have we learned from the first Troubled Families Programme?

Was a target of 120,000 the right approach?

The Programme has been subject to criticism for using the estimate of 120,000 families which was used as the 'target' figure for the programme. The data was based on the best estimate available at the time of the number of families with multiple problems. There could be no more accurate estimate of families with multiple problems because of the extremely limited data available at family level, precisely because services did not address problems from a whole family perspective.

Those who have sustained a critical focus on the derivation of the 120,000 figure, however, risk missing the wider and more important point. The figure served as a realistic estimate which could be used as a basis for agreements with local areas on their local targets. Those local services then identified the real families, their names, addresses and real problems - not notional numbers from surveys. It provided a launch-pad for the programme and provided focus, drive and structure for the programme.

Lessons learned for the new Troubled Families Programme

With the benefit of a greater understanding of the range and types of problems likely to be faced by families with complex needs as the first programme has developed, it has been possible to draw on various data sources to form a more comprehensive estimate of the overall numbers who could fall within the criteria for the new Troubled Families Programme. The new Programme aims to support 400,000 families by 2020.

It is still the case, however, that the overall national estimate and the individual local targets are just the starting points for local services identifying and working with the real families and their real problems

Payment by results

The evaluation found that the centrally prescribed criteria for entry onto the programme - work, crime/anti-social behaviour and truancy had made partners more 'outcome focused' and provided a structure for the programme¹⁷. The simplicity of the criteria was useful in helping to engage partners locally and it had helped drive the objective of working with families at scale. This is hugely important given the intention to take a much more systematic approach to working with complex families.

However as the programme evolved, some local authorities became frustrated that they could not bring all of the families they wanted to into this programme. For example, the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

programme's inbuilt bias towards helping families with school age children meant those with younger children were not a priority. Families suffering from domestic abuse, which often drove multiple responses from agencies did not fit neatly into the programme structure, though we know from the independent evaluation's family monitoring data that nearly a third of families were reported to be experiencing issues of domestic/familial violence¹⁸.

There have been criticisms that payment by results would incentivise authorities to stop working with families once they had claimed a results payment. No requirement was placed on areas to report on progress post claim, however the independent evaluation highlights how local authorities developed 'exit plans' and step down processes for families once their cases were closed¹⁹. The intention of the programme was to find ways to work with families that would reduce dependency on public services. Given the complexity of the families, closing cases precipitously at the point of the claim would be counter-productive. The strongest financial incentives (outweighing the PBR payments per family) were for local agencies to achieve reductions in demand for costly reactive services in the short, medium and long terms and hence alleviate budget pressures.

The contractors for the independent evaluation have suggested that the programme's PBR scheme risked paying for 'deadweight' i.e. made payments for successful outcomes that would have been achieved anyway without the programme's support²⁰. They suggest that the PBR scheme provided an incentive for local authorities to make claims for families where no specific new intervention had been necessary to achieve the required outcomes and suggest this may account for why their impact study failed to detect attributable impact. This suggestion does not stand up to scrutiny. Firstly, as explained earlier in this report, ample provision for deadweight was made in the PBR funding arrangements – meeting 40% of estimated cost for 5/6ths of claims made and not paying anything for 1/6th of claims. The strongest incentive for local agencies was the anticipated reduction in the demand for their services that achieving successful outcomes with their families would bring.

Secondly, the evaluation has amply demonstrated the significant multiple problems and challenges that families engaged on the programme faced – in no way confined to simply those of the eligibility criteria. That truancying children, for example, in families where truancy was but a symptom of wider family problems that might include mental ill health, familial violence and criminality would return to, high levels of school attendance sustained for three terms without any specific additional support being offered, seems unlikely. These families had often been the recipients of years of interventions, often resulting in very little change, and with a high cost to the taxpayer. We know from the evaluation that the programme drove service transformation, helped identify families who would otherwise have slipped through the net, and enabled local authorities to scale up the way they worked with families through new or expanded services or teams. Almost nine in ten families (86 per cent) reported that the Troubled Families keyworker's involvement had

¹⁸ Whitley, J. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Family Monitoring Data*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹⁹ White, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Process Evaluation*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

²⁰ Day, L. et al (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme; Final Synthesis Report*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

been very (66 per cent) or fairly (20 per cent) helpful. The difficulties faced by the evaluation of attributable impact and the likely reasons for its findings are discussed below.

Lessons learned for the new Troubled Families Programme

The new programme includes more local discretion and flexibility in the eligibility criteria beyond anti-social behaviour, crime and school attendance so that local authorities can work with a broader range of families and prioritise families based on local need.

The programme retains a focus on outcomes across a wider range of problems. However, rather than prescribed national outcomes of work, school attendance and crime/anti-social behaviour, outcomes are set locally in local Troubled Families Outcomes Plans and reflect local priorities, such as improving school readiness or reducing domestic violence. Local authorities working across a range of headline problems must make significant and sustained progress against all the problems that a family is experiencing.

Data

The independent evaluation found that the programme has driven significant improvements in data sharing²¹. Regulations created a new legal gateway enabling Job Centres to share data with local authorities about the employment status of families. Police and youth offending teams and schools were encouraged to bring their data together to build a clearer picture of a family, their problems and the services they were working with. There were also improvements in the quality of data collection and information sharing locally. Pooling data from different services about families revealed service duplication in some cases.

However there remain significant problems and complexities involved in data sharing. The evaluation highlights the challenges that existed around the quality and collection of data both at the outset and throughout the programme and the quality of locally available data in particular has also had an impact on the overall evaluation as described below.

Lessons learned for the new Troubled Families Programme

Accurate and relevant data is vital to the delivery of the programme, to understand families better, to measure progress and outcomes as well as to aid understanding of costs and benefits. The independent evaluation revealed weaknesses in local data quality. The new payment structure for local authorities in the new Troubled Families Programme makes more grant funding available to improve both the quality and the analysis of data. The new programme also provides local areas with greater support around data and outcome measurements.

²¹ White, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Process Evaluation*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

Driving partnership working

The structure and objectives of the programme have driven partnership working and started to break down silos between professionals, for example through the creation of multi-disciplinary area-based teams. Information sharing had helped also to bring partners to the table. However the evaluation found variable levels of engagement depending on the area and also depending on the services. For example, working with health services was found to be a very significant problem and remains of concern given the levels of health problems in families.

Lessons Learned for the new Troubled Families Programme

The inclusion of physical and mental health problems of children and adults as a headline problem for the new programme is designed to drive better partnerships locally. Service reform and further integration of services is a more explicit component of the new programme. Areas will not be able to work to improve the lives of 400,000 families without changing their services. Grant funding for each area (Service Transformation Grant) has been doubled to reflect the importance of service reform.

Employment

The programme has created a greater understanding of the importance of employment and how it can help to resolve other problems a family has. The introduction of Troubled Families Employment Advisers (TFEAs: Job Centre employees effectively seconded into local authority teams) provided a new and important dimension to family intervention. TFEAs helped to break down cultural barriers faced by local authority key workers who were initially reluctant to discussing employment issues with families.

Lessons Learned for the new Troubled Families Programme

Work is a clear objective of the new Troubled Families Programme and should be an aspiration for all families. This is a significant culture change for local authorities. There are now 307 TFEAs working across the country to work with the most challenging families and to help improve the skills and confidence of local authority key workers to help ensure that work is a core part of their work with families.

Evaluation design

The complex nature of the delivery of the Troubled Families programme, including a focus on multiple problems, variation in delivery model and intervention types, and a changing external public service landscape, present a number of challenges for evaluating its achievements.

Whilst the Troubled Families Programme was underpinned by a national framework and outcomes, it was managed and delivered by 152 upper-tier local authorities, with considerable discretion afforded to local authorities in how they identified, prioritised and worked with their families. Attributing improvements in families to the programme specifically poses a particular challenge. Isolating the net impact of the programme in this way requires as a minimum a robust comparison with similar families who did not participate in the programme. Given that local authorities expected to work with all families that met the eligibility criteria, leaving no obvious control group of like-for-like families, near-eligible families had to be identified and statistical techniques used to adjust for observable differences.

The main approach to estimating impact was to use information supplied by local authorities and match that to national datasets and compare the outcomes for families receiving intervention under the programme and similar families not identified as receiving intervention. The design was ambitious and innovative and challenging. Previous family intervention evidence was based on locally-reported monitoring evidence or qualitative studies so this new method was an attempt to identify net impact using datasets held by central government departments.

A complex set of issues had to be negotiated, including data-protection considerations with key partners. By seeking to link data from multiple national administrative datasets with personal data provided by local authorities, the project was reliant on the quality of the local authority data. At the time, we were unaware of other projects that had attempted data linking on this scale, at the family level..

In addition to the major limitations imposed on the evaluation's impact study by the quality of data supplied and by the restricted time period within which changes in outcomes as measured by certain national administrative datasets might be seen, there are also significant caveats to the findings of that study arising from the nature of the comparison group. This comparison group was used to ascertain whether changes could be attributed to the Troubled Families Programme. However there is some likelihood of 'contamination' of the comparison group arising from improvements made to the services that families in that group received as a result of a 'mainstreaming' of the troubled families approach i.e. families in the comparison group and not in the troubled families programme may still have, for example, benefited from a keyworker led family intervention service striving to achieve the same outcomes. There is evidence within the process evaluation undertaken by the independent contractors to suggest the likelihood of this²².

²² White, C., and Day, L. (2016) *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. Final Report on the Process Evaluation*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government

Not being able to provide conclusive evidence of net impact is somewhat unsurprising given the experience of other social policy impact studies. Even highly manualised programmes that have been proven in other settings have often failed to attribute positive outcomes to a programme effect.²³ The fact that the Troubled Families programme addresses a variety of different multiple problems using flexible approaches delivered by 150 local authorities poses significant challenges to isolating the programme effect specifically.

Lessons Learned for the new Troubled Families Programme

A new national evaluation of the new Troubled Families programme has been designed to address the limitations of the first evaluation and form a core part of delivery. A new National Impact Study is in place to track outcomes every six months over the course of the programme at both a national and local level. Being able to track outcomes in place from the outset of the programme and conducting analysis every six months until 2022 affords a fuller and longer appraisal of impact. Impact analysis will assess family outcomes relative to a comparison group and be based on advice from an independent external group of academics with expertise in this area. In addition, unit-costs will be applied to the changes in outcomes allowing for a consistent national and local cost-benefit analysis

Local outcomes for families will be fed back to councils through an online information system, allowing authorities to review family progress, estimate cost-savings, and make comparisons with similar authorities. In addition a new family survey interviews the same families before and after intervention to understand change in individual families as well as enabling comparison with responses to identical questions in other national surveys. The increased scale and breadth of the new national evaluation allows for a thorough, wide-ranging, and ongoing analysis that is subject to fewer constraints than the previous evaluation and forms a solid basis for assessing the impact of the programme through its course. The new evaluation also includes an extensive programme of qualitative work with local authorities, their partners, and families themselves.

²³ See for example the impact study of Family Nurse Partnerships: <http://fnp.nhs.uk/randomised-control-trial>

What does the new Troubled Families Programme look like?

The first programme created strong foundations on which to build the new programme, which was co-designed with local authorities and rolled out nationally in April 2015.

While it shares many of the features of the first programme, this is a distinct programme with a distinct set of programme aims, an evaluation that is able to inform the programme and contribute to its delivery; and a much greater level of discretion and flexibility²⁴. However at its heart it remains about improving outcomes for families with multiple problems based on a family approach.

The new programme has three objectives:

- For families: to achieve significant and sustained progress with 400,000 families with multiple, high-cost problems.
- For local services: to reduce demand for reactive services by using a whole family approach to transform the way services work with these families; and,
- For the taxpayer: to demonstrate this way of working results in cost savings.

Every family has to have at least two of the following problems to be eligible:

- Worklessness and financial exclusion
- Poor school attendance
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- Children who need help (including Children In Need, children with special educational needs)
- Physical and mental health problems
- Domestic violence

Delivery

Local Authorities committed to work with an agreed total number of families over a five year period from 2015/16. They have committed to prioritise working with those families with multiple problems who are of most concern and who drive the highest reactive costs. Local Authorities must also commit to engage in ongoing service reform, evidenced through participation in the programme's national evaluation.

²⁴ Further information provided in the Financial Framework:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/409682/Financial_Framework_for_the_Expanded_Troubled_Families_Programme_april_2015.pdf

Local Authorities and/or their partner agencies must appoint a keyworker/lead worker for each family who will manage the family and their problems. They must work towards agreed goals for every family for all of their problems. These goals are shared and jointly owned across local partners, such as the police, schools and health professionals.

The new programme allows a high level of local discretion and national flexibility. Local areas have the flexibility to identify and prioritise families of greatest local concern and cost and to commission services locally to meet families' needs. All local areas have their own local results framework (a Troubled Families Outcomes Plan) which describes the outcomes they are seeking to achieve and the measures they will use to substantiate those outcomes.

Funding

The new programme retains a payment by results element. This is a more modest reward than that offered by the first programme in recognition of there being a broader range of needs likely to be captured through the eligibility criteria for this larger cohort. Local authorities receive an upfront £1,000 attachment fee for each family with whom they agree to work and an £800 results payment for each family with whom they achieved an outcome. Each authority receives an annual Service Transformation Grant (most local authorities receive £200,000 each year) to support local delivery of the programme.

In order to claim a results payment for a family there must have been sustained and significant progress against all of the family's problems as set out in the locally defined Troubled Families Outcomes Plan. Alternatively an adult in the family must have moved into continuous employment.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the new programme is designed to address the limitations of the first and build on the local data infrastructure that was created by the first programme. The evaluation design has been led by DCLG, working with Ipsos MORI, the Office of National Statistics and other Government departments. An independent advisory group of leading academics provides external support and scrutiny of the evaluation.

The evaluation will measure the progress of families on over sixty outcome measures across crime, health, education, domestic abuse, employment and child-safeguarding. As part of the evaluation we are also collecting qualitative information from LAs and families about how the programme is being delivered. Ipsos MORI have conducted a survey of over 1,000 families who will be re-interviewed two years later, and which will capture improvements in families such as self-reported domestic abuse using the same measure as the Crime Survey for England and Wales.