



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme

Process evaluation final report

Clarissa White and Laurie Day

October 2016  
Department for Communities and Local Government



© Queen's Printer and Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2016

*Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.*

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or e-mail: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This document/publication is also available on our website at [www.gov.uk/dclg](http://www.gov.uk/dclg)

If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication, complete the form at <http://forms.communities.gov.uk/> or write to us at:

Department for Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF  
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

For all our latest news and updates follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CommunitiesUK>

October 2016

ISBN: 978-1-4098-4910-0

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Executive summary</b>                               | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>1 Introduction</b>                                  | <b>11</b> |
| 1.1 Overview   | 11        |
| 1.2 Evaluation aims and methodology                    | 12        |
| 1.3 Report structure                                   | 18        |
| <b>2 Delivering the programme</b>                      | <b>19</b> |
| 2.1 Developing the local approach to Troubled Families | 19        |
| 2.2 The delivery models                                | 25        |
| 2.3 Moving towards the expanded programme              | 34        |
| <b>3 Identifying and working with families</b>         | <b>36</b> |
| 3.1 Identification and targeting                       | 36        |
| 3.2 The family intervention workforce                  | 45        |
| <b>4 Developing and embedding practice</b>             | <b>56</b> |
| 4.1 Assessment, planning and review                    | 56        |
| 4.2 The 5 family intervention factors                  | 59        |
| 4.3 Exiting families                                   | 73        |
| <b>5 Transforming systems and services</b>             | <b>75</b> |
| 5.1 Scaling-up provision                               | 75        |
| 5.2 Mainstreaming whole family approaches              | 76        |

|          |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 5.3      | Driving innovation   | 76        |
| 5.4      | A stimulus for multiagency partnership working   | 77        |
| 5.5      | Improving the capacity to capture and measure outcomes   | 78        |
| 5.6      | Enhancing family intervention practice   | 80        |
| 5.7      | Improving the capacity and responsiveness of employability support                                 | 81        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Conclusions</b>   | <b>83</b> |
| 6.1      | Overview of programme achievements   | 83        |
| 6.2      | Key messages for future development  | 86        |
| 6.3      | Developing effective delivery models   | 91        |
|          | <b>Appendix A: Sampling framework for telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators</b> | <b>94</b> |
|          | <b>Appendix B: References</b>  | <b>96</b> |

# Executive summary

## Introduction

In April 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) launched the £448 million Troubled Families programme. It was set up to 'turn around' the lives of 120,000 families with multiple and complex needs; to transform services and widen access to family intervention across England; and to achieve an overall shift in public expenditure away from 'reactive' service provision towards earlier intervention. This was to be achieved through the provision of funding for every English local authority, overseen by a network of local Troubled Families Coordinators, and underpinned by a Payment by Results (PbR) financial framework.

In January 2013, Ecorys was commissioned by DCLG to lead a consortium<sup>1</sup> which provided an independent evaluation of the Troubled Families programme. The aims of the evaluation were to:

- understand how the Troubled Families programme made a difference to the lives of families, both in terms of outcomes and experience of services
- learn how the Troubled Families programme changed local delivery approaches
- measure success in terms of monetary savings.

The evaluation included process, economic and impact strands. This report presents the evidence from the process evaluation. It draws on longitudinal qualitative research with 20 case study local authorities which tracked the development and delivery of their Troubled Families programme, and interviews with the Troubled Families Coordinator from a further 50 local authorities.

## Key findings

The national Troubled Families programme set out to bring about a step change in the provision of family intervention across England, widening access to family intervention, transforming services, and improving outcomes for families with complex needs. The evidence from the process evaluation demonstrates the considerable progress local authorities made towards improving access and capacity for family intervention, during phase one of the Troubled Families programme including:

- the appointment of a local Troubled Families Coordinator, coupled with the national funding, helped to achieve strategic buy-in for the programme at a local level
- there was widespread evidence of local services and systems transformation, at a time when local authority budgets were under considerable strain, although the pace and depth of change varied considerably between individual authorities

---

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation consortium partners include Clarissa White Research; Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR); the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR); Ipsos MORI, and the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE).

- the programme enabled local authorities to expand their capacity for family intervention. This was achieved through a combination of recruitment and redeployment from existing teams, and was supported with investment in training and workforce development
- the evaluation confirms and builds on previous evidence about the importance of key worker delivery and having a caseload size that enables effective whole family working
- by the final year of the programme there were signs that the delivery agreement between DCLG and the Department for Work and Pensions had accelerated the integration of employment support as an intrinsic part of the programme and improved links with Jobcentre Plus
- while the financial framework presented many challenges to local teams, this approach was instrumental in raising the quality and capacity of local data management systems. The programme encouraged local authorities to set up a multiagency approach to identify and track families in many areas
- the evaluation found some models of good practice; where there was a real step change in the way family intervention was provided. This included where local Troubled Families programmes created the necessary time and space for assertive key working, and benefited from strong models of supervision.

Alongside these achievements, there were also a number of challenges with programme delivery that will require closer attention during the expanded programme:

- the evaluation encountered wide variations in local practice reflecting inevitable differences in local authority size, structure, and demographics
- similarly, the interventions offered to families varied in intensity and duration and were not always clearly defined. This was especially the case for therapeutic dimensions (mental health, domestic abuse / domestic violence and parenting), indicating a potential need for greater standardisation
- partnerships with health were slower to develop, although there were expectations that this would be addressed as part of the expanded programme
- despite the benefits in terms of performance management, the financial framework and targets were contentious in many local areas and were thought to have made it more difficult for local teams to work with the families that they were most concerned about
- there was some indication that scaling-up family intervention was 'diluting' practice and might result in quality being sacrificed. This will have implications for local authorities who are attempting to mainstream their approach under the expanded programme; and

- it is not possible to draw any conclusions on the (quantifiable) impact of the programme from the process evaluation, and these results will be reported separately.

### **The Troubled Families programme delivery models**

While the national financial framework and the 5 'family intervention factors' provided an overall structure, local authorities were intentionally given considerable autonomy to design and deliver their local response in order that they could be creative in their approach.

Local authorities in our sample typically located their Troubled Families programme within children's services or a combined children and adult services, or equivalent. They usually targeted families below social care thresholds, although some co-working with social care teams was also in evidence. Local teams set out to provide different interventions varying in intensity and duration of time (i.e. intensive family intervention, family intervention light and family intervention super light) to meet the needs of different types of families. These interventions inevitably evolved over time.

The delivery models adopted ranged from those who created or expanded an existing team of workers (the dedicated team) to those who embedded their provision (either individuals or a team of people) within the workforce, or more exceptionally embarked on a journey to transform the whole workforce to adopt whole family working (the embedded approach). Most local authorities in the sample adopted a 'hybrid' delivery model. This resulted in family intervention being delivered by a combination of a dedicated team and practitioners who were either embedded individually, or as part of a team, and those who were already working in existing services or agencies.

These delivery models remained in place for the duration of the evaluation. Any changes made by local authorities were in keeping with the underlying philosophy of their approach taken, and were more about maturing and consolidating management and practice issues. Local authorities were all embarked on the process to mainstream some or all of their provision as they approached the end of the phase one Troubled Families programme. This was driven by the underlying intentions of the expanded Troubled Families programme.

### **Identifying and working with families**

Local authorities needed to meet the requirements of the Troubled Families Financial Framework, showing that families met at least 2 of the 3 national eligibility criteria, plus a fourth local discretionary criterion. They typically identified eligible families using a combination of administrative data and direct referrals from partner organisations. The need to cross-check data on school attendance, antisocial behaviour and employment was unprecedented, and local authorities encountered a range of different challenges in meeting this requirement.

The financial framework gave some flexibility to shape the programme around local priorities and definitions of 'complex needs', although some local authorities felt that the national criteria made it more difficult to work with the families they were most concerned about. At the more intensive end of the scale, local teams often took referrals from

children's social care, as part of a step down arrangement from a child protection plan, for example. The effectiveness of this model depended on the extent to which both partners had developed effective links between their areas of professional practice.

Identification and referral methods developed over time, as local authorities improved their data systems to meet the needs of the programme. They also established multiagency referral panels involving partners with wider interests to ensure they were linked with other initiatives focusing on housing, regeneration, and community development. These referral panels were important for helping to streamline referral processes and ensuring partners took a shared decision and responsibility for families. They also reduced the duplication of services working with a family, as they considered the needs of the whole family rather than just focusing on an individual family member.

Local Troubled Families teams often ended up working with families with more complex needs than was first anticipated. This related both to the type and range of issues, and the history of involvement from other agencies. Families referred to the programme were also reported to have a high prevalence of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse. Local teams often worked with the most complex families first, as this was thought to be the most effective and impactful way to use the funding.

### **Developing and embedding practice**

A single key or lead worker with dedicated time for the family was the main way family intervention was delivered. This was critical for understanding families' needs, gaining their trust, and testing and evaluating 'what works' for each family. Caseload size and service duration varied according to the delivery model adopted and the needs of a family. Local authorities appeared to more effectively preserve the main features of family intervention when they opted for dedicated key worker provision with smaller case-loads and robust training and supervision.

The evaluation reinforces the importance of the flexible, hands-on and practical nature of the key worker role, the provision of parenting advice and emotional support; and help with education, training and work; as well as any housing and financial issues. It also builds on the learning about the pivotal coordinating function key and lead workers have: setting in place and reviewing the support plan for each family, orchestrating the team around the family meetings when there is no statutory involvement, advocating for families and brokering access to other specialist support when required.

The Troubled Families key worker role benefited from being 'one step removed' from statutory intervention. This sometimes provided the leverage needed to prevent sanctions, or to cushion the impact where sanctions were unavoidable. Key workers found it harder to adopt alternative ways to engage reluctant families with a lower level of need (as there were no sanctions to deploy).

The evaluation highlighted the important contribution of the Troubled Families Employment Advisers, Jobcentre Plus Single Points of Contact, and other bespoke roles (such as Employment Coordinators) that were developed following the Partnership Agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and their role in helping to support the development of practice in this area. The Jobcentre Plus single points of contact also

helped to build links at a more strategic level. There is potential merit in further refining both of these roles, through the expanded Troubled Families programme.

Relationships between Troubled Families teams and other agencies varied considerably between (and within) local authorities, but there were shared challenges of engaging with health professionals, and in agreeing areas of continuity and difference between family intervention and social work practice. Co-working between Troubled Families teams and other agencies provided a mechanism for achieving common and consistent action, where these partnerships were well developed. These arrangements were sometimes reinforced through secondments or the co-location of multiagency teams.

### **Transforming systems and services**

Depending on the delivery model adopted, local authorities varied in the degree to which they felt the Troubled Families programme had transformed local services and systems for supporting families. Those who were expanding an existing plan or provision generally described the way 'systems changed' as being subtler and more gradual than those who established new provision as a result of the Troubled Families programme.

At the most obvious level, the Troubled Families programme enabled local authorities to roll out family intervention to a wider cohort of families and meet gaps in service provision. It also helped to mainstream the key worker approach as it encouraged partners and other agencies to adopt whole family working. Without the funding and high-profile drive from national government, it was felt that the local commitment to families with complex needs would not have been of the same scale or intensity.

The Troubled Families programme also helped to encourage innovation and the desire to trial new ways of working. It was said that local authorities were now much more informed, more likely to base their allocation of resources on evidence of how to make better use of limited resources, and to ensure they were providing the right type of intervention for the different types of families. It was also felt to have enhanced the way professionals worked in partnership and broken down some of the 'silo working' that still existed. It helped to create systems and structures that encouraged good partnership working – whether that involved sharing information or working together with families. This enabled practitioners to reduce duplication between services, to think smarter and overcome any professional boundaries as they found solutions for the whole family.

The financial framework helped to give a 'focus' and structure to a local Troubled Families programme, and influenced local authorities to become more outcomes-focussed. The simplicity of the criteria also helped to highlight the value of the Troubled Families programme to partner agencies. While local authorities often struggled to operationalise the data matching process they reflected on its potential to help identify families that might have otherwise slipped through the net.

The Troubled Families programme was perceived to have enabled key workers to: get to the roots of deeply entrenched problems; understand the whole family more effectively; take a more assertive and challenging approach; incorporate training and employment as part of the intervention; and to be more outcome-focused. The Employment Advisers and, to a lesser extent, the Jobcentre Plus Single Points of Contact, were viewed as a new and much valued addition to family intervention. It was said that there was now a greater

understanding of the importance of employment and how it can help resolve some of the other problems families have.

**Key messages for future development** - the evaluation identified a number of important principles for developing and delivering effective family intervention practice. It highlighted the importance of:

- **developing a local solution that takes account of the context** and builds on pre-existing provision. There is unlikely to be a single 'blueprint' for success;
- **allowing time** to build the infrastructure, trial different provision, profile and target the families, recruit the right staff, and win partners' hearts and minds;
- **effective leadership and management** to set the direction and focus, and ensure the commitment and engagement of strategic and operational partners;
- **considering how to mainstream family intervention practice** in order to ensure the provision will be sustainable beyond the life of the programme;
- **preserving what is critical to family intervention**, a key worker who: has a manageable caseload; can build an emotional connection; takes a flexible, hands-on, persistent approach; is skilled in parenting advice; can work in partnership; can coordinate the team around the family to meet their education, training and work needs; and can access specialist provision to address any domestic abuse, substance misuse and child and adult mental health issues;
- **develop practice for identifying and working with families with a lower level of need**. It is not yet clear how whole family working can and should play out in practice for families with lower levels of need;
- **dedicated specialist provision for families with the highest level of need** and having small enough caseloads to work effectively with the whole family for a longer duration;
- **adopting a sequenced and sensitive approach to address the employment and training needs of family members;**
- **a robust training programme which is regularly updated and reviewed** to avoid the dilution of practice;
- **robust supervision delivered by a manager who understands family intervention and can quality assure practice**. Workers also benefited from having access to clinical support and supervision and being part of a broader peer network; and
- **working in partnership**. While the principle of partnership working was widely welcomed and accepted across local authorities the translation into practice could still be a challenge. There were still issues about sharing information and a reluctance to engage fully in sharing the responsibility for a family

**About the process evaluation**

The process evaluation involved a programme of qualitative research with 20 case study local Troubled Families programmes which were tracked over the three year evaluation period. They were specifically selected to understand how a cross-section of Troubled Families programmes were designed and delivered, and the impact these were perceived to have on services and systems change at a local level. To understand the variation in the local Troubled Families programme delivery models operating outside of the case study areas, telephone interviews were also carried out with a wider sample of 50 local authorities. The process evaluation also included qualitative research with 22 families, who were interviewed towards the start and end of their intervention, over a 12 to 18 month period (reported separately in Blades et al, 2016).

# 1 Introduction

In January 2013, Ecorys was commissioned by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to lead a consortium<sup>2</sup> which provided an independent evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. The evaluation included process, economic and impact strands of work.

This report presents the final evidence from the process evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme. It is based on a number of strands of qualitative data collection and analysis, which include:

- **longitudinal case studies** tracking the activities of a purposive sample of 20 local authority Troubled Families teams, their partner organisations and their families during the three year phase one Troubled Families programme
- **telephone interviews** with Troubled Families Coordinators in 50 further local authorities carried out between December 2014 and January 2015

The report also draws selectively on findings from a survey of 143 local authorities conducted in May 2013. This mapped the broad characteristics of local Troubled Families delivery models to inform the evaluation design. It does not include findings from the quantitative strands of the evaluation.

## 1.1 Overview

The aim of the £448 million Troubled Families programme was to ‘turn around the lives’ of 120,000 families who have multiple and complex needs in England. At the core is the desire to achieve an overall shift in public expenditure from reactive service provision, based around responding to accumulated acute needs, towards earlier intervention via targeted interventions, where problems can be addressed before they escalate. In seeking to achieve these results the Troubled Families programme included the following elements:

- a suite of locally designed family intervention programmes
- a network of local Troubled Families Coordinators, with a mandate to assimilate local data and ensure a joined-up approach for targeting the ‘right’ families at an area level; and
- a Payment-by-Results (PbR) financial model, to incentivise outcomes-driven practices, underpinned by the Troubled Families financial framework (DCLG, 2013a).

Following the start of the evaluation, further investment was announced for the Troubled Families programme to boost the scale and scope of the work conducted with families by local Troubled Families teams.

---

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation consortium partners include Clarissa White Research; Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR); the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR); Ipsos MORI, and the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE).

In March 2013, DWP and DCLG set in place a delivery agreement to provide additional focus in meeting the employment and employability objectives of the Troubled Families Programme (DCLG, 2013b). The agreement included provision for the secondment of at least one Jobcentre Plus Troubled Families Employment Adviser to work with each of the 94 upper-tier local authorities with the greatest number of families up until May 2014. It also included a commitment for the remaining local authorities to receive additional support from their Jobcentre Plus Single Point of Contact. These arrangements were at various stages of development at the time when the case study visits took place.

In June 2013, the Treasury announced an expansion of the Troubled Families programme to work with an additional 400,000 families supported by £200 million of funding in 2015/16. In March 2014, the government also announced that up to 40,000 of these families would start receiving help in 2014/15, a year earlier than planned, with funding initially allocated to the highest performing local authorities under the existing Troubled Families programme. A total of 51 local authorities were announced as 'early starters' in August 2014, and an interim financial framework was published for the expanded programme (DCLG, 2014). The final version of the financial framework was published in November 2014.

## 1.2 Evaluation aims and methodology

The aims of the evaluation were:

- to understand how the Troubled Families programme made a difference to the lives of families, both in terms of outcomes and experience of services
- to learn how the Troubled Families programme changed local delivery approaches; and
- to measure success in terms of monetary savings.

In responding to the brief, the evaluation included three main work streams:

### **A process evaluation**

This involved a programme of qualitative research with 20 case study local Troubled Families programmes, tracked over three years. They were purposively selected to understand how a cross section of Troubled Families programmes were designed and delivered and the impact these were perceived to have on services and systems change at a local level; and telephone depth interviews with a wider sample of 50 local authorities to understand the variation in the local Troubled Families models operating outside of the case study areas. It also included qualitative research with 22 families, who were interviewed towards the start and end of their intervention, over a 12-18 month period.

### **An impact evaluation**

To quantify the impacts of the Troubled Families programme for families – and individuals within those families – across a range of outcome measures that the programme aspired to improve. A quasi-experimental research design used outcome data from national administrative datasets and a large-scale face-to-face survey of families, to compare families going through the programme with a matched comparison group.

## **An economic evaluation**

The evaluation team worked with DCLG to develop a Troubled Families programme cost savings calculator, and provided guidance for local authorities to conduct their own economic analysis at a local level.

This report is based on the activities undertaken for the process evaluation work stream during the period from January 2013 to March 2015.

### **1.2.1 Process evaluation**

Twenty local authority case studies were carried out to track the development and delivery of local Troubled Families Programmes. In order to ensure a cross section of different delivery models, the case study local authorities were selected from an online survey conducted in May 2013 to ensure variation in terms of:

- service focus<sup>3</sup>
- delivery model<sup>4</sup>
- size of Troubled Families cohort
- presence of other linked initiatives operating in the local authority<sup>5</sup>
- geography (North, South, Midlands) and locality (inner-city, urban and rural contexts); and
- type of local authority and political control.

The case studies were designed to track the work of local Troubled Families programmes at 3 points during the evaluation. Wave one visits to each Troubled Families programme, followed by focus groups and workshops with the strategic and operational stakeholders were carried out between July 2013 and early 2014. The Troubled Families Coordinator for each of the local authority case studies was subsequently interviewed during wave two (July 2014). The final round of visits to each Troubled Families programme were carried out to review the impact the Troubled Families programme was perceived to have and views about its role and value (wave three) during December 2014 and March 2015.

Each visit comprised a series of: individual or paired qualitative interviews with staff managing and delivering the service, including Troubled Families Coordinators, service managers, team leaders, and/or data managers; a focus group or paired interviews with practitioners delivering the service; and focus groups or workshops with strategic and operational partners and stakeholders. Most of the case study visits also included interviews with Troubled Families Employment Advisers, and Directors of Children's Services or equivalent depending on where the local Troubled Families Programme was located in the local authority.

---

<sup>3</sup> Family Intervention, Family Intervention Light and Family Intervention Super Light

<sup>4</sup> Whether led and delivered centrally by the LA, or led centrally by the LA but with localised delivery arrangements

<sup>5</sup> For example: European Social Fund (ESF) provision for Families with Multiple Problems, Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), and Family Nurse Partnerships (FNP)

The interview coverage followed a topic guide which outlined the main topics to be addressed during interviews, but allowed flexibility for how they were covered depending on the role and perspective of different individuals. Separate topic guides were used for each wave of interviewing, with a greater relative focus on design and development issues during wave one, and coverage of outcomes, perceived impacts and sustainability back-weighted as part of the final round of visits during wave three. Table 1.1 below summarises the case study topic framework, identifying the main themes that were covered across the three waves of visits.

**Table 1.1 Summary of the case study interview topic framework**

**Programme development**

- background to the service delivery context within the local authority
- overview of initial programme design and set-up - timescales and processes
- key features of their local delivery model; rationale for the approach taken, and how/whether this has evolved
- reflections on the effectiveness of the model and what has worked well/less well
- reflections on overall progress with implementation
- reflections on governance and management arrangements for the local programme; how well these are working and how/whether these have evolved over time; and
- what if anything they would do differently in setting-up the programme

**Management, staffing and team structure**

- governance arrangements for the local programme, including remit and composition of steering groups/boards
- recruitment and staffing for the local programme – criteria, skills and aptitudes of the key worker; challenges and success factors for recruitment
- overview of team management arrangements, and geographical and functional deployment of teams
- approach taken for caseload planning and management; and
- supervisory arrangements and their perceived effectiveness

**Referring and assessing families' needs**

- number and profile of families worked with, and how identified
- how effectively the programme has responded to local needs
- how or whether the profile of families has changed over time; factors driving change
- referral, assessment and service planning processes and their effectiveness; and
- approach taken for working with families at different levels of intensity

**Working with families and understanding family intervention**

- roles and responsibilities of key workers / lead workers  
how key workers/lead workers have been managed and supported
- main similarities/differences in how working with families now, compared to previously
- reflections on the 5 family intervention factors and how these have been put into practice
- how families' cases have been closed or exited, and experiences of this process

**Table 1.1 Summary of the case study interview topic framework**

- challenges and successes of working with different partner organisations; and
- views on the Troubled Families Employment Advisers, their role and contribution

**Reflections on outcomes and impacts**

- views on most/least successful aspects of the local programme
- how the local programme is performing against targets, and factors involved
- how/whether services or systems have changed
- influence of the programme on workforce development
- main types of outcomes achieved for families to date
- factors affecting achievement in outcomes, and any areas of variation within their local programme (e.g. geographical / target groups)
- any evidence of cost savings, and how/for whom these have been achieved; and
- how would be working with these families without the Troubled Families programme

**Mainstreaming and sustainability**

- opportunities and risks for remainder of the current funding period
- exit strategy post-funding period, plans for mainstreaming/re-commissioning/scaling-back
- experiences, plans and aspirations for the expanded Troubled Families programme (or progress if already underway), and how transition phase between the current and extended phase will be managed
- views on the longer-term sustainability of the programme
- measures required to ensure that family intervention is embedded
- advantages and drawbacks of local delivery model for ensuring sustainability; and
- views on the legacy of the local Troubled Families programme

The interviews were recorded and transcribed with respondents' informed consent, and the data was then systematically analysed within a thematic framework (based on the questions and themes the evaluation was addressing). This has enabled us to compare and contrast the different Troubled Families programmes and explore whether the service focus and delivery models have a bearing on the perceived impact of the programme.

Alongside the case studies, the evaluation team tracked the experience of a sample of families based in 10 of the local authorities. A sampling grid was developed to ensure a cross-section of families supported at different levels of intensity; using different delivery models, and taking into account diverse family circumstances (see Blades, et. al. 2016 for full details). Qualitative interviews were carried out with selected adults and children from each family at two points in time – just after starting the Troubled Families programme (baseline), and at the point of exit or shortly thereafter. In total, 22 families and 62 individuals were interviewed across the two waves of the research, comprising of 79 interviews.

In order to complement the evidence resulting from these case studies, a further 50 Troubled Families Coordinators were interviewed by telephone. These interviews were intended to capture and understand the variation in the local Troubled Families

programme delivery models operating outside of the case study areas; to highlight examples of interesting practice or unusual delivery models for further exploration, and to further test and validate the emerging evidence from the 20 case study areas. The 50 areas were sampled by grouping local authorities into types, on the basis of their delivery model characteristics and target numbers of families. The final selection was made with attention to local authority size, structure and geographical location. Further information on the sampling framework can be found in Appendix A.

The telephone interviews were carried out in December 2014 and January 2015. A semi-structured topic guide was developed and piloted with a small number of Troubled Families Coordinators, prior to the main stage fieldwork. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. A summary of the main delivery models from the interim report were shared with the Troubled Families Coordinators so we could discuss these with them and refine and update our typology.

This report is based on the evidence from waves one to three of the case studies, and the 50 telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators. The findings from the qualitative research with 22 families are presented in a separate report (Blades, et. al. 2016).

### **1.2.2 The qualitative evidence**

The process evaluation provides a comprehensive overview of the set-up and implementation of the way a sample of local authorities delivered their Troubled Families programme. The longitudinal design of the case studies enabled us to track how each Troubled Families programme developed over time, and to take into account the shifting funding and national policy context.

Nonetheless, there are a number of important caveats to consider when reflecting on the findings:

- The process evaluation centred on the views and experiences of key stakeholders from 20 local Troubled Families programmes. The local authorities were purposively selected to reflect a reasonable cross section of Troubled Families delivery models. In order to ensure that we captured the full range of delivery models in operation, we carried out telephone interviews with the Troubled Families Coordinator in another 50 local authorities. The evidence collected from these additional interviews was inevitably limited to the views and experience of the Troubled Families Coordinator.
- The 20 case studies included interviews with individuals involved in the management and delivery of the Troubled Families programme within the selected local authorities. It was, however, beyond the scope of the evaluation to include all the local partners involved in the work with families. The case studies were primarily qualitative in nature, based on interview evidence gathered from local stakeholders. Adopting a qualitative approach has enabled us to understand the 20 local delivery models in depth, and to explore the intricate aspects and nuances of each approach. The purposive nature of the qualitative sample design as well as the size of the sample, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views and the report deliberately avoids giving numerical findings relating to the qualitative evidence.

The evidence from this process evaluation should be considered in the context of information about impact which is not the focus of the current report.

## 1.3 Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 describes the range of ways local authorities set up and delivered their Troubled Families programme, and examines the factors that influenced their delivery arrangements. The models presented span from those who created a dedicated team to those who embedded their approach within the existing workforce.
- Chapter 3 examines the way in which local authorities identified and prioritised their families for inclusion within the programme. It considers the role and influence of the financial framework for the programme's payment by results scheme on local service delivery arrangements. The chapter goes on to examine how local authorities worked with families at different levels of intensity, and the specific investment provided by DWP and DCLG through the employability support delivery agreement.
- Chapter 4 examines how family intervention operated in practice from the point of assessment through to case closure. It considers how local Troubled Families programmes have reflected the 5 family intervention factors within their work, and the extent to which service delivery is different from 'business as usual'.
- Chapter 5 reviews the evidence for how and whether the programme achieved the desired results with regard to services and systems transformation, as reported by local Troubled Families teams and their partner organisations.
- Chapter 6 reflects upon the evidence presented in the report and draws out some concluding remarks and key areas for consideration to inform the further expansion of the Troubled Families programme.

## 2 Delivering the programme

Following the launch of the Troubled Families Programme in April 2012, all 152 local authorities were tasked with turning around their allocation of the 120,000 families. As will be seen, this resulted in some local authorities setting up a team or 'service', but for others it involved expanding existing services, overhauling provision or changing workforce practice. Local authorities responded to the aims set out by the national Troubled Families team and followed the financial framework to deliver their results-based outcomes as prescribed by the guidance.

Local authorities were intentionally given considerable autonomy to design and deliver their local response in order that they could be creative in their approach. DCLG wanted to learn about the impact of the programme on families and the way services were delivered to them. Twenty case studies were selected to track how local authorities were delivering the Troubled Families programme. While these case studies captured a good cross-section of different delivery models adopted, the freedom for local authorities to innovate resulted in the development of a wide range of different approaches. For this reason the 20 case studies were supplemented with telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators in 50 other local authorities to ensure we captured the full range of delivery models.

This chapter begins with a description of the rationale for the approach local authorities adopted, the steps they took to set up their service, and the factors that influenced their delivery arrangements (section 2.1). The models span from those who created a dedicated team to those who embedded their approach within the existing workforce (section 2.2). This chapter draws on the findings from 70 local authorities who took part in the process evaluation.

### 2.1 Developing the local approach to Troubled Families

The speed with which local authorities set up their Troubled Families Programme depended on the approach they adopted and the ease with which they recruited staff and set up systems first. Inevitably, local authorities who were building their programme from existing provision were able to work with families more quickly than those who were creating new systems and teams. Local authorities in our sample started working with families in one of three periods:

- Immediately, or shortly after the Troubled Families programme was officially launched in April 2012 - where there was an existing service already in place that could work with families while they developed their approach
- Between autumn 2012 and early 2013 – often these local authorities were piloting their developing approach with a few families before becoming fully operational some months later
- In the summer of 2013 - these local authorities took longer to develop their approach and build the infrastructure before starting work with families.

### 2.1.1 Rationale for the approach

Developing a **local solution that took account of the context, pre-existing provision and infrastructure** was critical to the rationale for the delivery model adopted. Troubled Families Coordinators discussed how the size, type, structure, population, existing service map and geography of their local authority influenced their approach. As a result they typically 'grew' their approach to Troubled Families from pre-existing provision and tailored it to the prevailing political and service landscape and infrastructure. They expanded the best of what previously existed and built and shaped their provision around their different communities and existing capacity.

Small unitary authorities, boroughs or city councils were predictably working with a smaller number of families and a completely different set of propositions to that of large two tier county councils. The size of the cohort and the socio-economic variation across different districts inevitably resulted in county councils adopting more complex and devolved delivery models. By contrast local authorities with a much smaller number of families to work with appeared to be more limited in their delivery choices and opportunity for innovation. All but the very smallest local authorities included a degree of area based provision as a component of their delivery model.

Unsurprisingly, **the economic climate** was instrumental in driving the way local authorities reacted to the launch of the Troubled Families programme and the principles underlying it. The impact of 'austerity' and the need to streamline services and work more efficiently with families was recurrently described as the backdrop to local authorities' engagement with the Troubled Families programme. Typically they had already embarked upon a process of restructuring to cut costs and consider how services could work more effectively together so as to reduce any duplication of provision. The Troubled Families programme provided a means to reduce the reliance on public services of high cost families by enabling them to become more resilient and self-sustaining.

**Any restructuring that was already underway inevitably exerted an influence over the emerging approach** and infrastructure for the delivery model adopted. This resulted in decisions about who should deliver the service and how it should be integrated within an existing team structure. In at least one area it led to the Troubled Families Programme being subsumed within a broader programme, that was already underway, to transform the workforce to adopting a whole family approach to working with families. A number of local authorities had already embarked upon a process of 'downsizing' and were considering outsourcing part of their provision or moving towards becoming commissioning authorities. For other local authorities any transformation and restructuring limited the freedom to explore the option of outsourcing and the recruitment of new staff.

The decision whether to outsource some of the provision also depended on time and specifically whether **a local authority had a pre-existing contract with a particular Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partner**. Local authorities were reluctant to outsource provision where it meant undertaking a protracted commissioning process and investing time building the trust required for collaborative working. Conversely a concern about a lack of capacity to work with their cohort of families by March 2015 resulted in at least one local authority reflecting that they had no choice but to involve the VCS.

**Previous experience of commissioning as well as views about the importance of involving the VCS** also led local authorities to adopt different approaches. Troubled Families Coordinators who valued the skills and experience of VCS practitioners in delivering family intervention were keen to involve them as part of their model. For some there was also a belief in the acceptability and trust that families have in an intervention provided by a VCS organisation that might not be associated or tarnished by previous experiences with social care.

The desire **to build on previous learning and expertise of partners about what worked best from delivering family intervention** was also critical to the approach local authorities adopted. They were informed by the learning from Family Intervention Projects, Total Place and Think Family principles, Family Pathfinders and Community Budget Pilots.

Alongside the need to build their approach from existing knowledge and practice, they also viewed the Troubled Families programme as **an opportunity to innovate and to redesign and transform the way services are delivered to families**. They were motivated to trial new approaches and ways of working and evaluate what works best.

*“We want to use this to innovate, to challenge existing methods of delivery, to be brave and pilot new ways of working with a focus on the outcome.”*

Deputy Chief Executive of local authority

*“The Troubled Families programme has hit the zeitgeist quite well; I think it seems to have chimed in with a lot of what people are thinking.... There is a real opportunity here I think to get some strong learning about what is working well, what can be implemented in different scenarios across the country and that’s really valuable.”*

Assistant Director of Children’s Services

Troubled Families Coordinators reflected on the opportunity the Troubled Families programme afforded them to:

- trial a mixed economy of provision – where, for example, they could evaluate how VCS organisations compared with an in house team;
- provide a coordinated and sequenced approach to supporting families so as to turn-around deeply entrenched problems;
- provide innovative family centred interventions designed to: motivate and engage families with multiple needs; to enable families to gain greater control and stability in their lives, and make informed choices as a family;
- embed whole family working across the workforce in order to improve the outcomes for families and their children;
- reduce the spending on long term, high cost provision, reduce the number of repeat referrals and the number of children in the care system;
- enable practitioners to become more outcome-focused; and
- develop a longitudinal database which would track families over time and be used to prioritise and target resources appropriately according to levels of need. In the longer term it was hoped this would enable them to work towards earlier identification of risk and need within families.

A final factor underlying the aims and design of the approach local authorities took was a **concern about the future sustainability of their approach** at the end of the Troubled Families Programme. Local authorities wanted to avoid people seeing their Troubled Families Programme as a project with 'a shelf life'. Instead they wanted to ensure they were developing an approach to working with families that would sustain beyond March 2015. This prompted considerations of how best to scale-up and roll-out whole family working across the workforce; and led to local authorities deciding to embed part or all of their provision, or to see themselves as being on a journey towards this goal.

## 2.1.2 Setting-up the service

Irrespective of the delivery model adopted, or the size of a local authority, Troubled Families Coordinators described a broadly similar process to building the infrastructure for their approach, even if the timescales were different. Prior to officially going 'live' and working with Troubled Families, the appointment of an interim manager or Troubled Families Coordinator was the point when the development process actively started. This may have been preceded by some discussions about how they would respond to the financial framework, the identification of families and their approach to family intervention. Either way, the Troubled Families Coordinator spent time developing or fine tuning the structure and approach, the management and governance arrangements at strategic and operational levels and agreeing this with senior managers, the strategic board and local representatives – both stakeholders and councillors. They then embarked on building the infrastructure, setting up their service or approach, recruiting staff where appropriate and assessing how best to train and develop the workforce.

The ease with which local authorities were able to recruit and retain staff depended on the salary they offered and there appeared to be some variation across the country as to the level set – in part, determined by the local labour market but levels were also constrained by the need to ensure parity across different service teams. In most cases the Troubled Families Coordinator said they consciously set the level of pay at a grade below social workers. Local authorities who ended up pitching the role at the lowest levels (around £19,000) attracted applicants who often had quite a low skill base which was not appropriate for the job. There were also particular challenges for local authorities who set their level of pay considerably lower than what their neighbouring authorities offered. These circumstances clearly resulted in making it difficult to recruit a team of appropriately qualified staff and later contributed to a high turnover of staff, who left to earn more money or (in situations where they were on a temporary contract) to take a permanent post.

Considerable time was spent promoting the service across the local authority and externally, both building relationships and agreeing with partners how to identify families and share data. They embarked on commissioning processes to appoint VCS organisations to deliver some of the provision (sometimes setting up a variation on their payment by results model). They set up investment agreements with statutory partners to take on some of the provision, and encouraged and incentivised other partners to work with families alongside them in return for training and supervision – or for some initial investment which might involve paying for a post or offering to pay for a post if the partner matched the investment and funded another post.

The ease with which local authorities set up their programme depended on the complexity of the delivery model adopted and the extent to which they were building on work that predated the Troubled Families programme. Local authorities that were either setting up or building their service on existing area based teams sometimes opted to pilot their approach in one area before rolling out their approach across the whole local authority. Delays resulted from:

- staff turnover and specifically the departure of key staff who were instrumental in setting up their delivery model, such as a Director of Children’s Service or Troubled Families Coordinator;
- difficulty recruiting key workers with the requisite skills. This sometimes resulted when local authorities were redeploying rather than recruiting ‘new’ staff;
- carrying out commissioning procedures to recruit external providers to deliver their provision;
- partners being slow to embrace the approach to working with Troubled Families or challenges encouraging the existing workforce to take on whole family working; and
- difficulties identifying their Troubled Families cohort from the data matching process – there were reports of local authorities: misunderstanding the data requirement and not selecting the ‘right’ families; underestimating the scale of the work involved to carry out the data matching; not having the appropriate analytical capacity to carry out the work; and partners being slow to share their data.

Exceptionally these delays limited the time available to work with families. For example, one local authority said that the delays resulted in them having to try to ‘turn families around’ in six months in order that they would have time to work with their entire Troubled Families cohort by March 2015.

In most cases local authorities located their Troubled Families Programme within Children’s Services or a combined Children and Adult Services, People’s Directorate or equivalent<sup>6</sup>. Alternative locations included: Targeted Support and Youth Justice Service; a Communities Directorate; a broader Health and Wellbeing, Communities and Wellbeing or Wellbeing, Care and Learning Directorate which also covered children and adult services. In the case of the latter they viewed this as a natural place to locate their Troubled Families programme given its focus on children and families and the emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

Conversely, one local authority consciously moved their family intervention work from Children’s Services to Sustainable Neighbourhood Services as they felt this would be the best place to sustain the behavioural change and outcomes of the Troubled Families programme. In particular they reflected that it would create clear pathways towards employment support, literacy and numeracy as adult learning and employability services were also located within this department. It was also said that moving the Troubled Families programme would help facilitate some of the workforce reform and avoid any potential resistance to change amongst practitioners working in Children’s Services. However, this approach was reported to have resulted in unhelpful delays engaging

---

<sup>6</sup> Alternative departments included - Children and Young People’s Services, Children, Schools and Families, Children and Adults Division and Early Years and Family Support, Early Help, Social Care, Prevention and Intervention Services, Family Operations

partners in Children's Services. In another local authority they located their programme in the Chief Executive's Office in order that it would benefit from very strong strategic leadership and buy-in at a senior level.

Generally local authorities consciously changed the way they promoted the Troubled Families programme to families and avoided any negative associations with reference to families being 'troubled'. Instead they preferred to opt for what they saw as being more positive sounding programme names such as Transforming Families, Thriving Families, Building Resilient Families, Working Together with Families, Families First, Stronger Families and Families Matter<sup>7</sup>.

Across the sample, local authorities targeted their Troubled Families programme at families below social care thresholds. The cut-off point around this was, however, fluid. For example, one local authority was using their Troubled Families programme as way of supporting and de-escalating families on child protection plans, including some families who required statutory involvement, and whose children had been taken into care. Other local authorities included families on the edge, or just below the edge of care.

Local authorities typically alluded to providing either two or three different levels of service (i.e. intensive family intervention, family intervention light and family intervention super light) to meet the needs of different types of families. The way in which they differentiated between these different levels of service, however, varied and evolved over time. In at least one local authority, they started out with a three tiered service: an intensive service for families with multiple and complex needs; a less intensive service for families who were operating at a reasonable level but might have a child or family member with issues; and a universal service where families were assessed holistically and routed into mainstream targeted services. However, the intensive and less intensive services were merged as practitioners found it difficult to accurately establish which level of service was appropriate for families at the referral and assessment stage.

*"So, what might have been a less intensive family turns out to be more intensive, and what might have been a very intensive family actually is maybe not so big an issue as first thought."*

Troubled Families Coordinator

Typically local authorities either based the decision on the number of agencies involved or according to the severity of the family's needs, or both of the above.

*"[A family requiring] the level two [i.e. family intervention light] is less complex. They may only have a couple of services involved with them, they may only need the school. It just depends, or they may just need health. Level three [i.e. most intensive family intervention] is where more complex issues start to come to the fore, the*

---

<sup>7</sup> Alternative names included: Think Family Programme, Strengthening Families, Family Solutions Service, Supporting Communities and Improving Lives Team, Together for Families, Supporting Families, Family Recovery Service, Focus Family, Families in Focus, Priority Families, Building Successful Families, Complex Families, Changing Lives and Confident Families.

*family already has quite a few agencies involved with them, their needs are complex in each and every area where you've got other professionals involved.”*

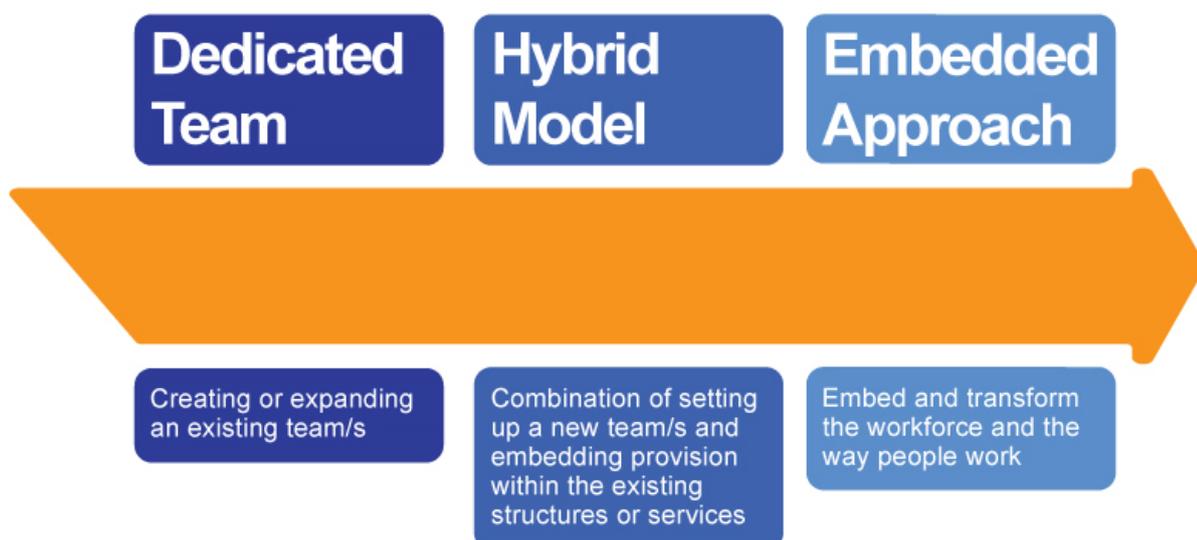
Troubled Families Coordinator

## 2.2 The delivery models

In order to make sense of the different approaches adopted we grouped them into quite broad and simple types along a continuum. As can be seen from Figure 2.1 they ranged from those who created or expanded an existing team of workers (the dedicated team) to those who embedded their provision (either individuals or a team of people) within the workforce or were on a journey to transform the whole workforce to adopt whole family working (the embedded approach). However, most local authorities in our sample adopted what we have called a 'hybrid' delivery model which resulted in family intervention being delivered by a combination of a dedicated team and practitioners who were either embedded individually, or as part of a team, and those who were already working in existing services or agencies. Inevitably the groups we adopted did not take account of all the nuances of individual models. Equally these models provide a snapshot at one point in time as local authorities were typically on a journey towards the embedded end of the continuum. These models are each described in more detail in the sections below.

Alongside these different approaches to delivering family intervention a proportion of the Troubled Families cohort was being worked with by existing services or (close to) 'business as usual' in most local authorities. These families were being tracked as part of the Troubled Families cohort and claimed for under the results based financial framework. Aside from being offered some level of additional support (such as employment advice and guidance) they were distinct from the rest of the cohort of families being supported by one of the above delivery models.

**Figure 2.1 The delivery models**



### 2.2.1 The dedicated team

The 'dedicated team' typically evolved from experience of what worked for a Family Intervention Project<sup>8</sup>. As a result it closely resembled the classic Family Intervention Project delivery model involving a dedicated key worker who works intensively with families for between 12 – 18 months and has access to a range of additional specialist provision including employment and training support. The rationale advanced for adopting this model was that local authorities wanted to expand their existing family intervention practice as it was making good progress and achieving outcomes for families. The local authorities who adopted this approach were small in size and were expanding an existing team to create their Troubled Families provision.

In common with the other delivery models, the dedicated team was managed by a Troubled Families Coordinator, steering board with senior level involvement from a Director of Children's Services or equivalent. In addition there was typically analytical support and/or a business manager to support the management of the programme. In local authorities where the Troubled Families Coordinator managed other linked teams alongside the Troubled Families team they would also have an operational lead managing the day to day running of the service. The team consisted of a number of key workers or equivalent practitioner roles such as family support workers and a range of specialists who were either based in the core team or in a VCS organisation or in house partner. The intensity of the service they provided was adapted to the needs of the family as was the caseload size and service duration. In addition, a particular area of work might be carried out by a specialist partner. Families may continue to be worked with after achieving the Troubled Families outcomes or, at that point, be referred or stepped down to a universal or targeted service.

Aspects of the approach that appeared to be additional to or distinct from the Family Intervention Project approach included:

- working with families with lower levels of need;
- working with larger caseloads and mixed caseloads combining both Troubled Families and other types of families;
- providing a range of additional specialist provision including employment and training support – this was provided by a wider range of internal and external partners and services;
- working with families for shorter, more focused, periods of time (around 6 to 9 months duration);
- providing linked services to support families when they have met their Troubled Families outcomes but were still in need of support; and
- working to stretching targets specified in the financial framework.

---

<sup>8</sup> This involved a dedicated worker taking a persistent assertive and challenging approach to working intensively with the whole family alongside partner agencies. The work followed a family action plan which was based on a whole family assessment and focused on family members achieving a range of outcomes.

**Table 2.1 Example of the dedicated team**

Local authority A extended their family intervention team (originally a Family Intervention Project) to incorporate the Troubled Families programme alongside their other family support work. They used their attachment fees to double the number of key workers they had to work with families. The Troubled Families Coordinator oversaw three teams including the family intervention team which consisted of a team manager, three social workers, a therapeutic interventions worker, and 11 specialist family support workers who had mixed case-loads of Troubled Families and other families. The team came from a range of backgrounds including: housing, substance misuse, domestic violence, residential care, youth offending and specialist parenting services. In addition there was a sexual exploitation project worker, an administrator and a part time analyst to support the team, identify families and process their results for the programme.

The key workers were working directly with families as well as coordinating the work of other partners and professionals. Irrespective of whether another partner had statutory responsibility for the family there was always a practitioner in the team who acted as key worker for a family and monitored their progress. Depending on the needs of family members they might co-work a family for a period of time where additional specialist support, such as family therapy, was required.

Reflecting the Troubled Families Team guidance there were three different levels of service provided according to the needs of the family – intensive, medium and low level. At the most intensive end, the intervention was designed to work with the very chaotic large families with multiple and complex problems requiring support three to five times a week. These families were likely to require support with anti-social behaviour /criminal activity, education issues, employment, training, domestic violence, alcohol and drug misuse. Their medium level service was working with families whose needs and issues were less complex and required between one and three visits per week.

At the lowest level the team may be just monitoring the progress of families and the services they are working with and can step them up or down depending on their circumstances.

They worked flexible hours to suit the families' and the duration of the intervention was 12 months. Where necessary they continued to work with families after they met the Troubled Families criteria.

The exit procedure involved either closing a family's case, referring them to another service or to a volunteer to work with them.

Moving along the continuum from the dedicated team towards the hybrid approaches were delivery models which expanded the number, size and scope of their team structure but did not embed any provision. These approaches reported having a number of area based teams or a virtual team made up of a bank of staff who were brought in to work with families as and when there was a need. In the case of the virtual team the local authority recruited very experienced professionals who had retired. They were given other responsibilities alongside their commitment to the Troubled Families programme.

## 2.2.2 The hybrid model

In between the dedicated team and the embedded approach was the hybrid model, which most local authorities adopted. This model integrated, to varying degree, a combination of team expansion or creation of a team alongside provision (either individuals or a team of people) that was embedded within an existing structure or service. Often these hybrid models were overlaying and building on pre-existing provision and tailoring the structure to the existing political and service landscape and infrastructure. This could result in some quite complex and devolved structures as the provision was, for example, weaved into an integrated early or early intervention structure. The location and number of teams where the provision was embedded varied from one to as many as nine area based teams.

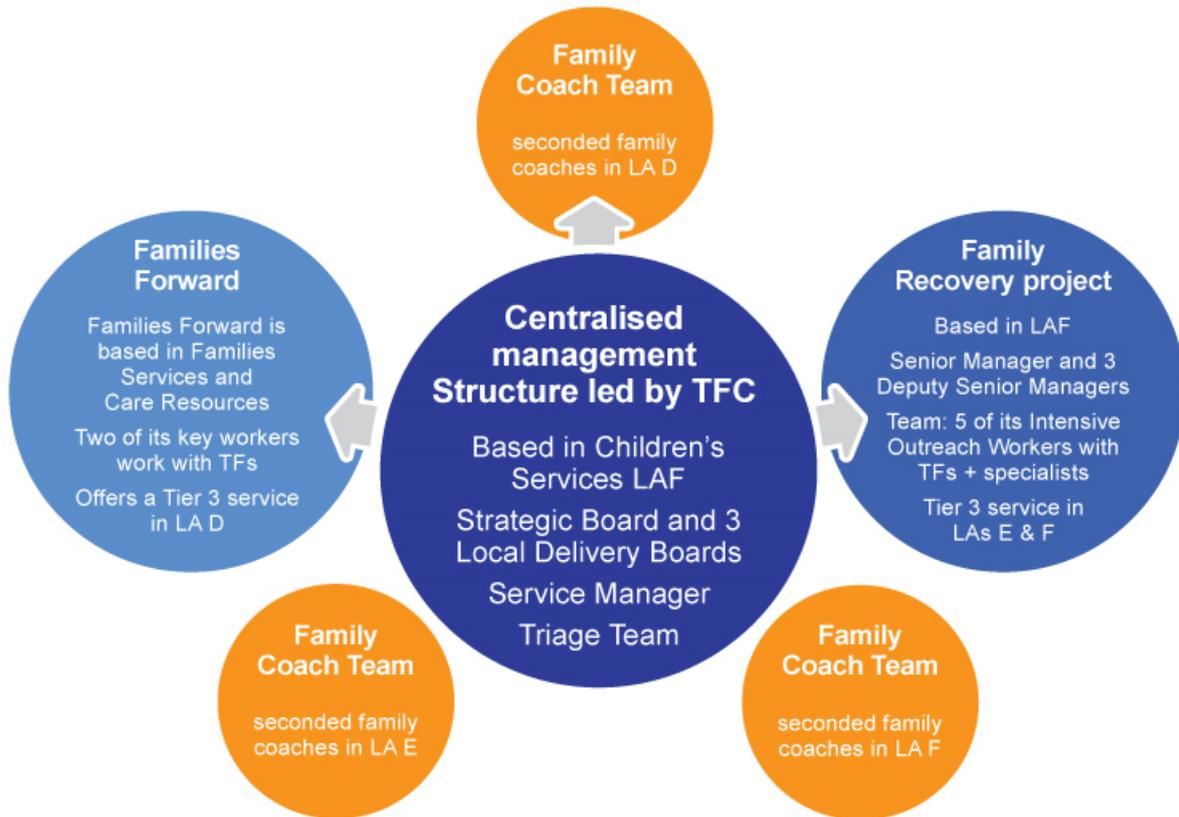
Hybrid models located closer to the dedicated team end of the continuum delivered their Troubled Families work via one to three area based teams and had a small number of workers embedded in existing services. By contrast, hybrid models located closer to the embedded end of the continuum were more advanced in their approach to embedding provision and often resulted in quite complex delivery models. For example, a number of dedicated teams embedded in an area based structure combined with a number of cross-sector workers, based in different services. This latter group managed both dedicated and mixed case-loads, where they juggled one or two Troubled Families alongside their regular caseload. The typical features of a hybrid delivery model included:

- a combination of in house and VCS providers delivering intensive and lower level family intervention support;
- Family Intervention Project teams – at the intensive end there may be one or more local authority or VCS teams which provided the classic Family Intervention Project type model working with families;
- embedded provision - individual key or lead workers were either embedded in a number of area based teams (ranging from three to nine) or different services across the local authority. Alternatively, individual practitioners based in existing teams or services adopted the family intervention approach. These workers either had a dedicated caseload of Troubled Families or they agreed to work with a couple of Troubled Families alongside their current caseload (i.e. they had a mixed caseload and were engaged in cross-sector working). Typically these workers were allocated families with a lower level of need;
- there may also be a wider circle of partner agencies who supported the teams and embedded workers delivering specialist provision;
- dedicated caseload sizes reflected the nature of the families being worked with and their level of need. At the intensive end it was around six to eight families and at the lighter end it was around 12 to 15 families;
- services were commissioned to offer step down or maintenance support when a case was closed;
- a centralised management team based in the local authority which governed all Troubled Families activity. This was led by a Troubled Families Coordinator, steering board with senior level involvement from a Director of Children's Services (DCS) or equivalent. The precise structure of the management team varied and might, for example, split the management team between a partnership board (with a focus on governance) and an operational steering group. There may also be a tier of operational managers who managed and supported activity at the local or district

level. In addition there was analytical support and/or a business manager to support the management of the programme.

The diagrams and text below illustrate two different ways the hybrid models operated.

**Figure 2.2: Hybrid Z approach**



**Hybrid Z** covers 3 local authorities. It was developed within Children's Services and overseen by the Director of Children's Services. Despite the integrated approach the Troubled Families programme was grown from pre-existing provision and tailored to the existing service landscape and needs of the families within the three individual local authorities. There were three levels of service.

**Troubled Families level three:** At the most intensive level (5% of the cohort) families were worked with by the Family Recovery Project in local authority E and local authority F and Families Forward in local authority D. An intensive outreach worker/key worker took a whole family approach – working flexibly – complementing other core services that were involved. The extent to which they took the lead professional role coordinating services and the team around the family (TAF) depended on the presence of other services with statutory responsibility for the family (e.g. social care). They worked alongside families, building a relationship, providing practical and emotional support, role modelling parenting skills and providing advice about issues like training, work, housing and debt management. They produced an integrated family care plan which set goals and outcomes and was reviewed on a regular basis. Key workers each held a caseload of about six families and worked with them for between three and 18 months taking a year on average.

**Troubled Families level two:** the Family Coach Service was provided for families (40% of the cohort) whose needs were not as complex or as entrenched as those for Level three. The family coach worked like a key worker delivering some interventions directly and supporting the family to practically address issues of, for example, debt, housing, parenting and mentoring. They worked as part of a wider multi-disciplinary team. The family coach had a caseload of approximately 10 families who they worked with for around six months or more (depending on the review carried out at the end of five months). At the time of the final case study visit (December 2014), the Family Coach Service was in the process of being embedded within the early help structure.

**Troubled Families level one:** the lowest tier worked with existing mainstream and targeted provision (55% of the cohort) within the early help teams (who adopted a whole family approach<sup>9</sup>). At the same time a TAF approach was rolled out across the early help teams. The whole family work was also augmented with a referral to employment and skills services for adults who were out of work. Their outcomes were continuously monitored against the Troubled Families criteria.

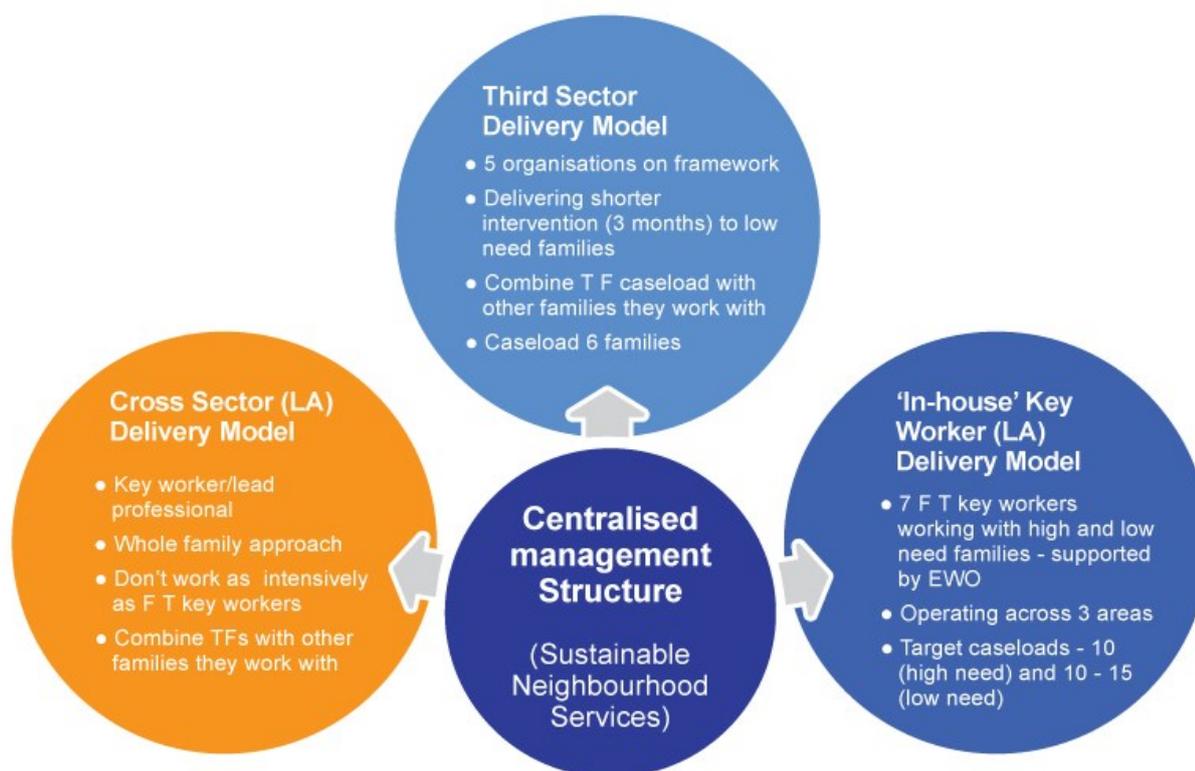
Hybrid Z had a centralised structure and was led and delivered by one Troubled Families Coordinator, based in local authority F. In terms of governance arrangements they had one strategic and three local delivery boards managing the Troubled Families Programme. Key characteristics were as follows:

- the Troubled Families Coordinator was the head of service and managed two of the three service managers as well as the Data Intelligence Manager who in turn managed the triage team;
- the Family Recovery Project was based in local authority F and was managed by a service manager and three deputy service managers ;
- Families Forward was based in local authority D and managed by a service manager and a deputy manager;
- the Family Coach Service was managed from local authority F by a service manager and delivered from a local base in each of the three local authorities by a deputy service manager with more of an operational management role overseeing the day to day management of the service and cases; and
- there were 25 family coaches in total

---

<sup>9</sup> This transition involved a programme of work to develop and adapt processes (e.g. for assessment, management, delivery approach, supervision and workforce development) to enable practitioners and their managers to consider the needs of the whole family

**Figure 2.3 Hybrid C**



Local authority C piloted three different ways of delivering their Troubled Families Programme, so that they could evaluate which worked best:

The in-house local authority team consisted of seven full time key workers spread across three neighbourhood teams. Each key worker had a mixed case-load of high and low need families and worked with between six and 10 families.

The cross-sector model where workers from partner agencies in the police, registered social landlords, Youth Service, Neighbourhood Services Team, Children's Service juggled key work with families alongside their existing case-loads. They did not work as intensively as the full time key workers. Cross-sector workers were managed within their home team and offered additional support around family intervention and supervision with a Neighbourhood Early Action Coordinator who oversaw their work.

The third sector framework consisted of five VCS providers who were each contracted to deliver the Family Intervention Project model to approximately 30 families a year. They worked with lower need families for a shorter duration (around three months). Key workers were given a caseload of about six mixed families juggling Troubled Families alongside the other families they worked with. They operated out of their own office as well as being able to visit the neighbourhood teams.

In order to help support the delivery of the Troubled Families programme a peer network was set up to enable all key workers to meet regularly. This provided time for peer reflection, to share learning, be briefed about the Troubled Families programme and be trained.

Local Authority C's Troubled Families programme was located in the Sustainable Neighbourhood Services and overseen by the Deputy Chief Executive. It had a devolved management structure and only the Troubled Families Coordinator and her administrator were based in the Town Hall. The Neighbourhood Early Action Coordinators and the full time key workers were based in the three neighbourhood teams, the cross-sector workers operated out of their home service teams and the VCS providers from their own base.

It was initially governed by a high level strategic steering group and subsequently subsumed within another broader focused Board. The Troubled Families Coordinator also set up an operational programme board to support the running of the service.

### 2.2.3 The embedded approach

At the other end of the delivery continuum were the **embedded models** where local authorities consciously decided against setting up any kind of dedicated team. Instead they embedded their key or lead workers in existing team structures or services, or they opted to transform the way services worked with families; encouraging practitioners to work with the whole family. The underlying driver for this approach was to ensure that the transformation of the work culture to whole family working would be sustained after the Troubled Families programme ended. The experience and learning from Family Intervention Projects and other national initiatives resulted in these local authorities wanting to avoid their Troubled Families programme being decommissioned at the end of the funding period. In one exceptional local authority, the Troubled Families programme was subsumed within another agenda that had already embarked on a programme of workforce reform.

These local authorities set about changing practice and systems by either embedding their key workers in existing team structures, or training local partners already based in these teams to carry out whole family work so they could work across sectors with both Troubled Families and the families they have always worked with. As one Director of Children's Services put it, the Troubled Families initiative provided:

*"A way of learning how they could do things differently and better throughout the whole system but also thinking about how they could ensure that they used the funding to kick-start a different way of thinking in services around the very difficult and high-end families."*

Director of Children's Services

For this reason the embedded approach was most likely to integrate with or to overlay an existing area based cluster or team structure. These models tended to have a larger centralised management team based in the local authority which governed all Troubled Families activity and supported the infrastructure. It was led by one or more Troubled Families Coordinators and a steering board and had senior level involvement from a Director of Children's Services or equivalent. It also included:

- a tier of operational managers who managed and supported activity at the local or district level in each area;
- analysts or a business manager to support the management of the programme; and

- a workforce development team or training consultants to support practitioners' taking on the key working or lead professional role.

Whilst the Troubled Families Coordinator and area based coordinators/operational managers contracts were limited to the life of the Troubled Families programme it was not clear whether other elements of the management team would be maintained.

**Table 2.2. Example of the embedded team**

The Troubled Families programme provided the opportunity for local authority B to embed whole family working throughout the workforce so as to break down any professional 'silos' and ensure that work was truly focused around making change for families. This local authority actively decided against creating a Troubled Families service or setting up a separate Troubled Families team because they wanted to ensure that the practice would sustain after the end of the programme, when the money ran out.

*"It is not about putting a team in, it's about changing the practice... We're taking existing infrastructure and changing the way people work. So we're embedding different processes. Rather than... embedding a new team, you're taking existing teams and saying we want you to work in this way."*

Their approach was premised on the desire to change workforce practice – across all sectors – from focusing on individuals to coordinated partnership working with the whole family, so that they are able to get to grips with the underlying causes of their problems, and prevent them being passed on to future generations. They said they were building on a previous history of good integrated working across partners which chimed with the need for greater efficiencies as a result of the external financial climate.

*"If we can be more efficient and more effective with families, then obviously that will, in the long run, save money. Because the idea is that these families will not cost as much money, because we won't be sending the police around to their door, we won't be taking their kids away, and we won't be doing all these incredibly expensive and very unpleasant interventions."*

The core team consisted of: the Troubled Families Coordinator; a Business Support Coordinator; three Locality Managers; a Performance Monitoring Leader; two Psychologists to work with the case workers (or key workers) finding solutions to problems they were having with families; two Research Assistants to evaluate their work; an Employment Coordinator and a number of Employment Advisers based in local offices who support the employment activity. The operational delivery and strategic lead operated within Children and Young People's Services. The Troubled Families Coordinator reported to the Assistant Director of Integrated Services who led the programme with the backing of the Director of Children's Service. The Health and Well-Being Board subsequently took over the governance of the programme and the chair sat on the steering group.

The locality managers each reported to the Troubled Families Coordinator and each covered one of three localities in the county reflecting a larger number of integrated (multiagency) teams. Their role was to support the Troubled Families Coordinator driving their Troubled Families programme forward, quality assuring practice and working

**Table 2.2. Example of the embedded team**

closely with their local partners in their locality.

The core team identified the families and then negotiated with agencies who were already working with families to agree who could take on the key working role. The decision was based on which agency had the best pre-existing relationship with the family and the capacity to take on the role.

The local authority and VCS providers were left to decide how to manage their caseloads most effectively. Practitioners were either allocated a dedicated case load of between six to 10 families or they juggled a mixed case-load of Troubled Families and the families they typically work with. The Workforce Development Team trained all practitioners who took on the key working role.

They were still assessing the optimum time to work with families but estimated it would be about 12 months. The Troubled Families Coordinator did not know how this would vary for families with a lower level of need but they hoped it might be possible to see some results after three months.

## 2.3 Moving towards the expanded programme

The broad delivery models adopted by local authorities in our sample remained in place for the duration of phase one of the Troubled Families programme. Any changes made by local authorities were in keeping with the underlying philosophy of the approach taken and were more about maturing and consolidating management and practice issues. As a consequence modifications were made to the number of staff and the providers delivering the service, in part to manage the inevitable staffing changes and turnover that occurred. Governance structures were adapted to support the needs of ongoing operational issues once the delivery structure was in place and partnerships established. Practices and processes were improved to support delivery and address any initial challenges with setting up teams and services. Referral and assessment processes were streamlined and resulted in one local authority, for example, in the creation of a multi-agency panel meeting to handle referrals across early intervention teams. Analytical support was marshalled, sophisticated IT solutions developed and information governance was strengthened to ensure access to all the right data systems as the scale of the monitoring requirements were realised.

Caseloads changed and increased for some professionals as key and lead workers (and particularly cross-sector workers) became more experienced and skilled at family intervention. Training programmes were developed in response to emerging practice issues as well as to prepare for the future mainstreaming of the programme. Supervision practice (including the use of clinical psychologists and the training of supervisors) and peer support networks were also honed and refined to help support the development of practice. The range of specialists aligned to the core teams who supported key and lead workers were expanded to include specific areas where gaps in provision were identified. In one local authority, for example, this resulted in the inclusion of a Child and Adolescent

Mental Health Services specialist, a domestic violence adviser and an increase in the number of DWP advisors.

Finally, local authorities worked hard to develop a clear exit plan and step down process for families when their cases were closed. These often included formalising the requirement for professionals to carry out follow up contacts at specific time intervals, in order to assess how well the family were managing.

Local authorities were generally very positive about the scope and focus of the expanded Troubled Families programme. They applauded the broader eligibility criteria and having the freedom to set the outcomes framework. Unsurprisingly, given the underlying intentions of the expanded Troubled Families programme, local authorities with a dedicated team were now on a journey to embed their approach. Those with a hybrid model talked of mainstreaming more of their approach and embedding whole family work across the workforce. Some of these local authorities were already in the process of mainstreaming part of their provision as they approached the end of the phase one Troubled Families programme. In these areas they were dismantling the management structures that supported their provision and contracts were not renewed with managers and staff who would not be part of the future model. Interestingly, at the embedded end of the continuum, where local authorities were embarking on a programme of wholesale workforce reform, there was some discussion about creating a small dedicated team to respond to the needs of the very intensive high level and complex families.

## 3 Identifying and working with families

In the previous chapter we looked at how the local Troubled Families programmes were developed and the main ways in which services were configured. In this chapter, we turn to examine the criteria that local authorities used to identify and prioritise their families for intervention, including the degree of influence of the (original) Troubled Families financial framework on targeting and local information sharing arrangements between local authorities and other agencies. We go on to consider how local authorities organised their services to work with families at different levels of need, and recruitment, training and supervisory arrangements that underpinned this work. Finally, we consider the influence exerted by the DWP and DCLG delivery agreement, with a focus on the work undertaken by the specialist Troubled Families Employment Advisers and Jobcentre Plus Single Points of Contact who were seconded from Jobcentre Plus to work on the Troubled Families programme.

### 3.1 Identification and targeting

As set out within the *Troubled Families Financial Framework* (2013a), the administrative definition of 'troubled families' for the Troubled Families programme was based on households who meet the following criteria:

1. are involved in crime and anti-social behaviour;
2. have children not in school;
3. have an adult on out of work benefits; and
4. cause high costs to the public purse

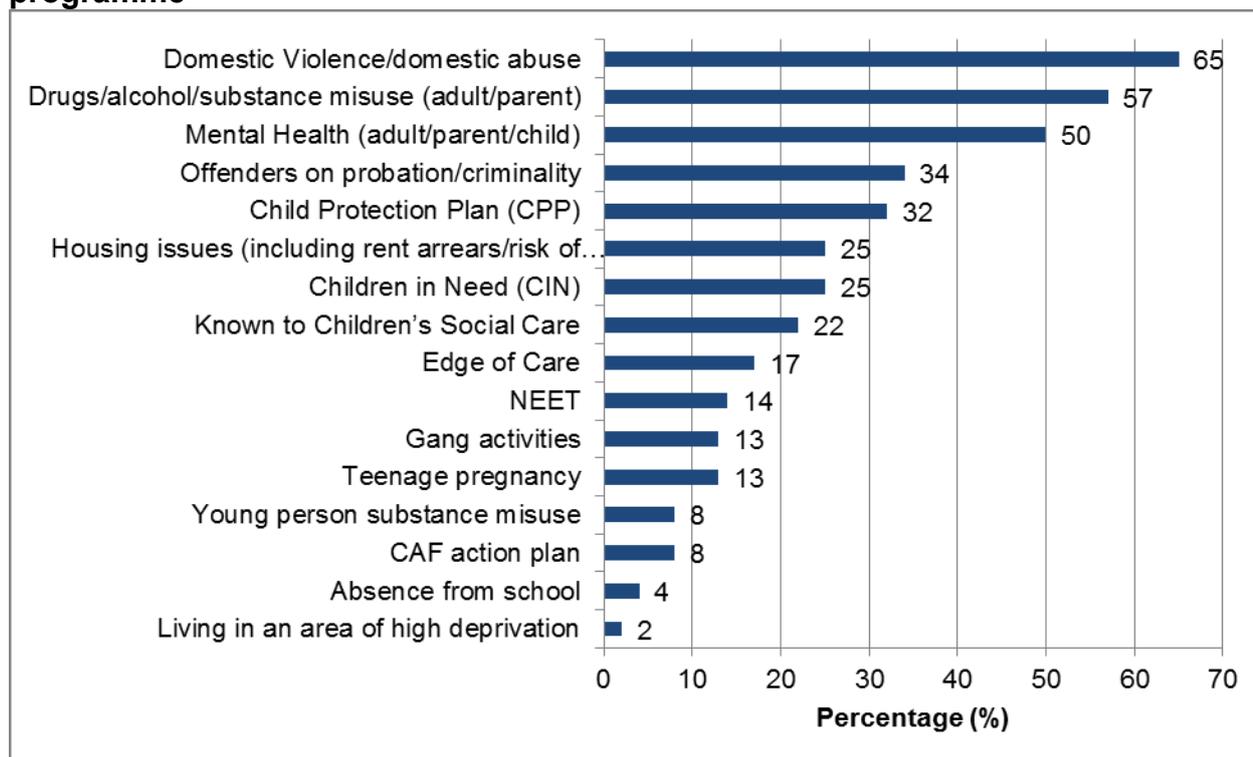
To qualify for inclusion within the Troubled Families programme, local authorities were required to evidence that families met all three of the core criteria (1-3), or two of these criteria plus the fourth 'high cost' criterion. DCLG afforded local authorities the discretion to identify their own local criteria to apply as a proxy for 'high cost' families (4).

Local authorities were required to keep evidence of the eligibility for each family in the event of an audit, to show that they met the criteria for the Troubled Families programme and to substantiate the results-based payments. The financial framework includes a detailed set of metrics to quantify these judgements.

#### 3.1.1 Tailoring the local programme – the fourth discretionary filter

Overall, local authorities applied a broad interpretation of the fourth eligibility criterion for the programme. This allowed for some flexibility to respond to emerging needs, and to work with families they were particularly concerned about. Most local authorities therefore either included multiple discretionary criteria, or used an umbrella criterion such as 'high cost' families to achieve the same result. A survey conducted towards the start of the national evaluation in May 2013 provides a further insight to the range of local discretionary indicators that were in use (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1 Local discretionary PbR criteria applied for the Troubled Families programme**



Source: Ecorys, 2013 (Base: 142 local authorities)

As the chart shows, the fourth criterion was widely used by local authorities to pick-up other acute issues not covered by the three national criteria and which were deemed important in the local context, although arguably the national criteria were either linked to some of the above or operated as a proxy for some of them. Most local authorities used a combination of criteria to maintain a degree of flexibility<sup>10</sup>.

In a few cases, the local criteria were originally designed to test a hypothesis or as a means to involve agencies with a specific remit. For example, one local authority included adult offending and involvement of probation services to shine a light on those families where adult and young offenders were living within the same household. This was in response to a potential risk identified for young people not at school and exposed to adult offending behaviours. Whilst local authorities predominately targeted their service below thresholds for statutory intervention, some used their local discretionary criterion to pick up social care indicators in the first instance (e.g. children with a Child in Need plan or who had been de-escalated from a Child Protection Plan). This was specifically with the aim of working with families who had children on the edge of care.

In other cases, the Troubled Families programme itself was seen as a test bed for developing a more sophisticated understanding of what these criteria should include, with priority indicators driven by the principle of casework and active identification by local Troubled Families teams. In practical terms, this meant that the local authority was less prescriptive about their local criteria at the outset. They placed a greater emphasis on the

<sup>10</sup> The number of discretionary local criteria per LA ranged from 1, to as many as 14. Over half of the local authorities used five or more local criteria (Survey base: 145 local authorities).

use of case reviews and multiagency panels to prioritise cases for inclusion within the programme, and they built up a clearer picture of needs within the cohort over time.

A widening of the criteria was also done for more pragmatic reasons, with a number of local authorities finding that their initial model was too narrowly focussed to capture all of the families they were concerned about. In the case of one regional grouping of local authorities, the programme provided a test bed for a new model based on 'complex, high cost dependency', moving away from lists of risk factors towards an assessment of families' capacity for change. The Troubled Families element was used to identify and work with families exhibiting high levels of dependency, but the model extended beyond this to include childless couples and single adults.

At the stage when the final wave of fieldwork took place, local authorities were looking ahead towards the new financial framework for the expanded programme (DCLG, 2015), and indeed areas with early adopter status were at a more advanced stage in determining the basket of indicators to be used locally. Troubled Families Coordinators who were interviewed for the evaluation invariably saw the expanded programme as an opportunity to extend the level of local discretion in identifying priority outcomes beyond the national eligibility criteria and validate change for families in more sophisticated ways. It was widely understood that the expanded programme would enable local authorities to work with a greater number of families, adopting the principles of early intervention, and that the greater local discretion in the selection of indicators would make it easier for local teams to engage families with younger children<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, local authorities were aware of the priority to maintain their focus and to avoid casting the net too widely. A need was also identified for effective quality assurance at a national level, to ensure fairness and transparency in the local determination of indicators. Some local teams also considered that it will be important to undertake strategic analysis and benchmarking at a national level, to make sense of the outcomes that are achieved England-wide by the programme.

### **3.1.2 Identification and referral mechanisms**

The requirement to cross-check data held on school attendance, antisocial behaviour and employment was unprecedented, and local authorities encountered a range of different challenges in responding to the financial framework for the Troubled Families Programme. Local authorities and their partner organisations had varying levels of infrastructure and analytical expertise at the start of the programme, which resulted in a host of different problems and solutions as each area devised an approach that was fit for purpose.

---

<sup>11</sup> The national criteria did not apply to families who only had children under school age.

Generally speaking, local authorities identified families using some combination of the following two main approaches:

- **Data wash** – this approach involved the preparation of a master list of eligible families, by first matching school attendance and anti-social behaviour (ASB) data and/or youth crime data, and then cross-checking against DWP employment records<sup>12</sup>. A further step was needed to match against the local criteria. Lists were prepared in advance for Year one families and updated for Years two and three. Some local authorities also ‘refreshed’ lists periodically to assist with streaming families onto the Troubled Families Programme. Upon identifying the families, local Troubled Families teams would establish contact to offer them the intervention.
- **Active referrals** – this approach involved Troubled Families workers, and/or partner organisations identifying families who might require intervention, and putting them forward for consideration to the Troubled Families team, or to a local multiagency assessment panel or intelligence hub. This was more like a traditional referral mechanism, and involved an element of triage to determine eligibility. In many cases families were routed through a single ‘front door’, such as a Multiagency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), or latterly via the local Early Help Hub (EHH).

All of the local authorities covered through the research described having used a variant on the **data wash** approach during Year one of the Troubled Families programme. Whilst not an explicit requirement of the Troubled Families programme, an initial centralised data gathering exercise was needed: to assess the total number of families falling within scope for the Troubled Families programme; to compare this against the official ‘share’ of the 120,000 families assigned by DCLG; and to determine the suitable phasing of families onto the programme. The matching of education, youth crime/anti-social behaviour and employment data was unprecedented on this scale in most local authorities, and the identification of the Year one cohort represented a distinct milestone in engaging partner organisations – schools and academies, Youth Offending Services and other partner organisations – and operationalising the local Troubled Families programme.

Where the numbers of families that were identified through the data wash outstripped capacity, local authorities needed to determine the order in which they started on the local Troubled Families programme. Decisions about how to prioritise were more or less explicit, according to the approach taken by individual local authorities. For example, one local authority created a long list of families and then approached relevant agencies to agree how to prioritise families for their intensive service. Another local authority required their analyst to provide a list of 20 families each month who met the Troubled Families criteria. This list was then sent out to all services asking them to provide very basic information about the family. The collated data was then presented to a multiagency panel meeting which arrived at a decision about how to proceed with the family.

There were mixed views on the effectiveness of a data wash approach for identifying families. Local authorities quite often found that attendance and anti-social behaviour data

---

<sup>12</sup> This ordering was largely driven by data protection considerations – local authorities do not have direct access to DWP data, so it was necessary to compile cross-checked lists first, and to subsequently send to DWP to undertake the employability checks.

had been recorded and reported upon inconsistently, whilst some encountered difficulties with partial data from academies and free schools, who are not under any duty to provide attendance data. This resulted in delays, as records needed to be updated before they could be sent to DWP to match against employment data, and created bottlenecks in some local authorities where a large amount of historical cases needed to be checked and processed. Time lags between data entry, recording and use for the Troubled Families programme also resulted in some of the data being out of date by the time local Troubled Families teams came to contact families.

There were incidences where families objected to receiving a letter outlining their eligibility for support, because their child was attending school and/or their employment status had changed. In other cases, the Troubled Families team found that these time lags resulted in families being offered intervention at a much later stage than would have been hoped for. Examples were cited where care proceedings or housing repossession, anti-social behaviour or educational sanctions had already taken place in the interim period.

The initial contact with families proved especially challenging in cases where the data matching identified families for whom there did not seem to be an obvious 'lead professional' involved with the family or where it appeared that the family were no longer in contact with local services. In these circumstances Troubled Families workers described having to effectively 'cold-call' a family to promote the service and explain the reason for offering support. This could make the initial engagement with families considerably harder, particularly where families were anxious about getting involved or did not perceive they needed the service.

*"It's harder when there are no agencies involved. The family may be quite happy with their circumstances, and they may be quite shocked to get a letter from someone who they see as social services wanting to come and see them, and I think that's quite scary [for them]... It's emotionally quite difficult because you're trying to sell a service to a family where they've not really identified that there's an issue."*

Troubled Families team manager

Building upon lessons learned from the early stages of the programme, the local authorities had often sought to achieve further contact between agencies for identification to test and validate the assumptions made about families' status. In some instances, this was as straightforward as the key worker speaking with schools and the YOS to help identify who was already in contact with the family, prior to making contact. This communication sometimes helped to overcome ambiguity about which families should be included, as local teams made contact directly and provided a firmer steer to partner organisations.

*“When we [first] went to get the information on the families they were saying, ‘Well, we wouldn’t have said that this one was a troubled family but we’ve got this one who we would say is a troubled family’... That has got a lot better, because we now have the Troubled Families CAF Coordinator; their role is to actually go out to the school about the families that they think should be on the list. And just check with them.”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

In many areas, however, there was a palpable sense of frustration at the lack of mechanisms for sharing ‘real time’ information on families, even where the data pooled for the Troubled Families Programme had assisted greatly with their initial identification. This was also coupled with difficulties with data retrieval. As described by one key worker, this sometimes hindered the ability to respond quickly in the event of a referral being made:

*“I’ve got one family being put forward for [the Troubled Families service]..., and I know that they’re well known to [statutory agencies]. But I know that if I rang up and asked them for that information: ‘What stage is this family at now?’ it would take me weeks to get that information...”*

Key worker

One Troubled Families service manager commented that VCS providers had encountered particular barriers to accessing data. There was a perceived reluctance amongst statutory agencies within this local authority to share data on families with VCS providers. This was thought to have been due to residual concerns about levels of data security, and the lack of a track record for VCS involvement in inter-agency sharing of statutory data.

Most of the local authorities in our sample also quickly recognised the need to set in place arrangements for key workers or partners to make **active referrals**, to run alongside the data-matching, although many had set these arrangements in place from the outset. This was sometimes thought to have brought a greater number and range of families onto the radar of local Troubled Families teams, further consolidated the degree of contact with partner agencies, and helped to reduce the risk that families were being overlooked through the screening process. It also allowed local Troubled Families teams to be more responsive in relation to emerging needs – families who might not have been flagged through the data wash, but whose circumstances had changed and had since become eligible for support, could be put forward for consideration in a more timely way. Most local authorities had established their local infrastructure for the Troubled Families programme by Year two and referral panels were playing a more significant role in filtering and selecting families, which made active identification feasible.

Nevertheless, local authorities varied in terms of how they balanced the use of these two methods. At one end of the scale, they described a more prescribed approach to work through lists of pre-identified families, whilst others were operating what one local authority Chief Executive described as ‘real time locality working’, with professionals actively putting forward new families on a rolling basis. A number of local authorities were also accepting families who had been stepped down by children’s social care teams because they no longer required statutory intervention. This added a further dimension to caseload management because the Troubled Families service needed to be equipped to work with families who were referred downwards from social care as well as upwards from universal

services. There were advantages to this model, however, as it sometimes provided a tangible way to secure closer working between Troubled Families teams and social care teams, as we go on to discuss later within this chapter.

Irrespective of the approach taken, there was a need to manage the expectations of partner agencies regarding the role of the Troubled Families programme. Some local authorities reported a tendency towards professionals withdrawing from further involvement with the family post-referral, which was not always in the best interest of the family. In some instances it was necessary for Troubled Families teams to re-engage with partner organisations to ensure that the referral process was completed satisfactorily, or to establish a co-working arrangement where their continued involvement was beneficial for the family. This might include where the key worker paired-up with a specialist such as a health or youth worker, if their input was needed to address a particular risk factor (see also section 3.2.1 for further discussion on these types of working arrangements).

### **3.1.3 Implementing the financial framework**

Local authorities generally recognised the role of the national eligibility criteria in ensuring that local Troubled Families programme aligned with national policy objectives, whilst ensuring that practitioners understood and responded to the diversity of families' needs and circumstances at a practice level. Troubled Families teams described taking a pragmatic approach to accommodate the national targets, whilst drawing upon their professional expertise to work with families using whatever methods were necessary. The local eligibility criteria helped to balance these two sets of requirements.

*“Workers know that, because of the payment by results, they've got to improve the anti-social behaviour or the education, or the crime. They know they've got to do that, but it's how you improve that. You improve that by sorting out the domestic violence and the mental health, and the alcohol and abuse because the local discretionary areas are the important areas really”.*

Troubled Families Coordinator

A challenge arising from the PbR framework related to how local authorities chose to implement it at a local level. Several of the case study local authorities had taken the decision to cascade the PbR formula to commissioned service providers by the local authority, so that they were paid on the basis of demonstrating outcomes for families against the financial framework. This put some pressure on smaller organisations – principally VCS providers – to maintain a throughput of families and to close cases relatively quickly, as they were more reliant on being able to draw down the funding allocated to them through the programme and in a less favourable position to cross-subsidise with other funding sources.

### **3.1.4 The profile of families supported**

Local Troubled Families teams commonly reported encountering a greater level of complexity to families' needs than was anticipated prior to the start of the programme. This related both to the type and range of issues encountered and the history of involvement from other agencies that needed to be unpacked through the casework process. The high prevalence of domestic abuse, mental health and drug and alcohol use amongst families referred to the programme was also often cited by local teams. Although this often

reflected the local discretionary criteria that were in use, these issues also emerged spontaneously through the assessment and review process, where a previously undisclosed issue relating to domestic abuse or mental health problems came to light.

A number of case study respondents commented on the inevitable skew towards families with older children arising from the inclusion of the eligibility criterion for school attendance. These issues were widely felt to have been addressed through the amended financial framework for the expanded programme.

Whilst the identification process uncovered some families who were not already in contact with local services, conversely local Troubled Families teams identified families meeting the criteria for the programme who already had a worker assigned from one agency or another, or had recently done so. The screening process uncovered what seems to have been a widespread problem – families with a long history of assessment and referral by individual agencies, but little evidence of any meaningful intervention having taken place with the family. In these instances the Troubled Families programme often constituted the first sustained intervention that had taken place with the family, over-and-above more ad hoc involvement from individual agencies.

At the start of the programme, local authorities typically identified greater numbers of eligible families than it was possible to work with straightaway. A strategy was required to determine the order in which families were worked with. A widespread approach was to prioritise the highest need families for support, usually on the grounds that there was a high level of unmet need and that working with the most acute cases maximised the potential impact of the programme. Other areas had not defined this strategy, but nonetheless found that cases were initially skewed towards those families with more acute and complex needs – partly reflecting the referring behaviours of partner agencies, who put forward those families in greatest need (e.g. on the cusp of thresholds for statutory intervention by social care teams).

The profile of families worked with was also influenced by service capacity and not all local authorities were in a position to work with the most complex cases at the outset, due to not yet having the necessary systems in place. For example, one local authority initially worked with a small cohort of (mainly less intensive) families prior to the launch of a Family Intervention Project-type model and only subsequently was it possible to work with families at higher levels of need. Other local authorities consciously sought to allocate mixed caseloads of intensive and less intensive cases from the outset, as a means of balancing the demands placed on individual key workers by families with complex needs.

In some areas the improved accuracy of local data sharing systems and processes meant that it was possible to more accurately identify families during the latter stages of the phase one programme. Some changes in the source and profile of families referred to the programme were also reported as a result of changes to local referral mechanisms.

The approach of targeting the most troubled families first was sometimes thought to have been successful in reducing the need for crisis intervention amongst a small number of families who placed the highest demand on local agencies, thus enabling local teams to shift their attention to families a tier below. Examples included some families with entrenched problems relating to criminality and gangs involving multiple family members, where sanctions and sometimes even relocation or re-housing were necessary to enable

the intervention to take place. There was little evidence that this strategy had achieved an overall reduction in the numbers of families requiring intervention, however, and Troubled Families Coordinators primarily described the role of the programme in terms of managing the 'flow' of families rather than diminishing the 'stock' of families within a given locality. As such, there was a continuing demand for intensive intervention alongside lighter touch work, even towards the end of the phase one programme. This suggests a continuing need to preserve capacity for more specialist work with families alongside support for earlier intervention.

The movement of families in and out of crisis was generally thought to be cyclical; reflecting both changes to individual families' circumstances and the wider churn of families moving in and out of the area. Some local authorities were sceptical about the role of family intervention in tackling the underlying structural factors, such as poverty and organised crime.

*"I think what's not taken into account within that equation is that you've got families who are passing through their child rearing years, but then they are replaced by other families... young families who are just in the cycle of deprivation, or who are coming into parenthood and are not coping, even though their parents did... [So] there is another big tranche of families, with just as much complexity."*

Troubled Families Coordinator

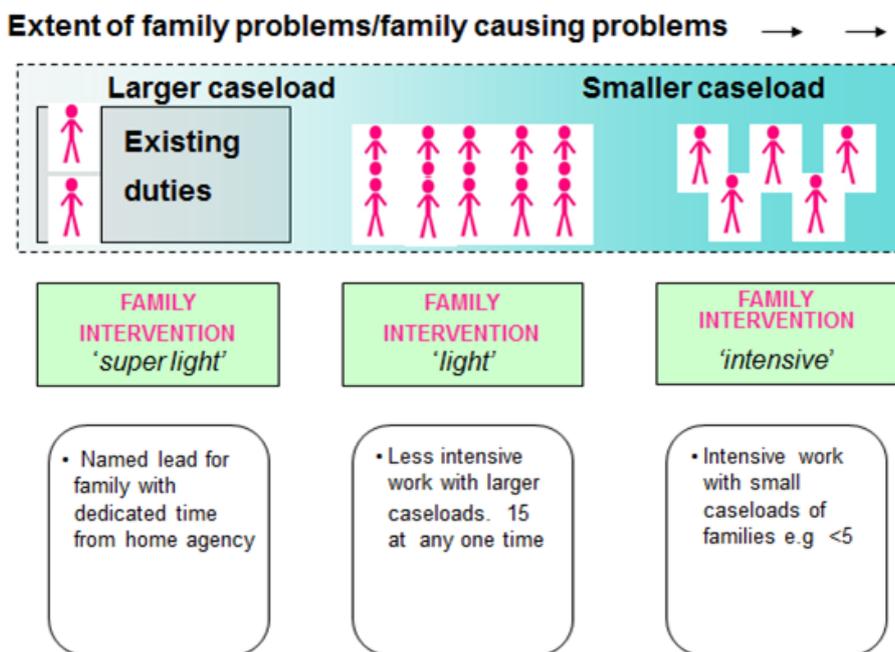
At the point when the final wave of case study fieldwork took place, a number of local authorities were examining ways in which intervention with individual families might be reinforced with measures to tackle issues at a community or neighbourhood level that were causing families to fall back into difficulties. For example, one local authority had developed their programme as part of a wider public sector transformation pilot, which aimed to identify 'social norms' within specific localities and to target services accordingly. This work identified that doorstep lending was widespread on certain estates, which was thought to have been a factor causing a number of the families to fall back into debt. Joint work had therefore begun with local housing teams to address this problem. In another example, the local Troubled Families programme was working closely with the Police where issues relating to organised crime and gangs in the local area were affecting some of the families who were being supported. Again, having access to this intelligence proved useful for identifying where family members might be associating with known gang members, and for intervening early. Similarly, police would liaise with the local Troubled Families team where family members were linked with an address where there was known criminal activity.

## 3.2 The family intervention workforce

We reviewed in Chapter 2 how local authorities organised their local delivery model geographically and with regard to the deployment of practitioners. In this section we examine more closely how these different staffing models operated, and the implications for recruitment, training and supervision.

DCLG presented three broad models of working with troubled families, which formed the basis of the national academy events for local authorities that were delivered in the spring of 2013 (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2 Degrees of the Family Intervention Service**



Source: DCLG (2013a)

As the diagram illustrates, the model combines two key dimensions:

- the way staff are deployed (dedicated or alongside existing duties); and
- levels of intensity (intensive, light and super light)

We now examine each of these elements in turn to observe their inter-relationships and how they were addressed by the case study local authorities.

### 3.2.1 Key and lead worker models

The case studies explored the distinctions between key working and lead working, and how these approaches operated at a local level. All but one case study local authority identified a key worker role even if it was called something different, such as family support worker or family intervention worker. This person often assumed the responsibility from a

lead professional at the point when a family joined the programme (or in some instances the existing lead professional stepped-up to take on the key worker role). The lead professional may have stayed involved to lead on a particular area of work, for example, where they were responsible for a statutory intervention in place. Rather more exceptionally, a local authority described only having lead professionals and this post appeared to combine both lead professional and key worker roles.

In local authorities where both roles existed, it is possible to distinguish them broadly as follows:

- **Key workers** were dedicated workers recruited and deployed by the local authority or a commissioned provider to work very closely with families providing direct support as part of the Troubled Families Programme and often assuming a coordinating role in respect of the families' contact with other agencies. They may also act as the lead contact for the family but this depended on whether a nominated lead professional was involved or not with the family – typically when they had statutory responsibility for the family. Key workers either had a dedicated caseload of Troubled Families, or they combined their work with Troubled Families with other families who were not eligible for the programme (a mixed caseload).
- **Lead professionals** operated in different ways across local authorities, but typically the label related to a person who was the lead contact for a family and coordinated all the services working with a family and often chaired the TAF meeting. They would be the person with the statutory responsibility for the family where this applied. Otherwise they were likely to be selected as the person best placed to perform this lead role and was often the service or agency with the closest relationship with the family. Where a key worker and lead professional worked alongside each other with a family it was the key worker who typically had the very intensive involvement with the family supporting them on a day to day basis. These lead professionals sat within their 'host' organisation and undertook any family intervention role alongside existing duties.

Local authority deployed key workers were typically based in a team working with the most complex families, overseen by an operational manager (that may have been the Troubled Families Coordinator). The main perceived advantage was to have a resource dedicated to working with families, and to shore-up the necessary skills and expertise for working at higher levels of need. Key workers were quite often recruited from a mix of different professional backgrounds, with some local authorities seeking to create multi-disciplinary teams.

Alongside the more generic use of lead professionals (described above) lead workers could be used to support the embedding of family intervention across a wider range of local services and organisations. In effect, this model sought to roll out the capability for working with families beyond a dedicated family intervention team, although not necessarily outside of the local authority, whilst retaining the essential features of having a single dedicated worker to work directly with the family. In this way, lead working was used to extend the work of core Troubled Families teams, and to grow this over time to provide additional scale at lower levels of need. As such, this work was typically at an earlier stage in development at the time when the visits took place because local authorities were seeking to first consolidate their core teams and supporting infrastructure. These arrangements had accelerated considerably following the announcement of the expanded

programme, however, and by the end of the evaluation there was a much more widespread aspiration to rollout lead working on a much larger scale.

Local authorities also used a co-working approach, where families had specific needs. This was equally applicable to key worker and lead worker models. Examples might include a worker paired with a family therapist if relationship problems were a particular risk factor, or a Targeted Youth Support Worker might be selected if risk-taking by a young person was the main presenting issue.

### **3.2.2 Working at different levels of intensity**

Local Troubled Families teams all had mechanisms for assessing and re-assessing levels of intensity for cases and assigning and making adjustments to caseloads on this basis. Nearly all of the local authorities that were covered through the evaluation reported using internal bandings of some kind. Families were typically classified as high/medium/low intensity, or a simpler twofold classification of intensive/less intensive, based on the available intelligence held on the family. For example, one of the case study local authorities banded cases in terms of maximum, medium and lower input. The latter category corresponded with very light touch cases, usually where the initial casework with the family had been completed and the involvement of the worker was primarily in a monitoring role to prevent re-escalation.

Initial classifications were usually made using a triage process of some kind, after referrals were made to a local multiagency panel or hub. This approach helped to avoid over-reliance on individual practitioner judgements. The precise criteria varied between areas, but usually took into account some combination of the following:

- the type and number of problems, and/or number of agencies involved with the family; and
- the severity of the problems - for example, Child Protection Plan/threat or eviction/domestic abuse/domestic violence or mental health often constituted high risk/need and warranted an intensive classification.

Such categories were largely nominal, however, and local Troubled Families teams found that the distinction between levels of intensity was highly porous. Families' needs were often subject to fluctuation during the course of their intervention, whilst cases initially assessed as low intensity were subject to escalation upon the disclosure of more serious issues such as domestic abuse. Moreover, service complexity was found to be a factor driving the time inputs required for workers. Some cases were assessed as lower risk on the basis of presenting issues, but derived their complexity from the extent of prior agency involvement with the family which required more time intensive worker inputs during the early stages.

Initial assessments were quite often based on partial or historical data, and it was common for Troubled Families teams to take four to six weeks to establish the needs of the family accurately. This meant that families that were originally assessed at one level of intervention were re-assessed as another when further information transpired and/or their circumstances changed. This process was typically managed through a supervisory process, with individual caseloads reviewed on a continuous basis to avoid workers becoming over-stretched. Local Troubled Families teams described how the effectiveness

of judgements about service intensity improved after the programme was embedded and workers and supervisors had experienced the full range of cases.

The internal division of responsibilities within local Troubled Families teams commonly reflected the different levels of intensity. Many local authorities initially devised a system whereby different teams handled intensive and less intensive cases, with the latter assigned to lead workers sitting outside of the core service (i.e. where authorities had a 'dedicated team' of key workers – see also Chapter 2). In practice, however, these arrangements were often more fluid and it was necessary to assign cases on the basis of available capacity within individual teams. Most local authorities found that the frequency of contact required for higher level cases imposed a limit upon the number of such cases that any worker was able to manage concurrently - especially during the early stages of working the case, when daily visits were often needed. It was necessary, therefore, for key workers to hold a proportion of lighter cases to operate at capacity. Reflecting this, mixed caseloads of intensive and less intensive families were found within nearly all of the local authorities covered by the evaluation by the later stages of the programme.

The exceptions to a mixed caseload model were found within those local authorities that had opted to work exclusively with higher-intensity families. Several of these local authorities were included within the case study research, and each operated a system whereby lighter cases were referred outwards and were managed externally to the Troubled Families team. This enabled the core Troubled Families team to operate on the basis of five to six cases per worker. In one such example social workers and key workers had been co-located within neighbourhood teams, and in the other the key workers themselves were social work trained. This helped to ensure that the statutory elements of casework were effectively managed for these high need families.

Finally, the case holding arrangements for lead workers were found to vary across the local authorities that were studied. Although lead workers based within the wider workforce tended to be assigned the lower intensity cases to hold alongside existing duties, this was not always the case. Some local authorities were in a process of overhauling the workforce so that lead working would be business as usual for all families. It was here that local practice perhaps diverges the most from the assumptions in the original models developed by DCLG, and where the views of local stakeholders were the most polarised with regard to how far family intervention can be taken from the original Family Intervention Project concept.

Many of the Troubled Families teams consulted for the case studies were adamant that the principles of family intervention and the five factors were equally applicable to the everyday working arrangements of all agencies with a responsibility for providing services to children and families, and indeed that family intervention can only be sustained at scale beyond the lifetime of the Troubled Families Programme if it becomes 'the norm'.

Others expressed greater concerns that so much of the evidence to support the effectiveness of the Family Intervention Project model and other intensive models of working with families derives from the calibre of the key workers and the intensity of their training and ongoing clinical supervision. A number of respondents perceived a risk that over-reliance on an embedded model risked diluting family intervention and – at worst – exposing families and practitioners to situations of risk.

These different viewpoints were split along similar lines with regard to the importance of the social work pedagogical elements of family intervention, as we discuss below.

In summary, the arrangements for key and lead working and the allocation of caseloads were found to follow the original illustrative models set out by DCLG (see Figure 3.2 above) to only a limited degree. Whilst some local authorities operated a tiered model very similar to the original concept of family intervention – intensive, light and super light – others retained only the highest need families within the Troubled Families programme and looked towards early intervention services to step up, whereas others still aspired towards embedding the principles of family intervention at all levels and across all local services. With the launch of the expanded Troubled Families programme, this conceptual gap between the Troubled Families Programme on the one hand and early intervention on the other inevitably narrowed and all local Troubled Families teams were seeking workable models to integrate family intervention to the wider continuum of support for families. The statutory requirement for all local authorities to produce an early help strategy<sup>13</sup> had often assisted this process, as it meant that there was an obvious route for mainstreaming the Troubled Families Programme at a local level. This contrasted with some of the earlier efforts of local teams to engage the wider workforce.

### **3.2.3 Recruitment, supervision and professional development**

Local authorities were unanimous in placing an emphasis on the calibre of the practitioners who were recruited or seconded to work on the Troubled Families programme. Certain personal qualities were often cited as being essential for family intervention, including: confidence and assertiveness; emotional intelligence; open mindedness, tenacity, and creativity; as well as having effective organisational and planning skills. Staff were recruited from a variety of professional backgrounds, and indeed most teams seemed to thrive off having a mix.

A fairly common source of recruitment was for Family Support Workers based in children's centres to become Troubled Families key workers. There was a perception that staff with this profile generally understood early intervention and parenting programmes, but found the intensity of the casework to be the most challenging. They were also perceived to have varying levels of prior safeguarding awareness due to lower levels of routine contact with families at the more intensive end of the spectrum.

Whilst local authorities sought to recruit the best practitioners for delivering the service, the composition of local teams was also shaped by local restructuring and redeployment and levels of pay available. Several of the local authorities had staffed their Troubled Families team primarily with staff redeployed as a result of cuts to universal and targeted services – play workers, youth workers, Connexions and children's centre workers. Although this meant that posts were filled quickly, it also resulted in variable levels of motivation (and competency profiles) amongst staff, and there was a degree of turnover during the first

---

<sup>13</sup> The requirements for Early Help are outlined in the "Working Together" guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (HM Government, 2013). Every local authority has a duty to lead on the development of an Early Help Strategy, to ensure that problem issues are identified and addressed at the earliest stage, and to coordinate inputs from all key agencies. Early Help arrangements are currently assessed in Ofsted inspections of local child protection services (LGA, 2013).

year of the programme as a result. Similarly another Troubled Families service was developed by merging their existing Family Intervention Projects with the Early Intervention Team. The result was to create a larger version of the Family Intervention Project with capacity to support a greater number of families, but with some marked differences in the profile and experience of the original Family Intervention Project workers and the early intervention workers.

Local authorities often distinguished between their core programme of induction and training for key workers situated within the local Troubled Families programme and a wider programme of workforce development for partner organisations and/or workers holding less intensive cases. Key workers typically completed the Level 4 City and Guilds *Work with Parents' (Intense Support for Families with Multiple and Complex Needs)* qualification (City & Guilds, 2011), and supplemented this with other modules, such as drug and alcohol awareness or domestic abuse/domestic violence training. A few local authorities encouraged practitioners to go on and take higher level courses, to strengthen their knowledge and bring extra kudos to the role. In contrast, the training offered to the wider workforce was typically shorter in duration and not always accredited. Several local authorities had embarked on a large scale programme of workforce development at the time when the case study visit took place, including one example where there was a major push to up-skill the VCS workforce. This was found to have been time consuming, but was considered important to achieve a critical mass of skills and knowledge to support the Troubled Families programme locally and to ensure its' sustainability.

Alongside the challenge of scaling-up the workforce, local teams sometimes encountered some resistance where practitioners felt certain that they were already delivering effective practice in their work with families. This sometimes meant that they did not recognise a need to adapt their practice to the family intervention approach. This appeared to be a risk with some of the workers in dedicated teams who had previous experience of family intervention, including from Family Intervention Projects, and wanted to stick with what they knew. Equally there appeared to have been some challenges encouraging the VCS providers with previous experience of family intervention to adapt to the requirements of the financial framework and to adopt a target-minded approach towards evidencing the results-based criteria.

The local supervisory arrangements emerged as being a key dimension for how Troubled Families teams assured the quality of their practice and maintained consistency between workers and caseloads. Most local authorities reported some kind of centralised system of individual supervision. A typical approach was to hold monthly individual supervisory meetings, which were undertaken by a senior practitioner and sometimes with the Troubled Families Coordinator. This function was centralised in most Troubled Families teams. One local authority had initially devolved supervision to the level of locality teams but re-centralised after concerns were noted about differing practices by key workers. Some local authorities also had access to external clinical supervision, although usually on a more infrequent basis.

Individual supervision of this kind was differentiated from regular peer group networking sessions. These were often valued highly by the practitioners who were interviewed, as they provided opportunities for reflective practice, and a forum for moderating decisions in relation to individual cases. A small group format was often reported to be the most conducive for encouraging practitioners to share their experiences honestly and openly.

Alongside these more formal structures, a number of the local authorities had introduced some form of co-location as part of their service delivery model. This provided opportunities for more informal interactions between staff, and indeed it was often in this day-to-day environment that practitioners were able to tap into colleagues' different professional skills and expertise.

*"The benefit of working in this multi-disciplinary team [is] most of us are brave enough to ask questions and say: 'I don't know everything and I don't know what's going on with this family'...If you go round the office, you will always see a couple of workers sat next to each other, talking about a case: 'How do I move this forward, how do I help?'...you can talk it through and come up with ideas in the round."*

Practitioner

*"[Our success] is in part due to the fact that we are such a mix of backgrounds. The people who said "well I would never have done that" are sitting next to somebody who says "well I always do that". It has a huge effect on how we work."*

Lead worker

Out of concern about the need to be able to assess the safeguarding risks and to recruit workers with a professional qualification several of the case study local authorities recruited key workers who were social work trained. This ensured that they held the necessary skills, status and credibility to support families on the edge of social care. Alternatively, one case study local authority sought to create a co-working relationship with children's social care teams by co-locating the Troubled Families key workers and social workers in small locality teams (known as 'pods'). Whereas previously the social workers would do time limited and child focused pieces of work and the Family Intervention Project workers picked up the family support around the same cases, the Troubled Families service brought together these two sets of professionals within a core team, each with caseloads of families. The aim was to develop a common working culture and also allow for assessment of higher need cases on the margins of statutory intervention. Whilst still at an early stage and relatively untested, the model showed a good level of buy-in from practitioners.

*"My previous role [in social work] was very child-focused, but now parents are a key part of the process. We are now looking holistically at the families... it's working intensely, if needed. So it's not time-limited... we are trying to work to the model of 'it takes as long as it takes.'"*

Social worker

The importance of the social work aspect of family intervention was echoed elsewhere within the case study research, including through the interviews with local Troubled Families services and other agencies working alongside them. In addition to working effectively with social care teams, a priority was identified for family intervention workers to maintain a high standard of safeguarding practice. Knowledge of risk assessment, identification and lines of reporting were deemed essential. A particular priority was identified in maintaining oversight of the informal contact between key workers and families, to manage the risk of being caught off guard.

*“I think it's important... the child protection line of it, and being aware of the risks and how to manage those... because you work so intensely with families you can become maybe a little bit desensitised. If you go in every morning and that becomes normal for them as a family, but having that background... these are the thresholds and, you know, this would be a concern, and knowing when to then pass that on”.*

Troubled Families Coordinator

Elsewhere, however, the relations between Troubled Families teams and children's social care were reported to have been more fractious at the time when the case study research took place. Some local authorities encountered resistance from social work teams where family intervention was perceived to cut across the remit of social workers, and reported low levels of engagement from social workers with Troubled Families multiagency working groups. Whilst many of these issues are specific to individual local authorities, there is clearly further work to be done in some local authorities to resolve how best to align social work with family intervention.

These tensions between different professional boundaries were not limited to social work, however, and local teams often encountered challenges in bringing about the culture change required to embrace family intervention across a variety of different professions. This often depended on the state of multiagency working at a local level prior to the launch of the Programme, and the approaches that were used to recruit key workers and raise awareness of family intervention. We go on to examine these approaches and their effectiveness further at Section 4.2.5, where we explore the interface between the key worker and partner organisations in the context of the Programme.

### **3.2.4 Tackling worklessness – Troubled Families Employment Advisers**

In March 2013, DWP and DCLG set in place a delivery agreement to provide additional focus in meeting the employment objectives of the Troubled Families programme (DCLG, 2014b). The agreement included provisions for the secondment of at least one Jobcentre Plus Troubled Families Employment Adviser or Coordinator to work with each of the 94 upper-tier local authorities with the greatest number of families up until May 2014. It also included a commitment for the remaining local authorities to receive additional support from a Jobcentre Plus single point of contact. As these developments constituted a boost for the employment aspects of the Troubled Families programme, they warrant further consideration in this report.

Those local authorities qualifying for a Jobcentre Plus single point of contact generally reported rapid benefits in terms of relationship-building at a local level. Having the single point of contact not only helped with accessing data, but also meant that there was often a more direct means of accessing support or advice from Jobcentre Plus advisers. One Troubled Families Coordinator overseeing the programme in a large two-tier authority described the way in which the single point of contact arrangement was cascaded at individual district level, so that each local Jobcentre Plus included a designated member of staff for all matters relating to the Troubled Families programme. This was thought to have been hugely beneficial, as it meant that all district leads had access to employability advice and expertise.

Although the impact of the Jobcentre Plus single point of contact role varied according to the roles and relationships that were established locally, some local authorities reported that there were mutual benefits. Jobcentre Plus teams showing an improved awareness and understanding of the needs of families within the programme, while local Troubled Families teams benefiting from the specialist advice. This occasionally served to unblock administrative barriers to multiagency working. For example, one Troubled Families Coordinator described how there had previously been an issue with high numbers of care leavers going on to receive benefits sanctions from Jobcentre Plus. The same young people subsequently presented to children's social care, who were left to support them with the consequences. The Jobcentre Plus single point of contact acknowledged this problem and was instrumental in facilitating meetings between Jobcentre Plus staff and social workers to explore an alternative to sanctions.

Despite these benefits, however, a number of local authorities considered that the Jobcentre Plus single point of contact role was more limited as a mechanism for building capacity and skills within frontline teams and lacked the flexibility provided by Troubled Families Employment Adviser to support casework practice. The priority to boost capacity for the Troubled Families Employment Adviser secondments was acknowledged at a national level, and this resource expanded significantly after the case study research took place. In January 2015, the number of Troubled Families Employment Advisers was increased from 150 to over 300 from April 2015 as part of efforts to address the work and training outcomes for the additional 400,000 families.

In many respects, the most successful Troubled Families Employment Adviser secondments were those that mirrored the ethos of the Troubled Families programme – the secondees adopted a hand on approach, worked creatively to transfer their knowledge, and challenged preconceptions about what families were capable of achieving. This role sometimes included a combination of direct family facing work, and capacity building with local Troubled Families teams to improve systems, data, and to provide strategies for building an employability dimension into casework. Alongside this one-to-one support, it was also common for Troubled Families Employment Advisers to run workshops or drop-in sessions for families and practitioners. However, local authorities had discretion in how they used this resource and some preferred to recruit an Employment Coordinator who operated at a more strategic role building skills awareness and links with Jobcentre Plus rather than the Employment Adviser role providing operational support. This approach also sometimes paid real dividends, in establishing joint working at a more strategic level, where this was previously less well established.

In some cases, Troubled Families Employment Advisers engaged with Troubled Families workers by attending case conferences and/or Team Around the Family meetings where individual cases were discussed. This work, drawing on live case examples, played an important role in raising awareness of the employability options for families. One of the particular benefits was to demonstrate the value of including employability in service planning – by approaching the subject in terms of parents' aspirations, wellbeing, and the effects of worklessness on family functioning. This work was important in challenging preconceptions about families' work readiness. Many local Troubled Families teams, and their partner organisations, had simply not considered employment or training as a viable option for families.

*“If you can get somebody into work and the routine of work obviously it just impact massively across that family in terms of role models for the children, routines set up by the parents themselves, et cetera... They've trained the staff in that, and have done lots of links for us with the local Jobcentre... That's worked really well, got [key workers] thinking about work”.*

Troubled Families team manager

A further area of work was to accompany key workers or lead workers on family visits. Whilst it was more exceptional for Troubled Families Employment Advisers to hold caseloads, this more hands-on support was provided at various stages during the family intervention according to need. Troubled Families workers recalled how in some instances the Troubled Families Employment Advisers were able to secure the initial engagement of families who had resisted previous attempts at contact by the service. The main difference was the ability to provide quite specific information about the impact of changes to welfare benefits for individual families at a household level, or to undertake better off calculations. With mobile technology, and access to the DWP Labour Market System, Troubled Families Employment Advisers could view this information at the visit, whereas previously it would have been necessary for the worker to arrange a Jobcentre Plus appointment on the families' behalf.

*“Now, we've got a DWP secondee, she has access to data that we can use in terms of challenging families. We've knocked on doors where families have refused support. We have then found out that the household income will suffer quite significantly as a result of the benefit cap. We've been able to knock back on that door with that information and that family has engaged with colleagues who work specifically on benefit cap issues”.*

Troubled Families service manager

The capacity building aspect to this work was apparent again within the interviews. Troubled Families teams valued the expertise of the Troubled Families Employment Adviser, but they also valued the techniques that were used to broach the subject of employability with families. These techniques were modeled by the Troubled Families Employment Adviser, for the Troubled Families worker to acquire.

*“Just on the basic level of attitude changes within key workers... we've been able to work a bit more creatively. So maybe people aren't in the position where they can get a job, but can they do some adult learning courses? Can they go and do something? The work readiness assessment has really helped with that, because that's looking at actually what are their aspirations?”*

Practice supervisor

The challenges encountered by Troubled Families Employment Advisers underwent a shift during the course of the programme. Low initial levels of awareness amongst local Troubled Families teams and their partner organisations meant that there was a slow uptake in many local authorities, and Troubled Families Employment Advisers found themselves under utilised initially. There was an inevitable period of testing-out and proving their value to key workers whilst relationships were built. A number of the Troubled Families Employment Advisers also pointed towards the extent of culture change required to challenge different professional viewpoints towards the role of employment. This was particularly thought to be the case for cases with a social work dimension, where the

employment link was traditionally the weakest due to the remit of social workers as advocates for the children within the family rather than adults.

Following this initial consolidation period, however, the demand for the Troubled Families Employment Adviser resource reached a premium amongst most local Troubled Families teams, and the challenge shifted towards finding ways to apportion a finite resource. Indeed, the Troubled Families Employment Advisers were almost universally reported to be at full capacity by the time the final wave of evaluation fieldwork took place. Many local teams felt that there was a high level of latent demand for the skills and expertise provided by the Troubled Families Employment Advisers, and this resource had become over-stretched. Varying strategies were deployed to address this issue.

One local authority had assigned virtual caseloads of families to each of their Troubled Families Employment Advisers, whom they monitored using a combination of the DWP data and contextual information provided from local case management meetings. This strategic approach enabled an ongoing assessment of families for whom employment outcomes were the most realistic in the shorter term, and allowed for more targeted pieces of work to take place.

Troubled Families Employment Advisers in several other local authorities had developed a road show format as a means of widening access to families and practitioners. In one local authority, this entailed running drop-in sessions and workshops on a rotating basis within individual districts. This approach was thought to have worked well as a means of operating within a large and geographically dispersed authority, although the Troubled Families Employment Advisers encountered some challenges in apportioning their time between user-facing work, and the need to be office-based for more administrative tasks.

On the strength of the interviews conducted for the evaluation, the value of the Troubled Families Employment Adviser role derived from the ability of local Troubled Families teams to work alongside and acquire practical strategies for employability. Troubled Families workers almost universally valued the Troubled Families Employment Adviser and described their contribution as helping to raise awareness, build skills, and act as 'co-workers' at key points during the intervention. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, there was a consensus on the need for some kind of dedicated resource to meet families' employment and employability needs in the longer-term. The specialist knowledge and experience of the Troubled Families Employment Advisers, their access to the data and links to local teams within Jobcentre Plus, and their knowledge of the evolving benefits system were all considered to be essential features that could not be transferred wholesale without the sustained involvement of DWP.

At the time when the final wave of evaluation fieldwork took place, an extension had been agreed to the delivery agreement between DWP and DCLG in preparation for the expanded Troubled Families programme, effectively doubling the Troubled Families Employment Adviser resource from 150 to over 300 from April 2015.

## 4 Developing and embedding practice

Having reviewed in the previous two chapters how local Troubled Families teams have been planned and organised, we now go on to examine what family intervention looks like in the context of the programme, and to further explore the key practice dimensions of this. The chapter starts by examining the role of assessment, planning and review, and the ways in which local Troubled Families teams tailored their approach, along with a consideration of how families were exited and followed-up. It then goes on to consider how local authorities and partner organisations have implemented the five family intervention factors and how or whether this added value to existing models of work with families.

### 4.1 Assessment, planning and review

The case study local authorities were at varying stages of consolidating their local arrangements for assessment, service planning and review when the first case study visits took place. It was apparent that the approaches taken were influenced by the desire to achieve a whole family dimension to the service where this was not necessarily the *modus operandi* prior to the programme. Local arrangements had become more embedded by the time the subsequent waves of fieldwork had taken place later in the programme, and by the final wave local teams were looking ahead to arrangements under the expanded programme. By this stage, most areas were also focussed on their emerging early help offer.

Local Troubled Families teams often cited the importance of obtaining accurate factual information on families' circumstances prior to making the important initial contact. Troubled Families workers would usually seek to obtain any historical assessment data, and to consult with other professionals who had previous involvement with the family. This was sometimes facilitated by the use of multiagency panels to oversee case allocation where individual cases could be discussed and the Troubled Families worker had direct access to a range of professional expertise. Holding key factual information about the family also provided additional leverage for approaching resistant families and setting out the consequences of their non-engagement.

Having started working with families, most practitioners undertook some kind of rolling assessment to gain a detailed understanding of families' needs and to underpin service planning and review. Despite variations in the methods used by different Troubled Families teams, this was nearly always described in terms of an on-going process, rather than a one-off event. Family assessments used a diagnostic tool involved information gathering and observation with multiple family members. This took place over a period of around four to six weeks initially whilst the key worker established a relationship with the family and gained their trust. This process was commonly underpinned by family focused tools based around the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or Family CAF (or "E-CAF" as the process moved online), although many areas had aligned or nested the assessment tools for the programme within their local Early Help Assessment by the time the final wave of case study fieldwork took place. The telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators further revealed many areas were using participatory forms of assessment

such as the Family Star<sup>14</sup>, and latterly the modified Family Star Plus<sup>15</sup>, alongside a wide range of more bespoke assessment tools designed to measure specific areas of family functioning (e.g. parenting skills and confidence, social and emotional wellbeing). In contrast to the more formally administrative function of the CAF or E-CAF, the Family Star was commonly valued for its emphasis on giving children and families a voice within the assessment process. This was also reflected in the subsequent action planning and review process. Despite the popularity of the Family Star and its visual representation of data for helping to validate progress with families, a number of local authorities had encountered difficulties using the format with some families during the early stages of the intervention. It was reported that families sometimes tended to overestimate their present abilities to cope, either because they were not yet in a position to recognise that some behaviours or routines were problematic, or because the relationship with the worker was a new one and the family was anxious to portray a sense of being in control. As a consequence, workers commonly found that the Family Star ratings worsened considerably in-between the early stages of the assessment and subsequent monitoring points. Troubled Families Coordinators therefore commented on the importance of measuring distance travelled at multiple points over the duration of the intervention.

The output of the family assessment was some kind of family action plan or equivalent which was subsequently reviewed at regular intervals (ranging from four to six weeks up to three months). The effectiveness of the assessment processes for the Troubled Families programme were often compared favourably with more traditional service assessments. Key workers cited the ability to undertake a more in-depth assessment of need for multiple family members, something which was rarely possible prior to the programme due to having more limited time to observe the family. The Troubled Families assessments were sometimes also thought to carry greater weight with family members because they captured events or behaviours arising during the intervention.

*“The assessments are really comprehensive, and I think families don’t argue with them because they’re factual, and they’re based on what you’ve seen or observed [over time]... whereas in the past they’ve been given assessments from other agencies based on one visit twice a month”.*

Team leader

Some variations were found in the extent to which the assessment encompassed wider family members beyond the main adults or children who were the subject of the intervention. Rather more exceptionally, local authorities adopted more of an ethnographic approach, using genograms to map family histories and relationships. In one local authority, the Troubled Families workers took iPads into the family home and completed the genograms interactively with the family as a group exercise. This proved particularly effective for engaging children and young people. Elsewhere, however, local authorities described making a more rapid assessment of key change agents within the family, and focussing the intervention accordingly. Typically the case studies did not seem to have

---

<sup>14</sup> One of a series of assessment tools licensed by Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd, adopting a “Ladder of Change” model to move families towards self-reliance, based on consensus between the practitioner and participant(s): <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/family-star/>

<sup>15</sup> A variant on the Family Star, adapted specifically for phase one of the Troubled Families Programme to capture evidence against the 3 core PBR outcome domains (employability, youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and school attendance).

engaged the wider family members in the assessment process unless they were living in the house or were thought to be important to understanding a family's needs.

The emphasis was often on using assessment data wisely on an ongoing basis, both to provide a structure to the intervention, and as a mechanism for ensuring that the necessary audit trail was maintained for the financial framework. Key workers were mindful of the importance of needing to demonstrate progress in terms of school attendance, anti-social behaviour and crime, and employment-related actions, and these (national) criteria provided a backdrop to the intervention.

*"[The Troubled Families programme] is a lot more structured in the sense that you know what you have to do from the off... and you know your referral meetings, your stars, your assessments, when they have to be done, when they have to be reviewed. You knew that with the Family Intervention Project, but now it's different because we've got those targets, its performance related."*

Troubled Families Coordinator

The timing of formal assessment was found to vary to some extent amongst the case study local authorities, although initial assessments were typically carried out during the first four to six weeks with subsequent reviews taking place every six to eight weeks – less frequent than was the case for the Family Intervention Projects. The extent to which families were intensely assessed varied, depending on the level of data that was already available. Local teams were also mindful of the need to avoid family intervention being experienced as intrusive prior to establishing a relationship with the family. In a more exceptional example, one local Troubled Families programme had set out to avoid implementing formal assessments at the start of the intervention altogether, as many families were fatigued from having received multiple service assessments in the past. In this example, the multiagency panel made maximum use of intelligence gathered from services that had been in contact with the family in the past. Subsequent assessment of the families was undertaken primarily based on Troubled Families worker observation and case recording.

*"We don't have a specific assessment tool, so when we go in we'll speak to the family and, based on the conversation, and probably because of our, the skill sets that most of us have, we will be able to make... an [initial] assessment on the spot."*

Troubled Families service manager

Similar variations were found in the implementation of action/service planning and review. Whilst not all Troubled Families workers were using action plans with families in the sense of a formal progress review process, most acknowledged the importance of goal-setting as a means of maintaining a structure. This was found to be particularly important when working with higher intensity families, where a Troubled Families worker's involvement could potentially last for 12 months or more, and include work with multiple family members. One Troubled Families service manager concluded that effective family intervention should achieve the balance between being carefully planned and goal-oriented, whilst being experienced as personable and non-bureaucratic by the family.

*“Every time they [Troubled Families worker] go, it might look on the surface they're chatting nicely, but actually they've done a lot of preparation, they know exactly what they're there for in that session, what they want to get out of that session. I would say that's what it looks like done well”.*

Troubled Families service manager

## 4.2 The five family intervention factors

The national guidance document published by government to underpin the Troubled Families programme identifies 5 family intervention factors (DCLG, 2012), which derive from the evidence base for working with families, including the evaluation of the Family Intervention Projects<sup>16</sup>. These five factors were also reinforced through a series of national ‘Academy’ workshops provided for local authorities by the national Troubled Families team in 2013 and within accompanying guidance for areas. These are:

- a worker, dedicated to a family;
- practical hands-on support;
- a persistent, assertive and challenging approach;
- considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence; and
- common purpose and agreed action

In the following section we review how these factors were operating within our case study local authorities and how they were perceived by the wider tier of 50 local authorities covered by the telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators. It is important to note that local authorities did not necessarily use the five family intervention factors explicitly as the basis of staff training or development. Indeed, some differences in terminology are apparent between the family intervention factors and some of the main external training courses sourced by local teams, including the widely used Level 4 City and Guilds qualification, for example. However, the research provided an opportunity to test the currency of the five factors, and to examine how or whether these were manifest in practice.

### 4.2.1 A worker dedicated to the family

The role of a dedicated key or lead worker who works closely with family members was central to the family intervention for all of the case study local authorities. Local Troubled Families teams aspired towards achieving a more focussed approach for supporting individual families, with a recognisable named worker as a single point of contact with clear responsibility for the family and dedicated to the family, whereas previously one might not have been assigned.

---

<sup>16</sup> The Family intervention Factors are a distillation of the 8 critical factors of family intervention developed by the FIP Programme evaluation, which were further developed and simplified (White, et. al., 2008)

In the main, the case study evidence indicated that local authorities had taken the opportunity afforded by the Troubled Families programme to review and strengthen their models of key working and in some instances to overhaul existing casework arrangements to accommodate the target numbers of families receiving one-to-one support. At the more intensive end of the scale, it was common for Troubled Families workers to contrast the staffing arrangements under the programme favourably with lead professional roles that were practiced under business as usual. In some instances, the Troubled Families worker role was thought to be set apart by way of being more 'seamless' with regard to the families' experiences of multiple services, and having a galvanising effect for the involvement of other agencies. One Troubled Families worker commented on how, too often, more traditional lead professional roles had constituted little more than a nominated lead practitioner, who would not necessarily be recognised by the family as holding distinctive responsibilities that set them apart from other professionals who were involved in their lives. Moreover, lead professional roles within child or youth-focussed organisations (e.g. YOTs or Connexions) sometimes historically lacked either the precedent or a mandate for acting in a coordinating role with regard to the whole family. It was often here that the strengthening of the concept of the designated worker was the most pronounced, for those families requiring more intensive support.

Equally, however, it would be fair to conclude that the distinctiveness of this mode of key working was often diminished when working with families requiring less intensive support. Where cases were managed by lead workers alongside existing duties, this lighter touch approach often more closely resembled pre-existing support with regard to the frequency and types of contact made with the family. Indeed, as we considered in Chapter 3, a proportion of the Troubled Families cohort were being worked with by existing services in most local authorities under arrangements more closely resembling business as usual.

The duration over which it was possible to work with families, assisted by smaller caseloads, clearly had a bearing on the nature of the intervention. Knowing that there was time to work with the family in a sustained way often allowed Troubled Families workers the flexibility to test different approaches for engaging with family members, to evaluate, and to adjust as necessary. This process was sometimes described in terms of controlled experimentation. This opportunity was greatly valued by many Troubled Families teams and, coupled with the regularity of contact time that was possible with families, was sometimes thought to have been a key success factor in unblocking entrenched problems within the family. One Troubled Families Coordinator contrasted the situation in their local authority for family support services prior to the programme, where intervention was capped at 12 weeks, with the scope to work with families for up to 12 months on the Troubled Families programme. She described how the previous situation had required a narrower mind-set, because practitioners were mindful of having only a finite period of time to work with the family and therefore focussed on key individuals with the most acute needs. The ability to work with families over a longer period through the Troubled Families Programme meant that there was scope for trial-and-error: "*We have the time to be creative... to try different things, and if anything doesn't work... we have the time to try something else*". This view was echoed elsewhere within the case studies.

*"If you have a really good reflective, creative practitioner, that's what makes the difference to families. It isn't a magic bullet, really, it's if you've got the time and the engagement skills, and that's what makes a difference I think."*

## Troubled Families Coordinator

The case studies point towards the Troubled Families worker role often having a clearer focus and identity where family intervention was undertaken as a core area of responsibility, and where practitioners organised their workload around supporting families on a day-to-day basis. The concept of a dedicated worker sometimes proved harder to replicate where practitioners worked principally with individual service users and assumed case-holding responsibilities for family intervention on top of existing commitments. Professional opinion was divided on this issue, however. Some Troubled Families services perceived that the concept of having a dedicated worker for the whole family could still be maintained with much lighter touch support for families with less complex needs. Others believed that this was neither feasible nor necessary for these families with a lower level of need. The case studies also illustrated that the efficacy of the Troubled Families worker role was dependent to a significant extent on the skills and qualities of individual practitioners and whether they were able to combine an assertive, persistent, patient, personable, understanding, creative, non-judgemental, empathetic and resilient approach for working with the whole family. As we discussed at section 3.2.3, decisions at a structural level within local authorities sometimes had implications for the extent to which the composition of local Troubled Families teams reflected these qualities, with redeployments of staff not always providing an optimum pool.

The principle of having a single dedicated worker for the family held slightly different connotations where Troubled Families services made use of co-working. The distinctive role of the Troubled Families worker was usually thought to have been straightforward to preserve where this entailed joint visits and joint planning with other professionals (e.g. Education Welfare Officers or social workers). However, one local authority was piloting an approach whereby families were co-worked by two individual Troubled Families workers, who shared the casework (this might be described as “dual working”). The Troubled Families Coordinator described the benefits of this model in terms of being able to combine different professional expertise within the same case. The implication, however, was that families had more than one dedicated worker, and the local authority was still at the stage of working this through in practice.

### **4.2.2 Practical, hands-on support**

The second family intervention factor relates to the Troubled Families worker taking an active role in supporting practical tasks within the family and being ready to get involved in whatever is needed to move the families’ situation forwards. The rationale was to move away from practitioners viewing their role as simply coordinating and referring families onwards to other agencies for support (so-called “referral culture”). This hands-on role was felt to be critical for offering a potential means of building a relationship with the family and gaining their trust.

The case study research showed that this hands-on approach was widely recognised and endorsed by local Troubled Families services. Staff at all levels cited numerous examples of Troubled Families workers offering practical help to families and viewed this as being a central element of their professional role. This type of hands-on support mirrored the needs of individual families, but common examples included: workers helping families to set in place morning or bedtime routines with children; accompanying them to attend medical appointments; and providing support with cooking or cleaning or clearing up the

home. This support was often front-loaded within the intervention, to ensure that routines were fully embedded from the outset, and then tapered as families gained in their self-sufficiency.

A common theme to emerge from the interviews with Troubled Families workers was that of helping families to face up to a problem that had long gone unaddressed – whether this was dealing with accumulated letters from creditors or clearing a house following a relationship breakdown. In these situations, the Troubled Families worker was sometimes able to provide the necessary push to overcome inertia:

*“The family was stuck and the mum wanted to deal with her issues of hoarding but didn’t know where to start... so having a practitioner say that we are coming with bin bags on X day gave her the confidence”.*

*“I had to deal with a family whose toilet broke...he was curled up in a ball and completely unable to deal with what was going on. So, I just got stuck in and started sorting and clearing things out. After about an hour, he came out and joined in. So, we might view that he was shamed into doing something, because someone was cleaning his dirty clothes, but he came out and was willing and got right into it and worked really hard. If we hadn’t had done that, then that stuff might still be there now”.*

Troubled Families workers

Often, quite small, practical measures could make a considerable difference to families’ willingness to engage in activities that were a core part of the service plan.

*“We’ve had this - 'I'm not going to go to Jobcentre Plus today because I've got no make-up'. Our worker has taken her make-up, put the make-up on the mum and taken them to Jobcentre Plus. Now, you might think, well, that's slightly bizarre... but we will remove any barrier...”*

Troubled Families service manager

Hands-on support also took the form of the Troubled Families worker “modelling” positive behaviours or routines for the family. This was particularly apparent in relation to parenting, whereby workers might step-in to demonstrate techniques for managing children’s behaviour. One Troubled Families service manager discussed how, prior to the Troubled Families programme, family support workers had too often made referrals to externally run parenting programmes. He considered that this option made it too easy for practitioners to absolve responsibility and to ‘move families on’, when they could have offered more in the way of practical parenting support.

Whilst Troubled Families workers cited the importance of building a strong relationship with families and taking a warm and empathetic approach, they also emphasised the need to maintain some degree of critical distance. It was important to be able to take a firm stance when necessary, and families needed to be clear that the relationship was a professional one that stopped short of friendship. This was especially important to avoid families becoming dependent on Troubled Families worker help, and to push back when this scenario arose so that families could see when it was necessary to take responsibility.

*“I've had it before, where the mum's rang me, 'He's refusing to go to school again, he wants you to come round and take him', and I said, 'I'm not doing it, he needs to get in himself'. So they [families] do sort of try and put it onto you that it's our responsibility, when we need to make sure that they know it's theirs, that we can help them when they need it, but not as an everyday thing.”*

Troubled Families worker

The case studies underlined that other practitioners (those not in a key worker or lead worker role) were by no means always willing or able to work in a more hands-on way, and tensions sometimes existed between Troubled Families services and partner organisations working alongside them. Professional clashes were evident in some local authorities with health and social care practitioners, who came under criticism from Troubled Families workers for holding back from offering more practical support for the whole family.

*“Because of what's happened historically to social work over the years they're quite hands off... Something about that is stopping social workers being able to do that really direct work with families that family intervention workers would do. It is a tension [in our programme].”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

These cultural differences in working methods between different occupations have been increasingly put under the spotlight with the rollout of key working within many local authorities. And yet this juxtaposition has arguably been a healthy development in some areas, with different professionals reportedly having an open dialogue about working with families, grounded within the context of Troubled Families services being co-located with other teams and being represented on the same multiagency panels.

The case studies underline that the availability of Troubled Families workers to families out-of-hours was often a distinguishing feature of the intervention. This was partly an issue of flexibility – being available to families in the evenings or at weekends meant that Troubled Families workers were able to respond at times when problem issues were most likely to occur, such as at children's bedtimes or before the start of school. This often gave the Troubled Families team a greater reach than existing services could provide. It was common for Troubled Families workers to spend a period of weeks visiting a family early in the morning to help parents get their children out of bed and ready for school until this routine was set in place. This was a tangible way in which workers could tackle attendance issues and one which was beyond the capacity of schools to do so. Spending this time with the family also had the advantage of spotting potential root causes to issues within the family that were hitherto undisclosed because other agencies did not have the same oversight.

*“I had a case study where lots of interventions around the young person not going to school had been really unsuccessful. We've gone in and done an assessment, which has been spending a lot more time in the family home, and the root cause of all that is dad [is agoraphobic], but nobody appears to have noticed that before...the son has been replicating what dad does...and we've actually got the son into school and also dad is off JSA, which seems like a fairly minor miracle, quite honestly”.*

Troubled Families Coordinator

A number of the case study local authorities also provided a more formal extended hours service, during weekends and weekdays, including emergency duty teams. Although practitioners were sometimes reported to have been nervous about setting a precedent for families, there was little from the case study local authorities to suggest that these services had been overused. One Troubled Families service manager noted that numbers of call-outs to the emergency duty team had been relatively low, but families' feedback to their Troubled Families workers had shown that they valued having the extra support available if this was ever needed.

The examples discussed above underline the potential impact of practitioners taking on heavier caseloads or juggling family intervention alongside other duties. The case study evidence clearly points towards family intervention being grounded in certain prerequisites with regard to time spent with the family, flexibility, and discretion on the part of the Troubled Families worker to tailor the intervention to the family.

### **4.2.3 A persistent, assertive and challenging approach**

The need for persistence and determination in engaging with families was very apparent from the case studies. Troubled Families workers regularly encountered resistant families for whom a period of weeks or months was required to gain their cooperation and reach the point where casework could begin. For families with whom there was little prior agency contact, this might require repeated door knocking over a period of time to show the family that the Troubled Families worker was not going away, and to provide sufficient contact time to persuade them of the need to engage. This process was often greatly assisted by Troubled Families workers approaching the family with 'concrete reasons' for them to engage: specific information about extra support that was available; tangible actions that the Troubled Families worker could take on their behalf to move their situation forward; or, in some instances, setting out the consequences of non-engagement in clear terms for the family.

*"I had one [case] when I first walked in; mum just screamed at me but I sat and I sat there... she walked out on me in the end, and I stayed with the young person...two days later I phoned mum back up and she apologised. I said, 'that's fine, no problem, can I come again?' She was fine after that. I think it's about persevering".*

Troubled Families worker

Troubled Families workers reported that resistance commonly stemmed either from families not perceiving the need for change, or viewing cooperation with outside agencies as a last resort. Previous experiences of contact with services were often thought to have been unhelpful in this respect. Troubled Families workers found that families were used to agencies withdrawing after the completion of a short-term intervention, and/or that they had previously been able to 'dismiss' services unchallenged at the point when they no longer felt they needed their input. The Troubled Families worker therefore needed to challenge families' expectations and to push back.

*"We step up the visits and activity when families start to disengage; as families expect key workers to step back. I am always going to be here whether you like it or not".*

Troubled Families workers

Troubled Families workers identified a need for complete honesty when dealing with families, both in terms of their assessment of the families' situation and in managing expectations of what they could do for the family. It was essential to be consistent and to deliver on promises, to avoid losing the family's trust. This also set a benchmark for the family's own behaviour in the context of the intervention.

*“Just being honest and truthful... If you beat around the bush, you've lost them. You go in with your facts, because if you've gone in with a half-truth and they've sussed... you've lost them.”*

*“I had one young person the other week say, ‘Can you do things?’ and I went, ‘I can't do everything and if I can't do it, I'll tell you’...Because they'd rather you be honest...”*

Troubled Families workers

The role of the Troubled Families worker included making families aware of the risk of sanctions, and taking action to challenge families' behaviour before the use of sanctions was required. In one local authority, a sanctions coordinator was mandated to work alongside the key workers who delivered a model of family intervention with a strong focus on parenting skills (using the Triple P programme). The families' engagement was underpinned by a sanctions framework based on the four levels of need within the child concern model<sup>17</sup>. Within this approach, parents had the opportunity to engage voluntarily with the Troubled Families programme, but if they chose not to then the framework provided a lever for helping to ensure they were accountable for improving their children's outcomes. Awareness raising activity was undertaken with families locally to ensure that they understood the process and that non-engagement would ultimately lead to criminal/civil proceedings.

Elsewhere, too, local teams viewed the balance between support and sanctions as an important one for delivering effective family intervention – from stepping in to make families aware of the consequences at the point when sanctions were imminent, to working alongside statutory agencies where there was no alternative but to administer sanctions. Examples ranged from prosecutions for non-attendance of children at school, to acceptable behaviour contracts and parenting contracts, through to child protection measures in more serious cases.

In a few of the examples that were discussed at the case study visits, it was apparent that Troubled Families workers had taken-on cases where other services had previously disengaged, meaning that the families' circumstances had reached a status quo. This was sometimes the case with regard to working with challenging or violent behaviour amongst children or young people in the family. In some cases, a persistent and problem-solving approach achieved some success where the child or young person had previously resisted outside intervention. The following example provides an illustration of this approach for a family where there were longstanding issues of truancy and school exclusion.

---

<sup>17</sup> Level 2 – voluntary engagement with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process – multi agency action plan; Level 3 – sign up to a parenting contract and engage with interventions in the action plan; Level 4 – abide by a parenting order awarded by the court – can be linked to other sanctions

*“The little boy knew what he could do in the transport to stop from getting to [school], so it was a case of working round that... [The local authority] wouldn't put in place someone to go with him; no transport would put him there because it's a higher risk. He spat. He jumped out. He attacked. He head-butted. So we said, 'Right, well that isn't working'. Instead of causing so much stress and fighting with the transport team, let's look at other routes, so we tried the train, maybe he would like that, and he loved it. We went every day and then refunded the tickets for a certain amount of time and built mum's resilience up to him and she knew how to manage him”.*

Troubled Families Coordinator

It often proved particularly challenging to sustain families' engagement with the Troubled Families programme in situations where parental mental health issues were involved. A number of Troubled Families workers spoke of cases where bad periods of mental health saw families' contact with the Troubled Families service become erratic or unresponsive. Working closely with the wider support network of family members and other services proved to be critical for maintaining an overview of what was happening with the family, and preventing their disengagement.

#### **4.2.4 Considering the family as a whole**

The focus on the family as a whole is central to the Troubled Families programme and was widely acknowledged by local Troubled Families services and partner organisations alike as being important for effective family intervention. Local practices varied quite considerably, however, and whole family working was described and understood in different ways. The three categories from the Cabinet Office Think Family literature review offer a useful reference point in this respect (Cabinet Office, 2008). They include:

1. working with the family to support the service user;
2. identifying and addressing the needs of [individual] family members; and
3. whole family support, focusing on 'shared needs... strengths and risk factors'

In practice, how and when these approaches were used often depended on the families' circumstances. Not all cases involved working with the whole family, and Troubled Families workers regularly took the approach of focusing on two or three important individuals, involving other family members more selectively (i.e. corresponding with the second of the categories above). This was based on the worker's assessment of need – active intervention was not always deemed necessary with all family members, or with all family members at the same time. However, Troubled Families workers were still mindful to keep a 'whole family oversight' in order to understand how the intervention affected the dynamics within the family as a whole. More selective engagement with family members was also guided by practical time and resource considerations, and Troubled Families workers were mindful of the need to apportion precious contact time across their caseload of families to achieve the maximum benefit.

In the strongest examples that were found within the case study local authorities, the key features of whole family support were apparent at an operational level within local teams and had been systematised within training and Continuous Professional Development. In

these examples, Troubled Families workers described taking time to understand the relationships between family members and how individual behaviours might be affecting the family as a whole. They often adopted a problem-solving approach, seeking-out potential levers within the family for affecting change.

*“It depends on what’s happening with the family... we’ll be out there supporting them with housing issues or benefits issues or school-based issues, and being in the home, doing direct work with them. We’ll be meeting the children separately as well, [and] working closely with the schools. So the intervention takes place wherever it needs to and as often as it needs to”.*

Troubled Families Coordinator

Some of the hallmarks of this approach included:

- ensuring that the assessment process involves all family members;
- working out how the family dynamic operates and understanding the relationship between different family members and how they influence each other;
- listening and taking multiple perspectives into account, including both adults and children;
- taking a steer from families on who to involve in the process;
- dividing time between individual family members, to help maintain an overview;
- seeking to identify the strengths within the family to underpin the intervention; and
- looking beyond the ‘household’ to wider family members who might also be engaged.

The contact time with families afforded by the Troubled Families programme was often an enabling factor for whole family working. There were clear diagnostic benefits from being able to observe families at different times of the day. Troubled Families workers were regularly ‘getting to see them [families] in their actual day-to-day life... earlier, later in the day and at weekends’. This meant that workers could engage with multiple family members around their availability, and observe interactions that might otherwise have been missed. This could be important where one or more of the family members was working, for example. It also sometimes provided an opportunity to spend time with individuals away from the family home and in a more informal setting. This could sometimes make a real difference in terms of their openness and willingness to engage with the Troubled Families worker, as the following excerpt illustrates.

*“I think [speaking with families] out in the car is brilliant”.*

*“Oh, the car is fab. Probably the car is the best place...”*

*“Because they don’t have to do the eye contact or anything... you can sit in the car and you can listen to music... and just talk about anything”.*

Troubled Families workers focus group

Troubled Families workers also identified safeguarding benefits from having time to observe interactions between family members. Participants in one focus group discussion commented on how the local authority had taken lessons on board from a recent Serious Case Review. The Troubled Families workers also always looked for opportunities to speak with the children alone, to listen carefully to what they had to say, and to check living and sleeping areas within the home when it was possible to do so. Speaking with children and young people individually also provided important insights to how issues within the family were affecting them socially and emotionally, and made it possible to cover topics they were uncomfortable discussing in front of other family members. As with adult family members, children and young people often proved to be more open and receptive to engaging with the Troubled Families worker outside of the family home and in a more neutral environment:

*“[Children and young people] can be a bit of a closed book at home...because they know their parents are about and they don't want to say anything about their parents...or what home is actually like. Whereas if they are in a school environment or outside McDonalds...”*

Troubled Families worker

Confidentiality was a key consideration for Troubled Families workers when deciding how or whether to discuss issues raised by individual family members with the rest of the family. One Troubled Families worker described a case where the father had been keeping his children at home. The children had disclosed to the worker that nobody in the family was working, and when the worker returned they found that the father had beaten the children as a punishment. This experience underlined the sensitivities of the case.

In certain instances, individual family members were supported to play a more active role within the intervention as 'agents of change'. Extended family members were sometimes found to be the best placed to exert a positive influence over the family and to help unblock a situation that had arisen.

*“One of the families I've got... mum and grandma are very reluctant. They want to make a change but they don't want to have to do anything... But there is aunty who I had invited to one of the meetings because we weren't getting very far, and aunty said well, you're hopeless... so I'm going to have to do it. So, now aunty is involved and she's helping with regards to some of the young people...you've got that internal shove for the family. It's not just us coming to them. It's also their family saying, let's try... let's see if we can make some changes” .*

Operational staff

Despite these successes, local authorities found that it was not always feasible to work with all members of the family to the extent that they would have hoped for. Particular challenges were encountered where families were dispersed across multiple households. One case study local authority undertaking significant levels of work with traveller communities in a rural area noted that definitions of 'family' tended to be relatively fluid and that the influence of different individuals fluctuated over time. The families would often periodically leave the area and then return, presenting challenges for maintaining continuity in the relationship with the Troubled Families worker.

Elsewhere, whole family working was made problematic by fractious relationships or historic issues of domestic abuse, which prevented Troubled Families workers from re-contacting estranged family members. Some families included adults or children in care or custody, which made access more difficult. Whole family approaches also often proved more difficult to implement for less intensive cases where workers might be holding a small number of cases for the Troubled Families programme alongside more traditional work with individual service users. In such cases, a more pragmatic approach involved 'holding the family in mind' whilst supporting the young person, rather than seeking to undertake more substantial pieces of work with multiple family members.

#### **4.2.5 Common purpose and agreed action**

The last of the five family intervention factors concerns the relationship between the key worker or lead worker and other agencies with involvement in families' lives. An aspiration of the programme was to empower Troubled Families workers to coordinate the work of other agencies, ensuring that families receive consistent messages about the actions required of them and that any multiagency working is fully joined-up. This might entail holding back or drawing in partner agencies as appropriate.

The case study research showed that the relationships between Troubled Families teams and other agencies varied considerably on an area by area basis during phase one of the programme, but with some broad themes emerging with regard to the challenges of engaging with health professionals – including health visitors, midwives and mental health services – and encouraging adult social care teams to take an active role in supporting family intervention. Schools were identified both as an important source of referrals and a point of engagement with children and young people, whilst sometimes proving challenging to engage more directly in reinforcing the intervention where the programme was perceived as being external to school management structures and objectives.

In instances where the Troubled Families service was working effectively with other agencies, this was often found to have been of mutual benefit for securing the engagement of families. One of the key facets of the Troubled Families worker role was their status of being one step removed from statutory intervention. This sometimes provided the additional leverage needed to either prevent the need for sanctions – or to work with the family to help deal with the consequences of sanctions where these were unavoidable – and to prevent any further unnecessary negative impact. In some local authorities, other agencies had recognised these benefits and were working closely alongside Troubled Families workers. In the starkest examples, Troubled Families workers described being able to direct the involvement of other agencies and to effectively put them on hold if needed.

*“It makes a big difference... if you can say to [the family]; actually 'I am that middle person who will speak on your behalf to the statutory service, who will let them know what's happening so they don't come in... I can put them on pause. That's one of the strategies. It is really powerful”.*

Troubled Families worker

Aspects of co-working between Troubled Families services and other agencies were also found within the case study local authorities, and provided a further mechanism for achieving common and consistent action where they were well developed. Joint visits were

typically undertaken to broker access to more specialist support via the Troubled Families worker's relationship with the family, and included introductions to families for Employment Advisers (see also Section 3.2.4), Education Welfare Officers, and Drug and Alcohol Team workers. In some instances, the Troubled Families worker would also accompany other practitioners to meet with the family at the point when sanctions were administered – to provide a 'foot in the door' for statutory agencies, but also to support the family through the process. In one local authority, Troubled Families workers accompanied social workers to visit the family as part of child protection enquiries to work through the next steps with them. Statutory agencies working closely with Troubled Families services in this way often proved to be a reliable source of referrals, as the regular professional contact fostered a good understanding of the role and capabilities of Troubled Families workers. In one local authority, the Probation Service had sought to formalise the link by including a Troubled Families Programme referral as part of an offender's probation plan, which set out the actions required by the offender to meet the conditions imposed by the court. This gave extra weight to the referral.

In a further local authority, the Troubled Families service had sought to widen the pool of key workers from partner organisations by providing a series of secondments for practitioners to complete lead worker training and gain experience visiting families alongside more experienced key workers. This was intended as a precursor to agencies providing workers on a longer term basis to assume lead worker responsibilities. This arrangement was thought to have worked well in providing some exposure for police, mental health, health and VCS to the model of working with families. The Troubled Families coordinator spoke of the benefits in fostering a common approach.

*"[PCSOs] are saying if they were to go back to their uniform role they would do it differently, and I think that's quite a big achievement. So we are looking about how best to get their learning into the police before they go back off at the end of the secondment, because they're saying, 'We get it now. We understand the difference. What we used to see was what was presented in front of us and now we see that there is a whole range of other stuff behind their [families'] behaviour'".*

Troubled Families Coordinator

Similar benefits were reported in another local authority, where the Youth Offending Team (YOT) had provided lead workers for the local Troubled Families service, and this direct experience was thought to have been central to transforming practice:

*"In the Youth Offending Team [change] is probably the greatest, because if you'd come here two years ago and asked YOT 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 met with the parents. Now they're adopting a whole family approach with all of the cases that are within [Troubled Families service]. So that's quite a shift, and they're not just focusing on the criminogenic aspects of the young person".*

Troubled Families Coordinator

In other local authorities, the level of ongoing work did not always include this level of day-to-day integration, and Troubled Families workers faced greater challenges in exerting an influence. A negotiation process was typically required to agree contact arrangements

with the family, and to decide whether other actions could be paused to avoid over-burdening family members with multiple intervention where non-essential work could be put on hold.

*“As a key worker, it’s saying... yes you do need to do that [piece of work], but at this point in time maybe we can put that on the back burner and concentrate on the needs of the family”.*

Troubled Families worker

The level of communication between agencies at the referral stage emerged as being a key factor in their agreement about the subsequent approach to be taken for individual families. Having some kind of shared multiagency panel generally helped to ensure that cases were discussed and understood, and that service responsibilities were transparent. Where there was no equivalent structure, there were reports of agencies ‘offloading’ families onto local Troubled Families services and/or pulling back too quickly once a referral was made.

Conversely, some tensions arose where families were assessed as being eligible by the Troubled Families service but were considered by other agencies to have been making satisfactory progress. This was because they held a view of the situation for individuals they were working with, but were unaware of the needs within the family as a whole. This sometimes resulted in these other agencies being reluctant to step back.

Staff from the case study local authorities generally agreed it was important to ensure that families did not have to repeat their stories to different practitioners during the course of the intervention, and that their contact with individual agencies was as streamlined as possible. Some local authorities reported success with reducing the overall number of individual agencies involved per family and moving towards a consolidated service plan under the coordination of the Troubled Families worker. This included one local authority where the Troubled Families service was piloting a new service planning model with children’s social care.

*“[We] are looking to coordinate and have the family plan as the unifying plan. In the FIP we always used to accede that if there was a statutory plan, it was... overarching. So the social worker always had to be the lead professional. What we actually found was, those statutory plans only related to one child in the family; so if you had four children, they’d all have a different plan. So what we’re trying to pilot is... you’ve got a family plan and this is the specialist social work, statutory element of the plan for that child”.*

Troubled Families service manager

Families’ needs were often subject to change during the course of their intervention, and a mechanism was required to review patterns of agency involvement on a rolling basis. Whilst it was generally considered beneficial to shield families from the complexities of multiagency work, some Troubled Families workers maintained that it was valuable for families to have an opportunity to observe dialogue taking place between different services in relation to their intervention. Making this contact visible helped to validate the role of the Troubled Families worker to the family, and underlined that they had followed through on their actions.

*“That’s a big thing... families seeing workers talking to each other and trying to help. Because I think, sometimes, when you’re on the phone to them and you say, I’ve emailed housing or I’ve done this, the family can’t actually see that and the families need to be able to see actual results”.*

Troubled Families worker

There were also potential benefits for families in observing Troubled Families workers in action, and then subsequently adopting a similar approach for managing their own communication with agencies. In this sense, Troubled Families workers had a role to play in modelling effective negotiation skills on behalf of families.

*“It’s hugely important for families to see professionals challenge each other...in an asserted way... when they can see them going about it in a very professional manner, and results happen.*

*A very real example is that yesterday, I was phoned by a parent who said that she was disputing some information that was in a report. And the way she was going about it... I was sitting in the car, smiling my head off because a year ago or six months ago, there is no way this parent would have behaved like this. What she would have done is kick off, argue, fight and then withdraw from services. But she said, no, this member of the health team came round and we had a discussion and I said I’m not happy with that so we’re going to have another meeting about it. For me, a large part of that is because she’s engaged in the process and she’s seen how other people get results and she’s... copied that and learnt some really valuable lessons on how to cope with something.”*

Troubled Families worker

In conclusion, it is clear that local authorities were moving from a contrasting baseline position with regard to the scale and depth of family intervention at the start of the programme, and that the five family intervention factors, whilst new for some, constituted an extension and reinforcement of work with families that was already underway in other local authorities. Individual local authorities were not always wedded to the terminology of the national Troubled Families programme nor did they necessarily define their work in terms of the family intervention factors. Nevertheless, the ethos of the programme was very apparent for intensive work with families across the case study areas. It was at the less intensive end of the scale where the equivalent factors were not always reflected in such a systematic way, and where variations in practice are more apparent between local authorities. Where local teams considered that the family intervention factors were potentially more limited in their usefulness, this typically related to the interventions offered to families.

Whilst the relationship-based model of support was felt to be important, some Troubled Families Coordinators considered that there was a need for an improved ‘theoretical understanding’ of family intervention and to make more systematic use of evidence-based interventions (especially therapeutic-based approaches). In practice, this might entail the development of a qualification, or a menu of approved qualifications, and a set of quality standards to help ensure greater consistency (see also the discussion on ‘professionalising the workforce’ at section 6.3.2).

## 4.3 Exiting families

The arrangements for closing cases and exiting families were found to vary quite considerably between local areas, in terms of: their criteria for exiting families; the decision making/approval process; exit planning arrangements; and the extent to which follow on support was provided by the local Troubled Families programme.

Decisions about when to close a case were generally based on an assessment of whether most/all of the outcomes in the support plan had been met, and the extent to which the family was able to demonstrate self-sufficiency. Whilst some local authorities were guided mainly by the plan, others applied target timescales for casework more systematically, and families were exited after a certain stage unless there were specific concerns about their ability to cope. For example, one local authority noted that families who were still receiving intensive support after nine months were significantly more likely to be stepped-up to social care, as this was usually a flag for underlying safeguarding concerns.

Local authorities invariably reported having a formal exit procedure in place. This typically required endorsement from a senior practitioner, and/or a family panel that the family was ready to be stepped-down, based on a review of case data and discussions with the key worker. In most of these cases, the key worker was required to set a formal Exit Plan in place, outlining the nature of any follow-up support to be arranged and the monitoring arrangements. Quite often, cases would straddle the financial claims process so that the final decision to exit the family was taken post-claim, as the team considered that other aspects of the support plan still needed to be addressed.

Variation was also apparent in the involvement of Troubled Families teams in brokering access to alternative support. The most common arrangements included the following:

- **Internal de-escalation** – where local Troubled Families programmes included different tiers of support, a fairly common approach was to re-allocate the case to teams tasked with providing less intensive support. This allowed for further work to take place with the family prior to a full exit. In some instances this might entail a targeted piece of work with an individual family member.
- **Stepping down to bespoke support** – a number of local authorities had commissioned external agencies to set in place provision specifically for the Troubled Families programme. Examples included where VCS providers were commissioned to run community-based provision including peer support groups, and/or volunteering activities. In some local authorities, providers were also commissioned to maintain a pool of volunteer mentors to offer one-to-one support to families.
- **Stepping down to universal services** – not all local teams commissioned provision specifically for the programme, and a common alternative approach was to direct families to locally available universal services such as children's centres and existing community groups – usually with a 'warm hand-over' to ease this transition following their exit from the intervention.

A few local authorities reported having greater difficulty with managing the case closure process for lighter touch cases that were held externally to the local Troubled Families team. For example, one Troubled Families Coordinator observed how the criteria for

closing cases sometimes reflected the priorities of individual organisations hosting the lead worker (e.g. the Youth Offending Service or police). This could mean that cases were closed somewhat prematurely.

With regard to longer-term support, local authorities ranged from holding an open door policy, to undertaking routine telephone follow-ups with families at an interval upon exiting the programme. In one area this entailed follow-up calls at +3, +6 and +12 months post-exit. Whilst time consuming, this process was thought to have benefits in terms of better understanding the longer-term effects of the intervention and its sustainability. Other local authorities tracked families to establish recidivism rates, but did not routinely conduct follow-up. Again, these decisions often rested with the individual key worker, based on their best assessment of the necessary/desired level of ongoing contact with families.

In many instances, processes were under review as local authorities geared-up for the expanded programme and the need to exit families on a significantly greater scale.

## 5 Transforming systems and services

In this chapter we reflect on the extent to which the Troubled Families programme was perceived to have transformed local services and systems for supporting families. Inevitably the degree to which local authorities believed it had made an impact depended on the scale and scope of activity undertaken. For this reason, local authorities who were either expanding an existing team or already embarked on their activities prior to the official launch of the Troubled Families programme generally described the way systems changed as being subtler and more gradual. In contrast, local authorities who established new teams as part of their Troubled Families programme found it easier to observe the impact they perceived it to be having.

The impacts reported are described in the following sections; and are based on the case study evidence and the additional interviews with 50 Troubled Families Coordinators.

### 5.1 Scaling-up provision

At the most obvious level, the Troubled Families programme **enabled local authorities to scale up the way they worked with families with complex needs**, by expanding or creating a service or a team, in a time when most services were contracting. Individuals specifically reflected that they would not have been in post without the funding from the Troubled Families programme. This enabled local authorities **to roll out family intervention to a wider cohort of families and meet a gap in service provision**. Specifically it was reported to have bridged the gap between early intervention and social care, by providing the opportunity to work with a new group of families who it was said were, *“somewhere before child protection, and somewhere much higher than early intervention”*. These families were reported as being missed by professionals, as they did not meet social care criteria and were not presenting in crisis; yet they were nevertheless experiencing problems. Prior to the Troubled Families programme there had not been an appropriately tailored service to hold these families or provide a safety net for them before they reached crisis levels.

*“It’s picking up those kids that are falling between the cracks, or families that have fallen between the cracks for years because...they didn’t fit anybody’s criteria. They didn’t hit the criteria for safeguarding or child protection, but they didn’t necessarily set off enough alarm bells years ago, when they probably should have had early intervention, that now they’ve ended up years down the line with four or five kids, teenagers, whatever.”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

As a consequence it was also felt to be providing crucial support for children exiting or being de-escalated from social care.

## 5.2 Mainstreaming whole family approaches

Importantly it also **provided additional impetus for adopting whole family working and for mainstreaming the key worker approach**. Without the funding and high-profile drive from national government, it was felt that local commitment to families with complex needs would not have been of the same scale or intensity. The Troubled Families programme gave local authorities the drive and a framework to push this agenda forward and to win over the doubters. The sheer scale of the message and the activity the programme generated, as well as the provision of a budget, gave legitimacy to the importance of working with each family member and encouraged professionals to take note.

Managers reflected how they were now able to marshal the evidence for adopting family intervention and to roll it out across the local authority. The provision of funding in a time of austerity also provided the additional impetus for professionals adopting whole family working. They were able to embed individuals in integrated teams as beacons of good practice and, with the appointment of analysts, to provide the evidence trail to build the case for family intervention.

Even local authorities who were already embarked on a journey to transform their workforce to adopt whole family working reflected that the Troubled Families programme helped to accelerate, reinforce and embed existing activities by providing additional resources to build the infrastructure and the momentum to drive forward their agenda.

*“I think it definitely gave us the opportunity, though, to really crank that up.... the momentum to really push it forward. [Without the Troubled Families programme] I think it will have taken longer.”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

*“We still use the whole family approach. The way we work is the same. I just think the only difference is that we've now got more workers.... and I think people know about us a lot more now.”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

## 5.3 Driving innovation

Another key impact identified was the way the Troubled Families programme **encouraged innovation, and the desire to trial new ways of working**. It was said that local authorities were much better informed, were more likely to base their allocation of resources on evidence of how to make better use of limited resources and to ensure they are providing the right type of intervention for different types of families. The reward from the results based payment was, for example, sometimes set aside to explore earlier intervention approaches for working with families and preventing them escalating into crisis. Previous initiatives particularly Family Intervention Projects and Think Family had helped to prepare the ground work for impacts that the Troubled Families programme was reaping. Whilst local authorities reflected that Family Intervention Projects were much smaller in scale and may have become isolated, or run out of steam, as practice faltered and families got stuck or regressed – the experience helped to build the case for family

intervention and provided much valuable learning. This, combined with a period of austerity, helped to sharpen the focus about the value of family intervention and the willingness of agencies to engage in the kind of partnership working that is required for the Troubled Families programme. A strategic stakeholder in one local authority reflected that Family Intervention Projects and Community Budget pilots helped prepare them for their Troubled Families programme by allowing them to test what worked well, what did not, embed the learning, and prevent generations of the same family from returning to the system.

It was seen as a **lever or catalyst for change** and helped some local authorities explore how to bring about the integration of services and the kind of workforce reform required to deliver the one stop shop or single front door approach (i.e. where one person supports and works with a family and coordinates all the services involved who are operating out of a local family centre or early help hub). It also enabled local authorities to experiment with delivery models and types of providers (both local authority and VCS) as they increased the numbers of staff delivering family intervention, developed the infrastructure, adopted new approaches to identification (e.g. through data matching, referral panels) and worked with families with different levels of need and for different durations. For example, it enabled one local authority to create a bank of generic key workers drawn from across a range of sectors who were trained in the kind of whole family working that is unique to the Troubled Families programme. In another local authority it allowed them to experiment with different commissioning arrangements and different approaches to working with families which they could roll out if they proved to work. This, for example, enabled the local authority to explore how family group conferencing might be used to support families to draw on their extended family and neighbours to prevent a future crisis.

## 5.4 A stimulus for multiagency partnership working

Whilst the critical role of partnership working was recognised through earlier forms of family intervention, the Troubled Families programme was felt to have **enhanced the way professionals worked in partnership and broken down some of the silo working**. It did this by, for example, providing the additional impetus to create systems and structures – in the form of area based teams – which were acknowledged as helping to build the culture of good partnership working. These, for example, enabled practitioners to collaborate more effectively when working with families, reducing duplication between services, enabling partners to think smarter and to find a way to overcome their professional boundaries in order to really engage with each other.

The ability to genuinely engage with partners, share information and bring them around the table was helping people to put the pieces of the jigsaw together and see the whole family more effectively. It was said that there was now more joint ownership and collaboration around families across their local authority. That said, local authorities typically reflected that their activities were often building on strong partnerships that pre-existed the Troubled Families programme and had provided the foundation for the multiagency working. This was particularly the case in small unitary authorities. Inevitably, the backdrop of austerity was also felt to be critical for encouraging local authorities to embrace partnership working in a way that had not previously happened. As budgets were reduced or cut there were

more pressing reasons for local partners to think smarter and to find ways to overcome their professional boundaries and work together to build capacity.

*“I think from a strategic point of view as well it’s really brought home the message about how we’ve linked a lot of the root causes. Most of the work of my team is about supporting strategic commissioning and I think it’s helped move along thinking from thematic into actually how commissioners need to work together in order to have long-term, sustainable improvements in a lot of these things. It’s shifted the way we look at a lot of our problems as well because it is high profile and there is so much evidence there to show some of the presenting issues and all the other issues that are in those families”.*

Troubled Families Coordinator

## 5.5 Improving the capacity to capture and measure outcomes

Local authorities typically identified some benefits from having the financial framework in place, although the administrative requirements that this generated during the initial stages of the Troubled Families programme were resource intensive. They also contributed towards some local authorities taking longer than anticipated to become operational.

In the main, it was acknowledged that the financial framework had **helped to give a ‘focus’ and structure to the programme, and influenced local authorities to become more outcomes-focussed**. The simplicity of the criteria helped to highlight the value of the Troubled Families programme to partner agencies. Employment, school attendance and community safety were widely recognised and acknowledged to be priorities for working with families.

Favourable comparisons were drawn with the monitoring arrangements for some predecessor programmes, such as Family Intervention Projects and Community Budgets, which were considered to be more complex and lacked the same level of applicability across families at different levels of need.

It was clear from the qualitative evidence that the financial framework, coupled with the expectation to work ‘at scale’, had helped local authorities to reassess their approach to the identification of families. While local authorities often struggled to operationalise the data matching process they reflected on its potential to **help identify families that might have otherwise slipped through the net**. One Troubled Families service manager described how they were initially sceptical about applying the criteria, because the profile of the families was not typical of those whom they would previously have supported through the family intervention team. This position changed during the course of the Troubled Families programme.

*“We were thinking initially, well, these aren't proper family intervention cases, we wouldn't be working with these before. But then, when you get to know these families and look at the issues... they've slipped through the net, and we are able to make those changes. And I think that's what's really positive about it, because instead of being able to work with 40 families in the year, we are working with 200 families in a year”.*

Troubled Families service manager

It had also encouraged them to think more creatively about how they might **draw together and share the data and look at whole families in a way they had not previously been attempted**. The use of data to identify families also resulted in the development of a triage approach in one local authority which was being used to enable earlier identification of families. In another local authority the matching process enabled them to compile a list of families which they could track and monitor over time and that can be used to prioritise and target their work towards early intervention and to identify those families who were most in need. It was hoped that the information sharing legacy would enable them to move to more sophisticated and predictive analysis, tracking whole communities and being better informed to plan services.

It was evident that the financial framework contributed towards the frontloading of families within the programme in some areas, to draw-down the more lucrative attachment fee element of the funding. To this extent, it went some way towards maximising the numbers of families worked with during the earlier stages of the Troubled Families programme. This helped them to **maximise the outcomes that could be achieved for families during the programme period**. The pressure of meeting targets also had some drawbacks, however, and **some local authorities reported that the front-loading had resulted in higher than optimal caseload sizes**. In rarer cases, local authorities who found themselves adrift from their target number of families, sought to compensate by identifying families for whom the required outcomes had been achieved, but who had not been assigned to the local Troubled Families programme. For some areas at least, therefore, there were families for whom outcomes were attributed retrospectively, who may not have been part of the original cohort. Nevertheless, the objective of working with families at scale was keenly felt at a local level and it is clear that the financial framework was a factor in keeping this objective in sight.

Finally, there were some promising signs that the financial framework had driven **quality improvement for local management information data collection and information sharing at a local level**, and prompted local authorities to review and update their procedures for information sharing with other agencies. This was brought about as a result of the audit trail required for the financial claims, and the metrics for eligibility and payment set out within the financial framework. In the first instance, the value of having better pooled data was to draw attention to any areas of duplication in the work of local organisations. In one local authority, for example, the cross-matching of attendance data with health and crime data laid bare the extent of involvement of different agencies with families for the first time. The results were quite stark - some families were found to have been receiving eight or nine separate services, but there had been no oversight of this process, because there was no equivalent mechanism for pooling data prior to the Troubled Families programme. The additional evidence provided a sufficient incentive to review local data sharing procedures and membership of multiagency panels. Elsewhere, however, levels of information sharing with other agencies – such as health partners – was

still reported to be relatively stuck, and significant complexities still existed in relation to data sharing and confidentiality.

## 5.6 Enhancing family intervention practice

The Troubled Families programme provided the opportunity and funding to rethink the way professionals were working with families. It encouraged innovation, as it provided the means to trial new ways of working in order to create a long term sustainable solution. The five family intervention factors had helped provide a framework for the key workers to assess and review the way they were working.

It was perceived to have **enhanced family intervention practice** by enabling key workers to: work intensively with all family members; dig deeper than other professionals and to get to the roots of deeply entrenched problems; understand the whole family more effectively; more closely align with partners; take a more assertive and challenging approach; and incorporate training and employment as part of the intervention.

*“I think the Troubled Families' Initiative enables us to dig deep underneath some of these families, and look at what the real issues are, you know, talking about toothache there and I've got an earache. We need to understand really what the symptom is and then deal with the symptoms as such, and what we tend to do is, as I say, we just deal with what's visible to us. Well, we need to put the children in to school, oh yes, we'll do this, this and this. But we haven't dealt with the fact that they've got an underlying mental health [problem], or they've got underlying domestic abuse.”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

Despite the way Family Intervention Projects introduced the combined approach of challenge and support, it was said that taking an assertive and challenging approach alongside the provision of support was a new way of working. This appeared to be more of an issue for practitioners coming from a family support background and those delivering family intervention in the VCS where less emphasis had been placed on the challenge aspect of their role.

*“I think the assertive and challenge, that's new language for them because a lot of them came from the family support background where they're nurturers by nature [and did not consider being challenging].”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

**Whole family working was now becoming the new business as usual for families with lower levels of need** as the wider workforce – particularly those services who historically may not have worked in this way – adopted this as part of their practice. Lead professionals, for example, were now assessing and working with the whole family rather than an individual child. In addition the quality of whole family working appeared to have developed as practitioners learnt to engage in more assertive engagement where they did not just provide support but were also being realistic about sanctions where appropriate.

## 5.7 Improving the capacity and responsiveness of employability support

The qualitative evidence clearly endorsed the importance and added value of the employment and employability support dimensions to working with families. Irrespective of whether areas qualified for the Troubled Families Employment Adviser or single point of contact resource, the delivery agreement **strengthened links into Jobcentre Plus at a local level and improved the level of access to DWP systems and data**. One of the immediate benefits was to give a boost to the employability dimension of local data matching processes, both at the point of identifying families and preparing the evidence of employability outcomes needed for PbR claims. While some local authorities already had effective systems in place for checking families' employment and benefits status, others found that the delivery agreement removed any data access barriers that existed at a local level as a result of historical partnership working with Jobcentre Plus. Having access to the data also proved a valuable resource for ongoing assessment and service planning.

The Troubled Families Employment Advisers, Jobcentre Plus Single Points of Contact, and other bespoke roles (such as Employment Coordinators) were viewed as a new and much valued addition to family intervention. It was said that there is now a **greater understanding of the importance of employment and how it can help resolve some of the other problems families have**. It also helped to provide learning about how and when to introduce and sequence discussions about employment and training with family members. Key workers were often uncomfortable and even wary of the idea of raising the topic of employment with family members until other more pressing practical and health problems were addressed. As a result there was some initial resistance to the idea of discussing employment issues with family members too early in their family intervention.

*“We very rarely spoke about employment or training, unless the family said, ‘I’m looking for a job’, ‘I’m trying to find a job’ or, ‘I want to go into an apprenticeship’.”*

Troubled Families Coordinator

Working alongside the Troubled Families Employment Advisers and the more strategic roles that were created for the programme enabled them to see how best to broach the subject of employability with families and even embrace the need to bring this up much earlier in their family intervention.

The Troubled Families Employment Advisers also enabled key workers to access information about benefits, training and employment options so that their issues could be addressed more quickly. Even in local authorities that did not qualify for a Troubled Families Employment Adviser, having a single point of contact based in the Jobcentre helped identify families and ensured their benefit, employment and training issues were dealt with more effectively.

The understanding of the relationship between the importance of employment in improving the emotional health and wellbeing of individuals also helped the local authority and public health staff work together to address a common purpose. In this way, key workers described how they worked with a Troubled Families Employment Advisers and health

staff to address the practical barriers to work (such as having the right clothing for work or dealing with childcare or travel issues), work on the emotional and health barriers (such as low self-esteem, mental health and substance misuse issues) as well as improve basic skills and literacy levels through training and volunteering opportunities.

## 6 Conclusions

This report has provided an account of the lessons learned from the set-up and implementation of the phase one Troubled Families programme, drawing upon evidence from qualitative case studies with 20 local Troubled Families teams, and telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators from a further 50 local authorities. In the previous chapters we examined how local authorities set up their Troubled Families programme, the models that they developed and the underlying rationale for this. We then explored the way local authorities identified and prioritised their families for inclusion within the programme, and the role and influence of the financial framework over local service delivery arrangements. This was followed by an assessment of how family intervention operated in practice, and the degree to which local Troubled Families programmes incorporated the 5 family intervention factors within their work. Finally, we examined the extent to which the programme was perceived to have achieved the transformation of local services and systems.

In this concluding chapter we highlight the key messages raised in the report, and identify a number of common features for effective service delivery. We end with some reflections and practice themes, looking ahead to the expanded Troubled Families programme.

### 6.1 Overview of programme achievements

The national Troubled Families programme set out to bring about a step change in the provision of family intervention across England and to improve outcomes for families with multiple and complex needs. As we have considered throughout this report, local authorities and their partner organisations invariably sought to maximise the benefits of the programme for families at a local level. From the outset, there was a drive to ensure that the approach taken to work with families would be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the programme. The evaluation has also illustrated the varied position that local authorities were moving from at the start of the Troubled Families programme. While some local authorities already had dedicated teams in place and benefited from a legacy of other programmes – such as Family Intervention Projects, Think Family or Community Budgets, – others were starting from a much lower baseline (having decommissioned their previous provision), and were building their teams from scratch.

The evaluation attests to the diverse range of approaches taken by local authorities to implement the programme. Whilst the national financial framework and the five family intervention factors provided an overall sense of purpose and structure, local authorities responded in a way that best suited their local needs and complemented wider service and systems reforms. They were intentionally given considerable autonomy to design and deliver their local response in order that they could be creative in their approach, whilst also accommodating differences arising from the socio-demographic profile, size and administrative structure of individual authorities. As a consequence, they adopted a range of different delivery models ranging at one end from those who were creating or expanding an existing team of key workers (the dedicated team) through to those who embedded their provision (either individuals or a team of people) within the workforce or were on a journey to transform the whole workforce (the embedded approach). In between the

dedicated team and the embedded approach was the hybrid delivery model which most case study local authorities adopted. This model resulted in family intervention being delivered by a combination of a dedicated team and practitioners who were either embedded individually or as part of a team, and those who were already working in existing services or agencies.

The broad delivery models adopted by local authorities in our sample remained in place for the duration of phase one of the Troubled Families programme. Any changes made by local authorities were in keeping with the underlying philosophy of the approach taken and were more about maturing and consolidating management and practice issues. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the underlying intentions of the expanded Troubled Families programme, local authorities were all embarked on the process to mainstream some or all of their provision as they approached the end of the phase one Troubled Families programme.

The evaluation evidence indicates that the financial framework shaped the programme in quite specific ways. On the one hand, the three core eligibility criteria were widely known and understood and helped to give a focus to the programme nationwide. The financial framework also necessitated a degree of inter-agency cooperation and data sharing that had not always been apparent amongst local authorities, and acted as a catalyst for improving the quality and capacity of local data systems. On the other hand, however, the financial framework was thought to have had a number of drawbacks.

First, the front loading of families to draw down the attachment fees pushed some local authorities to increase caseload sizes and to exit families more quickly so that they could keep pace with their targets. This resulted in some divergences from the original Family Intervention Project model, in terms of optimum caseload size and case duration.

Second, the focus on the financial framework made it harder to work with some families that local Troubled Families teams had identified as needing support. This included families with younger children who did not readily match the core eligibility criteria. The fourth discretionary criterion helped to compensate to some extent, by allowing local teams to take local definitions of need into account.

The phase one financial framework was generally perceived to be quite a blunt instrument for measuring the success of local services. At worst, it was perceived to have created some perverse incentives, where local teams sought to claim outcomes for families at the margins of the programme to ensure that targets were met.

These issues were widely considered to have been acknowledged and accounted for, within the financial framework for the expanded programme.

The phase one programme was implemented with a particular focus on improving outcomes for the most troubled families. There is certainly evidence to suggest that some authorities prioritised the families in greatest need during the initial stages of the programme, when the data matching identified more eligible families than it was possible to work with at the start. In practice, however, most local Troubled Families teams planned on the basis of mixed caseloads, including both intensive and less intensive families. This also ensured that they could more easily respond to families moving in and out of crisis during the course of the programme. Local Troubled Families teams generally

acknowledged the ongoing need for intensive intervention, even with the greater emphasis on early intervention in moving towards the expanded programme.

The evaluation showed that the five family intervention factors were clearly evident at a practice level within some local areas. In the best developed examples, key workers described adopting hands-on and creatively-minded approaches to meet families' needs, underpinned by rigorous training and supervision. Some areas had grasped the opportunity afforded by the programme to challenge orthodoxy amongst local services, and to widen access to training and professional development. Drawing upon the established models of practice that were established by predecessor programmes, such as the Family Intervention Projects and Community Budget Pathfinders, rolled these out at a greater pace and scale than was previously possible. This served to boost capacity and widen access to family intervention within local areas where the existing provision for vulnerable families was under-developed. The Troubled Families programme was viewed by some as an opportunity to embed family intervention within wider service restructuring and commissioning arrangements, at a time when many local authorities were downsizing and/or outsourcing services, and the timing of the programme was fortuitous in this respect.

The profile and additional funding invariably helped to consolidate the way professionals were working in partnership; supporting and reinforcing each other's practice. Workers also assisted with the implementation of sanctions on behalf of other agencies (e.g. housing, Youth Offender Teams), or to take preventative measures with the family avoiding the need for their use. The link between Troubled Families key workers and Troubled Families Employment Advisers and Jobcentre Plus single point of contact was a further key area of emerging practice. Families often reported to have benefited from earlier and timelier support with employability issues, and local Troubled Families teams benefiting from more direct access to Jobcentre Plus data and expertise. The increased resource for the expanded programme was widely welcomed and considered to be necessary to embed this expertise at a local level.

These successes were not universal, however, and the evaluation also encountered practice descriptions that differed very little from business as usual. The variations in the quality and consistency of family intervention practice were starkest in cases where: the programme was not embedded within wider local authority governance structures; multiagency partnerships did not include the breadth and depth of membership to deliver a comprehensive offer of support to families; management and supervisory arrangements were under-developed; and local teams lacked systems for identifying and subsequently sharing data on families effectively. Moreover, practice was often found to be much more variable in quality and consistency where lead workers within the wider workforce were operating at the very margins of the programme. Local Troubled Families teams held contrasting views on the scope for extending family intervention in a light or super-light form and there were concerns about diluting practice. Equally, some local authorities were adamant this widening in scope was necessary to integrate family intervention within the early help infrastructure at a local level.

At the time when the final case study visits took place at the end of 2014/early 2015, there were signs that the additional funding for the expanded programme had achieved a stabilising effect for those local authorities whose plans were starting to take shape. Whilst the expanded programme brought new challenges in terms of scaling-up and widening

access to family intervention for less money, the early signs were that it had also provided much needed assurances about continued access to funding. Local authorities valued the opportunity to set the parameters and focus of the expanded programme on the families that they were keen to target. They also appreciated being able to design their outcomes framework, albeit with the associated challenges that this posed.

The nature of the targets for the new programme and the much closer alignment with early intervention entailed that all local areas would need to move towards an embedded model mainstreaming their practice – bringing family intervention in sync with early help strategies. By the final case study visits, those areas that had originally adopted a delivery model based on the dedicated team were moving in the direction of a hybrid or embedded model, and the need to engage the wider workforce and to build VCS capacity had become inevitable.

## 6.2 Key messages for future development

Building on the evidence presented in this report, we conclude with a number of key messages for the future design and delivery of family intervention, as the expanded Troubled Families programme is rolled out.

### 6.2.1 Scaling-up family intervention

The evaluation reinforced the importance of the flexible, hands-on and practical nature of the key worker role – the provision of parenting advice and emotional support, help with education, training and work, as well as any housing and financial issues. It also builds on the learning about the pivotal coordinating function key and lead workers have – setting in place and reviewing the support plan for each family, orchestrating the Team Around the Family meetings when there is no statutory involvement, advocating for families and brokering access to other specialist support when required.

The desire to ensure that family intervention practice would sustain beyond the life of the Troubled Families programme resulted in local authorities opting to embed either part, or all, of their approach within the wider workforce. More exceptionally it drove local authorities to try to mainstream their approach, suggesting that potentially anyone in the wider workforce can become a key or lead worker.

The risks of moving further away from having dedicated key worker provision are that teams will potentially dilute the quality of their practice. During the case study visits managers did reflect on the challenges of delivering a consistent approach and being able to quality assure practice when staff were spread across the workforce or embedded in different teams. This was specifically borne out in a local authority that initially structured their Troubled Families team across three area based teams, but subsequently merged them into 1 dedicated team because of concerns about maintaining the quality and consistency of practice across the three teams.

This risk to quality appears to be even greater where practitioners were required to manage mixed caseloads where they adopted a family intervention approach with one or two families, alongside the way they usually worked with other families. In these circumstances it appeared to take even longer for them to build the specialist skills

required to be an effective key worker. The need to build and maintain quality practice becomes ever more challenging as local authorities attempt to scale up their work and mainstream provision.

The qualitative evidence indicated that effective family intervention depends on practitioners operating to a high quality of practice, and this cannot be sacrificed in the interests of mainstreaming provision. It goes without saying that, when working with families with such complex and challenging needs, the stakes are high as there is a risk of doing more harm than good to families if key worker practice is not of sufficient quality.

### **6.2.2 Equipping the workforce**

In recognition of the pivotal role key workers have in bringing about change for families with complex and entrenched problems, managers and practitioners highlighted the importance of the recruitment, training and supervision of the workforce.

Local authorities adopted varying approaches to developing wards assuring the qualifications and skill levels of their key workers. They ranged from those who, more exceptionally, set out to recruit a particular professional group, such as social workers, to those who recruited people according to key competencies and personal qualities. Equally, training pathways varied in their content and duration ranging from bespoke packages of training to local authorities to those who required their key workers to undertake specific qualifications such as the NVQ Level 4 in *Work with Parents (Intense Support for families with Multiple and Complex Needs)*.

The qualitative evidence highlighted the importance of key and lead workers being offered a consistent and robust training pathway, which needs to be regularly updated and reviewed. There may also be value in developing a qualification that workers are required to achieve, building on the existing Level 4 qualifications that many local Troubled Families teams already offer. This could provide different training pathways for the different models of family intervention (e.g. for dedicated key workers, for workers combining the key worker role alongside other activities and for those working with less intensive families). This would help to quality assure practice and ensure a consistently high standard across local authorities. It might also help to give key workers the status they need to operate in partnership with other services and agencies, and help to even out the pay differentials. In trying to achieve this there could be value in learning from the way other professions equip and develop their workforce, such as social work, or those working in residential children's care.

Alongside training, the importance of regular one to one high quality supervision was clearly emphasised as being crucial to developing family intervention practice. These sessions provided the opportunity to ensure that key workers were working in a safe way and were able to manage the professional boundaries around their relationship with families. This is a key challenge in any relationship of this kind, but even more so when the work is so intensive and the families have such complex and entrenched needs. In these circumstances there is a particular need to manage the tension of getting too close to the families – becoming their trusted confidante, and yet also retaining the distance required to be able to pull back when needed; and to give families the space to build resilience for addressing problems for themselves when they arise. Supervision was also used to help key workers discuss and manage safeguarding issues in a family and recognise the point

at which they need to let go, or to wean families off support, so as to manage the strong attachments that are formed.

Supervision often operated rather differently from one professional group to another (e.g. the supervision provided to someone working in a school was quite different to that offered to someone working in the Youth Offending Service). It was also a particular issue for workers who were embedded in a cross-sector team and managing a mixed caseload. These workers need line management, supervision and professional support for their core occupational role alongside their Troubled Families casework. Supervision appeared to work best when it was delivered by a manager who understood family intervention and could provide the appropriate professional advice and support to key workers. Workers also benefited from having access to a family therapist or a clinical psychologist, and from being part of a broader peer-to-peer network where they could share expertise and practice and network with other key workers. There were examples of this operating to good effect in a few of the case study local authorities.

### **6.2.3 Valuing and rewarding the key worker**

The question about the appropriate level of pay for key workers caused some challenges in local authorities and contributed to difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff. Case study areas varied at where they pitched the salary band of a key worker but typically they were paid below the level of a social worker. Yet their work is, arguably, equally demanding. Local authorities who embedded part or all of their Troubled Families provision were further constrained by the salary dictated by each professional group, resulting in a situation that practitioners working as a key or lead worker in different teams could be paid at different levels. These issues of remuneration and the need for parity will need to be given careful consideration during the expanded programme and to ensure that pay scales are fair and realistic to avoid ongoing recruitment and retention issues.

### **6.2.4 Winning hearts and minds**

Relationships between Troubled Families teams and other agencies varied considerably between (and within) local authorities, but there were shared challenges of engaging with health professionals, and in agreeing areas of continuity and difference between family intervention and social work practice.

Co-working between Troubled Families teams and other agencies provided a mechanism for achieving common and consistent action, where these partnerships were well developed. These arrangements were sometimes reinforced through secondments or the co-location of multiagency teams. Working in partnership enabled practitioners to collaborate more effectively when working with families, to reduce duplication between services and to share information and data in a secure way. It also prevented families being able to play one agency off another; and enabled partners to develop new ways to work with family members. For example, this included help get children back into school and prevent further exclusions.

It appeared from the accounts of Troubled Families Coordinators that, whilst the principle of family intervention was widely welcomed and accepted across local authorities, the translation into practice could still be a real challenge. This appeared to be particularly

challenging for partners working alongside key workers, who may be reluctant to release authority to them, or share information. Conversely, there were others who were keen to relinquish any involvement with the family once the key worker was involved. It also appeared to be a challenge for practitioners who were feeling uncomfortable about taking on the key worker role alongside their day job. They were worried about their capacity, time and skills to be able to work with families in this intensive way. The journey to a more mainstream approach will require a lot more than just winning the hearts and minds of staff. One Troubled Families Coordinator talked about the need for “*walking the journey*” with specific individuals’ showing them the way it works and how they can overcome any challenges.

### **6.2.5 Identifying and working with lower need families**

A real challenge that local authorities appeared to be grappling with during phase one was how to identify and work with lower need families. It was evident that it was not clear what this meant in practice – whether it referred to the number of agencies who were involved with a family, or the number of problems reported about a family, or both. Despite the three year programme there is still much more to be learnt about how to work with families with a lower level or threshold of need. During our first visits it appeared that practice with lower need families was often the least well-conceived aspect of Troubled Families programmes. It also seemed that original assumptions could quickly unravel so what might have appeared to be a lower need family could turn out to be a higher need complex family, and vice versa. In at least one local authority, the Troubled Families Coordinator said they combined their intensive and light family intervention models because they found it difficult to identify and assess accurately at the referral stage. This suggests there may need to be more flexibility around the assumptions about caseload and intervention length to help manage the unpredictability of families’ needs.

However, there were local authorities who specifically tested models for working with lower need families, and this became a more prominent feature of the programme as the evaluation progressed. The announcement of the expanded programme was important in pushing local authorities to consider how to develop this area of their practice. There is clearly more scope for understanding how family intervention (and the five family intervention factors) could operate across different types of families and family intervention models. There is a particular issue of how the challenge component of the model will operate with lower need families who may not have reached the point of sanctions. It was clear that the threat of sanctions (e.g. losing a tenancy, or a child being taken into care) played quite a pivotal role in persuading reluctant families to engage with the programme. It therefore remains to be seen how reluctant families will be encouraged to engage with the Troubled Families programme when there are no imminent sanctions before them.

### **6.2.6 Whole family working**

Related to the issue above is the need to understand how the role and purpose of whole family working operates and plays out in practice for families with fewer problems and less service complexity. Troubled Families workers described examples of cases where engagement with the wider family was instructive in moving family members forward. There were examples of how work with the wider family members – and with local

communities – helped to militate against the risk of regressive change, which could occur in the longer term for families.

Perhaps the newest territory for the Troubled Families programme has been the horizontal expansion of family intervention – the scaling-up of delivery to enable case-holding by practitioners within a wider tier of agencies that previously sat outside of Family Intervention Projects and their equivalent. The case study evidence has highlighted that this expansion has achieved mixed results, with agencies still struggling to adapt to the cultural and procedural changes required to undertake whole family working. However, it was also evident that the juxtaposition of Troubled Families teams with other agencies has forced a degree of engagement that may not have existed prior to the Troubled Families programme. This has raised important questions about the interface between family intervention and social work practice in particular.

The evaluation evidence suggested that strong models of whole family working, whilst influenced by local leadership and Continuing Professional Development arrangements, were also greatly assisted by Troubled Families workers having the time, space and access to understand what was happening within individual families, and the flexibility to adopt a creative and problem-solving approach. These facets were well suited to a model of dedicated Troubled Families workers overseeing balanced caseloads and supported by a robust framework of training and supervision. However, these principles appear to sit somewhat awkwardly alongside high caseloads and/or lead workers undertaking family intervention alongside their existing duties. Going forward, it will be necessary to examine the emerging evidence from the expanded programme, to ensure that the wider rollout of provision does not undermine these critical success factors for family intervention.

### **6.2.7 Optimising the employability dimensions of the programme**

The evaluation highlighted the important contribution of Troubled Families Employment Advisers and Jobcentre Plus Single Points of Contact and other variants on these roles in helping to support the development of practice in this area. The Jobcentre Plus single point of contact also helped to build links at a more strategic level. There is potential merit in further refining both of these roles through the expanded Troubled Families programme.

The evidence pointed towards a number of actions that might be taken to optimise the resource available from DWP for the programme, going forwards. The evaluation has shown that there are potential merits for combining the main strengths of the Troubled Families Employment Advisers (working directly with local Troubled Families key workers and families in a hands-on capacity) with the more strategic remit of the Jobcentre Plus single point of contact (managing links at a strategic level and to address issues of scalability in how the links between the Troubled Families Programme and Jobcentre Plus are managed across an entire local area).

Specifically, the evaluation evidence indicates potential advantages from the following:

- undertaking further work to determine the baseline level of employability skills and knowledge that are required for key workers, as part of their core training and professional development; thereby reducing the risk of dependency on Troubled Families Employment Advisers for more basic tasks;

- exploring the benefits of co-location, with more routine placement of Troubled Families key workers in Jobcentre Plus offices, and vice versa for Troubled Families Employment Advisers working with multiagency teams;
- boosting the level of administrative support for Troubled Families Employment Advisers, thereby increasing the proportion of time spent undertaking direct work with local Troubled Families key workers and families; and
- considering how best to roll out the Jobcentre Plus single point of contact role to secure the necessary engagement with Jobcentre Plus teams at a more strategic level and to widen access to employment and employability expertise more systematically across local networks of Jobcentres, beyond the remit of individual Troubled Families Employment Advisers.

## 6.3 Developing effective delivery models

In this final section we reflect on the learning from the national evaluation evidence about developing effective delivery models. In Chapter 2, we described our ‘continuum’, of delivery models ranging from the dedicated team, to the embedded approach. Reflecting upon the lessons learned from phase one, we have identified some key principles for developing effective delivery.

**The importance of developing a local solution that takes account of the context** and builds on pre-existing provision and the local infrastructure. This means there is unlikely to be a single blueprint for success, but instead different approaches will work more effectively in different local contexts. The size, type, structure, population, service map and geography of a local authority needs to be taken into consideration. Small unitary authorities may have less opportunity for innovation and development than large two tier county councils, who are likely to need to adopt a more devolved and embedded approach to delivering family intervention. It is also inevitable that external factors such as the economic climate may limit the choices open to local authorities if, for example, a wider programme of service reform is being embarked upon.

**The importance of time** to build the infrastructure; trial and pilot provision and providers; profile and target the families; recruit the right staff; win partners’ hearts and minds. Adopting a more embedded approach or embarking on workforce reform will inevitably take much longer to deliver than setting up a team or service.

**The importance of leadership and management.** Successful management and governance will depend on the skills and experience of the Troubled Families Coordinator, and the commitment of a high level board or steering group at the strategic and operational levels with representation from all key stakeholders and providers. The pivotal role of the Troubled Families Coordinator appears to be most effective when that person: is more strategically rather than operationally focused; has a clear vision for their service/approach; has the seniority and clout to drive the programme forward; is well networked across the local authority; and has access to senior management. Supportive central teams are also essential for driving forward the work and freeing the Troubled Families Coordinator to be strategically focused. These teams included administrative staff/business managers, data analysts, operational managers and district representation of some kind (in the more devolved structures).

**The importance of preserving what is important to family intervention as local authorities mainstream this way of working.** The evaluation confirms and builds on previous evidence about the importance of key worker delivery and having a caseload size that enables effective whole family working. It reinforces the importance of the flexible, 'hands-on' and practical nature of the key worker role, the provision of parenting advice and emotional support, and help with education, training and work, housing issues and debts and financial management. It also builds on the learning about the pivotal coordinating function key and lead workers have: setting in place and reviewing the support plan for each family; orchestrating the Team Around the Family meetings (sometimes wrapping-around statutory plans for individual family members such as Children in Need plans or Child Protection Plans; advocating for families and brokering access to other (including specialist) support when required.

**The importance of creating sustainable provision.** Under the expanded Troubled Families programme local authorities are likely to be mainstreaming their approach and embedding family intervention within existing services. As it will need to be pitched at a much larger cohort of families with lower levels of need, interventions will become shorter and more focused and caseload sizes will inevitably increase.

The lead or key worker to take on this role will ideally have a dedicated caseload and be located in a team that is well suited to working with families with additional or multiple and complex needs (e.g. family support, early years provision, Youth Offending Service, social care etc). Some services may be less well equipped to take on key or lead working for whole families if, for example, they have a statutory responsibility as part of their role. The ability to be able to juggle the enforcement and supportive roles of a key worker needs delicate handling and there may be good reasons for separating the way these operate when working with families. Inevitably it will take longer for practitioners to develop the specialist skills required to be an effective key worker if they are building their Troubled Family caseload incrementally.

**The importance of preserving some specialist dedicated provision** to work with families with the highest level of need. As local authorities progress on their journey to mainstream family intervention practice there is likely to be a need to ensure there is some specialist team provision for those families with the highest level of need. This will ensure that experienced key workers are able to work to the key features of family intervention and their small caseload can be protected. These teams will operate more effectively when they consist of a multiagency team with access to a range of specialists who are part of the core team including for example, domestic abuse, employment specialist, CAHMS specialist and adult mental health specialist. The appropriate balance between the dedicated team and embedded provision needs to reflect the local context and the cohort of families being targeted.

**The importance of quality assuring practice.** There is a very real need to avoid the dilution of practice that appears to be the primary and real risk of the embedding approach or 'mainstreaming' provision. Particular consideration is needed to ensure that arrangements for training and supervision remain sufficiently robust to protect and adapt the role as appropriate to meet the needs of families with lower levels of need. In order to militate against this there is a need for:

- a very robust rolling programme of workforce reform to ensure practice is of a high quality and sustainable over time, as staff leave and new staff are recruited – this will include formal and informal training (including shadowing and buddying opportunities);
- regular monthly supervision with a line manager (trained in supervision and family intervention);
- access to key worker champions who work alongside staff who are new to family intervention;
- access to a clinical support where appropriate; and
- access to peer learning networks.

# Appendix A: Sampling framework for telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators

## A2.1 Sampling criteria

| <b>Criterion</b>                   | <b>Explanation</b>  | <b>Variables</b>  |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Service focus</b>               | Based on the % of families supported under the main types/levels of family intervention – a useful indicator of the level of need of families being supported   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skewed to intensive family intervention</li> <li>2. Skewed to less intensive family intervention</li> <li>3. Even split</li> <li>4. None of the above</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Delivery model</b>              | Based on the model identified by local authorities as best describing their local governance arrangements for the Troubled Families programme (asked as part of the local authorities profiling survey) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Centralised" - led and delivered centrally by the local authority, managing most of the resources and service delivery</li> <li>2. "Mixed" - led centrally by the local authority, but with localised delivery arrangements - or - led centrally by the local authority and a combination of localised and upper-tier level deliver</li> <li>3. "Devolved" - the local authority has delegated both the leadership and the delivery</li> </ol> |
| <b>Number of Troubled Families</b> | Based on the national ranking position for numbers of Troubled Families (out of 152 English local authorities, where 1 = highest numbers)   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Large number of families (national local authority ranking of 1-76 for numbers of Troubled Families)</li> <li>2. Small number of families (national local authority ranking of 77-152 for numbers of Troubled Families)</li> </ol>  |

## A2.2 Creation of sampling pools

| <b>Service focus</b>                         | <b>Delivery model</b> | <b>Number of Families</b> | <b>Sampling pool</b> |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Skewed to intensive family intervention      | “Centralised”         | Large number of families  | A                    |
|  | “Centralised”         | Small number of families  | B                    |
|  | “Mixed”               | Small number of families  | C                    |
| Skewed to less intensive family intervention | “Centralised”         | Large number of families  | D                    |
|  | “Centralised”         | Small number of families  | E                    |
|  | “Mixed”               | Large number of families  | F                    |
|  | “Mixed”               | Small number of families  | G                    |
| Even split                                   | “Centralised”         | Large number of families  | H                    |
|  | “Centralised”         | Small number of families  | I                    |
|  | “Mixed”               | Large number of families  | J                    |
|  | “Mixed”               | Small number of families  | K                    |
| None of the above                            | “Devolved”            | Large number of families  | L                    |

## Appendix B: References

Blades, R., Day, L., and Erskine, C. (2016) Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme: Families' Experiences and outcomes.

Cabinet Office (2008) *Think Family: a literature review of whole family approaches*. [Online] Available: [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7373/1/think\\_family\\_report%20pdf.ashx](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7373/1/think_family_report%20pdf.ashx) [Accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2015]

City & Guilds (2011) *Level 4 Award in Work with Parents (Intense Support for Families with Multiple and Complex Needs (4338-04)*. [Online] Available: [http://cdn.cityandguilds.com/ProductDocuments/Children/Children and Young People/4338/4338\\_Level\\_4/Centre\\_documents/4338-04\\_L4\\_Qualification\\_handbook\\_v1-0.pdf](http://cdn.cityandguilds.com/ProductDocuments/Children/Children and Young People/4338/4338_Level_4/Centre_documents/4338-04_L4_Qualification_handbook_v1-0.pdf) [Accessed: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2015]

DCLG (2015) *Financial framework for the expanded Troubled Families programme*. [Online] Available: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/409682/Financial\\_Framework\\_for\\_the\\_Expanded\\_Troubled\\_Families\\_Programme\\_april\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/409682/Financial_Framework_for_the_Expanded_Troubled_Families_Programme_april_2015.pdf) [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015]

DCLG (2014) *Interim financial framework for the Troubled Families programme*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.lgcplus.com/Journals/2014/09/01/z/j/b/Expanded-Troubled-Families-Programme-Interim-Financial-Framewor.pdf> [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015]

DCLG (2013a) The Troubled Families programme: financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities. [Online] Available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/11469/2117840.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11469/2117840.pdf) [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015]

DCLG (2013b) *Delivery agreement: putting troubled families on the path to work*. [Online] Available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136344/DWP\\_CLG\\_Troubled\\_Families.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136344/DWP_CLG_Troubled_Families.pdf) [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015]

DCLG (2012) *Working with Troubled Families: A guide to the evidence and good practice*. [Online] Available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/66113/121214\\_Working\\_with\\_troubled\\_families\\_FINAL\\_v2.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/66113/121214_Working_with_troubled_families_FINAL_v2.pdf) [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015]

HM Government (2013) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. [Online] Available from: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/w/working%20together.pdf> [Accessed: 8th January 2016]

LGA (2013) *Must Know 5: What you need to know about early help*. London: Local Government Association. [Online] Available from: [http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=50e58128-e1e3-4e66-bfaa-7cdd852a98d8&groupId=10180](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=50e58128-e1e3-4e66-bfaa-7cdd852a98d8&groupId=10180) [Accessed: 8th January 2016]

White, C., Warrener, M., Reeves, A., and La Valle, I. (2008) *Family Intervention Projects: An Evaluation of their Design, Set-Up, and Early Outcomes*. [Online] Available from: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8578/1/acf44f.pdf> [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> August 2015]