

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET

20 JANUARY 2013

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHILDRENS

UPDATE ON CONNECTING FAMILIES INCLUDING PROGRESS OF EVALUATION AND UPDATE ON FUTURE FUNDING

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with:

- an update regarding the progress of Connecting Families including the evaluation of the service;
- an update on the future plans for the continuation of funding for the service

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

2.1 This report links to the following improvement priorities in the corporate plan:

- Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational attainment
- Working with children and families to tackle problems early
- Working together to help vulnerable people stay independent
- Working together to tackle health issues and encourage healthy lifestyles

2.2 Supporting families and making stronger links between adults services and those provided to children is a priority in the Social services and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill.

3. Background

3.1 Connecting Families is a Local Service Board (LSB) initiative in Bridgend. It works with the most complex and vulnerable families in the area who place a large and disproportionate demand on public services and their local communities. Connecting Families brings together partners from Bridgend County Borough Council, South Wales Police, the Department for Works and Pensions, Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board and the Probation Service to provide an integrated support service that aids families with improving their lifestyles and behaviour.

3.2 Connecting Families is an innovative, pilot family support project for complex and vulnerable families in Bridgend. To assess its implementation and impact, an independent researcher was commissioned to work with the Information Officer and other team members to conduct an evaluation of the service. The evaluation was conducted in the summer of 2013 when the project had been operating for just over 18 months. A draft report was produced in October 2013 and a final version was published in November 2013. An executive summary can be found at appendix 1

3.3 The main aims of the evaluation are to provide some evidence regarding the impact of Connecting Families upon the families it works with and to examine the

implementation and delivery of the service. The report will then make some recommendations about the continuation and potential expansion of the service including recommendations for tools to enhance monitoring and evaluation for future delivery.

3.4 The main aims of the evaluation were to:

- Examine the impact that Connecting Families has been perceived to make to the lives of families who have used the service.
- Gather evidence on the implementation and delivery of the Connecting Families Project regarding what is working well and what could be done better to inform future practice.

3.5 An executive summary of the evaluation report can be found at Appendix 1.

4. Key findings of the evaluation

4.1 The evaluation identifies a number of areas in which their investigations found significant improvements for families and for children and these were identified as:

- Lowering of the legal status of the child due to improved parenting practice.
- Better family relationships.
- Broader wellbeing of the family.
- Increased parental wellbeing and confidence.
- Help with practical issues.
- Support from partner agencies.
- Positive relationships with other services.
- Sustainable changes and costs avoided.

Some of the evidence quoted from the draft report for each area is outlined below.

4.2 **Improved parenting Practice** -One practitioner confirmed that, “a lot of children would have been removed and or gone into care without Connecting Families involvement”. This message was reflected in responses from a Children’s Services Social Worker who stated “I am sure without the direct input of Connecting Families there would be a risk of plans not coming to fruition or on return placement breakdown”. Similarly another Social Worker reported that “Connecting Families is an intense service which is able to support families to avoid breakdown preventing children being placed into the care of the local authority”

4.3 **Better family relationships** - The relationships of participants were often felt to be stronger through family members learning to value each other. One parent explained that “I appreciate my family and partner more” whilst another reported “I am less annoyed and so can show the kids love more easily”. These sorts of

changes were perceived to have helped ensure improved relationships, even if they were still not perfect. For example, one father was pleased that he had “an amicable relationship” with his daughter, which was a highly significant move forward from when he was worried he may lose her completely.

- 4.4 **Broader wellbeing of the family** - The changes experienced by families were different in each case. A number of professionals explained that because of the complex and broad range of issues that were experienced by families coming in to the service, the changes made were equally varied. One practitioner explained “the look of a successful family is always going to be different, it’s not going to be that this, this and this has been met, it’s going to be entirely different for every family”. This indicates that when working with families, the Connecting Families team would address a variety of needs for the whole family, rather than focus on the specific child protection concerns for the child. Such an approach would help to improve family life and children’s experiences in the longer term.
- 4.5 **Increased parental wellbeing and confidence** -In addition to addressing the needs of children, a number of parents reported that Connecting Families helped to improve their own wellbeing. Staff at Connecting Families, enlist the support of other services to address specific needs and parents were helped with issues such as their self-confidence. A Children’s Services social worker added that in their experience, parents working with Connecting Families “have been supported to develop their organisational and life skills”. Much of these positive changes to the wellbeing of the parents related to their improved confidence to do more for themselves, as well as for their children
- 4.6 **Help with practical issues** -Further to helping parents with their own emotional wellbeing, a number of parents also cited the importance of the assistance with more practical issues that Connecting Families provided in enhancing their family lives. The main areas they felt this came from was in providing advice with finances and housing
- 4.7 **Support from partner agencies** - In addition to the general, practical aspects of family life that were able to be addressed by the key workers in the Connecting Families team was the support that was provided through the multi-agency partners. Analysis of the parent feedback emphasised Connecting Families as a valuable multi-disciplinary service. Similarly, a number of practitioners described the service as a “one stop shop” that provided enhanced support around specific issues such as mental health and domestic abuse as well as parenting difficulties.
- 4.8 **Positive relationships with other services** - A number of parents reported that they appreciated this support from their key workers in managing their relations with social services. One parent explained that working with the service “made us relaxed and not afraid of social services”. Another felt that the most important aspect of Connecting Families was that they “gave me support when dealing with social services”. This was recognised by workers as one of the most appreciated impacts of the service, with one describing that her work has “improved families’ relationships with statutory and voluntary agencies”
- 4.9 **Sustainable changes and cost averted** -“Since Connecting Families became operational in August 2011, interventions have been completed with 73 families and the team are currently providing support to another 22. A range of ‘need specific

and family led' interventions including keep safe work, the triple P positive parenting programme and behaviour support have been provided to families. The team have also prevented family breakdown, resulting in 60 children and young people identified as being at risk of becoming looked after by their social worker remaining at home with their families. Children and young people have also been de-registered from the child protection register through encouraging parents to make positive sustained change”

5. Effect on the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

5.1 There is no impact on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in respect of the service which indicated no negative impact on any minority group.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Connecting Families was originally a 3 year project which was funded by the following;

	£
ESF GRANT FUNDING	468,523
LA CORE BUDGETS	287,538
EARMARKED RESERVES	300,000
SMAT	30,000
	<hr/>
	1,086,061

7.2 The ESF grant funding comes to an end in December 2014 and the earmarked reserve will have been fully utilised by the end of March 2014. An invest to save business case has been completed for the continuation of the project into 14/15 and it has been agreed that funding of £131k will be provided from the Strategic Change Programme Fund for 2014/15.

7.3 By focusing on preventative work, and helping to curb or reduce the number of children becoming Looked After, or families breaking down, the project has resulted in cost savings across a wide range of partners. Consequently, in order to continue with the project going forward from 2014/15 the Council must seek financial contributions from these partners.

8. Recommendations

8.1 That Committee note the content of this report and provide any necessary feedback

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Attachment

Appendix 1 - Executive Summary of the evaluation report.