

Future development of the Families First programme

Cabinet Secretary's decision

The Cabinet Secretary has considered advice on the future of the Families First programme and has come to the following decision:

- The key elements of the JAF, TAFF and disability focus will remain unchanged, with £3 million per year ring-fenced funding for disability-related services being retained.
- The focus of the strategic projects commissioned through the programme will be narrowed to concentrate on the delivery of parenting support and support for young people.
- There will be a transitional period of at least six months from 1 April 2017 before these new arrangements are rolled out nationally.

Why has this decision been made?

The Cabinet Secretary has made this decision to ensure the Families First programme is able to develop services which address identified gaps in service provision for parents and young people and link the work of the programme clearly with the prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

What does this mean?

Parenting support

Parenting plays a central role in relation to outcomes for children. Good quality parenting can help promote resilience, positive self-esteem and have a positive impact on a child's learning and outcomes and school. Children who grow up in a nurturing environment where parenting is fair, consistent and structured are also less likely to be exposed to adverse childhood experiences which may detrimentally affect their physical and mental health over the longer term. These children are also less likely to bring up their own children in households where ACEs are commonplace.

A recent mapping exercise has identified gaps in existing provision and all local authorities will need to consider these when designing and commissioning services. Current identified gaps in service provision include:

- Universally available parenting groups
- Support for couple relationships
- Support for parents with a learning disability
- Support for adoptive/foster parents/kinship carers
- Support for families affected by a parent in prison
- Support for families following family breakdown

Each local authority will be expected to offer services under the following age related themes:

- Perinatal and support in the early years to age 7
- Support for parents of children in middle childhood aged 7-12
- Support for parents of teenagers

Each of these age-related themes will then need to be underpinned by the following cross-cutting themes:

- Relationship support
- Early intervention support vulnerable families
- Positive parenting
- Evidence based theories of child development

It may be necessary for local authorities to undertake further assessments to identify the extent to which these gaps need to be filled in their local area to ensure services can be commissioned accordingly. The needs of local populations will vary, and there is no “one size fits all” approach which should be taken so local authorities will still have a certain degree of flexibility in how they design and commission services, as is the case currently. However, it will be important for local authorities to ensure, and be able to demonstrate, they are providing services which fill these identified gaps.

There are some clear benefits to widening the provision of parenting support, these have been summarised below:

- Families First will be able to enhance existing parenting support to fill the identified gaps in provision and provide services ranging from universal support to targeted/specialist interventions.
- The programme will have a sharper focus on ensuring families are confident, nurturing, resilient and safe. Evaluation evidence tells us that families’ presenting needs most often fall into these categories and recent feedback indicates this remains a clear need amongst local populations.
- The broad range of parenting support which can be delivered will also be able to address a variety of other issues, such as:
 - low level mental health and emotional health and well-being
 - domestic violence support
 - support for young carers
 - family engagement support

Support for young people

Providing support for young people directly complements the support which will be provided for parenting and is entirely in keeping with Families First’s whole family approach to service provision.

Services should be focussed to concentrate on ensuring young people are resilient and confident and equipped with skills which will help them make a meaningful contribution to society. This could mean services are developed which will complement those which are proposed for parents, and include interventions for a range of age groups which promote resilience and positive self-esteem to encourage long term positive outcomes for all children and young people.

Families First and the prevention of ACEs

Whilst our parenting proposals have clear links with ACE prevention, continuation of youth provision will provide valuable services which could help to mitigate the effects of exposure to ACEs for those children and young people who are living in difficult circumstances. Enhancement of existing services, such as youth clubs, advocacy, counselling and mentoring services, as well as those which provide access to work placements and education may help to reduce the acute and long-term impacts of ACEs on the health and behaviour of young people.

Where local authorities are not currently providing youth services, these services should be developed alongside new parenting support to ensure young people in the local area are receiving appropriate support along with their parents.

Services which will no longer be funded through Families First

A simple mapping exercise has been carried out using information contained in the Families First Delivery Plans 2016-17 and we have identified the following main services which will be affected as a result of the Cabinet Secretary's decision:

- Debt/benefit advice/income maximisation/financial literacy
- Worklessness/employability/training
- Some health services, e.g. sexual health, substance misuse.
- Childcare services (except crèche facilities)

Debt/benefit advice/income maximisation/financial literacy

Many families who enter the programme require some kind of financial advice however services are available outside of the programme to which families could be signposted. Organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Money Advice Service provide free information and support to families and, whilst it is important that families know where they can get help, it is not essential for these services to be provided through Families First.

Worklessness/employability/training

The Families First evaluation reports have made it clear that the programme does not perform well in terms of helping people seek or gain employment. Families' presenting needs most often fall into the categories of wellbeing, confidence, resilience and safety and it is essential for families to address these issues before they can move on to addressing other challenges such as gaining employment.

We do not, therefore, consider it viable for the programme to continue funding services such as these.

Some health services, e.g. sexual health, substance misuse

Some health services, for example, those which promote healthy living or substance misuse support, could be refined to ensure stronger links with parenting, in the context of providing a healthy environment for children to thrive. If local authorities wish to retain any health services which are currently being delivered through the programme,

they will need to be able to demonstrate clear links to parenting, youth support and ACE prevention.

Childcare (except crèche facilities)

Services currently funded by the programme include:

- Assisted childcare places
- Contributions towards the cost of childcare
- Provision of affordable day care
- Crèche facilities

We know that crèche facilities are particularly useful in helping parents who have no childcare support access services, such as parenting programmes. We are, therefore, recommending that the provision of crèche facilities be retained where it will encourage parents to engage with services.

With regard to other childcare services, these were developed prior to other Welsh Government initiatives which are now available or in development. These include:

- **Parents, Childcare and Employment project (PaCE)** which provides support to economically inactive parents into education, training and employment, where childcare is the main barrier.
- **The enhanced early years childcare offer** which is aimed at working families and will subsidise the provision of 20 hours of childcare for three and four year olds in addition to the 10 hours of early years education which is already available under the Foundation Phased for 38 weeks of the year.

As these new initiatives are implemented, we would expect to see a reduction in need for services to be delivered through Families First and so do not consider it appropriate for childcare services to continue to be funded through the programme.

Transition

We understand that it will take time to move from the current arrangements to another, and we are proposing a transitional period of at least six months from 1 April 2017, which will mean the new arrangements will be operating nationally from 1 October 2017 at the earliest. This should allow local authorities sufficient time to undertake relevant needs assessments and consider how services should be delivered in each local authority and develop appropriate commissioning arrangements.

Local authorities will be able to decide how they wish to proceed during this transitional period. We do, however, recommend they explore whether existing contracts can be extended during this period which would mean the programme continuing to operate in its current form for six additional months to allow for a more effective exit period for families currently receiving support through the programme.

Next steps

We will welcome your input in a number of key areas as we move towards these new arrangements and we will be seeking your support over the coming months to consider the following:

- The development of new guidance
- Suitable data monitoring and performance management arrangements.

Further details on the new arrangements will be available in due course, including funding arrangements. The Cabinet Secretary is expected to make a formal announcement on the future of the programme in the autumn.

If you have any immediate queries at this stage, please contact Hannah Williams, Senior Family Support Policy Manager at hannah.williams@wales.gsi.gov.uk or 029 2082 5677.

The Families First Team