



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme

Final Synthesis Report

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# Glossary

ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
CIN	Child In Need
CLA	Child Looked After
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DfE	Department for Education
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
DCS	Director of Children's Services
DA	Domestic Abuse
EHH	Early Help Hub
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
FIPs	Family Intervention Projects
FMD	Family Monitoring Data
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LLR	Local Linear Regression
MI	Management Information
MSB	Mean Standardised Bias
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MASH	Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
NAD	National Administrative Datasets
NPD	National Pupil Database
PbR	Payment by Results
PNC	Police National Computer
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
SDA	Severe Disability Allowance
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TFEA	Troubled Families Employment Adviser
VCSSO	Voluntary or Community Sector Organisation
WPLS	Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study
YOSs	Youth Offending Services

# 1 Introduction

In January 2013, Ecorys was commissioned by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to lead a consortium providing an independent evaluation of the Phase One Troubled Families Programme<sup>1</sup>. The evaluation included process, impact and economic strands of work, culminating in a set of final reports in September 2015.

This report presents the overall summative findings from the evaluation. It is based on triangulated evidence from across all strands of the evaluation informing the final report series, which include:

- quasi-experimental research using outcomes data from national administrative datasets, and a large-scale face-to-face survey of families, comparing families going through the programme with a matched comparison group
- qualitative case study research with a purposive sample of 20 local authorities, conducted longitudinally, and
- snapshot qualitative telephone interviews with a further 50 local authorities.

The report also draws selectively on monitoring data collected on a self-report basis from 143 local authorities at three points in time during the evaluation, and a quantitative survey of local authorities conducted during the early stages of the programme to map the broad characteristics of local Troubled Families programmes.

The synthesis report is complemented with a series of technical reports, detailing the findings from the impact analysis of the administrative data (Bewley, et al., 2016); survey data (Purdon and Bryson, 2016); process evaluation (White and Day, 2016), and qualitative research with families (Blades, et al., 2016). The series also includes shorter technical reports on the Family Monitoring Data (Whitley, 2016), and the survey of families (Panayiotou, et al., 2016).

## 1.1 Programme overview

In April 2012, the Troubled Families Unit at DCLG launched the £448 million Phase One Troubled Families Programme, with the aim of ‘turning around’ the lives of 120,000 families with multiple and complex needs in England. At the core was 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:

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

- A suite of locally designed family intervention programmes
- A network of local Troubled Families co-ordinators, 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).

The launch of the programme followed an announcement in December 2011 of the commitment to work with the 120,000 most 'troubled' families. This figure was based on earlier Cabinet Office analyses of the Families and Children Study (See DCLG 2012a). This found that 120,000 families in England were estimated to meet five of the following seven criteria:

- ◆ no parent in the family was in work;
- ◆ the family lived in poor-quality or overcrowded housing;
- ◆ no parent had any qualifications;
- ◆ the mother had mental health problems;
- ◆ at least one parent had a long-standing limiting illness, disability or infirmity;
- ◆ the family had a low income (below 60 per cent of the median); and
- ◆ the family could not afford a number of items of food and clothing.

The Troubled Families Programme was subsequently launched in April 2012. As set out within the *Troubled Families Financial Framework* (DCLG, 2013), the administrative definition of 'troubled families' for the 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<sup>2</sup>
4. cause high costs to the public purse

The programme was supported with fiscal analysis by DCLG, which estimated that the families would incur costs of £9 billion to the public purse during the 2010-2015 Spending Review period, of which £8 billion was anticipated to be reactive spend.

While there is likely to be some correlation between the indicators of disadvantage which underlie the 120,000 estimate from the original study from the Cabinet Office and those that were used by DCLG to define eligibility for the programme, there is no quantitative estimate of the number of families nationally which satisfy the DCLG criteria. Local authorities were invited to participate and to confirm that they would seek to turn around their local estimated share of the national 120,000 target. This estimated share was calculated primarily with reference to population figures, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and the child wellbeing index. (DCLG, 2012a). DCLG describe this methodology as "providing an indicative number of the number of problem families [that is,

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<sup>2</sup> This includes Income Support (IS) and/or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Incapacity Benefit (IB), Carer's Allowance and Severe Disability Allowance (SDA).



those facing several of the multiple disadvantages set out above] in each local authority". There was therefore no necessary correspondence between the number of families satisfying the criteria for inclusion in the programme and the quotas or targets, either at a national or at a local level.

To qualify for inclusion within the Troubled Families Programme, local authorities were required to check that families meet all three of the core criteria (1-3), or two of these criteria plus the fourth 'high cost' criterion. DCLG allowed 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 provide 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.

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. The key developments were as follows:

- In March 2013, the Department for Work and Pensions (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 (TFEA) 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.
- 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. The Financial Framework was also amended at this stage, with greater local discretion for local authorities to identify the qualifying criteria. The Financial Framework for the expanded programme was published in November 2014 (DCLG, 2015). In March 2014, the Government also announced that up to 40,000 of these families would start receiving help a year earlier than planned (in 2014/15), 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.

This report covers evidence from the Phase One Troubled Families Programme. The 'early starters' for the expanded programme had commenced their activities at the stage when the final wave of fieldwork took place in autumn 2014 / spring 2015, however, and the evaluation captured stakeholders' views on the transition to the new programme.

## 1.2 Evaluation aims and methodology

The aims of the evaluation were:

- To understand how the Troubled Families Programme has made a difference to the lives of families, both in terms of outcomes and experience of services
- To learn how the Troubled Families Programme has changed local delivery approaches
- To estimate the impact of the programme on a range of intended outcomes; 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 authorities, 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 the way local services were designed, managed and delivered. Telephone interviews were then conducted with a further 50 Troubled Families Coordinators, to explore any variation in the local Troubled Families Programme delivery models operating outside of the case study areas. The process evaluation also included a parallel set of qualitative interviews with 22 families, interviewed towards the start of their intervention and at an interval of 12-18 months later, sampled from a sub-set of ten case study local authorities.
- **An impact evaluation** – this strand aimed 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. Given the complexity of the evaluation, two separate and independent methodologies were used. First, a quasi-experimental research design used outcome data from linked 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. Separately, interviews were carried out with 495 families, between March and October 2014, who started on the programme around nine months earlier; and with a 'comparison' group of 314 families, these being families identified as eligible and just about to start (or having only very recently started) the programme.
- **An economic evaluation** – this strand aimed to draw upon data regarding the costs of delivery, obtained from Management Information and the process evaluation, and evidence of (net) outcomes achieved for participants, estimated as part of the impact evaluation. Savings were to be examined from the perspective of society and the state, according to Green Book and DWP guidance. Owing to the results from the impact evaluation, it was *not* possible to undertake a full Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) of the programme. However, the evaluation team worked with DCLG to develop a Troubled Families Cost Savings Calculator, and provided guidance for local authorities to conduct their own economic analysis at a local level.

Ecorys was also commissioned to oversee a national monitoring system for the Troubled Families Programme. The **Family Monitoring Data (FMD)** was based on reporting by local authorities using standardised measures relating to family composition, profile, and different types of problem issues<sup>3</sup>. Data was provided for families starting their intervention between April 2012 and December 2014, and compiled into a single national dataset. The cleaned and weighted<sup>4</sup> sample of 16,156 families<sup>5</sup> represents 13 per cent of the 129,124 families worked with nationally at this stage in the programme<sup>6</sup> (Whitley, 2016).

A detailed account of the method design for each strand of the evaluation can be found within the series of technical reports accompanying this final synthesis report. The technical reports explain in full any caveats or limitations to the evaluation data sources and how these were taken into account within the analysis.

## 1.2 Report structure

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter two** examines how the programme was set up and implemented at a local level. It considers the range of local delivery models that were set in place, and the factors influencing their design. It goes on to examine the key features of family intervention, and the effectiveness of the Delivery Agreement between DWP and DCLG in addressing the employability dimensions of the programme. It concludes by reviewing the evidence for local services and systems transformation.
- **Chapter three** examines the need and characteristics of the families who were supported within the programme in closer detail. It starts by looking at how local authorities responded to the PbR Financial Framework, including local decision-making around the local 'discretionary' filter, and how families were assessed and prioritised. It goes on to examine the profile of families within the cohort, including the type and complexity of families' needs upon starting on the programme.
- **Chapter four** reviews the evidence for the impacts and outcomes from the programme. First, it explains the outcome measures that were selected and the reasons for their inclusion within the evaluation. It then describes the methods used to assess impact; their advantages and limitations. Finally, the section presents the impact findings for each of the principal outcome measures in turn.
- **Chapter five** presents the conclusions from the evaluation. It starts by reviewing the main achievements of the programme, and those areas where the programme was less successful. It then goes on to consider a range of plausible explanations for the impact results and the extent to which these are supported by the evidence from the

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the Family Monitoring Data (FMD) does not constitute official Government statistics.

<sup>4</sup> Local returns were weighted according to the sample size submitted, after cleaning the data. The weighting used is:  $10\% \div (\text{sample size submitted})$ . Following this approach, local authorities submitting a 10% sample have been given a weight of 1; local authorities submitting more than 10% have been weighted less than 1; and local authorities submitting less than 10% have been weighted greater than 1.

<sup>5</sup> In total, there were 22,190 adults and 31,328 children in the sample.

<sup>6</sup> A 13% sample provides a margin of error of  $\pm 0.72$  at the 95% confidence level.

different strands of the evaluation. Finally, it offers some overall reflections and lessons learned for the Expanded Troubled Families Programme.

## 2 Programme design and implementation

This chapter sets the backdrop for the evaluation by describing how local authorities responded to the requirements of the national Troubled Families Programme, drawing upon evidence from 70 local authorities<sup>7</sup>. It considers the rationale for the approach taken by local authorities, and the delivery models they developed during Phase One of the Troubled Families Programme; reflecting on how they evolved and were progressing towards the expanded programme (Section 2.1). It also examines the key features of their family intervention practice, and the extent to which these correspond with the five 'Family Intervention Factors' as conceived by the National Troubled Families Team (Section 2.2); and reviews how local authorities used the additional capacity for building employment skills resulting from the delivery agreement between DWP and DCLG (Section 2.3).

We conclude the chapter by reflecting on the extent to which the Troubled Families Programme achieved the intended impacts on the way services were designed, managed and run; identifying seven key areas where the local effects were the most pronounced, based on the qualitative evidence (Section 2.4).

A full account of the findings from the process evaluation can be found in the separate technical report (White and Day, 2016).

### 2.1 Developing and transforming local services

Since the Troubled Families Programme was formally launched in April 2012, all 152 upper tier local authorities agreed to deliver the Troubled Families Programme, and identify and work with their share of the 120,000 families. They 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. This freedom for local authorities to innovate has resulted in an array of different approaches to delivering the programme.

#### 2.1.1 Rationale for the approach taken

The importance of developing a local solution that took account of the context, pre-existing provision and infra-structure was critical to the rationale for the delivery model adopted. Troubled Family Coordinators discussed how the size, type, structure, local population, existing services and geography of their local authority had influenced their approach. As a result, they typically 'grew' their Troubled Families Programme from pre-existing services and tailored their approach to the political landscape and service infrastructure. Small

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<sup>7</sup> Based on 20 longitudinal case studies tracking the activities of a purposive sample of local authority Troubled Families Teams, their partner organisations and their families during the three-year Phase One Troubled Families Programme; and telephone interviews with Troubled Families Coordinators in 50 further local authorities carried out between December 2014 and January 2015.

unitary authorities 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 political and socio-economic variation across the district councils 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 choices and opportunity for innovation.

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.

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 cut costs, streamline services and reduce any duplication across provision was typically reported as the backdrop to engaging with the Troubled Families Programme. In fact, it often helped build the case for the programme as a means of reducing the reliance on public services by high cost families.

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. Views varied about whether to outsource provision to external providers such as those in the voluntary sector. Time was an important consideration and resulted in pragmatic decisions to either outsource or not, depending on whether a local authority had a pre-existing arrangement with a particular voluntary sector partner. Previous experience of commissioning, as well as views about the importance of involving the voluntary sector, also led local authorities to adopt different approaches.

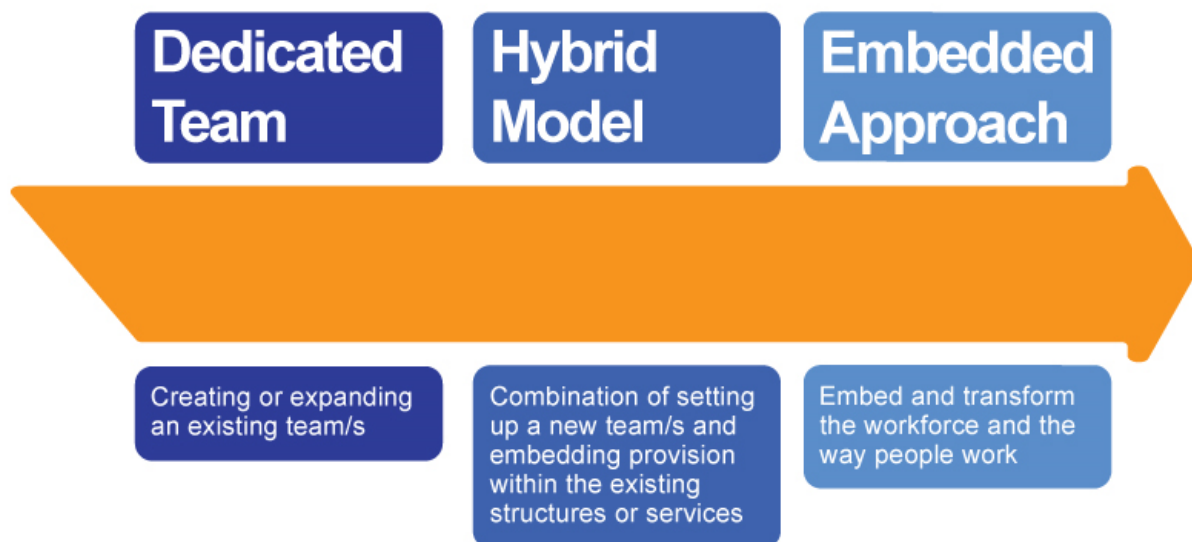
A final factor underlying the rationale for the aims and design adopted was a concern about the sustainability of the work and what would happen at the end of the Troubled Families Programme. Local authorities wanted to avoid people seeing their Troubled Families Programme as a service or project with 'a shelf life' and instead wanted to ensure they were developing an approach to working with families that would be sustained beyond March 2015. This prompted considerations regarding 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 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 (a 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 groupings we adopted did not take account of 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.

**Figure 2.1 The delivery models**



Alongside these different approaches to delivering family intervention a proportion of the Troubled Families cohort was supported 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.

**The dedicated team** typically evolved from experience of what worked for the Family Intervention Project<sup>8</sup>; involving a dedicated key worker who works intensively with families for between 12 and 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 (DCS), or equivalent. The team consisted of a number of key workers or equivalent practitioner role, such as family

<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.

support workers, and a range of specialists who were based either in the core team, or in a Voluntary or Community Sector Organisation (VCSO) 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 who was either part of the core team or subcontracted to a voluntary provider or in house 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.

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 all 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 who had already embarked on a programme of workforce reform.

These embedded models tended to have a larger centralised management team whilst they were building the infrastructure consisting of: a Troubled Families Coordinator; Steering Board with senior level involvement from a Director of Children's Services (DCS) or equivalent; a tier of operational managers who managed and supported activity at the local or district level; analysts and 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.

In between the dedicated team and the embedded approach was the **hybrid model** (see Table 2.1). This model integrated, to varying degrees, a combination of team expansion, or the creation of a team, alongside provision (i.e. 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 landscape and service infrastructure. This could result in some quite complex and devolved structures as the provision was, for example, weaved into an integrated Early Help 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.



**Table 2.1 Typical features of the 'hybrid' delivery model**

- **A combination of in-house and VCSO providers delivering intensive and lower level family intervention support**, and step-down or 'maintenance' support when a case is closed.
- **One or more local authority or VCSO teams which provided the classic Family Intervention Project type model working intensively with families** (working with a low caseload of around five to eight families for between six and 18 months but typically nine to 12 months). These teams might be embedded in a number of area-based teams or work across the whole local authority.
- **Individual key or lead workers who were based in existing teams or embedded in a number of area-based teams or different services** adopted the family intervention approach. The workers either had a dedicated caseload of Troubled Families, or they worked with Troubled Families alongside their current caseload of families (i.e. they had a mixed caseload and were engaged in cross-sector working). Typically, these workers were allocated families with a slightly 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 less intensive 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. 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.

### **2.1.3 Moving towards the expanded programme**

The 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. 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 and to prepare for rolling out their whole-family approach to the wider children and families' workforce. Supervision practice (including the use of clinical psychologists and the training of supervisors) and peer support networks were honed and refined to help support the development of practice. The range of specialists aligned to the core teams who were supporting key and lead workers were expanded to include specific areas (such as mental health and domestic violence) where gaps in provision were identified.

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 criteria for eligibility and having the freedom to set the outcomes framework. Unsurprisingly, given the underlying intentions of the expanded programme, local authorities with a dedicated team were moving towards embedding all or some of 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 adopting whole family working across the workforce, there was some discussion about creating a small dedicated team to respond to the needs of the very intensive high level and complex families.

## 2.2 Working with families

The national guidance document published by Government to underpin the Troubled Families Programme identified five 'Family Intervention Factors' (DCLG, 2012b), which derived from the evidence base for working with families; including the evaluation of the Family Intervention Projects (FIPs)<sup>9</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. The five family intervention (FI) factors were:

1. A worker, dedicated to a family

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<sup>9</sup> The Family Intervention Factors are a distillation of the eight critical factors of family intervention developed by the FIP Programme evaluation, which were further developed and simplified. Refer to: White, et al. (2008).

2. Practical 'hands-on' support
3. A persistent, assertive and challenging approach
4. Considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence; and,
5. Common purpose and agreed action

It is important to note that local authorities did not necessarily use the five FI factors explicitly as the basis of staff training or development, and indeed differences in terminology were apparent across the local authorities covered by the process evaluation. Nonetheless, there was a good level of recognition of the family intervention factors, and these were used as a reference point for exploring how family intervention was implemented in practice.

The role of a **dedicated key or lead worker** who works closely with family members was central to the programme. 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 greater numbers of families.

The evaluation evidence pointed towards the Troubled Families key 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. 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 opportunity was greatly valued by many Troubled Families teams and, coupled with the regularity of contact time that was possible with families, was thought to have been essential for tackling entrenched problems within the family.

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. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of this model was often thought to be diminished when working with less intensive families. Here, the 'lighter touch' approach often more closely resembled pre-existing support with regard to the frequency and types of contact made with the family.

The second Family Intervention Factor relates to the Troubled Families worker taking a **practical, hands-on role** in supporting practical tasks within the family. The rationale was to move away from practitioners viewing their role as simply co-ordinating and referring families onwards to other agencies for support, which was a perceived criticism of more traditional lead professional roles. 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 and for building the trust and relationship with a family. 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.

The need for **persistence and determination** in engaging with families was very apparent from the qualitative work. Troubled Families workers regularly encountered resistant families for whom a period of weeks or months was required to gain their co-operation to

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.

Troubled Families workers reported that resistance commonly stemmed either from families not perceiving the need for change, or viewing co-operation 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, or grew tired of their intrusion in their lives. The Troubled Families worker therefore needed to challenge families’ expectations and to push back throughout the time they were working with families.

The focus on the **‘family as a whole’** was widely acknowledged as being a necessary part of family intervention by local Troubled Families services and partner organisations alike. Local practices varied quite considerably, however, and whole-family working was described and understood in different ways. 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 focussing on two or three key individuals, involving other family members more selectively. This was based on the worker’s assessment of need and active intervention was not always deemed necessary for all family members at the same time, although Troubled Families workers were still mindful to keep a whole-family oversight. 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.

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.

Troubled Families workers also identified safeguarding benefits from having time to observe interactions between family members. 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 engage with the Troubled Families worker outside of the family home within a more neutral environment.

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. Elsewhere, whole-family working was made problematic by fractious relationships or historic issues of Domestic Abuse (DA), which prevented Troubled Families workers from re-contacting estranged family members, whilst access was more difficult for adults or children in care or custody.

The last of the five Family Intervention Factors concerns having a '**common purpose and agreed action**'. This principally applies to the relationship between the key or lead worker and other agencies with involvement in families' lives. An aspiration of the programme was to empower Troubled Families workers to co-ordinate the work of other agencies; ensuring that families receive consistent messages about the actions required of them, and that any multi-agency working is fully joined up. Practitioners from the case study local authorities generally agreed on the importance of avoiding families having to repeat their stories to different practitioners, and ensuring that their contact with individual agencies was as streamlined as possible throughout the course of the intervention.

The case study research showed that the relationships between local Troubled Families Programmes and other agencies varied considerably on an area-by-area basis during Phase One, but with some broad themes emerging with regard to the challenges of engaging with health professionals; including health visitors and midwives, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), 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.

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. In some local authorities, other agencies had recognised these benefits and were working closely alongside Troubled Families workers. In the better developed examples, the Troubled Families worker would accompany other practitioners to the family to provide a "foot in the door" for statutory agencies, but also to support the family through the process. This level of engagement was not apparent in all areas, however, and many Troubled Families workers faced greater challenges in exerting an influence.

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 because they held a view of the situation for individuals with whom they were working but were not necessarily aware of the wider problems or needs within the family as a whole. This sometimes resulted in some resistance on the part of the latter to the idea of stepping back.

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 multi-agency 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.

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.

## 2.3 Tackling worklessness

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, 2013b). The Agreement included provisions for the secondment of at least one Jobcentre Plus Troubled Families Employment Adviser (TFEA) 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 (SPOC).

Those local authorities qualifying for a Jobcentre Plus SPOC generally reported rapid benefits in terms of relationship-building at a local level. Having the SPOC 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. Although the impact of the Jobcentre Plus SPOC role varied according to the roles and relationships that were established locally, some local authorities reported that there were mutual benefits, with Jobcentre Plus teams showing an improved awareness and understanding of the needs of families, as well as local Troubled Families teams benefiting from the specialist advice.

In contrast to the SPOCs, the TFEA secondments often 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 strengthening the employability dimension of casework. It was also common for TFEAs to run workshops or drop-in sessions for families

and practitioners, alongside one-to-one support. In some cases, TFEAs attended case conferences or multi-agency meetings. The aim of this work was to raise 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.

The challenges encountered by TFEAs underwent a shift during the course of the programme. At the outset, 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 TFEAs found themselves underutilised. There was an inevitable period of testing-out and proving their value to key workers, whilst relationships were built. Following this initial consolidation period, however, the demand for the TFEA resource reached a premium amongst most local Troubled Families teams, and the challenge shifted towards finding ways to apportion a finite resource. Indeed, the TFEAs 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 TFEAs, and this resource had become over-stretched.

The priority to boost capacity for the TFEA 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.

## 2.4 Local services and systems change

In this final section 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 transformed local systems and services depended on the scale and scope of activity undertaken. For this reason, local authorities who were either expanding an existing team or had 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 effects they perceived it to be having.

There were seven main ways in which local systems and structures were identified as having been transformed, from the process evaluation evidence:

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

## 2.4.2 Mainstreaming whole-family approaches

Importantly, the programme **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. 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 whole families 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.

## 2.4.3 Driving innovation

Another key impact identified was the way the Troubled Families Programme **encouraged innovation, and the desire to trial new ways of working**. Local authorities often reported being more informed and 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 achieved. While 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.

Furthermore, the programme 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 co-ordinates 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 VCOSs, as they increased the numbers of staff delivering family intervention, developed the infrastructure, adopted new approaches to identification, and worked with families with different levels of need and for different durations of time.

#### **2.4.4 A stimulus for multiagency partnership working**

While 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 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 and 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, sharing information and bringing them ‘around the table’, was also helping professionals to put the pieces of the jigsaw together and understand the whole family more clearly.

That said, local authorities reflected that their activities were often building on strong partnerships that pre-existed the Troubled Families programme and had provided the foundation for their 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 work together to build capacity. Furthermore, it was questionable whether deep and sustained improvements resulted from partnership working at a local level, beyond individual examples of good practice. The evaluation encountered variable levels of engagement by certain partner organisations (especially among health and adult social care). The good practices for multi-agency planning and data sharing had not always translated into benefits at an operational level.

#### **2.4.5 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. 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.

It was clear from the case study research that the financial framework and criteria, coupled with the expectation to work “at scale”, had helped some local authorities to re-assess 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’**. 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 that had not previously been attempted.

It was evident that, in some local authorities, the financial framework had influenced decisions about the number of families that were worked with during the first (and second) year of the programme in order to be able to draw down more of the lucrative attachment fee element of the funding. Consequently, this behaviour meant that they were also able to **maximise the outcomes that could be achieved for families during the programme period and therefore increased the likelihood of receiving the results payment**. These behaviours were entirely consistent with the intended purpose of the framework.

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 by other services and programmes. 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 PbR 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 (MI) 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 helped to draw attention to any areas of duplication in the work of local organisations. In some areas, however, significant complexities still existed in relation to data sharing.

#### **2.4.6 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; to dig deeper than other professionals and to get to the roots of deeply entrenched problems; to understand the whole family more effectively; to be more closely aligned with partners, to take a more assertive and challenging approach; and to incorporate training and employment as part of the intervention.

**There were also signs that whole-family working had been rolled out to the wider workforce who were working with families with lower levels of need**. 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 adopted a more assertive approach to engaging families and combined both support and challenge, and were open to using sanctions where appropriate.

#### **2.4.7 Improving the 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 TFEA or SPOC 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 financial claims. Whilst 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.

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.

Working alongside the Troubled Families Employment Advisers and the more strategic Employment Coordinators enabled key workers 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 (TFEAs) 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 TFEA, having a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) 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 TFEA 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, and improve basic skills and literacy levels through training and volunteering opportunities.

# 3 The needs and characteristics of families supported

This chapter reviews how local authorities responded to the requirements set out within the Troubled Families Financial Framework, and considers the extent to which the profile of the families supported during Phase One of the programme matched the intended profile. The chapter starts by examining how local authorities implemented the Payment by Results (PbR) criteria, including how they set their local discretionary PbR filter, and the stages through which they subsequently went about identifying eligible families. It goes on to consider how families were assigned to different levels of need and intensity, and how local authorities determined the order in which to work with their eligible families.

The second part of the chapter examines the characteristics of families within the cohort. We draw upon the analysis from the national administrative datasets, face-to-face survey of families, and Family Monitoring Data (FMD) to review the personal and household characteristics of families who started on the programme. We then go on to consider the historical issues experienced by these families, in relation to employment, education and child welfare, and crime and offending history, before comparing the profile of families within the ‘intensive’ and ‘less intensive’ sub-groups within the programme.

Finally, we consider how far the evaluation data can be used to estimate the proportion of families meeting the national eligibility criteria for the programme, and we seek to explain the differences from the results that were reported by local authorities.

## 3.1 Local implementation of the PbR framework

The Troubled Families Programme was underpinned by a Financial Framework (DCLG, 2014), which aimed to ensure that the funding was targeted at the priority issues. The eligibility criteria reflected DCLG’s definition of ‘Troubled Families’ as households that:

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

All families meeting *all of* criteria 1-3 were to be automatically included in the programme<sup>10</sup>. Families meeting *any two of* criteria 1-3 who were a “cause for concern” were also potentially eligible providing that they met a locally determined assessment of need. Local authorities were tasked with identifying a discretionary filter to serve as a proxy for criterion 4 (“high cost”). The guidance from DCLG indicated that this might include families with health problems, those with a child on a Child Protection Plan or

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<sup>10</sup> A more precise set of eligibility criteria were provided, corresponding with each of the first three criteria to ensure a greater degree of objectivity: 1) young people involved in crime and families involved in anti-social behaviour; 2) households affected by truancy or exclusion from school; and, 3) households that also have an adult on Department for Work and Pensions out of work benefits

where there was a risk of the child becoming 'looked after', families with a high level of Police call-outs or where adult offending was an issue, and families involved in gang-related crime.

Local authorities were tasked with identifying approximately one-third of their share of the 120,000 families in 2012/13 and the majority in 2013/14. A Payment-by-Results (PbR) mechanism was used to make payments, with a proportion of the total £4,000 funding available per family paid upfront as an 'attachment fee' for the number of families with whom the local authority started working, and the remainder based on a menu of outcomes corresponding again with the four main issues that the programme sought to tackle ('results-based payments'). The financial model was based on an assumption of local authorities being in a position to claim their results-based payments at around 12 months after the start of the intervention.

The PbR structure was designed with the aim of incentivising local authorities to work with families at pace, thereby maximising the chance of drawing down the full available funding amount whilst ensuring that the programme remained on target to 'turn around' the 120,000 families at a national level. Moreover, the audit trail for the Financial Framework required a high degree of accountability and assumed a certain degree of multi-agency co-operation and data sharing to bring together the data into one master list.

### **3.1.1 Responding to the PBR criteria**

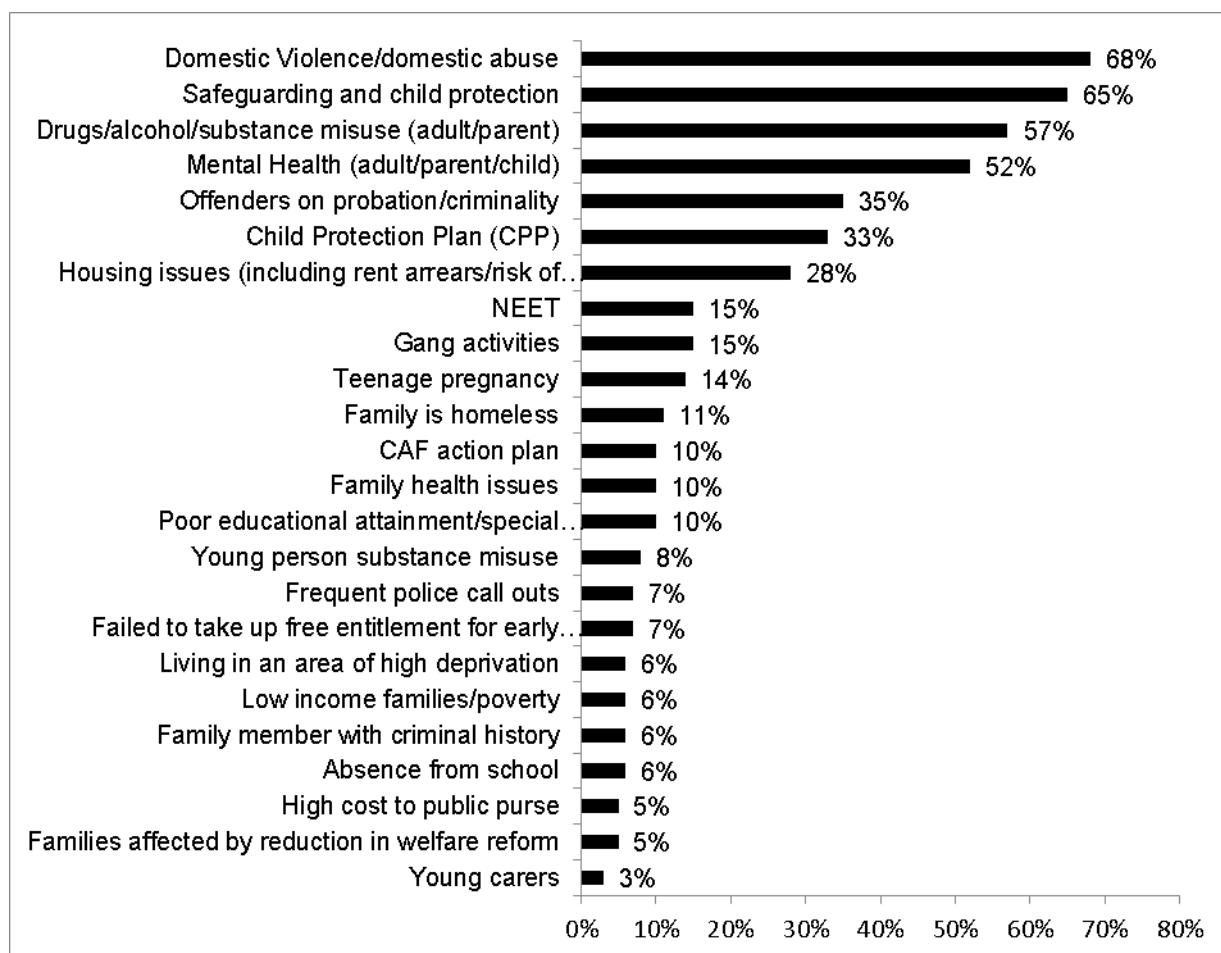
Local authorities generally acknowledged the role of the PbR framework in aligning local Troubled Families Programmes with the national policy objectives, whilst ensuring that practitioners understood and responded to the diversity of families' needs and circumstances at a *practice* level. Troubled 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 discretionary filter played a central role in ensuring that local authorities could shape the programme around local definitions of need. Ecorys conducted an online survey of Troubled Families Coordinators towards the start of the national evaluation in May 2013 as part of the initial scoping work for the evaluation. The survey asked local authorities about the local 'discretionary' indicators that were in use at this relatively early stage during the roll-out of the programme. The results are presented at Figure 3.1 (overleaf)<sup>11</sup>. As the chart illustrates, the filter was widely used by local authorities to pick up other acute issues not covered by the four core PbR criteria that were deemed important in the local context. The number of discretionary local criteria per LA ranged from one to as many as 14. Over half of the local authorities used five or more local criteria, which allowed for a degree of flexibility in decision-making around which families to work with.

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<sup>11</sup> This was asked as an open question, and code frames were subsequently created to group the responses.

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



Base: 145 local authorities

Source: Ecorys (2013, unpublished)

### 3.1.2 Identifying families

Local authorities identified using some combination of the following two main approaches to gather the evidence needed to identify eligible families:

- **“Data wash”** – this approach involved the preparation of a master list of eligible families, by matching school attendance and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) data and/or youth crime data, and then cross-checking against DWP employment records. A further step was needed to match against the local criteria. Lists were prepared in advance for Year 1 families and updated for Years 2 and 3. 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 multi-agency 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 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), or latterly via the local Early Help Hub (EHH).

Not surprisingly, all of the local authorities covered through the research described having used a variant on the **data wash** approach during Year 1 of the Troubled Families Programme. Whilst not an explicit requirement of the Troubled Families Programme, an initial centralised data gathering exercise was required to assess the total number of families falling within scope for the Troubled Families Programme. The matching of education, youth crime/ASB and employment data was unprecedented on this scale in most local authorities, and the identification of the Year 1 cohort represented a distinct milestone in engaging schools, Youth Offending Services (YOSs) and other partner organisations and operationalising the local Troubled Families Programme.

There were mixed views on the effectiveness of a data wash approach. Local authorities quite often found that attendance and ASB data 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.

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 was 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.

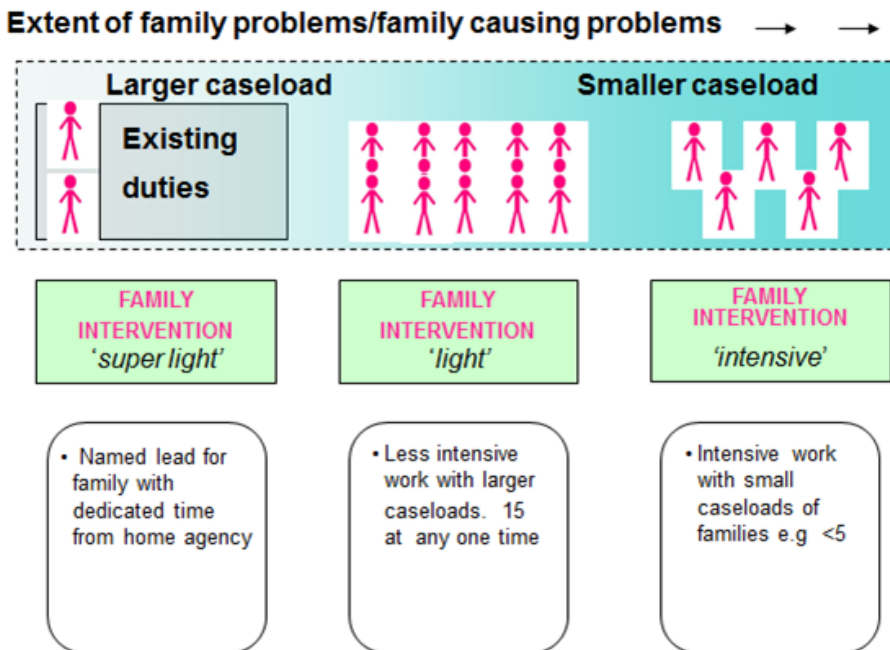
Most of the case study local authorities also quickly recognised the need to set in place arrangements for key workers or partners to make **active referrals**, to run alongside the data-matching, although many had set these arrangements in place from the outset. This brought a greater number and range 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. 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 2 and referral panels were playing a more significant role in filtering and selecting families, which made active identification feasible.

### **3.1.3 Assigning levels of need / intensity**

The eligibility criteria for the programme were sufficiently broad to include families across a wide spectrum of needs. Generally, the programme was located in-between Early Help

(Tier Two) at the lower end of the scale and statutory Social Care intervention at the higher end (Tier Four). Local Troubled Families teams nearly always used some kind of marker to denote level of intensity, which informed caseload planning. The original guidance from the national Troubled Families Team included a threefold classification of 'intensive', 'light' and 'superlight' (Figure 3.2). This was provided to illustrate how local casework might be organised, but the precise arrangements were left to the discretion of local teams.

**Figure 3.2 Degrees of the family intervention service**



Source: DCLG (2013a)

Such categories were largely nominal, and local Troubled Families teams found that the distinction between levels of intensity was porous – families' needs were often subject to fluctuation during the course of their intervention, whilst cases initially assessed as low intensity were subject to rapid escalation upon the disclosure of more serious issues.

### 3.1.4 The Phasing of families onto the programme

The process evaluation showed that it was not uncommon for local authorities to prioritise the highest need families for support during the initial stages of the programme<sup>12</sup>, usually on the grounds that there was substantial unmet need, and that working with the most acute cases maximised the potential impact of the programme. This strategy aimed to reduce the need for crisis intervention amongst a small number of families who placed the

<sup>12</sup> This question was also asked in the May 2013 survey of local authorities by Ecorys. When asked: "What approach is used to determine the order in which families start their intervention on the programme?", 34 per cent of local authorities answered "Those with the greatest needs/problems first"; 25 per cent answered "as and when families are identified", 4 per cent answered "Those with the lowest needs/problems first" and just 1 per cent answered: "Selected at random from waiting lists". The remaining 36 per cent did not identify a particular strategy (Base: 142 local authorities).



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, where sanctions and sometimes even relocation or rehousing were necessary to enable the intervention to take place. Other areas had not explicitly set out to work with the “most troubled” first, but nonetheless found that cases were initially skewed towards those families with more complex needs - partly reflecting the fact that referring partner agencies tended to put forward the families in greatest need.

This overall trend is borne out to some extent by the survey. The ‘waiting list’ impact design inevitably meant that the comparison families joined the programme at a later date than those who were interviewed from the Troubled Families group<sup>13</sup>. Across the range of characteristics reviewed for the survey impact analysis, it appears that the families starting the programme in 2013 were, on average, somewhat more disadvantaged than the 2014 starters based on the unweighted data, although the differences are not very large. These differences *may* reflect survey non-response bias, but more plausibly represent genuine changes in the profile of families over time.

Despite some apparent front loading of more intensive cases, local authorities generally reported a consistent throughput of new referrals at both higher and lower levels of need, during the remainder of the Phase One programme. It was not the case that they worked their way through pre-defined lists of families, and there was an inevitable degree of flux within the cohort at a local level as subsequent waves of data matching and partner referrals uncovered previously unmet needs. Where changes were reported to the profile of families joining the programme, these also reflected adjustments to local PbR screening processes. In some areas, the improved accuracy of the data matching meant that it was possible to identify eligible families who previously fell out of scope using the available sources of data.

## 3.2 Families supported and their characteristics

In the previous section, we considered the criteria that local authorities used to identify and prioritise their families, and the processes through which families were phased onto the programme. In this next section we review the profile of the families who went on to start on the programme, and whether the ‘right families’ were indeed supported. This section draws upon three principal sources of data from the evaluation:

- The face-to-face survey of families
- The analysis of linked national administrative datasets; and,
- The Family Monitoring Data (FMD) dataset.

### 3.2.1 Personal and household characteristics

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<sup>13</sup> To re-cap, the first group (the Troubled Families group) covers families starting the Programme between Spring and Autumn 2013, whereas the comparison group covers families starting later (between Spring and Autumn 2014).

The Family Monitoring Data (FMD) provides the principal source of data on the background characteristics of families in the programme, based as it is on a reasonably large sample of families (16,156) drawn from almost all local authorities (147). The analysis from the national administrative datasets is of more limited value for analysing family size and composition, as the linking process inevitably resulted in a greater number of missing observations. However, the national administrative data is the principal source of information on outcomes, as we discuss further below.

**The FMD shows that the typical family composition of the Troubled Families group was dissimilar to families within the general population in the UK, but similar to those supported by previous family intervention programmes<sup>14</sup>.** According to the FMD results, families who received an intervention included a higher than average proportion of lone parents, at 48 per cent compared with 16 per cent in the general population (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Family sizes were also typically larger than the UK average. Well over one-third of parents had three or more children, compared to a national average of 14 per cent, and the cohort also included a sizeable proportion of larger families with five or more children (at 9 per cent). More than one in ten families (14 per cent) had three or more adults in the household, including young people over the age of 18 (Whitley, 2016).

Whilst a majority of the families within the FMD dataset included teenage children, less than one third (28 per cent) of families included a child under five years old. This figure is likely to be explained in part by the criteria from the financial framework. The measures of school attendance and youth crime/ASB reduced the probability that the programme would include families with children below school age (and below the age of criminal responsibility), to whom these measures do not apply. As discussed in the previous section, the fourth discretionary criterion was often used to provide more flexibility in those families who were assessed as being eligible for inclusion within the programme. However, this does not entirely offset the effects of the PbR criteria, as there would be a disincentive for local areas to include families for whom the results-based payments were unlikely to be achieved.

The figures for housing tenure are much as expected, given the low levels of employment and high benefit claimant rates within the cohort. Local authorities reported that the vast majority of families (90 per cent) rented their homes. Most (69 per cent) were renting from the local authority or a housing association, with comparatively few (20 per cent) renting in the private sector. Where the ethnicity is known, a considerable majority of the primary carers in the families within the FMD sample were White British (80 per cent), which is the same as the national average for England (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

The survey also captured background data on family characteristics for the Troubled Families group, although the smaller sample sizes mean that the findings are less likely to be representative of Troubled Families at a programme level<sup>15</sup>. Overall, the results are in

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<sup>14</sup> Evaluations of the Family Intervention Projects (White, et al. 2008) and Family Pathfinder Programme (York Consulting, 2011) also showed that the families who were supported included a high proportion of lone parents (64 per cent and 63 per cent respectively); and a high proportion of White British parents and carers (88 per cent and 77 per cent respectively). As would be expected given the focus of each Programme, the families typically also exhibited a range of characteristics associated with socioeconomic disadvantage.

<sup>15</sup> 495 families, sampled from 10 local authorities

line with the Family Monitoring Data. There was a high share of families with three or more children amongst the primary carers who were interviewed for the survey, and a high proportion of lone parents (67 per cent, which is somewhat higher than the FMD figure of 48 per cent). The vast majority of the primary carers were women (92 per cent<sup>16</sup>).

The survey data also provides a snapshot of the disability and Special Educational Needs (SEN) status of the Troubled Families group. Very high percentages of survey respondents reported that at least one household member had a limiting long-standing illness or disability (75 per cent of the Troubled Families group and 67 per cent of the comparison group). Around half of each group said they had at least one child with SEN status or other special needs. These figures provide an indication of the complexity of families' needs upon starting the programme.

### **3.2.2 Historical issues experienced by families**

A significant volume of data was captured and analysed regarding families' needs and issues prior to participation on the programme. In this next section, we provide an overview of the headline findings grouped under three main domains: employment; education and child welfare; and crime and offending history, which broadly correspond with the national criteria for the programme.

The findings demonstrate that the participating families experienced significant levels of need. Based on local authority reports, half of the families in the treatment group met at least some of the crime/anti-social behaviour criteria, whilst 77 per cent met one or more of the educational criteria and 86 per cent met one or more of the out-of-work criteria. The circumstances families faced before starting on the programme are examined in further detail below. A full account can also be found in the corresponding technical reports for the evaluation.

#### **Employment**

Based on the national administrative data (Bewley, et al, 2016), just under three-tenths of the intervention families (29 per cent) had one or more adults in employment 12 months before starting on the programme. Consequently, a relatively high share of families had at least one adult claiming out-of-work benefits. Around one-tenth (12 per cent) of families in the intervention group had an adult on JSA; around one in seven (15 per cent) included an adult on incapacity benefits; and in total 47 per cent of households included at least one adult claiming out-of-work benefits. The situation had slightly worsened for the intervention group one month before they started on the programme. By this stage, the proportion of families with at least one adult claiming out-of-work benefits had increased by around two percentage points. This is consistent with employment-related issues being a contributory factor in the referral of some families to the programme.

Similar patterns emerge if we look at individual-level data from the same data source (see Table 3.1, below). Here, the majority of adults claiming some sort of out-of-work benefit received either JSA or incapacity benefits, which is in line with the low rate of employment participation.

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<sup>16</sup> The Family Monitoring Data does not include gender data for the primary carer, so a comparison is not possible with the survey on this variable.



**Table 3.1 History of claiming benefits – national administrative data**

	12 months prior to programme start	1 month prior to programme start
	%	%
Adults on JSA	11.9	12.2
Adults on incapacity benefits	14.9	16.8
Adults on out-of-work-benefits (national criteria)	45.6	47.7
Adults in employment	29.0	34.9
<i>Bases: all main respondents</i>	36,825	

Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

Regarding the history of time spent on benefits, Table 3.2 (below) shows that the average duration of claims for out-of-work benefits within the 12 months prior to the start of the programme was 29 weeks, whilst the average time spent in employment was only 22 weeks. The average amount of time spent claiming JSA and incapacity benefits was 11 weeks.

**Table 3.2 History of time spent in benefits - national administrative data**

	Within 12 months of programme start
Average number of weeks claiming JSA	10.7
Average number of weeks claiming incapacity benefits	11.0
Average number of weeks claiming out-of-work benefits	28.8
Average number of weeks in employment	22.2
<i>Bases: all main respondents</i>	36,825

Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

The survey investigated families' employment histories using self-reporting data (Purdon and Bryson, 2016). The results concurred broadly with those obtained from the administrative data, with a predominance of low levels of prior employment and frequent periods spent on benefits. Table 3.3 shows that two-thirds of the Troubled Families respondents reported that no adults in the household were in paid work 12 months earlier. Around one in ten (12 per cent) carers responding to the survey had never been in paid work, and just one quarter (26 per cent) reported having spent most of the time working. Figures for partners (where applicable) provide a more positive picture: only six per cent had never been in paid work and over half (55 per cent) had spent most of the time working. Regarding benefits, almost half of surveyed families included an adult claiming

either IS or JSA, whilst over half (57 per cent) included at least one adult in receipt of a disability-related benefit one year earlier.

**Table 3.3 Economic circumstances (one year before the interview) – survey data**

Troubled Families group	
%	
<b>Whether any adult in paid work one year ago:</b>	
Yes	33
No	67
<b>Working history of main carer:</b>	
Never been in paid work	12
Spent most of time out of paid work	43
Spent about as much time in paid work as out	19
Spent most of time working	26
<b>Working history of partner (where applicable):</b>	
Never been in paid work	6
Spent most of time out of paid work	23
Spent about as much time in paid work as out	16
Spent most of time working	55
<b>Household in receipt of IS or JSA one year ago:</b>	
Yes	48
No	52
<b>Household in receipt of a disability-related benefit one year ago:</b>	
Yes	57
No	43
<i>Bases: all main respondents (survey)</i>	
	495

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2015)

**Overall, both the national administrative and survey data sources showed the fragile employment situation of the Troubled Families cohort, and a high level of dependency on benefits at the point when they were about to start (or had recently started) on the programme.** The high proportion of families in the survey in receipt of disability-related benefits is a strong indicator of the underlying health and mobility problems of the sample, and the extent to which these are likely to have been a factor in families' recent employment history. While these figures might appear to be at odds with

the NIS data, which showed that around one quarter (26 per cent) of families included an adult claiming incapacity benefits one year prior to the start of the programme, the survey covered anyone within the household with a disability, and adopted a wider definition of disability-related benefits than those recorded within the administrative dataset.

### **Education and child welfare**

School attendance and behaviour was a primary outcome measure for the Troubled Families Programme, as reflected in the inclusion of the school absence criterion within the PbR financial framework. The findings from the analysis of national administrative datasets (Bewley et al., 2016) showed that the average absence rate for the child with the highest level of absence in the family was around 13 per cent both one and three terms prior to programme start<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, one year prior to programme start, 4.8 per cent of participating families had a child with a fixed exclusion from school. Regarding children's welfare; more than a third of families included a child 'in need', and 4.1 per cent had a child 'looked after' (in care). The situation had slightly improved for most indicators by one month before the start of the programme. One exception to this was the proportion of children classified as 'in need', where the situation worsened, with 32 per cent of families having a child in need 12 months prior to starting on the programme and 41 per cent of families in this position one month before the programme start. It seems plausible that a proportion of families were referred to the programme with the express purpose of avoiding further escalation of safeguarding concerns and therefore to avoid children being taken into care.

### **Crime and offending**

The findings from Bewley et al. (2016) show a relatively extended history of criminal and/or offending behaviour amongst families within the intervention group (Table 3.4). At household level, within the 12 months prior to programme start just over one tenth of families had a child who received a caution or conviction and around 17 per cent of families had an adult in a similar situation. Families with any adult or child receiving a custodial or community sentence represented 2.4 per cent and 9.0 per cent of all participating families respectively.

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<sup>17</sup> As an alternative measure, the Family Monitoring Data (FMD) shows that just over half (52 per cent) of children had 15% unauthorised absences or greater from school. The FMD was measured over a single school term prior to starting on the programme.

**Table 3.4 Family offending history - national administrative data**

	Within the 12 months prior to programme start (Troubled Families group)
	%
Any child with a caution or conviction	10.7%
Any child with a conviction	5.1%
Any child with a caution	6.7%
<i>Base</i>	<i>21,087</i>
Any adult with a caution or conviction	16.8%
Any adult with a conviction	12.7%
Any adult with a caution	5.5%
<i>Base</i>	<i>20,589</i>
Any custodial sentence	2.4%
Any community sentence	9.0%
<i>Base</i>	<i>24,794</i>

Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

Table 3.5 gives a more detailed picture of adult criminal behaviour, focusing on violent offences, theft or fraud, anti-social behaviour, breach offences and indictable offences. One month before the programme start the situation had slightly improved compared to eleven months earlier.

**Table 3.5 History of committing particular types of offence - national administrative data**

	12 months prior to programme start (Troubled Families group)	1 month prior to programme start (Troubled Families group)
	%	%
Adults committed violent offence	0.2%	0.1%
Adults committed theft or fraud	0.4%	0.3%
Adults - anti-social behaviour or other	0.9%	0.9%
Adults committed a breach offence	0.2%	0.2%
Adults committed indictable offence	0.9%	0.7%
<i>Base:</i>	<i>36,825</i>	<i>36,825</i>



Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

The survey respondents were also asked about the problems they experienced in their families when they were growing up, and since becoming an adult (Table 3.6). **Again, the findings illustrate significant levels of historical problems for the Troubled Families group, including those dating back to childhood.** Almost one-third of respondents from the Troubled Families group had experienced family break-up as a child, and close to a fifth had experienced domestic abuse or violence. Around two-fifths had experienced family break-up since becoming an adult, and around a third reported experiencing domestic abuse or violence<sup>18</sup>.

**Table 3.6 History of family problems – survey data**

	Troubled Families Group
	%
<b>Problems in family of main carer when growing up:</b>	
Family break-up	30
Domestic abuse/violence	19
Sexual abuse	8
Self/siblings living in care	8
Drugs	7
Alcohol	14
<b>Problems experienced by main carer since becoming an adult:</b>	
Family break-up	43
Domestic abuse/violence	38
Sexual abuse	8
<i>Bases: all main respondents</i>	<b>495</b>

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

Finally, the Family Monitoring Data (FMD) provides useful information regarding the prevalence of issues not captured through the other evaluation data sources. According to the FMD, approaching one-third (31 per cent) of adults had received a clinical diagnosis for current mental health problems at the point when they started their intervention, whilst equivalent diagnosis rates amongst children stood at almost one in five (18 per cent). Based on key worker assessment, around two-thirds of families (67 per cent) were

<sup>18</sup> Again, these variables have been used as matching variables, on the assumption that most of these experiences would have been before the start of the Troubled Families intervention.

experiencing parenting difficulties upon starting their intervention (Whitley, 2016). Taken across all indicators in the FMD dataset, families had seven problem issues at entry based on a mean average, or nine using the median.

### 3.2.3 Levels of intensity

A combination of the FMD and survey data allow us to test the relationship between the level of ‘intensity’ assigned to families by local Troubled Families teams; their characteristics, and the types of support they received<sup>19</sup>. As the survey included a comparison group, it was also possible to assess differences in characteristics and the support offered to families depending on whether they were classified as needing more or less intensive support from the programme, or were not yet participating in the programme at all.

Just over half (51 per cent) of the Troubled Families group in the survey had received ‘intensive’ services. This is reflected in the level and types of support that families reported receiving, with Table 3.7 providing the details. **Across all categories of support, families receiving the intensive services were much more likely to report having had support**, with just 11 per cent of families in this group saying that they received no support from the categories on the list.

**The families receiving ‘less intensive’ services reported receiving less support than those in the intensive group, but they still reported receiving more than those in the comparison group.** The contrast is the sharper *within* the troubled families group than between the less intensive families and the comparison group, for most indicators. These findings give a clear indication that the Troubled Families group received something extra to those families who experienced business as usual. The differences are quite marked across a range of issues, including for those that provide a good match for the five ‘Family Intervention Factors’, such as families accepting responsibilities better; implementing daily routines, and looking after their children better.

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<sup>19</sup> For the Troubled Families group, the sample file for the survey included an indicator from the local authority as to whether the family received ‘intensive’ support through the programme or ‘less intensive’ support, with this information being provided for 93 per cent of the survey respondents in the group.

**Table 3.7 Self-reported receipt of services, by level of support reported by LA – survey data**

	Troubled Families group: intensive services	Troubled Families group: less intensive services	Comparison group (unmatched)
	%	%	%
<b><i>Whether received support in the last year regarding:</i></b>			
Getting on better as a family	50	27	15
Getting children to school each day	37	20	11
Managing money/debts	26	14	8
Getting job/training	17	18	6
Finding things to do in community	21	11	8
Accept responsibilities better	23	7	3
Daily routines	21	6	4
Looking after children better	21	6	9
Stopping getting involved in crime	15	7	5
Feeling safer at home	15	4	4
Making home nicer (e.g. housework)	14	6	3
Keeping children living at home	11	4	4
Reduce drugs	7	4	4
Reduce alcohol	6	1	1
Health issues	-	1	1
School issues	-	1	-
None of these	<b>11</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>56</b>
<i>Bases: all main respondents</i>	<i>241</i>	<i>220</i>	<i>314</i>

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

**In terms of their profile, there is some evidence in the survey that, as expected, those families receiving the intensive services are indeed those with higher levels of need.** For example, 57 per cent of the families receiving higher intensity services had one or more children with a SEN statement or special needs, compared to 46 per cent of the families receiving less intensive services. Table 3.8 summarises the characteristics of the two sub-groups: those receiving more intensive services and those receiving less intensive services. The profiling variables included in the table are those where there was a statistically significant difference between the two sub-groups.

**Table 3.8 Profile of families, by level of support reported by LA – survey data**

	Troubled Families group: intensive services	Troubled Families group: less intensive services
	%	%
Three or more children	15	7
Oldest child 15-16	49	33
At least one child living with neither parent	13	5
Social renter	78	71
Moved at least twice in last three years	8	4
Family member with long-standing illness or disability	78	71
One or more child with SEN/special needs	57	46
Ex-partner has a criminal conviction	15	7
A son has a criminal conviction	19	13
Experienced domestic abuse/violence since becoming an adult	43	30
<i>Bases: all main respondents</i>	241	220

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

### 3.2.4 Meeting the national PbR criteria

Whilst the historical levels of educational, employment and crime amongst the Troubled Families group appear high when compared with the UK general population, some disparities emerge with the PbR results. Based on the national administrative data, the prevalence of some issues – especially those relating to adult and child offending – appears much lower than might be anticipated from the PbR requirements.

To test these differences, Bewley et al. (2016) used the screening data from the national administrative data analysis to calculate the proportion of families participating in the programme over the period to October 2014 who could be observed to meet each of the national PbR eligibility criteria. The results were compared with data provided by local authorities on the same sample of families on the number and type of eligibility criteria met by each family. In some cases, the information provided by local authorities was incomplete, and further data cleaning was necessary. Having cleaned the data<sup>20</sup>, most

<sup>20</sup> Local authorities varied in whether they recorded the detail of the criteria that the family had met for all families in the sample supplied. In other cases, the eligibility criteria were only recorded against a single family member and had to be propagated to all family members. It therefore seems likely that any

families who were recorded as having participated in the programme over the period to October 2014 appeared to meet at least some of the eligibility criteria, according to the information provided by local authorities. Table 3.9 (overleaf) provides a more detailed breakdown as to which of the national eligibility criteria were fulfilled.

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inconsistency between recorded participation and the number of criteria met was due to some local authorities failing to record and/or report complete information.

### 3.9 Percentage of families meeting each of the national criteria – national administrative data

	Treatment group %
<b>Crime/anti-social behavior</b>	
Household with 1 or more under 18-year-olds with a proven offence in the last 12 months <sup>21</sup>	10.3
<u>and/or</u>	
Households where one or more member has an anti-social behaviour order, anti-social behaviour injunction, anti-social behaviour contract, or where the family has been subject to a housing-related anti-social behaviour intervention in the last 12 months	Not known
<b>Any of crime/anti-social behaviour criteria, according to local authority reports</b>	48.8
<b>Education</b>	
Child subject to permanent exclusion; three or more fixed school exclusions across the last 3 consecutive terms;	16.2
<u>Or</u>	
Is in a pupil referral unit <sup>22</sup>	2.4
or alternative provision	1.5
or is not on a school roll	Not known
Is in a pupil referral unit or alternative provision because they have previously been excluded; or is not on a school roll;	3.9
<u>And/or</u>	
A child has had 15 per cent unauthorised absences <sup>23</sup> or more from school across the last 3 consecutive terms	38.2
<b>Any of the education criteria</b>	47.2
According to local authority reports	78.0
<b>Work</b>	
Adult on out-of-work benefits <sup>24</sup>	72.5
According to Local authority reports	86.1
At least two national criteria	39.4
According to local authority reports	92.7
<b>Base (number of families)</b>	17,184

Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

<sup>21</sup> Defined as caution or conviction in the 12 months prior to programme start.

<sup>22</sup> This was only observed up to January 2013.

<sup>23</sup> The definition used in the NIS analysis considered all absences, rather than unauthorised absence only.

<sup>24</sup> Defined as being on ESA, IB, CA, IS and/or JSA, SDA within one month of programme start.

The administrative data contrasts sharply with the estimates for this same sample of families provided by local authorities. **Whilst local authority reports suggested that more than nine in ten of the Troubled Families group supplied in the sample met at least two of the national eligibility criteria, only 39 per cent of these same families could be positively identified as meeting the criteria when using the national administrative data.** There would appear to be two main reasons for the discrepancy between these two sources:

- ◆ the national administrative data does not contain information on all of the eligibility criteria;
- ◆ in some cases, the time-period used to determine whether the family met the eligibility criteria is not stated in the financial framework for the programme.

The crime/anti-social behaviour criteria provide the starkest illustration of the first of these two issues. Whilst the Police National Computer can be used to identify families where children had received a caution or conviction in the 12 months prior to the family starting on the programme, it was not possible to identify those where a family member had engaged in some form of anti-social behaviour over the same time period. As a result, only around one in ten families could be identified as meeting the crime/anti-social behaviour criteria according to the information that was available on the PNC. In contrast, local authorities reported that half of all families in this same sample met the crime/anti-social behaviour criteria (Bewley et al., 2016).

Similar issues are encountered with regard to the education data. The measure of persistent absence used in the analysis of national administrative data was broader than that used to identify whether a family met the eligibility criteria. The omissions from the NPD meant that only around half of all families (47 per cent) could be positively identified as having met the education criteria prior to starting on the programme when using the national administrative data alone. By contrast, local authority reports suggested that over three-quarters of participating families (78 per cent) met the education criteria.

We can conclude, therefore, that **data coverage and comparability issues explain the apparently small proportion of families meeting the eligibility criteria for the programme when relying on data from the national administrative datasets.** The national administrative data neither captures the full range of outcome measures that were used for PbR, nor captures these measures using directly equivalent units of measurement. This is not to suggest that the national administrative data is less robust, particularly given that the information provided by local authorities on the sample of families considered in the administrative data analysis suggested that the vast majority of them did meet the eligibility criteria. Indeed, the rationale for using the national administrative datasets was their ability to provide verifiable impact estimates. However, it is apparent that direct comparisons between the national administrative data and the PbR data are unhelpful. Of course, the comparison of outcomes between the Troubled Families group and the matched comparison group use identical metrics so these comparability issues have no bearing on the ability of the evaluation to detect impacts.

There were also some notable omissions in the education data when trying to use it to identify families that met the education criteria. Whether a child was in a pupil referral unit

was only recorded for academic years prior to January 2013<sup>25</sup>, so these data were missing for a large proportion of treated families. It was also not possible to ascertain from the NPD that a child was not on a school roll.

Of the three national criteria, it was most straightforward to identify families that met the worklessness eligibility criteria. However, in this case the financial framework did not specify when, or for how long, an adult within the family should be on out-of-work benefits before the family would be considered eligible for the programme. Around 70 per cent of families had an adult on out-of-work benefits in the month before the family started on the programme, but local authority reports suggested that 86 per cent of families met this particular criterion. This may be due to local authorities assessing eligibility some time before the family started on the programme, so that the proportion of families with an adult on out-of-work benefits had fallen by this point.

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<sup>25</sup> The pupil referral unit census was incorporated into the school census in the 2013/14 academic year, but the school-level identifier needed to determine whether a child was within a pupil referral unit from this point onwards was not included in the data extract.



## 4 Impacts and outcomes from the programme

A central aim of the evaluation was 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 aspires to improve. Two separate and independent methodologies were used. A quasi-experimental research design used outcome data from national administrative datasets and a large-scale face-to-face survey of families, compared families going through the programme with a matched comparison group.

The key finding from the analysis of administrative data is that across a wide range of outcomes, covering the key objectives of the programme - employment, benefit receipt, school attendance, safeguarding and child welfare - we were unable to find consistent evidence that the Troubled Families Programme had any significant or systematic impact. That is to say, our analysis found no impact on these outcomes attributable to the programme 12 to 18 months after families joined the programme. The vast majority of impact estimates were statistically insignificant, with a very small number of positive or negative results.

Given the major limitations imposed by data quality (detailed in Bewley et al, 2016) the administrative data results in isolation cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that the programme had no impact at all, and it is important to consider this result in conjunction with the other evidence contained in the evaluation as a whole and presented elsewhere in this report. These results are, however, consistent with those found by the separate analysis using survey data, which also found no significant or systemic impact on outcomes related to employment, job seeking, school attendance, or anti-social behaviour nine months after families joined the programme.

Although the survey analysis was consistent with the administrative data analysis on the key objectively measurable outcomes described above, a number of statistically significant impacts were found on more subjective and attitudinal measures. Families in the Troubled Families group were more likely to report managing well financially; knowing how to keep on the right track; being confident that their worst problems were behind them, and feeling positive about the future, when compared with a matched comparison group. The impact of the programme on these outcomes was statistically significant.

This analysis estimates the impact of programme participation on these outcomes, relative to non-participation. That is, the findings that overall participation in the programme had no significant or systemic impact does not mean that there were no *changes* in the relevant outcomes for families; simply that any changes (positive or negative) cannot be attributed to participation in the programme, because similar changes were observed for comparable non-participants. In other words, participation in the programme did not in itself result in or cause any change in outcomes at the time points they were observed (around nine months after programme start for the survey and 12 and 18 months after programme start for the administrative data). This applies to all impact estimates described below.

This chapter draws on two technical reports which detail the design and findings from the impact analysis of the administrative data (Bewley et al. 2016) and survey data (Purdon and Bryson, 2016).

## 4.1 Outcome measures

The evaluation measured the impact of the Troubled Families Programme across the range of outcomes that it aspires to improve. The administrative datasets provide objective measures of individual family members' outcomes with regard to benefit receipt and employment; criminal behaviour; school attendance and child welfare. For the employment, benefit and criminal behaviour outcomes, Bewley et al. (2016) report both on outcomes 12 months and 18 months after starting the programme. In this chapter, we focus on the 18-month outcomes, in order to report on somewhat longer term outcomes<sup>26</sup>. School attendance is measured in the third school term following the one in which the family started on the programme.

The outcomes from the national administrative datasets reported here are as follows:

### **Benefits and employment of adult household members:**

- Whether an out-of-work benefit claimant, and number of weeks' receipt during the period
- Whether an incapacity/sickness benefit claimant, and number of weeks' receipt during the period
- Whether a Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) claimant, and number of weeks' receipt during the period
- Whether in employment, and number of weeks in employment during the period

### **Criminal behaviour of adult or child household members:**

- Whether any offences resulting in:
  - caution
  - conviction
  - custodial
  - community sentence

### **School attendance and child welfare, for all children in education in household:**

- Whether absent for 15 per cent of time or more
- Percentage of time absent from school
- Whether on the Child In Need register or in care

The survey was used to capture data on families' outcomes either which were not available from administrative data or for which it was useful to capture the family perspective. For a number of the key outcomes, in particular those relating to benefits, employment, crime and child welfare, the survey also provides a useful cross-check on the

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<sup>26</sup> We comment in footnotes on the pattern of results at 12 months.

results from the administrative data analysis. The timing of the interview meant that these outcomes were somewhat shorter-term in nature than those collected using administrative data: around nine months after starting the programme. They either related to the current situation (e.g. current employment status) or during the three months prior to the interview. These were collected from the main carer (usually the mother) and from the young person (aged 11 to 25) in the family deemed to be most troubled, with proxy information on partners collected from the main carer.

Whilst the impact of the programme on all the outcomes collected in the survey is reported in Purdon and Bryson (2016), in this chapter we restrict ourselves to those which are additional to the national administrative datasets<sup>27</sup>. However, it is important to note that the outcome measures which are directly comparable between the administrative datasets and the survey are as follows:

**Employment, housing and financial stability:**

- Working status, jobseeking and work readiness
- Threat of eviction, repossession, arrears, and satisfaction with housing
- Level of debt and financial management

**Anti-social and criminal behaviour:**

- Contact with the police and criminal justice system
- Anti-social behaviour

**Health and well-being:**

- GP and A&E visits
- Self-reported general health
- Life satisfaction, well-being and depression
- Use of non-prescription drugs and alcohol use

**Family functioning:**

- Relationship quality with partner
- Family violence and conflict

**Attitudes and confidence**

- Self-perceptions of family functioning and confidence about help-seeking

### 4.1.1 Outline of the chapter

The following section provides a brief explanation of the methods employed in both the analysis of the national administrative data and the survey data (for full details see Bewley et al. (2016) and Purdon and Bryson (2016)). In Sections 4.3 to 4.7, we report on the outcome measures collected from the different sources, comparing the outcomes of those going through the Troubled Families Programme with a matched comparison group of

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<sup>27</sup> In other words, we do not report on the survey respondent reports on employment, school attendance and crime outcomes if they largely duplicate the outcomes available from administrative data. Rather, we comment in footnotes on whether the pattern of results from the survey data matches those from the administrative data.

families yet to start in order to measure the impact of the programme. These outcomes cover:

- Benefits, employment, housing and finances (Section 4.3)
- Anti-social and criminal behaviour (Section 4.4)
- School attendance and child welfare (Section 4.5)
- Health, alcohol and drug abuse, well-being and family relationships (Section 4.6)
- Attitudes and confidence (Section 4.7)

## 4.2 The approach to measuring impact

As mentioned previously, the impact of the initial phase of the Troubled Families Programme on families' outcomes has been estimated using both administrative and survey data.

First, outcomes for 15,482 adults and 13,946 children who had entered the programme were tracked using national administrative datasets (NAD) for a period of up to 18 months after programme start. A similar set of individuals from 'comparison' families were tracked in the same way, these being families who were identified by local authorities as meeting at least two of the national eligibility criteria but who had not started the Programme at the time the information was supplied to the evaluation team in Autumn 2014.

Fifty-six local authorities provided the data used in this study between October and November 2014. These data were then matched to national level administrative data sets. Data were obtained on approximately 25 percent of the 120 000 families that participated in the programme, representing a large sample, and enabling us to undertake detailed analysis. However, the data supplied were of variable quality. As a result, some important data were missing, and it was necessary to make certain assumptions in assigning individuals to treatment and control groups. In addition, a significant number of individuals were not matched to certain administrative data sets, and this necessitated further assumptions – for example, we assume that individuals not matched to employment records were not employed. Further details are set out in Bewley et al (2106). The three administrative datasets used to track families over time were:

- The DWP's Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study dataset, which includes information on claims for benefits and participation in employment and active labour market programmes;
- The National Pupil Database, which includes information on educational participation, attainment and welfare; and,
- The Police National Computer dataset, which includes information on cautions and convictions.

The second source of data for the estimation of impacts was a face-to-face interview survey of 495 families carried out between March and October 2014. These were all families who had started on the programme around nine months earlier, and many were still on the programme at the time of the interview (around 70 per cent), so the survey provides data on short-term, or interim, outcomes. A comparison group of 314 families was also included in the survey, these being families identified as eligible and just about to start (or having only very recently started) the programme.

For both the administrative data and survey data analyses, the Troubled Families group and the comparison group were not automatically comparable. In the administrative data, for instance, the Troubled Families group tended to have worst outcomes historically than the families in the comparison group. For example, in the raw data, 57 per cent of the Troubled Families group had at least one adult on out-of-work benefits one year before the programme start, whereas the equivalent percentage<sup>28</sup> for the comparison group was just 28 per cent. To ensure that, when comparing the Troubled Families group with their comparison group, like was being compared to like, the two groups were matched (using propensity score matching)<sup>29</sup>. After the matching the two groups (Troubled Families and comparison) were very similar across all the pre-programme outcomes and characteristics recorded<sup>30</sup>. The corollary was that any difference in outcomes between the Troubled Families group and the matched comparison group could *reasonably* be attributed to the programme, unless there were unobserved differences between the groups that were not controlled for by the matching.

It is possible that in some cases the findings may be subject to measurement error. However, as long as the prevalence of missing or incomplete data is random and/or does not differ systematically between the treated and control groups, the conclusions will remain unbiased. None of the available evidence suggests that such systematic differences exist, and the possibility of significant bias therefore appears unlikely. The process evaluation found that some local authorities had started to roll out 'whole family' working on a larger scale for families with lower levels of need across the wider workforce – particularly with those services who historically may not have worked in this way (White and Day, 2016). Although these families were not directly receiving the intervention through the Programme, there is a small risk that this led to the impacts being underestimated, if these families had improved outcomes as a result and were represented within the comparison group for the evaluation. This does not, however, provide a suitable explanation for the impact results for the higher intensity families, where differences between the intervention provided within the programme and business as usual remained more distinct. In addition, the roll-out does not seem to have been sufficiently widespread to explain why the outcomes for the matched comparison group were so close to the outcomes for the Troubled Families group.

The fact that separate analysis, using survey data, produces results consistent with our analysis is further evidence that any bias that would impact our results to a significant degree is unlikely. However, given the data issues this possibility cannot be entirely excluded. It is not possible to say with certainty how this might affect the reported results.

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<sup>28</sup> Based on a random pseudo-start date.

<sup>29</sup> Propensity score matching is a statistical technique that ensures that two groups (in this case the Troubled Families group and the comparison group) are very similar across a set of 'matching variables'. The matching variables include family characteristics (such as age and gender of family members) as well as the range of problems/issues that families have before starting the programme.

<sup>30</sup> The administrative data analysis involved multiple methods of matching, and a number of different comparison groups, to test the sensitivity of the results to varying methods. This report uses the results from just one of these methods.

## 4.3 Introduction to the impact findings

### 4.3.1 Overview

Sections 4.4 to 4.7 present the findings from the analysis of the national administrative and survey data, measuring the impact of the Troubled Families Programme on families going through it. As explained in Section 4.2, their outcomes are compared to those of a matched comparison group of families yet to enter the programme.

Overall, the analyses found – across nearly all the outcome measures collected – no consistent evidence that the Troubled Families Programme had led to any systemic or significant improvements in families' outcomes over the period that it was possible to observe changes. That is to say, our analysis found no impact on these outcomes attributable to the programme. The vast majority of impact estimates were statistically insignificant, with a very small number of positive or negative results. There were no positive (or negative) impacts identified for housing, employment and jobseeking, anti-social behaviour and crime, school behaviour and attendance, health, drug or alcohol use, family dynamics or wellbeing. This holds true both in terms of the shorter-term outcomes measured within the survey and the medium-term outcomes collected within the administrative data. The exception to this is that, within the survey, significantly more of the families going through the programme reported they were managing well financially, and managing better than a year ago, compared to the matched comparison group.

In terms of families' levels of confidence and expectations about the future there *has* been a detectable impact however. Within the survey, the Troubled Families group were significantly more likely than the matched comparison group to say that they were in control of their lives and that they knew how to keep on the right track. They were also significantly more likely to say that they were confident their worst problems were behind them and that they were feeling positive about the future.

We looked specifically at those families identified by the Troubled Families teams as receiving more intensive services (due to higher levels of need) to explore the impact of the programme on these families. However, there is little to suggest that they did either better or worse than those deemed to require fewer services under the programme<sup>31</sup>.

### 4.3.2 Interpreting the tables

The tables in the sub-sections below each present three columns of data: the percentage or mean responses of the Troubled Families group (first column); the percentage or mean responses of the matched comparison group (second column); and the estimate of impact (that is, the difference, in percentage point terms, between the first two columns of data) (third column<sup>32</sup>). Survey findings are shown to the nearest percent, whilst findings based

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<sup>31</sup> Findings among the high intensity families are reported in detail in Bewley et al. (2016) and Purdon and Bryson (2016).

<sup>32</sup> The differences between the percentages in the first and second columns are calculated using percentages to several decimal points. This explains why the percentage differences do not always reflect a simple subtraction of the two percentages shown in the tables.

on administrative data are shown to one decimal place, because of the substantially larger sample sizes.

In assessing the impact of the programme, we have tested whether, compared to a null hypothesis that the programme had no effect on each of the outcomes considered, the magnitude of any impact was large enough to say with a 95 per cent degree of certainty that the programme did make a difference (i.e. that the difference observed between the samples is genuine and not 'random noise' in the data). These statistically significant differences are marked in the tables with an asterisk.

## 4.4 Benefits, employment, housing and finances

The Troubled Families Programme seeks to move adult family members who are claiming benefits towards work. Using data from the DWP's Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, we measured the impact of the programme both on receipt of benefits and engagement with paid employment. The survey provided further data on any impacts on increased readiness for employment. Within the survey, families were also asked to report on any issues they had had with their housing or rent in the previous three months, in order to measure the impact of the programme on housing stability. The survey also asked families how they were coping financially, given the focus of the Programme on helping families to manage their money and debt.

We found no significant impacts of the programme on families' benefit, employment or housing situations. However, families in the Troubled Families group were doing significantly better than those in the comparison group in relation to how they felt they were managing financially.

### 4.4.1 Benefit claiming

If the Troubled Families Programme is moving adult family members who are claiming benefits towards work, this may manifest itself through a reduction in the proportion of the Troubled Families Programme group claiming incapacity benefits, JSA or out-of-work benefits in general, or a reduction in the number of weeks that adults claimed each of these benefits following their start on the programme. However, there might also be an increase in the proportion claiming JSA, or the amount of time spent on JSA, as those claiming other out-of-work benefits (such as incapacity benefits) become more work-ready. Therefore, whilst a reduction in claims for JSA, incapacity benefits and out-of-work benefits in general would provide the strongest evidence that the Troubled Families Programme was effective, a reduction in claims for incapacity benefits or an increase in claims for JSA might also be consistent with the programme having a positive effect. However, Table 4.1 shows that – 18 months after starting the programme – there is no evidence of statistically significant impacts on any of the outcomes<sup>33</sup>. For instance, 45 per cent of adults in both the Troubled Families and matched comparison groups were claiming out-of-work benefits 18 months after starting the programme. The mean claim length for out-of-work benefits was 33.8 weeks for those on the programme and 34.6 weeks for the matched comparison group.

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<sup>33</sup> Similarly, no significant impacts were found after 12 months.

**Table 4.1: Benefit claiming, 18 months after starting the programme – administrative data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
% claiming out-of-work benefits 18 months after programme start	45.3	45.3	0.0
Number of weeks on out-of-work benefits in 18 months following programme start	33.8	34.6	-0.8
% claiming JSA 18 months after programme start	10.9	11.6	-0.6
Number of weeks on JSA in 18 months following programme start	8.6	9.0	-0.5
% claiming incapacity benefits 18 months after programme start	18.6	19.3	-0.7
Number of weeks on incapacity benefits in 18 months following programme start	12.8	13.8	-1.1

*Base: 15,373 adults*

Source: Bewley et al. (2016)

#### 4.4.2 Employment

A further aim of the Troubled Families Programme is to move adults claiming out-of-work benefits into continuous employment. If the programme has a positive effect in this regard, an increase in the proportion of adults employed 18 months after starting on the programme should be evident. The number of weeks spent in employment following Programme start should also rise following contact with the programme. However, Table 4.2 shows that the programme did not appear to affect either the likelihood that adults were employed 18 months after starting on the programme, or the amount of time that they were employed<sup>34</sup>. Four in ten (40.7 per cent) adults who participated in the programme were in work 18 months after starting it (with adults spending an average of 26.3 weeks of employment) compared to 43.6 per cent of those in the matched comparison group (with an average of 27.8 weeks spent in employment).

<sup>34</sup> Again, there were also no significant impacts 12 months after starting the programme. Likewise, the survey data found no significant impacts on the likelihood of either respondents or their partners being in work around nine months after starting the programme. In addition, within the survey, there were no significant differences in the proportion of young people currently in education, employment or training (87 per cent in the Troubled Families group and 89 per cent in the matched comparison group).



**Table 4.2: Employment, 18 months after starting the programme – administrative data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
% employed 18 months after programme start	40.7	43.6	-2.9
Number of weeks employed in 18 months following programme start	26.3	27.8	-1.5
<i>Base: 11,807 adults</i>			

Source: Bewley et al. (2016)

The survey attempted to capture any early impacts of the programme on work-readiness. Respondents were asked about their and their partner's jobseeking activity and expectations about getting into paid work in the next year. Again, on these outcomes, we found no statistically significant differences between the Troubled Families and matched comparison groups. Table 4.3 shows the proportion of families, in the two groups, in which the main carer respondent or the partner was either in work or actively looking for work. Around four in ten respondents (43 per cent versus 41 per cent) were in work or actively seeking it, whilst the vast majority (87 per cent versus 88 per cent) of partners were doing so. Likewise, the proportions of main carer respondents expecting themselves or their partner to be in paid work in the next year were 59 per cent in the Troubled Families group and 61 per cent in the matched comparison group.

**Table 4.3 Jobseeking and expectations about paid work – survey data**

	Troubled Families Group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
	%	%	
Respondent in work or jobseeking	43	41	2
Respondent expects themselves or partner to be working in next year	59	61	-2
Respondent expects to be working in next year	52	53	-1
<i>Base: all main respondents</i>	495	314	
Partner in work or jobseeking	87	88	-1
<i>Bases: all main respondents with partners</i>	160	132	

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

### 4.4.3 Housing issues

The survey was used to assess the impact of the Troubled Families Programme on the stability of families' housing situations. Using a pre-coded list (as shown in Table 4.4), main carer respondents were asked about any housing problems which they had experienced within the previous three months. They were also asked how satisfied they were with the state of repair of their home using a five-point scale (from very satisfied to very dissatisfied). Overall, three quarters of families in both the Troubled Families (75 per cent) and comparison (73 per cent) groups reported having had no housing issues over the previous three months<sup>35</sup>, with at least nine in ten families in each group reporting no issues across the range of potential problems asked about. There were no statistically significant differences between the Troubled Families and matched comparison group families, with typical differences between them around one to two percentage points. Likewise, families in the Troubled Families group were not significantly more likely to be very or fairly satisfied with the state of repair of their home compared with the matched comparison group: the five percentage point difference (64 per cent versus 59 per cent) is not statistically significant.

Families who were renting were asked whether they had fallen behind with their rent payments during the previous three months. In both the Troubled Families and matched comparison groups, 71 per cent of main carer respondents said that they had not.

**Table 4.4 Housing issues over the previous three months – survey data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
	%	%	
No housing issues	75	73	2
No notice served by landlord to leave property	99	99	0
No evictions	98	97	1
No possession order	96	95	1
Warning meeting/interview with landlord, council, social worker	96	97	0
No bailiff warrant issued	95	97	-1

<sup>35</sup> The mean number of housing issues mentioned was 0.38 among the Troubled Families group and 0.45 among the matched comparison group.

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
No nuisance/ASB complaints	94	93	1
No threat of eviction	93	88	4
No warning letters	90	89	1
Very or fairly satisfied with state of repair of home	64	59	5
<i>Bases: all main respondents</i>	<i>495</i>	<i>314</i>	
No rent arrears	71	71	-1
<i>Bases: all renters</i>	<i>441</i>	<i>266</i>	

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

#### 4.4.4 Managing financially

Families in the Troubled Families group were statistically significantly more likely to report in the survey that they were managing well financially, when compared to the matched comparison group (Table 4.5). When asked how the family was managing financially ‘these days’, seven in ten (69 per cent) families in the Troubled Families group reported managing ‘very’ or ‘quite well’ (from a six-point scale), compared to 59 per cent of the matched comparison group (a 10 percentage point difference, p-value 0.012). Moreover, when main carer respondents were asked whether their financial situation was ‘worse’, ‘better’ or ‘more or less the same’ as a year ago, 26 per cent of those in the Troubled Families group reported doing better, compared to 19 per cent of those in the matched comparison group (a seven percentage point difference). However, there were no significant differences in the proportion of families keeping up with bills or regular debt payments in the previous three months: a substantial majority (79 per cent) of families in both groups reported having kept up with their bills over that period.

**Table 4.5 Managing financially – survey data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
	%	%	
Kept up with bills in previous three months	79	79	0
Managing well financially	69	59	10*
Managing better than a year ago	26	19	7*
<i>Base: all main carer respondents</i>	495	314	

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

## 4.5 Criminal and anti-social behaviour

### 4.5.1 Criminal behaviour

The Troubled Families Programme seeks to reduce the involvement of families in crime: so a positive impact would be a reduction in offending rates among adults and children, as recorded on the Police National Computer database. We measured the impact of the Programme on offending rates by comparing the rates of offending by those who had been on the programme - between seven and 18 months after they had started the programme - with those of the matched comparison group. There was no statistically significant evidence that participation in the Programme had an impact on adult offending over the period<sup>36</sup> (Table 4.6). For instance, 8.7 per cent of adults on the Troubled Families programme had had a caution or conviction over the period, compared to 7.8 per cent of those in the matched comparison group. The same figures for children were 5.8 per cent and 5.7 per cent respectively.

<sup>36</sup> In the period between seven and 12 months after starting the Programme, we found a statistically significant *negative* impact on offending rates that resulted in a caution or conviction for both adults and children. However, this is likely to be due to observing at a point when the intervention was still taking effect.

**Table 4.6 Criminal behaviour, 7 to 18 months after start of programme – administrative data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
<b>Adults</b>			
% with any offence resulting in a caution or conviction	8.7	7.8	1.0
% with any offence resulting in a conviction	7.1	6.2	0.9
% with any offence resulting in a caution	2.2	2.3	0.0
% with any offence resulting in a custodial sentence	1.7	1.5	0.2
% with any offence resulting in a community sentence	2.7	3.2	-0.5
<i>Base: 15,373 adults</i>			
<b>Children</b>			
% with any offence resulting in a caution or conviction	5.8	5.7	0.1
% with any offence resulting in a conviction	3.9	3.2	0.7
% with any offence resulting in a caution	2.5	3.0	-0.5
% with any offence resulting in a custodial sentence	0.4	0.4	-0.1
% with any offence resulting in a community sentence	3.0	2.2	0.8
<i>Base: 13,859 children</i>			

Source: Bewley et al. (2016)

#### 4.5.2 Anti-social behaviour and contact with police

The analysis of the Police National Computer database provides an objective assessment of the Troubled Families Programme on identified criminal activity among families going through the programme. We used the survey to identify any impact on anti-social behaviour and lower level trouble with the police, which may not be included in administrative records. The main carer respondents were asked about themselves and other household members. The young people interviewed were asked about their own behaviour. There were no statistically significant differences in main carer or young people's reports of themselves or family members being in trouble with or charged by police, or having anti-social behaviour actions taken against them (Table 4.7). In general, the substantial majority of families in both the Troubled Families and matched comparison groups had not been in trouble over anti-social or criminal behaviour. For instance, eight in ten main carer respondents reported there being no anti-social behaviour actions taken

against the family in the previous three months (84 per cent in the Troubled Families group and 86 per cent in the matched comparison group).

**Table 4.7 Anti-social behaviour and contact with police in previous three months – survey data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
	%	%	
No ASB actions used against family	84	86	-2
No trouble with police by family members	78	82	-4
<i>Base: respondents answering self-completion<sup>37</sup></i>	481	295	
No ASB actions against young person	77	80	-3
Young person not been in trouble with police	85	85	0
Young person not charged by police	92	90	2
<i>Base: all young people answering self-completion without help</i>	331	201	

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

<sup>37</sup> The base for the outcome 'trouble with police' is somewhat lower, as those receiving help with the self-completion were not asked this question.

## 4.6 School attendance and child welfare

### 4.6.1 School attendance

A primary aim of the Troubled Families Programme is to improve the school attendance of children and young people, with the aim of improving educational attainment in the longer term. We measured the impact of the programme on school attendance using data from the National Pupil Database, using the mean percentage of the time that a child was absent from school, observed three terms after starting on the programme, and whether the absence rate was 15 per cent or more within this same term<sup>38</sup>. As Table 4.8 shows, the programme did not have a statistically significant effect on either of these outcome measures<sup>39,40</sup>. One in five (20.3 per cent in the Troubled Families group and 21.2 per cent in the matched comparison) had been absent from school for at least 15 per cent of the time.

**Table 4.8 School attendance over the previous three terms – administrative data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
% of time absent from school three terms after programme start	9.6	9.9	-0.3
% of children absent for 15% or more of time	20.3	21.2	-0.9
<i>Base: 13,255 children</i>			
<i>Source: linked administrative data</i>			

Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

<sup>38</sup> The programme sought to reduce the incidence of unauthorised absence, so whilst the measures used here included authorised absence, if the programme was effective in reducing overall absence rates, both absence measures should fall following contact with the programme. If this were the case, the programme could be considered to have had a positive effect on absence.

<sup>39</sup> It seems likely that an inability to obtain a good match between the Troubled Families and comparison groups in terms of the proportion of families with an absence rate of 15 per cent or more in the term prior to starting on the programme reduced the likelihood of observing a statistically significant impact from the programme following participation for this particular outcome measure.

<sup>40</sup> Within the survey, main carer respondents were asked about their child's school attendance. As with the NPD analysis, we found no statistically significant impacts on attendance rates reported. Similarly, main carer respondent and young people's reports about behaviour at school showed no statistically significant differences between the Troubled Families and matched comparison groups.

## 4.6.2 Child welfare

We measured the impact of the programme on child welfare using the proportion of children classified as in need (CIN) or looked after 12 months after the family started on the programme, as recorded in the National Pupil Database. In terms of the programme's aim to reduce costs, a reduction in the proportion of children classified as in need or who are looked after would be viewed as a positive impact. However, in terms of child welfare, there may be greater ambiguity over whether reducing the likelihood of a child going into care or being classified as in need was incontrovertibly beneficial for the child.

Table 4.9 shows that the programme appeared to significantly *increase* the percentage of children with CIN status and *significantly* reduce the proportion in care. Twelve months after starting the programme, 40 per cent children in the Troubled Families group were classified as in need compared to 37 per cent of children in the comparison group. Three per cent of children in the Troubled Families group were in care 12 months after the family started on the programme, compared to five per cent of children in the comparison group.

Our confidence in the findings on the proportion of children in care is greater than our confidence in the findings of children classified as CIN. Even after matching, a greater proportion of children in the Troubled Families group were classified as in need *before* they started on the programme compared to the comparison group.<sup>41</sup> This *may* account for the significantly greater proportion of children in the Troubled Families group being classified as CIN 12 months on.

**Table 4.9 Child welfare 12 months after programme start – administrative data**

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
	%	%	
% of children with CIN status 12 months after Programme start	40.1	36.7	3.3*
% of children in care 12 months after Programme start	3.1	4.8	-1.7*

*Base: 12,008 children*

*Source: linked administrative data*

Source: Bewley, et al. (2016)

<sup>41</sup> During the course of the study, we tested the use of different matching methods. For some methods, which better matched children on their CIN status, no statistically significant impacts were detected on the proportion of children with a CIN status.



## 4.7 Health, alcohol and drug abuse, well-being and family relationships

The survey included a wide range of secondary outcome measures aimed at testing whether the Troubled Families Programme had an impact on families' use of health services and on their own health and well-being:

- GP and A&E visits in previous three months
- Self-reported general health of respondent and young person interviewed, plus proxy data on partners
- Life satisfaction of respondent and young person interviewed
- Use of non-prescription drugs in previous three months by respondent and young person interviewed
- Alcohol use in previous three months of respondent and young person interviewed, plus proxy data on partners
- Well-being (Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale) and depression (Malaise Scale) of main carer respondent

It also included measures on how well the parents got on within the family and of physical, verbal, emotional and sexual domestic violence.

There was no statistically significant evidence of any impacts of the programme across all of these health and well-being measures.

## 4.8 Attitudes and confidence

Although significant impacts were not detected for most of the main programme outcomes, there are nevertheless marked impacts in the survey data on main carer respondents' levels of confidence and expectations about the future. Table 4.10 shows the percentage of main carer respondents saying they agreed ('strongly' or 'tended to agree') with the following statements, each of which used a five-point scale.

1. *I know how my family should keep on the right track*
2. *I am confident that our worst problems are behind us*
3. *I feel in control of things*
4. *I can count on others from my family for support*
5. *I would know where to turn for outside help if we needed it*
6. *I feel positive about what the future holds for me and my family*

Virtually all show the Troubled Families group to be more positive than the matched comparison group, with the differences between them statistically significant on four of the six statements. Those in the Troubled Families group were significantly more likely to report that they knew how to keep their family on the right track (96 per cent compared to 91 per cent) and that they were confident that their worst problems were behind them (68 per cent compared to 52 per cent). They were also more likely to say that they felt in control of things (69 per cent compared to 60 per cent) and that they felt positive about the future (69 per cent compared to 61 per cent).

#### 4.10 Perceptions of how family is doing – survey data

	Troubled Families group	Matched comparison group	Impact (percentage point difference)
<b>Whether agree strongly or tend to agree</b>	%	%	
Know how family should keep on the right track	96	91	5
Know where to seek outside help	80	76	4
Can count on others in family for support	73	72	0
Feel in control	69	60	9
Feel positive about the future	69	61	8
Confident worst problems behind them	68	52	17
<i>Base: all main respondents</i>	<i>495</i>	<i>314</i>	

Source: Purdon and Bryson (2016)

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

This report has presented the summative findings from the *National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme*, which was carried out by a consortium led by Ecorys UK<sup>42</sup> on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The report is based on data collection and analysis carried out between January 2013 and September 2015, and it draws upon the full set of technical reports from the evaluation.

In this final concluding chapter, we draw together the overall findings from all strands of the evaluation. The chapter first provides an overview of the main achievements and areas for development for the phase one programme. It then sets out to examine a range of plausible explanations for the impact results and to consider their viability. Finally, we conclude with some overall reflections on the learning from the evaluation and look ahead to the expanded programme.

### 5.1 Overview of programme achievements

In April 2012, the Troubled Families Unit at DCLG launched the £448 million Troubled Families Programme. The Programme aimed to ‘turn around’ the lives of 120,000 families with multiple and complex needs in 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 local change programmes in every English local authority, overseen by a network of local Troubled Families Coordinators (TFCs), and underpinned by a Payment by Results (PbR) financial framework.

In reflecting upon the evidence gathered for the evaluation, it is clear that the Phase One Programme provided an important catalyst for developing and investing in family intervention, at a time when fiscal constraints were being keenly felt. The national Troubled Families Team provided central direction for the programme, through the provision of the PbR financial framework; a network of Area Teams, and guidance for local authorities. Whilst local areas differed in their views on the appropriateness of the national criteria and targets, the scale of the programme’s ambitions was widely acknowledged. This window of opportunity was grasped by most local authorities, with a view to maximising the potential benefits for families and embarking on a programme of local workforce development.

Specifically, the **main overall achievements** of the phase one programme can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>42</sup> The evaluation consortium partners include Clarissa White Research; Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR); the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR); Ipsos MORI, and the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE).

- The national ‘spotlight’ at a policy level, coupled with the additional Government funding, helped to raise the profile of family intervention, and assisted Troubled Families Coordinators in achieving strategic buy-in at a local level.
- The process evaluation found widespread evidence of local services and systems transformation, at a time when most local authority budgets were undergoing retraction. The timing of the programme meant that family intervention provided a test bed for new models of service development and commissioning in many local areas.
- The programme played a key role in boosting local capacity for family intervention, and expanding the workforce – especially within those areas moving from a low baseline position. This was despite some redeployment of existing staff.
- The auditing requirements of the programme were instrumental in raising the quality and capacity of local data management systems. The programme helped to set a multi-agency agenda for the identification and tracking of families in some areas.
- There were signs that the Development Agreement between DCLG and DWP had accelerated the employability dimensions of the programme; going some way towards embedding this expertise within local teams, and paving the way for better joint working with Jobcentre Plus at a local level.
- The evaluation found some beacons of good practice, demonstrating the hallmarks of FIPs – workers observed a real step change in practice, regarding the time and space for assertive key working, and benefited from strong models of supervision.
- The impact evaluation identified statistically significant impacts on families’ satisfaction with the service; their confidence, and optimism about being able to cope in the future, compared with a matched comparison group of families.
- The programme achieved statistically significant impacts on families’ self-reported financial capability, although not on their overall (self-reported) levels of debt.

Funding was confirmed for the expanded programme at the stage when the final wave of the evaluation was still taking place. Unsurprisingly this encouraged local authorities to proceed apace with the rollout of their family intervention approaches, aided by the security of continued access to funding. However, the criteria and targets for the expanded programme brought new challenges for engaging families at lower levels of need.

The evaluation also identified a number of areas where the phase one programme **appears not to have been as successful**. These are as follows:

- The evaluation encountered wide variations in local practice. Although some of these reflected inevitable differences according to local authority size, structure, and demographics, there was nonetheless a stark contrast in how local teams recruited and trained their workers; set caseload sizes, and exited their families. There was a perceived need for more standardised training, quality assurance, and CPD.
- Whilst the evaluation found a good deal of consensus regarding the role and value of the ‘key worker’, there was more limited evidence for the efficacy of the interventions offered to families. In particular, the therapeutic dimensions of the programme (mental health, DA/DV and parenting) were not always clearly defined.

- There appeared to have been relatively little progress in addressing the health issues for families that were documented within the FIPs<sup>43</sup>, although this issue had been acknowledged at a policy level and was factored-in to the expanded programme.
- It is questionable whether deep and sustained improvements were achieved to partnership working at a local level, beyond individual examples of good practice. The evaluation encountered variable levels of engagement by partner organisations (especially so health and adult social care). Improvements in multi-agency planning and data sharing at a strategic level to ensure the implementation of the PbR framework had not always translated into benefits at an operational level.
- There was mixed evidence regarding the extent to which scaling-up had been achieved without sacrificing some level of quality of family intervention practice. This has potential implications for the expanded programme, given that it involves local authorities attempting to mainstream their approach. Moreover, the requirement to work with greater numbers of families on reduced funding poses a risk of 'diluting' the intervention.
- The PbR financial framework and targets were contentious in many local areas and were thought to have resulted in certain perverse incentives.

Perhaps the key issue to emerge from the phase one programme evaluation, however, is the lack of evidence that it has had an impact on the outcomes that it seeks to affect for families. This issue warrants closer scrutiny and is addressed in full within the next section (Section 5.2).

## 5.2 Explaining the impact results

A central aim of the evaluation was to estimate 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.

The key finding from the impact evaluation using administrative data was that across a wide range of outcomes, covering the key objectives of the programme - employment, benefit receipt, school attendance, safeguarding and child welfare - we were unable to find consistent evidence that the Troubled Families programme had any significant or systematic impact. That is to say, our analysis found no impact on these outcomes attributable to the programme, with observed outcomes for the Troubled Families Programme families being very similar to the outcomes for a matched comparison group of families. The vast majority of impact estimates were statistically insignificant, with a very small number of positive or negative results. The separate analysis using survey data also found no significant or systemic impact on outcomes related to employment, job seeking, school attendance, or anti-social behaviour.

Although the survey analysis was consistent with the administrative data analysis on the key objectively measurable outcomes described above, a number of statistically significant impacts were found on some attitudinal and behavioural measures. Families in the Troubled Families group were more likely to report managing well financially; knowing how to keep on the right track, being confident that their worst problems were behind them, and

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<sup>43</sup> See for example, the report by Boddy, et al. (2012) *Health Related Work in Family Intervention Projects*.

feeling positive about the future, when compared with a matched comparison group. The impact of the programme on these outcomes was statistically significant.

Before going on to examine some of the explanations for these results, **it should be noted that large scale impacts would not necessarily be anticipated for the Troubled Families Programme. Whilst the Troubled Families Programme was underpinned by a national framework and outcomes, it was managed through 152 local change programmes, with considerable discretion afforded to local authorities in how they identified, prioritised and worked with their families.** In many respects, therefore, the programme was always going to pose challenges in terms of generating measurable impact. The key assumption was that the increased capacity for providing local family intervention, targeted using a national Payment by Results (PbR) financial framework, would be sufficient to bring about behaviour change amongst families on a large scale. The evaluation set out to test this assumption using a range of sources of data and research methods.

Whilst previous evaluations of family programmes such as the Intensive Intervention Projects (Flint, et al., 2011), Family Pathfinders (York Consulting, 2011), and Family Intervention Projects (White, et al., 2008) found positive impacts, most measured outcomes for participants using a pre / post comparison of (gross) positive outcomes achieved and / or negative outcomes avoided. With the exception of the Family Intervention Projects (FIPs), none of these evaluations have attempted a counterfactual design using matched comparison groups. This limits their usefulness for benchmarking the results from the Troubled Families Programme. The expectations for the Troubled Families Programme were largely shaped by the FIP impact evaluation, which did indeed provide impressive impact estimates. However, that comparison was based on local data and with outcomes being reported by local teams, using much smaller sample sizes than for the current evaluation and with a small number of areas<sup>44</sup>. Whether these findings could be generalised to the national level may therefore be open to question.

In the remainder of this section, we set out to explain the impact results with reference to the methodological issues that were encountered by the national evaluation; the outcomes that were prescribed for the programme; the timescales over which they were measured, and the likely influence of the programme design and implementation. We conclude with a number of key learning points for the Expanded Troubled Families Programme.

### 5.2.1 Methodological issues

It is first necessary to consider any limitations of the evaluation design, and the effects these might have had on the estimated impacts of the programme.

**A quasi-experimental design was deployed for the administrative data analysis, covering a range of outcome measures over which the programme sought to achieve an impact.** These included: benefit receipt and employment; criminal behaviour;

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<sup>44</sup> The FIPS impact evaluation used a comparison sample of families from LAs not running a FIP who were able to identify and track a 'similar FIP-eligible' set of families. Outcomes for these families were then compared to outcomes for the FIPS families. In both instances the outcomes were collected and recorded by project staff.'

school attendance and child welfare. The administrative data analysis covered approximately 25 percent of the 120,000 families that participated in the programme, and the resulting large sample sizes made it possible to detect relatively small effects within the period over which measurement took place.

But, as we discussed in Chapter Four, there are a number of caveats to the analysis that must be taken into account. These are as follows:

- Given the quite major limitations imposed by data quality (see Chapter 3 in Bewley, et al., 2016), the results of the administrative data analysis in isolation cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that the programme had no impact at all, and it is important to consider this result in conjunction with the other evidence contained in the evaluation as a whole.
- It was not possible to obtain robust estimates on all outcome measures. Most notably, the comparison group for the administrative data analysis provided a poor match on one of the two school attendance measures, and the results are therefore inconclusive regarding the impact of the programme. Similarly, only a small proportion of children had received cautions and convictions prior to starting on the programme, meaning that this sub-group was ultimately too small to generate a well-matched comparison group. As a result, it was not possible to draw robust conclusions on the impact of the programme on youth offending using the administrative data. It should be noted, however, that the survey data also found no evidence of impact on parental- and self-reported measures of school attendance and ASB / youth offending.
- The administrative data indicated that there were variations in outcomes between individual local authorities. Although it was possible to control for these differences satisfactorily through the matching process for most outcome measures, this was not the case for all of them. Again, the school attendance measure proved the most sensitive when varying the sub-set of areas included within the analysis, and the results should be approached with caution (as noted above).
- The process evaluation (White and Day, 2016) found that some local authorities had started to roll out 'whole family' working on a larger scale for families with lower levels of need, across the wider workforce. There is a small risk that this led to the impacts being underestimated, if these families had improved outcomes as a result and were represented within the comparison group for the evaluation. This does not, however, provide a suitable explanation for the impact results for the higher intensity families, where differences between the intervention provided within the programme and business as usual remained more distinct. In addition, the roll-out does not seem to have been sufficiently widespread to explain why the outcomes for the matched comparison group were so close to the outcomes for the Troubled Families group.

Results from the survey, which was designed to capture intermediate outcomes more conducive to measuring change in the short-term, including self-reported health, work-readiness, and attitudes and behaviours relating to education, employment, crime and ASB, alongside measures of service satisfaction, were broadly consistent with the analysis using administrative data. This suggests that overall, there is little reason to believe that the evaluation overlooked or under-reported impacts that might have been achieved within the evaluation period.

### ***Timing of the data collection and analysis***

One possible explanation for the impact results relates to the timing of the data collection and analysis that it was possible to undertake within the evaluation period. **The findings from the impact and process evaluation concur that the analysis *may have been undertaken too early to capture the full range of potential effects of the programme on families.*** The qualitative evidence demonstrated that local services would often need to work with more intensive cases for upwards of 12 months before being in a position to exit families. This stepping-down process typically entailed a referral of some kind to other services, meaning that families continued to receive a lighter touch intervention well beyond the initial PBR claim point. The qualitative research also underlined the challenges that were encountered in securing families' engagement in the intervention. It was reported that families' outcomes would sometimes worsen during the first six months, as they became more self-aware and trust was built to a point where families were prepared to disclose underlying issues to their worker.

Viewed in this context, the data collection and analysis for the evaluation came at a relatively early stage in the intervention timeline. The survey was conducted at an interval of around nine months after families officially started on the programme. A comparison with the Family Monitoring Data shows that the intervention was still ongoing for around 70 per cent of the survey respondents at this point (Whitley, 2016). So the survey outcomes reflect the position reached by families by mid-programme in the majority of cases. Similarly, with the administrative data analysis, there is a possibility that some families were still being worked with more than 12 months after their official start on the Programme.

The optimum timing for the evaluation data collection might be expected to vary according to different types of outcomes. For employment outcomes especially, local authorities generally reported a slow process of engaging with families furthest from the labour market during the lifetime of the phase one programme. The thrust of activities reported at the time when the initial case study visits took place was around pre-employability actions and the provision of work experience and volunteer placements of a temporary nature. Moreover, the full benefits of the extra resource provided through the Delivery Agreement were not generally experienced until the later stages of the Programme, after the TFEAs and Jobcentre Plus SPOCs were fully embedded within local teams. This would certainly be a factor for the survey impact analysis, given the timing of the data collection<sup>45</sup>.

The timescales for data collection also placed some constraints on the available sample sizes for certain data-sets. This meant that it was not possible to draw conclusions with the same level of confidence for all outcome measures. One of the drawbacks of the administrative data analysis was that only a limited sub-set of families could be observed at a point when they might be expected to have completed their participation in the programme (at 12 months or more after their start date). In the case of exclusions; data was only available for 15 months following the introduction of the programme, meaning

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<sup>45</sup> To reiterate, the first group (the Troubled Families group) covers families starting the programme between Spring and Autumn 2013, whereas the comparison group covers families starting later (between Spring and Autumn 2014). The Delivery Agreement between DWP and DCLG was dated March 2013.



that the impact analysis was restricted to a sub-set of families who started their intervention within the first three months following national rollout.

It was only possible to observe outcomes at 18 months after starting on the programme for a narrower range of outcomes: benefit receipt, employment and offending, and for a smaller sub-set of families. However, an implication of extending the observation period in this way is that the analysis is necessarily restricted to those families who started on the programme within the first ten months of its introduction. As such the results might not be fully representative of the outcomes achieved by families starting at a later date.

Nonetheless, if outcomes were measured too soon for the full programme impacts to be realised, we would still have expected to have observed some positive *trends* in impacts, and yet very few were observed. In particular, the lack of impact observed with respect to employability – where successful programmes generally have a short-term impact – does not suggest that longer-term impacts on employment outcomes are very likely. There was, in fact, no evidence of even a modest reduction in benefit receipt over 52 or 72 weeks, or any other progress towards work in the form of adults moving from JSA onto other types of out of work benefit.

### ***Accounting for differences between the PbR outcomes and the impacts***

In interpreting the impact findings, it is important to understand why the impact might be give such an apparently different picture to the Payment-by-Results (PbR) progress data. The PbR data showed that the overall target of 120,000 families was almost achieved, with most LAs having identified and achieved outcomes-based payments for families in numbers that closely represented their local share of this target. By contrast, the impact findings, as set out above, did not provide any systematic evidence that the programme had any impact on any of the outcomes related to employment, benefit receipt, offending or child welfare (DCLG, 2015b). Clearly, it is important to understand the potential explanations and implications of these results.

The key point is that the PbR progress data counts the number of positive outcomes observed for families on the Programme (i.e. gross rather than net outcomes). The impact estimates, in contrast, estimate how many net positive outcomes there are *over and above* any positive outcomes that would have occurred in the absence of the programme (i.e. deadweight or counterfactual outcomes). There is therefore no necessary contradiction between the PbR data suggesting that 120,000 families had been turned around, and the findings of the evaluation that no significant or systemic impact could be attributed to the programme. Different things are being measured.

**In particular, the process evaluation shows how the issue of ‘outcome churn’ amongst families on the programme might help to explain why so many families achieved a positive outcome according to the PbR data.** Local authorities involved in the process evaluation described how families not previously meeting the criteria for the programme were flagged through subsequent rounds of the screening process so that they would be picked up at the point when they became eligible, whilst other families who met the criteria based on historical data were found to be no longer eligible at the point when contact was made. This included where families had taken steps towards employment or had addressed issues of non-attendance through other means. These changes in eligibility status for families, suggests that there was naturally-occurring

variation in outcomes for families, with periods of positive outcomes and periods of negative. In addition, the movement of families between 'intensive' and 'less intensive' status during the course of their intervention was also a common occurrence, requiring a process of re-assessment in response to newly emerging needs. These trends are indicative of churn within the system on outcomes, and of the ebb and flow of issues encountered by families over time.

Given that the PbR financial framework rewards periods when there is a reduced incidence of ‘problem’ behaviours, this churn suggests that the payments might eventually be claimed for a substantial proportion families within the wider cohort, if measured over a sufficient period of time, even if the programme actually had no impact in changing behaviour. As long as families have a period of improved outcomes a PbR claim could be made. The implication of the natural churn is that many of the apparent ‘improvements’ may well have occurred irrespective of the programme. That is, many (and the impact evaluation suggests, most) observed improvements may, in fact, have been deadweight.

Of course, deadweight is a normal feature of almost all social policy interventions, so in itself this is not a concern. However, the financial framework of the Troubled Families Programme had only limited mechanisms to avoid paying for results not attributable to the programme. A small deadweight adjustment was applied in the form of a reduction in payments of one sixth, based on an estimate of the impact of participation in (other) work or employment programmes. However, this calculation did not take into account natural churn (in, for example, patterns of school exclusion or offending behaviour), or of the impact of standard “business as usual” programmes at a local level. The per-family payment of £4,000 was a notional amount based on an estimate that intensive interventions could cost LAs £10,000, with an expectation that they would fund the difference. However, it was at the discretion of LAs to determine their local payment structure, as documented in the process evaluation, and Government did not monitor expenditure. This inevitably resulted in some variations in local implementation. Furthermore, some positive outcomes would, as noted above, be observed with no intervention at all.

The financial framework could have been significantly improved if it had followed the model of other programmes, which included a requirement to demonstrate that results were attributable to the programme. The Reducing Reoffending Payments by Results Pilot Programme (RRPbR), for example, only paid out if outcomes from the programme were significantly better than those achieved by a comparable programme. Beyond these issues of churn there are some data (non)comparability issues too. A degree of variation might be expected between the PbR data and the administrative data. The administrative outcomes measures were selected to provide a robust assessment of impact, rather than to mimic the PbR financial framework, and the units of measurement are non-identical. As Bewley et al. (2016) explain within the impact report, there is no reliable measure of ASB within the national administrative data-sets, making it difficult to establish which of the families within the impact study qualified on this measure, and what proportion achieved the results-based payments. The ‘progress to work’ measure<sup>46</sup> in the Financial Framework uses metrics, which could not be replicated using the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WLPS) dataset used in the impact study for the evaluation.

Again, these explanations do not preclude the possibility that some impacts might be realised over a wider timeframe. The ‘test’ in this instance would be whether families receiving the intervention go on to achieve sustained improvements in outcomes over

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<sup>46</sup> The ‘progress to work’ measure is based on adults having volunteered for the Work Programme or having been attached to European Social Fund (ESF) provision within the past six months

time, compared with families within a matched comparison group who do not join the programme.

### 5.2.2 Identification and targeting issues

A further theory to test is that the families who went on to be supported through the programme were not representative of the intended target group. As set out in Chapter 1, while there is likely to be some correlation between the indicators of disadvantage which underlie the 120,000 estimate from the original study from the Cabinet Office and those that were used by DCLG to define eligibility for the programme, there is no quantitative estimate of the number of families nationally which satisfy the DCLG criteria. Furthermore, although LAs were required to provide supporting evidence for all families claimed for, the original 'share' of the 120,000 assigned to them was essentially a notional one and did not necessarily reflect the true prevalence of families with multiple and complex needs within each LA. Viewed in this context, it is unclear how far the families who went on to receive the intervention were representative of the intended target group, beyond the fact that they met the eligibility criteria in the Financial Framework at a given point in time

#### ***Selection processes***

**There is some evidence that local processes influenced the profile of the families starting on the programme, which might predict their likelihood of achieving positive outcomes. These processes varied widely at a local level, however, and it is unlikely that they would have skewed the results systematically at a Programme level.** DCLG required that local authorities use the PbR framework to assess families' eligibility for the programme. Whilst the framework provided an over-arching structure, the fourth 'discretionary' criterion added a considerable degree of flexibility<sup>47</sup>. Local authorities routinely used this filter to ensure that local definitions of need were taken into account. Many of the local stakeholders who were interviewed for the process evaluation perceived that issues such as mental health, domestic abuse or social isolation should be targeted for family intervention and sought ways to prioritise these families. This meant that decisions about whether or not a family started on the Programme were also informed by more subjective judgements regarding whether or not a family was at 'crisis' point, and the families' ability to cope (their 'resilience'), which cannot be observed using administrative data.

#### ***Other targeting issues***

A second potential issue concerns whether the families met the intended profile for the Programme. If the families were not identified and assessed effectively then the lack of impacts might be as a result of how the programme was targeted locally. It should be noted that, as explained in chapter 1, there was no necessary correspondence between local authorities' targets and the actual number of families meeting the criteria in a given area, although local authorities used local data to identify and work with families who met the criteria based on their local estimated share of the national 120,000 target.

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<sup>47</sup> A further breakdown of the criteria adopted by local authorities for their fourth discretionary PBR criterion is provided in Chapter Two of this report.

**There is clear evidence that the programme did indeed engage with families with multiple and complex needs.** The national administrative data indicated high levels of need in relation to education, employment and crime / ASB issues. Based on local authority reports' half of the families in the treatment group met any of the crime/anti-social behaviour criteria, whilst 77 per cent met one or more of the educational criteria and 86 per cent met one or more of the out-of-work criteria. Levels of health-related problems were particularly pronounced within the survey, with 75 per cent of Troubled Families self-reporting that they had a limiting long-standing illness or disability, whilst over half of Troubled Families showed signs of depression using the Malaise Inventory scale. These findings were also borne out within the process evaluation, where local Troubled Families teams routinely commented on the challenges encountered with engaging and supporting families and the frequent need to go well beyond the benchmark of 12 months for achieving the intended outcomes and exiting families from the programme.

**Furthermore, the administrative data analysis showed that a greater proportion of families who started on the programme had problems in the period prior to starting on the programme than the unmatched comparison group.** As we reported in Chapter Three, the intervention families in the administrative data analysis were more likely to be claiming benefits and to have children with a higher rate of absence from school than the comparison group. A considerably higher proportion of families who received support included children classified as 'in need', immediately prior to their intervention than the families within the (unmatched) comparison group.

**The evaluation also found a relationship between the intensity of the intervention provided and the number and range of issues reported by families.** The families from the 'more intensive' sub-group within the survey appeared more disadvantaged than those in the 'less intensive' sub-group, and also self-reported having received a greater number of services as part of their intervention. Moreover, the survey and administrative data analysis seemed to concur that there was some front-loading of higher need families towards the start of the programme, whether or not this was by design. For example, the relationship between the intervention and the likelihood of children being in care after 12 months suggests that some local authorities had purposively selected families where the young person was at risk of being taken into care to avoid this negative outcome. The findings from the process evaluation also support the view that, whilst local authorities did not always set out to work with the 'most troubled' first, there was often an implicit prioritisation process during the initial stages of the programme when many areas had identified more families than it was possible to work with straightaway.

## 5.2.2 Programme implementation issues

A final possible set of factors affecting the impact results lie with the programme design, including the extent to which the overall aims and "theory of change" were fit for purpose, and the potential influence of how the programme was implemented locally.

**Overall, the evaluation findings indicate that the impacts at a programme level might have been constrained by a lack of standardisation in how family intervention was implemented at a local level. Averaging effects between local areas may therefore have influenced the impact results at a programme level - that is, in principle it is possible that positive impacts in some areas were obscured by negative impacts elsewhere, so average impacts were not significantly different from zero.**



### ***Programme 'fidelity'***

DCLG allowed a high degree of discretion in how the national programme aims and criteria were implemented locally. This was welcomed by local authorities, and indeed was essential to some degree, given the varied infrastructure that existed for family intervention at a local level across England (see also White and Day, 2016).

The process evaluation found that some local authorities were implementing the programme based on the core principles of family intervention. These areas had mirrored their practices closely on the learning from Family Intervention Projects, and had developed systems for training, supervision and professional development. This was by no means universal, however, and the evaluation evidence suggests that the Programme might have benefited from having more structured guidance and possibly a more standardised programme of accredited training.

The pace of implementation also perceptibly influenced the quality and consistency of what was delivered at a local level. The PBR framework incentivised a rapid throughput of families from the early stages of the programme to draw down the attachment fees, but it also meant that some areas were at an early stage with testing their model when the first cohort of families was supported. The case study research found that the local implementation arrangements were often considerably more streamlined by year two, by which point local supervisory and management structures were better established.

Local authorities were also acutely aware of the importance, from a financial perspective of achieving their PbR targets; which was further reinforced by a clear message from CLG that they were expected to achieve these targets. Many sought to use the outcomes that were claimed for families needing less intensive support to fund staffing resources for more intensive cases. Others still reportedly looked to claim PbR outcomes retrospectively from across a wider pool of families who were affiliated to the local Programme.

**These influences meant that many local authorities were working with a sub-group of families who were receiving support that closely resembled 'business as usual'. It would be fair to infer that any potential impacts would be much smaller than anticipated if working with families more intensively - especially so in those areas where alternative provision for families was already well developed.** Indeed, many local authorities had a legacy from Family Intervention Projects, Family Pathfinders, Family Recovery Programme, Multi Systemic Therapy, and more bespoke VCSO programmes. This would suggest that the national aspirations for the programme under-estimated the skills and knowledge for working with families with complex needs that already existed at a local level. In these local areas, the support offered by the programme to families at lower levels of need was therefore arguably too similar to what came before to register quantifiable impacts. All of this suggests again that the programme encountered significant issues with 'deadweight' - outcomes that might have been achieved in the absence of the Programme.

### ***Intensity of support***

The process evaluation predicted differences in the impacts achieved between ‘more intensive’ and ‘less intensive’ family intervention, based on the evidence that families with more complex needs generally received a higher duration and intensity of support.

**The survey data largely supports the claim that the more intensive group received a greater ‘dose’ of support than less intensive families, and a significantly greater amount than the (unmatched) comparison group** (see also Purdon and Bryson, 2016)<sup>48</sup>. The process evaluation concurs with this overall trend – local teams described key differences in the size of the caseload, duration of the intervention for ‘higher intensity’ families and in the direct contact time on a week-to-week basis. The assignment of families to individual workers and the subsequent decision-making with regard to caseload sizes was usually guided by these classifications. Indeed, the process evaluation found that some elements of effective family intervention – the ability to work flexibly and creatively and to conduct observations with family members around their everyday routines – were only possible in the context of more intensive cases, where sufficient time was allocated per family to identify and address ‘root causes’.

**The expected relationship between intensity and impacts did not materialise, however, and the impact evaluation found no significant impacts either for the ‘intensive’ or for the ‘less intensive’ groups. These findings were more or less consistent across all outcome measures, for the administrative and survey data analysis.** As the counterfactual should estimate what would have happened to these families if they had not received support, the possible explanations include that; the estimate of the counterfactual is wrong because the comparison group is not well-matched; the sample size was too small to detect an impact, or the programme had no effect. The only alternative explanation lies with the differences in impacts at an individual local authority level. If some areas were effective in working with families requiring high intensity support whilst others were not, the average effects might not be enough to detect an impact at a programme level.

## **5.3 Concluding thoughts**

The evaluation has presented a mixed picture with regard to the effectiveness and impact of the Troubled Families Programme. As we have discussed throughout this report, the investment of £448 million in developing family intervention provision across England provided an important opportunity to boost local capacity and to expand the workforce across all 152 local authorities. The programme clearly raised the profile of family intervention country-wide, and transformed the way services were being developed for families in many areas. These achievements did not translate into the range and size of

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<sup>48</sup> For the Troubled Families group, the sample file for the survey included an indicator from the local authority as to whether the family received ‘intensive’ or ‘less intensive’ intervention. Families responding to the survey also self-reported their receipt of a range of different types of services, which were then cross-tabulated with level of support to allow for a comparison between the different sub-groups.



impacts that might have been anticipated, however, based on the original aspirations for the programme.

### **Programme impacts**

A number of factors would appear to have contributed towards the lack of evidence of any systemic or significant impact found by the evaluation on the primary outcome measures for the programme. Data issues mean that no one piece of evidence is conclusive, and it is also possible that outcomes were measured too soon in some areas to provide a full account of the Programme's potential impact. Nonetheless, the local share of the target of 120,000 families for the programme was essentially a notional one, and it is unclear how far the families who went on to receive the intervention were representative of this target group, beyond the fact that they met the eligibility criteria at a given point in time.

It is apparent that the PBR financial framework masked significant variation in how the programme was implemented at a local level. Local areas sought to affect a wide array of behaviour changes in families, and decisions about how individual families were prioritised for intervention and the 'complexity' of their needs ultimately resided with practitioners and multi-agency teams. Although the programme was modelled on FIPs and other predecessor programmes (the single 'key worker'; the focus on the whole family; the persistent and assertive approach, and so forth), the requirement to deliver at significant pace and scale with families across a broad spectrum of needs meant that local flexibility was essential. Simply replicating the FIP model in this context would not have been feasible or cost effective in all instances.

The original programme guidance implied a clear distinction between those families who would be assessed as eligible and go on to receive the intervention (at one of a number of levels of intensity), and those with less complex needs who would not. In practice, however, a more fluid set of arrangements were encountered at a local level. As we have described within this report, the programme cohort is perhaps more usefully understood in terms of a much wider pool of families, whose changing circumstances bring them in and out of scope for intervention. This natural 'churning' of families may have played a role in explaining why no impact from the programme was observed when estimating the counterfactual when areas were able to claim PbR because outcomes had improved for families who were subject to the intervention.

It would seem particularly surprising that no direct correlation was found between service intensity and impacts given that the 'high intensity' variants of family intervention were often more strongly associated with FIP provision (and might therefore offer a good proxy for a strong and well developed model of family intervention). There are a range of possible explanations for this, all of which are difficult to test empirically. Firstly it *might* be explained to some extent by variation between areas in the quality of support offered to families with the most complex needs. This may have meant that any positive impacts from the programme for high intensity families in some areas were offset by less positive effects in areas that were less adept at supporting this group. But other possible explanations include this group of families simply having more entrenched problems and hence it being harder to change outcomes within the evaluation timeframe. It is also plausible that some positive impacts for these families were offset by much smaller (possibly negative) impacts for other families. Although the evaluation sought to generate direct estimates of impact for the high intensity group of families, these impacts may have been underestimated because of the difficulty of finding comparison families with a similar range of needs.

It could also be argued that the entrenchment of families' problems was under-estimated, however, and that the aspirations for the programme to transform their lives within a comparatively short period of time afforded by the intervention were unrealistic. Indeed, opinions were divided as to whether a demand-side approach was viable for addressing the root causes of families' problems. Some local areas considered that corresponding measures were required to tackle the structural determinants of poverty and disadvantage – the capacity of local labour markets and educational infrastructure on the one hand, and measures to tackle community-based risk factors such as organised crime, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), and doorstep lending on the other. Some local areas were moving towards a model with a stronger focus on neighbourhood-based issues at the time when the final wave of fieldwork took place for the evaluation in the autumn of 2014 and spring of 2015. This also reflected the wider reorganisation of children's services in accordance with the Early Help model.

### ***Lessons learned and recommendations***

It is important to distinguish between the conclusions that might be drawn for the PbR model and for the programme itself, even though the two are closely inter-linked. The PbR results are fully auditable and it was not within the scope or remit of the evaluation to assess the validity of the claims that were submitted by local authorities. However, the evaluation sounds a cautionary note for relying on PbR data to inform assessments about the added value of policy intervention, and highlights the importance of applying a suitable counterfactual. Most importantly, it emphasises the need for PbR programmes to be structured in such a way that they incentivise those responsible for delivery to improve outcomes relative to such a counterfactual, rather than simply claiming "results-based" payments for outcomes which would have been likely to occur in any event.

The evaluation also points towards the need to better align the outcomes data captured for the impact analysis with the data captured by local authorities as part of their grant requirements for the programme. Local authorities often reported that the PbR metrics were not capturing the families they were most concerned about, and that there was a greater need to examine the impact of the programme on outcomes such as domestic abuse mental health, and substance misuse issues. Although the evaluation measured these outcomes using survey data and found no impact, it was possible that the observation was too soon to provide firm conclusions. The 'bottom-up' model of monitoring and reporting for the expanded programme brings a much wider range of outcomes into the frame, but the lack of standardisation is likely to pose even greater challenges for any future attempts to measure impact at a Programme level.

The evaluation does not rule out the possibility that impacts from the phase one programme *may* occur further downstream. The survey results showed some signs of 'green shoots' regarding the intermediate outcome measures that might be expected to occur in lieu of harder impacts. The increased levels of confidence and optimism amongst the families within the treatment group compared with those from the comparison group imply that changes in outcomes may be occurring in these families, but that the interview was too early to detect those changes. Indeed, there is evidence from parenting

programme evaluations that interventions showing no initial signs of being efficacious can demonstrate their worth over a longer time period<sup>49</sup>.

The evaluation concurs that there are merits in undertaking a further wave of impact analysis using national administrative datasets at a future date. A further wave of data collection would be necessary, to determine whether the comparison group went on to join the programme following the period during which the original observations took place. Repeating the analysis after 24 or 36 months would increase the range of outcome variables that could be considered and allow longer for the intervention to take effect for families who started during the earlier stages of the programme. This would also make it possible to compare outcomes with families starting at a later date, to determine whether the results from the earlier cohort were typical of the impacts of the programme as it became more established.

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<sup>49</sup> See for example Oden, et al. 2000, with regard to the impact of the Head Start Programme in the USA

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