



NEW Strengthening Families Service

Children and Families Business Unit, WCC

Warwickshire County Council's Children and Families business unit has a new service which incorporates Targeted Family Support and Child In Need and is called Strengthening Families.

The service is for families with children and young people aged 0-18 years old who need support to improve their life chances or avoid issues escalating to child protection concerns. Depending on the level of need they will either receive targeted support or child in need support.

Key to the new service will be the joint approach between multi-disciplinary and multi-agency professionals who will be supported by a Strengthening Families Social Worker (advanced social work practitioners who work closely with a small group of family support workers and other professionals within communities to provide the most comprehensive support possible at an early stage).

Targeted support

To receive support families will consent to an early help single assessment completed by lead professional within the early help network to identify level of support needed. In this situation a dedicated family support worker will become the lead professional and work with other agencies to work with the family.

Child in need

This service can be initiated following consent from a family for a social worker to complete a statutory level single assessment which concludes that the threshold is met for child in need support under section 17, Children Act 1989. This means without support a child's health and development is likely to be impaired.

In this situation the family will be assigned a family support worker to implement a child in need plan. A Strengthening Families Social Worker will also be allocated whose role will be to complete specific pieces of work and to oversee the plan. The social worker will be responsible for reviewing the plan every 4-6 weeks to ensure it

remains relevant and effective. Family support workers will robustly manage the plan and set review timescales to prevent drift and escalation of concerns.

Strengthening Families will not work with children supported by the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) service, edge of care, or edge of child protection as systems of support will already be in place.

Implementing the new service

The first stage of the new service commenced on 1 May 2018. The effectiveness of the service and future delivery will be reviewed in September 2018 following an evaluation of the new approach.

By the end of May 2018 there will be a Strengthening Families Team in each district and borough based at the Children & Families buildings but delivering flexible services across the area in homes, schools and some early years settings.

Plans are in place for future co-location of the teams at Children & Family Centres, along with youth workers, health colleagues and other partner agencies. This will provide community support to develop early help networks, to oversee less complex child in need cases and to enable a shared understanding of thresholds for services. It should also reduce reliance upon statutory intervention.

The delivery model

Warwickshire will develop a 'pod' system to promote collaboration and support built through joint working and a shared vision to support the child and family with strong focus on outcomes for the child.

Each pod will support up to 100 children with a 50/50 split for Targeted Family Support and Child in Need interventions. In a pod, 50 children will be allocated to the Strengthening Families Social Worker who will also offer support and consultation to the family support workers to prevent escalation of issues affecting children at the targeted family support level.

The Strengthening Families Social Worker, as the lead professional with statutory responsibility for child in need cases, will oversee the Child In Need plans. Family support workers will undertake direct intervention which will include regular family visits, liaising with professionals and closely managing the plan.

Family support workers apply multi-disciplinary skills in their work with up to 20 children at any one time with mixed caseload categorised as Child In Need and targeted support. They help families to identify their own strengths and find ways to build on these to make changes.

They work closely with the multi-agency group including the social worker within child in need work, and have an input in making plans to achieve changes, as well as identifying any risks and concerns.

Strengthening Families - values and principles

1. Our **focus is the child** and the family and the outcomes we can help them achieve - with their voice at the centre of our engagement;
2. The level of intervention will be with **consent** from the family and will be **proportional to the needs** of the child and family;
3. We value and promote a **strong culture of collaboration** and support built through joint working and shared vision in supporting the child and family,
4. We will adopt a **relationship model** to enable the child and young person to have access to the **same practitioners** if the situation escalates from targeted support to child in need.
5. We will adopt a **consistent theory of change** to support practice in delivery of the service; this will be a **Solution Focused approach**.
6. We will work the child's plan **intensively** with regular visits, timely and enhanced reviews.
7. We will **enhance support** with Strengthening Families Social Workers offering advice and support to professionals within their locality to prevent an escalation in concerns by **intervening early**.

Strengthening Families builds upon the principles and evidence from other local authorities such as the Innovation Unit's Project Crewe. Project Crewe, which started in North East Cheshire. This led to reducing re-referrals and enabled needs to be addressed before they escalated.

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