

**For general release**

**Meeting: Children, Families and Schools Sub-Committee**

**Date: Monday 26 January 2004**

**Report of: Director, Children, Families and Schools**

**Subject: Update on Family Support Strategy**

**Wards affected: All**

**1. Purpose of report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on progress to implement the Family Support strategy, approved by the Children, Families and Schools sub-committee in January 2003.

**2. Recommendations**

2.1 That the information contained in this report be noted.

2.2 That three area teams rather than four be created, (for the reasons set out in this report, paragraph 4.18.) be agreed.

2.3 That members agree to reconsider the location of the 6 proposed children's centres, to ensure a geographical spread across the 3 area teams, and that any revisions are agreed by the Chair, Vice-Chair and opposition spokesperson.

**3. Background**

3.1 The Family Support strategy, approved by the sub-committee in January, proposed the establishment of area-based, integrated teams to work with children in need, who do not meet the thresholds for child protection intervention from the Duty and Assessment Team, or the long-term social work teams.

3.2 The aim of the strategy is to ensure earlier identification and intervention in problems which could mean that children and young people fail to thrive and achieve their potential, or which could lead to them suffering harm.

3.3 The strategy proposes to harness the efforts of CFS services and other partner agencies, including schools, health and the voluntary sector, and to build on the successful models of integrated working shown by Sure Start, On-Track, YOT and Connexions.

- 3.4 The strategy forms a central element of the Council's preventive strategy for children and young people, and links with the efforts made by the initiatives above, the Children's Fund and the Identification, Referral and Tracking project, to identify those most at risk and support them within their communities.

#### **4. Information**

##### **4.1 Consultation and Planning**

Since the strategy was approved by the sub-committee, there has been further consultation with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, the Area Child Protection Committee, and with various agencies and community groups to ensure a city-wide alliance is created for an integrated, area-based service for children and young people in need. A city-wide advisory group meets regularly, and there have been meetings with the senior management teams of the Primary Care Trust, the GPs Professional Executive Committee, South Downs NHS Trust and Brighton and Hove, Sussex University Hospitals Trust.

- 4.2 The initial proposal was for four area-based teams, and consequently four working groups were established, led by voluntary coordinators, and involving approximately 80 different group. The groups have looked at local needs and gaps in service, at service access points, and examples of how the various agencies can work together. A summary of their work to date is attached as annex 1.

- 4.3 The West area team have already started developing the service, building on the successful model of On-Track. See summary attached as annex 2.

##### **4.4 Children's Centres**

Since the strategy was approved, proposals have also been submitted to the DfES for 6 integrated Children's Centres for under-5s. The Centres will provide early education, childcare, health and family support services, and will link with neighbourhood nurseries, EB4U and Sure Start area programmes. The centres are currently proposed for North Portslade, City Centre, Hollingdean, Moulsecomb, Whitehawk and Bevendean. The location of the proposed centres is under review to ensure a city-wide spread across the area teams. It is recommended that any proposed changes be agreed by the Chair, vice-chair and opposition spokesperson for this sub-committee.

##### **4.5 Project Board**

A Project Board has been working to steer the implementation of the Family Support strategy. Due to the complexity of creating a multi-agency service, when the various agencies were all at different stages, it was agreed in June that CFS would concentrate on ensuring our own services were fit for

purpose, providing an effective preventive response for children in need. This has mainly involved the refocusing and targeting of Playlink home-visiting service and the four community based family centres.

#### **4.6 Playlink**

Children, Families and Schools Playlink home-visiting service is based in Moulsecoomb, Whitehawk, Hollingdean, Portslade and Hangleton. City Centre Sure Start also funds a Playlink service funded as an integral part of the Sure Start team. Since its inception Playlink has offered a universal service in these areas to all families with pre-school children. There has been an entitlement to a year's worth of weekly home-visiting for children aged 18 months, to prepare them for nursery and school.

4.7 Since the Family Support strategy was approved, the Playlink teams have been working with the health visiting service and others to identify the children and families most in need of support, through home visiting and group work. All families in the Playlink areas are contacted and offered a basic entitlement to home-visiting. They are also introduced to local services and activities for pre-school children. The Playlink offer a more extensive service to those who most need it. Through this refocusing, the teams can now extend to areas of need not previously covered, such as Stanmer Heights in Hollingbury, and the Bristol Estate in Kempton. In Hollingdean, Sure Start is funding an extra Earlylink scheme to ensure home-visiting from the birth of a new child. A similar proposal is under consideration by EB4U.

#### **4.8 Family Centres**

A key recommendation of the Family Support strategy was to ensure adequate targeting and monitoring for the four community based family centres: Hillview in Moulsecoomb, Whitehawk, Acorn in Hangleton and Chimneys in Portslade. Since the realignment of child protection assessment services over the summer 2003, Morley Street family centre is also now available for community use. A combined development of Morley Street is being planned in conjunction with City Centre Sure Start, the PCT and SDT.

4.9 Work is underway to adapt the CareFirst social care monitoring system to adequately record the family support work carried out by the family centres. All are now operating at least on an 80:20 ratio of targeted case work with individual children and families to more general group work. It is important to maintain some groups as an important part of the developmental work with parents, enabling them to become mentors to others in need of support.

4.10 It is also important to recognise that family support involves the whole family unit, not just the child or children with immediate presenting problems. A draft report on Matching Needs and Services for Looked After Children, recently commissioned by the department, indicates how highly

children and families in need appreciate the non-stigmatised and holistic support offered by the Family Centres.

4.11 However, the audit also indicates that at times there is a lack of coordination and communication across the whole of children's social care services, and a lack of clarity about intended outcomes and whether they had been achieved. This emphasises the importance of moving towards integrated teams, working to a shared framework for assessment and monitoring.

4.12 An analysis of the numbers of children being worked with by the family centres, and the main presenting problems has been carried out and this is attached as annex 3.

#### 4.13 **Transfer of cases**

The Head of Family Support carried out an analysis in June 2003 of the numbers of "pending" cases being held in the Duty and Assessment team. These are cases which had been referred as being in need, but did not meet the high thresholds for service. The analysis found 240 such cases, which were evenly spread across the city. Many of the cases have now been transferred to the family centres or other appropriate local services. This is an important feature in the development of an integrated family support service, to ensure that the various elements of the department and other agencies are linked up, and that cases are not held unnecessarily within DAT or the long-term teams.

4.14 During the late autumn it became apparent that there was a problem in the transfer of cases to the long-term social work teams, having been assessed as requiring formal child protection care by the Duty and Assessment team. This is due to a combination of high numbers being assessed as in need, or under court order, but also due to the continued recruitment pressures for front-line social workers and the inexperience of many who have been recruited. This latter factor will of course improve over time if staff can be retained, but the unrelenting nature of their work does not assist with this.

4.15 Due to these concerns, the CFS Departmental Management Team decided that the first priority for the transfer of cases to the family centres had to be from the long-term teams. These would be children who were moving towards de-registration and out of formal child protection proceedings, or children who could be returned home safely with a family support package.

4.16 The family centres managers and their staff were notified of this in November, and it caused considerable concern due to the lack of security and monitoring systems, adequate administration and recent child protection experience within the family centres. It is perhaps helpful to outline the current staffing levels within the family centres, which are led by practice managers and on average have one other qualified social worker

and up to three family support workers, supported by part-time administrative help. A full staffing outline is attached as annex 4.

4.17 These concerns have been explored with the staff and their representatives, following the submission of a formal grievance. The cases identified for transfer from the long-term teams are not currently under child protection arrangements, although they are complex and of a high level of need. These cases are being taken on by the family centres, which have been boosted with additional administrative support until the end of the financial year, and pending a wider restructuring of the CFS services, as outlined below. This limited transfer is of some assistance to the long-term teams, although they are still under considerable pressure.

#### 4.18 **Creation of area teams**

Following further analysis of service needs and current resources, it is proposed to create 3 area teams for the new Supporting Children and Young People Service. This matches the locality teams within South Downs NHS Trust Children's Service, and is very close to the boundaries planned for the combined health and adult social care community teams. This will facilitate working with the GPs, and it is vital that we maintain close links with adult social care and health services. Equally, it is important that schools are closely linked to the area teams. See map showing proposed boundaries at annex 5.

4.19 The area teams will initially be formed from Children, Families and Schools services, including Family Centres. Playlink and elements of the current long-term social work teams and the Duty and Assessment team. Smaller, city-wide and possibly multi-agency teams for child protection assessment and Looked After Children will be retained. Further work to plan for the area and city-wide teams is being carried out early in January before wider consultation and then appointment to the new Area Manager and Head of Service posts.

4.20 We will also work on the inclusion of the Education Welfare Service, and other education related teams, while ensuring no loss of focus on school attendance and attainment. In fact this could well be a combined target for the new community teams.

4.21 The Area Teams will include new initiatives such as the Children's Centres, Sure Start, On-Track and Connexions. We are also hoping to secure additional resources for family support from EB4U. We have additional 3 year government funding for community based CAMHS workers, but were unfortunately unable to appoint. The posts will be readvertised in the New Year.

4.22 The teams will link closely with schools, GPs and other community services. The Family Group Conferences which have been set up as part of the Children's Fund will also provide an important resource, as will the extended and full-service school initiative.

#### **4.23 Development of integrated working as part of the Children's Trust**

Eventually, the area teams will include staff from health and other key agencies, such as midwives and health visitors. The Family Support Project Board has recently reformed as a small strategic group working to develop Family Support and Children's Centres as first wave services within the Children's Trust. See annex 5 for a diagrammatic representation on how the project team fits into the overall reporting structure for the Children's Trust.

4.24 The Children's Trust will assist in the development of an integrated assessment framework, identification and referral systems for children at risk. Work has started on these, but the formal joint working of all the agencies involved in the Children's Trust will ensure sign up and that all front-line workers are mandated to use the same systems.

4.25 A report on the Family Support strategy, and the creation of area based teams is being prepared for the Board of the Primary Care Trust in January, to secure formal approval to the agreed strategy.

### **5. Conclusions**

5.1 The Family Support strategy is underway, in line with the recommendations approved by the Children, Families and Schools sub-committee in January 2003. The development has been slower than at first anticipated, due to the low resource base for family support, and the high level of demand for child protection services.

5.2 There have been some concrete developments including a better understanding of the level of demand for services for vulnerable children and those in need. A wide alliance of community based services has been created, linked to a range of relevant initiatives and the development of the Children's Trust. Integrated team working is already underway in the West area led by On-Track, and in the city centre and Hollingdean through the two Sure Start schemes.

5.3 Existing family support services are now better targeted, while not wanting to put all services at the higher end of need, which would detract from the original intention to boost early identification and intervention. There is still a considerable dilemma in ensuring the whole spectrum of need is met, due to the continued pressure on child protection services.

### **6. Consultation**

6.1 Staff and Trade Unions

6.2 Partner agencies, including Sure Start, PCT, SDT, BSUH, voluntary organisations

6.3 Serving Children Well network, Local Government Association and other national networks, including consultation on the Green Paper, Every Child Matters.

**7. Contact Officers**

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## **Annexes**

- Annex 1. Summary of work to date – four area based working groups**
- Annex 2. Summary of work – West area team**
- Annex 3. Cases in Family Centres November 2003**
- Annex 4. Family Centres – staffing outline**
- Annex 5. Map showing proposed boundaries of 3 area teams**
- Annex 6. Diagrammatic representation showing how the Family Support Board fits into the overall reporting structure for the Children’s Trust**