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**To: Education and Children Policy Board**

**On: 14 May 2015**

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**Report by: Director of Children's Services**

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**Heading: Glasgow University Evaluation of Families First**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. Renfrewshire's Community Planning Partnership is committed to ensuring that all children and young people in Renfrewshire are given the best start in life. An early years strategy was approved by the council's education policy board on 7 March 2013. This strategy commits the partnership to a family centred approach to improving outcomes for children and families.
- 1.2. Following extensive consultation an implementation plan was developed prior to full implementation in the autumn of 2013. An early years steering board was established in order to provide clear governance and accountability for the implementation of the strategy. This board reports to the Children and Young People Thematic Board and draws its membership from across the community planning partnership.
- 1.3. Although the early years strategy is at an early stage of implementation current progress is already demonstrating indications of a positive impact on children and families in Renfrewshire. In order to determine the impact and effectiveness in achieving agreed outcomes an evaluation plan is in place. This comprises two strands:
  - i) an outcome focussed self evaluation framework involving ongoing monitoring of the implementation plan by the evaluation team and
  - ii) an external evaluation.
- 1.4. The external evaluation of the family centred approach in Linwood and Ferguslie by Glasgow University has now been completed and a summary of the final report is attached as an appendix to this report. The key findings of the evaluation report are "overwhelmingly positive". The report highlights a number of key strengths of the approach. These are that, to better meet the needs of families, services should be:

- Faster in response and more able to devote time to building up and maintaining relationships with families. Initial presenting issues may just be one of many that families face and it takes time to understand parents and children's, often complex, situations
  - Willing to model appropriate behaviour for families rather than merely 'instructing them what to do'
  - Building relationships with families based on mutual respect and relating to them on their terms
  - Prepared to 'go the extra mile'. Services which are able to operate in a flexible manner and go beyond families expectations of what is required are held in high esteem by the community
  - Reducing the number of agencies families have to deal with at times of crisis. Having a one-stop service with an emphasis on building strong professional client relationship helps maintain parental confidence at times in their lives when self-belief and self-esteem is often low. At such times families are often ill prepared to cope with the demands imposed on them by any number of professional agencies.
- 1.5. It is recognised that much work is still required and ongoing evaluation will continue as the teams in Linwood and Ferguslie become embedded and further development is considered in response to the recommendations of Renfrewshire's Tackling Poverty Commission.
- 1.6. The early years steering board are considering the implications of this evaluation report. This will form the basis for further development of the strategy.

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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The education and children policy board is asked to note the very positive evaluation by Glasgow University of Families First in Linwood and Ferguslie.

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## **3. Background**

- 3.1. Renfrewshire's Community Planning Partnership is committed to ensuring that all children and young people in Renfrewshire are given the best start in life. The early years steering board was established in order to provide clear governance and accountability for the implementation of the strategy. This board reports to the Children and Young People Thematic Board and draws its membership from across the community planning partnership. This board also provides strategic leadership for the implementation of the early years collaborative stretch aims and associated key change areas. These aims are embedded within the Integrated Children's Services Plan.

3.2. The Families First core teams in Linwood and Ferguslie have been in place since November 2013. Roles and responsibilities for staff within the core teams were developed by managers who understood the needs of local children and families. Extensive consultation has been carried out with communities and community planning partners in order to ensure the approaches being developed meet the needs of families in the identified areas.

This includes the following:

- 20 formal focus groups were carried out with families in Linwood and Ferguslie to establish needs of families in these areas;
- 306 (as at end of March 2015) referrals have now been made to the core teams from self-referrals, pre-5 centres, schools, social work and health visitors;
- a significant number of self referral demonstrates the growing trust of the approach in the areas;
- drop -in sessions and universal groups such as Baby Massage, Active Mums and Cooking on a Budget have been established for all families with children between 0-8;
- personalised support for families is evidenced through a well produced video and interviews with family members;
- £660,077 income has been maximised for families in Linwood and Ferguslie as a result of financial advice being provided;
- funding to address fuel poverty has been used to recruit two energy advocates to support families across Renfrewshire with one working as part of the Families First team; and
- the model adopted in Linwood and Ferguslie actively promotes a culture in which staff from a broad range of agencies value each other's contribution.

3.3. A range of partners are now working within each of the localities in order to ensure the focus and keeping children and families at the heart of service provision. For example, HomeStart provides volunteer support to families across Renfrewshire with a more focused approach now being implemented within the core team areas of Linwood and Ferguslie.

3.4. The external evaluation of the family centred approach in Linwood and Ferguslie by Glasgow University has now been completed and a summary of the final report is attached as an appendix to this report. The key findings of the evaluation report are "overwhelmingly positive". The report highlights a number of key strengths of the approach, These are that, to better meet the needs of families, services should be::

- Faster in response and more able to devote time to building up and maintaining relationships with families. Initial presenting issues may just be one of many that families face and it takes time to understand parents and children's, often complex, situations

- Willing to model appropriate behaviour for families rather than merely 'instructing them what to do'
- Building relationships with families based on mutual respect and relating to them on their terms
- Prepared to 'go the extra mile'. Services which are able to operate in a flexible manner and go beyond families expectations of what is required are held in high esteem by the community
- Reducing the number of agencies families have to deal with at times of crisis. Having a one-stop service with an emphasis on building strong professional client relationship helps maintain parental confidence at times in their lives when self-belief and self-esteem is often low. At such times families are often ill prepared to cope with the demands imposed on them by any number of professional agencies.

3.5. As a result of this evaluation our next steps include:

- ongoing evaluation of the impact of actions within the current operational plan through self evaluation and the Glasgow University external approach;
- learning lessons from the core team approach providing support for children and families in Linwood and Ferguslie in order to consider development of sustainable approaches across Renfrewshire; and
- further development of the implementation of the early years collaborative stretch aims through appropriate use of improvement methodology along with other approaches in order to ensure ongoing improvement.

## Implications of this report

### 1. Financial Implications

None.

### 2. HR and Organisational Development Implications

None.

### 3. Community Plan/Council Plan Implications

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| Children and Young People             | - Our children and young people will have the best start in life.             |
| Community Care, Health and Well-being | - Closer and stronger links are developing across all CPP partners.           |
| Empowering our Communities            | - Families will become more resilient and empowered to make positive choices. |

### 4. Legal Implications

None.

### 5. Property/Assets Implications

None.

**6. Information Technology Implications**

None.

**7. Equality and Human Rights Implications**

The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

**8. Health and Safety Implications**

None.

**9. Procurement Implications**

None.

**10. Risk Implications**

None.

**11. Privacy Impact**

None.

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**List of Background Papers**

- (a) Background Paper 1: (delete row if not used or add further rows if required or state 'none')

The foregoing background papers will be retained within ELS for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Gordon McKinlay, Head of Service, 0141 618 7194, [gordon.mckinlay@renfrewshire.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:gordon.mckinlay@renfrewshire.gcsx.gov.uk)

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**Children's Services**  
GMcK/LG  
30 April 2015

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# **University of Glasgow**

**Renfrewshire Families First Evaluation  
The Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change**

***SUMMARY APRIL 2015***



# **Renfrewshire Families First Evaluation**

## **SUMMARY**

**The Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change  
Stuart Hall, Kevin Lowden, Georgina Wardle,  
Natalie Watters, Kristinn Hermannsson, Niamh Friel**

**Renfrewshire Council  
Jennifer Macmillan-Currie**

**April 2015**



The Integrated Children's Services Plan indicates how we will work towards delivering this long term vision and explains how services working with children, young people and their families will provide support to achieve improved outcomes for Renfrewshire's children over the next three years.

The most significant influence on children making the best start in life is the care and nurture of their parents. Our universal services of education and health work to support parents to make a positive impact on children and young people. It is our aim to prevent problems or difficulties from arising where at all possible, but when they do, we want to act with parents to resolve issues as quickly and effectively as possible.

Reach for a Better Future outlines our approach based on prevention and early and effective intervention.

The prevention approach means that parents, with the support of services when needed, will continue to focus on positive outcomes for most children by stopping problems before they arise.

The second element of our approach is to identify and intervene early when problems do occur. Evidence and research shows that early and effective intervention improves outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Using these approaches will help services support families, children and young people to achieve the outcomes that all of our children deserve.

**Councillor Jacqueline Henry**

Chair of the Children and Young People Thematic Board  
Renfrewshire Council



## Key findings

The findings presented here are based on 71 interviews with parents/carers and 56 interviews with professionals in the Linwood and Ferguslie neighbourhoods.

Overall, findings from the major stakeholders in the Families First neighbourhood projects; parents, Core Team members, and partner organisations have been overwhelmingly positive. Interviews with parents have clearly demonstrated that the initiative has had a positive, and in some instances a profound, impact on the lives of families in the Linwood and Ferguslie neighbourhoods. For many of these families referral, from partner agencies or by self-referral, has brought immediate support from dedicated Core Team members. Often, initial presenting problems have represented the tip of an iceberg and many of the families that the project has worked with have, over a period of time, revealed a series of additional and often complex underlying problems and difficulties. Yet even in these situations the Core Teams have shown themselves able to cope, both with the range of issues and with the complexity of some family situations. Many of the partner agencies that the project has engaged with over the last two years have reported that the Project's presence has resulted in benefits to their organisations. For some this has been the result of referring families onto a service that they believe is best placed to deal with their clients' issues, for others it has meant an improvement in their working environment. For example, class teachers spoke about how, with Core Team support, disruptive children have become more settled in class and better able to learn. Consequently, teachers then spend more time thinking about teaching rather than worrying about class control. Social work and health visitors noted that support from the Core Team had frequently prevented situations and issues from becoming more serious.

If the *Core Team Initiative* is as successful as the evaluation indicates then there are important implications for local authority services. It is clear that the nature of the project has resulted in a service to local families which is proactive and responsive to a wide range of needs. Indeed, parents often contrasted their 'positive' experience of the team with their 'negative' experiences of other local and central government authority services. The messages from this evaluation are clear, to better meet the needs of families, services should be:

- Faster in response and more able to devote time to building up and maintaining relationships with families. Initial presenting issues may just be one of many that families face and it takes time to understand parents and children's, often complex, situations
- Willing to model appropriate behaviour for families rather than merely 'instructing them what to do'
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Findings from Core Team staff, parents and representatives of partner services indicated broad agreement on the impact of the project.

### **Core Team Staff**

- The Core Team have helped many local families deal with a wide range of issues, from financial difficulties, through parent and child health issues, relationship difficulties and child behavioural problems.
- The financial advice workers have brought an added dimension to the work of the Project, so much so, that benefit checks for families have become routinised into the work of the project. Between November 2013 and March June 2014 the project secured over £573,000 in additional income for local families. They also helped local people manage more than £25,000 of debt.
- The Project's approach to working with families, adopting a 'walking with them' ethos while encouraging parents to take increasing responsibility for dealing with the issues appears to have been highly successful and there is little evidence of families becoming dependent on family workers.
- Staff highlighted the benefits of having a locally based team operating in a flexible and responsive manner with an ability to deal with a range of issues and difficulties.

### **Parents/Carers**

- The *Core Team Initiative* quickly established itself in the Ferguslie and Linwood neighbourhoods and built trusting relationships with local families.
- The project has made a notable positive impact to the lives of families in the two communities. In some instances, the support has had an immediate impact on families lives, for example, in preventing eviction and securing additional benefits. In other instances, impact may take longer and, in the case of families with mental health problems, may require cyclical support from the project.
- There is good evidence that the approach used by workers in modeling behaviour, advocacy and 'walking' parents through issues has begun to build the skills and resilience of those in vulnerable families and, therefore, contribute to the wider social capital of their communities.

- Many parents contrasted the positive ethos and approach of the Core Team with that of other public services including; social work, health visitors and the jobcentre where personnel were regularly viewed as patronising and judgmental.
- Parents also commented on the fact that Core Team members were able to spend more time with them than they had experienced with other public services where engagement time was more limited.
- Parents who had engaged with the energy advice service spoke positively about the help they had received. Among the encouraging outcomes were instances where families had switched to more economical tariffs, been supported to apply for insulation grants, or been informed on how to manage their heating systems more efficiently.
- Those parents who had been matched with a Homestart volunteer were very pleased with the support they received and were particularly appreciative of the fact that the volunteers had given up their own time to help other families.

### **Partner Agencies**

- Partner agencies regularly reported the *Core Team initiative* as an asset for supporting families in the communities in which they worked.
- There was little evidence of service overlap between the Core Team and other public services.
- Referral systems from other agencies had grown over the life of the project. Local schools, nurseries, and health visitors had become regular referrers.
- A number of partners suggested that the *Core Team project* was playing a role in building the social capacity and resilience of the communities.
- The *Core Team project* was having a positive impact on the work of other services in the neighbourhoods.

### **Conclusion**

Renfrewshire Council's *Core Team Initiative* represents a bold investment on the part of the Council to develop a locally based early intervention approach. It is clear that the success of this project will influence the future development of Council services including Education and Social Work. Findings from the evaluation indicates that the project has had a substantial impact on the lives of many parents and children living in the Ferguslie and Linwood areas. Moreover, in terms of measurable impact the project has secured more than half a million pounds in additional benefit income for families in the localities.