



Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

Date: 5th November 2020

Title: The Family Support Service, One Year Impact Report

Relevant councillor(s): Councillor Mark Shaw

Author: Gareth Morgan. Head of Early Help

Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendation:

That the Children and Education Select Committee notes the progress made and impact achieved by the Family Support Service in the first year of operation.

Executive summary

Following the Cabinet Decision of 4th March 2019, The Family Support Service (FSS) was implemented on 2nd September 2019. This report provides an update on the progress made and challenges faced by the service and details the impact that it has made in terms of its aims: to support vulnerable children and families so that they achieve positive outcomes; to integrate services wherever possible to create stronger partnerships which make effective use of all resources and improve family and community resilience; to improve access and reduce duplication to enable children and families needing support to tell their story only once and to evidence the impact of early help to reduce cost pressures on statutory services.

Background and context

Early Help provision in Buckinghamshire was reviewed following the Ofsted Inspection of October 2017, which highlighted that early help services needed to improve their effectiveness in providing the right support at the right time to help prevent escalation or repeat referrals to children's services. In light of both the reported weaknesses identified by Ofsted, and concerns over whether the previous early help model of delivery was providing cost-effective service delivering positive outcomes for vulnerable families to meet local need as opposed to a one size fits all model, a review was conducted. Following lengthy public consultation on proposals for change, which would provide a more accessible, connected and targeted response to emerging needs and deliver budget savings of £3.1m, Cabinet approved the new Family Support Service delivery model and ambitions on 4th March 2019. The new service was implemented on 2nd September 2019.

The aims of the Council's new Early Help Service

The Council's Family Support Service was designed to deliver support to families based on local need, which enable improved outcomes for children and families as set out in the Early Help Strategy 2019-22. Since its launch on 2nd September 2019, the service operated as planned until the significant restrictions resulting from the Covid -19 pandemic were imposed. Whilst the service has maintained provision to families in need of support throughout this period, this has been delivered remotely in line with the approach adopted across children's services and all family centres were closed from late March, in line with national directives.

Inevitably, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in significant changes to the scale and delivery of early help services and, due to the duration of the significant restrictions on face to face contact, family centre closures and challenges with making sites Covid secure for their usual client groups, a true assessment of the impact of the integrated FSS is impossible to complete. For example, direct comparison between family centre operation and children's centres pre-September 2019 are largely redundant or only valid across the initial six-month period of operation. The incremental growth of our family centre offer has been curtailed; however, what is evident is the expansion of our family centre offer beyond the traditional 0-5 universal provision and the FSS Family Centre offer at the point of closure, provides clear evidence of the change in service priorities from an emphasis purely on under 5's and at a universal level, to a targeted support offer for a wider age range of clients.

Early help is about supporting families to stay safe and resolve problems at the earliest possible opportunity, before they become more serious. Evidence gathered in the development of alternate delivery models, identified that current services were not reaching those families who needed help the most. 15% of the families who accessed the Council's early help services in 2017/18 had an identified need for support as did just 5% of families accessing children's centres. To provide positive outcomes, this distribution of resource needed to change.

Evidence of the impact of the new Family Support Service

It is worth noting that in their June 2019 letter, following a Monitoring visit, Ofsted reported that: "Leaders have worked proactively with partners at a strategic level to redesign the early help offer, with a plan to launch the new service in September 2019."

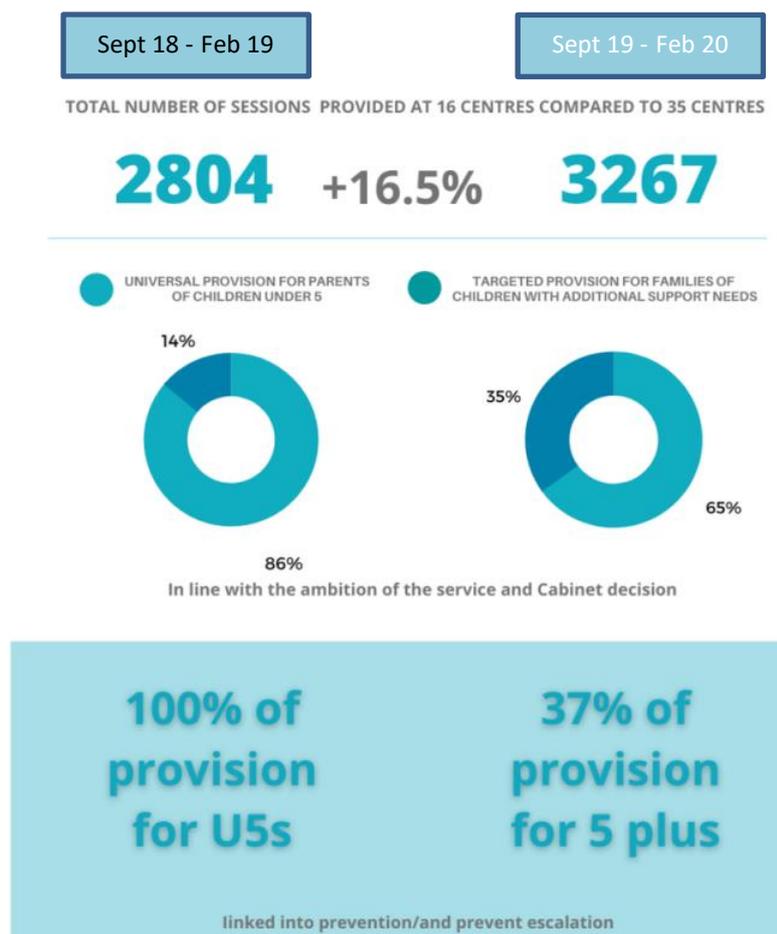
The new service is focused on working with partners to deliver the ambitions of the Early Help Strategy and has established a strong network of named, link family support workers aligned to every school in the County – providing a consistent offer of advice, information and joint working with school staff to discuss emerging needs and concerns for children and families and identify the appropriate support to prevent matters from getting worse. Locality Partnership Forums are also established in each area, enabling professionals from a range of agencies to come together to develop effective family support plans where progress is slow in helping families to move forward. Increasingly, operational partnerships are being strengthened to improve the early help offer sharing resources and intelligence to promote early intervention and prevention.

The establishment of FSS brought the previously commissioned support to community youth clubs back in house. This has enabled closer links to be created with these centres and enabling youth practitioners to support VCS youth workers through a newly established on-line practice forum. FSS assists community groups with policy guidance and the development of their youth offer including co-delivered sessional activity and supporting additional community youth provision in areas including Denham and Quarrendon. Youth practitioners from FSS are also linked to secondary schools to promote the early help offer to young people and support young people transitioning between universal and targeted provision as needs emerge, providing individual and group support to prevent things getting worse.

Family Centres

As part of the new service model, Family Centres looked to build a broader programme of activities for both families with very young children seeking peer support and aid the early identification of emerging needs and also to a broader range of families who needed additional support as their children got older.

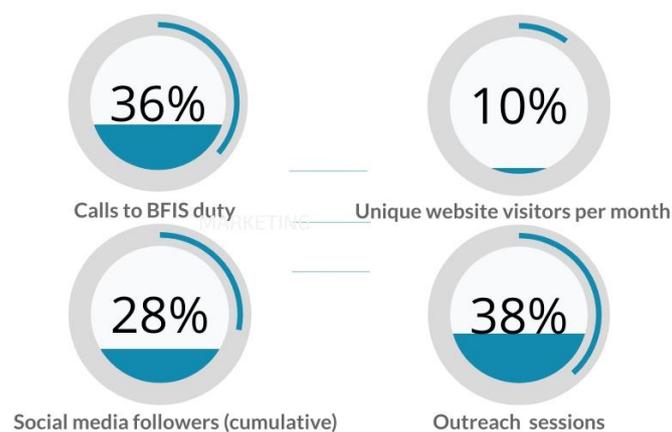
The comparison of provision between September 2018 and February 2019 and the first 6 months operation of the new model, reflects the move towards a wider age range and also the increased level of activity targeted towards families who need additional support due to emerging concerns.



Accessibility

Accessibility was an area where through the development of the new FSS, families or individuals needing advice and guidance would be able to access appropriate information easily. The development of a new Buckinghamshire Family Information Service is ongoing and will provide a new platform and customer experience in the coming months. It is pleasing to be able to report that the visibility of the early help offer, on-line and through BFIS, is increasing in line with our ambition to increase the ability of people to self-serve.

The growth statistics below show an increase in users accessing early help services on-line or through direct contact with the BFIS team in order to access self-help information and guidance or receive support from information and outreach officers on emerging issues:



Since the FSS launched with improved accessibility, requests received in the customer call centre have reduced by over 50%, improving the customer journey with callers reaching their destination without delay, which also reduces unnecessary demand against a high volume council service.

Demand (volume)

Contacts received into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for early help support increased significantly between 2018/19 and 2019/20, as detailed below and have remained steady in the current performance year despite the lockdown. We are now seeing demand increase which we expect to continue over the coming months.

FSS staff working alongside MASH colleagues enables families to access the right support at the right time, and FSS focus heavily on engaging families early as we know this provides the best opportunity for meaningful engagement and supporting families to achieve positive outcomes. It also contributes to reducing unnecessary demand in children's social care by ensuring all families who need help have access to appropriate services or advice so that the FSS focuses resources consistently at those families in need of additional support and to help prevent things getting worse.

Ofsted reported in summer 2019 that: "Thresholds for early help are appropriately applied by managers in the MASH. The development of the early help hub in the MASH has been positive in strengthening communication between MASH and early help services".

Building on this, since the introduction of the FSS the service is taking a higher proportion of contacts received by MASH. Positioning permanent FSS staff in the MASH team has led to a year on year increase of 21% in the volume of contacts processed by FSS, taking demand away from social care teams and offering earlier targeted assistance to families and children in need of additional support. This represents an increase in the proportion of total contacts arriving in MASH responded to by FSS from 4% to 7%.

+21%

MASH contacts for early help support increased significantly between 2018/19 and 2019/20 from 3483 to 4183.

Remained steady despite lockdown and an increase forecasted due to schools and other services restarting.

Contacts now have a clear destination and are progressed to the right service allowing FSS to focus on those families who need additional support



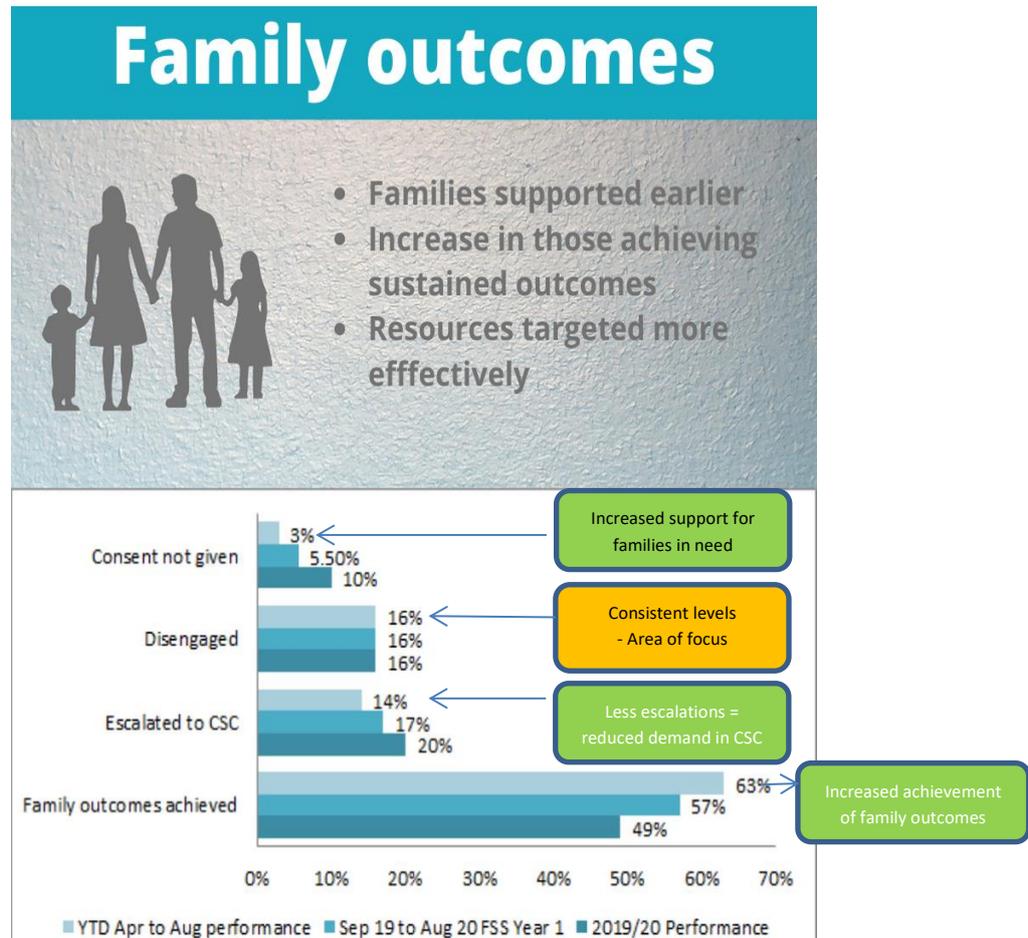
Outcome	% of contacts to service
Escalate to CSC	2%
FSS L3 support	46%
FSS L2 support	43%
Advice at L1 (BFIS)	5%
Other agency area	4%

FSS staff in MASH work to ensure that every contact to the service receives a meaningful response and where appropriate information, guidance or targeted support. 94% of contacts received by FSS in MASH are resolved by the service directly, with 91% receiving support in response to children and families who have emerging or complex needs, including where appropriate, statutory support. This provides clear evidence of the service focusing resource on those families most in need, with just 5% of contacts requiring self-help or universal support.

Family outcomes

The FSS aims to support families to overcome issues that they are facing before things become worse, wherever possible. The changes in the service operating model are delivering improvements in the number of families achieving sustained outcomes, but also in the way in which the service is able to target resources more effectively. This can be seen in the following data. Prompt contact, early face to face meetings, supporting active engagement, clear 'assess, plan, review' model of family support enables the new service to deliver higher volumes of family support with specialist workers allocated according to prevalent need in family. The FSS has completed 78% more early help assessments during the pre and post FSS comparison, completing 466 assessments in the latest reported period compared to 260 in the same period, a year earlier. In addition, in the current reporting year FSS teams have supported over 400 children who have been stepped down from statutory services, enabling ongoing support to families whilst releasing capacity within social care teams.

Increasingly consistent outcomes for families are being evidenced with 77% of families achieving identified outcomes or have correctly been escalated to children’s social care to ensure that they receive the right level of support.



In the Ofsted report of 2017, the overall effectiveness of early help provision was considered to be in need of improvement. Working with our improvement partner, Hampshire County Council, two remote audits of cases open to the Family Support Service have been completed (February 2020 and August 2020).

In the initial audit report, areas for development were specifically focused on supervisory practice, management oversight and improved quality, reflection and timeliness of open cases. Since March, all managers and assistant team managers in FSS have received additional external training and guidance focusing on these areas and evidence of improved supervisory practice is reported in the August audit report. Immediate action was taken to prioritise supervisory training in order to develop and support line managers to be better equipped to guide, support and direct family workers and drive both the quality and consistency of practice to ensure that all children and families receive appropriate, high quality, timely and effective and support in line with their needs. The report following the

August audit recognises the progress made and the considerable impact on all services from Covid 19 and the changes in practice that this has required.

The areas identified within the recommendations made were confirmation of aspects already known to the service as requiring further improvement. Actions have already been taken to address key areas of development, including increasing the focus of family plans and embedding the reflective supervisory practice and ensuring case summaries are detailed and timely. The service is monitoring performance against these key areas through a monthly quality assurance process, weekly data reports and a monthly service performance scorecard.

Since the launch of the Family Support Service, permanent staff levels have remained stable and there are no agency staff employed within the service.

We are pleased with what has been achieved since the service was launched in September 2019 especially in the context of Covid since March 2019. We are grateful to our staff for their resilience and hard work and the families that we have been working with for their continuous efforts.