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The Troubled Families Programme (England)

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Summary

The Troubled Families Programme (henceforth the 'TF Programme' or 'Programme') is a programme of targeted intervention for families with multiple problems, including crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse. One aim of the Programme is to tackle issues before they require costlier interventions. The Government also hopes to drive wider system change at the local level, including the adoption of a 'whole family approach' and better multi-agency working.

Staff funded by the Programme identify 'troubled families' in their area and usually assign a keyworker to each family, acting as a single point of contact. The Government uses a 'payment-by-results' model to incentivise positive outcomes. This involves both an upfront attachment fee to local authorities and a reward payment for each family that shows sustained improvement across set criteria or moves into continuous employment.

The first phase of the TF Programme is explained in section one of this paper. £448 million was allocated to the first phase which ran from 2012 to 2015. Local authorities worked with around 120,000 families, and 'turned around' 99%. This figure was later disputed when an independent evaluation of the Programme (published in October 2016) found no evidence that it had made any significant impact across its key objectives. The Government subsequently committed to carrying out a more robust evaluation of the Programme's impact during its second phase, alongside statutory annual reports.

The second phase of the Programme was launched in 2015. £920 million was allocated to help an additional 400,000 families. Following a Government announcement in January 2020, the second phase is now running to March 2021, with annual progress reporting until 2022. Section two of this paper explains the ongoing phase of the Programme.

An impact evaluation, supported by a Technical Advisory Group, is assessing the impact of the Programme in phase two. An independent qualitative study is also being undertaken by Ipsos MORI. Section three of this paper outlines the most recent findings published in March 2019; Annex A lists the other reports that have been published for phase two.

Qualitative data from staff involved in the Programme suggests that the second phase has been effective in initiating change at a local level. According to feedback, participant families see the benefit of the initiative.

Efforts to conduct a more rigorous analysis of family outcomes are ongoing as the evaluation establishes a robust comparative group outside of the Programme. By March 2019, comparative data indicated that the Programme had reduced the number of Looked After Children, as well as the number of custodial sentences and convictions. However, in areas such as employment, Children in Need, health, and school attendance, evidence was either mixed, showed little change, or had not yet been possible to analyse.

The 2019 cost-benefit analysis suggested that the Programme had resulted in economic and fiscal benefits to the taxpayer and wider society. These benefits had mainly been realised through reductions in the number of Children in Care and youth offending.

Despite Ministers' continued support of the Programme's aims, including the January 2020 announcement of funding extending the Programme for a year, it is unclear if it will be funded beyond March 2021.

The TF Programme is administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, formerly the Department for Communities and Local Government, DCLG) and covers England only.

1. Phase one (2012-2015)

Summary

- The first phase of the Troubled Families Programme ran from 2012 to 2015.
- It set a target to work with, and 'turn around', families with multiple problems, or help them move into continuous employment.
- Problems included crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy and unemployment.
- Local authorities ran the Programme and received payment-by-results from central Government.
- Figures from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)¹ in May 2015 showed that 99% of the families identified were 'turned around'. The Government estimated the Programme saved £1.2 billion of public money.
- After criticism of these figures, an independent evaluation of the Programme found that it had had no significant impact across the Programme's key objectives and could not calculate estimates of savings.

1.1 Pilot programme

The 2010 Spending Review announced a new Community Budgets programme to be trialled in 16 English local authority areas that would:

[...] help turn around the lives of families with multiple problems, improving outcomes and reducing costs to welfare and public services. The campaign will be underpinned by local Community Budgets focused on family intervention –enabling a more flexible and integrated approach to delivering the help these families need.²

The Programme, overseen by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG),³ gave council areas direct control over several strands of central Government funding from 2011/12, free of the usual conditionality attached to the funding streams. This was to be spent on tackling social problems around families with complex needs.⁴

The 16 council areas chosen to pilot the Programme were: Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Bradford, Essex, Greater Manchester (a group of 10 councils), Hull, Kent, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Barnet, Croydon, Islington, Lewisham, Swindon, and a grouped area of Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Wandsworth.⁵

¹ Now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

² HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2010](#), October 2010

³ Now the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

⁴ '[16 areas get 'community budgets' to help the vulnerable](#)', DCLG press release, 22 October 2010. More information on the community budget model can be found in the Commons Library briefing paper, [Local government: alternative models of service delivery](#).

⁵ '[16 areas get 'community budgets' to help the vulnerable](#)', DCLG press release, 22 October 2010

1.2 Launch of the Troubled Families Programme

Following the 2011 riots in some parts of England, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, set out plans to invest £448 million over the course of the Parliament to turn around the lives of around 120,000 'troubled families' in England.⁶ In his speech, he cited an estimate that, over the previous year, £9 billion had been spent on these families due to the multiple interventions they received from different parts of the State.⁷

Launched in 2012, the TF Programme initially targeted 120,000 families with multiple problems

Although it would continue to target families with multiple problems, the administration and funding of the new Troubled Families Programme was different to that of the Community Budgets pilot, moving instead to a payment-by-results model.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the Programme, DCLG provided 39% of the central Government funding, with five other departments providing the rest (Department for Work & Pensions, Ministry of Justice, Department for Education, Home Office and Department of Health).⁸

Identifying troubled families

The estimate of 120,000 troubled families was based on a 2005 survey. DCLG provided all upper-tier local authorities in England with an indicative number of troubled families in their area, based on population estimates and indices of deprivation and child well-being.

Local authorities were responsible for identifying their assigned troubled families, based on criteria set out in the financial framework document (see below).

To help local authorities to identify some of their troubled families, regulations were passed allowing the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to share data on families receiving out-of-work benefits, without informed consent.⁹

Defining a troubled family and successful outcomes

The definition of 'troubled families' was set out in the 2012 financial framework document (now archived). This primarily defined 'troubled families' as households who:

- Are involved in **crime and anti-social behaviour**
 - Households with 1 or more under 18-year-old with a proven offence in the last 12 months; AND/ OR

⁶ The 120,000 figure is based on research from 2005. Further details were published in the Cabinet Office's, [Troubled Families Estimates Explanatory Note](#)

⁷ Prime Minister's Office, [Troubled families speech](#), 15 December 2011

⁸ National Audit Office, [Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges](#), 3 December 2013, HC 878 2013-14

⁹ The [Social Security \(Information-sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.\) Regulations 2012](#), SI 2012/1483

- Households where 1 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.
- Have **children not in school**
 - Has been subject to permanent exclusion; three or more fixed school exclusions across the last 3 consecutive terms; OR
 - Is in a Pupil Referral Unit or alternative provision because they have previously been excluded, or is not on a school roll; AND/ OR
 - A child has had 15% unauthorised absences or more from school across the last 3 consecutive terms.
- Have an **adult on out-of-work benefits**¹⁰

In phase one, 'troubled families' were defined as those facing problems with crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy and/ or unemployment

These three criteria were non-discretionary: families that met all three were to be enrolled in the TF Programme automatically.

Those that met two of the three criteria **could** be included if they were a "cause for concern". The local authority could set local criteria in this respect, but the Government expected these families to "cause high costs to the public purse" or to have underlying health problems.¹¹

According to the independent evaluation of phase one, the most common discretionary criteria applied by local authorities were: domestic violence/abuse; child protection; drug/alcohol/substance misuse; and mental health problems.¹²

The aim of the Programme was to 'turn around' the lives of these families. This would be achieved either when:

- They achieve all 3 of the education and crime/anti-social behaviour measures set out below where relevant:
 - Each child in the family has had fewer than 3 fixed exclusions and less than 15% of unauthorised absences in the last 3 school terms; and
 - A 60% reduction in anti-social behaviour across the family in the last 6 months; and
 - Offending rate by all minors in the family reduced by at least 33% in the last 6 months.; OR
- At least one adult in the family has moved off out-of-work benefits into continuous employment in the last 6 months¹³

Families meeting all three of the crime and anti-social behaviour, truancy and unemployment criteria were to be included automatically

These outcomes would lead to payment under the payment-by-results system (see below). There was also some payment if families achieved

¹⁰ DCLG, [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), March 2012

¹¹ DCLG, [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), March 2012

¹² DCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme: Final Synthesis Report](#), October 2016, p30

¹³ DCLG, [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), March 2012, p9

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'progress to work' (e.g. volunteering for the Work Programme or attached to European Social Fund provision), but this was not a measure of 'turning around' a family.

Payment-by-results

DCLG estimated that the cost of intensive intervention with a family was around £10,000. As part of the TF Programme, it paid 40% of this (£4,000) using a payment-by-results model, when a family was 'turned around' (see above).¹⁴

The framework document referenced DCLG analysis that existing programmes would have 'turned around' one in six families eligible for support without the TF Programme. As a result, the 40% was only paid for five out of every six families helped.¹⁵

Most of the £4,000 was paid up-front as an 'attachment fee', with the rest paid when a family was deemed to have been 'turned around'. The proportion paid up-front decreased year-on-year to reflect the higher initial set-up costs. The up-front fee made up 80% of payment in 2012/13, 60% in 2013/14 and 40% in 2014/15. **Figure 1** shows the payment model for 2012/13.

Local authorities received up to £4,000 for each family 'turned around' under the programme

¹⁴ DCLG, [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), March 2012

¹⁵ DCLG, [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), March 2012

Figure 1: Troubled Families payment-by-results model, 2012/13

Result	Attachment fee	Results payment	Total
They achieve all 3 of the education and crime/ anti-social behaviour measures set out below where relevant: 1. Each child in the family has had fewer than 3 fixed exclusions and less than 15% of unauthorised absences in the last 3 school terms; and 2. A 60% reduction in anti-social behaviour across the family in the last 6 months; and 3. Offending rate by all minors in the family reduced by at least a 33% in the last 6 months.	£3,200 per family	£700 per family	£4,000 per family
If they do not enter work, but achieve the 'progress to work' (one adult in the family has either volunteered for the Work Programme or attached to the European Social Fund provision in the last 6 months).		£100 per family	
OR			
At least one adult in the family has moved off out-of-work benefits into continuous employment in the last 6 months (and is not on the European Social Fund Provision or Work Programme to avoid double-payment).	£3,200 per family	£800 per family	£4,000 per family

Source: DCLG, [The Troubled Families programme: Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme's payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), March 2012

Results were self-declared by local authorities' Troubled Families teams. However, DCLG also carried out 'spot checks' to ensure accurate reporting.

How the Programme worked in practice

The financial framework did not set out any centrally mandated way in which the Programme should be implemented, instead emphasising flexibility for local authorities.

In December 2012, DCLG published [Working with Troubled Families: a guide to the evidence and good practice](#). Looking at what practitioners and families said had worked for them, the guide noted five key factors:

1. A dedicated worker, dedicated to a family
2. Practical 'hands-on' support
3. A persistent, assertive and challenging approach
4. Considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence

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5. Common purpose and agreed action.¹⁶

Examples throughout the guide showed that many interventions centred on having a keyworker as a single point of contact for the family.

The DWP also provided 150 JobCentre Plus advisers to 94 local authority Troubled Families teams, to offer help in finding work.¹⁷

1.3 Analysis of phase one

Progress information on phase one of the Programme is published on the Gov.uk website: [Troubled Families programme 2012 to 2015: progress data and financial framework](#). These datasets show how many families were identified and 'turned around' by local authorities throughout the Programme.

How many families were 'turned around'?

The first phase of the Programme set out to identify 117,910 families to 'turn around' by the end of the 2010-2015 Parliament, a figure usually rounded to 120,000 in DCLG publications.

Figures for May 2015 indicated that all 117,910 troubled families had been identified.¹⁸ They also showed that of the 117,910 families identified, 116,654, or 99%, had been 'turned around'. Of the 152 local authorities in England, only two, Cornwall and Lancashire, had a success rate of below 90%, whilst 132 had a success rate of 100%.¹⁹

¹⁶ DCLG, [Working with Troubled Families: a guide to the evidence and good practice](#), December 2012

¹⁷ [HC Deb 10 March 2015 c158](#)

¹⁸ DCLG, [Troubled Families: progress information by December 2014 and families turned around by May 2015](#), 22 June 2015

¹⁹ DCLG, [Troubled Families: progress information by December 2014 and families turned around by May 2015](#), 22 June 2015

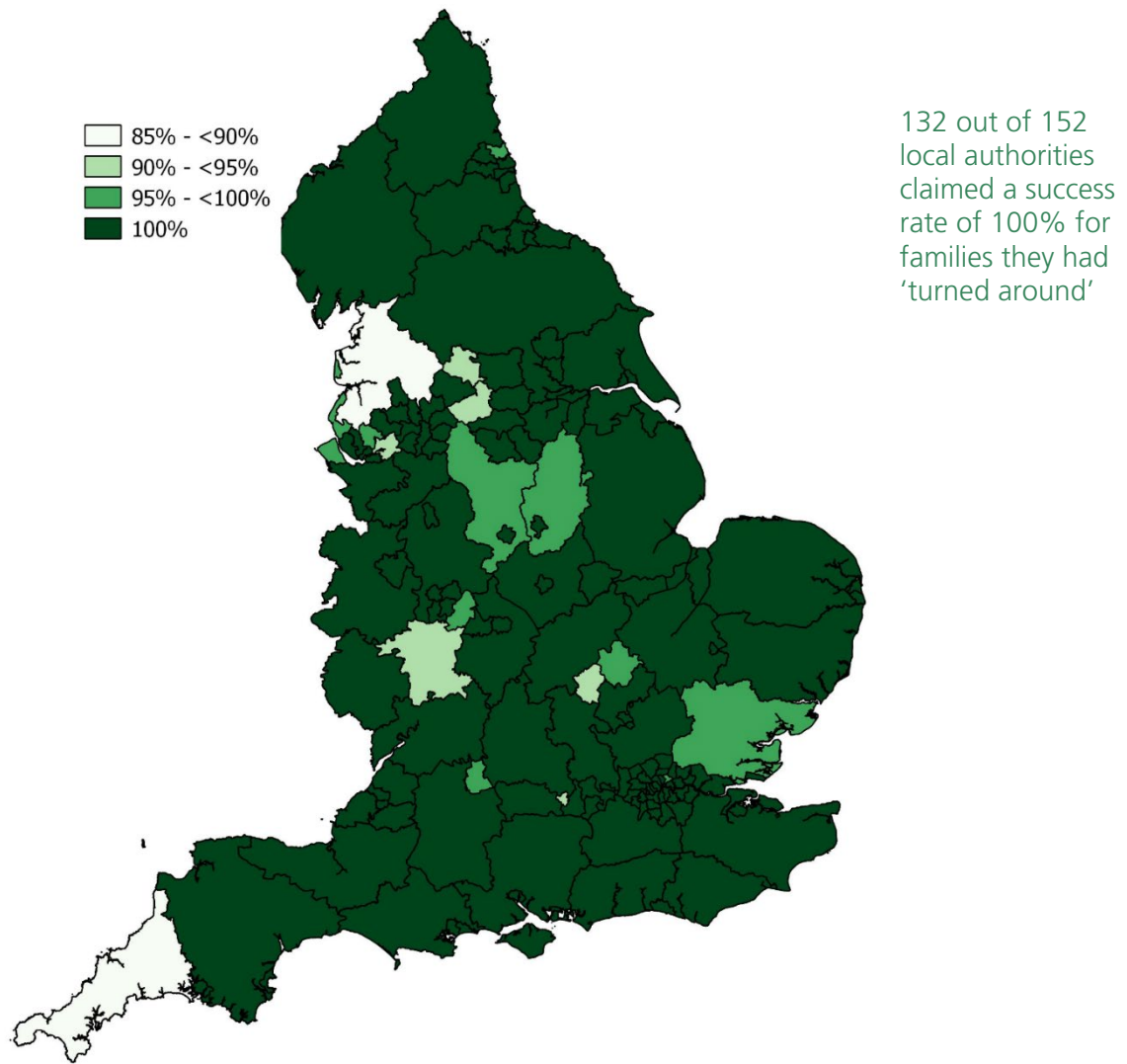


Figure 1: Percentage of families 'turned around' by local authority, to May 2015

A significant majority of families that were 'turned around' by the Programme were defined as such because of a crime, anti-social behaviour or education outcome, rather than an 'achieving continuous employment' outcome (see Chart 1 below).

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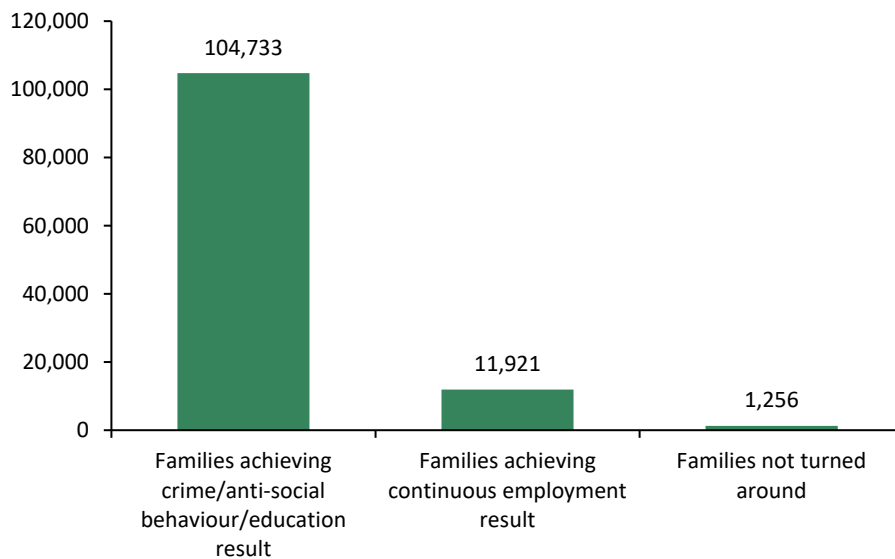


Chart 1: Outcomes for identified 'troubled families', to May 2015

Source: DCLG, [Troubled Families: progress information by December 2014 and families turned around by May 2015](#)

Both the then Communities Secretary (Eric Pickles) and Shadow Communities Secretary (Hilary Benn) welcomed the results achieved by the Programme in the House of Commons Chamber in March 2015.²⁰

However, several commentators criticised the figures. Jonathan Portes from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) argued that the success rates were so high that they lacked credibility:

CLG told Manchester that it had precisely 2,385 troubled families, and that it was expected to find them and "turn them around"; in return, it would be paid £4,000 per family for doing so. Amazingly, Manchester did precisely that. Ditto Leeds. And Liverpool. And so on. And CLG is publishing these figures as fact. I doubt the North Korean Statistical Office would have the cheek.²¹

In her evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the former Director General of the TF Programme, Dame Louise Casey, admitted that the number of families worked with may have been higher than 117,910, in order for local authorities to meet their targets:

It was suggested in the financial framework that local authorities reached more families, although we would not pay them for them, in order both to reach that and as part of a system change. I don't think they did masses more, but our sense around the country is that people did more in order to meet that.²²

²⁰ [HC Deb 10 March 2015, cc169-160](#)

²¹ ['A troubling attitude to statistics'](#), *NIESR policy blog*, 15 March 2015

²² Committee of Public Accounts, [Troubled families: progress review](#), 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, Q104

Other commentators, including the Labour MP Lyn Brown, argued that in many cases families had been classed as having been ‘turned around’ but had in fact never engaged with the TF Programme in their area, with many still facing problems of crime, unemployment and truancy.²³

Stephen Crossley from the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) raised concerns about local authorities using data matching exercises to justify payment claims, when in reality other factors, or the families themselves, may have brought about improvements to their situation. He was also concerned about the term ‘turned around’, suggesting that it may not reflect the outcomes experienced by those helped by the Programme:

We do not know how many ‘turned around’ families are still experiencing domestic violence, poor mental health or other issues such as poor quality or overcrowded housing, poverty or material deprivation, because this information has not been reported by the government.

At present, we are also not aware of whether the families consider their lives to have been ‘turned around’ by their involvement with the programme, or whether their lives remained ‘turned around’ after the intensive support was withdrawn. It should also be noted that many families will not know that they have been labelled as ‘troubled families’ because many local authorities choose not to inform them of this and use different names for their local programmes.²⁴

The 2016 Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report, [Troubled families: progress review](#), was also critical of the terminology. The PAC argued that it was a ‘misleading’ term when the outcomes measured were short-term, and families with such serious social problems could not be expected to be ‘turned around’ within a space of months or years. The PAC recommended that DCLG should change the terminology to give “an accurate depiction of how disadvantaged families make progress.”²⁵

The [Government’s response](#) to the report noted that this had already been implemented, with a change in terminology for phase two of the Programme from ‘turned around’ to ‘significant and sustained progress’.²⁶ See section two of this paper for more details.

Critics argued that some of the families who had been ‘turned around’ had received little actual assistance from the programme

²³ [HC Deb 30 June 2014, c582](#)

²⁴ CCJS, [The Troubled Families Programme: the perfect social policy?](#), November 2015

²⁵ Committee of Public Accounts, [Troubled families: progress review](#), 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, recommendation 5

²⁶ HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), March 2017, para 4.3

How much money was saved during phase one?

David Cameron's 2011 speech highlighted the benefits, not only to the families taking part in the Programme, but also to the public purse:

We've always known that these families cost an extraordinary amount of money...

...but now we've come up the actual figures.

Last year the state spent an estimated £9 billion on just 120,000 families...

...that is around £75,000 per family.²⁷

Of this £9 billion, Government figures estimated that £8 billion was spent "purely reacting to their [the approximately 120,000 families] problems".²⁸

Analysis of subsequent DCLG publications by Stephen Crossley, working for the CCJS, raised concerns about the accuracy of this figure. Crossley argued that the £9 billion had been extrapolated from a smaller sample of families with at least five disadvantages and a child with multiple behaviour problems, and that this may not be the case amongst the whole population of the 120,000 families.²⁹ However, a 2014 Written Statement from the then Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, noted that each of the families worked with by that point had an average of nine serious problems.³⁰

DCLG estimated phase one of the Programme saved £1.2 billion of public spending on the identified families

Although no target was set for how much money the Programme was intended to save, DCLG's original business case estimated a saving of £2.9 billion (later revised down to £2.7 billion).³¹ Figures were published in March 2015, estimating that £1.2 billion had been saved to date.³²

This figure was based on extrapolation of results from seven local authorities, including Manchester, for which it was estimated that for every £1 invested in the Programme, £2.20 in benefits were realised.³³

When questioned on the difference between the £1.2 billion of savings and the initial cost estimate of £9 billion, Eric Pickles said:

The right hon. Gentleman made a number of points on how we can demonstrate success and square the £1.2 billion with the £9 billion. He knows as well as anybody that this is notoriously difficult territory, because Governments of all types are absolutely terrible at measuring outcomes. We have made a start—he might have had an opportunity to look at the research—by looking at seven exemplar authorities and extrapolating the findings to produce some financial analysis. To answer his questions, I think

²⁷ Prime Minister's Office, [Troubled families speech](#), 15 December 2011

²⁸ [PO 7919 \[on Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 7 September 2015

²⁹ CCJS, [The Troubled Families Programme: the perfect social policy?](#), November 2015

³⁰ [HC Deb 1 September 2014, c5WS](#)

³¹ National Audit Office, [Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges](#), 3 December 2013, HC 878 2013-14

³² ['More than 105,000 troubled families turned around saving taxpayers an estimated £1.2bn'](#), DCLG press release, 10 March 2015

³³ DCLG, [The Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme to the Taxpayer](#), March 2015

that it is only fair to have that audited independently. As he will know, we are due to have a very comprehensive audit of the programme.³⁴

In their analysis of the £1.2 billion, Full Fact raised concerns about the quality of the figure:

The £1.2 billion figure doesn't count the cost of the intervention, and it's based on a sample of families from just seven of the 152 local authorities taking part in the scheme.

Most of the seven areas saved about £6,000 to £10,000 per family, but Salford saved £18,000 per family while Staffordshire saved £49,000 per family in the first year of the programme.

If the other 145 local authorities are more like the £6,000 or £10,000 regions than Salford or Staffordshire, then the total savings will be much lower than the £1.2 billion figure.

The department says that it thinks the estimate for savings is on the low side. Not all of the savings made are included (for example, they don't have an agreed cost for police call outs), and the councils reporting back didn't collect information on all the services where they could make savings.

Some areas actually ended up spending more per family on things like social services and housing, so some of the services that they didn't have information on might have seen an increase in spending.³⁵

Several organisations raised concerns about how the figure of £1.2 billion of savings figure was calculated

The National Audit Office (NAO) also noted that the estimated figure did not take into account the non-intervention rate (that is, those who would have been 'turned around' without the Programme).³⁶

Independent evaluation of phase 1

An [independent, national evaluation](#) of phase 1 of the Troubled Families Programme was published on 17 October 2016. This work was carried out by the research and consultancy company, Ecorys. The report was originally intended to be published in late 2015, and the 2016 PAC report into the Troubled Families Programme was very critical of this delay.³⁷

Impact evaluation

Through analysis of data from 56 local authorities, encompassing around 25% of the 117,910 participants, and through interviews with 495 families, the evaluation found **little impact attributable to the Programme:**

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

³⁴ [HC Deb 10 March 2015, c161](#)

³⁵ '[£1.2 billion saved? The troubled families programme](#)', *Full Fact*, 23 June 2015

³⁶ National Audit Office, [Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges](#), 3 December 2013, HC 878 2013-14

³⁷ Committee of Public Accounts, [Troubled families: progress review](#), 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, recommendation 1

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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.³⁸

The only short-term outcome with statistically significant improvements attributable to the Programme related to families reporting that they were managing well financially or managing better than a year ago. However, there were no significant impacts on their self-reported levels of debt.³⁹

Families taking part in the Programme were more likely to report 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 comparison group.⁴⁰

The evaluation noted that the lack of any significant impact did not necessarily contradict the claimed 99% success rate. This is because the 99% of families were those who achieved set outcomes, while the evaluation analysed whether families would have achieved these outcomes in the absence of the Programme. That is, **when outcomes were compared between similar families inside and outside the Programme, they made similar progress.**⁴¹ This suggested that families might have been 'turned around' through their own efforts, or due to existing interventions by local authorities.

Concerns were raised in the evaluation about the failure of the payment-by-results model to take this into account:

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.

[...] 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.⁴²

The evaluation did concede the possibility that the 12- and 18-month evaluation periods were too soon to provide firm conclusions, and recommended repeat analysis after 24 or 36 months.⁴³

Variations in how the Programme was implemented by different local authorities were also highlighted; it was acknowledged that the

Making comparisons to a matched control group of families, an independent evaluation found no consistent evidence that positive family outcomes could be attributed to the Troubled Families Programme

³⁸ DCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme: Final Synthesis Report](#), October 2016, p49

³⁹ Ibid., p68

⁴⁰ Ibid., p68

⁴¹ Ibid., p69

⁴² Ibid., p75

⁴³ Ibid., p83

Programme may have had statistically significant impacts in some areas, balanced out by negative impacts in other areas.⁴⁴

Although there was no evidence of significant impact across the Programme's core objectives, the evaluation did observe other positives, including:

- raising the profile of family intervention nationally;
- boosting local capacity for family intervention;
- transforming local services and systems, at a time when most local authority budgets were undergoing retraction; and
- improving joint working with Jobcentre Plus at a local level.⁴⁵

The evaluation found evidence of the Programme transforming local authority services

Economic evaluation

Despite earlier claims by the Government that the Programme had saved £1.2 billion (see section 2.3), the evaluation stated that it had not been possible to undertake a full cost-benefit analysis due to the results of the impact evaluation.⁴⁶

The evaluation was unable to undertake any cost-benefit analysis of the Troubled Families Programme, as there was no control group to compare with

The Government calculated, using information provided by 67 local authorities, an estimated fiscal benefit due to the gross reduction in services of around £7,050 per family per year (around £2.11 for every £1 spent). However, without a control group to compare to, it was not possible to attribute these savings to the Programme. The Government acknowledged that the spending reductions may have reflected "changes in wider national trends, demographic changes in the make-up of the cohort, success of other government programmes, or a natural de-escalation of issues".⁴⁷

On 19 October 2016, in her evidence to PAC's inquiry into the Programme, DCLG's Permanent Secretary Melanie Dawes, said "we are certainly not claiming any definitive cost savings from the programme."⁴⁸

The final PAC report noted that there had been difficulties in building the cost savings calculator, as it had not always been possible to convince other agencies to release data needed by the DCLG, such as the number of police or ambulance callouts.⁴⁹

How 'troubled' were the identified families?

Some commentators, such as Ruth Levitas from the Poverty and Social Exclusion research project (PSE), criticised the use of the term 'troubled families', noting that the families identified for help by the Programme were not necessarily the "neighbours from hell" referred to in David Cameron's 2011 speech:

⁴⁴ Ibid., p77

⁴⁵ Ibid., p68

⁴⁶ Ibid., p10

⁴⁷ DCLG, [Local Authority Data on the Cost and Potential Fiscal Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme](#), October 2016, p4, p10

⁴⁸ Committee of Public Accounts, [Troubled families: progress review](#), 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, Q107

⁴⁹ Ibid., para 24

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The '120,000 families' identified in the original SETF (Social Exclusion Task Force) report do indeed have troubles: physical and mental ill-health, poor housing, income poverty, material deprivation. And, as Ogden Nash said, 'a trouble is a trouble is a trouble, and it's twice the trouble when a person is poor'. The leap to treating them as 'troublesome families', bears little relation to the original criteria of multiple disadvantage on which the figure is based.⁵⁰

Critics argued that the so-called 'troubled families' had little in common besides economic disadvantage

Following the publication of the independent evaluation, an analysis by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS), authored by Stephen Crossley, also raised concerns about the term 'troubled families' when looking at the characteristics of families entered in the Programme:

In contrast to the image of 'troubled families' as 'neighbours from hell' where drug and alcohol addictions, crime and irresponsibility 'cascade through generations' [...] the only characteristics shared by the majority of 'troubled families' are that they are white, not in work, live in social housing and have at least one household member experiencing poor health, illness and/or a disability. Crime, anti-social behaviour and substance abuse, even at relatively low levels, are all characteristics which relate to small minorities of official 'troubled families'.⁵¹

More information on the characteristics of participant families can be found in [section 3.2 of the independent evaluation](#).

⁵⁰ PSE, [There may be 'trouble' ahead: what we know about those 120,000 'troubled' families](#), 21 April 2012, Policy response series no. 3

⁵¹ CCJS, [The Troubled Families Programme: the perfect social policy?](#), November 2015

2. Phase Two (2015-2021)

Summary

- The Troubled Families Programme was expanded for 2015-2021 to work with 400,000 additional families.
- The second phase targeted additional problems, including domestic violence, health, drug abuse, mental health and children at risk.
- The payment-by-results system was retained, although it features a less generous pay-out per family to reflect broader criteria for inclusion in the Programme.
- A small number of local authorities have moved to a new funding model called 'Earned Autonomy', in which all payments are provided up-front.
- MHCLG are required to report annually on the progress of the second phase of the Programme.
- The impact evaluation for phase two aims to look at a longer timeframe and compare outcomes to a quasi-control group for a more robust analysis of net impact.
- Ipsos MORI is independently gathering data via surveys to gain an insight into service transformation at the local level.

The 2013 Spending Round announced that the TF Programme would be expanded to reach an additional 400,000 families for which £200 million would be allocated in the first year (2015/16).⁵² It was later confirmed that the Programme would run until 2020, with an additional £720 million allocated for the next four years.⁵³ In January 2020, the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick announced a further £165 million to continue the Programme to March 2021.⁵⁴ A total funding allocation for each local authority, as of March 2019, was provided in answer to a PQ.⁵⁵

The second phase of the TF Programme (2015-2021) was expanded to target an additional 400,000 families

Stephen Crossley of the CCJS criticised the 400,000 figure as a move away from the Programme's initially stated aims:

The new figure of 400,000 more 'troubled families' equates to around 6.5 per cent of all families in England, and the substantial discretion offered to local authorities in interpreting and applying the criteria, means that almost any family who comes into contact with, or is referred to, a non-universal service could fall into the category of 'troubled'.⁵⁶

Although the Programme did not fully start until 2015/16, 113 local authorities signed up as 'early starters' in 2014/15 for the expanded Programme.

Under measures brought in by the *Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016*, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is required to report annually to Parliament on progress under the Programme.

⁵² HM Treasury, [Spending Round 2013](#), Cm 8639, 26 June 2013

⁵³ [PO 28956 \[on Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 3 March 2016

⁵⁴ MHCLG, [Government Confirms Extra Support for Troubled Families to Succeed](#), 5 January 2020

⁵⁵ [PO 234231 \[on Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 19 March 2019

⁵⁶ CCJS, [The Troubled Families Programme: the perfect social policy?](#), November 2015

2.1 Changes to the payment-by-results framework

The significant increase in the number of 'troubled families' identified was due to wider inclusion criteria than in phase one. A new financial framework for phase two, [Financial framework for the expanded Troubled Families Programme](#) (last updated January 2018),⁵⁷ sets out the following criteria:

To be eligible for the expanded programme, each family must have at least two of the following six problems:

1. Parents or children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour.
2. Children who have not been attending school regularly.
3. Children who need help: children of all ages, who need help, are identified as in need or are subject to a Child Protection Plan.
4. Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion or young people at risk of worklessness.
5. Families affected by domestic violence and abuse.
6. Parents or children with a range of health problems.⁵⁸

When identifying families, the framework states that families should be prioritised if:

- they are facing multiple problems and are likely to benefit from the 'whole family' approach; and
- they incur the 'highest cost to the public purse'⁵⁹

The framework sets out how local authorities can get access to and share data to identify families.

Each criterion is more broadly defined than in the first phase of the Programme. Local authorities can claim funding for a family when they have:

1. Achieved significant and sustained progress against all problems identified at the point of engagement and during the intervention, or
2. An adult in the family has moved off benefits and into continuous employment.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ The phase two financial framework was originally published in March 2015. This version can be read on the [UCL Digital Education Resource Archive](#).

⁵⁸ DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018

⁵⁹ DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018, p19

⁶⁰ DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018, p24

The terminology of ‘significant and sustained progress or continuous employment’ replaces the ‘turned around’ terminology of phase one (see section 1.2).

What counts as ‘significant and sustained progress’ is agreed locally and set out in a Troubled Family Outcome Plan. In the [original framework from 2015](#), annex D set out the 10 principles these should follow.⁶¹

The 2018 framework explains that ‘continuous employment’ is assessed in two ways:

1. The movement off out of work benefits or the satisfaction of an earning threshold if in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) [...], and
2. The sustainment of a period of continuous employment.

For the first part for the result, where family members are in receipt of UC [Universal Credit], the family must satisfy the relevant earnings threshold. Troubled Families Employment Advisors will provide information about earnings thresholds to local authorities.

For the second part of the result, the length of time an adult must remain in work depends on the type of benefit they were receiving previously.⁶²

For most working-age benefit claimants, the minimum period of continuous employment is 13 weeks; however, for those in receipt of Job Seeker’s Allowance (except those who have previously claimed disability-related benefits), it is 26 weeks out of the previous 30.⁶³

In October 2016, DCLG produced an overview of the first phase of the TF Programme, which looked at what had been learned for phase two. This included the following information on the payment-by-results model for phase two:

The new programme retains a payment by results element. This is a more modest reward than that offered by the first programme in recognition of there being a broader range of needs likely to be captured through the eligibility criteria for this larger cohort. Local authorities receive an upfront £1,000 attachment fee for each family with whom they agree to work and an £800 results payment for each family with whom they achieved an outcome.

Each authority receives an annual Service Transformation Grant (most local authorities receive £200,000 each year) to support local delivery of the programme.⁶⁴

As with phase one of the Programme, results are self-reported by local authorities’ Troubled Families teams. However, the Government’s response (2017) to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report on the

Families’ success is measured on the basis of “significant or sustained progress” (against their identified problems) or “continuous employment”

In phase two, local authorities are given an upfront **£1000 attachment fee** for each family involved in the Programme, and a **reward payment of £800** for each family that achieves a positive, sustained outcome

⁶¹ DCLG, [Financial framework for the expanded Troubled Families programme](#), March 2015, Annex D, accessed on the UCL Digital Education Resource Archive, 2 July 2019

⁶² DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018, p25

⁶³ DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018, p25

⁶⁴ DCLG, [The first Troubled Families Programme 2012 to 2015: An overview](#), October 2016, p19

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Programme noted that additional checks would take place for phase two, compared to previously:

Each local authority is now subject to two spot checks during the lifetime of the programme. The spot checks now include a visit by a Department expert, as well as scrutiny of local authority data systems, and these visits include an interview of local authority keyworkers to assess local practice.⁶⁵

In the Third Annual Report for the Programme (March 2019) the Government went into more detail on the spot check process so far:

[The 'spot check' process] involves visits to view local data systems and case files, as well as meetings with service managers and keyworkers. The process checks whether families are eligible for the programme, that local practice adheres to the whole family working principles, and that there is evidence that the outcomes have been achieved.

MHCLG has completed 171 spot checks up until March 2019. All local authorities have undertaken the process once, and MHCLG is now undertaking a second round using a new and improved process. The vast majority (97%) of claims have been found to be valid, with invalid claims removed from the claims total. Feedback is provided to local areas on their claims and on their data systems. A new [Data Maturity Model](#) framework [...] has been introduced to support areas in improving local data systems to track and validate outcomes.⁶⁶ [Link added]

Results are self-reported by local authorities, but they will be subject to two 'spot checks' during the second phase

2.2 How the Programme works in practice

Like phase one, the Government has not been prescriptive about the format of a local Troubled Families intervention strategy. The Financial Framework (last updated January 2018) emphasises that local authorities must consider the familial and local context. DCLG advised that the following principles should be followed:

- there will have been an assessment that takes into account the needs of the whole family;
- there is an action plan that takes account of all (relevant) family members;
- there is a lead / key worker for the family that is recognised by the family and other professionals involved with the family; and
- the objectives in the family action plan are aligned to those in the local authority's Troubled Families Outcomes Plan.⁶⁷

Who's who amongst Troubled Families staff

Troubled Families coordinators (TFCs) oversee a local authority's TF Programme and bring services together.

⁶⁵ HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), March 2017, para 3.2

⁶⁶ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, p11

⁶⁷ DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018, p23

Troubled Families keyworkers (keyworkers) work alongside families to help them deal with their various needs, acting as a single point of contact.

Troubled Families employment advisors (TFEAs) are JobCentre Plus specialists seconded to local authorities to provide employment advice to families.

The keyworker acts as a single point of contact and tends to have a high degree of flexibility to decide how to help families.⁶⁸ Almost all keyworkers report carrying out the following tasks:

- building a trusting relationship with the family;
- developing action plans;
- making referrals to other services and agencies; and
- advocating for the family.

Many keyworkers also report carrying out assessments and coordinating the family action plan. Over 90% report delivering some interventions themselves.⁶⁹

Troubled Families Co-ordinators oversee a local Programme. For phase two, DWP provided a network of around 300 work coaches who could act as Troubled Families Employment Advisors.⁷⁰

Families spend an estimated nine months on average in the TF Programme.⁷¹ Once progress has been made, a typical ‘step-down’ process from the Programme involves looking again at a family’s goals, highlighting areas of achievement and areas to improve. Appointments with other agencies, particularly universal services like schools or JobCentre Plus centres, are then arranged.⁷²

2.3 2017-19: a renewed focus on worklessness and parental conflict

DCLG’s first progress report for the 2015-2021 phase, published in 2017, included plans to review the payment-by-results model so that it could drive service transformation and allow for a greater focus on parental unemployment and parental conflict.

⁶⁸ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families qualitative case study research: Phase 2: Wave 1](#), September 2018, p7

⁶⁹ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#), June 2018, p19

⁷⁰ DCLG, [Financial framework for the Troubled Families programme](#), January 2018, p24

⁷¹ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p54

⁷² Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families qualitative case study research: Phase 2: Wave 1](#), September 2018, p7

Although the entry criteria for the Programme remained the same, the review proposed asking local authorities to prioritise families experiencing worklessness, as well as parental conflict and serious personal debt. The 2017 progress report argued that conflict and debt were two of the main disadvantages associated with worklessness.⁷³

The review was launched alongside the DWP policy paper, [Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families](#), which set out an evidence base for the impact of worklessness and conflict on children. As part of the launch, the DWP announced £30 million of funding over three years for relationship support for families experiencing worklessness, which would be delivered through the TF Programme.⁷⁴

Gingerbread, a charity for single parents, criticised the increased focus on worklessness as the root of family problems:

While Gingerbread welcomes the promise of better relationship support across family types, it questions the emphasis on 'worklessness' as an overriding obstacle to financial stability. While two-thirds of single parents work, the risk of working single parent families being in poverty sharply increased over the last year, emphasising that employment alone is not a solution to improving life chances. Today's policy paper doesn't address structural obstacles facing single parents out of work, such as lack of access to childcare, flexible work and training.⁷⁵

In February 2019, the Government published [guidance on the Reducing Parental Conflict programme](#), which will use £39 million to help local authorities integrate parental conflict services into other local services. It will also go towards training and building an evidence base of successful interventions.

In November 2019, the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme was offered in 30 local authority areas, and 148 local authority areas had access to practitioner training to support workers in how manage conflict in family life.⁷⁶

2.4 Service transformation self-assessments

On top of the assessments made for family outcomes, which are used to claim rewards under the payment-by-results system, local authorities are expected to assess their progress in joining up services and bringing about a 'whole family' approach to service delivery.

In December 2016, the Government first published a practical guide on delivering local service transformation through the TF Programme, created in partnership with local authorities and other important organisations. It has been adapted throughout the lifetime of the Programme: the most recent incarnation of this [Early help service](#)

In 2017, DCLG suggested it would prioritise families experiencing worklessness, family conflict or serious personal debt

From 2017 onwards, local authorities have been expected to assess local service transformation through the [Early help service transformation maturity model](#)

⁷³ DCLG, [Supporting disadvantaged families – Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: progress so far](#), 4 April 2017, pp23-25

⁷⁴ ['Government to fund relationship support for unemployed families'](#), Guardian, 4 April 2017

⁷⁵ ['Gingerbread queries "muddled thinking" behind new government programme'](#), Gingerbread press release, 4 April 2017

⁷⁶ MHCLG Blog, [Reducing Parental Conflict](#), 5 November 2019

[transformation maturity model](#) (December 2017) can be found on the Government's website.

The Government describes the model as a way for local authorities to meet commitments and make "robust assessments of current progress and determine next steps needed to drive that progress forward." Authorities rate themselves as either 'early', 'developing', 'maturing' or 'mature'. By November 2017, nearly every local authority had undertaken their first self-assessment using this model. The Government expects self-assessments to take place at least once a year and to use the Data Maturity Model to ensure that effective data analysis is part of this process.⁷⁷

The six 'transformation strands' looked at are:

1. The family experience
2. Leadership
3. Strategy
4. Culture
5. Workforce development
6. Delivery structures and processes⁷⁸

2.5 The 'Earned Autonomy' financial model

In January 2018, the Government announced that a new funding model for the TF Programme would be piloted as an alternative to payment-by-results.

[...] some local authorities told us that earlier up-front investment could help them generate system change more quickly. We are therefore offering an alternative funding model: 'Earned Autonomy' that will permit some local authorities and their partners to move away from the PbR arrangement, allowing them to use more up-front investment to embed better ways of working. However, PbR will continue as the most common method of payment, reflecting the success of the model in driving a focus on outcomes for families.⁷⁹

In the 2018 Annual Report, it was revealed that 11 local authorities would move to the Earned Autonomy model in April that year, following "a rigorous selection process". According to the Government, these authorities "put forward a strong case that upfront investment will help them achieve their ambitious service transformation plans and positive outcomes for families."⁸⁰ The areas selected for the pilot were:

- Barking and Dagenham

⁷⁷ DCLG, [Early Help Service Transformation Maturity Model: a practical guide and toolkit for local authorities and their partners delivering the Troubled Families Programme](#), last updated December 2017, pp4-11

⁷⁸ DCLG, [Early Help Service Transformation Maturity Model: a practical guide and toolkit for local authorities and their partners delivering the Troubled Families Programme](#), last updated December 2017

⁷⁹ DCLG, [Financial Framework for the Troubled Families Programme](#), January 2018

⁸⁰ [Supporting disadvantaged families: Annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2017-18](#), DCLG, March 2018, p21

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- Brighton and Hove
- Bristol
- Camden
- Cheshire West and Chester
- Durham
- Islington
- Kent
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- Staffordshire

In the second phase, 14 local authorities were paid upfront for their TF Programme, rather than via the payment-by-results system

Details of how each authority planned to use this upfront payment can be found in [Annex C of the 2018 annual report](#).

The 2019 Annual Report for the Troubled Families Programme indicated that 14 local authorities had moved to the new funding model: the additional areas were Ealing, Sheffield and Westminster.⁸¹

2.6 Other developments

Recognising that data-sharing had been a significant barrier to multi-agency working, the **Digital Economy Act 2017 created a new data sharing power**, which came into force in 2018.⁸² The accompanying [Code of Practice](#), in particular section two, explains this power in more depth. The TF Programme is cited as an example of these powers at work in section 2.3 of the Code of Practice.

In October 2018, the Government [announced](#) the creation of a **Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund**, which would be channelled through the TF Programme. In February 2019, it was announced that £9.8 million would go towards projects in 21 areas to tackle knife crime and gang culture.⁸³

In the Third Annual Report (March 2019), the Government also highlighted efforts to provide **more intensive support for 30 areas** where local programmes had been too narrowly focussed, and where performance was below the national average. MHCLG had developed a “performance diagnostic tool”, shared best practice and worked closely with local senior managers in order to improve results in those areas.⁸⁴

⁸¹ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, p11

⁸² MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, p10

⁸³ [£9.8 million fund to confront knife crime and gang culture](#), MHCLG press release, 22 February 2019

⁸⁴ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, p11

2.7 Phase two impact evaluation

Changes to the evaluation process

As previously noted, the 2016 PAC report on phase one of the Programme criticised the design of the evaluation for phase one, noting that it was unable to directly attribute any significant impact on a range of key measures, despite receiving some evidence of good practice.

As a result, the Committee recommended that DCLG develop a more meaningful, longitudinal methodology for evaluating the impact of phase two, which should also include annual progress reports.⁸⁵

The Government's response to the Committee report agreed with this recommendation, and set out several changes to the evaluation process for phase two:

- regularly reporting throughout the lifetime of the programme and beyond to 2022;
- measuring over 60 outcome indicators across crime, education, employment, health, domestic abuse and child safeguarding;
- tracking outcomes for up to five years before and after intervention;
- ensuring all participating local authorities have committed to the collection and provision of good quality data;
- including rich qualitative information from local authorities and families describing how the programme is being delivered and how changes are experienced by families;
- a survey of over 1,000 families interviewed before and after intervention, capturing improvements in families' circumstances;
- regularly feeding back local findings to councils so they can review family progress, estimate cost-savings and make comparisons with similar councils; and
- establishment of an independent advisory group of leading academics to provide external support and scrutiny of the evaluation.⁸⁶

Significant changes were made to the evaluation methodology for phase two of the programme

DCLG was already required to report annually to Parliament on progress under of phase two of the TF Programme by virtue of section 3 of the *Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016*. In addition to this annual report, it had been DCLG's intention, since December 2017, to publish six monthly datasets in order to better monitor trends "as they emerge". However not every dataset was to be released at six monthly intervals due to different cycles of data.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Committee of Public Accounts, [Troubled families: progress review](#), 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, recommendation 2

⁸⁶ HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), March 2017, para 2.3

⁸⁷ DCLG, [Troubled Families Programme: Evaluation Overview Policy Report](#), December 2017, p4

Alongside this, with the help of a Technical Advisory Group, the Government is conducting a 'National Impact Study' where data regarding individuals in the Programme will be matched to data held by other Government departments. This will be used to track outcomes and conduct comparisons with a quasi-control group of families outside the Programme. The Technical Advisory Group includes Dr Jo Blanden (University of Surrey); Mike Daly (Department for Work and Pensions); Dr Susan Purdon (Bryson and Purdon Social Research); and Professor Peter Urwin (University of Westminster).⁸⁸ It is hoped that a more robust comparison group will make the impact of the TF Programme clearer and enable a cost-benefit analysis to be carried out.⁸⁹ More detail can be read in Annex A of the [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: Findings](#) (March 2019).

An independent study of the TF Programme is being undertaken by Ipsos MORI from 2015 to 2020 which incorporates three main elements:

- The Family Survey [...] a quantitative longitudinal survey of families in receipt of help from the programme in nineteen local authorities
- [...] Annual staff surveys, online quantitative surveys of delivery staff (Troubled Family Co-ordinators, keyworkers/local practitioners and Troubled Family Employment Advisors (TFEAs))
- Qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with staff delivering the programme and families receiving services.⁹⁰

The survey data referred to above is looking at the characteristics of families and their reception of the Programme; staff impressions of the effectiveness of the Programme; and evidence regarding its impact on service delivery at a local level. An important focus for the staff surveys is whether the Programme is encouraging any service transformation, including better multi-agency working.

At the time of writing, the most recent reports on the TF Programme were published in March 2019. Section three of this paper considers the findings in more detail. Details of earlier reports from 2017 and 2018 can be found in appendix A to this paper.

⁸⁸ Ipsos MORI/DCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: family outcomes – family survey: part 1](#), April 2017, p3

⁸⁹ DCLG, [Troubled Families Programme: Evaluation Overview Policy Report](#), December 2017, p8

⁹⁰ Ipsos MORI/DCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: family outcomes – family survey: part 1](#), April 2017, p3

3. March 2019: Third Annual Report on phase two

Summary

- The Third Annual Report on the TF Programme was published in March 2019, along with the first major comparisons to a quasi-control group.
- Some statistically significant positive outcomes were found that were attributable to the TF Programme: data suggested that the Programme reduced the number of Looked After Children, custodial sentences and juvenile convictions amongst participant families.
- Evidence was mixed for employment outcomes. It had so far not been possible to compare health and school attendance outcomes.
- Commentators welcomed the more robust analysis but noted that the positive impacts identified so far may only affect a very small number of families.
- A cost-benefit analysis also found both fiscal and economic benefits as a result of the Programme, chiefly from reduced numbers of Looked After Children and youth offending.
- Survey data, as emphasised in earlier reports from 2017 and 2018 (see Appendix A), have consistently suggested approval for the TF Programme from both participating families and staff. It has also found evidence of wider systemic change, whilst identifying barriers to implementation and reform.

In March 2019, the Government published the latest tranche of documents related to the TF Programme. This included the Third Annual Report to be presented to Parliament, called [Building Resilient Families](#). The fourth evaluation update was also published, which featured the following reports:

- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: Evaluation overview policy report](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: Family Outcomes – national and local datasets: part 4](#)
An analysis of family outcomes, matching local and national datasets. **For the first time, more robust comparison group data had been found for 'children who need help', out of work benefits and offending.** The first **economic evaluation** had also been undertaken.
- [Troubled Families qualitative case study research: Phase 2: Wave 1 \(part 3\)](#)
The findings from five local authority case study areas (including 27 family and keyworker studies and 40 stakeholder interviews). Researchers prioritised families that were relatively new to the Programme. This research also uses the results from six online forums involving 62 participants: these staff were also asked to complete digital diaries.
- [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families Co-ordinators \(part 3\)](#)
Responses to questionnaires were received from 109 TFCs: over 70% of these had participated in previous surveys.

- [Troubled Families Programme National evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#) (part 3)
The results of survey responses from 1,400 keyworkers covering 123 local authorities (out of 152). Most of the authorities had been represented in previous surveys.
- [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families employment advisers](#) (part 3)
A survey of 216 TFEAs. 129 local authorities were represented and over 85% of these areas had participated in the previous years' study.
- [Troubled Families Programme National evaluation: Family survey - follow up survey](#)
This report "presents findings from a cohort of 654 main carers and 307 young people who were interviewed in 2015/16 as they were starting on the Programme and again around two years later, in 2017/8, looking at how their attitudes and circumstances may have changed over this time."
There was an attempt to compare findings to families in the UK Household Longitudinal Survey in order to understand the impact of the Troubled Families Programme. Ipsos Mori was unable to form a sufficiently robust comparison group.⁹¹

The following sections 3.1-3.5 provide a brief outline of the key findings from these reports.

3.1 Participation

The Third Annual Report states that by 8 March 2019, 380,426 families had been assisted by the TF Programme, out of the 400,000 target families.⁹²

Of the 380,426 families participating, the Government reported that "171,890 families had achieved significant and sustained progress across all their headline problems" and "20,366 families have adults that are now off benefits and in work."⁹³

As in previous years, the percentage of families that made progress varied between local authorities: more detail can be found in Annex A of the Third Annual Report.⁹⁴

By March 2019, over 380,000 of the 400,000 target families had been subscribed into the Programme

Payment-by-result claims had been made for nearly 200,000 of these families

3.2 Characteristics of families

Like previous reports (see appendix A), the 2019 release compared the characteristics of families in the TF Programme to the general population. As well as the demographics of the families, it looked at the various issues that these families had to contend with. The Government outlined some headline findings:

⁹¹ Ipsos MORI, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: follow up family survey](#), p13

⁹² MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, p17

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp52-57

- Adults were five times more likely to be claiming benefits and over ten times more likely to be claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Children were nearly three times more likely to be persistently absent from school.
- Children were over nine times more likely to be classified as a Child in Need.
- Adults were over nine times more likely to have a caution or conviction.

The report also noted that:

- [...] Over two fifths of troubled families had a family member with a mental health problem.
- Just over a fifth of troubled families had a family member affected by an incident of domestic abuse or violence.⁹⁵

More detail can be found in section A of the [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: Family Outcomes – national and local datasets: part 4](#) in particular pages 18 to 24.

Keyworker surveys also indicated the kind of help a Programme intervention provides to families on at least weekly basis. The most common help provided, in 2017, was:

- Helping with parenting issues (78%)
- Addressing mental health difficulties in adults (56%)
- Addressing mental health difficulties in children (56%)
- Helping children to attend school (55%)
- Encouraging parents to use local facilities and services (50%)

However keyworkers helped in other respects, including financial management, housing, mitigating the impact of domestic abuse and parental relationship support. For more information see page 20 of [Troubled Families Programme National evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#) (June 2018).

3.3 Family outcomes

The [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: Family Outcomes – national and local datasets: part 4](#) explains the government's "quasi-experimental approach" to analyse the impact of the second phase of the TF Programme on family outcomes. This involves identifying a more robust comparison group and matching large amounts of quantitative data from a local and national level to track over 3,000 variables. At this stage, data had been matched covering offending, school attendance and attainment, children's social care, benefits and employment.

By 2019, researchers were able to compare some family outcomes to those of families not participating in the TF Programme.

⁹⁵ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p9

The evaluation used Propensity Score Matching to compare outcomes to the comparison group of families outside the TF Programme. This enabled analysts to control for different characteristics between the Programme's cohort and comparison group and better assess where the Programme had made an impact.⁹⁶

There are a number of caveats and limitations to the results. For instance, as this is not a randomised control trial (RCT), some families in the comparison group may still be receiving services related to the TF Programme. This may skew the impact attributed to the Programme. Performance across local authorities is not yet available and the analysis has not considered the factors driving results.⁹⁷ However, the Government said: "the models and results were approved by the Technical Advisory Group and considered robust as a measure of net impact of the programme."⁹⁸

Positive outcomes attributed to the Programme

The Government's summary of the findings says that the latest evidence is "encouraging" and outcomes "appear realistic in scale given the complexity of needs of families on the programme."⁹⁹

In the 0-6 months before intervention, 0.5% of children in both participant families and families outside the Programme had gone into care (Looked After Children). For those families attached to the Programme, this rose to 1.7% of children 19-24 months after joining the Programme. However, in the comparison group, over the same period, this had risen to 2.5% of children: representing a **32% difference in the proportion of Looked After Children**.

The evaluation also suggested that the Programme reduced the proportion of:

- [...] **adults receiving custodial sentences** - 1.6% of the comparison group received custodial sentences compared to 1.2% of the programme group, a 25% difference in the 24 months after joining the programme;
- **juveniles receiving custodial sentences** - 0.8% of the comparison group received custodial sentences compared to 0.5% of the programme group, a 38% difference in the 24 months after joining the programme; and
- **juvenile convictions** - 4.6% of the comparison group received custodial sentences compared to 3.9% of the programme group, a 15% difference in the 24 months after joining the programme.¹⁰⁰

Comparisons to the control group found that the second phase of the TF Programme had made a positive impact on the number of Looked After Children, custodial sentences and juvenile convictions

⁹⁶ Ibid., p6

⁹⁷ MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, p10

⁹⁸ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p36

⁹⁹ MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, p4

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p4

Areas of mixed or no impact

There was “**no statistically significant difference in the proportion of adult cautions or convictions and juvenile cautions**” although the family survey suggested that families are experiencing less contact with the police, less violence at home and less action to stop anti-social behaviour.¹⁰¹

There was **no statistically significant difference in the proportion of Children in Need**.¹⁰² Despite some negative impacts on the proportion of children on **Child Protection Plans** at 7-12 and 13-18 months after joining the Programme, these disappeared after 19-24 months. This could be because early intervention is uncovering unmet needs in the early months of the Programme, which may in turn be helping reduce the number of Looked After Children.¹⁰³ Survey responses supported this hypothesis.¹⁰⁴ The Government also noted that, according to other data, a significant proportion of children (not necessarily in the TF Programme) do not stay in the Child in Need category, or within a Child Protection Plan, for longer than a year. This may explain why the analysis, considering a five-year timescale, could not attribute a positive impact to the Programme when compared to a comparison group.¹⁰⁵

HM Revenue and Customs’ employment data has limitations, so the evaluation relies on benefits data to compare the employment rates of participants in the TF Programme and comparison group.¹⁰⁶ Although there was **no statistically significant difference for adults claiming Employment and Support Allowance**, the study did indicate improvement in terms of worklessness:

The benefits results show a statistically significant difference for **adults claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance** 19-24 months after joining the programme: 10.5% in the comparison group compared to 9.3% in the programme [sic] group, an 11% difference [sic].¹⁰⁷

However, in Part 4 of the Family Outcomes dataset, the authors state that it is unclear what led to this result: it could be work of the TF Programme, but this is not substantiated by other (problematic) employment data, and other factors had not been fully discounted. Furthermore, survey data suggested that Troubled Families staff had been focussing on other barriers to employment, as well as enabling

The evaluation found no attributable impact in other areas, including adult cautions and convictions and the number of Child Protection Plans

Employment data was inconclusive about the impact of the TF Programme, but researchers believed it had no or limited influence.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p16

¹⁰² MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, pp13-14

¹⁰³ Ibid. p4-5

¹⁰⁴ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p46

¹⁰⁵ MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, p15

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p17

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p5

access to benefits, which could explain why a drop in out-of-work benefits had not been seen.¹⁰⁸

Ultimately, the researchers concluded:

[The results from this model] suggest the programme is having no or limited impact on individuals claiming out-of-work benefits. This finding is supported by the employment model which shows no difference between the programme and comparison group for employment outcomes.¹⁰⁹

The evaluation also pointed out that “the results of the benefits (and employment) model should be interpreted with caution”. One reason for this is because the study excluded areas where more than 10% of working-age individuals were receiving Universal Credit. The aim was to avoid a distorted view of the reduction of JSA claimants over time.¹¹⁰

Survey data on employment was mixed. Main carers reported better levels of employment, but fewer of the unemployed were actively looking for work. In general, worklessness and barriers to work (such as having children and mental health issues) were persistent problems: 66% of households in the Programme had a net household income of less than £12,000 per annum.¹¹¹

Case studies suggest that the Programme had enhanced other soft skills, confidence levels and work experience opportunities. According to the Government, this means that “the programme may be adding value that cannot be picked up in the data analysis, where families have made steps towards work and are building new skills, even if they are not reaching the high bar of sustained employment.”¹¹²

Quantitative outcomes analysis to follow

Over the course of this evaluation, all the outcomes data explored above will continue to be analysed.

For other outcomes, like those related to domestic abuse, impact analysis has not been, and is unlikely to be possible. According to the evaluation’s survey data, there has been “no statistically significant change in overall levels of reported domestic abuse or violence.”¹¹³ Quantitative data on **health** is not yet available but surveys have so far suggested that households had visited their GPs less and featured fewer people with a long-term illness. At the same time, self-reported health statuses and feelings of wellbeing had not changed significantly over time.¹¹⁴

The evaluation has yet to establish robust comparative data regarding the Programme’s impact on health and school attendance

¹⁰⁸ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, pp42-3

¹⁰⁹ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p42

¹¹⁰ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p38

¹¹¹ MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, p17

¹¹² Ibid. p5

¹¹³ Ibid. p19

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p18

Evidence from survey responses was also mixed regarding **school attendance**; one of the next steps for the evaluation is to carry out an impact analysis on school attendance.¹¹⁵

Other impacts reported by families and staff

Family survey data suggested the TF Programme was strengthening family resilience, improving parenting skills and daily routines, and providing confidence and greater opportunities to gain work experience.¹¹⁶ Families' impression of the Programme can be found in [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Family survey – Follow-up survey](#). Ipsos MORI's summary of the findings described mixed results in various respects, but families did report greater confidence that their worst problems were behind them (60% compared to 53% two years ago).¹¹⁷

80% of keyworkers in 2017 felt that the Programme was very or fairly effective at "helping families achieve long-term positive change in their circumstances."¹¹⁸ 93% of Troubled Families Employment Advisors believed the same.¹¹⁹

Commentary on the impact evaluation

The quantitative data matching exercise described in the March 2019 release represented a significant amount of work and drew comment from several experts.

Dr David Halpern from the Behavioural Insights Team called it a "landmark study in terms of its methodological sophistication" setting a "new benchmark in data-linking".¹²⁰ A previous critic of the evaluation from phase one, Keith Davies from Kingston University, reportedly commended the "striking sea change in tone and terminology since the strident reporting of phase one of the initiative."¹²¹ Tom McBride, director of evidence at the Early Intervention Foundation and a member of the government's Troubled Families Programme advisory group, is also reported as saying that there is a "good level of assurance that the impacts are real", especially since the bar of achievement was kept high by the Government.¹²²

Talking to Civil Service World, Jonathan Portes, a professor at King's College London who evaluated the first stage of the scheme in 2016, welcomed the review, noting that the results are "fairly robust". However, he underscored the point that **the most discernible impact**

¹¹⁵ Ibid. pp19-20

¹¹⁶ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, pp26-8

¹¹⁷ Ipsos MORI, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: follow up family survey](#), March 2019

¹¹⁸ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#), June 2018, pp6-8

¹¹⁹ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families Employment Advisors](#), June 2018

¹²⁰ [A landmark evaluation of the Troubled Families programme](#), Behavioural Insights Team blog, 21 March 2019

¹²¹ [Troubled Families programme: its impact and what should replace it](#), Children and Young People Now, 30 April 2019

¹²² [Troubled Families programme: its impact and what should replace it](#), Children and Young People Now, 30 April 2019

found so far was on children considered at risk, which represented only a few of the participants in the Programme:

[...] The actual impacts of the programme are largely confined to children at serious risk. The most important and significant impact of the programme is to reduce the number of children going into care. The numbers involved are relatively small – less than one percent of those on the programme – and interpretation is difficult without knowing more about why children are not going into care.

There is essentially no measurable or significant impact on benefit receipts or employment (the JSA result referred to is not at all convincing, especially taken together with the lack of impact on employment). Given the nature of the programme and the target group, that is not surprising.¹²³

A similar point was raised by Stephen Crossley, writing for the Child Poverty Action Group, who criticised the lack of impact on children in need which “represent a far greater number of the children involved with the programme.”¹²⁴ As set out in the family survey, 11% of families had a ‘child in need’ whereas only 1% had a child in care.¹²⁵

Portes argued that one of the lessons of the initiative is the need for greater investment in children’s services in the next Spending Review, although not as part of the TF Programme.¹²⁶ Similarly, Martin Reeves, finance spokesperson for Solace (a membership network for public sector and local government professionals) is reported saying that the evaluation “demonstrates the value of early intervention across a range of integrated services.” This, he argued, suggests that the next Spending Review should “properly fund preventative and early intervention services” in a way that “enables councils to co-ordinate activities across a place to the greatest effect.”¹²⁷

Other criticisms have been made, including:

- the evaluation’s findings do not reveal **how** the Programme made an impact: i.e. which factors were important for driving improvement in outcomes.¹²⁸ This is acknowledged in the impact evaluation (see above);
- the impact on key criteria for phase two, such as employment, health or domestic violence, is not clear;¹²⁹ and
- welfare reform is treated as a “peripheral” issue in the evaluation, and the focus on finding work means that the Programme ignores

While experts praised the more robust data, it was noted that the main benefits attributable to the TF Programme would have only affected a small number of families

That the quantitative analysis has not been able to look at the drivers of success has also been criticised, as has a lack of thinking wider employment and social security issues

¹²³ [Troubled Families: Casey says evaluation proves government “absolutely right” to have backed programme](#), Civil Service World, 20 March 2019

¹²⁴ [Learning to be poor? Poverty and the Troubled Families Programme](#), Child Poverty Action Group, 10 April 2019

¹²⁵ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Family survey – Follow-up survey](#), March 2019, p47

¹²⁶ [Troubled Families: Casey says evaluation proves government “absolutely right” to have backed programme](#), Civil Service World, 20 March 2019

¹²⁷ [Keeping intervention uppermost in mind](#), MJ, 26 March 2019

¹²⁸ [Troubled Families is not the Holy Grail](#), MJ, 2 April 2019

¹²⁹ [Learning to be poor? Poverty and the Troubled Families Programme](#), Child Poverty Action Group, 10 April 2019

the “damaging consequences of poorly paid, insecure employment.”¹³⁰

3.4 Cost-benefit analysis

For the first time, the 2019 release considered whether the TF Programme was resulting in a net financial gain. Considering only the outcomes where a statistically significant impact had been found, the evaluation calculated the following estimated savings for 2017/18:

- *Economic benefits (includes economic, social and fiscal benefits)*
The total net public benefit for the 2017/18 cohort is estimated to be £366m. This suggests **every £1 spent on the programme delivers £2.28 of benefits.**
- *Fiscal benefits (only budgetary impacts on services)*
The total net fiscal benefit for the 2017/18 cohort is estimated to be £147m. This suggests that **every £1 spent on the programme delivers £1.51 of fiscal benefits,** although not all of these will be cashable, particularly in the short term.

Looking at areas where the Programme had been found to be effective, the evaluation suggested it had provided some fiscal and economic benefits.

However, the study was not clear about the impact on employment through the entire Programme. Once the impact on Jobseeker’s Allowance was factored out, the analysis resulted in an “**economic benefit of £1.94 and a fiscal benefit of £1.29 for every £1 spent.**”¹³¹

What are economic and fiscal benefits?

The evaluation used the following definitions:¹³²

Economic benefits relate to “all the costs and benefits of the programme to any individual in society (the whole of England) in order to capture the overall public value created.”

Fiscal benefits refer to the “budgetary impacts of the programme to tax-payer funded services (including welfare). It considers the additional costs to these services associated with delivering the programme, as well as any changes in demand for services.”

The largest economic benefits came from reduced numbers of Looked After Children and youth offending. The largest fiscal benefits came from the former. As pointed out in the evaluation, criminal justice and putting children into care are, in general, the costliest interventions, but only affect a minority of families. The evaluation suggests that greater benefits might be achieved if resources are more concentrated on this smaller group of families.¹³³

The evaluation notes that these figures may underestimate the savings produced for the following reasons:

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), MHCLG, March 2019, pp5-6

¹³² MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p57

¹³³ Ibid., pp60-1

- The set of outcomes considered are **limited to those that have been included in the Propensity Score Matching models**, meaning that it has not considered possible impacts on domestic abuse, homelessness and improved mental health and wellbeing;
- The **assumptions about how effects are sustained** beyond the two years for which there is outcomes data were **conservative**;
- The analysis **only considered costs and benefits over a five-year time horizon**. Where outcomes are positive for younger children (e.g. the reduction in Looked After Children), evidence from other early programme programmes suggests that benefits may be sustained over a considerably longer time period.¹³⁴

The Government believed that the economic analysis likely underestimated the cost-savings, although over-estimation was also possible.

Indeed, the evaluation noted that “the analysis was unable to take into account the direct health and wellbeing impacts of any of these changes, which may be considerable.”¹³⁵

Furthermore, calculations of cost savings were based on the average cost of services, which could result in an over- or underestimate of savings.¹³⁶

More information on the methodology applied can be found in section D of [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#).

While local authority stakeholders welcomed the economic analysis as a demonstration of the cost-effective benefits of early intervention (see section 3.3), they highlighted the fact that the economic analysis does not consider if this money could have been spent more productively.¹³⁷

3.5 Service transformation

As in previous years, survey data and local authority self-assessments were used in the 2019 release to assess how the TF Programme was changing service delivery.

The headline findings included:

- families at risk being identified more proactively and can receive support earlier;
- the Programme's approach to data recording and sharing between local services has created a whole family focus;
- relationships with schools, health and police are all improving; and
- families value keyworker support.¹³⁸

Qualitative survey data has suggested that the Troubled Families Programme is helping to bring about wider system change, but barriers to improvement remain

Local self-assessments using the Service Transformation Maturity Model (see section 2.4 above) showed that most areas were rated as

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp51-2

¹³⁵ Ibid., p63

¹³⁶ Ibid., p57, p63

¹³⁷ [Troubled Families is not the Holy Grail](#), MJ, 2 April 2019

¹³⁸ MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, pp6-7

“maturing” with evidence of good practice in some regions. The [Third Annual Report](#) describes various case studies and recommends elements of strategies that appear to work particularly well. The Government indicated that there were still improvements to be made across all metrics of the Service Transformation Maturity Model.¹³⁹

Case study research by Ipsos MORI showed:

- Troubled Families Co-ordinators are a “critical factor in successful service transformation”;
- “Partnership working was strongly embedded” and keyworkers were working with specialist partners, helped by “physical co-location and harmonising computer systems and data management approaches”;
- the expertise of Troubled Families Employment Advisers was valued by stakeholders;
- families found keyworkers to be open and non-judgemental. Keyworkers were able to help families in tackling long-term health conditions, getting access to specialist mental health support, dealing with financial problems and building confidence in adults in terms of their employment prospects;
- there were examples of successful voluntary sector relationships, which required effective means of navigating the services available.¹⁴⁰

The evaluation went into more detail on how TF keyworkers were working alongside social workers:

Staff who were interviewed reported that joining up services improved the quality of the work they could carry out with families and their outcomes, whilst reducing the burden on social workers. One case study found that keyworkers were stepping in for social workers and carrying out the child in need/child protection plans (with the social worker maintaining oversight and statutory responsibility), working with the whole family and making decisions about the care/services provided. The majority of Troubled Families Co-ordinators fed back in the staff survey that the programme was helping to manage the demand on Children’s Social Care. Some keyworkers fed back that their caseloads included a lot of children on the edge of care and they were working to stop families from escalating to social care, to help reduce pressure on the system as well as to improve the lives of the families.¹⁴¹

The case study research provided examples of innovations developed by Troubled Families teams such as:

- weekly ‘locality meetings’ with representatives of key partner agencies;

¹³⁹ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, pp30-43

¹⁴⁰ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Qualitative Case Study Research Phase 2 : Wave 1](#), September 2018, pp6-7

¹⁴¹ MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, p46

- 'claims clinics' where particularly intractable issues with families are discussed by staff to find and share new approaches;
- developing common outcome frameworks so that different agencies' aims would match that of the TF Programme; and
- creating a voluntary sector co-ordination service to improve the working relationship with the third sector.¹⁴²

Some reported that new ways of working could be costly and time-intensive to implement. Difficulties in collaboration arose when Troubled Families teams and other local services (such as the police and schools) worked to different schedules. Services were often too stretched to help: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and other health and housing services were identified as particularly difficult to engage with. Although having a flexible role was welcomed, keyworkers reported that other services could consequently regard the keyworker as a person who 'does everything' for a family. This made the role highly demanding, especially when judging whether they had the skills to help a family themselves. Furthermore, the evaluation noted that staff could sometimes struggle to decide whether a family should be allocated to a Troubled Families team or social services; some families were on the 'borderline' of eligibility thresholds.¹⁴³

The Government also acknowledged that entrenched behaviours such as substance misuse, domestic abuse, and unemployment are proving difficult for keyworkers to address.¹⁴⁴

Staff surveys

Results of all staff surveys from the previous three years can be read in the evaluation reports. The most recent findings are outlined below.

Across the surveys, Troubled Family Coordinators, keyworkers and Employment Advisors indicated their support of the 'whole family approach' and the focus on early intervention. There is widespread belief that the Programme can bring about lasting changes for families.¹⁴⁵

Responses were mixed in other areas. For instance, TFCs were positive about the Programme's ability to effectuate wider system reform, but this was not a strongly held view. TFCs noted an influence on commissioning processes and felt that the values of service transformation were communicated well, with staff "taking ownership". However less than 50% of TFCs thought that the Programme reduces demand for statutory services, reduces costs, or

Staff surveys are positive about the aims of the Programme but have mixed feelings about, or have identified barriers to, wider service transformation.

¹⁴² Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Qualitative Case Study Research Phase 2 : Wave 1](#), September 2018, pp22-37

¹⁴³ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Qualitative Case Study Research Phase 2 : Wave 1](#), September 2018, p5-7, p17

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p21

¹⁴⁵ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation Staff survey among Troubled Families Co-ordinators](#), June 2018, p.48; Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families Employment Advisers](#), June 2018, pp44-5; Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#), June 2018, pp43-4

encourages outcome-based commissioning (although in general they were happy with commissioning processes and leadership).¹⁴⁶

Over 90% of keyworkers, on the other hand, believed that the TF Programme reduces demands on statutory services. They did, however, have mixed feelings about the Programme's ability to bring about wider changes to services. Keyworkers felt that the Programme was effective at helping Children in Need and tackling parental conflict but they found it still difficult to get support from partner agencies, particularly housing and mental health.¹⁴⁷

TFEAs much more strongly believed in the Programme's ability to effectuate wider system change and liked the education and training opportunities the TF Programme offers, especially work experience. Most of their criticism centred on their training and the timeliness of employment support to families.¹⁴⁸

The report also explored the challenges to delivery of the Programme identified by TFCs. Responses on this question have varied greatly over time, although cuts and capacity problems in core services has always been the most commonly identified factor (in 2017, 68%). Other frequently mentioned barriers in 2017 were:

- Payment-by-results (53%)
- Too much bureaucracy (50%)
- Too data driven (42%)¹⁴⁹

Other factors can be seen in the report. Keyworkers also identified improvements that could improve service transformation. The top three answers in 2017 were:

- Improved access and links to mental health services (57%)
- Flexibility over timescales and outcomes during intervention (42%)
- More financial resources (42%)¹⁵⁰

TFEAs were asked whether there were any gaps in support in their areas. The most common were:

- Mental health support (42%)
- Support with childcare or caring responsibilities (33%)
- Specific job-related skills training (31%)

¹⁴⁶ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation Staff survey among Troubled Families Co-ordinators](#), June 2018, p48

¹⁴⁷ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#), June 2018, pp43-4

¹⁴⁸ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families Employment Advisers](#), June 2018, pp44-5

¹⁴⁹ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation Staff survey among Troubled Families Co-ordinators](#), June 2018, p14

¹⁵⁰ [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#), Ipsos MORI, June 2018, p8

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- Support and courses for those with English as a second language (30%)¹⁵¹

With this survey data in mind, Ipsos MORI suggested that more work could be done to **embed service transformation, improve access to data, help partnership working** and **upskill staff**. There has also been a persistent gap in **employment support**. Ipsos MORI argue for **more evidence of good practice and positive change** to be collated.¹⁵² The authors noted that **austerity continues to be a major issue**, although they highlighted that unnecessary bureaucracy had been identified in some interviews.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families Employment Advisers](#), Ipsos MORI, June 2018, p26

¹⁵² Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation Staff survey among Troubled Families Co-ordinators](#), June 2018, pp49-50 ; Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation: Staff survey among Troubled Families keyworkers](#), June 2018, p45;

¹⁵³ Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families Programme National Evaluation Staff survey among Troubled Families Co-ordinators](#), June 2018, pp49-50

4. Future of the Programme

Summary

The Troubled Families Programme is funded until March 2021. It is not known if the initiative will be continued after this date. Ministers responsible for the Programme have suggested that they want something similar to follow, perhaps under a different name, but the decision will ultimately be made as part of the next Spending Review, due to be held in 2020.

Retaining the legacy of multi-agency working

Considering how the Programme had changed over time, the 2019 Annual Report claimed that the TF Programme now represented more of an 'approach' than a 'targeted intervention', with support for families often provided by a multi-agency workforce, rather than identifiable 'troubled families' teams.

Looking ahead, the Government said it would help local authorities make as many payment-by-results claims as possible over the final year of the Programme, adding:

At a national level, the programme will continue to work closely with other government departments to join up the support available for families, for example through the Children in Need review; [...] the £84 million Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme; the £2.7 million Reducing Parental Conflict Programme; [...] the £6.5 million Early Outcomes Fund; [...] the £13 million Trusted Relationships Fund [...] and the £22 million Early Intervention Youth Fund.

[...] The Troubled Families Programme has played a critical role in improving services to vulnerable families and built a strong evidence base and body of practice. We will be working with national and local partners to ensure that future service responses to need build on the learning and legacy of the programme, as well as using insight from and complementing other early intervention programmes.¹⁵⁴

Will funding continue?

The December 2019 Conservative Party Manifesto stated that:

A strong society needs strong families. We will improve the Troubled Families Programme and champion Family Hubs to serve vulnerable families with intensive, integrated support they need to care for children.¹⁵⁵

In January 2020, the Government announced that the TF Programme would continue for a further year, to March 2021.¹⁵⁶

In March 2019, the Government had said that the future of the TF Programme after March 2020 would be considered in the 2019

¹⁵⁴ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, pp13-14

¹⁵⁵ [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019](#), p.14

¹⁵⁶ MHCLG, [Government Confirms Extra Support for Troubled Families to Succeed](#), January 2020

Spending Review.¹⁵⁷ A full spending review was delayed until 2020, after which it is expected that multi-year budgets will be set.¹⁵⁸

After publication of the Third Annual Report in March 2019, several stakeholders argued for the continuation of funding. The President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) wrote:

Troubled Families funding pays for a range of things like family coaching, domestic abuse interventions and positive activities for children and young people. Some of the government's claims to date about the success of the programme have been challenged but I am under no doubt that it is getting real results in lots of local areas. This is a complex area of work, many of the families we work with are facing multiple issues, such as poor mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse, but the evidence suggests the programme is making a positive difference to the lives of many children and families. Whole family and multi-agency working is also being strengthened. The pressures we face in children's services are such that much-needed funding for this programme is currently propping up our efforts to act early and offer support before families reach crisis point. The looming cliff edge of this funding ending in 2020 is very real, and very worrying. We need urgent assurances from government about the future of the programme.¹⁵⁹

According to a survey conducted by the ADCS (reported in Children and Young People Now), 88% of local authorities believed a loss of income from the Troubled Families Programme would have a "devastating impact" with around 75% claiming that all early help services would need to be cut in response. ADCS argued that this could lead to more children's social care interventions, undermining the impact of the Programme so far.¹⁶⁰

The Chair of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People Board have also urged a continuation of funding but highlighted that the Spending Review must address wider funding issues including a "£3.1bn funding gap" for children's services by 2025.¹⁶¹

The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, said in September 2019 that she wanted to see the Programme, or an equivalent system of family support, continue, and an expansion of the Programme to 500,000 households and an outcomes framework built more around children.¹⁶²

During the [Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry into Children's services](#), a number of local authorities argued that the Government should commit to further funding to avoid

¹⁵⁷ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, pp13-14

¹⁵⁸ HM Treasury, [Chancellor Fast-Tracks Spending Round to Free UP Departments to Prepare for Brexit](#), 8 August 2019

¹⁵⁹ [Comment: National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme](#), ADCS, March 2019

¹⁶⁰ [Troubled Families programme: its impact and what should replace it](#), Children and Young People Now, 30 April 2019

¹⁶¹ [LGA responds to Troubled Families Programme evaluation](#), Local Government Association, 19 March 2019

¹⁶² Children's Commissioner, [A Manifesto for Children](#), September 2019, pp3, 7

cutting-back on non-statutory services and to help staff plan beyond March 2020. The Select Committee's final report recommended that the Government announce a successor programme in advance of the 2019 Spending Review.¹⁶³

Rishi Sunak, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at MHCLG, was asked about the future of the TF Programme during an oral evidence session with the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on 11 March 2019. He described the elements of the Programme that he would like to see carried forward in some form:

What the Secretary of State has said is that he is very keen to have a successor programme to Troubled Families [...]

[...] I am personally very keen to see something like the Troubled Families programme continue. What are the elements of it that I think are interesting? It is one of the few programmes in social policy that has a payment-by-results set up. There is some element of block grant, and combined with that there are various attachment fees and performance fees. That is relatively novel. It has not been done on this scale. People rightly should debate whether that model works or not. I tend to think it does. When you talk to anyone in a local authority, it does change the culture around how people approach social policy and makes it more outcome-focused, which I think is a good thing.

Clearly the emphasis on whole-family working has been [...] unambiguously positive. The key worker approach has been unambiguously positive. At the moment there is an interesting conversation to be had around whether more of the support should be targeted at the very early stage of young children's lives, from conception to two years old. It is something that the Leader of the House, Andrea Leadsom, has formed a ministerial group and a taskforce on, which both of us sit on. She is someone who has a passion for that area. It is something that others, including the Science and Technology Committee, have talked about as well. There is good research to show that those first crucial couple of years are vital in a baby or child's development, for all the various things that might happen down the line.

[...] The last thing I would say is that I hear universally from local authorities that they think it is a good thing. You have probably had evidence from the Children's Commissioner as well. Anyone involved in the space would tell you that this programme is good, it has made a real difference, they think it is valuable, and in one form or another it should be extended. I am hopeful that we, with the publication of the data in the next couple of weeks, can start to build a stronger case for that.¹⁶⁴

A changed name?

If the TF Programme is continued after the Spending Review, it may operate under a different name. In the 2019 Annual Report, James Brokenshire, then Secretary of State at MHCLG, acknowledged issues with the initiative's name:

¹⁶³ House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Funding of local authorities' children's services. Fourteenth Report of Session 2017–19](#), HC 1638, 1 May 2019, para 27

¹⁶⁴ Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Oral evidence: Funding of Local Authorities' Children's Services](#), HC 1638 Monday 11 March 2019, Q201

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I understand why we alighted on the phrase 'Troubled Families', but, in reality, it obscures as much as it enlightens. The criticism of the name isn't without legitimacy. At its worst it points an accusing finger at people, who are already isolated, and says to them *"you are the 'others' and you are not like the rest of us"*. When, in truth, they are like the rest of us, they've just had a little less help, been a little less lucky, and yes, made choices themselves that haven't led to the best outcomes. People should be responsible for their choices, but that doesn't mean we should give up on them. People can make the most of a second chance.¹⁶⁵

Rishi Sunak, and Nadhim Zahawi, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Education, have also indicated that "the name needs to change", especially since most local authorities avoid using the term 'Troubled Families.'¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2018-19](#), March 2019, pp6-7

¹⁶⁶ [Speech by Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP](#), MHCLG, 19 March 2019 and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, [Oral evidence: Funding of Local Authorities' Children's Services](#), HC 1638 Monday 11 March 2019, Q201

5. Devolution of the Troubled Families Programme

The 2010 Coalition and Conservative Governments of 2015 and 2017 have encouraged greater devolution of powers to local regions.

The 2016 devolution deal for Greater Manchester Combined Authority handed over administrative control of the Troubled Families budget to the region and pooled the funding with other budget streams. DCLG (now MHCLG) retains oversight of the Programme but the ten Greater Manchester boroughs have been able to pool their Troubled Families funding, as a single pot amounting to £35 million from 2016 to 2020.¹⁶⁷

Greater Manchester is so far the only combined authority to secure devolution of the Troubled Families programme

This plan was outlined in [Further Devolution to Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#), (HM Treasury, 16 March 2016).

In 2017, Innosi published a [Case Study Briefing on Troubled Families in Greater Manchester](#). It found that implementation of the Programme varied greatly across districts. Stakeholders had mixed feelings towards the payment-by-results system, some seeing it as a political measure, others as an incentivisation tool for service integration. The authors found evidence of a cultural shift due to the Programme, but it was difficult, given the overlap with several other programmes to capture data and ascertain an attributable impact for families. Furthermore, some services, such as mental health services, were not yet effective enough to address all families' needs.¹⁶⁸

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority published a report on the [Troubled Families Funding Allocation](#) in February 2019. As well as explaining how the rest of the centrally funded money would be allocated to localities, it outlined progress of the TF Programme across the area. There was evidence of service transformation in several areas, including changes to behaviours in the workforce and system design.¹⁶⁹

More information can be found in the Commons Library briefing paper, [Devolution to Local Government in England](#).¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ HM Treasury, [Further Devolution to Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#), 16 March 2016; [PQ 234231 \[on Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 19 March 2019

¹⁶⁸ Case Study Briefing: Troubled Families in Greater Manchester, Innosi, 2017

¹⁶⁹ Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [Troubled Families Funding Allocation](#), 15 February 2019

¹⁷⁰ House of Commons Library, [Devolution to Local Government in England](#), SN07029, 23 November 2016

6. Similar programmes

Summary

There have been two initiatives similar to the Troubled Families Programme: the Respect Programme (2006-2010) and the Families with Multiple Problems programme (2011-2015).

Both targeted families with multiple problems. The latter initiative was launched in the same year as the Troubled Families Programme with many of the same objectives. The Public Accounts Committee was critical of this confusion.

6.1 Respect programme (2006-2010)

As part of the Labour Government's approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, 2006 saw the launch of the Respect programme. Following six local authority pilot schemes, the programme included family intervention projects (FIPs), which would:

Take a new approach to tackle the behaviour of 'problem families' by challenging them to accept support to change their behaviour, backed up by enforcement measures.¹⁷¹

The policy was part of a change in emphasis in the approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, moving from investment in deprived areas to more targeted focus on so-called 'problem families'.¹⁷²

Similar to the TF Programme, Respect allocated a key worker to co-ordinate with the family and multiple services, and to offer a single point of contact. However, unlike Troubled Families, there was a focus on sanctions for those who did not sufficiently engage.

There were a number of similarities with the TF Programme, including personnel. The Respect Task Force was led by Louise Casey, who was also in charge of the Troubled Families Unit at DCLG between 2011 and 2015.

Additionally, like the TF Programme, the Government's analysis argued that the programme was extremely successful, with significant reductions in anti-social behaviour, truancy and housing enforcement actions.¹⁷³ Critics argued that poor families were misrepresented as 'problem families' and that the statistical basis for the high success rate was questionable.¹⁷⁴

In his response to Eric Pickles' March 2015 statement on the TF Programme, the then Shadow Communities Secretary, Hilary Benn, argued that the Programme could be directly traced back to the Respect programme:

We on the Opposition Benches support this important work. As the Secretary of State has generously acknowledged, the previous Labour Government started the family intervention project, and a

¹⁷¹ Home Office, [Respect Action Plan](#), 10 January 2006

¹⁷² ['I got it wrong on problem families, admits Blair'](#), The Telegraph, 28 April 2007

¹⁷³ Department for Children, Schools and Families, [Anti-social behaviour family intervention projects: monitoring and evaluation](#), November 2009

¹⁷⁴ CCJS, [Family intervention projects: a classic case of policy-based evidence](#), June 2010

future Labour Government would want to see this work continue and go from strength to strength.¹⁷⁵

6.2 Families with Multiple Problems programme (2011-2015)

The Families with Multiple Problems programme was launched in December 2011 and funded under the 2007-2013 European Social Fund, with the DWP acting as one of the co-financing organisations. £200 million was provided for the programme from the DWP's budget.

It sought to work with families facing multiple barriers to work, and the coordinator role could either be carried out by local authorities or private providers. The DWP set a target of having 22% of those joining the programme moved into employment by March 2015.

The final outcomes data was published in October 2015. The data showed that 9,130 out of 79,130 participants moved into sustainable employment, with 3,550 employment outcomes achieved from March 2015 onwards. The DWP calculated the overall job outcome rate for all participants 18 months after joining the programme, as 11.8%.¹⁷⁶

The NAO highlighted concerns about the performance of private contractors in the programme, noting that none met their target for the number of families moved into to work; the best performing contractors reached 74% of the target, and the worst performing reaching only 7%.¹⁷⁷

The Public and Commercial Services trade union argued that the contracted private companies were “proving themselves incapable of providing the kind of complex, dedicated support necessary”.¹⁷⁸ Although some local authorities performed better, with one reaching 270% of its attachment target, 105 authorities did not meet the target set for them by the DWP by December 2013.

Relationship to the Troubled Families Programme

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) looked at the DWP programme and the DCLG programme together in its 2014 report, [Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges](#).

The PAC report was critical of the launch of two programmes in the same year which targeted similar families and which both offered payment-by-results, with little in the way of coordination or joint governance arrangements between DWP and DCLG:

¹⁷⁵ [HC Deb 10 March 2015, c159](#)

¹⁷⁶ DWP, [ESF Support for Families with Multiple Problems – December 2011 to August 2015](#), October 2015

¹⁷⁷ National Audit Office, [Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges](#), 3 December 2013, HC 878 2013-14

¹⁷⁸ [‘‘Catastrophic’’ back-to-work scheme for families gets just 720 people back to work - out of 88,000](#), Mirror, 3 December 2013

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The integration of the programmes at the design phase was poor, leading to confusion, and contributing to the low number of referrals to the DWP's programme.¹⁷⁹

The Departments told PAC that a decision was taken to roll-out both programmes as quickly as possible with an aim of ensuring they would be joined up later. Some coordination took place after both programmes had been launched, such as the secondment of 150 Jobcentre Plus advisers to local authorities' Troubled Families teams.

The similarity in some of the outcomes can be seen in the payment-by-results criteria for phase one of the TF (see section 1.2). Local authorities could not receive payment for getting families into work if they were attached to the DWP/ ESF programme, to avoid double payment.

¹⁷⁹ Public Accounts Committee, [Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges](#), 24 March 2014, HC 688 2013-14

7. Appendix A: earlier reports on phase two

April 2017 – first Annual Report

In April 2017, the first Annual Report under the *Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016* was published: [Supporting disadvantaged families](#). The Government also released a number of documents related to the ongoing evaluation by Ipsos Mori:

- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: family outcomes – national and local datasets: part 1](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: service transformation – case study research: part 1](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: service transformation – staff survey: part 1](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: family outcomes – family survey: part 1](#)

The results published in the initial phase two evaluation report showed that nationally, of the 399,960 families funded up to 2020, 46% had been entered onto the TF Programme by December 2016.

As of 28 March 2017, local authorities had made payment-by-results claims for 13% of the 399,960 families. 17% of these claims were made for families achieving continuous employment, whilst 83% were for families achieving significant and sustained progress.

Data was also available at a local authority level and showed significant variations in performance and outcomes. See pages 49-56 of the report for more details.

Summarising the qualitative data collated at this point, the Government said:

- local authorities were supportive of service transformation which was beginning to happen (although progress varied);
- staff liked the ‘whole family’ approach and a focus on empowering families, which they believed was achieving long-term change for families; and
- families were positive about their ‘collaborative’ ‘goal-setting’ relationship with their keyworkers.¹⁸⁰

December 2017 – early findings and first comparative data

Between May and December 2017, several additional reports were published. They continued in the same vein as the April 2017 release, although some of the questionnaires had been adapted to “reflect changes in delivery of the programme”:

¹⁸⁰ DCLG, [Supporting disadvantaged families - Troubled Families Programme 2015 – 2020: progress so far](#), April 2017, p39

- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: family outcomes – national and local datasets: part 2](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: service transformation – case studies research: part 2](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: service transformation – Troubled Families coordinators staff survey: part 2](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: service transformation – keyworkers staff survey: part 2](#)
- [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: service transformation – Troubled Families employment advisers staff survey: part 2](#)

A Government [overview](#) of the above was also published in December 2017. DCLG summarised the following:

- The programme is driving service transformation in local authorities; changing structures and processes, strengthening partnership working and promoting ‘whole-family’ working.
- Troubled Families Co-ordinators are providing effective leadership and improving multi-agency working.
- Families have appreciated the way family keyworkers took time to understand the family, build relationships and trust.
- There is work to do to improve engagement between Local Authorities and the voluntary and community sector including ensuring that once families exit the programme, they are plugged into the right services locally so that the positive outcomes that they have achieved are sustained.¹⁸¹

The December 2017 ‘early findings’ attempted to compare the family outcomes of families in the TF Programme with a group of families outside the Programme. However the comparison group was **unmatched**, which meant that the two groups’ characteristics may have differed too greatly to render a comparison fair.¹⁸² More details can be found in the [Evaluation Overview Policy Report](#).

March 2018: second Annual Report

In March 2018, the Government published its [second Annual Report of the Troubled Families Programme \(2017-18\)](#), along with part 3 of the [Family outcomes datasets](#).

According to the 2018 Annual Report, 289,809 families had been brought into the Programme which represented over 70% of the 399,960 families targeted in phase two. 92,245 had achieved ‘significant and sustained progress’ and 13,907 had achieved

¹⁸¹ DCLG, [Troubled Families Programme: Evaluation Overview Policy Report](#), December 2017, pp5-6

¹⁸² DCLG, [Troubled Families Programme: Evaluation Overview Policy Report](#), December 2017, p6

'continuous employment'; in March 2017, the numbers had been 44,000 and 9,100 respectively.¹⁸³

The report also detailed family enrolment at a local level, compared to the maximum number of families targeted by the TF Programme. As was the case in the first Annual Report, there was a high degree of geographical variation, both in the rate of family enrolment in the Programme, and the percentage of payment-by-results claimed. More details can be found on pages 43-48 of the report.

The 2018 Annual Report stated that it **had been possible to create a comparison group for outcomes relating to children's social care.** These were preliminary results that only considered the 'early impact' of the Programme, and only used data from a fifth of the upper tier local authorities that administer the TF Programme.¹⁸⁴ The authors found reduced demand on children's services which may be attributable to the TF Programme.¹⁸⁵

Following the March 2018 publications, Stephen Crossley (by then a Senior lecturer at Northumbria University), continued his criticism of the concept of 'troubled families', saying the evaluation showed that the characterisation of such families did not stand up to scrutiny: less than 10% had been involved in anti-social behaviour, only one in three was 'workless' and just 2.8% of children had received a police caution.¹⁸⁶

He also argued that regional variations in success rates were not explained and that the "intensive, transformative approach" had made disappointingly modest gains given the resources invested. He highlighted that the Programme failed to recognise the structural employment issues that may make families' lives insecure.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ MHCLG, [Supporting disadvantaged families: annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2017 to 2018](#), March 2018, p8

¹⁸⁴ MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: family outcomes - national and local datasets: part 3](#), March 2018, pp10-11

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp13-15

¹⁸⁶ [The Troubled Families Programme: changing everything, yet changing nothing](#), Policy Press / University of Bristol, 4 April 2018

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

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