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Evaluation of Families First: Year 1 Report

Evaluation of Families First: Year 1 Report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary of terms

Action Plans	As a requirement of funding, each local authority completed a template document detailing their plans for the implementation of Families First. These 'action plans' were updated in October 2012. An End of Year Report for each area was produced in April 2013, outlining progress against these plans.
Agencies	Refers to a range of organisations, companies or departments which are involved in the delivery of family support services. For example, a Local Health Board or a mental health organisation in the Third Sector.
Baseline	Refers to a 'starting point' against which the success of Families First will be measured. A series of population indicators have been set by Welsh Government; the 'baseline' figures for these measures have been recorded for 2012 (i.e. prior to the introduction of Families First). Future reports will measure the progress against the original 'baseline' figures.
Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP)	The Children and Young People's Plan is a strategy, set at the local level, which outlines the high-level aims of agencies working for children and young people.
Cymorth	The Cymorth Fund was introduced in 2003/04 by the Welsh Government to provide a network of targeted support for children and young people delivered at a local level. Families First replaced Cymorth from April 2012.
Disability (funding) element	One of the five key elements of the Families First programme. Each local authority's Families First funding includes a ring-fenced amount that should be spent on improving provision for families with disabled children and young carers.
Distance Travelled Tool (DTT)	A framework designed to monitor the progress made by families as a result of an intervention. A range of different DTTs are in place; however they all capture the strengths and needs of individual families at the start of an intervention (against a standard framework) and regularly update this throughout the programme of support to help identify progress.
Early intervention and prevention	Refers to specific stages in the 'continuum of support' offered in family support services. 'Prevention' is an approach that takes account of the wider family needs in pre-empting or addressing those needs before they become acute. This precedes support services designed at 'protection'

	(support for families who without intervention may reach crisis point) and 'remedy' (support for families near or at crisis point).
Families First leads	Local authority staff with responsibility for delivering the Families First programme in their local area.
Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF)	One of the five key elements of the Families First programme. A JAFF is a process used to assess the needs of the whole family across multiple types of need. Each local authority must have a JAFF as a requirement of funding.
Learning sets	One of the five key elements of the Families First programme. Learning sets offer a structured format for groups of staff, agencies and authorities to come together and share learning at a local, regional and national level. Each local authority has a programme of learning sets to share learning about Families First. The Evaluation Team is responsible for delivering annual national learning sets and have created the MLE as a forum for discussion.
Local Service Boards (LSB)	An operational group established in each local authority. LSBs bring a range of public and third sector organisations (such as health, social services, police and children's charities) together to agree how best to deliver services.
Match-funding	Refers to a financial arrangement where the cost of some or all of a grant has been provided by another service or funding stream. Local authorities are able to use 'match-funding' in the delivery of commissioned projects.
Managed Learning Environment (MLE)	A web-based forum. Local Families First staff are able to use the site to share learning, promote best practice and raise questions for the Welsh Government and for each other. The Welsh Government and Evaluation Team can also use the site to disseminate information about the evaluation and Families First programme as a whole.
Multi-agency working	A working arrangement where staff from more than one agency work together towards a common objective. This may be in the joint delivery of a service, or in an agreed 'joined-up' approach to providing an intervention (or range of interventions) for a family.
National stakeholders	Refers to a range of senior staff identified by the Welsh Government as having a relevant contribution to the design or implementation of the Families First programme. These include senior staff from within relevant

	Welsh Government departments and third sector organisations.
Needs assessment	A process through which local authorities are able to identify the range and volume of 'gaps' between the current and desired skills/circumstances of local residents. Needs assessments are used to plan family support services.
Pioneer areas	Families First was rolled out in phases, with six local authorities acting as early adopters of the programme in July 2010 (phase 1) and eight additional local authorities involved from March 2011 (phase 2). These local authorities are called 'pioneer' areas. The programme was rolled out to the remaining eight authorities from April 2012.
Results Based Accountability (RBA)	A management tool used to define and assess services. Under an RBA approach, the expected results/outcomes are clearly defined at the start of the project and data is regularly collected to review progress against these outcomes. An RBA framework will look in detail at performance accountability (how much did we do / how well did we do it / is anyone better off?) and population accountability (what improvements have been made at the population level).
Service Providers	Agencies or third sector organisations who have been commissioned to delivery specific services in relation to Families First. These could include third sector or private organisations, or departments within local public services.
Stock and Flow	Refers to the number and journey of families through the JAFF and TAF process in accessing family support services through Families First. For example, how many TAFs were signed, and how many families were referred to a commissioned project as part of their individual TAF action plan.
Strategic commission-ing	One of the five key elements of the Families First programme. Projects commissioned using Families First funding are expected to be tied to a coherent strategy based on local need, commissioned through a competitive tendering process and delivered as large-scale flexible projects.
Team Around the Family (TAF)	One of the five key elements of the Families First programme. TAF refers to the model of support that oversees and coordinates the interventions received by families through the programme. A TAF is expected to take account of the needs of the whole family and involve the coordination of multiple agencies in delivering a seamless service for the individual family.

Third sector	Refers to non-governmental and non-profit-making organisations or associations who are able to deliver family support services. These include charities, voluntary and community groups, and cooperatives.

Executive Summary

This summary provides an overview of the Families First programme, and summarises key findings from the first year of the programme evaluation.

This report aims to provide an assessment of stakeholders' perceptions of the programme design, progress in implementing the key programme elements, and early views on the successes and challenges of implementation. The evidence base at this stage of the evaluation includes qualitative interviews and reviews of documentary evidence. Subsequent evaluation activity will focus on the programme's impact and the effectiveness of different delivery models used by local authorities.

1. Programme background

In July 2012 Ipsos MORI and Ecorys were commissioned by the Welsh Government to evaluate the national Families First programme over the period 2012-15.

Families First aims to improve the design and delivery of the services local authority areas provide to families. In particular, it aims to improve families' experiences through offering support that meets the needs of whole families, rather than individuals within families, and by providing a means of co-ordinating the support families receive from different agencies.

Families First was introduced against a background of Wales experiencing a relatively high level of child poverty for the UK. A number of other socio-economic trends continue to pose challenges across Wales, such as high levels of child obesity and youth unemployment.

Local and national stakeholders acknowledge there was scope to enhance the services provided to children and families before Families First was introduced, through improving the effectiveness of working practices. In particular, there was scope for more efficient delivery of front-line services by coordinating the agencies involved in delivering services to families; for more consistency in the services provided to families with disabled children; and for a more strategic approach to commissioning services.

Families First is a hybrid programme that marries several elements to address these needs (see box overleaf). It is also a key part of the Welsh Government's approach to tackling child poverty: the programme was designed to address the strategic objectives set out in the 2011 Welsh Child Poverty Strategy.

2. The evaluation

The three-year evaluation aims to answer a number of questions about the programme including: whether the programme design is fit for purpose; an assessment of how the programme is implemented; the quality of the programme's implementation; the impact of the programme on families; and the impact of the programme at an overall population level. This first report is based on a range of evaluation activity, including qualitative research with national stakeholders and Families First leads, and desk research including a review of local authority action plans and a wide range of other sources.

At this stage, it is too early in both the programme's implementation and in the evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the different models that are being implemented across Welsh local authorities, or the impact of this work on families. This report focusses therefore on perceptions of the design of Families First; and how it has been implemented to date, recognising that new processes and working arrangements will take time to establish. Questions around impact and effectiveness will be addressed in later evaluation reports.

3. Views of the programme's design

Families First contains five key elements that all authorities must implement in delivering the programme (see box below[1]). However, an important aspect of the programme design is the amount of flexibility it gives to local authorities to innovate by determining how to implement each of these elements locally, and by designing services that meet the needs of their local community. As a result, the operation of Families First is quite different across the Welsh authorities.

The five key elements of Families First

i. a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) used to assess the needs of the whole family;

ii. a Team Around the Family (TAF) model that oversees and coordinates the interventions families receive;

iii. a coherent set of strategically commissioned, time limited, family-focused services or projects (in response to a community based needs assessment);

iv. participation in inter-authority learning sets both nationally and locally; and

v. improved support for families with disabled children and young people.

National and local stakeholders support the design of all five key elements of the programme, and perceive that these elements address gaps or inefficiencies in previous ways of working. The extent to which Families First is a departure from pre-existing working practices varies by local authority: a few were already employing practices that echo the key elements of Families First, and in these cases the programme has given impetus and stronger direction to work that was underway. In most local authorities, however, Families First represents a significant change in direction that would not otherwise have come about. In particular these changes include:

- A new approach to partnership working, building on previous managerial level cross-planning to focus on integrated front-line delivery among practitioners (i.e. multi-agency working);
- Moving from a child-focused model to a family-focused model (i.e. Team Around the Family);
- A new, formalised approach to commissioning that is more strategic; and,
- A new approach to inter-authority learning.

[1] See glossary for definitions of key terms, and individual chapters for a detailed explanation of the key elements of Families First.

Local authorities acknowledge that, in the past, joined-up working across the multiple agencies involved in assessing, referring and delivering services to families was informal and focused on individuals or specific issues (e.g. alcoholism, abuse) rather than whole families' needs. As a result, there were both gaps and duplication in service delivery from families' perspectives: local authorities perceive that **JAFF and TAF** are leading to more effective organisation of services. At the same time, local authorities consider that joined-up assessment and delivery means Families First allows local authorities to identify and to address families' needs more effectively.

National and local stakeholders consider that the move to **strategic commissioning** is a significant improvement on previous arrangements in several respects: it is improving (i) the process of commissioning by introducing a more coherent, structured and needs-based approach to commissioning; (ii) the scope and nature of the services that are commissioned by basing commissioning on locally-identified need; and (iii) the quality of provision for families and children by increasing the focus on monitoring the quality of what delivery agents offer. In particular, local authorities draw a contrast with the predecessor programme to Families First, Cymorth, where services were perceived to be fragmented, lacking overall direction, and involving limited partnership working across the various projects commissioned. Notably, local authorities point to a change in the culture of commissioning: under Cymorth there was often an expectation that services would be re-commissioned, irrespective of their quality, whereas Families First requires delivery agents to evidence the impact they have had on families.

National and local stakeholders feel that the **disability element** of Families First helps to address the previously limited, and often variable, support available for families with disabled children and young people. In particular, families who were not eligible for statutory services but needed support often failed to receive services.[2] As with other areas of service delivery, a lack of joint working by agencies meant that the support families received was often fragmented or duplicated. However, there is some concern among national stakeholders that ring-fencing funds for disability may encourage local authorities to view disability services as separate from mainstream services and discourage wider spending. There are also concerns about the sustainability of the services offered if the ring-fenced element of the funding was cut in future.

An evaluation of the pioneer phase of Families First (which took place from July 2010 – April 2012) suggests that there are clear benefits to the **learning sets** embedded within Families First, including forming links between colleagues across local authority borders that facilitated learning and sharing of good practice. On a more general note, it is evident that the flexibility the Families First model gives to local authorities to innovate in their delivery of the programme to meet locally-identified needs has given rise to a wide range of models of implementation across Wales. Having a mechanism in place to identify and share examples of good practice therefore seems important in helping to derive maximum value from the programme. Nevertheless, there appears to be uncertainty about the purpose and practical value of learning sets among some local authorities, and further Welsh Government support around the role of learning sets may be of value.

While there is strong support for the programme rationale, and optimism about what it can achieve, some stakeholders are wary of a number of challenges faced by the programme in

[2] For example, needs assessments, transition plans.

realising its full potential. Of particular concern is the aspiration to improve a series of outcomes for the full target population given the relatively small numbers of families benefitting from Families First, and the relatively small budget per child/family compared with other programmes.[3] Likewise, some are wary about the difficulties of being able to demonstrate an impact on poverty during a period of recession and welfare reform. Stakeholders also note the tension between achieving significant cultural change within organisations at a time when local authority and agency resources are under great pressure.

4. Progress in implementing Families First

Families First was rolled out in phases, with six pioneer local authorities being involved from July 2010 (phase 1), and eight local authorities involved as pioneers from March 2011 (phase 2). The programme was rolled out to the remaining eight local authorities from April 2012.

Typically, local arrangements for **managing Families First** are initially based around established governance arrangements, such as the Children and Young People Partnership (CYPP), although some new governance structures for Families First are starting to develop. The majority of local authorities are part of regional consortia and delivery groups. The governance of Families First locally tends to include a diverse group of organisations, mainly because governance arrangements draw on the multi-agency representation of existing groups (such as CYPPs).

JAFF and TAF

A Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) is a process used to assess multiple needs of the whole family. A Team Around the Family (TAF) is the name given to the team that coordinates the interventions received by families and identified through the JAFF. A TAF is expected to take account of the needs of the whole family and involve the coordination of multiple agencies in delivering a seamless service for the family.

As of summer 2013, a JAFF approach had been *fully* implemented in 18 of the 22 local authorities in Wales, though the specific detail as to how the JAFF is administered locally continues to evolve over time. JAFF approaches are under development in four other local authorities. Some form of TAF approach is running in all but one local authority.[4] Local authority estimates of the number of families involved in JAFF and TAF were provided in November 2012 (and updated where possible in summer 2013): according to these estimates a total of 1,867 JAFFs had been initiated, and 1,557 TAF action plans were in place, across all local authorities by March 2013. Monitoring data shows that, in the six months to March 2013, a total of 1,492 JAFFs had been initiated, and 727 TAF action plans had been signed, across 20 local authorities.[5] Many local authorities expect these numbers to increase over time as they broaden the scope of services following the initial development phases.

[3] See Table 3.1 for a full list of the 16 population indicators which are being monitored as part of Families First.
[4] In the other local authority, TAF workers are in place with a small caseload but the TAF model is still being finalised.
[5] Data could not be established in two local authorities.

Local authorities are given licence to innovate under Families First and as a result a wide variety of models are used to deliver JAFF and TAF. At this stage of the programme's implementation it is too early to draw conclusions about which models are most effective, but later evaluation reports will seek to draw conclusions about the impact of the models used. While the variety of models used is part of the programme design, some models will inevitably be less effective than others, and local authorities and the Welsh Government will need to be open to changing practices over time to reflect emerging evidence about 'what works'.

Strategic Commissioning

Projects commissioned using Families First funding are expected to be tied to a coherent strategy based on local need, commissioned through a competitive process and delivered as large-scale flexible projects.

There is substantial variation in the pace of change in commissioning across local authorities. As of summer 2013, all but six have completed their strategic commissioning. Four of these six local authorities have commissioned some, but not all, of the projects they have identified they need to address gaps in services. While most local authorities have completed the first round of commissioning, the process has been far from straightforward: most local authorities emphasised the difficulties they faced, mainly due to the limited experience and capacity within both local authorities and local delivery partners to participate in a formal procurement process.

The extent to which commissioning has addressed Families First priorities varies: some principles have been adhered to by all local authorities, such as identifying local need, and commissioning time-limited projects. Other features of the Families First commissioning requirements, such as joint commissioning, were found to be more challenging and remain more limited.

One of the criticisms of the Cymorth programme related to the large number of small-scale projects commissioned: as a whole. The evidence available suggests that fewer, larger, projects are commissioned under Families First although the picture is very difficult to assess on the information currently available. Future evaluation activity will need to clarify this further. The number of projects commissioned per local authority ranges from 2-16, with an average of seven projects, although the headline figures obscure the underlying pattern of 'sub-projects' and consortia delivery arrangements. Despite this, it is evident that a number of small-scale services are still commissioned – 20 projects have a value of £20K or less, and 39 have a value of £50K or less – but is it also clear that in at least some of these cases local authorities have a good rationale for using smaller providers who are perceived to engage better with Families First clients.

Disability element

The disability element of Families First provides local authorities with a ring-fenced sum to be spent on innovative ways of improving services for families with disabled children and young carers. Local authorities are expected to provide for these families in all their services, but the ring-fenced funding is provided to ensure their specific needs are catered for.

As of summer 2013, 16 out of 22 local authorities have completed the commissioning of disability services to be funded through the ring-fenced sum, and in one other local authority some services have been commissioned. Five local authorities are delivering services on an interim basis until planning and commissioning is completed. The amount spent on disability services in relation to the ring-fenced budget varies: in 12 local authorities, spending on disability services is approximately in line with the ring-fenced allocation (within £10K), while in five local authorities the amount spent is significantly higher than the ring-fenced amount (£50K or more). Overall spending on specific disability services is £3.9m, as compared with £3m allocated through ring-fencing.

Local authorities were keen to stress that they are also working to improve the accessibility of mainstream services in addition to delivering specialist provision. Further evaluation activity will need to unpick how different current services are compared with those provided under Cymorth and to investigate how far disability services are genuinely integrated into mainstream service delivery.

Learning sets

Learning sets offer a structured format for groups of staff, agencies and authorities to come together and share learning at a local, regional and national level. Each local authority has a programme of learning sets to share learning about Families First.

There are currently 14 multi-authority learning sets, in which all but three local authorities are involved. All local authorities plan to be involved in learning sets around JAFF/TAF, and workforce issues are also a common theme of learning sets. The range of topics addressed through learning sets is becoming more diverse as the programme beds in. Authorities are typically involved in learning sets with other authorities in their region, which both reflects the need for local consistency (e.g. to cater for families moving across authorities), and other regional working arrangements from the pioneer phase or earlier.

Learning sets have taken a lower priority in some local authorities, where there is scepticism about their purpose in comparison to other existing multi-authority forums, and/or difficulties in engaging the right mix of participants and expertise to make them fully effective.

The evaluation team is responsible for delivering annual national learning sets and have created an online 'Managed Learning Environment' as a forum for discussion, sharing good practice, and for those involved in Families First to keep up to date with evaluation activity. The National Learning Sets involve face-to-face meetings with representatives from all local authority areas. The intention is that the national events will each focus on a key topic relating to the implementation of Families First, and comprise a mix of presentations and small-group discussions: the first event in January 2013 centred on JAFF and TAF.

5. Early successes and benefits of Families First

Local and national stakeholders highlighted a number of successes and benefits to Families First working arrangements across all key elements of the programme.

JAFF and TAF

- Local Families First staff highlighted a few key features of the JAFF as helping to **engage families more effectively** and improve the effectiveness of agencies' work: the assessment process generates more active involvement from families than previous forms of family assessment; the JAFF assesses families' strengths as well as their needs; and the JAFF helps practitioners to understand the underlying issues behind families' behaviours and needs. The role of the lead professional is pivotal in engaging families, and seen as one of the most successful aspects of the TAF model.
- TAF panels are seen as **more responsive** compared with prior arrangements for assessing family needs.
- **Better multi-agency working** means more effective support for families with multiple needs as well as better use of local resources. JAFF supports multi-agency work because it provides a structured approach to recording and sharing information, and a common language that practitioners from different fields can understand. The TAF helps to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise across workers from disparate disciplines.
- The distance travelled tools integrated into JAFFs provide a consistent assessment, as well as a way of **linking Families First work to national priorities** and local population indicators.

Strategic Commissioning

- Strategic commissioning promotes **better multi-agency working**: local authorities often commission consortia as delivery agents which is helping to formalise partnership working, including shared training across organisations.
- Families First justifies a greater focus on commissioning projects with a **focus on early intervention**, which was difficult to fund from core budgets in the past.
- An **outcome-based culture** is starting to develop: providers are aware of the need to evidence outcomes for families.
- There are some examples of joint commissioning helping to **leverage other funds**, with some local authorities securing match funding for projects.

Disability

- Ring-fenced funds, and the disability focus of the programme, help to **prioritise and protect services** that might otherwise be cut in a time of reducing budgets.
- New assessment and referral processes, and better data sharing across agencies, is helping to **identify more families, earlier, than in the past**, and agencies have better access to the information they need to provide an effective service to families.

Learning Sets

- Provide space for practitioners to **share knowledge** and reflect on their practice.
- Local authorities welcome the learning sets as a way of **benchmarking progress** in implementing Families First against other local authorities.
- Multi-authority learning sets allow tackling of **cross-authority issues**.
- Valuable in the development of 'soft' infrastructure – informal networks and training for staff.

6. Challenges in implementing Families First

Some key challenges have also been identified in the early phases of the programme's implementation. Later stages of the evaluation will capture evidence on how challenges are addressed and overcome, and the extent to which they continue to affect delivery.

JAFF and TAF

- Significant **time and resources** have been required in the initial set up and on-going running of JAFF. The significant changes to working practices entailed in introducing JAFF also has implications for job roles and working processes.
- It can be difficult to develop a common assessment that fits **the needs of all agencies**.
- **Securing buy-in** from agencies and staff who may be reluctant to give up their individual service agenda.
- **Managing workloads**: most local authorities accept families below the thresholds for social services, but some mention that social service eligibility thresholds are changing, which has increased the flow of families into Families First services.

Strategic Commissioning

- Prior to Families First, there was **limited expertise and capacity** to undertake procurement among both local authorities and agencies. There are also a number of specific difficulties in commissioning services, such as avoiding conflicts of interest in local markets, and sourcing local service providers with the right expertise to participate in tender design and commissioning panels.
- Allowing for **participation of children and families** in the commissioning process: time constraints limited this involvement in the first round of service commissioning.
- Ensuring that contracts are **flexible to changing demand**: consortia partners will aim to retain their original share of contract arrangements, even if demand is low.
- Collecting **objective data on performance** can be difficult, where projects do not feel their work lends itself to quantitative reporting of outcomes.

Disability

- There are concerns that the service offer would reduce if ring-fencing were cut, as **developing sustainable services is difficult** in some areas and the ring-fencing currently protects a number of services.
- National stakeholders still feel that the priority given to disability services remains **reliant on the effectiveness of individual advocates** in local authorities.
- Although similar services are offered across local authorities, Families First leads note **difficulties working across borders**, particularly because of different thresholds for services and differences in mainstream provision.

Learning Sets

- Some local authorities are **sceptical about the value of separate multi-authority forums solely for Families First** rather than the broader family support agenda.
- Some note difficulties for specialist learning sets where other specialist forums already exist, and in **engaging the wider sector expertise** needed for effective working.
- While learning sets have been effective in developing 'soft' infrastructure, in terms of training and networks, and there are some examples of good practice, the **impact on service delivery has, to date, been mixed**.

7. Next steps for the evaluation

Evaluation activity thus far has focused on perceptions of the design of Families First, and how it has been implemented to date. Activity over the remainder of the evaluation will address its impact, including questions around:

- What is the impact of Families First on families? This will be captured via case studies; and the Family Outcomes Tool monitoring data collected through local authorities.
- What is the impact of Families First on local authority delivery arrangements? This will be captured via case studies; Process Change Performance Measures, a set of monitoring data being collected by local authorities; and the forthcoming stakeholder survey.
- What features of delivery are associated with the greatest impact? This will be assessed by comparing delivery models for JAFF/TAF delivery, models of strategic commissioning, and forms of management, with the programme's local impact (as evidenced through local authority monitoring data).

The next major evaluation output will compare the findings across a number of new sources of evidence; these include a survey of stakeholders, local area case studies, and in-depth monitoring information from local authorities. These findings will address critical evaluation questions about what difference Families First is making in practice.

Future evaluation activity and reporting will continue to monitor the implementation of Families First in greater depth, including the stock and flow of families through projects and JAFF and TAF; the composition, management and targeting of strategically commissioned packages and projects; and the involvement of local authorities in learning sets and the perceived benefits of this.

The table below outlines key evaluation activities leading up March 2014.

Date	Activity
October 2013	Process Change Performance Measures: first round of local data available
December 2013	Re-launch of Managed Learning Environment, and targeted support for local authorities with less established learning sets, to promote shared learning and dissemination of best practice.
January-February 2014	Stakeholder online survey: capture detail on local historical arrangements, and implementation of Families First to date.
January-February 2014	Case studies in 7 local authorities, involving interviews with a range of staff about the implementation of Families First. Case studies with families will be conducted with 24 families across 4 of these areas to understand families' experiences and gain an indication of impact.
January 2014	Family Outcomes Tool measures: first round of local data available
May 2014	Annual report: early evidence of the impact of Families First, identifying good practice locally, and updates on implementation of the programme.

1. Introduction

In July 2012 Ipsos MORI and Ecorys were commissioned by the Welsh Government to evaluate the national Families First programme over the period 2012-2015.

1.1 Overview of Families First

Families First was rolled out across all 22 local authorities in Wales from April 2012, following a pioneer phase which tested a range of delivery models across five consortia.[6] Families First will run for an initial lifespan of five years; the funding will be reviewed annually, and is set at around £43.4m for the current financial year.[7] Families First succeeds the Cymorth grant which Welsh authorities received from 2003 to support children and young people.

Families First aims to improve the design and delivery of local authorities' family support services. It aims to improve services through offering support that caters for whole families, rather than individuals within families, and by co-ordinating the agencies working with families so that families receive joined-up support. Ultimately, the aim is to improve families' outcomes through improving the quality of the services they receive. The programme design:

- encourages innovation within local authorities so they change the way services are delivered, and in particular coordinate better the services delivered by different agencies;
- promotes an 'invest to save' approach to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery; services should intervene early, and aim to prevent problems – or to prevent their escalation – rather than only tackling entrenched problems; and,
- embeds learning throughout the programme's delivery, to help identify and share learning, and to apply those approaches that are proven to be the most successful in improving families' outcomes.

Families First also promotes the development of more effective services for families affected by disability, by providing ring-fenced funding for specific disability services in the early stages of the programme,[8] as well as encouraging mainstream service delivery to cater better for the needs of families affected by disability. The funding for this element takes advantage of the budget that became available when the Child Trust Fund was cut in 2010.

The programme's design allows for a significant amount of local flexibility in the interpretation and implementation of the programme. Local authorities are given the scope to innovate and develop services that conform to a set of key principles; however there are five **key elements** that each authority must use in delivering Families First:

[6] Two consortia were in operation from July 2010 and another three from March 2011: each consortium comprised neighbouring LAs.
[7] http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/firstminister/2013/130130ff/?lang=en. The Welsh Government is providing £42 million during 2012 -13 for the programme, with the figure set to increase to £43.4 million in 2013-14
[8] The ring-fenced element of Families First will be reviewed and may not continue for the full duration of the programme.

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i. a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) used to assess the needs of the whole family;

ii. a Team Around the Family (TAF) model that oversees the interventions families receive;

iii. a coherent set of strategically-commissioned, time-limited, family-focused services or projects (in response to a community based needs assessment);

iv. participation in inter-authority Families First learning sets both locally and nationally; and

v. improved support for families with disabled children and young people.

For the purposes of this report, the first and second elements will be treated together, reflecting the integrated way in which JAFF and TAF are often delivered and monitored locally. Further detail outlining the specific drivers, design principles and assumptions underpinning the programme can be found in the Appendices.

In addition to the five key elements that local authorities are using in the delivery of Families First, there are a number of key principles that services should conform to, as follows:

- **family-focused,** taking a whole family approach to improving outcomes;
- **bespoke,** tailoring help to individual family circumstances;
- **integrated,** with effective co-ordination of planning and service provision across organisations, ensuring that needs assessment and delivery are jointly managed and that there is a seamless progression for families between different interventions and programmes;
- **pro-active**, seeking early identification and appropriate intervention for families;
- **intensive,** with a vigorous approach and relentless focus, adapting to families' changing circumstances; and
- **local,** identifying the needs of local communities and developing appropriate service delivery to fit those needs, with particular regard for the opportunities to link with, for example, the Flying Start and Communities First programmes.[9]

1.2 This report

This first evaluation report provides an assessment of the rationale for the programme and a review of the progress made by local authorities over the first year of its delivery. The evidence base at this stage of the evaluation includes qualitative interviews with stakeholders and Families First leads; this is supplemented by quantitative data obtained through local authority action plans and a proforma completed by authorities in December 2012 relating to the delivery models used for some elements of the programme.

The findings from year 1 will be cross-referenced with a range of primary data which will be collected in years 2 and 3 of the evaluation, including family case studies, a stakeholder survey, and monitoring data covering family outcomes and the changing processes used by local authorities to provide family services. This activity will help provide an early assessment of impact and help to identify good practice during the latter half of the evaluation. The second chapter of this report provides more detail about the evaluation methodology.

[9] Families First Guidance: http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/111219ffguideen.pdf

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1.3 Structure of this report

This document is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2:** provides an overview of the evaluation aims and methodology, and the scope of the current evaluation report;
- **Chapter 3**: provides a context for Families First and includes an outline of other relevant national policies, a review of national population indicators and exploration of the rationale for the programme;
- **Chapter 4:** considers the management and implementation of the Families First programme at both a national and local level;
- **Chapter 5:** reviews progress of the JAFF and TAF elements of the programme, incorporating the findings of a pro-forma completed by local authorities in Nov/Dec 2012;
- **Chapter 6:** reviews progress of strategic commissioning by local authorities;
- **Chapter 7:** reviews the disability strand and how this has been administered by local authorities; and
- **Chapter 8:** reviews progress of local authority learning sets and provides an outline of national learning activity.

The supporting appendices to this report are provided in a separate document.

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2. The evaluation of Families First

This chapter describes the aims and scope of the evaluation of Families First, explains the methods being used to monitor the implementation and impact of the programme, and sets out the evaluation activities carried out to date which this first evaluation report is based on.

It highlights the aims of the current evaluation report, which are to describe the early implementation of Families First, review the programme rationale, and to indicate the range of implementation models used across local authorities. This report will provide a baseline understanding of the programme's implementation; later reports will go on to provide an assessment of the impact of Families First.

2.1 What questions does the evaluation aim to answer?

Over the course of three years, the evaluation seeks to answer questions about Families First at four levels:

- **At a programme design level** - are the key principles and assumptions underlying the design of Families First sound? Does the design of the five key elements of Families First – JAFF, TAF, strategic commissioning, disability focus and learning sets – address these principles? Are the key design assumptions which underpin the programme realised in practice? (See Appendices for a full list of these design assumptions.)

- **At a programme implementation level** – within the five Families First key elements, and at the overall programme level, what resources have been used, what has been achieved, what is the quality of this activity, and what are the impact and outcomes?

- **At a family level** – what is the impact of the programme, and each of its five key elements, on the families benefitting from Families First?

- **At a population level** – what is the potential impact of the programme on population-level outcomes relating to employment, educational attainment/engagement, health and well-being, and confidence/resilience/safety?

A more detailed set of evaluation objectives can be found in the Appendices.

The intention is that the evaluation will provide evidence throughout the lifecycle of the Families First programme development, so that the evaluation findings can help to inform the on-going implementation of the programme. As such, there is an emphasis on identifying examples of good practice, and on the systematic dissemination of evidence through national 'learning sets' which will complement the local learning activities already taking place as part of the core programme activity.

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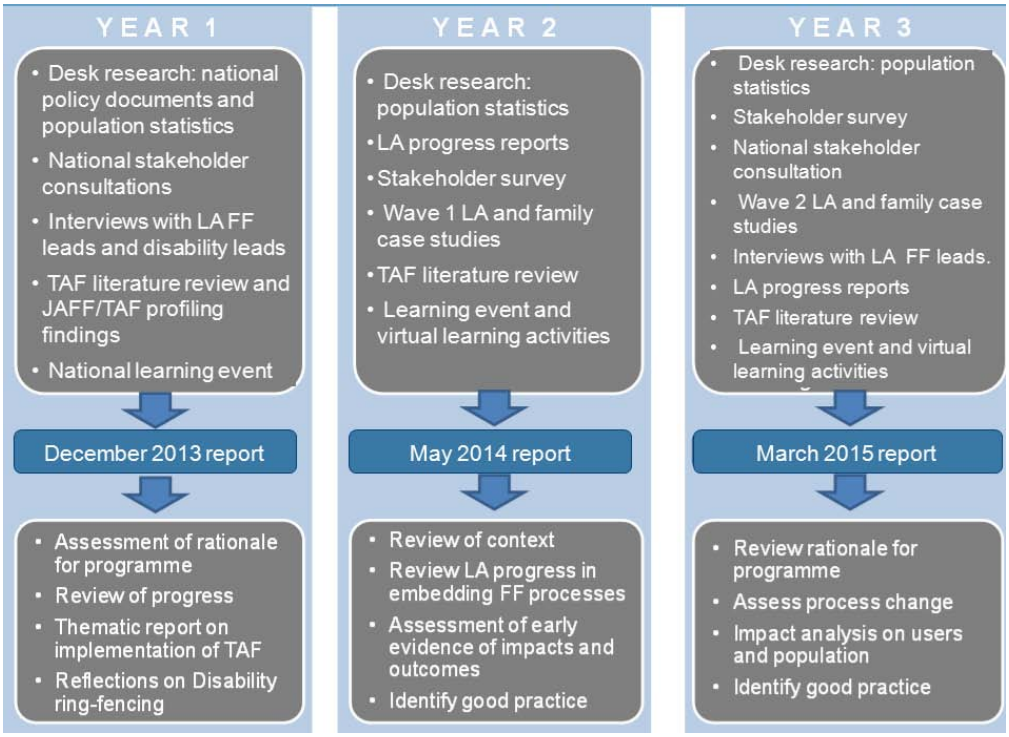
2.2 The evaluation design

The diagram below summarises the key evaluation activities that will be used to capture evidence about how Families First is being implemented in each local authority, and what impact it is having on both service delivery and on families themselves. The diagram also highlights the aims of each reporting period: the focus of the Year 1 reporting is in assessing the rationale for the programme, reviewing progress in its early implementation and particularly in the implementation of Team Around the Family (TAF) arrangements and the impact of ring-fencing funds for the disability element. At each stage the evaluation will draw on, and cross-reference, evidence from a wide range of sources, including desk research as well as primary research with national and local stakeholders.



The evaluation activities take place at a number of levels in order to answer questions relating to the national design of the programme, the implementation of Families First both nationally and locally, the impact of Families First on the way local services are organised and delivered, the impact of services on families, and the impact on the population as a whole.

The key principles driving the evaluation design are:

- The need to measure change at an agency and organisational level within individual local authority areas: Families First is about changing the way services are delivered locally. As such, we will use a case study approach to investigate the processes of change in detail within each authority, as well as collecting on-going monitoring data from authorities, and interviews with local authority Families First leads.

- The need to evaluate the impact of Families First on families themselves: the case study work will incorporate interviews with families as well as local authority staff, and the interviews will ask staff to assess the impact of Families First on families.

- The need to answer questions about the design of Families First and how it complements, and contributes to, other policy initiatives in the Welsh Government:

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national stakeholder consultations will help to make judgements about how well the programme addresses policy needs.

- The need to identify good practice, and provide a means of sharing it with others. The Managed Learning Environment (MLE), an online platform accessed by local authorities in order to share learning about Families First, and face-to-face national learning sets will help to identify and share good practice.

2.3 Evaluation activities to date

A full schedule of the evaluation activities that will be carried out over the life of the evaluation is included in the Appendix 2. This report is based on the evidence gathered from the evaluation activities carried out to date, and specifically:

- an initial profiling exercise to describe how local authorities have established JAFF and TAF, including the models of delivery used, and the stock and flow of families;
- the establishment of a Managed Learning Environment (MLE) which provides an online forum for local Families First practitioners and leads to share experiences and examples of good practice, and to access evaluation reports and other useful information pertaining to the programme;
- a national learning event which took place in January 2013, and which focused on presenting the findings from the JAFF and TAF profiling exercise, and discussing LAs' reactions to the initial typologies suggested by the profiling work;
- a literature review of other UK and international whole-family programmes which sought to answer the question, "What can research literature tell us about the effectiveness of whole-family models of intervention and support, and what are the transferable lessons for Families First?";
- a review of socio-economic population data relating to Families First indicators, to understand how Families First addresses need in the population, and to set the programme in the context of changing key population trends;
- a review of the policy context for Families First in Wales and the UK, to provide an understanding of how the design of Families First complements other Welsh Government activity, and how the desired outcomes may be affected by other policy developments;
- a review of local authority Families First Action Plans and End of Year Reports, which describe in detail how the programme has been implemented, and provides detail of spend on the range of activities Families First encompasses;
- national stakeholder consultations with 17 national stakeholders from a range of organisations; and
- consultations with Families First leads in each of the 22 local authorities in Wales. In most cases, these leads were also the leads for the disability element of Families First and were able to comment on the ring-fenced element of the programme.

In addition to the evidence presented here, the evaluation team has worked in close partnership with the Welsh Government to develop two monitoring frameworks that will be used for the remainder of the evaluation, and will provide evidence about the local implementation and impact of the programme:

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1. The Process Change Performance Measures Framework will help to demonstrate the extent to which processes and systems in the delivery of services for children, young people, and their families have changed and are changing due to the introduction of Families First. The Framework comprises descriptive measures, such as the staffing levels for Families First teams locally, and evaluative measures, such as staff perceptions of the effectiveness of elements of the programme. It will draw on quarterly progress reports which will be provided by local authorities as well as the stakeholder survey from October 2013.

2. The Family Outcomes Tool will aggregate data captured by local authorities to provide an overall assessment of what proportion of families experiencing Families First have seen improved outcomes. Local authorities use 'distance travelled tools' with the families they work with through the programme, to measure their progress against agreed objectives. These data will be aggregated under a set of ten domains, such as 'training, skills, employment and income' and 'achievement and development', so that the evaluation can provide an overall assessment of the proportion of families benefitting from Families First. These data will be reported annually from January 2014.

2.4 Evaluation aims and the scope of this report

It is important to note that both the programme and the evaluation are at relatively early stages, and this report aims to describe the way services have been designed in this early phase of the programme's implementation. This report should therefore be viewed as a baseline: it does not aim to draw conclusions about the impact of Families First, except to highlight key differences in the organisation of services now compared with arrangements in place prior to Families First.

Later evaluation reports will provide evidence about the impact of the programme, drawing on evidence from local authorities about the way services have been redesigned (from the Process Change Performance Measures Framework) and the changes observed among beneficiary families (from the Family Outcomes Tool), as well as information from in-depth case studies with local authority staff and families (see above for further detail of future evaluation activities).

At the end of each of the substantive chapters of this report we have highlighted a number of key areas for investigation in the later stages of the evaluation. These will feed into the overall evaluation objectives, which will be reviewed at the end of the evaluation (more details are available in the appendices.

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Measuring the impact of Families First

Future Families First evaluation reports will provide an assessment of the programme's impact. In measuring the impact of Families First, we are interested in comparing outcomes that are achieved over the coming years with the outcomes that would have been achieved in the absence of Families First, including outcomes for agencies delivering services as well as families in receipt of services. However, given that Families First is in place across Wales, and no suitable comparison of local areas not running the programme is available, a qualitative approach to judging the programme's impact is needed.

Essentially, the principle underlying this approach is that we map our understanding of how the programme *should* work to achieve its envisaged aims, and draw on a range of sources to gather evidence of whether the programme is operating according to this model. At each stage, we will triangulate evidence across a number of sources – i.e. cross-reference evidence from a range of sources – to understand the contribution Families First has made to achieving outcomes for families. Clearly, there are a wide range of programmes and other funds that will affect the outcomes which Families First seeks to achieve, and the evidence will need to be assessed carefully to estimate the impact of Families First as distinct from other programmes.

The first stage in this process is outlining a Theory of Change, which maps how the programme *should* work. The Theory of Change model outlines:

i) the resources dedicated to the design and delivery of Families First ('inputs' e.g. budget, resource and time);

ii) the activities undertaken as part of the programme (e.g. training);

iii) the outputs of the activities undertaken (e.g. families worked with);

iv) the improvement in systems and ways of working (e.g. better holistic family intervention); and

v) how these inputs, activities, outputs and system outcomes (listed above) are expected to lead to impacts on families.

The Theory of Change for Families First is included in the Appendix. This model will guide the collection and analysis of evidence throughout the life of the evaluation. Throughout the course of the evaluation, we will seek to gather evidence that allows us to test whether the hypothesised flow of processes outlined in this model are realised in practice.

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3. Programme rationale

This chapter outlines the context and rationale for the Families First programme. Throughout the course of the evaluation, it will be important to reflect on these to assess the extent to which the design and implementation of Families First is aligned to the programme's initial objectives.

The evidence presented in this chapter draws on desk research, including a review of population indicators relevant to Families First, and a review of the key UK and Welsh programmes and strategies that link to Families First. Programmes and strategies have been selected for review where they use similar approaches, and/or aim to effect outcomes that may complement or act as barriers to the realisation of Families First outcomes.

3.1 Strategic and policy context

3.1.1 Child poverty

The Families First programme has been developed by the Welsh Government to play a key role, alongside mainstream services and other grant-funded initiatives such as Flying Start, in addressing child poverty. Families First will contribute to all three strategic objectives set out in the Child Poverty Strategy[10] and, latterly, the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, by reducing the numbers of workless families through improving skills levels and removing barriers to employment; reducing inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes for children; and by improving services for those living in poverty.

As identified in the recent baseline report for the evaluation of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales,[11] in the three years to 2010/2011 the child poverty rate in Wales after housing costs was the highest of the four UK countries. The report noted some significant trends and challenges ahead:

- poverty among working households has become more widespread, and children living in poverty in Wales are equally split between working and workless households;[12]
- current figures do not yet reflect the impact of recent and on-going welfare reforms that are likely to increase the level of child poverty (for example, cuts to working tax credit and housing benefit for larger households in private rented accommodation[13]); and
- children living in low-income households have a greater risk of negative health, wellbeing and education outcomes.

[10] See later in this section for more detail on the three strategic objectives.
[11] McInnes T, Conway P (2012): Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy Evaluation, baseline report: New Policy Institute and Ipsos MORI.
[12] The factors likely to have contributed to increased poverty among working families include a combination of stagnating wages and fewer hours worked, as well as rising unemployment turning two earner families into single earner families
[13] Research by IFS cited in Ending Child Poverty by 2020 Progress Made and Lessons Learned, CPAG 2012. Above-inflation rises in child-related benefits played a key role in helping to prevent child poverty rates from rising further than they might have during the preceding decade. A recent report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) shows that welfare reform will remove this cushioning effect: IFS forecast that between 2010-11 and 2013-14 average incomes are likely to stagnate and that both absolute and relative poverty among children and working-age adults will rise as a result http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/5372

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The economic costs of child poverty, as well as the social costs to families and children concerned, are high – a recent report calculated the cost to Britain at £25bn per year. [14] As such, addressing the causes and impacts of poverty in Wales are important for the economic efficiency of both the Welsh and UK governments.

Tackling poverty, alongside promoting economic growth, forms one of the two central pledges of the current Welsh Government. To tackle poverty effectively, the Welsh Government has set out a plan to use the policy levers at its disposal to coordinate action at a national and local level. The Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan[15] outlines three goals for national and local government and public bodies to work towards:

- prevent poverty, especially through investment in giving children the best possible start in life;
- help people improve their skills and enhance the relevance of their qualifications, and thereby provide a route out of poverty through employment; and,
- mitigate the impact of poverty here and now, to improve the quality of life of those currently living in poverty.

The Plan's aims reflect those of the Child Poverty Strategy which Families First was designed to address, and as such the Families First outcome measures closely mirror the Plan's goals.[16] The shift from a child-focused approach to tackling poverty, as expressed through the Child Poverty Strategy, to the holistic approach represented by the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, is mirrored in the policy developments seen in family support services over the past decade. Most significantly, Families First replaces the child- and youth-focused services of the Cymorth grant with integrated whole-family services.

3.1.2 Policy landscape

The aims and objectives of Families First form part of a complex policy landscape at both the national and local level. It will therefore be important for latter stages of the evaluation to consider the following, through the feedback of local and national stakeholders, as well as families themselves:

a) the extent to which Families First has integrated seamlessly with other policies; and

b) the extent to which other policies have contributed to Families First outcomes.

A full 'mapping' of Families First outcomes against other Welsh Government policies can be found in the appendices - for example Jobs Growth Wales will make a significant contribution to outcomes relating to employment.

At a national level, Families First complements the directives of the Social Services and Well-Being Bill by focusing on early intervention and protection, and by integrating the delivery of

[14] Cited on Child Poverty Solutions Wales: http://www.childpovertysolutions.org.uk/english/child-poverty/child-poverty-cost. Calculations by Donald Hirsch, Head of Income Studies, Centre for Research in Social Policy at the JRF shows that child poverty is costing Britain at least £25bn a year. Research has identified that: the government spends £12bn a year on services to remedy consequences of childhood deprivation such as poor health, low educational attainment, crime and antisocial behaviour; the Treasury commits an additional £2bn in benefits and forgoes £5bn in taxes and national insurance contributions from adults who do not get jobs as a direct result of an impoverished upbringing; the economy loses a further £8bn from their lack of productive output.

[15] Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-16: http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/publications/socialjustice/120625tackpovplanen.pdf

[16] See Families First policy overview above for more detail on the four core objectives of the programme nationally.

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services for families with multiple needs that cannot be met via a single agency.[17] It also uses a model of integrated working that is a central principle of the many cross-cutting strategies it contributes to.[18]

In line with the requirement to integrate services, the delivery of Families First at a local level is linked to the delivery of other whole-family interventions, such as Flying Start and the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS): local authorities are encouraged to seek opportunities to integrate the delivery of these and other programmes, such as Communities First, to promote efficiencies, and in order to provide seamless and good quality support to the most disadvantaged families. The Families First guidance describes the programme as essentially 'an innovation programme' that requires local authorities to develop models of working to address identified need in their areas. As a result, the programme design at a local level varies significantly by authority.

3.2 Rationale for Families First design

Families First aims to reduce the numbers of families developing complex needs and requiring relatively intensive and costly interventions.[19] The programme is designed to complement mainstream services which tend to be more focused on delivering core universal services (such as education) or delivering remedial support (such as social care, health and policing). Families First seeks to improve early access to, and the delivery of, preventative and protective support.

As outlined below, the design of Families First appears to reflect emerging best practice and lessons from predecessor programmes. However, given the amount of flexibility offered in local implementation, a key part of the evaluation will be to consider the extent to which these principles have been adhered to by local authorities in practice.

3.2.1 Emerging best practice

The programme funds local authorities to invest in innovative approaches, based on identified local needs, to improve early intervention services for families. The approaches that Families First prescribes – whole-family working, early intervention, providing integrated support from multiple authorities needed to comprehensively deal with families' problems, and using outcomes-led approaches – are informed by a literature around what works best in dealing with family problems;[20] in particular:

- a growing body of evidence about the relative merits of early rather than later intervention in families' problems, and the fiscal benefits of earlier intervention;[21]
- evidence from the Welsh Government's IFSS programme underlining the value of family-centred approaches;[22] and,
- evidence from elsewhere highlighting the value of strengths- rather than deficit-based models of working with families.[23]

[17] http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/socialcare/bill/?lang=en
[18] These include, for example, the Healthy Working Wales Strategy, Our Healthy Future, the Domestic Abuse Strategy, the Youth Offending Strategy, and the School Effectiveness Framework. For example, Our Healthy Future means that health equity considerations will be built into policy-making across government.
[19] Families First Guidance: http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/111219ffguideen.pdf
[20] For example, they adhere to principles of effective family working identified in an earlier literature review of family services. (As quoted in Families First Guidance.)
[21] See evidence cited by the Allen review: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf
[22] An independent evaluation concluded that IFSS teams achieved greater success when working with the whole family unit. http://www.sqw.co.uk/file_download/397

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However, although there is evidence relating to some of the key principles underlying the design of Families First, there is limited evidence relating to how best to implement some of the programme elements in practice. Furthermore, given that Families First is a hybrid model, the overall nature and scope of the programme is different to predecessor programmes, which also limits the extent to which practical evidence around implementation is available.

3.2.2 Learning from predecessor programmes

Families First seeks to build on the successes of and learning from Cymorth.[24] From a base of limited partnership working, Cymorth helped to establish multi-agency partnerships within local areas, and in doing so paved the way for the development of other programmes using similar models, such as Flying Start and IFSS as well as Families First itself. Its funding was directed as intended, to supplement mainstream services, and to fund innovative services in response to local needs.

However, an evaluation of Cymorth highlighted a number of areas where its impact was more limited. The design of Families First aims to address a number of these concerns:

Areas of limited impact of Cymorth	Ways in which Families First seeks to address concerns
▪ The grant was often used to fund a large number of small projects; and, ▪ At least in the early years of its operation, authorities tended to re-commission existing services rather than assessing their cost-effectiveness and purpose.	▪ Authorities are required to map commissioned services against locally-identified needs through strategic commissioning, and to closely manage projects' performance.
▪ Its effect on mainstream services was limited, partly because changing mainstream services was never explicitly part of the programme's objectives.	▪ Integration with other initiatives, and reshaping of mainstream services, is explicitly part of the programme objectives.[25]
▪ Evidence of its value for money was limited because it was rarely assessed.	▪ A monitoring requirement placed on authorities to ensure that funded projects' value for money and effectiveness is monitored; and, ▪ Learning set activities that will help to share and promote more widespread use of successful initiatives.

[23] C4EO (2010) *Effective practice to protect children living in 'highly resistant families*

www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/safeguarding/files/safeguarding_knowledge_review.pdf

[24] Evidence in this paragraph is taken from the final evaluation report of Cymorth (2010): http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/101001cymorthen.pdf.pdf

[25] The programme design notes that Families First should 'act as a spur to local area system redesign'.

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3.3 Socio-economic context

Families First needs to be understood in terms of the underlying socio-economic context for the intervention. In order to assess this the Welsh Government established four population outcomes on which Families First will be measured at a national level, which are closely aligned to the priorities within the Child Poverty Strategy. The population outcomes[26] are:

i. working age people in low income families gain, and progress within, employment;
ii. children, young people and families, in or at risk of, poverty achieve their potential;
iii. children, young people and families are healthy, safe and enjoy well-being; and
iv. families are confident, nurturing, and resilient.

A total of 16 population indicators have been developed to measure progress against the four population outcomes. In addition to the national population indicators, local authorities have identified additional indicators that are of particular relevance to local need and the projects they are running. These local indicators will also be tracked over time and reported to Welsh Government.

The national population indicators were agreed through a Steering Group process involving local authorities and Welsh Government officials; the criteria for selection of the final population indicators included that they should be relevant to the programme's outcomes, available at a local authority area, and collected annually. [27]

Analysis of the population indicators will be incorporated over the course of the evaluation:

- initial analysis of the population indicators agreed with local authorities at year one will help the Welsh Government to establish a baseline against which the four programme outcomes can be measured;
- a review of trends in the said population data (from 2008 where available) also helps assess the rationale for the programme, and identify whether the indicator was already improving or worsening prior to the programme's introduction; and,
- future annual reports will consider the direction of travel of these key population indicators since the introduction of Families First.[28]

[26] Families First Guidance: http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/111219ffguideen.pdf
[27] To advise on the update of the initial Population Indicators, in May 2012 the Welsh Government established a Steering Group led by a WG official, composed of eight local authority Families First lead co-ordinators, and a number of Welsh Government officials from a range of programmes with a focus on poverty, communities, and children and young people. The Steering Group met on three occasions to consider a range of possible indicators proposed by the Group itself.
[28] It will not be possible to attribute the full extent of changes directly to the Families First programme as there are a large number of programmes that will contribute towards these outcomes (see appendix for details of these policies), or even the full extent of the contribution towards the outcomes made directly by Families First. It will, however, be possible to establish where positive changes at a population level have been achieved, how far there is an on-going need for investment in this area, and how much of a difference any enhancements in targeting could make.

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3.3.1 Analysis of population trends prior to the introduction of Families First

Table 2.1 overleaf provides a summary of the baseline picture for each of the 16 population indicators prior to Families First being introduced in 2012.[29]

- **Outcome 1, working-age people in low-income families gain, and progress within, employment:** Over one fifth of children in Wales (22.4%) live in families in receipt of out of work (means tested) benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60% of median income,[30] and 33% of children in Wales live in poverty using the after housing costs measure. Though the proportion of year 11 leavers identified as not being in employment, education or training (NEETs) has fallen,[31] the proportion of those aged 18-24 in receipt of Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) increased 157% between 2008 and 2012. Thus, employment remains a concern in Wales and forms a key focus of the Families First programme-

- **Outcome 2, children, young people and families, in or at risk of, poverty achieve their potential:** Though there has been a small improvement in attainment for children eligible for free school meals (e-FSM - used as a proxy for poverty), the gap between e-FSM children and others has narrowed only slightly. In general there are still some very unequal outcomes by e-FSM status. The data suggests that a focus on attainment and attendance within Families First is a welcome intervention.

- **Outcome 3, children, young people and families are healthy, safe and enjoy well-being**: The population indicators under this outcome focus on immunisation, obesity, weight at birth, and rate of teenage conceptions. Data for these indicators has been largely constant, with some minor improvements over the past few years in Wales. However, recent data on childhood obesity found that over a quarter of children (28%) aged four to five were overweight or obese.

- **Outcome 4, families are confident, nurturing, and resilient:** indicators under this outcome look at homelessness and the number of children in need because of domestic abuse issues. Though there have been some small improvements in the number of dependent children due to tenure, the number of children in need because of domestic abuse has risen sharply. Trends around entry into the justice system are more positive, with a marked improvement since 2008.

There is significant local variation in the socio-economic status of the population across the 22 local authorities; for example child poverty is highest among local authorities in the south west of Wales. Moreover, the direction of change also varies by local authority; for example the attainment gap at key stage 4 between those eligible for Free School Meals and those not eligible has reduced by eight percentage points in Vale of Glamorgan, but increased by nine percentage points in Wrexham.

A full set of charts and local authority maps demonstrating the baseline population indicators can be found in the Appendices.

[29] Data in the following bullets are drawn from official Welsh and UK population data. See Appendices for a list of sources for specific indicators.
[30] Children in Low-Income Families Local Measure 2011 (HMRC).
[31] This success has not been reflected in the official measure of NEET for 16-18 year olds as a whole. The national measure of young people who are NEET in Wales shows that the figure for 16-18 year olds who are NEET has remained at similar levels of between 10 and 12 per cent in the last five years to 2011.

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Table 3.1: Population indicator trends pre-2012 and Families First *(data drawn from official Welsh/UK statistics: see Appendices for sources)*

Outcome	Population Indicator	Latest figure	Trend prior to 2012
Outcome 1: Working age people in low income families gain and progress within employment	1. The proportion of children living in families in receipt of out of work (means-tested) benefits or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60% of median income	22.2% (2010)	Broadly in line with 2009 (23%)
	2. 2. Percentage of Year 11 leavers not in education, employment, or training	4.2% (2012)	Fallen 2.9 percentage points from 7.1% in 2008
	3. Proportion of 18-24 year olds claiming JSA	8.6% (2012)	An increase of 9,438 since 2008. From 16,530 to 25,968.
Outcome 2: Children, young people & families, in or at risk of poverty, achieve their potential	1. Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals who achieve the Foundation Phase Indicator (in teacher assessments) compared to pupils who are not eligible for free school meals	66:85 (2012)	*Data prior to 2012 not available*
	2. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals who achieve the Core Subject Indicator at KS2, compared to pupils who are not eligible for free school meals.	64:84 (2010/11)	Gap reduced by two percentage points since 2008
	3. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals who achieve the Level 2 threshold including a GCSE A*-C in English/Welsh and Maths, at the end of KS4 compared to pupils who are not.	22:56 (2010/11)	Gap increased by 2 percentage points since 2008
	4. Percentage of half day sessions (overall absence) missed by pupils of compulsory school age attending maintained primary schools and eligible for FSM compared to those pupils who are not	9:6 (2010/11)	Broadly in line with 2009/10 (10:6)
	5. Percentage of half day sessions (overall absence) missed by pupils of compulsory school age attending maintained secondary schools and eligible for FSM compared to those pupils who are not	14:8 (2010/11)	In line with 2009/10 (14:8)
Outcome 3: Children, young people & families, are healthy, safe & enjoy well-being	1. Percentage of children fully immunised by their 4th birthday*	82.4% (2013/13)	Small increase of 1.6 percentage points from 2011/12 (80.8)
	2. Percentage of live births with a birth-weight of less than 2500g	6.8% (2011)	In line with 2008 (7.1)
	3. Numbers of conceptions under age 16 years per 1000 female residents aged 13 to 15	6.1% (2011)	Fall of two percentage points from 8.1 in 2008.
	4. The proportion of children in reception class (age 4/5) who are overweight or obese	28.2% (2011/12)	*Data prior to 2011/12 not available*
Outcome 4: Families are confident, nurturing, and resilient	1. The number of households with dependent children accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.	2,250 (2011/12)	Small reduction of 435 households since 2,685 in 2007/08
	2. The number of homeless households with dependent children in temporary accommodation at the end of the period.	1,250 (2011/12)	Small reduction of 170 households since 1,420 in 2008/09
	3. Children in need by parental capacity (domestic abuse)	5,080 (03/2012)	A significant increase of 1,400 from 3,680 in 2010
	4. First time entrants to Youth Offending Teams	1,819 (2012)	Reduced to a third of rate in 2008 (from 5,497)

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3.4 Summary

Nationally, there is a strong strategic fit between Families First and other Welsh Government initiatives. Most notably, the rationale and objectives of the programme are tightly aligned with the Child Poverty Strategy and the Tackling Poverty Action Plan. Furthermore, the programme's rationale has drawn successfully on emerging best practice and integrated several key lessons from predecessor programmes such as Cymorth. Families First is being delivered in a complex policy landscape and there is a significant amount of local flexibility in the interpretation and implementation of the programme. The extent to which the delivery of Families First is successfully integrated with other programmes and meets its intended rationale may differ by local authority; this will be considered during the course of the evaluation.

Wales is experiencing a relatively high level of child poverty for the UK, which has not improved in recent years. The rationale for Families First is supported further by a number of compounding challenges in other population indicators. These include:

I. a rise in the number of children in need because of domestic abuse;

II. high levels of child obesity;

III. unequal outcomes in levels of attainment (between those eligible for Free School Meals and other children);

IV. a rise in the proportion of 18-24 year olds claiming JSA.

However, a number of population indicators have shown significant improvement prior to the introduction of Families First (such as the number of year 11 leavers identified as NEET and first time youth entrants into the criminal justice system); it will therefore be important to consider these developments in estimating the counterfactual of the Families First programme.

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4. Management and governance

Introduction to management and governance

The Families First programme is managed at two levels: i) national management and coordination across 22 local authorities; ii) local management within each area, including coordination of multiple agencies and projects.

The Families First guidance describes the programme as essentially 'an innovation programme' that requires local authorities to develop their own models of working to address the needs identified in their area. The management and governance of the programme therefore necessitates a balance between specified requirements that are core to all local authorities and 'principles' that promote variation in the way the programme is implemented locally.

Local management and governance

Whilst allowing for local variation, guidance for Families First asked all local authorities to consider the following when designing management and governance structures for the programme:

- to consider the merits of building on existing governance structures;
- to ensure representation of multiple agencies, families and young people in delivery groups;
- to regularly review plans to assess whether management structures are fit for purpose; and,
- to consider the contribution and opportunities developed through expansion of Flying Start and continuation of Communities First programmes.

Local authorities are also expected to consider developing multi-authority working through sub-regional delivery groups.

National management and governance

The national management of Families First sits within the Children, Young People and Families division in the Welsh Government. It is expected that national arrangements will consist of:

- good communication between the Welsh Government, local authorities and the third sector in order to achieve a coherent set of aims and objectives, and to promote multi-agency and multi-authority working;
- an appropriate monitoring framework with which to assess progress against key objectives; and,
- sound risk management in understanding the factors and influences (from both within and outside of Families First) that will shape whether the programme meets its intended objectives.

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This chapter reports on the effectiveness of management arrangements at both the local and national level, focusing on four key objectives:

- the extent to which local and national arrangements are sufficient in terms of supporting capacity and ensuring progress and accountability;
- the extent to which national arrangements deliver the right balance between evidence-based practice and innovation;
- the extent to which delivery is sufficiently outcomes-focused; and,
- the extent to which the programme design is relevant and effective in delivering its intended outcomes.

The main source of evidence for exploring the effectiveness of local governance is local authority action plans, supplemented by interviews with local Families First leads. At this stage of the evaluation, the analysis of national arrangements and policy design draws mainly on the perceptions of stakeholders and Families First leads.

Later stages of the evaluation will continue to monitor management and governance arrangements through in-depth case studies and a stakeholder survey.

4.1 Local management and governance

4.1.1. Regional and local arrangements

As outlined below, the delivery of Families First has been based on a mixture of new and existing governance structures. Responsibility for the day-to-day running of the programme is often aligned to previous governance arrangements under Cymorth, though some authorities have established a structure specifically for Families First.

Summary of local governance structure for Families First
▪ In **four LAs**, Families First is led by **the existing Children and Young People Partnership (CYPP)** or its equivalent – i.e. the authority's well-established multi-agency structure for children and young people - which then reports directly to the Local Service Board (LSB) or equivalent. ▪ In **11 LAs** Families First is **led by a separate group or sub-group**, which usually reports to the CYPP, and which in turn reports to the LSB or equivalent. ▪ In **three LAs**, Families First is led by a **regional delivery group**, the area-based members of which typically report to their CYPP (discussed above). ▪ **Two LAs** are considering setting up **a new FF Programme Board,** which may be based on a former existing multi-agency structure. ▪ In **one LA,** Families First is driven by **three separate thematic subgroups** who each report separately in to the CYPP. ▪ In **one LA,** Families First is led by the executive team of the equivalent of the central LSB.

Alongside these local governance structures, the majority of local authorities have formed collaborative arrangements at a regional level – 12 pioneers are in consortia of three local authorities each – and Cardiff and Newport are in a "cities" consortia. The two Northern groups of local authorities established during the pioneer phase have joined to create a single North Wales working arrangement of six local authorities.

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However, there are also a number of regional decision-making arrangements. For example, the three South-West local authorities report to a regional delivery group, from which the area-based members report to their own individual CYPPs; Conwy and Denbighshire have also joined to create one Local Service Board (LSB).

Arrangements continue to evolve; however, some changes in local governance bring challenges to the momentum in delivery of Families First. For example it is likely that the CYPP in Neath Port Talbot may be restructured and it is currently unclear who will have responsibility for Families First; and in Pembrokeshire, a review of the local authority structure (potentially to create one corporate team for the CYPP) has hindered progress in implementing JAFF and TAF. It will be important for local authorities to try to minimise the impact of any re-structuring on the implementation of Families First; at the same time, it will be important for the Welsh Government to support local authorities through any transition.

4.1.2 Synergy with other programmes

The extent to which Families First is aligned at the local level both strategically and operationally with other family support services (such as Flying Start, Communities First, IFFS, Jobs Growth Wales) is varied. It is difficult to make any robust judgements of best practice at this stage of the evaluation; however early indications from stakeholders and local authority leads suggest that the most effective relationships involved strategic alignment, with programmes working together under the same directorate/department. For example, Blaenau Gwent has a joint steering group for Flying Start and Families First, and in the Vale of Glamorgan the two programmes share the same management board.

Synergy with other programmes will be explored further in the latter stages of the evaluation, particularly as part of the local stakeholder survey, case studies with local staff and practitioners, and the family case studies.

4.1.3 Degree of multi-agency representation

Information contained in local authority action plans suggests that the majority of the local authorities have representation from a diverse group of organisations in their governance structure. This is mainly because the majority of the authorities draw on the multi-agency representation already in place through the CYPP.

Many authorities have good representation of key partners from Health and Education; the voluntary sector is also represented, either through networks such as WCVA, or individual non-governmental organisations. However, there is weaker representation of employment agencies and job/career centres, both statutory and non-statutory, and in some cases Adult Social Services, Police and/or Youth Justice Services.

Further research to evidence the degree of multi-agency representation will form a key part of the stakeholder survey and of the Process Change Performance Measures (for example demonstrating referrals from a number of agencies); however early indications from interviews with stakeholders and Families First leads suggest that it has been difficult to secure universal engagement from all agencies. Although there is significant representation from Health Boards at a strategic level, authorities report that it is sometimes challenging to engage with health professionals at the front line of delivery, who are perceived to be less culturally attuned to the prevention agenda.

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4.1.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Four authorities have commissioned specific evaluations as one of their commissioned projects; however this does not represent the full scale of evaluation and monitoring work undertaken by local authorities, many of whom have incorporated this into their core costs.

A number of authorities (especially those on shorter commissioning cycles) have already conducted, or plan to conduct, a review of Families First provision prior to the next commissioning window; in the case of Rhondda Cynon Taf, this led them to commission additional provision for speech therapy in 2013. Some authorities have also commissioned independent reviews of their JAFF/TAF processes to help them refine and improve the service to families. For example, Merthyr Tydfil is considering introducing a specific strategy for vulnerable families and a dedicated key worker to coordinate the most vulnerable families accessing the TAF.

A common challenge for local authorities is collecting monitoring information from projects and agencies. The requirements of RBA represent a significant increase in the amount and quality of information requested to demonstrate that they have had an impact on the families they work with. On the other hand, third sector stakeholders comment that agencies often struggle with the wide variety of monitoring requirements across local authorities and also across projects. Both groups welcome efforts to try to formalise monitoring arrangements based on best practice of 'what works'; however any developments would need to be based on identifying 'what works' and be sensitive to the vast amount of work already invested in developing local monitoring arrangements.

4.2 National management and governance

In setting a framework for the national delivery of Families First, it is important to consider the extent to which:

- the programme objectives and guidance is effectively communicated to local authorities / third sector;
- monitoring is in place to observe progress against key objectives; and,
- risk management is in place to aid the success of the programme.

4.2.1 Communication

Communication with local authorities: Broadly speaking, national and local stakeholders are positive about the efforts of the Welsh Government to support the delivery of Families First. Engagement with local authorities has been very strong and authorities have appreciated the opportunity to communicate with representatives of the Welsh Government face-to-face through the account management role and contribute to Task and Finish groups and other national events. Ensuring consistency in the account management roles will be important as the programme develops – this will allow for a deeper understanding and stronger relationships between local authorities and the Welsh Government.

Communication with the third sector: The amount of communication between local authorities and the third sector varies by location, and thus interviewees welcome the opportunity of a more strategic approach to third sector dialogue at a national level in future. Given that a number of agencies work across multiple local authorities, this will ensure that the agencies are 'up to speed' on expectations for commissioning and delivery.

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Communication and guidelines: The Families First Pioneer Stage Review notes the challenge for Welsh Government in achieving a balance between prescribing core elements of the programme while at the same time allowing the capacity for local authorities to exercise discretionary priority-setting and decision-making. Some stakeholders perceived that elements of the programme have been refined at a national policy level without consultation with local authorities. It will be important for the Welsh Government to be open about its vision for Families First and to share a dialogue with local authorities and the third sector on how the programme should develop.

4.2.2 Monitoring and financial management

Having undertaken considerable consultation with local authorities, at the time of writing, requirements for monitoring the Families First programme are currently being finalised. Local authorities acknowledge the challenge in establishing a monitoring framework at this stage of the programme and appreciate the consideration the Welsh Government has given to the burden placed on local authorities. Moving forward, it will be important that new developments give sufficient time for the collection of data from local providers and continue to communicate the merit of the data collected.

Local authorities have recently started to submit data using the Process Change Performance Measures and revised financial management tools. This data will be submitted to Welsh Government every quarter from October 2013 and used to help inform latter stages of the evaluation as well as assist the Welsh Government in performance and financial management.

A framework for monitoring the impact of Families First on families is still undergoing a scoping exercise in partnership with local authorities. The framework will use the information collected by local authorities through Distance Travelled Tools (DTT) and help assess the progress made by families in receipt of a TAF. However, this will only present part of the picture; it will also be important to review the impact of strategic projects on families not using a DTT – this will be collected as part of the local area case studies.

4.2.3 Risk management

Stakeholders are hopeful but reserved about the likelihood of Families First meeting its intended outcomes. Local anecdotal evidence shows that initial progress is strong. The early monitoring information collected by local authorities suggests that the programme is having a positive impact on the families it has engaged with thus far. Furthermore, Families First leads also point to early progress in better collaborative working between agencies and to a more structured and coherent approach to commissioning services.

However, stakeholders are aware of a number of challenges faced by the programme in realising its full potential. Any national evaluation of the programme (or future policy decisions) needs to take into account the following complexities in the delivery of the programme:

- the extent of variation in delivery and variation in governance structures suggests that the delivery of Families First will be more successful in some local areas than others; among both local authority staff and third sector representatives some are unsure if all models will deliver the intended outcomes;
- the complex policy landscape in which Families First operates means that its success (both locally and on population outcomes) is in part dependent on the progress of other programmes such as Flying Start, Communities First, IFSS and Jobs Growth Wales;

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- it is expected that the impact of recent welfare policies and the current economic climate will alter the financial capability of individual families and thus make it even more challenging to demonstrate a positive impact on child poverty;
- local authorities perceive that the aspirations for improving population outcomes as a result of the programme are high for a relatively small budget per child/family compared to other programmes;
- the sustainability of the programme is yet to be realised. Several stakeholders are concerned that local models of delivery could not be maintained if funding was removed;
- some local authorities are already starting to experience waiting lists in provision and thus the capacity of the programme will need to be monitored carefully throughout the evaluation; and,
- the difficulties of effecting cultural change in organisations at a time when organisational resources and budgets are under great pressure.

4.3 Programme design

In addition to exploring the delivery of the programme through a review of management and governance arrangements, the evaluation of Families First will also consider the extent to which the design of Families First is relevant and effective in meeting its intended outcomes.

In line with the findings from the initial evaluation of Families First pioneers, there is broad support for the theoretical intervention of Families First and the way it has been designed; however the extent to which Families First represents a departure from previous models of delivering family support services varies by local authority. For example, as noted in chapter 5. a number of authorities had already started to build on the new evidence base in developing closer relationships between agencies, and some common assessment tools (although narrow in scope) were also in place. For these authorities, Families First presented the funding, resources and opportunity they needed to push on with developing a team around the family approach. As described by one Families First lead, *"the programme gave us a reason to change and a direction to change in. It's given us the tools we needed to drive change forward."*

However for most authorities, Families First represents a significant change in direction in a number of ways:

- a new approach to partnership working, building on previous managerial level cross-planning to focus on integrated front-line delivery among practitioners;
- moving from a team around the child to a team around the family model;
- a new, formalised approach to commissioning; and,
- a new approach to inter-authority learning.

One of the consequences of such a departure from previous models of delivery is that both local authorities and local agencies are developing ways of working for the first time, some of which have unintended consequences. For example, as explored further in chapter 6, the effectiveness of new approaches to strategic commissioning is constrained by the commissioning experience and capacity of both the local authority and agencies. This has influenced both the pace and nature of change on the ground.

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'Innovation' programmes such as Families First require a balance between prescription from the Welsh Government at the national level and enough room for local innovation. Local authorities value the non-prescriptive nature of the programme – which allows them to develop a system of services that are relevant to their local needs, and that build on their structure and history of provision – but also note the challenge this presents to cross-authority border working with families, joint commissioning, and national monitoring. In this regard they would have welcomed a stronger steer and clarification on common aspects of the programme such as expectations for monitoring, family outcomes and commissioning process. A key learning point for future programmes is to involve local authorities is defining the right balance between flexibility and guidance, both at the inception of the programme and as it develops.

The national identification and communication of 'what works' is seen as critical to the success of a more localised approach. It will be important to cultivate this as the Families First programme develops and to secure buy-in from local authorities during this process - some of whom will need to adapt their delivery approach based on the evidence of good practice. Local authorities are willing to learn and develop but it will be appropriate to acknowledge the investment they have already made in implementing the programme thus far.

Stakeholders are keen to note that a significant challenge in the design of Families First was the policy timescales in which it was introduced. A number of lessons for the design of future programmes emerge from the timescales involved in delivery; where possible, more time should be given to:

- the ability to conduct a more formal consultation exercise with stakeholders, including children and families; for example, the consultation exercise conducted for Communities First helped refine the policy language and understand the support delivery partners would need in implementing the programme;
- the amount of time to engage in detail with the lessons learned from implementing other national programmes (such as the monitoring framework established through Communities First);
- the amount of time allowed for the pioneer phase of the programme to develop and to reflect on the lessons learnt. For example to develop a national assessment framework or further guidance on the commissioning process; and,
- the ability to develop a national monitoring framework at the early stages of the programme, from which local monitoring could be developed.

Views on whether the disability funding should be ring-fenced are mixed. Although the rationale for guaranteeing spend on families with disability is acknowledged, a critical risk is that the provision for spending on disability is perceived as restricted only to the ring-fenced budget (although see evidence in chapter 7: five local authorities spent significantly more than the ring-fenced allocation last year, while 12 authorities spent sums approximately in line with the allocated budget). A key part of future evaluation activities will therefore be to assess the extent to which disability has been integrated into other elements of the Families First programme.

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4.4 Summary

The management and governance of Families First varies significantly across the 22 local authorities in Wales. The inception of the programme was largely based on existing structures, although new bespoke arrangements are starting to develop which account for multi-authority working and greater synergy with other family support programmes. The success of these structures will be explored later in the evaluation, through triangulation with the experience of practitioners and families.

The efforts by Welsh Government to support local authorities in the delivery of Families First are welcome. The ability to work together to identify and share best practice – and develop the programme accordingly – will be critical to the success of the programme.

The second year of the evaluation will benefit from additional monitoring data that will give a better insight into financial management, process change and the impact of the programme on families.

Based on the evidence collected so far, there is broad support for the design and focus of the Families First programme. Stakeholders and local Families First leads also point to emerging quick wins; however there is some concern that the positive impact of Families First will be difficult to prove due to the current economic climate, welfare reform, local variation and the complex policy landscape in which it sits. It will therefore be important to continue to evidence the impact of the programme at the local level.

4.5 Key areas for investigation

Key areas to investigate in future evaluation activity are detailed in the table below.

Area for investigation	Method
The extent to which Families First aligns with complementary programmes and funding streams, and the impact of joint working and management across programmes across authorities.	Stakeholder survey and in-depth interviews during local authority case study visits.
The effectiveness of different local governance structures.	This will be revealed through the on-going development of the programme and through the in-depth process monitoring information gathered by authorities throughout the remaining period of the evaluation.
The degree of multi-agency representation in local governance structures.	This will be monitoring through evaluation of future action plans, and information collecting through the Process Change Performance Measures.
The extent to which dialogue with the Welsh Government and Third Sector organisations develops and helps to support the continued roll-out of the programme, including the extent to which regional and national learning is integrated into the future development of the programme.	Stakeholder survey and in-depth interviews during local authority case study visits.

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5. Progress – JAFF and TAF

Introduction to JAFF and TAF

Families First aims to work with the whole family in order to support children, particularly those living in poverty. It also aims to offer early support in order to reduce the likelihood of families developing more complicated and costly needs. In addition, the programme recognises that supporting a family often involves many different teams and services. In order to ensure these services work well together, as part of Families First, teams are required to develop a **Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF)** and a **Team Around the Family (TAF) model.** These are described in more detail below.

JAFF

JAFF is designed to encourage agencies to work together to assess whether a family needs support, and if so, the nature of the support required. They are designed to be used by lead professionals across a range of different services and aim to provide greater consistency in terms of referring families to agencies for support, plus ensuring that the most appropriate agencies are involved at the earliest opportunity.

The majority of local authority areas previously had protocols for joint assessment, with many using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or variants of the CAF. As a result, Families First could involve developing new systems or further aligning existing systems to Families First principles. In particular, the new framework should demonstrate innovation; take account of the family and support engagement with the family; and ensure that information is accessible, meaningful and useful.

TAF

The information gathered through a JAFF is used to assess whether a family requires additional support. If further multiple forms of support are required, a TAF is established. The team comprises a number of professionals from different agencies who meet regularly to discuss the family's needs (either face to face or virtually). There is typically a key worker who is the main point of contact for the family and is responsible for co-ordinating the inputs and support from other professionals. A TAF aims to pull together the right people, from the right agencies to ensure that a family receives the right advice, help and support in a timely manner.

Many authorities previously operated a Team Around the Child model so Families First aims to ensure that a broad range of support can be delivered in ways that suit family, and not solely the child's, circumstances and needs. Accordingly, the composition of the TAF model, possibly based around existing structures, should reflect the breadth of need and should include a range of appropriate partners[32].

Roll out

Though all local authorities are required to establish JAFF and TAF models, Families First allows for innovation in the local design and delivery of these elements. As a result, local authorities are using a wide range of different models for JAFF and TAF and a key question for later stages of this evaluation will be the effectiveness of these models.

[32] Families First Programme Guidance, July 2011, Welsh Government

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Introduction to JAFF and TAF

JAFF and TAF was initially developed in six 'Phase One' Pioneer authorities[33]. It was intended that these areas would provide learning on how to transform services so that families are supported through an integrated, whole family approach. In March 2011, a further eight 'Phase Two' Pioneer authorities were announced[34] and then in April 2012, the programme was rolled out to include all Local Authorities.

This chapter explores the progress and nature of the JAFF and TAF elements of the programme; with particular reference to three key evaluation objectives:

- to understand how effectively JAFF and TAF have been developed and implemented in accordance with the key principles of Families First, and the change and development processes involved, including developing workforce and information sharing;
- to understand the targeting and reach of JAFF and TAF; and
- to establish the effectiveness of JAFF and TAF in fostering effective multi-agency and holistic family-focused working and improving families outcomes, and key features for success.

The chapter draws upon evidence from the review of JAFF and TAF, which was based on: evidence gathered from all Local Authorities in November 2012; a literature review which explores the effectiveness of whole family approaches and identifies transferable lessons for the Families First programme; consultations conducted with local authorities and national partners in July and August 2013; and documentary evidence such as action plans and progress reports.

Findings within this chapter are predominantly based on qualitative evidence. During the course of the evaluation more recent quantitative data on progress (including data gathered through the Family Outcomes Tool) will be collated and analysed in addition to primary case study research. This additional research will allow the evaluation team to explore the evaluation objectives in more detail, including identifying key features for success, identifying which models of organisation and delivery work best, and which types of families and needs are best served by JAFF and TAF, as well as best practice implementation.

[33] Phase One Pioneer areas were Wrexham, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil.
[34] Phase Two Pioneer areas were Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd, Conwy, Anglesey, Cardiff and Newport.

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5.1 Rationale – assessing the need for change

It is important that the evaluation reflects on the context and rationale for the programme in order to assess the extent to which the design and implementation of Families First is appropriate. This section sets out the extent to which local authorities recognised that there was a need for the Families First programme.

At the point when Families First was rolled out, most Families First teams recognised that there was a need to improve their existing local systems for assessment and delivery of family support in a number of areas; however, as noted below, some felt that good progress in developing family support services was already apparent prior to Families First and Families First helped to accelerate changes that were already underway.

Prior to Families First, most teams recognised that there was scope to enhance **joined up working** (and information sharing) across different agencies providing services in their area. Prior to Families First, there was evidence to suggest that a range of multi-agency teams were established across most local authority areas to deliver integrated or co-ordinated multi-agency support, for example only two local authority areas did not identify any common assessment tools / frameworks that were used by more than one agency. However, only in a small number of cases, did these work with the **whole family**. Instead, multi-agency working more commonly focused on an individual child or a specific type of need (e.g. domestic violence or anti-social behaviour). In addition, in some areas, multi-agency working tended to occur at a more informal level. Consultations highlighted that Families First teams believed that the programme could provide a structure and a process from which to build, and enhance, joined up working.

Prior to the programme, Families First teams also cited that due to insufficient joined up working, there was some evidence of **duplication across services** and/or support for families. They felt that Families First could help to address this challenge. In addition, as a result of a more consistent and joined up approach to delivery, teams felt that the programme would help them to better identify, and address, gaps in provision. Compared to previous processes, it was believed that Families First would help to offer more coherent and structured support for families.

Building on this, Families First teams welcomed the provision of a mechanism to enable services to be **tailored according to need** (rather than simply building on what existed previously). In some local authority areas, a **preventative approach** was already being developed and delivered but Families First teams cited that the programme would enable them to strengthen this way of working and encourage them to tackle the root causes of challenges facing families. Supporting this, the flexibility of the programme was considered a strength.

In some cases, teams felt that, prior to Families First, good progress was already being made in improving systems for family support. For example Carmarthenshire was a pilot area for CAF which helped to lay some of the foundations for new ways of working and Merthyr Tydfil had started to develop a common assessment using the Think Family indicators.[35] In these instances, Families First provided a welcome opportunity to build on previous activity. However, for a small number of local authorities, the need for change was initially less evident and it is only once they started working on Families First that they recognised the need for change - in one area a representative stated that *"we probably didn't realise there was a need for change until Families First came about".*

[35] A framework to identify and support families at risk, developed by Cabinet Office in 2007

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5.2 Progress in implementation

Progress in implementing JAFF varies across the Families First teams, as highlighted in the following table. However, the Families First teams appear to be progressing well, with 18 areas now fully implementing JAFF. It is important to note that JAFF is still evolving in all areas. In a number of areas, progress has been delayed, for example due to restructuring within the local authority or a change to the original approach.

Table 5.1 Progress in implementing JAFF

Progress	Pioneer phase 1	Pioneer phase 2	Non-pioneer area	Total areas
JAFF fully implemented in 2011	1		1	2
JAFF fully implemented in 2012		1	3	4
JAFF fully implemented in 2013	5	5	2	12
Full implementation of JAFF still in progress		2	2	4
TOTAL	**6**	**8**	**8**	**22**

Progress in embedding TAF varies across the Families First teams, as highlighted in the following table.

At the time of data collection, one area has not yet fully implemented its TAF and this is due to restructuring within the local authority, which has led to delays in agreeing their TAF processes (although two TAF workers are in place). Consultations with Families First teams suggested that some areas had experienced delays. In most cases, this was simply due to the design and development process taking longer than expected. In addition, one area noted that, in part, delays were due to the time taken to ensure the workforce were on board with the changes.

Table 5.2 Progress in implementing TAF

Progress	Pioneer phase 1	Pioneer phase 2	Non-pioneer area	Total areas
TAF up and running in 2011	1	1	1	3
TAF up and running in 2012	2	2	4	8
TAF up and running in 2013	3	5	2	10
TAF not fully up and running			1	1
TOTAL	**6**	**8**	**8**	**22**

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5.3 JAFF models of delivery

In line with the evaluation objectives, this section explores how effectively JAFF has been developed and implemented in accordance with the key principles of Families First, and the change and development processes involved.

5.3.1 Designing JAFF

Positively, across all Families First areas, the JAFF was developed in partnership with key agencies and/or through multi-agency steering groups. In some areas, families were also consulted to assess the suitability of the tool: for example in one local authority area a parent participation group was consulted. However, despite being a key principle, early evidence suggests that greater engagement of families at an early stage in the design of JAFF could have enhanced its effectiveness.

Wherever possible, the Families First teams sought to build on good practice to develop their JAFF. Many areas built on the successes of CAF; in Cardiff, the JAFF was developed based on a combination of the Family Learning Signature and the My World Assessment (Scottish Government, 2008) but tailored to the requirements of Families First, resulting in the Our World Assessment. Blaenau Gwent reviewed research conducted by the Institute of Public Care which identified best practice on joint assessments; and Ceredigion used learning from the Early Support Programme. Other areas drew on external support to develop the JAFF; for example Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire worked with Oxford Brookes University.

A number of the Families First teams that were not part of the pioneer phase explicitly stated that they gathered, and built upon, good practice from the pioneer areas to develop their JAFF. For example Ceredigion based their JAFF on a version of Rhondda Cynon Taf's assessment form, which had been independently evaluated to assess its viability. Similarly, Swansea closely followed developments in Rhondda Cynon Taf and Wrexham in order to develop their own Our World assessment. A number of areas, such as Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Monmouthshire considered lessons learnt in Blaenau Gwent. Notwithstanding this evidence, most consultations suggested that further learning from the pioneer areas could have been applied to enhance shared learning, and that improved communication of lessons from this phase of the programme may have been beneficial.

Although a number of local authorities demonstrated an element of collaboration to develop their JAFFs (e.g. Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion), there appears to be only two instances, firstly in North Wales and secondly in Newport and Cardiff (the 'cities'), where cross border working has resulted in the development of one JAFF that can be used across multiple local authority areas. Whilst some flexibility to tailor JAFF to local contexts is required, in general developing one JAFF across a number of local authority areas appears to have been a positive way of working, as demonstrated in the following case study.

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Developing JAFF: A collaborative approach in North Wales
The three North-East Wales areas that were involved in the pioneer phase (Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham) engaged the other, North-West teams (Anglesey, Conwy and Gwynedd) in the development and trialling of the JAFF. Wrexham initially piloted the JAFF and then cascaded the learning from this to the other areas, via a JAFF learning set. Positively, this approach means that the JAFF is portable and can be used and transferred with any family moving across Families First teams in North Wales. However, it has been acknowledged that guidance on its use will be tailored to the local contexts and some minor tweaks may be required to suit local service delivery arrangements.

The research has identified that two key types of JAFF have been designed across the Families First programme. Within these two approaches, there remains a range of variation in the way in which these are administered across the local authority areas, for example in some cases, core staff conduct assessments and in others key workers are responsible for the assessments:

- **JAFF as an initial referral process:** In some areas the JAFF has been developed as a referral form. The rationale for this in Caerphilly was that the complexities of the different assessments needed separate in-depth assessments based on the initial referral.

- **JAFF as a subsequent assessment process:** In other areas, the JAFF has been developed as an assessment. For example, in Merthyr Tydfil, the Think Family Indicators are used to identify and refer families in need and then a JAFF assessment is carried out, which identifies the needs and strengths of the family.

Importantly, the pioneer stage of Families First focused on a developmental process whereby new models were developed and evidence on what worked well and less well was gathered. To further support this, all areas (including those in the roll-out of the programme) implemented a pilot phase. Where necessary, processes were amended based on lessons learnt. For example, following the pilot phase one local authority made amendments relating to obtaining permission from families to undertake the assessment and in another, the length of the JAFF document was shortened and a section on fire safety checks was added. Going forward, the Families First teams recognise the need to keep assessing whether the JAFF is fit for purpose.

It is too early in the programme, and the evaluation, to fully assess the effectiveness of different JAFF approaches, including who administers the assessment and whether it is used as a referral form or assessment process. However, during the course of the evaluation, evidence from family outcomes, process outcomes, the stakeholder survey and monitoring data, will be triangulated to identify 'what works' and form a judgement on the success of different approaches to JAFF.

5.3.2 Administering JAFF

Commonly, JAFF was initially administered by core local authority staff, and then over time it has been /is being rolled out to other agencies. The review of the Pioneer stage in May 2012 highlighted that the competence and experience of the implementing practitioner is critical to the effective application of the JAFF, thus highlighting the importance of workforce development. This was also supported through consultations with Families First teams in August 2013, which emphasised the importance of ensuring that a range of awareness-raising activities, plus training in using JAFF, were offered.

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Across many non-pioneer areas, this roll-out to other agencies started to take place in 2013, for example through conferences and development days. There have, however, been some delays in rolling out JAFF. For example in one local authority area, the team responsible for managing referrals and the development and completion of JAFF was recruited late. Notwithstanding this, there is already some evidence to suggest that JAFF is being embedded within services: for example in Caerphilly, the JAFF was promoted through the Single Integrated Plan consultation process to ensure its inclusion.

The pioneer areas have largely, as would be expected, progressed further in rolling out their JAFF. For example, across some local authority areas there is evidence that service providers, such as health, education, social care and voluntary sectors, are using the JAFF. In one local authority, the TAF team has run a series of workshops to introduce JAFF as a multi-disciplinary assessment tool and in 2013, some commissioned services will be asked to complete a JAFF with the family that they have been requested to work with.

5.4 TAF models

In line with the evaluation objectives, this section explores how effectively TAF is being developed and implemented in accordance with the key principles of Families First, and the change and development processes involved.

It was intended that the first two years of the programme would provide the opportunity for local authorities to develop TAF approaches to meet local needs, refine and embed emerging models. In the absence of wider evidence about which TAF approaches work best (Wales is the only UK nation to require a TAF in all local authorities), the programme also advocates local innovation in the design of TAF, which will help generate evidence relating to the effectiveness of different models. Consequently, a variety of approaches have been adopted and a range of innovation has been applied across the local authority areas. This experience will provide evidence on effective engagement and delivery to inform future practice. This section considers the variation in design and implementation of TAF.

5.4.1 Designing TAF

The Families First programme requires all local authority areas to have a TAF in place. However, in order to suit local circumstances and needs, and to facilitate effective engagement and delivery, a number of different approaches to TAF have been adopted by local authorities. An initial assessment of these approaches suggests that there are four broad models in the design of TAF. These models provide a helpful start (in seeking to summarise a complex delivery approach), but it is expected that the definition of these models will evolve and be refined over the course of the evaluation.

An initial assessment of different models in delivery can be summarised as follows.

- **Single co-located team operating authority wide:** TAF co-ordinators are organised as one single co-located team that operates across the whole local authority area.
- **Locally based teams:** TAF co-ordinators are based locally, for example around school clusters, community hubs or neighbourhood management areas.
- **Dispersed staff:** TAF co-ordinators are dispersed across the local authority area.
- **Mixed approach:** A single co-located team that operates across the whole local authority area, which is supported by a number of locally based teams.

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The following table shows that the most common approach has been to have a single co-located team operating authority-wide. Local authorities that adopted locally based teams cited a number of reasons for this decision including, for example, to facilitate greater joined up working with existing activities and interventions and to ensure there is an accessible 'front door' to the service for families and other service providers. Two Families First areas adopted a mixed approach: Ceredigion has a number of TAF co-ordinators based in school catchment areas who deliver TAF primarily from secondary schools, which helps to support accessibility in rural areas. However, they also have one TAF coordinator covering the whole county but focusing on families who have a child with a disability. Similarly, Newport has one central base for the team but also a number of bases within localities across the area.

Table 5.3 TAF models

Model	Number of areas
Single co-located team operating authority wide	11
Locally based teams	7
Dispersed staff	1
Mixed approach	3
TOTAL	**22**

Families First teams are continuing to review, and where necessary, refine, and embed their TAF models. During the course of the evaluation, evidence from family outcomes, process outcomes, the stakeholder survey and monitoring data, will be triangulated to form a judgement on the success of TAF.

5.4.2 Administering TAF

Three key approaches to delivering TAF have been identified and these are outlined below:

- **TAF is based within the local authority:** Core members of the team running the TAF are employed by a department within the local authority. These include TAF Managers/Co-ordinators /Officers/admin support/key workers.
- **TAF is commissioned outside the local authority:** Most members of the core team running the day-to-day of TAF are employed by an agency (or agencies), commissioned by the local authority.
- **Mixed:** Some core-members of the team sit within the local authority, others have been commissioned by the local authority to provide an aspect of the TAF service.

The following table shows that the most common approach has been to have TAF based within the local authority. However, the departments that TAF sits within vary across local authority areas, for example in Pembrokeshire the Families First team is based in the Flying Start Centre, the Vale of Glamorgan's social services, and Neath Port Talbot's education department. Families First teams have highlighted that one of the key strengths of locating TAF in the local authority is that it supports effective alignment with other local authority strategies and interventions. Two local authorities have commissioned TAF outside the local authority. For example, in Cardiff, a children's charity (Tros Gynnal Plant) is responsible for TAF. In this instance, Cardiff felt that the third sector had already established effective mechanisms for engaging families. Finally, six Families First teams have adopted a mixed approach. Most commonly, the core team sits within the local authority and agencies are commissioned to provide key workers.

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Table 5.4 TAF delivery approaches

Delivery approach	Number of areas
TAF is based within the local authority	14
TAF is commissioned outside the local authority	2
Mixed	6
TOTAL	**22**

The TAF models adopted by Families First teams have evolved over time and one of the most common developments appears to have been a broadening of the model away from focusing on schools, which in many cases stemmed from the Team Around the Child approach which had previously been adopted in some areas. For example, during the pilot phase in one local authority area, TAF was run through schools but this was considered to be too much of a narrow focus so this has now been widened so that a greater range of agencies can refer families into the TAF. Alongside these developments, other changes have occurred in order to improve consistency in the delivery of Families First, for example Blaenau Gwent merged its two community hub managers into one role.

Across the Families First areas, there is also evidence that the programme has linked up with existing initiatives to ensure consistency across the support offered to families, for example in one area, a Family Support worker post is jointly funded between Families First and Flying Start and in another, a common database has been established which integrates JAFF and TAF with existing models, thus supporting more effective tracking of families in and out of the system as a result of changing needs.

5.4.3 TAF panels

TAF panels are a key feature of TAF delivery in most areas. At the time of data collection, only two areas did not have TAF panels in place but they were considering introducing them as part of their TAF process. TAF panels comprise representatives from different agencies, for example representatives from social services, youth, health, education, housing, youth offending, substance misuse and the voluntary sector. They typically provide a supporting role to the implementation of TAF but the precise role of the TAF panels and the times at which they participate in the process varies across local authority areas. As examples, their roles can include a combination of the following:

- offering a pre-referral process, whereby they consider whether a JAFF is needed;
- allocating a key worker to each family;
- considering TAF referrals from across the local authority and configuring services according to need;
- providing high level support to overcome challenges such as accessing the resources required to implement the support plan or if there is uncertainty over what course of action should be proposed; and,
- offering support to the TAF coordinator in the delivery of the support as and when required.

Families First teams highlighted that the TAF panels have been effective at supporting the implementation of Families First. In some areas, teams noted that compared to similar structures that had been in place prior to Families First, the TAF panels were responding to cases much more quickly.

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5.4.4 Key worker/ lead professional

The literature review conducted as part of the evaluation highlighted that having a clearly designated individual to oversee family support and to mobilise other services is a common component of whole family support. In line with this, Families First teams identified the role of the lead professional, and the associated systems around this, as one of the most successful aspects of the model. For example, a representative from one Families First team stated that: *"if you have the right people working then families will engage".* A review of wider research found that the key worker can act as the 'lynchpin' in providing and coordinating effective support for families and is central to improving and sustaining outcomes. Facilitating this role, in Blaenau Gwent, key worker teams are located as part of the Community Hubs, which means that staff have ownership of referrals and they gain a comprehensive knowledge of services within each area. Lead professionals can also play a key role in advocating for families, reducing their anxiety and fear of stigma when accessing services[36]. What is more, consultations with Families First teams found that there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that families prefer to speak to one person who coordinates services on their behalf.

A number of studies have sought to identify the core characteristics of effective lead professional working with families. Key qualities identified in these studies include: [37]

- a worker dedicated to a family;
- practical 'hands on' support;
- a persistent, assertive and challenging approach;
- considering the family as a whole – gathering the intelligence; and,
- common purpose and agreed action.
- Wider research also identified that family based support programmes often benefit from having a number of key workers to coordinate inputs from multi-disciplinary teams and to facilitate information-sharing.[38] This is an aspect that could be explored further during the evaluation of Families First.

Families First teams recognised that this new way of working, which focuses around a lead professional, required a cultural change and therefore, emphasised the importance of having sufficient training available for all practitioners, particularly lead professionals. Wherever possible, local authorities felt that this training should be aligned to continuing professional development and workforce planning strategies, so that it is embedded and remains available over the coming years to respond to an increasing number of potential referring agencies.

[36] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI
[37] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI
[38] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI

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5.5 JAFF and TAF reach

In line with the evaluation objectives, this section reviews the targeting and reach of JAFF and TAF.

Most commonly, local authority areas have eligibility criteria that are threshold-based. Most of these local authority areas accept families that are below eligibility for statutory social services, such as those not part of a Child Protection or Child in Need Plan. The second most common criteria are based on service complexity. Of these, some local authority areas have criteria based on families that require support from more than one agency, whereas others specify a need for support from two or more agencies. Over half of the local authority areas have needs-based eligibility criteria (e.g. families with 2-3+ needs / difficulties). Just less than half stated that they have criteria based on the age of the child, but this is typically up to 18 years old or 25 years old.

The following table highlights the number of families that have had a JAFF initiated and the number of families that have a TAF action plan in place. There are two sets of data pertaining to the flow of families onto JAFF and TAF:

- Data up to March 2013 was gathered from local authorities in November 2012 and where possible updated through consultations in summer 2013: these data are based on local authority estimates (using locally available data sources) of the flow of families. In total, by March 2013, it was estimated that at least 1,867 JAFFs had been initiated across Wales and at least 1,557 TAF action plans were in place.

- Data for Q1 and Q2 of 2013 (April-September 2013) was collated in October 2013 as part of programme monitoring. Monitoring data indicates that, since March 2013, a total of 1,492 JAFFs have been initiated (across 20 local authorities) and 727 TAF action plans have been put in place (across 18 local authorities).[39]

It is not possible to aggregate the data from the two sets of records because of the different way in which data was collected for each. The monitoring returns are based on data that could be extracted from local authority databases: where databases are not in place to evidence JAFF/TAF, authorities typically recorded a figure of '0' families. When estimating the number of JAFF/TAF families as part of consultations, local authority staff were willing to provide estimates based on other sources (although the accuracy of these estimates cannot be evidenced).

Table 5.5 JAFF and TAF reach

Progress	Number
LA estimates	
JAFFs initiated by March 2013	1,867
TAF action plans in place by March 2013	1,557
Monitoring returns	
JAFFs conducted in Q1 and Q2 of 2013 (from 20 local authorities)	1,492
TAF action plans signed in Q1 and Q2 of 2013 (from 18 local authorities)	727

[39] A number of local authorities are still developing a system to record the number of JAFFs and TAFs completed. This information will be available in the May 2014 Evaluation Report.

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Further research will be required to assess how effective JAFF has been in reaching the families being targeted by Families First. Further research will also assess capacity constraints, which some authorities have highlighted as being problematic.

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Table 5.6 Summary of JAFF and TAF models by local authority *(information derived from consultations except JAFF/TAF figures which are taken from quarterly Process Change Performance Measures Framework)*

Local Authority Area	Pioneer phase?	Date that JAFF was implemented	Date that TAF arrangements were implemented	TAF model	TAF lead department / organisation	Number of JAFFs in Q1 and Q2 since March 2013	Number of TAF action plans in place in Q1 and Q2 since March 2013[40]
Blaenau Gwent	P1	January 2013	January 2013	Locally based teams	Mixed	29	21
Denbighshire	P1	April 2013	June 2012	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	25	Not recorded*
Flintshire	P1	April 2013	May 2013	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	60	51
Merthyr Tydfil	P1	October 2011	April 2012	Dispersed staff	Commissioned outside of LA	102	102
Rhondda Cynon Taf	P1	April 2013	April 2013	Dispersed staff	Mixed	81	51
Wrexham	P1	May 2013	May 2011	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	125	54
Anglesey	P2	April 2013	January 2013	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	93	77
Cardiff	P2	April 2013	April 2013	Single co-located team	Commissioned outside of LA	50	3
Carmarthenshire	P2	Still piloting	April 2012	Locally based teams	Based within LA	35	35

[40] An * denotes that this information is currently unavailable. A number of local authorities are still developing a system to record the number of JAFFs and TAFs completed. This information will be available in the May 2014 Evaluation Report.

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Local Authority Area	Pioneer phase?	Date that JAFF was implemented	Date that TAF arrangements were implemented	TAF model	TAF lead department / organisation	Number of JAFFs in Q1 and Q2 since March 2013	i. umber of TAF action plans in place in Q1 and Q2 since March 2013[40]
Ceredigion	P2	March 2013	March 2013	Mixed approach	Mixed	49	44
Conwy	P2	April 2013	April 2013	Mixed approach	Based within LA	34	0
Gwynedd	P2	April 2013	July 2012	Locally based teams	Based within LA	68	45
Newport	P2	July 2012	November 2011	Mixed approach	Based within LA	295	9
Pembrokeshire	P2	Still piloting	September 2013	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based in LA	Not recorded*	Not recorded*
Bridgend	N	May 2012	June 2012	Locally based teams	Mixed	78	78
Caerphilly	N	Still piloting	November 2011	Locally based teams	Based within LA	62	31
Monmouthshire	N	April 2013	September 2012	Locally based teams	Mixed	6	6
Neath Port Talbot	N	Still developing	Model still being finalised[41]	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	-	-
Powys	N	April 2011	November 2012	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Mixed	53	46
Swansea	N	March 2013	January 2013	Locally based teams	Based within LA	164	Not recorded*
The Vale of Glamorgan	N	September 2012	September 2012	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	31	31
Torfaen	N	November 2012	April 2013	Single co-located team operating authority wide	Based within LA	52	43

[41] Two TAF workers are in place but the TAF model is under development.

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5.6 Benefits of JAFF and TAF

A review of Families First documents, plus consultations, has highlighted that JAFF and TAF have resulted in a number of positive changes in the way that families with multiple needs are assessed and supported. At this stage in the evaluation, a number of process benefits are emerging; these can be summarised as follows:

- **An early intervention approach:** Consultations with Families First teams emphasised that JAFF offers a way of assessing need as early as possible, thus supporting earlier intervention. For example one Families First representative stated that: *"we are now better at delivering the right services at the right time to families".* What is more, Families First teams believe that the multi-agency support offers more effective support for families with multiple needs and supports better use of local resources. In turn, this prevents needs escalating to the point where families may need social care intervention.

- **A move towards whole family assessments and active engagement of families:** The development of JAFF and TAF has supported a move towards whole family assessment and support. What is more, Families First teams recognise that the programme supports a better balance between professional input and family input in the assessment of need (however, as stated previously there is scope for greater involvement of families in the design of JAFF).

  Research shows that where families take a more active role in appraising their situation, whole family assessment approaches have been more effective (for example, this was demonstrated through the evaluation of the Integrated Family Support Service programme in Wales)[42]. Supporting this, evidence from the review of the Pioneer Areas (GHK, 2012) suggests that one of the critical elements of JAFF is that it provides a mechanism for engaging with families rather than a rigidly formal assessment tool, therefore allowing some flexibility to be retained. Equally, research participants in the review reported that JAFF provides a 'trigger for conversation' rather than a 'formal tick box assessment tool', allowing an 'agenda free conversation' that enables families to identify their own needs[43].

  The importance of actively engaging families in the assessment was also supported through recent consultations with Families First teams, which highlighted that one of the key benefits of JAFF is that *"it encourages the family to lead the assessment, rather than the assessment leading the family"*. In turn, this generates a better indication of readiness to change, which will facilitate timely interventions and ensure the best use of resources. In addition, it encourages the family to take ownership of the assessment, and subsequent support plan.

- **Greater coordination and multi-agency working:** Consultations with Families First teams highlighted that one of the key benefits of JAFF and TAF is that they offer a consistent and more structured approach to recording, and where appropriate, sharing information on families requiring support. What is more, a neutral and

[42] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI
[43] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI

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common language is utilised (rather than using, for example, health specific terms or education specific terms), which can be applied across different thematic areas and across different tiers of support, thus supporting a common means of ascribing need. Families First teams believe that this will improve communication, understanding and information sharing among practitioners, which in turn will facilitate multi-agency working and subsequently avoid duplication (but also pick up families that previously 'fell through the gaps'), improve the timing of support, and allow more efficient and creative solutions to be developed.

Building on this, TAF teams are typically made up of individuals from a range of different backgrounds and this tends to improve the delivery of support as it facilitates the sharing of expertise and knowledge. Importantly, developing multi-agency working and securing buy-in from a wide range of agencies supports the sustainability of Families First.

- **A comprehensive and balanced assessment that supports improved identification of need:** In line with Families First principles, JAFF offers a balanced assessment approach that considers the strength of families as well as the needs. Previous research found that using family strengths was advocated as a means to engagement and positive change[44]. JAFF also provides a tool to facilitate examination of whole family needs providing an opportunity for other needs to be identified that may not emerge through other more structured assessment. In addition, consultations highlighted that Families First has helped practitioners to understand the underlying issues informing behaviours and needs. In turn, this ensures that a responsive and suitably tailored package of support can be offered.

- **A focus on outcomes and the incorporation of measures to assess distance travelled:** Families First teams highlighted that the incorporation of distance travelled tools into the JAFF, which enables progress against key outcomes to be consistently assessed, was a positive approach. Individual family outcomes can be measured against a baseline and a clear link with national priorities and population indicators can be made.

Families First teams believe that the programme has played a key role in driving changes in their local areas. The extent of this role does vary, however, with some areas noting that Families First has enhanced existing work, whilst others stated that it has contributed to significant changes. The funding available through Families First has enabled local authorities to continue, and to enhance, support for families with multiple needs. However, alongside this, the programme has played a much bigger role in influencing the way that services support children, young people and families.

Alongside process changes, the evaluation is also exploring how effective JAFF and TAF have been in achieving the family outcomes intended. Families First teams shared anecdotal evidence of how JAFF and TAF have improved outcomes for some families. However, this aspect of the evaluation will be explored in more detail through the data gathered through the Family Outcomes Tool and the case studies that will be conducted from the end of 2013 onwards.

[44] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI

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5.7 Challenges of embedding JAFF and TAF

In designing and embedding JAFF and TAF, Families First teams have faced a number of challenges. These are summarised below:

- **Managing workloads and defining workforce roles:** One of the main challenges of whole family assessments is the time and resources required to implement the approach; especially during the initial transition phase from existing (separate) assessments[45]. Consultations with Families First teams highlighted mixed views on whether the JAFF / TAF model will impact positively or negatively on practitioners' workloads[46]. However, it is recognised that successful implementation of the programme does require a cultural shift among the workforce. This will take time to achieve but sufficient awareness-raising activities and training sessions can play a key role.

  Some Families First teams also suggested that for individuals that take on the lead professional role, there may be a requirement to revisit job descriptions to reflect this new approach to working. Wider research also highlighted that as whole family approaches are based on the development of integrated pathways between agencies providing different elements of family support, change management and workforce reform can be required in order to ensure roles and processes are fit for purpose[47]. In some areas, TAF has proved to be very successful and subsequently there are concerns that capacity issues will be experienced soon: *"capacity will soon be an issue as the team is becoming a victim of its own success"*.

  In some areas, Families First teams have developed referral forms and / or pre-JAFF assessment forms, which support agencies in assessing whether a full JAFF is appropriate, and in turn reduce the number of inappropriate or unnecessary assessments undertaken. There is also an on-going need to train more staff to become key workers / lead professionals. To this end, one local authority has developed a memorandum of understanding with non-contracted agencies and a key worker training programme has been rolled out.

- **Developing common assessment tools:** It can be difficult to develop an assessment process that is relevant to all partners. Supporting this, an evaluation of Intensive Intervention Projects (IIP) concluded that the CAF that was used had not always sufficiently captured the complexity and full extent of the issues affecting children and families who were referred to the programme. This was particularly found to be the case where the needs of children were hidden at the time when the initial assessment took place[48]. Building on good practice and developing tools and

[45] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI
[46] For more information, see JAFF and TAF profiling report, February 2013, Ipsos Mori and Ecorys
[47] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI
[48] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI

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processes in collaboration with key agencies has been key to addressing this challenge.

- **Securing buy-in:** Successful delivery of Families First is dependent on securing sufficient buy-in and support from partners. However, in some cases this has been challenging. For example, research conducted as part of a wider evaluation of Whole Family Pathfinder Projects found that one of the main challenges of whole family assessments was the reluctance of some agencies and professionals to move away from their individual service agenda (due to both practical constraints, targets and different 'organisational cultures')[49]. Mechanisms should be built into the programme to ensure on-going buy-in from agencies. Families First teams highlighted that strong branding for JAFF and TAF, alongside on-going awareness raising and training sessions will support this. Rhondda Cynon Taf, also has TAF leads in each of the agencies who act as champions for TAF and for multi-agency working within their own profession.

- **Managing thresholds and eligibility criteria:** Most commonly, local authority areas have eligibility criteria that are threshold-based. Most of these local authority areas accept families that are below eligibility for statutory social services, such as those not part of a Child Protection or Child in Need Plan. However, one of the key challenges cited by Families First teams is that children's services thresholds appear to have risen[50], which places greater pressure on TAF. Teams also highlighted concerns that people will start thinking that the TAF model is the answer to every problem and that it becomes *"a bit of a catch all solution".* This emphasises that a clear understanding of TAF among agencies is essential. Supporting this, in Monmouthshire, a joint policies and procedures panel was set up and a threshold document was produced to ensure a clear understanding of referral thresholds and clarity of panel processes. What is more, it also highlights the importance of greater information sharing so that families can be supported before their issues become too great.

5.8 Summary

There is strong evidence to suggest that Families First teams have engaged key agencies in the design of their JAFF, and drawn upon previous lessons and good practice, which has supported overall effectiveness. In particular, the collaborative approach to designing one JAFF to be used across the six North Wales authorities appears to have been successful. However local authorities perceived that more could have been made of the opportunity to learn from pioneer areas in shaping further guidance on 'what works'.

Two key types of JAFF have been designed: JAFF as an initial referral process; and JAFF as a subsequent assessment process. However, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of these different models. The process of developing a JAFF has evolved, and continues to evolve, over time in all areas but, positively, there is evidence that JAFF is already becoming embedded within service providers' work.

[49] Taken from Whole Family Approaches: A Scoping Review to Inform the Families First Evaluation (July 2013), Ecorys and Ipsos MORI
[50] See The Social Services and Wellbeing Bill for Wales for more information

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The Families First programme requires all local authority areas to have a TAF in place. However, in order to suit local circumstances and needs, and to facilitate effective engagement and delivery, a number of different TAF models have been adopted. As a result, the following key models have been identified: single co-located team operating authority wide; locally based teams, for example organised around school clusters or neighbourhood management areas; dispersed staff; and mixed approaches, for example with some individuals working authority-wide and others based within specific localities. The desire to support effective joined up working has typically driven the choice of TAF model adopted. In eight areas, TAF has been (all or partly) commissioned out to other organisations, whilst the remainder have maintained responsibility for TAF within the local authority. Going forward, the evaluation will seek to explore the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches in more detail.

TAF panels are involved in supporting JAFF and TAF across most areas. These panels comprise representatives from a range of agencies and Families First teams highlighted that they have been effective at supporting the implementation of Families First. In addition, having a clear designated individual to oversee family support and to mobilise other services is a common, and successful, component of whole family support.

JAFF and TAF have resulted in a number of positive changes in the way that families are assessed and supported. These include: an early intervention approach; a move towards whole family assessments and active engagement of families; greater coordination and multi-agency working; a comprehensive and balanced assessment that supports improved identification of need; and a focus on outcomes and the incorporation of measures to assess distance travelled.

There have been a number of key challenges in embedding JAFF and TAF. Principally, these include: managing workloads and defining workforce roles; developing common assessment tools; securing buy-in; and managing thresholds and eligibility criteria.

5.9 Key areas for investigation

Subsequent evaluation activity will seek to build on the baseline picture established at year one. Primary research will be conducted with local stakeholders and families, alongside specific monitoring information will help to explore the following.

Area for investigation	Method
Further explore the effectiveness of the design and implementation of JAFF and TAF.	Triangulation of evidence from family outcomes, process outcomes, stakeholder survey, case studies and monitoring data.
Update data relating to the targeting and reach of JAFF and TAF.	This will be captured via the Process Change Performance Measures monitoring data currently being collected by local authorities.
Assess the extent to which families outcomes have been improved and key features of success.	This will be assessed through the Family Outcomes Tool and Process Change Performance Measures monitoring data being collected by LAs, and through in-depth case studies with families in four local authority areas.

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Review which types of families and needs are best served by JAFF and TAF.	This will be assessed through the Family Outcomes Tool, and through in-depth case studies with families in four local authorities.
Assess which models of TAF delivery have been most effective in supporting families.	This will be assessed through the Family Outcomes Tool and Process Change Performance Measures monitoring data being collected by LAs, and through in-depth case studies with families in four local authority areas.
Review the budget allocated to delivering JAFF and TAF services.	This will be captured via the Process Change Performance Measures monitoring data currently being collected by local authorities.

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6. Progress – strategic commissioning

Introduction to strategic commissioning

In addition to a new approach to assessing need (JAFF) and coordination of family intervention (TAF), Families First also asks local authorities to consider a new approach to the commissioning of family support services. Thus a large share of the resources available for Families First is used to fund 'strategically commissioned projects'.

Such projects are based on local need and are aimed at supporting a broader spectrum of local families than might be reached through JAFF and TAF processes and models. The process of strategic commissioning represents a new way of commissioning family support services. Although the specific nature of projects has not been specified by the Welsh Government, it is expected that commissioning under Families First should demonstrate 'strategic management' through:

- a coherent and structured set of projects, that in turn contribute to population outcomes;
- commissioning based on a local assessment of the needs of children and families;
- a focus on delivery through prevention and early intervention;
- consideration of joint commissioning – both across agencies and across multiple authorities,
- a smaller number of large-scale strategic projects rather than a large number of small-scale bespoke projects;
- a set of time-limited projects, with a clear exit strategy; and
- inclusion of the voice of children and families in the commissioning process.

This chapter reports on the progress made by local authorities in relation to strategic commissioning, focusing on four key evaluation objectives:

- the extent to which the introduction of strategic commissioning was relevant and appropriate in addressing the shortcomings of previous methods of commissioning family support projects;
- the progress made by local authorities in putting in place appropriate commissioning arrangements to date;
- an initial assessment of whether the provision of family support services has improved as a result of strategic commissioning; and
- an evaluation of the key success factors and challenges for future commissioning.

The chapter draws on a number of sources of evidence including local authority action plans and End of Year Reports, and the views (as obtained through in-depth interviews) of national stakeholders and local authority Families First leads.

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Future stages of the evaluation will build on the conclusions from this chapter, by comparing initial findings against primary sources of evidence such as the views of local stakeholders (stakeholder survey), families (family case studies) and additional monitoring information (Process Change Performance Measures Framework and Family Outcomes Tool). These future sources of evidence will help provide a full assessment of strategic commissioning, and in turn enable the evaluation of the quality of commissioning arrangements and the outcomes achieved for families. Further detail of evaluation objectives and activity can be found in chapter 2.

6.1 Role of Families First in bringing about change to the commissioning process

6.1.1 Support for a new approach to commissioning of family support services

Despite being a new and relatively complex approach (compared with previous arrangements under the Cymorth programme), there is strong consensus among local and national stakeholders that the Families First programme has been a welcome and timely intervention in improving: a) the process of commissioning; b) the scope and nature of resulting projects; and c) the quality of provision for children and family support services.

Projects delivered through Cymorth were commissioned through a process where providers bid for access to local authority grants rather than responding to a competitive tender; in critique of Cymorth, interviewees comment that this approach often led to a fragmented landscape with a duplication of provision and lack of a distinct overall direction. Some feel that the old process of commissioning was open to influence outside of the needs of families, with the scope of projects suffering from either having too strong a focus on social services and/or insufficient consideration of families affected by disability. Projects rarely took a 'whole family' perspective, often working in silos, and it was not uncommon for multiple agencies to be unaware they were working with the same family.

The theory behind the policy intervention is therefore widely supported. Stakeholders and local authorities perceive the commissioning approach prescribed through Families First to be more aligned, structured, evidence (needs) based, professional and fair compared with Cymorth, with greater potential for collaboration and multi-agency working.

6.1.2 Bringing about change to the commissioning process

It is clear that Families First marks a significant departure from previous arrangements for commissioning family support services.

Those local authorities commissioning against a results-based accountability (RBA) framework use population measures as a starting point to commissioning. These authorities note that under Families First there is a stronger emphasis on commissioning through evidence of outcomes for families, rather than performance targets; targets relate to outcomes, such as whether families have shown improvement on agreed measures, rather than merely the outputs delivered by the project, such as the number of families accessing services. This, in turn, has created a clearer focus in terms of how projects contribute to agreed population indicators that demonstrate progress in the outcomes of children and families.

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The introduction of Families First has also encouraged a number of local authorities to develop a commissioning strategy (often with academic support) that can be applied elsewhere in the local authority. For example Gwynedd has formed a Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and developed a strategic vision, set of priorities, outcomes and performance measures for parenting and family support services in Gwynedd between 2012-17. Similarly. in Anglesey, the lessons from Families First feed into a corporate commissioning group with a remit to develop a commissioning strategy for the whole local authority.

Stakeholders from both local authorities and the third sector suggest it is unlikely that this change towards a more structured approach to commissioning would have taken place without Families First. This is perceived to be partly due to a lack of commissioning experience and capacity (among both local authorities and providers), but also believed to be due to the significant cultural change required in moving away from a climate where providers expected to be re-commissioned with little focus on an assessment of need or evidence of outcomes for families.

Families First also marks a shift in the focus of provision towards early intervention and prevention. Although such projects were previously delivered in pockets, local authorities that had attempted to commission preventative projects report that they struggled to secure funding from their core budget, with other core social services often given higher priority. It is therefore unlikely that the commissioning of preventative projects on such a scale would have taken place without the additional funding provided by Families First.

6.2 A revised commissioning landscape

6.2.1 Progress of commissioning

The progress of strategic commissioning varies greatly, even between those local authorities that started to implement the programme at the same time. As of summer 2013, all but six local authorities have successfully completed their strategic commissioning. Four of these authorities have commissioned some – but not all – of the projects to address the gaps identified in their needs assessment; two authorities have commissioned temporary contracts for all projects while finalising their commissioning brief.

For most local authorities, this represents a substantial achievement in a relatively short period of time; however the difference in the pace of change is significant. For example, as shown in Table 4.1, some non-pioneer areas have completed commissioning against a small number of strategic themes (Swansea and Bridgend), yet one Phase 1 pioneer has not been able to finalise their commissioning arrangements.[51]

Nonetheless, the pace of change does not necessarily guarantee success in commissioning. Welsh Government and third sector stakeholders suggest that the most successful commissioning processes have taken time and involved a detailed review of need/projects, the development of a commissioning strategy and process framework, and undertaken considerable dialogue with the third sector and families. It is too early to identify which models of commissioning have been the most successful at this point; however identifying

[51] At the time of reporting ,for example Wrexham were awaiting confirmation of funding from health colleagues for a new Family Counselling Service. Until funding is confirmed, this service continues to be delivered through a previous contract.

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the attributes of success will form a key part of subsequent evaluation activities (see chapter 2).

6.2.2 Scale of projects commissioned under Families First

A summary of progress in commissioning by local authority (as documented in End of Year reports) is provided in Table 4.1 below; a more detailed table can be found in the Appendices.[52] In summary:

- 159 projects have been commissioned in total, an average of seven per authority (not including disability, infrastructure, evaluation or implementation of TAF/JAFF);
- the number of projects per authority ranges from 2-16;
- the average cost of projects commissioned is £166,485. This ranges from an average of £31,064 in Flintshire to £1,259,166 in Swansea; and,
- the amount allocated to commissioned projects as a percentage of the overall claim for 2012-13 is 64%.

In basic terms, the number of projects commissioned has reduced and the average cost of projects has increased compared with previous arrangements under Cymorth. The number of projects funded by Cymorth over 2004/05 – 2007/08 was about 890 (equivalent to 222 per year); and the average annual allocation over the same period was about £55k per project per annum.[53] However, the number of projects commissioned varies by local authority: six local authorities have developed fewer than five large scale strategic projects; in contrast four authorities have more than ten projects.

Yet, a judgement on the size of projects and the number of providers commissioned is complicated by the presentation of projects into 'strands' or 'packages', and the discrepancy in classifying 'projects'. For example Flintshire provides a breakdown of disability funding into 3 sub-projects, including detail of a £700 contract commissioned to a voluntary sector provider to aid access to mainstream services. In contrast, Swansea have just two strategic projects (that sit outside disability, infrastructure and JAFF/TAF) with a budget of £1,158,385 and £1,359,946 respectively; however each of these strategic projects supply a sub-set of six programmes of support, the costs of which are not specified.

Most local authorities have made a conscious effort to encourage consortia bids (from multiple providers) to allow smaller agencies to play a role in delivery. The inclusion of smaller agencies is seen by both local authorities and third sector stakeholders as positive because they often have a better local understanding, more specific skillset and have a smaller management structure compared to larger providers. In some instances this has resulted in the creation of packages which aggregate several individual projects into one wider 'Lot' rather than multiple agencies working together to deliver the same service. For example, Cardiff has a total of 57 services/providers involved in the delivery of five strategic service packages, yet it is currently unclear how closely they work together.

[52] Monitoring information collected through the Process Change Performance Measures and the Progress Report will offer additional information from October 2013, including a more detailed breakdown of finances.

[53] The range of allocations per project pa across the Partnerships in 2007/08 was from £35k (Ceredigion and Monmouthshire) to about £80k (Caerphilly and Newport) and in the number of projects from 24 (Powys) to 100 (Cardiff and Rhondda). *Evaluation of Cymorth, Final report.*

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Third sector stakeholders also suggest that a number of large-scale projects may be more fragmented than initially presented in End of Year reports, as in some instances agencies have been allowed to bid for specific aspects of a 'Lot' (rather than deliver the entire project).[54] Moreover, the total number of projects does not necessarily reflect the extent to which local authorities have sought to develop a strategic narrative to their commissioning process. For example Flintshire has a total of 16 projects, but these were formed through a multi-agency Task and Finish Group on commissioning, which established an overarching Commissioning Plan for the area.

It is therefore challenging to compare the true composition of the new service landscape commissioned under Families First to that of Cymorth. Nonetheless, of those projects detailed in the End of Year Reports, 20 projects are valued at £15,000 or less and a further 39 at the value of £50,000 or less. This suggests that the commissioning of small-medium size projects still accounts for a significant amount of provision.

Further work is therefore required to understand whether the creation of large-scale more flexible projects, with fewer providers, has been realised under Families First. This will be unpicked further during in-depth case studies with seven local authorities and on-going monitoring established as part of the evaluation process.

[54] The extent to which such projects still form part of a wider strategic narrative will be explored latter in the evaluation by case studies and the stakeholder survey.

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Table 6.1 Progress in delivering strategic commissioning

Local authority	Phase (P1 = pioneer phase 1; P2 = pioneer phase 2; N = 'newcomer'	Status in progress of commissioning family support services	Projects (excluding JAFF/TAF, disability and infrastructure)		
			Total number of projects	Average cost of projects	% of full claim allocated to projects
Blaenau Gwent	P1	Full implementation	7	£139,056	76%
Denbighshire	P1	Full implementation	7	£85,000	47%
Flintshire	P1	Full implementation	16	£31,064	30%
Merthyr Tydfil	P1	Full implementation	10	£61,950	57%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	P1	Revised specification post full-implementation	6	£304,111	49%
Wrexham	P1	Partial implementation	6	£198,200	67%
Cardiff	P2	Full implementation	5	£880,594	84%
Carmarthenshire	P2	Temporary contracts	4	£433,842	80%
Ceredigion	P2	Full implementation	3	£15,828	7%[55]
Conwy	P2	Full implementation	8	£115,595	71%
Gwynedd	P2	Full implementation	4	£233,924	74%
Isle of Anglesey	P2	Full implementation	9	£36,556	46%
Newport	P2	Full implementation	4	£426,878	67%
Pembrokeshire	P2	Partial implementation	3	£165,057	34%

[55] Figure taken from local authority end of year report: 69% of the claim related to funding of TAF, including TAF coordinator, manager and multi-agency team of support staff.

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Local authority	Phase (P1 = pioneer phase 1; P2 = pioneer phase 2; N = 'newcomer'	Status in progress of commissioning family support services	Projects (excluding JAFF/TAF, disability and infrastructure)		
			Total number of projects	Average cost of projects	% of full claim allocated to projects
Bridgend	N	Full implementation	4	£251,275	54%
Caerphilly	N	Partial implementation	14	£146,291	69%
Monmouthshire	N	Full implementation	8	£70,163	56%
Neath Port Talbot	N	Partial implementation	16	£93,794	70%
Powys	N	Full implementation (but partial suspension)[56]	2	£306,799	54%
Swansea	N	Full implementation	2	£1,259,166	75%
Torfaen	N	Temporary contracts	13	£91,630	79%
Vale of Glamorgan	N	Full implementation (but review imminent)	8	£94,503	51%

Source: Local Authority End of Year Reports April 2013

[56] One of the services offered was suspended following an Estyn inspection and subsequent review.

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6.2.3 Focus of projects commissioned under Families First

Table 4.2 shows the intervention type addressed in the projects commissioned by local authorities in 2012-13 (note that these are not mutually exclusive, it may be that one project covers multiple types of intervention). By far the most common theme is 'parenting', with a total of 30 projects providing some form of parenting support across 15 local authorities. Childcare, Education and Employment are also common, with fewer projects contributing to more acute needs such as substance misuse or speech and language development. Fifteen projects have a specific focus on targeting families in or at risk of poverty.

Table 6.2 2012-13 commissioned projects by type of intervention[57]

	Number of projects	Number of authorities
Parenting	35	18
Childcare	24	14
Education	20	10
Employment	18	12
Poverty	15	11
Health	13	8
Domestic Abuse	12	8
Information for families	10	5
Transitional stages[58]	9	9
Substance misuse	7	6
Advocacy	6	5
Speech and language	2	2
Total *(projects may fall under more than one category)*	**159**	n/a
Projects relating to central infrastructure costs		
Early Intervention (Family Support services / TAF)	9	9
Workforce development / Infrastructure	14	14
FF evaluation	4	4
Disability	39	22
Total *(projects may fall under more than one category)*	**66**	n/a

[57] 'Play and youth support' have been included under the category 'childcare'. A number of disability services also have elements of play and youth support.
[58] Transitional stages' related to support for young people at times of transition into adult hood'.

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The extent to which projects have been commissioned with an appropriate focus on prevention and early intervention will be explored in closer detail as part of the local authority case study activity. However it is clear at this stage that in a number of cases the budget has been spent with a wider scope than Families First alone. For example, two authorities have commissioned significantly sized short-term projects that allowed for an earlier expansion of the Flying Start programme than planned by the Welsh Government (it is not clear what will happen to this allocated funding once the Flying Start Expansion has been completed). A number of authorities have also used Families First budget to develop integrated or 'multi-service' information systems for either parents and/or children[59]. These will benefit a number of local services and programmes but have not necessarily received appropriate contribution of funds from other relevant services and programmes, leaving Families First as the sole source of funding.

As was the case with Cymorth, a significant proportion of spending is allocated to central infrastructure costs.[60] The proportion of central infrastructure costs has risen under Families First, accounting for 28% of all funding compared with the 12% of funding allocated to central and evaluation costs under Cymorth over the period 2003-04 – 2007/08. The increase can in part be explained by the investment in developing new JAFF and TAF services.

Some local authorities have commissioned out some aspects of their TAF service, to be delivered by staff outside of the local authority. An example of this is Merthyr Tydfil where Barnado's has been commissioned as the main provider of key workers who complete JAFF assessments and act as the lead in implementing an individual TAF. One local authority commented that they were forced to commission out part of their TAF/JAFF service because the local authority has a freeze on internal recruitment; another commented that they proactively sought a third sector provider to administer JAFF/TAF as they were concerned that the programme would not be prioritised if run internally by the social services team.

Just over half of local authorities have commissioned workforce development projects. These are most significant in authorities which have a dispersed JAFF/TAF model where all professionals in contact with children and families – including schools and registered social landlords – are expected to play a key role in referral, assessment and delivery of the JAFF/TAF (rather than JAFF/TAF being delivered by a single core team); such models require a large volume of staff training. Four authorities have commissioned evaluation projects, which will consider the monitoring information collected by the authorities and in some cases conduct interviews with children and families, in order to assess the value and quality of provision. However in practice, other local authorities are undertaking a range of evaluation and review activities costed for outside of commissioned projects.

[59] For example, Flintshire have used part of their Families First budget to help fund their Family Information Service to help families make informed decisions about childcare and family support.

[60] This includes cost of establishing JAFF/TAF services, workforce development, and evaluation. Any comparisons made between local authorities must be treated with caution because practice varied between local authorities in terms of their treatment of central costs – for example all local authorities have undergone some workforce development, but not all have identified this as a specific commissioned project rather than spend within the core service offer.

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6.3 The commissioning process

6.3.1 Attributes of commissioning process

Local authorities report that the new commissioning process has been challenging, with both commissioners and providers often going through a structured approach to commissioning for the first time. As a result, the extent to which the commissioning process has been undertaken against the attributes set out in the Families First guidance varies by local authority – this is summarised in Table 4.3 below.

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Table 6.3 Progress against key strategic commissioning attributes

Attribute – as stated in Families First guidance	Progress	Notes
Be coherent and structured, contributing to population outcomes	Mixed	LAs have taken a varied approach to decommissioning. Some have 'wiped the slate clean' and decommissioned all previous projects funded through Cymorth; others have completed a mapping exercise and decommissioned only services which were deemed 'not to fit' with the objectives and principles of Families First; others have reconfigured or rationalised services. Six LAs have commissioned fewer than 5 'packages' set against clear strategic and structured themes; commissioning in others – though still based on need – appears more ad hoc.
Be based on identification of need	Good	All LAs have based commissioning on the needs of families. Some have commissioned a new assessment of need specifically for Families First, others have made use of recent assessments conducted for other initiatives such as the development of a CYPP plan. Some local authorities have also waited on the type of referrals received through TAF before commissioning their full budget allocation.
Consider joint commissioning – both across agencies and across multiple authorities	Mixed	The amount of financial contributions secured from outside Families First varies by local authority. Some authorities have few details of such arrangements, while others have secured significant budget from Flying Start, Communities First, Health Boards and other core local authority services. All but two authorities have a mix of departments leading the delivering Families First. These include local authorities departments, the local health board and the third sector. In the remaining two authorities, all projects are led by the local authority; however they still require multi-agency input in day to day delivery of the project.
Be time-limited, with a clear exit strategy	Good	All projects have specific end dates. Six authorities have commissioned projects for three years until March 2017; three have commissioned projects for one year only; one has chosen two-year contracts and the remaining LAs have a mixture of end-dates. Future evaluation activity will explore whether strategic commissioning benefits from longer or shorter commissioning cycles.
Involve children and families	Poor – mixed	The extent of including the voice of families and children in commissioning is unclear. There are some examples of good practice, but other authorities had very little or no involvement from children and families. Some authorities noted that they struggled to build this into the commissioning process within – what was perceived to be – tight timescales. However, they are keen to develop this in future rounds.

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The two areas of greatest variation in the way local authorities have conducted strategic commissioning are in: i) the consideration of decommissioning of projects previously commissioned under Cymorth; and ii) the success of joint commissioning between agencies or local authorities.

The extent of decommissioning is driven in part by local authorities' assessment of the performance of projects under Cymorth and the extent to which they had already started to commission services under a coherent strategy. Local authorities who were most satisfied with projects delivered by Cymorth perceive there to be less of a need for change. They are thus more inclined to undertake a mapping exercise to reconfigure services where required and ensure they are delivered to Families First objectives and monitoring requirements. Other local authorities have been keen to administer a full break with previous projects in order to foster a culture change in commissioning – one which is driven by the needs identified by the local authority, not by agencies applying for grant funded. In both circumstances however, some projects formerly funded by Cymorth have been legitimately re-commissioned (in some form) under Families First.

There are some good examples of joint commissioning (highlighted in 'successes' below); however variation in the volume of joint commissioning is a result of both 'real' challenges in alignment with other programmes/agencies and 'perceived' willingness to take this approach.

Some local authorities are less confident of the merits of joint commissioning 'for the sake of it', and note the risk of diluting support if a project is made too generic in an attempt to fit multiple ways of working across agencies or area boundaries. Other local authorities point to challenges in the alignment of agencies or areas; these are systematic barriers which are more difficult to overcome, and include:

- **The timetable/cycle for commissioning can be different:** for example Communities First and Families First commission at different times – this is unlikely to change in the near future. Neighbouring local authorities may also have different commissioning time scales – ranging from 12 months to 3 years.
- **The governance structure of Families First:** joint commissioning is less apparent in structures where Families First sits separately to Flying Start and Communities First.
- **The structure / threshold of core services**: for example differences in the age of child requirements set to be eligible for Families First services. Some local authorities reach up to 25 years old, others up to 18 years old.
- **Alignment of gaps in need:** neighbouring local authorities may have identified different gaps in delivery (i.e. services that are needed but not provided by other programmes).
- **Phase of commissioning:** some local authorities have found it difficult to commission with their nearest neighbours if commissioning has already taken place (i.e. a contract has already been awarded for a number of years prior to consideration of joint working).

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6.3.2 Consequences of commissioning process

With oversight across a number of authorities, third sector stakeholders are less positive about the way/variation in which commissioning has been implemented by local authorities; however, they appreciate that both local authorities and providers are on a joint learning curve.

Although collaborative proposals and contracts are permitted and sometimes encouraged, third sector stakeholders suggest that the competitive tendering process has often reduced the potential for collaborative working because agencies are competing against each other. This is accentuated by the current economic climate with agencies increasingly focused on their 'business', including their need to secure revenue to cover their head count and management costs. Collaborative working has also been hindered by the tight timescales requested for submission of bids (though this is more of an issue in some areas), and an expectation that smaller agencies should have the same insurance liability cover as larger partner agencies[61]

These issues are to be explored further in a forthcoming review commissioned by the Welsh Government 'Best Practice in Families First Commissioning'.

6.4 Success

Both stakeholders and local authority Families First leads suggest that the most successful commissioning processes have involved strong dialogue between the local authority and providers at all stages of the commissioning process. This includes administering a multi-stage bidding process which allows for bidders to receive feedback on initial bids - this was particularly evident in Flintshire (where they funded a part-time temporary post to specifically help the third sector with the development of their bids) and in Cardiff (where a multi-stage process helped develop the capacity of providers to submit appropriate bids).

A number of authorities have also placed a strong emphasis on communication after, as well as during, the commissioning process. This aims to develop providers' sense of contribution to a wider programme – for example Monmouthshire have established a Families First project managers' network and Flintshire have produced a leaflet that sets out how all providers feed into the Families First Programme.

[61] There are some examples of LAs commissioning according to standard criteria/contracts, which often specify a specific level of liability cover that smaller providers cannot afford.

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Successes in joint commissioning
Despite some of the challenges with alignment (considered above) there have been some strong successes in joint commissioning; these include: ▪ Anglesey has secured over £100k in match funding from a range of partners including the local health board, children's services, and the Child Care Grant. ▪ Merthyr Tydfil joint commissioning of transition to employment project with Communities First (£80k FF; £120k CF) ▪ Three projects in Neath Port Talbot are matched with Flying Start funding totalling over £150k. ▪ Wrexham and Flintshire have jointly commissioned four services together relating to support for child-minders, business support for playgroups, out of school clubs and access to childcare for families affected by disability.

Local authorities also point to a number of other 'quick wins' already emerging from the new commissioning process.

- **Improvement in multi-agency working is evident.** The development of consortia as delivery agents has the potential to improve collaborative working. In some areas, this has included shared training and workforce development across agencies.
- **An outcomes-focused culture is starting to develop.** Most providers have now bought into new requirements to evidence outcomes for families and follow an RBA approach to monitoring. This has in turn helped to remove expectations of repeat funding as 'given'; however further work is required during the case studies to establish how better monitoring information is used at the point of recommissioning.

6.5 Challenges

Some of the challenges in commissioning are likely to be short-term, and could be overcome if local authorities are able to share and learn from the experiences of the first tendering process. These include:

- **Expertise and capacity in procurement for both local authorities and agencies.** Many authorities have now developed a commissioning strategy to set the framework for later rounds of commissioning; similarly agencies will be able to build on the experience and submit more appropriate bids based on feedback from round 1. Nonetheless, some authorities are concerned that they may not have the internal capacity to undergo a repeat process and provide the support needed by smaller agencies.
- **Building in more explicit contribution from children and families.** For example, a Merthyr Tydfil youth forum representative was on their planning board and the youth mayor was consulted as part of the commissioning process. Local authorities now have more time to build similar activities in to forthcoming rounds of commissioning.

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However, there remain some long-term challenges for strategic commissioning, which local authorities will have to address on a repeat basis, such as:

- **Collecting objective data for performance reporting**. Local authorities report that not all projects lend themselves to quantitative reporting of outcomes, and that not all providers are able to support substantial quantitative data collection, and thus they have to rely on more qualitative data (from families / agency staff) for performance reporting, which can be more subjective.
- **Avoiding conflicts of interest during the commissioning process.** Local authorities also report difficulties in securing third sector expertise in designing specifications and awarding contracts. For example, Cardiff had to find expertise from outside the area to be a part of their awarding panel – all of those inside the local authority were part of the bidding process.
- **Ensuring the flexibility and depth of large-scale projects.** This is particularly relevant in the current economic climate where each contract is significant. Agencies are therefore more inclined to keep hold of the financial contract initially secured even if the requirements of the project change. For example RCT have unexpectedly been faced with the need to adapt the Healthy Lifestyles project to have a stronger focus on sexual health (due to size of need from referrals and policy change outside Families First). This may be more challenging for LAs on a three-year commissioning cycle.

6.6 Summary

The introduction of strategic commissioning to family support services is a challenging yet welcome policy intervention. Though some authorities were starting to introduce RBA into commissioning, it is unlikely that the change in direction to a more structured, coherent, needs-based approach would have happened without Families First.

At the time of reporting, all but six local authorities have completed a first wave of strategic commissioning; for most local authorities this represents a significant achievement in a relatively short period of time. At a basic level, it is clear that the implementation of strategic commissioning has led to a smaller number of large projects with a higher average spend than under the Cymorth programme, and that projects have been commissioned with a strategic narrative and based on an assessment of need. However, progress against a number of other key attributes (as set out in the programme guidance) has been mixed:

- although the number of projects commissioned by local authorities has reduced compared with Cymorth, it is difficult to assess the true composition of projects and the range of providers, due to the way 'packages' or 'strands' have been presented by local authorities in End of Year reports;
- projects are time-limited, but most have been commissioned for longer than two years; this may present challenges if the need to be flexible is important;
- the amount of budget allocated to projects varies by local authority, with parenting, childcare, education and employment the most common types of project commissioned;
- decommissioning has been considered by all. Some local authorities have undertaken a full decommissioning exercise, while others have only decommissioned services that do not align with Families First after a mapping exercise; and

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- joint commissioning has been successful in pockets, but there are some challenges of alignment which inhibit the ability for this to be more widespread.

There remain a number of challenges for commissioning moving forward, but a great deal has already been learnt through the experience of round one. The success of future commissioning will rely on the ability of the Welsh Government, local authorities and providers to support shared learning, and on the ability of local authorities and agencies to work together in an on-going dialogue well in advance of future commissioning.

6.7 Key areas for investigation

Subsequent evaluation activity will seek to build on the baseline picture established at year one. Primary research will be conducted with local stakeholders and families, alongside specific monitoring information will help to explore the following:

Area for investigation	Method
Identify clear attributes of success in the quality of provision.	Cross-reference the views of families and local stakeholders with monitoring data collected from local authorities (the Process Change Performance Measures Framework and Family Outcomes Tool).
Explore how best practice can be encouraged, including multi-authority and multi-agency joint commissioning.	Identify through national learning sets, the online managed learning environment, and in-depth case study interviews.
Consider how flexible projects are in moving with the needs of children and families.	Review of progress against key objectives in the Progress Report and cross-reference with the views of local stakeholders collected through the stakeholder survey and local case-studies.
Examine the extent to which there is duplication of provision.	Combine the views of families and local stakeholders and cross reference with local authority reports of projects.
Review whether and how provision has been targeted at families in poverty.	To be considered in depth during case study visits to local authorities.
Explore the true composition of provision underneath strategic themes/packages.	Evaluation of financial reporting monitoring of progress against key activities, cross-referenced with in-depth local case studies.

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7. Progress – disability

Introduction to the Families First disability element

Families First aims to improve the support available to families with disabled children and young people, and in particular families that are not eligible for statutory provision to support their needs. Each local authority's Families First funding includes a ring-fenced amount that should be spent on improving provision for families with disabled children and young carers.

The Families First guidance specifies that the needs of families with disabled children and young carers 'should be taken into account when designing or commissioning *all* services' under Families First, the additional funding is provided to 'ensure that the specific needs of these families are provided for'[62]. As with other elements of the programme, services should be designed in response to local need. The intention is that families with disabled children and young carers are able to access mainstream services alongside other families, as well as having the specialist support they need.

Areas that the guidance highlights as being appropriate for local authorities to focus on through the disability element of the programme are:

- improved co-ordination and integration of services;
- income maximisation and awareness of welfare rights;
- improved access to employment, education and training;
- supplementary provision of short breaks and respite;
- training for specific child care provision;
- training and other support opportunities for parents; and
- increased access to play and leisure, including pre-school play provision.

This chapter considers progress made by local authorities under the disability element of Families First. It focuses on the following objectives:

- the perceived rationale and value of having ring-fenced funding for this element of the programme, and the extent to which it addresses shortcomings in the provision available in the past for families with disabled children;
- how the disability element has been interpreted and implemented;
- progress in implementing the disability element of Families First across local authorities; and,
- an evaluation of the successes and challenges for this element in the future.

[62] Families First guidance: our emphasis. http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/111219ffguideen.pdf

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The chapter is mainly based on evidence from local authority action plans and annual reports as well as relevant information from consultations with Families First disability leads. It also draws on the views of national stakeholders with an interest or involvement in services for families with disabled children: any references to national stakeholders relate to the views of these individuals.

In future evaluation activities and reporting we will focus on capturing in-depth information about how Families First has changed the landscape of the services delivered in this area, as well as focusing on the progress made in improving the accessibility of mainstream services. The final section of this chapter highlights areas for further investigation in this evaluation.

7.1 Rationale – assessing the need for change

This section sets out the views of national and local stakeholders about the services provided for families with disabled children and young people *prior to* Families First, and the extent to which the disability element of Families First addressed gaps in existing services.

Evidence from stakeholders and authorities suggests that **a large number of families with disabled children and young people are not eligible for support from statutory services, and** that **provision for these families was often limited prior to Families First**. National and local stakeholders felt that disabled children and their families have often 'fallen through the gaps' in the past, because of postcode restrictions, or restrictions based on parents' employment status, which meant they were not eligible for support. The number of families not registered or receiving support is potentially large: for example, Rhondda Cynon Taf's local review showed that, of 7,718 children registered as disabled in the authority only 525 were known to statutory services and the remaining 7,193 did not receive family support through the Disabled Children's Team.[63]

Provision of services for families with disabled children has been variable historically, with **some local authorities placing a greater focus on disability than others**. For example, the significance of disability services within Cymorth varied by local authority, according to national stakeholders. The views of national stakeholders were split: while a few felt that Families First ring-fenced funding means that disabled children will now get their 'fair share', an equally prevalent opinion held that the priority given to disability services still varies depending on the effectiveness of individual advocates within authorities.

Families First builds on the principles employed by a number of initiatives for disabled families recently but is seen as distinct because it plugs the gap in provision for families that fall below the threshold for statutory support, and yet who have real needs for support. For example, other recent initiatives employing similar principles include the Early Support Programme which ran from 2010-2013 and which promoted integrated working across multiple agencies, team around the family approaches, and the principle of early intervention. It focused on the families of children under 5 years old.[64] Multi-agency working was also tested through a pilot of Transition Key Working for 14-25 year olds,[65] and is central to Individual Development Plans (which have been trialled

[63] April 2013 Annual Report.
[64] See 'The Journey So Far'.
http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/journeysofar/?lang=en
[65] http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/130125-costs-benefits-transition-key-working-summary-en.pdf

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currently as a possible replacement for SEN Statements)[66]. The Cymorth programme also included provision for disabled children's play and leisure: although Families First is not prescriptive about the types of provision that should be funded, play and leisure remains an area where Families First disability funding is commonly focused.

7.2 How has the Disability Focus strand been implemented?

7.2.1 Needs assessments and delivery models

Where families had accessed services in the past, local authorities' needs assessments highlight families' frustrations in having to provide the same information to each professional that they come into contact with, and a general lack of coordination across services. This reflects the picture across other services, and improved coordination and integration of services is a key aim in local authorities' plans for the disability element.

All local authority plans refer to local needs assessments being carried out, which reflects the requirement for strategic commissioning of services under Families First. Needs assessments usually had a specific focus on disability: either separate needs assessments were carried out to plan these services, or general needs assessments included consultations with parents of disabled children and/or disabled young people. Eight local authority action plans refer to on-going consultation, consultation with disabled families and young people: these authorities are continuing to consult in order to refine service delivery and monitor users' satisfaction with services.

The needs assessments carried out by local authorities highlight areas where there were gaps in services for families below the threshold for statutory support. To a large degree **local authority assessments identified a very similar set of issues**, which usually address the areas which the Families First guidance suggest local authorities should consider:

- improving coordination of services/ diagnosis and referral process;
- income maximisation and welfare rights;
- access to employment, education and training;
- increased access to play and leisure, including pre-school play provision;
- childcare facilities suitable for disabled children;
- training and support for parents and families – e.g. siblings; and,
- short breaks and respite.

Local authorities aim to use the disability funding to fill the gaps in provision left by statutory services. **Across local authorities there is a consistent understanding of what Families First disability funding should be used to achieve**: to help families to access mainstream services where possible, and fill in gaps where mainstream services are not going to be suitable or sufficient.

[66] http://www.snapcymru.org/USERFILES/FILE/HELP_AND_ADVICE/IDP%20BOOKLET-%20FINAL%2027_7_12.PDF

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There are, broadly speaking, two key ways that the disability funding has been used, and authorities are all using a mix of these two approaches:

1. **to increase the capacity of universal services and/or other Families First services to meet the needs of disabled families** through training and consultancy services for staff or, in a few cases, to develop an existing integrated approach to disability; and
2. **to provide specialist services directly to families** with disabled children.

The balance of these elements varies by local authority, and different implementation models have been used (see below for more detail).

7.2.2 Review of progress

Local authorities' annual reports provide detail on their progress in setting up disability projects, and the number and cost of projects they are running. Table 5.1 below summarises the progress made under this strand. It shows the total cost of the disability projects run by each local authority and, to put this into context, the amount of ring-fenced funding for the disability element of Families First. The number of disability projects funded (as specified in local authorities' action plans) is specified, as is the status of commissioning: as noted earlier, some caution should be exercised in interpreting these figures, as some local authorities run a single disability project or package which covers several sub-projects and this is not always evident from action plans. Where further detail on how the project(s) break down was given, this is included in the table. The table also indicates where disability learning sets are being discussed or convened.

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Table 7.1 Overview of progress in disability focus spending

LA (/P2=pioneer phase 1/phase 2; N= Newcomer)	Cost of disability projects (p.a.)[67]	WG allocated 2012/13	Number of disability projects funded	Disability learning set	Progress (April 2013 annual report)
Blaenau Gwent (P1)	£100,000	£91,063	1	Not mentioned	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Denbighshire (P1)	£89,989	£89,989	1 project covering 5 elements	Yes	Some services commissioned, other contracts to be awarded.
Flintshire (P1)	£107,036	£119,891	4	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Merthyr Tydfil (P1)	£90,000	£80,854	1	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Rhondda Cynon Taf (P1)	£275,157	£268,446	3	Yes	Planning phase (funding currently used to maintain suitable Cymorth projects)
Wrexham (P1)	£148,871	£127,867	1	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Cardiff (P2)	£396,808	£396,808	1	Yes	Commissioned.
Carmarthenshire (P2)	£191,217	£155,019	1	Regional Strategic Disability Working Group	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Ceredigion (P2)	£315,446	£49,061	1	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Conwy (P2)	£92,768	£92,768	3	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Gwynedd (P2)	£90,697	£90,697	2	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Isle of Anglesey (P2)	£98,000	£58,052	2	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.

[67] Figures taken from October 2012 plans and relate to requested funds.

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LA (/P2=pioneer phase 1/phase 2; N= Newcomer)	Cost of disability projects (p.a.)[68]	WG allocated 2012/13	Number of disability projects funded	Disability learning set	Progress (April 2013 annual report)
Newport (P2)	£300,000	£189,956	2	Not mentioned	Planning phase (services temporarily delivered by partner agency)
Pembrokeshire (P2)	£108,720	£102,786	3	Regional Strategic Disability Working Group	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Bridgend (N)	£138,600	£132,139	1	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Caerphilly (N)	£234,990	£214,895	2	Not mentioned	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Monmouthshire (N)	£50,937	£50,937	3 elements	Not mentioned	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Neath Port Talbot (N)	£153,646	£153,646	One project covering a range of elements.	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway, but plans to realign/ rescope services.
Powys (N)	£168,918	£81,831	1	Regional Strategic Disability Working Group	Planning phase.
Swansea (N)	£238,000	£239,029	1	Yes	Commissioned.
Vale of Glamorgan (N)	£200,000	£106,053	10	Yes	Commissioned and delivery underway.
Torfaen (N)	£340,000	£108,215	4	Not mentioned	Planning phase.

As illustrated in the table, **16 local authority plans refer to Families First disability services having been commissioned**, and in one local authority some services have been commissioned. Five LAs are in a planning or interim delivery phase: for example, one local authority currently delivers services on a temporary basis while they plan how they will recommission services,[69] and another local authority has contracted an agency to deliver services temporarily until their planning phase is completed. It was evident from the consultations with local Families First leads that a few local authorities have made a complete break with services commissioned under Cymorth, but in several authorities, some or all services are continuations of services offered under Cymorth. Local authorities

[68] Figures taken from October 2012 plans and relate to requested funds.
[69] Reconfiguration of services is dependent on the outcomes of local authority restructuring which is underway.

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stressed during consultations that where services have been continued, this was after scrutiny of their 'fit' with local need. The extent to which the disability services offered under Families First vary from those offered under Cymorth will be explored further in the remainder of this evaluation.

At face value the number of disability projects which local authority action plans refer to being funded is usually fairly low, especially in comparison with Cymorth where, typically, much larger numbers of projects were run. However, it is difficult to assess the number of projects funded because of the way projects are defined. For example, a single disability 'package' in Cardiff covers seven partner agencies delivering activities under three strands.

However, according to the way disability projects have been defined by local authorities, 19 local authorities are running between one and three projects that specifically relate to disability. Several local authorities mention they had reviewed the projects run under Cymorth and had cut those which were perceived as ineffective or which did not fit with the remit of Families First. Taking a crude average across all projects run, the average budget for disability projects is around £80,000. Many local authorities stressed during consultations that, in line with the programme guidance, **the relatively small number of projects reflects that disability is integrated across all their strategically commissioned projects**, **and several local authorities stressed that other strategic projects incorporate significant disability elements**.

The allocated funding for disability by the Welsh Government totals £3m across all 22 authorities, but local authority plans indicate that £3.9m was earmarked for disability spending in 2012-13.[70] In 6 local authorities, the amount spent on disability projects equals the amount of funding ring-fenced for this purpose. In another 6 local authorities, the amount spent is closely aligned with the ring-fenced amount, and falls within £10,000 of the ring-fenced budget. Thus, in around half of the authorities in Wales spending is approximately in line with the ring-fenced allocation. In one local authority the spending is £12,000 (10%) lower than the ring-fenced amount: this is part of a general under-spend on Families First in this authority which is down to delays in recruitment and to the start of one project. At the other end of the scale, in five authorities the amount indicated for disability spending is £50,000+ in excess of the funds allocated for this element of the programme. The rationale for the levels of spending on disability projects across LAs will be explored later in the evaluation.

Local authorities indicate that **there is limited joint delivery or commissioning of disability services across authority boundaries, but 17 authorities say they are engaged in regional disability learning sets**.[71] Some local authorities note that the different starting points and delivery models used across authorities make it challenging to commission and deliver services in partnership. However, it is notable that authorities tend to be commissioning similar types of services (see section below for detail on the types of services being offered). In many cases, authorities are expanding previous provision in order to widen access and support to a 'new' group of families that did not previously receive support. In contrast, it is notable that almost all local authorities are participating in regional learning sets about disability.

[70] Figures for local authority spending are taken from the amounts requested for disability services in the October 2012 plans.
[71] Five local authority plans do not mention disability learning sets.

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7.2.3 How are LAs building capacity in universal services?

Local authorities acknowledge that capacity-building is necessary so that all Families First services can meet the needs of families affected by disability. However, local authorities are using different methods to build capacity across the range of Families First services.

Running training for staff is a key element in most local authorities, although the funding for this training is not always drawn from the ring-fenced disability budget but may be funded from other authority or Families First funds. Likewise, most local authorities are engaging in disability learning sets with neighbouring authorities, and in several cases are conducting joint training courses for staff across authorities.

Beyond training, however, there are a number of models being established to embed disability considerations across universal services, including:

- In Cardiff, a Disability TAF team has been established which not only delivers services to families directly, but also acts as a consultancy service to provide advice to staff working on other strategically commissioned projects in order to ensure services are accessible and to build staff capacity to cater for families experiencing disability.
- In some LAs, individuals within the TAF team specialising in disability are helping to build capacity across the TAF team as well as deliver services. For example, Ceredigion has a TAF Disability Coordinator both to work directly with families experiencing disability, as well as to build the capacity of other TAF professionals to work with these families. Other local authorities are also using models utilising co-located TAF teams in order to build the capacity of the workforce.
- Several LAs have set up Strategically Commissioned projects that fall outside of the Disability Focus funding, but which still have a significant disability element. For example, in Denbighshire, the mainstream play and leisure Families First projects also incorporate significant disability elements and monitoring data is captured to measure this. In addition to this, most local authorities voice an aspiration that the services offered across the broad range of their Strategically Commissioned Projects are accessible to all (although specific mechanisms and accessibility monitoring is not necessarily in place in all cases).
- Many local authorities, in addition to learning set activity around disability, operate a strategic group or steering group focused on disability that has representation from key organisations involved in Families First delivery, in order to make links and share practice and learning.

7.2.4 What specialist services are being provided?

As noted above, while authorities are working to improve the accessibility of mainstream services, and increase their capacity to support families with disabled children, all authorities are also using ring-fenced funding to deliver services directly to families with disabled children. There were three main types of provision being funded, as described in the table below: play and leisure activities; information and services for parents and families; pre-school and childcare services suitable for disabled children; and other services.

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Table 7.2: Types of services run using disability focus spending

Type of direct services for disabled families funded by Families First disability funding	Number of local authorities
Play and leisure	
Improve access to play and leisure opportunities, including holiday support	18
After school and weekend / out of school activity provision	5
Information and services for parents/ families	
Parenting/ family advice and support programmes, including parent support groups/ workshops	11
Advocacy services	3
Improve parents' access to information/ information about services	2
Welfare and benefits advice	2
Pre-school and childcare	
Improved access to mainstream pre-school settings	6
Improved childcare provision suitable for disabled children	3
Other services	
Volunteer buddying/ friending schemes	5
Independent living skills	3
Speech and language/ disability specific assistance	2

As the table above illustrates, there is a **strong focus on play and leisure opportunities**. Eighteen local authorities mention this type of scheme, and five local authorities mention improving access to out of school activities and leisure opportunities. Services tend to focus on 'regular' play and leisure opportunities rather than holiday support. These types of scheme often aim to improve disabled children's access to mainstream play opportunities and sporting facilities, for example, through improving transport, or by providing buddies or mentors to allow disabled children to attend activities.

Several projects aim to provide information and support for parents of disabled children, and sometimes broader support for families, including the siblings of disabled children. Several local authorities acknowledge the cross-over between poverty and disability: parents of disabled children face particular barriers to working (e.g. finding suitable childcare), but at the same time many do not claim the full range of welfare benefits they are entitled to. As a result, some local authorities are working to raise parents' awareness of these entitlements. One element includes the uptake of welfare support (specifically mentioned in only two local authority's disability plans, but often covered under general Families First activities).

A common theme in both local authorities' needs assessments and the stakeholder consultations was the variable provision historically available for children of different ages. Typically, there has been much more provision for early years and pre-school children than other age groups. While this continues to be a common theme in Families First Disability Funding – and sits well with the early intervention ethos of the programme – several local authorities have identified a lack of provision for teenagers and young people, and the limited opportunities for these age groups to access mainstream services. For example, five

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local authorities mention improving access to out-of-school activities for school-age children, and three local authorities offer services to support independent living skills.

A number of local authorities have highlighted how they have aimed to develop sustainable services when using Disability Focus funding. For example, one local authority used Families First funding to set up a Saturday morning workshop for parents of disabled children; the parents themselves have now taken on the organisation of this workshop. Another local authority is delivering training to parents, so that parents themselves can support and train other parents in future, and create a self-sustaining network of provision.

Other services aim to both create a sustainable resource, as well as mutual benefits. For example, five local authorities mention setting up or expanding existing volunteering buddying schemes. These schemes train volunteers to assist disabled young people so that they can access mainstream leisure opportunities; at the same time, they also raise awareness of disability issues among the volunteers and help to integrate disabled young people into the community. Providing holiday schemes is another service with multiple benefits: children and young people benefit from mixing with others, while parents gain respite from caring for their children.

7.2.5 The impact of ring-fenced funding on local authorities

As noted above, 12 local authorities' spending on the disability element of Families First is approximately in line with the ring-fenced allocation. A small number of local authorities spend significantly more than the ring-fenced allocation, and the total spend across all authorities was £900,000 in excess of the ring-fenced allocation. In the absence of a comparison or control group, it is difficult to assess how spending on disability might compare with spending in the absence of the programme.

Stakeholders and local authority leads have highlighted some aspects of the ring-fenced funding that are particularly effective. A few authorities stressed that Families First has helped to protect services that might otherwise be cut in an era of reduced budgets: the additional pot of money provided by the ring-fenced disability funding helps to maintain these services when other provision might otherwise take priority. In a similar vein, several local authority leads gave the opinion that the services they offer under the disability strand would be cut if the ring-fencing of disability services was discontinued. This reflects concerns expressed by national stakeholders that non-statutory services for disabled families (and in general) are under threat as authorities' budgets continue to be squeezed.

A minority of local authorities noted that, while they have made efforts to create sustainable services (see following section for more details), there are some services which cannot easily be set up on a sustainable basis. For example, providing holidays to give families respite will always require additional funding.

Further in-depth consultations with disability leads will generate more detail about the potential impact of cuts to ring-fenced funding, as well as the impact that disability projects have had on families and children. The family case studies, and the Family Outcomes Tool monitoring data will provide more in-depth information about the impact of the programme on families and children.

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7.3 Successes

There are a number of clear successes in the early stages of implementing the disability ring-fenced funding. Most local authorities have commissioned (or re-commissioned) services based on an assessment of local need, and local authorities' plans follow the Families First principles. Feedback collected and reported by local authorities indicates many success stories for individual projects and families[72].

One national stakeholder noted that **disability is prioritised more within Families First than within comparable and previous programmes**, and ascribes this to the specific disability focus and ring-fenced funding. While national stakeholders are wary of how much Families First on its own might achieve in addressing disability needs, most feel that it **provides momentum to develop services** in the right direction.

Local authority feedback from consultations suggests that new monitoring and data sharing systems are helping to **identify disability earlier and share data more effectively across agencies** in a few authorities. Shared data systems mean that all professionals working with families can access relevant information. Rhondda Cynon Taf highlights that improved JAFF and TAF referral systems are picking up a much higher number of families with disabilities than the authority was previously aware of.

At the delivery level, some local authorities have highlighted how **Families First is helping to change families' perceptions of disability services**. For example, one local authority mentioned that Families First is helping to overcome the stigma attached to registering as disabled, and that families now have a greater incentive to register to receive additional help. A small number of local authorities have referenced the need to build parents' confidence in mainstream services as well as improving the accessibility of those services: a key challenge inherent in integrated provision is reassuring parents that services are suitable for their disabled children.

7.4 Challenges

Despite efforts to establish sustainable services, **authorities feel some support for disabled families cannot be sustainable and would have to be cut if disability focus funding was removed** (e.g. respite and holiday). Local authorities also highlight that it is difficult to remove services once parents and families are accessing support, so short-term provision of support tends not to be very successful.

There are mixed views among stakeholders as to the value of ring-fenced funding for the disability element of Families First: stakeholders welcome the priority and guaranteed funding it provides for disability projects, but also the drawbacks, in that the funding could encourage local authorities to view disability services as separate and discourage the integration of disabled services into mainstream provision. In practice, several local authorities say they are making efforts to improve the accessibility of mainstream services.

[72] The impact of projects on families will be evaluated in more detail in the later phases of this evaluation, based on feedback from families and stakeholder consultations.

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Despite the ring-fenced funding and disability focus, **national stakeholders feel the priority given to disability services is still largely dependent on the extent to which individuals within LAs champion it effectively – in the absence of an over-arching disability policy national stakeholders tend to feel progress is dependent on individuals**.

As noted above, local authorities have highlighted **challenges in working across authority boundaries** to deliver disability services. While disability learning sets are common, and some local authorities are engaged in joint training programmes, the similarity of services being delivered across authorities suggests there may be more scope to explore joint delivery in later years of the programme.

A few local authorities noted that the Families First criteria have **restricted the types of project they offer under their disability focus funding, as compared with Cymorth**. In a minority of cases, local authorities felt that Cymorth projects responded well to local need but have had to be cut back because they do not meet the Families First funding principles, but nor do they fall within the remit of statutory services. For example in one authority, some services related to play and leisure – which had a strong focus under Cymorth – were cut because the service design did not address key Families First principles.

7.5 Summary

The disability focus element of Families First addresses an historical gap in the services available for families with disabled children who do not qualify for statutory help. Stakeholders and local authorities feel that ring-fenced funding for this element has already played a role in helping to protect and maintain services that would otherwise be cut. Further evaluation activity will help to understand the wider significance of ring-fencing funds on the delivery of services, and in particular how services for families with disabled children are integrated with mainstream services.

Authorities are taking a variety of approaches to improve the capacity of mainstream services to meet the needs of families with disabled children. While authorities acknowledge that the culture change involved in greater mainstreaming of services will take time to achieve, they are optimistic about achieving more effective integration of partnership working. A few authorities stressed that while joint working across local authorities was limited currently, they expect to explore this more in future; the similarity of services being offered across authority areas suggests joint working could be viable.

The direct services funded via the disability focus mainly relate to improving access to play and leisure opportunities, and support for parents and families. Mapping exercises have in some cases helped to identify areas for greater focus than services offered in the past: for example, several authorities are redressing the age imbalance in the services offered for disabled children. However, a few authorities are concerned that valuable services offered under Cymorth have been cut because they do not address Families First priorities.

Local authorities point to a range of early successes from the programme, including comprehensive assessment processes identifying a larger pool of families requiring services, and better information services and referral patterns improving families' access to services.

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7.6 Key areas for investigation

Future evaluation activities will build on the knowledge gained to date, specifically investigating both the historical provision of disability services (in order to determine in greater depth how Families First has changed these services) and the changing service landscape as Families First becomes more established.

Area for investigation	Method
Capture information about the number, nature and funding of services delivered historically, to gain an in-depth understanding of the difference Families First has made.	Information captured in the stakeholder survey, Process Change Performance Measures monitoring data, and in-depth interviews with Families First disability coordinators.
Explore how mainstream services are changing due to Families First requirements, links with other programmes and funding streams (e.g. Flying Start and Communities First), and the factors facilitating/inhibiting change. Explore the scope for multi-authority working.	Information captured in the stakeholder survey, Process Change Performance Measures monitoring data, and in-depth interviews with Families First disability coordinators.
Identify who is better off as a result of the Families First disability element, and the nature of the impact of Families First.	Explore the views of families and local stakeholders and cross-reference with administrative data such as progress monitoring and the Family Outcomes Tool. Perceptions of impact will also be captured through in-depth interviews with disability coordinators.

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8. Progress – learning sets

Introduction to Learning Sets

The Families First programme requires local authorities to demonstrate a commitment to shared learning at local, regional (multi-authority) and national levels.

The expected outcome of participating in learning sets is the ability to access, apply and contribute to shared learning. This involves sharing knowledge about practice, challenges, solutions and tools and using this to develop local delivery approaches. It is anticipated that the application of action learning will lead to improved outcomes in terms of the quality of services delivered through Families First. [73]

Local and regional multi-authority learning

The planned activities for the local and regional learning sets are outlined within each of the local Families First Action Plans, with information provided about the intended partners, focus of activities, objectives and funding arrangements.

A set of core principles were proposed for the rollout of learning sets as part of the main implementation phase of Families First[74]. These were subsequently included within the Families First programme guidance issued by the Welsh Government. They include:

- having a 'broad membership' of both managers and practitioners, with all members taking an active role to support a participatory approach to delivery;
- being focused on particular activities or work-plans;
- meeting regularly; and,
- promoting reflection and learning as well as challenge and support.[75]

In subsequent guidance issued in 2013, the requirement was reiterated for all local authorities to commit to participating in multi-authority learning sets, and to document their frequency, focus and outcomes. This guidance further differentiated the role of local learning sets from those at a national level, which focus on issues of national (policy) relevance. Performance with regard to multi-regional learning is being measured against metrics including expenditure of learning, percentage of strategic staff engaged in learning, progress

[73] The Families First guidance built upon the findings from the Pioneer phase of Families First, during which time 14 of the 22 Welsh local authorities received funding to trail-blaze the programme through two phases of delivery and four consortia. Based on a review of learning sets in the North-East Phase 1 Pioneer, an independent evaluation by GHK and Arad Consulting concluded that the arrangements for sharing learning across local authorities were beneficial at both formal and informal levels[73]. Even at this early stage, the evaluation identified benefits from cross-authority working, which were reported to include: "*…the formation of new links between colleagues in neighbouring authorities, enabling individuals to learn from the experiences of others and share effective practice*".

[74] GHK and Arad (2011) Families First Learning Sets: key lessons for planning and delivery
[75] Welsh Government (2011), Families First: Programme Guidance

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Introduction to Learning Sets

against activities in action plans and the number of multi-authority learning partnerships. Outputs are being measured with reference to the proportion of strategic staff and practitioners reporting positively on the experience of participating in learning and with reference to views on whether learning has had an impact on and improved the quality of services.

National learning sets

National Learning Sets provide a mechanism to bring together learning on issues that are common to all those involved in delivering Families First. Topics for the national learning set will be selected based on the findings of the report so it can be focused on disseminating evaluated evidence of practice. As part of the process of facilitating learning at a national level a **Managed Learning Environment (MLE)** was established as part of the national evaluation.

Progress is being measured with reference to WG expenditure on national learning set activity and the number of national learning sets delivered. The outputs of national learning will be measured with reference to the number of events, number of individuals attending events, those using the MLE and those reporting positively about learning. Learning set outcome measures relate to the proportion of participants reporting learning had a positive impact on service design and quality.

This chapter considers the progress made by local authorities in relation to learning sets. The specific evaluation objectives in relation to the learning dimension of the Families First programme are:

- to understand local authorities' approaches to local and regional learning sets and the contribution of these to the effective implementation of the programme, and potential benefits to wider services and systems; and,
- to assess the contribution of the national learning sets to the effective implementation of the programme, and potential benefits to wider services and systems.

This chapter focuses on lessons learned from the evaluation with regard to developing and implementing multi-authority learning sets and national learning sets within Families First. The chapter first considers the situation within Wales prior to the launch of the programme, based on a review of literature covering lessons from the Pioneer phase. It will then review literature on the initial development of the learning sets and their subsequent expansion during 2012-13. It goes on to present the success factors and challenges, and the emerging evidence for the added value of the learning sets gained from a review of action plans, progress reports and from interviews with local authorities and national partners in July and August 2013.

Further evidence on the process and outcomes of applying learning associated with Families First will be gathered in the next stages of the evaluation, drawing on progress reporting by local authorities and in further stakeholder interviews and case studies.

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8.1 Set-up and initial development of multi-authority learning sets

Local authorities provided details of their learning set arrangements within their original Families First Action Plans, which have subsequently been updated. An analysis of the 22 sets of action plans was carried out by the evaluators during the initial stages of the evaluation. The review focused in particular on the five themes outlined by the Welsh Government building on Pioneer Areas for discussion at the 2012 National Learning Set and programme guidance, and examined cross-border working between local authorities. An updated map of this activity is presented at Table 8.1. The latest available information suggests that all but three local authorities are engaged in multi-authority learning sets.

Table 8.1. Families First Learning Sets – Thematic and Geographical Coverage

Geographical Arrangements			Topics								
Local Authority Area	Welsh Region	FF Pioneer area	TAF	JAFF	Workforce	Heath	Parenting	Disability	Info-sharing	Planning and Commissioning	Performance management
Denbighshire	NE	Yes, Phase 1 (NE)									
Wrexham	NE	Yes, Phase 1 (NE)									
Flintshire	NE	Yes, Phase 1 (NE)									
Gwynedd	NW	Yes, Phase 2 (NW)									
Conwy	NW	Yes, Phase 2 (NW)									
Ynys Mon (Anglesey)	NW	Yes, Phase 2 (NW)									
Powys	Mid	No									
Ceredigion	Mid	Yes, Phase 2 (SW)									
Carmarthenshire	SW	Yes, Phase 2 (SW)									
Pembrokeshire	SW	Yes, Phase 2 (SW)									
Neath Port Talbot	SW	No									
Swansea	SW	No									
Bridgend	SW	No									
Merthyr Tydfil	SE	Yes, Phase 1 (S)									
RCT	SE	Yes, Phase 1 (S)									
Blaenau Gwent	SE	Yes, Phase 1 (S)									
Caerphilly	SE	No									
Torfaen	SE	No									
Monmouthshire	SE	No									
Newport	SE	Yes, Phase 2 (Cities)									
Cardiff	SE	Yes, Phase 2 (Cities)									
Vale of Glamorgan	SE	No									

As the chart illustrates, most local areas are engaged in learning sets focused on the development of JAFF and TAF, with a high level of awareness of the need to align JAFF referral mechanisms and protocols on a multi-authority basis. Workforce issues also featured prominently – either as a distinct learning set, or subsumed within the arrangements for

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JAFF and TAF. A variety of more bespoke topics were identified, encompassing process issues (e.g. 'Joint Working' or 'Information Sharing') and areas of service delivery (e.g. 'Parenting' or 'Early Intervention').

In terms of geographical distribution, the mapping exercise clearly highlighted the legacy of the Pioneer infrastructure, with many of the learning sets building upon the multi-authority work completed during Phases 1 and 2. The consortia that were formed under these phases generally remained intact to some degree, but widened their geographical coverage to include non-Pioneer areas for the first time. In North Wales, the former North-West and North- East Consortia joined together to create one larger group, and signed-up to an ambitious suite of learning sets, with respective leads assigned to each.

From the outset of the programme, there was some overlapping membership of some learning sets – particularly in South Wales, where Pioneer and non-Pioneer areas signed-up to collaborate according to shared areas of interest. These arrangements represented a move away from the more tightly defined regional / sub-regional arrangements of the Pioneer phase, to encourage a more 'fluid' arrangement of shared learning across Wales.

8.1.1 Progress during 2012-13

The first national learning set was held in January 2013. This focused on opportunities to share learning about the experience of developing and implementing JAF and TAFF and was attended by all local authorities and a range of other organisations. Seventy per cent of participants who responded to the event feedback survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the event overall and the same proportion was satisfied with the relevance of the event to them. A separate report of the findings of this event can be found on the Managed Learning Environment. The next national learning set event is scheduled to take place between April and June 2014.

The updated Families First Action Plans for 2013 provide an insight to the continuing evolution of the multi-authority learning sets, and a point of comparison with the original action plans.

As might be expected given the structure of Families First, the JAFF and TAF learning sets have generally continued to provide a focal point for the activities taking place during 2012-13, with local authorities keen to "get this right first" as a fundamental strand of the programme. Learning sets with a focus on Commissioning and Workforce Development remain widespread across the 22 local authorities. Beyond this, the thematic focus has been diverse, with multi-authority learning sets themed around Parenting (North West) and Disabilities (South East Wales, South West Wales) featuring strongly, and other consortia driving forward more specific work in relation to Worklessness, Health Inequalities (South East Wales), and Culture Change for family support services (South East Wales).

Learning sets have typically operated on a quarterly basis, but with some additional 'ad hoc' activities as local authorities have sought to test out new potential work streams. Overall, however, it would seem that there has been a degree of rationalisation, with some consortia having reduced the number of learning sets from their original action plans now that the programme is underway. The reasons for this will be explored during the research. Capacity to engage in learning has been cited by some local authorities as a constraint.

The 'multi-authority' dimension

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Whilst the multi-authority learning sets have evolved to some extent since the start of the programme, the membership arrangements have – in the main – remained fairly consistent during 2012-13. This would seem to be partly attributable to the fact that most learning sets had a pre-defined membership (in terms of local authorities) within the original Families First Action Plans, and these consortia have remained affiliated to some extent during the past year as the programme has been implemented. Similarly, cross-border issues have continued to present a rationale for local authorities working with their immediate neighbours. There has been a widespread awareness of the need for consistency in how families are assessed and supported if they move between local authority boundaries, and many of the consortia have sought to address this issue in the context of JAFF and TAF development.

Examples of wider multi-authority cooperation were less evident, outside of a regional context. This would seem to partly reflect the practical barriers for local authorities from different regions working with each other (i.e. relating to a lack of proximity). However, a number of local authorities noted the opportunity for national learning sets to help address this issue, by providing access to additional learning and practice examples from across Wales. There were still some concerns that the various consortia have been working in relative isolation to date, and that a better mechanism is needed to access good practice.

The 'multi-agency' dimension

The composition of learning sets with regard to individual agencies has undergone some changes during the programme. One local stakeholder involved in a consortium noted how there has been a process of trial-and-error to get representatives from the right partners and at the right level of seniority to the table. Notwithstanding these measures, the 'multi-agency' profile of the learning sets was not always entirely evident from the action plans and interviews. It would appear that some consortia have opted to maintain an exclusively 'local authority' led agenda for certain learning sets – especially those with a systems change focus such as JAFF and TAF – whilst others have opened them up considerably to a wider range of agencies.

8.2 Effectiveness of implementation

The evidence from the interviews and action plans would seem to indicate that learning sets have been the most effective where a strategic rationale was agreed from the outset, along with a full timetable and objectives. The learning sets in North Wales (the former North-West and North-East Consortia) and South-East Wales (evolving from the previous Southern Consortium) each benefited from having a clear programme of activities and a strong multi-authority element in place from an early stage. In contrast, efforts by individual local authorities to initiate new learning sets during the programme have generally proven less successful. The following provides a strong example of a regional learning set.

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Developing a regional agenda - the 'Worklessness' learning set

A learning set was identified with the aim of developing a shared infrastructure to tackle 'worklessness', with a particular focus on the impact of Welfare Reform on families. This was taken forward on a multi-authority basis. The cross-border dimension was reflected in the objectives to investigate standardised data and associated outcomes between the local authorities, and to inform a regional agenda and development plan.

The feedback from the stakeholder interviews and action plans shows that each of the three worklessness learning sets held to date has resulted in action points, and a regional action plan has been drawn-up. The experience was thought by one stakeholder to have "*influenced the way that managers reflect on practice",* and to have considerably strengthened existing levels of collaboration.

The phasing of learning sets has also been an important consideration. In some regions it proved more successful to concentrate on a smaller number of core themes initially, and to move onto more 'specialist' learning sets once these were fully embedded. Conversely, other consortia reported having struggled to roll-out a large number of learning sets in parallel, with a high demand on managers' and practitioners' time. In some areas, consortia have run learning sets on a time-limited basis. This was thought to have been a more efficient use of time, where activities were designed to correspond with a particular stage in the rollout of Families First. For example, in one area, the Commissioning learning set was one of the first to be established, but has since been wound-down, now that the actions are complete.

The multi-authority approach has required that different local interests and expectations are effectively managed, and that different perspectives are navigated. A number of consortia have opted to make use of external consultants as facilitators to help address these issues. The following example describes how this is structured in Mid- and West Wales.

Externally facilitated approach

A consortium of local authorities has pooled funding to create a joint secretariat, and to procure an external facilitator. These steps were considered to have added credibility to the learning set, and to have put each authority on a very "equitable" footing. Each learning set follows a clear structure, with an initial presentation outlining the issue to be addressed and any cross-border dimensions, followed by a series of action learning activities to explore the issues in greater depth, and the agreement of follow-up tasks. The model has been applied to a range of Families First themes, including JAFF and TAF.

A number of more specific learning points have emerged from the evaluation, to help explain the variable progress with learning. These include the following:

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Table 8.2: Success factors and enablers for learning set implementation

Success factors
▪ Keeping the number and focus of learning sets manageable, so that there is a coherent and realistic programme of activities, and local teams are not over-stretched. ▪ Ensuring consistent membership of learning sets within a multi-authority consortium, to maintain their coherence and maximise the transfer of learning between them. ▪ Adopting a 'solutions-focused' approach, with clear ownership of action points arising. ▪ Setting ground rules in terms of conduct and expectations of participants, so that views can be exchanged openly and freely within a supportive environment. ▪ Being clear about the phasing and timetable, so that progress can be monitored. ▪ Deciding which learning sets should be time limited, and which should be continued on a rolling basis, so that expertise is not spread too thinly.
Enablers
▪ Investing in shared infrastructure – for example pooling funding to cover the costs of a regional Families First consortium coordinator, to embed multi-authority working. ▪ Developing protocols and action plans to underpin learning sets and to ensure that the expectations of the participants are clear. ▪ Drawing upon external expertise, e.g. for facilitation or training, so that the learning sets add real value and build upon the knowledge that is already present at a local level.

8.2.1 Overcoming challenges to effective implementation

Whilst good progress has generally been made with the learning sets in relation to JAFF, TAF, Strategic Commissioning and Workforce issues, those with a more 'specialist' focus such as Disability, Parenting and Mental Health have often proven more challenging to implement. Two particular issues were reported in this respect. The first is that a wide range of specialist forums and working groups already exist at a local (and national) level. This has resulted in some nervousness about duplicating work that is already underway, and agencies have therefore been less willing to send representatives to a new forum for Families First.

The second challenge has been to source the appropriate level of specialist expertise to give these learning sets real impetus. For example, one local authority area planned to oversee a 'Disability' multi-regional learning set with the aim of shifting towards multi-authority commissioning, but local authorities struggled due to *"…a lack of knowledge and insufficient multi-agency representation*". Similarly, a Family Counselling and Infant Mental Health multi-authority learning set was reported not to have gone ahead due to difficulties in recruiting appropriate health partners. Elsewhere, it would seem that these difficulties have been overcome to some extent by widening the membership to include stronger Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) representation. This was cited as a success factor in one area for raising the profile of the Parenting learning set.

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In one pioneer area the sheer number and complexity of the multi-authority learning sets has been one of the main challenges. The Commissioning, Performance Management, JAFF and TAF and Parenting learning sets have each been attended by different stakeholders, and along with some inevitable turnover of individuals over time, the consortium has needed to continually review and prioritise the set of work streams to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

The legacy of the Pioneer phase has presented both challenges and opportunities. During the early stages, the differences between Pioneer and non-Pioneer areas were found to be very pronounced, which made it difficult to adopt a coherent 'regional' approach. The multi-authority working was widely considered to have achieved a 'levelling' effect over time, with these differences now being less evident.

8.3 Emerging impacts and outcomes

The evaluation aims to establish whether learning sets have contributed towards local and regional systems change and service transformation in the context of Families First.

The evidence is mixed at this stage in the programme. Local stakeholders within areas where multi-agency learning sets are now well established were generally very positive about their contribution, and cited a wide range of examples where learning sets have supported exchanges of good practice and smoothed the implementation of JAFF and TAF. This work includes the development of 'soft' infrastructure such as new networks and training for staff. These benefits have not been universally realised at this stage of the evaluation, however, and in some areas the learning sets are not being prioritised. There is also some scepticism about the value of having separate multi-authority forums for Families First, with some stakeholders considering that any regional arrangements should be part of a wider 'family support' agenda.

The evidence from the evaluation suggests that learning sets have been less successful in developing 'harder' service infrastructure on a multi-authority basis as an outcome of sharing learning, and that some consortia had unrealistic expectations. In two well established multi-authority learning sets it was reported that there has been an acknowledgement that each local authority TAF is unique, and that a bespoke needs assessment is still needed at a local level alongside any common JAFF protocols. This is a developing agenda, however, and there is still potential for new structures to emerge during the remainder of the programme.

With regard to attributing changes to the programme, local stakeholders underlined the significance of existing forms of collaboration between local authorities through pre-existing mechanisms. This has included local Children and Young People's Partnerships and the work of the regional family support coordinators groups. The multi-authority learning sets have embedded knowledge sharing alongside, and sometimes integrally, to these other structures.

Notwithstanding the above, a number of more specific benefits can be identified from the learning sets, which are described below.

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8.3.1 Principal benefits of the learning sets to date

One of the most consistently reported benefits of learning sets has been to *help local authorities benchmark their progress* with implementing Families First, and to ensure greater consistency in knowledge and understanding of the programme across Wales. The learning sets have provided a valuable 'checking mechanism' in this respect. In particular, the regional basis of the consortia has helped to tackle issues with a cross-boundary dimension and to ensure that systems and processes are joined-up between authorities. In the case of the Northern Consortium, this has been an integral part of the development process for JAFF and TAF, which has aspired towards having a strong multi-authority dimension from the outset (the JAFF 'passport'). Elsewhere, the set of multi-authority sessions on Results-Based Accountability (RBA) were considered to have brought about a real step change in understanding outcomes within the group.

Several of the consortia also reported benefits in terms of feeding back to *influence professional practice and standards* at a local / regional level. This was achieved where the learning sets had a focus on the process of sharing knowledge, in addition to implementing systems and processes, and where practitioners have also been able to participate directly. For example:

- The JAFF / TAF multi-authority learning set overseen by one local authority has provided an opportunity to share experiences of completing JAFF assessments; to problem-solve, and to explore what constitutes a 'good assessment'. This was thought to have been invaluable for strengthening professional practice. It has resulted in the wider sharing of JAFF and TAF tools and protocols with other authorities in the region.
- Elsewhere, a learning set on Parenting Support overseen by a local authority on behalf of a Consortium received very positive feedback from a number of local authorities. It provided a forum for pooling expertise in relation to evidence-based parenting programmes, and several of the local authorities identified having reviewed their own suite of local programmes as a result.
- One local stakeholder commented on how a learning set focused on cultural change stimulated "…thinking differently and delivering creatively". Again, it was the forum provided by the learning set that allowed practitioners the time and space to reflect upon their professional roles, and to identify areas for improvement. Few equivalent forums were thought to have offered this opportunity.

There were also individual, more anecdotal, examples of where learning sets have been used to *exert leverage over partner organisations to support the programme*. For example, a well-established multi-authority learning set reportedly helped to promote the involvement of adult services in family assessment, by providing a regular forum to challenge their existing levels of involvement, and to call for action. It was also used to inform the development of JAFF/TAF multi-agency panels and to define their membership.

8.4 Opportunities for future development

Looking ahead to the remaining programme period for Families First, a number of priority areas are identifiable from the evaluation to date. These include the following

- **Widening access to tools and models for managing learning sets** – some local authorities noted that it would be useful to share approaches that have worked well in

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other areas. This includes a level of demand for the model developed by The Institute of Policy Care at Oxford Brookes University.

- **Offering further strategic direction at a national level** – although local authorities acknowledged the existence of national guidance, there remains some demand for further clarification about the expectations for learning sets during 2013-14. The Evaluation Team will continue to work with local authorities to establish what areas of clarification are required, and to share the experiences of those local authorities demonstrating particular success in this area.
- **Widening channels of communication** – local authorities have started to look beyond regional arrangements and would like to have greater opportunities to share learning on relevant themes with other local areas that provide a closer match (e.g. online). This will be facilitated by the MLE which has been developed as part of the evaluation.
- **Sharing learning on outcomes measurement and distance travelled** – has emerged as a common area of interest across the programme and several of the consortia are examining the potential of delivering multi-authority learning sets on these themes.
- **Re-activating the learning from the Pioneer areas** – a number of former Pioneer authorities have expressed an intention to revisit and make the work of the Phase 1 and 2 learning sets more widely available.

8.5 Summary

Most local authorities are involved in learning sets focused on JAFF and TAF development, with workforce development also featuring prominently. As learning sets have evolved the focus on JAFF and TAF development has continued and topics have become more diverse, spanning disabilities, parenting and cultural change for example.

Membership of multi-authority learning sets appears to have remained constant since the outset of the programme and are organised on a regional basis. Typically learning sets do not have a strong multi-agency profile although there are examples of wider agency involvement which has helped to bring in specialist expertise and give impetus to learning.

It has been reported that learning sets have provided time and space for practitioners to share knowledge and reflect on their practice.

Learning was most effective where there has been a strategic approach, timetable and clear objectives. The main challenges involved embedding learning within wider learning structures, especially around disability and commissioning, and engaging wider sector expertise in learning sets focused on improving practise in specialist areas. Later stages of the evaluation will explore the types of learning activities that are perceived as most useful, and how learning has been applied.

The first national learning set was held in January 2013. This focused on opportunities to share learning about the experience of developing and embedding JAF and TAFF and was attended by local authorities and a range of wider organisations. Seventy per cent of participants who responded to the event feedback survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the event.

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In terms of outcomes and impacts there is evidence of learning sets leading to new partnership-based working infrastructure initiatives to support improvements to services such as networks and staff training. There is limited evidence of multi-agency learning leading to greater collaboration on a regional basis regarding service delivery. Later stages of the evaluation will explore the factors enabling and inhibiting authorities' involvement in multi-authority learning sets, as well as explore the nature and benefits of multi-authority learning sets that are taking place.

Given the highly individualised approach that local authorities have taken to implementing Families First, learning sets are viewed as being beneficial as a means to benchmark progress, support the cross-fertilisation of ideas and find ways to handle cross-border issues.

8.6 Key areas for investigation

Subsequent evaluation activity will be focused on supporting learning and measuring progress against the agreed process change framework performance measures for learning.

Area for investigation	Method
Provide support to local authorities that have not firmly established their involvement in multi-authority learning lets.	This will be explored through on-going telephone contact and webinar.
Facilitate the use of the Managed Learning Environment by local authorities, including as a mechanism for sharing tools.	Managed through on-going running and use of the Managed Learning Environment.
Assess the investment being made in learning and the quality of plans for using learning to improve service delivery and quality.	This will be captured through document review of local authority progress reports and through the process change performance measures.
Assess outputs of learning and review how well the learning is applied to the running of Families First thereafter.	To be captured through future stakeholder survey, case studies and stakeholder interviews.
Assess which approaches have been most effective in supporting families.	This will be explored using the Family Outcomes Tool and Process Change Performance Measures Framework, and in-depth case studies with families.

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