

Children, Young People and Learning Scrutiny Committee

Early Intervention Policy Review

Expert Jury Day Notes

Present: Cllrs Stewart, Williams, Morrissey, MacKnight, T Martin, Bell, Scanlon and Rose Elliott & Suzanne Duncan Morris (Co-opted Members).

Ros Watt – Parent Partnership Service (PPS) Coordinator

Q1 – The Sunderland response to early intervention requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response, where appropriate, what are the benefits to this form of approach?

The multi-agency approach reduces the repetition for families in that they only have to inform of their circumstances once via the CAF form. Also the Team around the family/child (TAF/C) once initiated moves very quickly in response.

The locality teams that are now based within the local area is an incredible move forward. It means that families have services on their doorsteps and has created a one-stop shop for families.

It was slow in getting started and to get used to the new system but the increase in quality is really visible now with good quality outcomes for families.

There is also an increased number of health representatives attending the TAF/C meetings.

Q2 – Intervention strategies can help families and individuals enormously but what barriers might exist to prevent access to support?

One of the main barriers is communication. A lot of families access my services through a variety of routes. Having worked for the LA for 11 years it is still possible for me to walk into schools and be unknown.

Another major barrier for SEN parents is around transport. A number of early intervention programmes that are available including training courses are held at Columbia Grange and getting there can be problematic for low income families with limited resources.

Again in relation to communication a lot of families are unaware that services are available or even exist, there needs to be better signposting to the support and help that is available.

Q3 – How can the outcomes and impacts of early intervention strategies be measured effectively with benefits often only truly identified/realised years later?

This is difficult but we can measure outcomes by looking at the end of the support and what the family think of this support. Look at their starting point and also at where they are now by monitoring responses along the way.

Additional Questions

How do families access your service – Is the LA the first port of call?

Yes – hopefully by accessing the call centre a person can be signposted through to the service. Also routes in via website, GPs, Schools and Libraries. It is ultimately about conflict resolution, mediation and getting parents on side.

One option would be to inform elected members of the service and this could be added to the signposting routes available.

There are still lots of work to be done with families, as some are more able to cope with the situation than others. It is important to remember that parents have a different viewpoint on their own child than others. Some parents are still grieving for the child they do not have as against the child they have.

How effective is the sharing of SEN information between schools, FE colleges etc?

It is better than it used to be and the transition to adult services is continuing to develop. Colleges are much better at diagnosis of dyslexia than schools generally.

Do you have a substitute if you are unable to attend a CAF meeting?

No. There is only RW. There is an issue of suitable cover for this role in the LA.

The role that RW undertakes is about offering an informed choice for families in a challenging situation. It is true that some families need direction and parents are often reluctant to look at the options available to them to make that informed choice.

Members thanked Ros for her attendance and providing some interesting points as part of the evidence gathering process.

Rachel Putz – Locality Operation Manager (Coalfields)

Q1- The Sunderland response to early intervention requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response, where appropriate, what are the benefits to this form of approach?

One of the main advantages is that bringing the various practitioners together with all their knowledge and skills can produce a better outcome for families. In the past families would be working with only one professional and this could mean that a number of associated issues had the potential to be overlooked.

Families could also feel like they are pushed around from one service to the next. This allows for a more co-ordinated and organised approach and provides a good experience for the family. It will also lead to quicker resolutions for families involved.

Q2 – Intervention strategies can help families and individuals enormously but what barriers might exist to prevent access to support?

There are 2 key aspects to this that revolve around the family perception and the professional point of view respectively.

Families have a general sense of fear of engagement arising from the fear that their children will be taken away from them. It is important to build trust and relationships and this can be difficult too.

There is also a lack of confidence from families making those initial steps into accessing services/activities, even just entering the building can be a huge barrier.

There is also a dislike to the message of professionals around how children are best looked after, sometimes messages can be perceived as nosy or obtrusive.

Professionals need the referral and assessment process to be as simple as possible. The CAF process has the ability to bring agencies together to work for the same outcomes. A lot more CAF forms are coming through the system now, but it is still the early days of the process.

There are also cultural changes that need to happen. Some staff are still new to this way of working and it is taking time to see the benefits of working in different ways. Integrated working can mean that some professionals are working out of their own comfort zone which has merits and disadvantages.

There are also issues around confidentiality as the CAF process requires a greater sharing of knowledge and information and everyone needs to be mindful of the confidential nature of such information.

Q3 – How can the outcomes and impacts of early intervention strategies be measured effectively with benefits often only truly identified/realised years later?

Interventions can be measured on an individual level from the start point through to the end of support via a strength and difficulty questionnaire.

There is also the outcomes star which gauges family perceptions on how far they have travelled.

It is harder to measure impact on a larger scale. There are global outcome measures like the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile where increased results can illustrate a general increase in education status. There are also educational attainment measures at KS2 and KS4 however it is unsure how long these will remain in light of the Dame Tickell review.

Other global indicators around obesity rates, teenage pregnancy rates can show impacts of a wide range of strategies on a global or specific level.

Additional Questions

It was reported that the Government was doubling the amount of free child care places for disadvantaged children under 2yo, this would relate to 15 hrs per week for those eligible under set criteria.

How will you look to stop the potential abuse of additional child care hours by parents who simply see it as an opportunity to offload their children?

Currently looking at how to address the delivery of the service from April to stop abuse of the system, moving to a locality process for the allocation of child care rather than the current system of central control will help.

Why are Gentoo represented on the CAF panel meetings?

Gentoo are present because of their good local knowledge of estates and families it adds to the context and wider picture when dealing with family issues.

What happens if a young person or family does not want to engage with the CAF process?

It is true that the process is purely voluntary and that is why the development of relationships is so important to ensure that families and young people engage fully.

What is the voluntary sector role in early intervention?

The TAF/C involves all agencies and it is the hope that such organisations and agencies would be involved.

It was also noted that the Operational Manager does not attend CAF panel meetings. Health partners were reported as good attendees at such meetings and have agreed to attend all meetings where a health visitor is involved.

Members thanked RP for her attendance and found the information provided very useful.

Louise Hill – Head of Service for Youth Offending

Q1 – The Sunderland response to early intervention requires a coordinated multi-agency response, where appropriate, what are the benefits to this form of approach?

The service works closely with the police, magistrates and other agencies to identify young people at risk of offending and look to keep these at risk young people out of the youth offending system.

There are a number of initiatives that help young people and use a multi-agency approach including Wear Kids, Tackle it and Positive Futures.

The benefits for Sunderland are long term in nature in that the service is looking to prevent young people from becoming hardened criminals.

It was noted that the prevention element was to be relocated to the locality teams (Wear Kids element) to further strengthen the locality response.

Q2 – Intervention strategies can help families and individuals enormously but what barriers might exist to prevent access to support?

Funding is an issue with so many projects currently funded through the LA and with spending cuts to LA's there are real pressures on sustaining these projects.

Another barrier is around the motivation of young people and their parents, there are often inter-generational issues that create barriers to intervention. As well as the often chaotic circumstances that young people and families live in.

The location of services and transport is also an issue and ties in with the motivation aspect already mentioned.

Q3 – How can outcomes and impacts of early intervention strategies be measured effectively with benefits often only truly identified/realised years later?

There are national targets for the reduction of re-offending in young people and Sunderland performs well in this area. There are also measures around the use of custody and the long terms impacts for young people. There are also good success rates in young people accessing Education, Employment or Training.

The service also monitors those young people entering the criminal justice system for the first time.

There are also a number of softer measures that can be used including:

- Young Achievers Award
- Community Payback Scheme

- Restorative Justice – where young people meet the victims of their crimes; this also includes feedback from the victims too
- Fear of crime survey.

Additional Questions

It is hoped that the advent of locality working will help to enhance engagement with those young people in the care system.

It was acknowledged that the XL Youth Villages had been a success in keeping young people out of trouble.

Important that young people get the message that prison is not a holiday camp and it was noted that some young people do get institutionalised.

Members queried if there were any areas that had particularly success compared to others and LH was to look into this and report back to the committee.

In relation to the issues of funding are there any particular organisations that are at risk due to funding concerns?

The Youth Justice Board Grant has not been finalised at present and will need to look at what is classed as statutory provision and what is not. There will also be a need to look at the benefits of services and projects and the whole picture for Sunderland.

Members thanked LH for her involvement in the process.

Susan Henderson – Every Learner Matters (ELM) Manager (Red House Academy)

The ELM Manager is in charge of a unit attached to Red House Academy that caters for anyone who is excluded from school. The unit is also used for the phased return of non-attendees back into the main school and helps councils those young people with social or emotional difficulties within the school.

The unit is also used for bullying and conflict resolution, as well as having drop-in sessions to raise awareness around issues such as sexual health, drug, alcohol and mental health.

There are a maximum of 12 pupils in unit at one time with 2 staff members who also attend meetings and CAF panels.

The ELM Group monitors a variety of young people within the school.

It was noted that the unit was never used just as a 'sin bin' and that there were rules and procedures within the school for access to the unit.

It was reported that success was measured by the numbers of students who had received no call outs or internal exclusion and currently the figures were 95% Year 7, 94% Year 8 and 97% Year 9.

SH outlined the process for intervention used by the Academy. It was noted that the first step would be to set up a meeting with parents and discuss any concerns. A target report would be produced and if there was no improvement then there would be a move to the Bridge Centre for 3 days. The Academy uses the CAF process a lot and this again is discussed with the parents.

What happens in the Bridge Centre when a pupil is placed there?

The first ½ hour is used for silent reading and this acts as a calming strategy. All course work completed in main school is also carried out in the unit, there is also group and socio-economic work undertaken in the centre.

There is a proper teacher training area and work is done in small groups by year and ability.

It was noted that every child submitted to the Bridge Centre was also subject to a CAF referral with any immediate concerns being flagged with Children's Services.

The impact of intervention strategies on the exclusion rates in the school on a ½ termly basis. The school also conducts evaluations on young people at the beginning of an intervention strategy and at the end to assess outcomes and success. It was noted that young people did not like to have their break and lunchtimes away from their friends.

Was there any peer pressure on young people who were attending the unit?

SH commented that the unit had been in place for 10 years and school culture was very accustomed to its use and practice. Parents view was mixed with some being very positive and others negative; however there have never been any parents who have refused the use of the unit with their child.

It was also noted that when identifying needs for young people they are generally more receptive if services are provided or offered in the school setting. It is a more comfortable environment for the majority of young people.

Members thanked SH for her informative answers to the various questions and her involvement in the process.

Lynne Goldsmith – Service Manager (Child and Family Support Service)

Q1 – The Sunderland response to early intervention requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response, where appropriate, what are the benefits to this form of approach?

It was noted that the Safeguarding Service and Early Intervention had been the subject of a peer review very recently.

The review was critical of the LA's partnership arrangements with other agencies. The LA takes too much responsibility and it should be that other agencies share this responsibility in the delivery of services. It will be important in the future to look at how we commission services both differently and smarter.

The multi-agency approach is better for families, better parity to a wider range of services. It is important that we get all partners to engage with the TAF/C.

Q2 – Intervention strategies can help families and individuals enormously but what barriers might exist to prevent access to support?

LA's have seen a depletion of a lot of resources and operating in a more for less situation. It is important to work smarter with the reduced resources at our disposal.

The city has problems with drug, alcohol and domestic violence and it will be how we use our resources differently to tackle these issues and the locality working is one such way.

Q3 – How can the outcomes and impacts of early intervention strategies be measured effectively with benefits often only truly identified/realised years later?

Yes – often the benefits are not seen for many years and there are other issues to factor in, it is a complex situation.

Additional Questions

Is it simply a postcode lottery in relation to funding grants?

It is about how we target particular areas as well as looking at what resources we have in those areas. It may be a case of looking at different ways of commissioning possibly even bespoke commissioning to address a particular need of an area or family within an area.

What are your experiences of the CAF process?

Certain services are 'opting out' of the TAF/C Panel meetings as some are still of the mindset that this is additional to their current sphere of work. It should be noted that CAF panels are well attended.

The CAF needs a re-launch in Sunderland to fully engage with partners around the process.

The recent peer review had highlighted Telford and Wrekin as good areas of practice in this field.

There was also concern over the filling of the Chairing role for the various TAF/C panels.

There are issues around capacity for the CAF panels and TAF/C groups.

Members would be interested to see a full breakdown on attendance at CAF panel meetings and TAF/C meetings to gauge this issue further.

Members thanked LG for attending the jury day and found her contribution most helpful.

Sandra Mitchell – Head of Early Intervention and locality Services

Q1 – The Sunderland response to early intervention requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response, where appropriate, what are the benefits to this form of approach?

From the child and family perspective the multi-agency response delivers a better outcome. No problem or issue exists in isolation and tackling a range of issues at the same time has benefits.

It is also a more effective use of agency resources leading to quicker and better outcomes and provides an opportunity to bring in other agencies.

Q2 – Intervention strategies can help families and individuals enormously but what barriers might exist to prevent access to support?

Being a voluntary process has positive and negative points. There can often be a difference of opinion between the professional and the family who do not perceive the problem in the same way or even think they have a problem at all.

There is also still a lack of awareness from agencies around the process which can lead to an inappropriate use of the threshold for CAF's.

Some agencies also question what their involvement would be and have capacity concerns.

Q3 – How can the outcomes and impacts of early intervention strategies be measured effectively with benefits often only truly identified/realised years later?

There is a lot of CAF data and the outcomes star plots progress from a child/family perspective, this is not perfect but does allow the evidencing of the impact of interventions. This measure is ultimately more around perspective and opinion of those at the centre of the work.

Professionals may have a different view on this.

There has also been a lot of research conducted in the USA around the benefits of early intervention. No where near as much research in this country, which is an issue.

Additional Questions

Is the CAF process to be re-launched?

Yes looking to have a re-launch of the CAF in January 2012 as part of raising awareness on the thresholds. Important to remind people about the types and sorts of support available and what social care is all about.

It was also noted that local voluntary agencies appeared to be unaware of the changes and such groups had the potential to be good contacts based on their knowledge and work in the areas. This could be addressed during the re-launch.

SM reported that monitoring of those agencies submitting CAFs highlighted there was a level of awareness.

How do we ensure parity across the CAF process?

It is recognised that individual CAF panels could arrive at different decisions. There is a monitoring process for TAF/C through the regular review of the meetings that take place. There is also moderation of all decisions through putting CAF forms to different panels to test the process.

Members also requested further detailed data (approx. 6 months work) on CAFs including who attends and attendance rates.

Is there buy-in on this process from outside agencies?

There are a number of agencies including Gentoo / Local Churches etc who contribute but there are also capacity issues and issues around the independence of the Chair.

Did the Peer Review bring any issues forward?

Yes a number of issues have been highlighted following the peer review including:

- Concerns around capacity to sustain the current CAF system;
- Capacity of partners – not taking their full part;
- Thresholds are unknown and too numerous.

How long is a case in the system if no decision is reached?

We would look to submit this back to the CAF panel at the very next meeting (week later).

Are there any targets in relation to this?

Yes we look to have 100% of referrals read by the panel in the first week of submission and that are referred back are read again in the second week.

Members requested further information and stats on this particular aspect.

Members thanked SM for her attendance at the meeting and found her information extremely useful in the policy review work of the committee.