

Troubled Families

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper describes the work the LGA has been undertaking to shape the way the public sector works to help troubled families, and sets out the current state of play between the government, the LGA and councils on the implementation of the Prime Minister's commitment to help troubled families.

Recommendation

That the Executive:

1. note the leadership councils are showing in addressing the troubled families issue and the results they have been achieving;
2. endorse the proposed LGA approach to supporting councils working on this issue in future, and to working with the government's new Troubled Families Unit.

Action

Officers to proceed in line with the Executive's direction.

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Troubled Families

Background

1. Work with troubled families has been rising up the agenda for councils and the government. Four-fifths of social services authorities are operating Family Intervention Programmes, while 28 councils also established community budgets for troubled families in the autumn of 2010 and a further 70-odd councils committed to run community budgets for troubled families from next financial year, following the invitation issued by the Deputy Prime Minister at last July's LGA conference. The Prime Minister made work with troubled families a priority in 2010.
2. In the wake of last summer's civil disorder, a consensus rapidly emerged that this emphasis on turning round the lives of troubled families was the correct response to an urgent social problem. Following an internal government review, the Prime Minister set up a new Troubled Families Unit, based in CLG, in November. It has been tasked with implementing a commitment to turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families by 2015. The Unit will work with councils, and its Director-General, Louise Casey, has written – echoing language used earlier by the LGA Chairman - that the new unit will “maintain and wherever possible build upon the momentum already gained¹”.
3. In December, it was announced that the new Unit will have a £448 million budget over the next three years, put together with contributions from six Whitehall departments². This money will be spent in three main ways:
 - 3.1. paying - at £100,000 a year – for councils to employ new “coordinators” or “troubleshooters” in each area to lead troubled families work;
 - 3.2. funding councils at the rate of £20,000 between now and the start of the next financial year to undertake preparatory work, identifying the troubled families in their areas and making action plans;
 - 3.3. paying 40% of the estimated cost of intervention with the troubled families in each area, the majority of this money to be paid as results payments in return for outcomes delivered.
4. Councils which wish to participate in this programme will be expected by the end of March this year to:
 - 4.1. employ a “troubleshooter”/“coordinator”;

¹ Letter to council chief executives of 17 November.

² CLG, Home Office, DfE, Ministry of Justice, DWP and DH.

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- 4.2. individually identify all the troubled families in their areas they intend to work with;
 - 4.3. draw up a plan for bringing service together around the families;
 - 4.4. mobilise the estimated 60% of the funding needed from their own and local partners' resources.
5. Councils have been sent the national Unit's estimate of the number of troubled families in their area for them to compare with their own, as well as figures for their allocations of funding for hiring coordinators and doing preparatory work in the current financial year. Details of how the bulk of the central funding will be distributed are yet to be worked up and announced, although the outcomes which the government is willing to fund are likely to include reductions in crime and truancy, and increases in employment, among family members.

Councils and the new national initiative

6. There is no doubt that the Prime Minister's initiative, with its new central Unit, represents a return to a centralised delivery model – the government's preferred word is "implementation" - that is an exception from the government's overall approach to localism. That said, the vast majority of councils were committed to work helping troubled families in any case and making good progress. The social, political and economic case for investing in preventive action to reduce the costs of troubled families to the taxpayer is extremely strong and commands widespread support among councils.
7. The challenge for the sector is to ensure that the "momentum already gained" is not lost while the government's unit develops its operating model, and that we quickly evolve a way of working with the Unit that does not replicate the flaws of some past central initiatives.
8. LGA elected members and officers have held very positive meetings with the Director-General and other staff of the new unit. It is common ground that councils should play the lead role in bringing services together locally, and that the Troubled Families Unit has a crucial role to play in encouraging Whitehall and its agencies to work with the grain of that. The unit has so far shown no appetite to impose solutions or operating models on councils, and we can expect to build on the models councils have been developing locally with partners through community budgets and family intervention programmes. We will continue to pursue conversations with the CLG unit about exactly how the proposed payment-by-results funding should operate.
9. Louise Casey will be making a presentation at the Councillors' Forum which precedes this Executive meeting.

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LGA support for councils

10. The LGA has been supporting the 100 councils which were operating or planning to operate community budgets for troubled families, convening learning events and providing online resources. Through the work of Baroness Hanham's group, LGA members and officers also helped to develop resources for councils working with troubled families on issues such as data sharing with other public sector bodies (work led by Greater Manchester, Leicestershire and Bradford), developing common assessment frameworks (work led by Essex) and developing the financial analysis needed to support investment in prevention (work led by Manchester and Birmingham). This material is available on the LGA website. We have also worked with DWP and London Councils to ensure that local authorities have the maximum influence over the European Social Fund money that is being directed to work with troubled families, and have arranged for regional events to evaluate the process of commissioning that provision.
11. We recommend to the Executive that we should continue supporting councils working on troubled families in the new policy setting. This support will include continuing facilitating a learning network but we will also review our wider support offer for work with families and children with the aim of ensuring resources can be made available to councils that need and want it.
12. Political leadership, both locally and nationally, will be crucial to the success of this programme and we recommend that the LGA seeks to develop arrangements for regular communication with Ministers on this issue.