

Have you got what it takes?

Supporting troubled families



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Important facts

The Troubled Families Programme is a catalyst for local services to change the way they support families with multiple problems.

The programme advocates a new way of working: it incentivises services to come together, working with and understanding the needs of the whole family instead of constantly reacting to their individual problems – and to co-ordinate support accordingly.

The original programme ran from 2012-2015 and successfully helped over 116,000 families. The programme has now been expanded, and aims to support up to a further 400,000 families with multiple, high-cost problems by 2020.

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

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

Background

The original Troubled Families Programme launched in 2012 and aimed to turn around the lives of nearly 120,000 troubled families across England by May 2015. Families in the original programme were specifically affected by worklessness, youth crime, anti-social behaviour and poor school attendance, but they also had many other problems – and therefore many other reasons for services to be in contact with them.

Before the programme, troubled families were estimated to cost the tax payer £9bn per year (around £75,000 per family). £8bn of this was simply reacting to their problems, for example through constant police call-outs. Families could often have numerous individual services working on their many problems (such as police, social services, educational welfare, drugs workers, domestic violence support, the youth offending service, probation and others). According to analysis carried out by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2014; Understanding Troubled Families, troubled families had on average 9 serious problems before the programme – and had an average of five police callouts to their homes in just a six month period. This is an expensive, reactive way of working, and it is often ineffective in terms of achieving any significant, lasting change. Many services reported second and third generations of the same families having the same problems.

The Troubled Families Programme encourages services to work together, understand each family better, and co-ordinate their support. By May 2015, local authorities reported that over 116,000 families had been ‘turned around’. Specifically, this meant reduced youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and improved school attendance. Or, as in over 18,000 of those families, it meant an adult had moved off out-of-work benefits and into continuous employment.

The new, expanded Troubled Families Programme builds on the success of the original programme, with a continued focus on service transformation. The new criteria mean that it also reaches out to families with younger children, and those who have a broader range of problems, including domestic violence and health issues. As with the original programme, there is an emphasis on the need to offer practical help, to challenge behaviour when necessary and to focus on working with the families to achieve specific, agreed outcomes. Crucially though, it is the consideration of the family as a whole, rather than the problems of each individual within it, which is encouraged as a more effective way to tackle those problems.

More information

What role will police and crime commissioners (PCCs) play in relation to the Troubled Families Programme?

Services cannot afford to simply circle troubled families, reacting only when problems get serious, and often not resolving problems in the long run. The success of the programme relies on partners from the local authority, health, schools, housing and the police working closely together to change their approach to tackling the problems of troubled families – and PCCs should have a leading role in that discussion. Success requires local leadership, and means partners sharing information on families who have multiple problems – and even contributing resources (whether direct funding or in kind by seconding staff) to develop integrated services that can understand and get to the root causes of family problems.

Why is this a policing issue?

Troubled families can place an enormous burden on local services. For the police, this might mean repeated call-outs for domestic violence or antisocial behaviour. And more generally, the police will have increased contact with troubled families because they are more likely to be either victims or perpetrators of crime. The police can and do play a vital role in understanding and tackling the reasons for this demand on their time. They are often the first to have contact with families who have complex multiple problems, so they are well-placed to help identify families who are costing the most to the public purse, and would benefit most from the support of the programme. And, of course, they are also a part of that support,

providing crucial expertise as part of a whole family, co-ordinated multi-agency response.

How do the police contribute?

In a practical sense, as well as bringing their own specialist expertise to supporting troubled families, the police also provide data which is critical to the programme. This helps to both identify families that are in most need of support, and to monitor how effective that support has been.

The police can also strongly influence the direction of the programme itself locally. Under the Troubled Families Programme, there is a Troubled Families Co-ordinator (TFC) in each of the 150 upper-tier local authorities currently delivering the programme. The TFC pulls together local partnerships (of the police, health, schools and so on) to help identify families of common concern, to plan and deliver services, and to formulate the local 'Troubled Families Outcomes Plan'. This plan outlines the goals a local area aims to achieve with families, which should be linked to the wider strategic aims of local services. Working closely with their Troubled Families Co-ordinator and the wider local partnership, the police can therefore influence the development of wider local services in a way that may benefit them (ultimately by reducing reactive demand on police time), and the wider community.

Other important facts

Funding is made available to all upper-tier local authorities delivering the programme. This includes three types of funding:

- An annual Service Transformation Grant
- Attachment fees for each family a local authority agrees to support (£1,000 per family)
- Results payments when the local authority claims a result with a family (£800 per family).