

Have you got what it takes?

Tackling troubled families

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Important facts

The Troubled Families Programme is responsible for turning around the lives of 120,000 troubled families before the next general election.

A troubled family is one that has serious problems and causes serious problems, such as children not in school and the family causing crime and antisocial behaviour.

Troubled families cost the taxpayer £9 billion a year, of which £8 billion is spent just on reacting to their needs and the problems they cause, such as constant police call-outs. £2.57 billion a year goes on crime and justice alone.

Chief Constable Peter Fahy was quoted last year as saying that one family in his area, which had been involved in a series of incidents, had cost his force £50,000 over 12 months. He said: "You could say that it would have been cheaper if we'd had a police officer living with them."

When we talk about 'turning a life around' we mean:

- **parents on the road to work;**
- **children going to school;**
- **reductions in crime and antisocial behaviour; and**
- **lower costs for the state.**

Background

Previous research identified around 120,000 families who suffer from multiple disadvantages related to poverty, lack of basic skills and ill health. While these problems alone do not mean that it is a 'problem family' or that there is an inability to care for children, a family that has many of these disadvantages may struggle to cope and may display problems such as unemployment, crime and anti-social behaviour, children not going to school and a number of other problems such as domestic violence, problems with parenting, debt, drug and alcohol problems.

Families often have many services (such as police, social services, educational welfare, drugs workers, youth offending service, probation and others) working on their many problems.

However, the money being spent does not seem to be resulting in any significant lasting change. Many services report second and third generations of the same families having the same problems.

There is evidence about what works to help these families. For example, intensive interventions which have one key worker for the family – such as family intervention projects (FIPs) – have been shown to be effective for the most troubled families.

One key worker can work intensively with the family, provide practical help on day-to-day matters (such as how to get children up for school and keep them clean), and get to the bottom of the problems facing family members. They also co-ordinate support from other agencies involved with the family, with the overriding aim of creating a lasting change.

Not all families will need a place in a family intervention project, nor is this the only model. However, these kinds of approaches have lessons for the best way to help families – for example, thinking about the family as a whole rather than the problems of a single individual within it. They also emphasise practical help, challenge behaviour when necessary and constantly focus on working with the families to change.

The Troubled Families Programme should act as a spur to drive cultural change in the way that services are delivered. Funding has been made available for a national network of troubled family co-ordinators in 152 local councils to lead this change.

More information

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

PCCs will be an important partner in working to turn around the lives of troubled families. The success of the programme will rely on partners from the local authority, health, schools, housing and the police working closely together to tackle the problems of these families. This will mean partners sharing information on families and contributing resources (whether direct funding or in kind by seconding staff) to develop services that will have a lasting effect on a family. There are good examples around the country of the police playing a central role to help intervene with families who badly need help.

Why should the police be involved in family services?

Troubled families can place an enormous burden on local services, including the police, with repeated call-outs for antisocial behaviour and because of the high levels of crime in these families. As a result, intensive work with these families can have a huge benefit for the police, with evidence from family intervention projects showing marked reductions in offending and antisocial behaviour. The police are often the first to have contact with troubled families and play a vital role in identifying those families that have the most problems and cause the most problems. They also provide support to them as part of a multi-agency response.

How can the police contribute?

Under the Troubled Families Programme, the Department for Communities and Local Government is paying for a troubled-families co-ordinator in every upper-tier local authority. They will be pulling together local partnerships (of the police, health, schools and so on) to identify families and plan and deliver services. We would encourage the police to work closely with their troubled families co-ordinator to develop services locally.

Other important facts

£448 million has been identified from government departments and brought together for this programme, led by Louise Casey CB from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Funding will be made available to all upper-tier local authorities, mainly on a 'payment-by-results' basis. This will be paid as a contribution of up to 40% of the costs of action needed.

The payment-by-results scheme was launched at the end of March and by early summer we expect to have agreements in place with local authorities on the numbers of families they will work with over the three years of the programme.

Funding has also been made available for a troubled families co-ordinator in each (upper-tier) local council. The co-ordinators will operate at a senior level to bring in resources, get a grip on the numbers of troubled families and identify who these families are. They will bring together local partners – police, Jobcentre Plus, health organisations, schools and others – to put a robust plan of action in place and to make sure the right action is being taken at the right time with each family.