Department for Communities and Local Government

Troubled Families Programme

Evaluation Overview Policy Report

December 2017
Department for Communities and Local Government

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The Troubled Families Programme – background

The Troubled Families Programme (2015 – 2020) is working to achieve significant and sustained progress with up to 400,000 families with multiple, high-cost problems by 2020. This is backed by over £900m of central government investment.

This programme, run from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and delivered by all 150 upper tier Local Authorities and their partners, is working with families who have a wide range of problems: worklessness and problem debt, poor school attendance and attainment, mental and physical health problems, crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and abuse and children who are deemed as in need of help.

The programme is geared toward reducing demand and dependency of these complex families on costly reactive public services and delivering better value for the taxpayer. A dedicated key worker considers the problems of a family as a whole – they organise services to grip the family's problems, and work with the family in a persistent and assertive way towards an agreed improvement plan.

About the Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme

The Troubled Families Programme's objectives are not only to provide help and support to families, but also to improve the effectiveness of local services and by doing so, save money for the tax payer. With this in mind, the programme's evaluation measures outcomes for families for up to five years after intervention, records staff experience to measure progress towards service transformation and analyses the cost benefit of the programme's interventions. The evaluation findings are fed back to local authorities to help services develop and improve within the programme's lifetime.

An independent advisory group of leading academics provides external support and scrutiny of the evaluation.

In future, it is the intention to publish six monthly sets of outcomes data so that trends can be monitored as they emerge. Due to differing cycles of matching data amongst dataset owners, however, not all sets of outcomes will be updated each time.

The programme has a duty to report to Parliament annually on the progress of families on the Troubled Families Programme[1].

This overview policy report and evaluation publications cover the latest findings from the evaluation of the current Troubled Families programme. For a short introduction to the evaluation of the first programme and the differences between the current one, please refer to our 2017 Annual Report[2]

The Reports from the National Evaluation

The key reports from the national evaluation of the Troubled Families programme comprise of:

- **Staff Surveys** – the views of Troubled Families Coordinators, keyworkers and Troubled Families Employment Advisers undertaken by Ipsos Mori on behalf of DCLG.

- **Families and Service Transformation** - case studies research based on the work undertaken by Ipsos Mori on behalf of DCLG.

- **Family outcomes – national and local datasets** – quantitative report using national administrative datasets and local data, analysed and written by DCLG. This is based on data from national administrative datasets which are processed by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of DCLG.

Early conclusions from the case studies research and the staff survey

Ipsos Mori conducted case studies research into the effects of the programme on the delivery and configuration of services, staff experiences of the programme and how the programme was received by families themselves.

Ipsos Mori's in-depth interviews and Staff Survey show that:

- The programme is driving service transformation in local authorities; changing structures and processes, strengthening partnership working and promoting 'whole-family' working.

[1] Troubled Families Annual Report 2017 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/611991/Supporting_disadvantaged_families.pdf

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/611991/Supporting_disadvantaged_families.pdf

- Troubled Families Co-ordinators[3] are providing effective leadership and improving multi-agency working.
- Families have appreciated the way family keyworkers took time to understand the family, build relationships and trust.
- There is work to do to improve engagement between Local Authorities and the voluntary and community sector including ensuring that once families exit the programme, they are plugged into the right services locally so that the positive outcomes that they have achieved are sustained.

Early Findings from the quantitative analysis

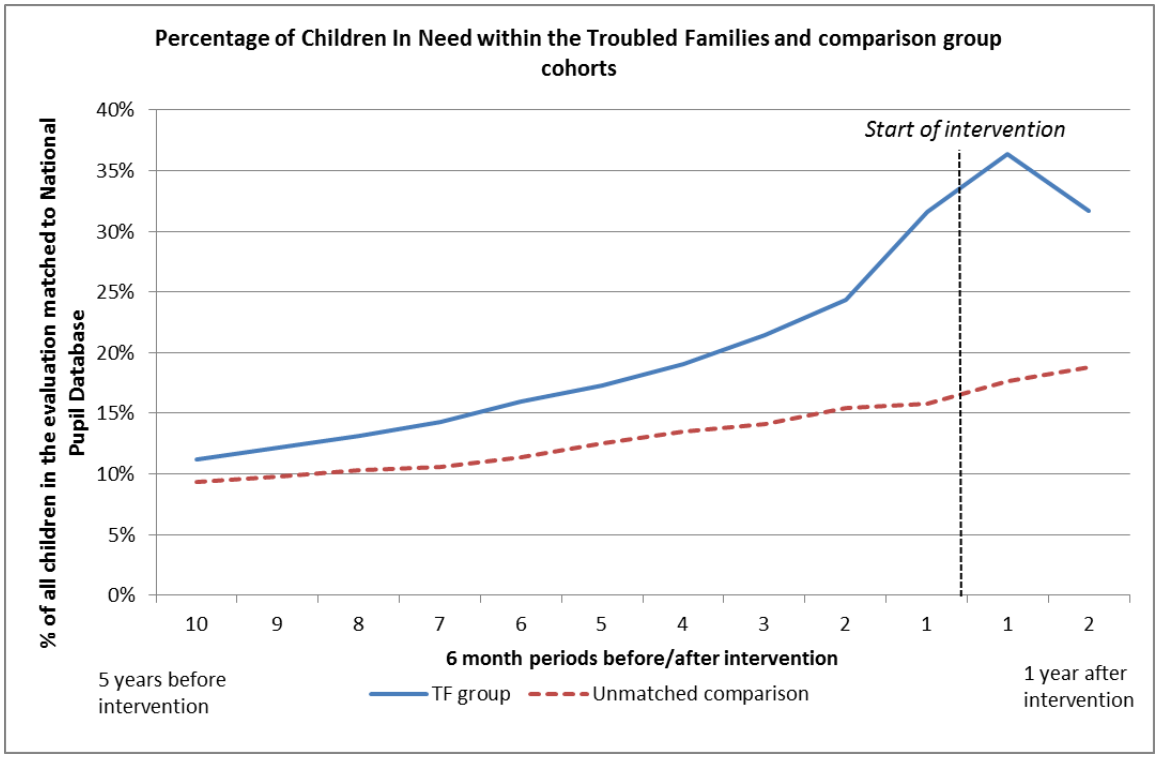
The accompanying quantitative evaluation report sets out early findings on family progress measured against children's social care, crime and school attendance indicators, as well as out of work benefits, all taken from national administrative datasets. We show outcomes for families who have received a Troubled Families programme intervention and those who haven't but are eligible for the programme (the comparison group).

The comparison group is as yet 'unmatched' and its outcomes are shown for indicative purposes only. Work is underway with independent experts from academia on constructing a comparison group that can be properly matched to the types of family characteristics and multiple problems faced by the treatment group of Troubled Families.

Children's Social Care

Bearing in mind the important caveats above, findings on children's social care indicators are encouraging. The chart overleaf compares the incidence of children designated Children in Need[4] (CIN) over a six year period. For this Troubled Families cohort, the incidence of children designated as children in need decreases by 13% when comparing the position at 6 months after the start of the Troubled Families intervention with the position 12 months after the Troubled Families intervention. In the same period the incidence of children designated as children in need in the unmatched comparison group continued to rise. There is a similar trend for children on Child Protection Plans, albeit less pronounced.

[3] Those responsible for coordinating the delivery of the programme in local authorities
[4] Under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989



Based on 49,965 children on the programme for which 12 month outcomes are observed and 12,067 children in the unmatched comparison group cohorts. The percentages are the proportion of children in the intervention and comparison group cohorts that were classified as Children in Need.

Crime, school attendance and out of work benefits

The number of individuals on the programme cautioned and convicted in the 12 months after the start of intervention dropped by 25.3% (cautions) and 10.4% (convictions). The same figures for the unmatched comparison group suggest a smaller reduction.

The proportion of children on the programme persistently absent from school (more than 10% absence) is less variable in the 12 months after the start of intervention compared to the period before intervention. The unmatched comparison group follows a similar trend.

Work is underway to understand these findings further. While it is to be welcomed that school attendance is less variable in the 12 months after the start of intervention, we know from local area data that children's success in achieving school attendance at 90% across three school terms is evidenced by local schools themselves and is occurring across the country. Time lags prevalent in the harvesting of school data and the structure of our dataset (where outcomes are broken into 6 monthly blocks)

mean we are still exploring how to analyse and interpret the emerging findings. We are working with Department for Education to make sure we interpret school attendance data correctly, so we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the trends.

The proportion of working age adults on the programme claiming Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance 12 months after the start of intervention decreases and the proportion claiming Employment and Support Allowance increases although these changes are small (less than two percentage points) and similar changes are seen in the unmatched comparison group.

It should be noted however that claimants worked with as part of the Troubled Families Programme are often far from the labour market and Ipsos Mori's findings indicate their progress towards work which would not be reflected in benefits changes. Troubled Families Employment Advisers provided intensive face-to-face support to families, helping explore employment options, research jobs and write CVs. They also aided claimants in finding opportunities for work experience, education and training to boost their progress towards employment. Ipsos Mori's Staff Survey found that 99% of Troubled Families Employment Advisers agree that employment advice significantly improves outcomes for claimants and families. Further work to dig into these emerging trends, and more six monthly data, will be key to understanding these early results, as will our further work on the comparison group data. Matched comparison group data will allow us to draw firm conclusions about net impact of the programme.

Further analytical work on net impact

As explained earlier, work is in hand to investigate the analytical options that would allow firmer conclusions about *net* impact. Alongside the work underway on matching to family characteristics and problems, we are thoroughly investigating and quality assuring data returns from participating local authorities, as well as carrying out further analytical work to give us the confidence that the comparison group data is not distorted by issues relating to selection or contamination (families in the comparison group receiving services similar to the Troubled Families Programme as a result of the programme's goal to drive wider local public service transformation). We will be opening up the programme's evaluation work to a wider group of academics and specialists in the New Year. The establishment of a robust comparison group will inform our programme of work on cost benefit analysis by attaching cost savings to impact shown from the national administrative datasets. It is our intention that, by 2019/20, there will be individual cost benefit analyses for each of the 150 participating local authority areas showing costs avoided and savings made to the public purse in regard to their local Troubled Families programme.