

Research Briefing

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By David Foster

# Supporting Families Programme



## Summary

- 1 The Troubled Families Programme 2012-2015
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- 3 The next phase: Supporting Families 2021 onwards

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## Summary

Around the mid-2000s, the Government started to develop policy approaches to what were referred to as “[problem families](#).” Following a [pilot programme](#) in 2010, then-Prime Minister David Cameron, [committed funding to “turn around” the lives of 120,000 troubled families in England by May 2015](#). [The fiscal case for the programme](#) (PDF) was based on expected savings made from reactive interventions, such as taking children into care.

The Troubled Families Programme started in 2012 and had its ten year anniversary in 2022. It was refreshed and relaunched in 2021 as the Supporting Families programme.

[The Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 announced an increase in funding](#) (PDF) so that by 2024-25 total planned investment across the following three years would be “nearly £700 million.” This funding is aimed at helping 300,000 families “facing multiple interconnected issues access effective whole-family support and improve their life outcome.”

[Ten years of Supporting Families: Supporting Families programme Annual Report 2022-23](#) (March 2023) reported that since April 2015 to December 2023 a total of 534,961 successful family outcomes were achieved.

This paper provides information on the aims, objectives and achievements of the Troubled Families Programme and its successor, the Supporting Families Programme.

# 1 The Troubled Families Programme 2012-2015

## 1.1 Announcement and design

In December 2011, the then-Prime Minister, David Cameron, said the UK Government would commit £448 million to “turn around” the lives of 120,000 troubled families in England by May 2015.<sup>1</sup> This followed a [pilot programme](#) in 2010. The pilot programme followed several previous policy approaches to address ‘problem families.’

### Box 1: Respect Programme, 2006-2010

The [Respect Programme](#), launched by the Home Office in 2006, sought to “tackle the behaviour of ‘problem families’ by challenging them to accept support to change their behaviour, backed up by enforcement measures”.<sup>2</sup>

Interventions included Family Intervention Projects (FIPs), parenting contracts in respect of anti-social behaviour, and a youth taskforce.<sup>3</sup>

A [2011 Analysis](#) (PDF) commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) found 3,675 families on FIPs (85%) were recorded as achieving a positive outcome, including addressing parenting and family breakdown issues, involvement in crime, poor health, exclusion, and alcohol/drug misuse. The report emphasised that not all impacts were sustained: in respect to health, 39% of families did not sustain their positive outcome 9 to 14 months after exiting intervention.<sup>4</sup> The TFP was based on evidence from the FIPs.<sup>5</sup>

In making the case for intervention, the Government estimated it would spend around £9 billion per year on these families from 2010 to 2015, with £8 billion of this being “reactive” in nature rather than targeted.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office, [Prime Minister’s Troubled Families speech](#), 11 December 2011

<sup>2</sup> Home Office, [Respect Action Plan](#), 2006, p3

<sup>3</sup> Home Office, [Respect: Document Library](#), 1 November 2010

<sup>4</sup> National Centre for Social Research and Bryson Purdon Social Research for the Department for Education (DfE) in [Monitoring and evaluation of Family Intervention services and projects between February 2007 and March 2011](#) (PDF), May 2011, paras 8.1.3, 8.1.4

<sup>5</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP 2015-2020: Findings](#), 2019, p8

<sup>6</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), [The fiscal case for working with troubled families](#), (PDF) February 2013, pp9-10

The estimate of 120,000 troubled families came from the [Cabinet Office's Task Force for Social Exclusion report of June 2007](#) (PDF). This estimated that in 2005 there were around 117,000 families in England with five or more of the following disadvantages:

- no parent working;
- family living in poor quality/overcrowded housing;
- no parent with qualifications;
- mother having mental health problems;
- a parent living with a longstanding limiting illness or disability;
- family income being below 60% of the median; and
- the family being unable to afford certain food or clothing items.<sup>7</sup>

The more of these disadvantages a family experiences, the report said, the more likely they are to experience poor outcomes and be socially excluded.<sup>8</sup>

A 2022 article on The Social Policy Blog noted the estimate of the number of troubled families “did not incorporate any measure of problematic behaviours.” The article additionally suggested that, “although families experiencing multiple social and economic disadvantage were at an increased risk of displaying problematic behaviour, only a small minority did so.”<sup>9</sup>

## Funding

Of the £448 million committed, up to £400 million was allocated to local authorities based on the number of families they worked with, and the results achieved. £51 million of central funding was used to fund a coordinator in each local authority to deliver the TFP locally.

Councils could claim funding of up to £4,000 per family. The DCLG estimated the average cost of successful family interventions at around £10,000, with authorities expected to make up the remainder.

Part of the £4,000 was paid up front as an “attachment fee” for each family meeting the eligibility criteria to reflect set-up costs. The remainder could be claimed by a council if they “turned around” the family. The attachment fee made up 80% of the total payment in 2012/13, 60% in 2013/14 and 40% in 2014/15.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force, [Families at risk](#), (PDF) 2007, p4

<sup>8</sup> As above, p5

<sup>9</sup> The Social Policy Blog, [The Problem With Troubled Families: Rethinking the “120,000” Troubled Families Statistic](#), 28 October 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force, [Families at risk](#), (PDF) 2007, p8.

## Identifying troubled families

The DCLG calculated an indicative number of “troubled families” in each local authority area primarily using indices of deprivation and child-wellbeing as proxy-measures.<sup>11</sup> Authorities were expected to identify and “turn around” this number of families within their areas using local evidence from crime/anti-social behaviour, education, school exclusions, employment and through local discretion (such as frequent intervention from the police, or children on Child Protection Plans).<sup>12</sup>

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regulations made provision for sharing data on an estimated 240,000 people in connection to the TFP.<sup>13</sup> Councils were encouraged to work with more families than the indicative number in case interventions failed.<sup>14</sup>

### Box 2: Who were the families supported in the 2012-2015 TFP?

The [Final synthesis report of the national evaluation of the TFP](#) (PDF, 2016), published by the DCLG in October 2016, found 48% of families who received an intervention under the TFP included a lone parent (compared to 16% nationally) and “well over” a third of parents had three or more children (compared to 14% nationally). Most families (90%) rented their homes and 80% of families were White British.<sup>15</sup>

On the issues experienced by families, the report estimated 29% of families had one or more adults in employment in the 12 months before starting on the programme and 47% of households included at least one adult claiming out-of-work benefits.<sup>16</sup>

The report estimated 32% of families had a child in need 12 months prior to starting on the programme and 41% of families were in this position one month before the programme start. The authors said it appeared many families were referred to the TFP “with the express purpose of avoiding further escalation of safeguarding concerns” and a child being taken into care.<sup>17</sup>

Within the 12 months prior to programme’s start “just over one tenth” of families had a child who received a caution or conviction and around 17% families had an adult in a similar situation.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cabinet Office, [Troubled Families Estimates explanatory note \(PDF\) \[undated\]](#)

<sup>12</sup> DCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP: First synthesis report](#), (PDF) 2016, para 3.1.2; DCLG, [TFP: Financial framework for the TFP’s payment by results scheme for local authorities](#), (PDF) 2012, pp4-5

<sup>13</sup> The [Social Security \(Information-sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.\) Regulations 2012](#)

<sup>14</sup> National Audit Office (NAO), [The TFP: Update](#), (PDF) 2016, para 1.12

<sup>15</sup> DCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP: Final synthesis report](#), (PDF) 2016, p34

<sup>16</sup> As above, p35

<sup>17</sup> As above, p39

<sup>18</sup> As above, p39

## “Turning around” families

The Department did not prescribe how councils should work with families, but encouraged a “family intervention approach”, where a nominated key worker was assigned to each family to gain an understanding of their interconnected issues and design a plan of action.<sup>19</sup> A family would be “turned around” if:

They achieve all 3 of the education and crime/anti-social behaviour measures set out below where relevant:

- Each child in the family has had fewer than 3 fixed exclusions and less than 15% of unauthorised absences in the last 3 school terms; and
- A 60% reduction in anti-social behaviour across the family in the last 6 months; and
- Offending rate by all minors in the family reduced by at least 33% in the last 6 months;
- If they do not enter work, but achieve the ‘progress to work’ [but not in job] (one adult in the family has either volunteered for the Work Programme or attached to the European Social Fund provision in the last 6 months).

Or

- At least one adult in the family has moved off out-of-work benefits into continuous employment in the last 6 months.<sup>20</sup>

## 1.2

## Evaluating the programme

### Families “turned around”

Local authority figures submitted to the DCLG for May 2015 indicated all 117,910 troubled families had been identified by authorities and 116,654 (99%) had been “turned around.” As a minimum, this meant:

- Truancy and absent children were back in school with high levels of attendance over three consecutive terms;
- Significant reductions were made in youth crime and anti-social behaviour; or
- An adult previously on out of work benefits was in continuous employment for at least three months.

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<sup>19</sup> DCLG, [The first TFP 2012 to 2015: An overview](#), (PDF) 2016, p6

<sup>20</sup> DCLG, [The TFP: Financial framework for the TFP’s payment-by-results scheme for local authorities](#), (PDF) 2012, p9 and Annex C

11,921 families had achieved “continuous employment” and 9,106 had achieved the “progress to work outcome” by the same date.<sup>21</sup>

Of the 152 local authorities in England, only two, Cornwall and Lancashire, had a success rate below 90%, whilst 132 had a success rate of 100%.<sup>22</sup>

The Public Accounts Committee, for their 2016 report [Troubled Families: Progress review](#) (PDF), heard that authorities had worked with more than the prescribed number of families, but DCLG was not aware of the total number of families worked with.<sup>23</sup>

The Committee argued the terminology used by the DCLG “overstated” the success of the programme:

The implication of ‘turned around’ was misleading, as the term was only indicative of achieving short-term outcomes under the programme rather than representing long-term, sustainable change in families’ lives. While there was some success, by claiming that an outcome achieved meant that a family had been “turned around”, the Department’s use of the term overstated the impact of the Troubled Families programme. The use of this term suggested that long term social problems could be fixed within a few months or years, and risks undermining the entire concept of this work. The Department should not have used such misleading terminology.<sup>24</sup>

The Committee recommended the Department adopt new terminology to evaluate the programme. The Government agreed to implement this for the TFP from 2015.<sup>25</sup>

## Financial Savings

In March 2015, when 106,000 families had been “turned around”, the Government estimated £1.2 billion had been saved for the taxpayer.<sup>26</sup> This was based on a sample of 7 of the 152 participating authorities.<sup>27</sup>

In 2016, DCLG estimated a gross saving of £2.11 for every £1 spent on families participating in the programme but said savings could not be directly attributed to the TFP.<sup>28</sup> The Government said these spending reductions may have also reflected “changes in wider national trends, demographic changes

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<sup>21</sup> DCLG, [Troubled Families: progress information by December 2014 and families turned around by May 2015](#), 22 June 2015

<sup>22</sup> As above.

<sup>23</sup> Public Accounts Committee, [Troubled families: Progress review](#), 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, para 22

<sup>24</sup> As above, para 4

<sup>25</sup> HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), (PDF) March 2017, para 4.3

<sup>26</sup> DCLG, [More than 105,000 troubled families turned around saving taxpayers an estimated £1.2 billion](#), 10 March 2015

<sup>27</sup> DCLG, [The benefits of the TFP to the taxpayer](#), (PDF) 2015

<sup>28</sup> DCLG, [Local authority data on the cost and potential fiscal benefits of the TFP](#), (PDF) 2016, p4

in the make-up of the cohort, success of other government programmes, or a natural de-escalation of issues.”<sup>29</sup>

The 2016 [Public Accounts Committee report](#) said the Department had not demonstrated “genuine” financial savings arising from the TFP. They argued the £1.2 billion was an overestimate as it did not “take account of the costs of delivering the programme.”<sup>30</sup>

The Government agreed its saving measurements could be improved and said it would work with authorities to develop better data collection for the future programme.<sup>31</sup>

## Interaction with the Families with Multiple Problems programme

The Families with Multiple Problems programme ran from 2011 to 2015 and was funded by the European Social Fund. It sought to work with families facing multiple barriers to work. Outcomes data showed that by August 2015 there were 79,130 attachments to the programme and 9,130 sustained job outcomes.<sup>32</sup>

The Public Accounts Committee was critical of the launch of two programmes in the same year targeting similar families and which both offered payment-by-results with minimal coordination or joint governance between DWP and DCLG:

The integration of the programmes at the design phase was poor, leading to confusion, and contributing to the low number of referrals to the DWP’s programme.<sup>33</sup>

Some coordination took place after both programmes had been launched, such as the secondment of 150 Jobcentre Plus advisers to local authorities’ Troubled Families teams.<sup>34</sup>

## National evaluation

The DCLG commissioned an [independent evaluation of the TFP](#) to 2015 by Ecorys, who led a consortium of research organisations.

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<sup>29</sup> As above, p10

<sup>30</sup> Public Accounts Committee, [Troubled families: Progress review](#), (PDF) 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, para 5

<sup>31</sup> HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), (PDF) March 2017, paras 5.2-5.4

<sup>32</sup> DWP, [ESF Support for Families with Multiple Problems – December 2011 to August 2015](#), (PDF) October 2015

<sup>33</sup> Public Accounts Committee, [Programme to help families facing multiple challenges](#), March 2014, HC 688, para 3

<sup>34</sup> As above, para 3

The [Final synthesis report of the national evaluation](#) (PDF, 2016) was based on analysis of data from 56 local authorities (encompassing around 25% of the 117,910 participants) and interviews with 495 families. The report observed the TFP may have had statistically significant impacts in certain local areas, but this may have been balanced by negative impacts in other areas. This meant specific impacts were hard to determine.<sup>35</sup>

The research was unable to find “consistent evidence that the TFP had any significant or systematic impact” on “employment, benefit receipt, school attendance, safeguarding and child welfare” outcomes (defined as outcomes attributable to the programme 12-18 months after a family joined the TFP). This did not mean families who participated in the programme had not, on some measures, experienced improved outcomes, but rather that observed outcomes for TFP families were very similar to outcomes for a matched comparison group of families.<sup>36</sup>

Families on the programme were found to be more likely to report “managing well financially; knowing how to keep on the right track; being confident that their worst problems were behind them and feeling positive about the future” compared to the matched comparison group. This did not include any significant impacts on their self-reported levels of debt.<sup>37</sup>

The report also found the TFP helped to raise the profile of family intervention, supported the testing of new models of service development and commissioning in many local areas, expanded the workforce in some areas and paved the way for better joint working with Job Centre Plus at a local level.

The evaluation noted “wide variations” in local practice regarding training, caseload sizes, and families leaving the programme and said there was “mixed evidence” regarding the extent scaling-up had been achieved without sacrificing the quality of family support.<sup>38</sup>

The evaluation said it had not been possible to undertake a full cost-benefit analysis.<sup>39</sup>

In response, the Government emphasised the evaluation found positive outcomes from the programme and said the next stage of the TFP would extend the length of time over which family outcomes would be tracked, from 12 months to 5 years.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> DCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP: Final synthesis report](#), (PDF) 2016, p77

<sup>36</sup> As above, p69

<sup>37</sup> As above, pp 49 & 68

<sup>38</sup> As above, p68

<sup>39</sup> As above, p10

<sup>40</sup> PQ HL2384 [\[Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 25 October 2016

## 2 The Troubled Families Programme 2015-2021

### 2.1 Announcement and design

In June 2013, the Coalition Government announced a second TFP would run from 2015/16.<sup>41</sup> It was later confirmed the Programme would run until 2020.<sup>42</sup> In January 2020, then-Communities Secretary, Robert Jenrick, said the scheme would continue to March 2021.<sup>43</sup>

The programme aimed to help up to 400,000 families “achieve significant and sustained progress against all their multiple problems and make work an ambition for all families” by 2020.<sup>44</sup> The TFP also aimed to “transform for the long term the way that public services work with families facing multiple disadvantages.”<sup>45</sup>

#### Funding

Funding of £1.085 billion was committed to March 2021.<sup>46</sup>

The programme was primarily a payment by results scheme, where local authorities could claim payments where their work with families resulted in significant and sustained progress, or employment. Funding was allocated to local authorities based on the level of need. A total funding allocation for each local authority, as of March 2019, was provided in a PQ response of 22 March 2019.<sup>47</sup>

Local authorities received an upfront £1,000 attachment fee for each family with whom they agreed to work, and a £800 results payment for each family with whom they achieved an outcome. Each authority received an annual Service Transformation Grant (most local authorities received £200,000 each year) to support local delivery.

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<sup>41</sup> DCLG and HM Treasury, [Troubled families programme receives extra £200 million boost](#), 24 June 2013

<sup>42</sup> [PQ 28956 \[on Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 3 March 2016

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), [Government Confirms Extra Support for Troubled Families to Succeed](#), 5 January 2020

<sup>44</sup> DCLG, [Supporting disadvantaged families: TFP 2015-2020: Progress so far](#), 2017, p7

<sup>45</sup> [PQ 45100 \[Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 14 September 2016

<sup>46</sup> [PQ 12258 \[Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 11 February 2020

<sup>47</sup> [PQ 234231 \[Families: Disadvantaged\]](#), 19 March 2019

The Government said payment by results in the second TFP provided a “more modest reward...in recognition of there being a broader range of needs likely to be captured through the eligibility criteria for this larger cohort.”<sup>48</sup>

The programme worked with several other Government programmes, including, but not limited to, the [Strengthening Families Protecting Children](#) programme, [Reducing Parental Conflict](#) programme, the [Early Outcomes fund](#) and the [Trusted Relationships fund](#).<sup>49</sup>

An additional £165m was committed for the 2021-2022 phase of the programme during the 2020 Spending Round. This extended the TFP to March 2022.<sup>50</sup>

A small number of local authorities moved to a new funding model, “Earned Autonomy”, in which all payments were provided up-front (see section 2.4 below).<sup>51</sup>

## Identifying troubled families

The TFP aimed to help 400,000 troubled families, but local authorities could work with a larger number.

The [Financial Framework for the Troubled Families Programme](#) (PDF, April 2020)<sup>52</sup>, set out the following eligibility criteria:

To be eligible for the Troubled Families Programme, each family must include dependent children<sup>53</sup> and/or expectant parents and have at least two of the following six problems:

1. Staying safe in the community: Parents or children involved in crime or antisocial behaviour
2. Getting a good education and skills for life: Children who have not been attending school regularly
3. Improving children’s life chances: children who need additional support, from the earliest years to adulthood
4. Improving living standards: families experiencing or at risk of worklessness, homelessness or financial difficulties

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<sup>48</sup> DCLG, [The first Troubled Families Programme 2012 to 2015: An overview](#), (PDF) October 2016, p19

<sup>49</sup> MHCLG, [Building resilient families: Third annual report of the TFP 2018-19](#), (PDF) March 2019, p3

<sup>50</sup> MHCLG, [Troubled Families Annual Report 2021](#), (PDF) March 2021, p7

<sup>51</sup> HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), (PDF) march 2017, para 3.2

<sup>52</sup> This replaced the DCLG, [Financial framework for the expanded Troubled Families Programme \(last updated January 2018\)](#) and the DCLG, [Financial Framework for the expanded TFP \(2015\) \(both PDFs\)](#)

<sup>53</sup> Defined as a person aged 0-15 or aged 16-18 and in full-time education and/or training and/or unemployed and living with their family—more detail is set out in the MHCLG, [Financial framework for the TFP](#), (PDF) April 2020, p19

5. Staying safe in relationships: families affected by domestic abuse
6. Living well, improving physical and mental health and wellbeing: Parents and children with a range of health needs.<sup>54</sup>

The framework said local authorities should prioritise families for inclusion on the basis that they were families with multiple problems who were most likely to benefit from a whole family approach and that they were families who incurred the highest cost to the state.<sup>55</sup>

An updated financial framework, published in June 2020, extended eligibility for the programme to expectant parents and clarified the eligibility criteria to encourage local areas to prioritise families affected by child sexual exploitation, gang and knife crime and those at risk of homelessness.<sup>56</sup>

A slight majority of families (51%) on the second TFP up to December 2017 met three or more of the eligibility criteria. 18% of families met fewer than two criteria. The MHCLG said this could be due to data quality issues, the reliance of local authorities on local discretion to include families with other needs on the programme, or because families met only one criterion.<sup>57</sup>

Further information on the characteristics of families on the second TFP was provided in the following reports published by the MHCLG:

- MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 – 2020 - Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#) (PDF), March 2019, section A.<sup>58</sup>
- MHCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP 2015-2020: Family outcomes— national and local datasets, part 5](#) (PDF), March 2020, sections 1a and 1b.

In 2017, the DWP had said the next phase of the TFP would place greater emphasis on worklessness and issues associated with it (such as problem debt and parental conflict).<sup>59</sup> The MHCLG encouraged local authorities to prioritise these issues in interventions.<sup>60</sup> In November 2019, the [Reducing Parental Conflict Programme](#) was offered in 30 local authority areas, and 148 local authority areas had access to practitioner training to support workers to manage conflict in family life.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> MHCLG, [Financial framework for the TFP](#), (PDF) April 2020, p16

<sup>55</sup> [As above](#), p17

<sup>56</sup> MHCLG, [Improving families lives: Annual report of the TFP 2019-20](#), (PDF) June 2020, p9

<sup>57</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP 2015-2020: Family outcomes— national and local datasets, part 5](#) (PDF), March 2020, pp14-15.

<sup>58</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP 2015-2020: Family outcomes- national and local datasets, Part 4](#), March 2019, pp16-24.

<sup>59</sup> DWP, [Improving lives: Helping workless families](#), (PDF) April 2017, para 49

<sup>60</sup> MHCLG, [Supporting disadvantaged families- Annual report of the TFP 2017-18](#), (PDF) 2018, p35

<sup>61</sup> MHCLG Blog, [Reducing Parental Conflict](#), 5 November 2019

## Working with families

Local authorities were encouraged to take an integrated, “whole family” approach when working with families. They had to apply four principles set out by the MHCLG to be eligible to claim families as having worked with the programme and to make a claim:

- There will have been an assessment that takes into account the needs and voice of the whole family;
- There is an action plan that takes account of all (relevant) family members;
- There is a lead / key worker for the family that is recognised by the family and other professionals involved with the family; and
- The objectives in the family action plan are aligned to those in the local authority’s Troubled Families Outcomes Plan (TFOP).<sup>62</sup>

A Troubled Families Outcome Plan (TFOP) was required for all authorities delivering the TFP. This set out what each local authority and its partners considered to be the indicators of eligibility and successful outcomes against the programme’s six headline problems (crime and anti-social behaviour; poor health; domestic violence and abuse; children who need help; poor school attendance and worklessness).<sup>63</sup>

On average, families spent an estimated nine months in the TFP.<sup>64</sup> Once progress had been made, a typical “step-down” process involved looking again at a family’s goals, highlighting areas of achievement and areas to improve. Appointments with other agencies, particularly universal services like schools or JobCentre Plus centres, were arranged.<sup>65</sup>

The DWP provided a network of 300 work coaches to act as employment advisors to support families into work and share expertise with local workers.<sup>66</sup>

Each local authority was subject to two spot checks during the lifetime of the programme. The spot checks included a visit by a Department official, as well as scrutiny of local authority data systems. These visits included an interview of local authority keyworkers to assess local practice.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> MHCLG, [Financial framework for the TFP](#), (PDF) April 2020, p21

<sup>63</sup> [As above](#), p10

<sup>64</sup> MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), (PDF) March 2019, p54

<sup>65</sup> Ipsos MORI, [Troubled Families qualitative case study research: Phase 2: Wave 1](#), (PDF) September 2018, p7

<sup>66</sup> MHCLG, [Financial framework for the TFP](#), (PDF) April 2020, p22

<sup>67</sup> HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), (PDF) march 2017, para 3.2

## 2.2

### Defining success

To claim a payment, a local authority had to demonstrate an eligible family had either:

- Achieved significant and sustained progress against all problems identified at the point of engagement and during the intervention; or
- An adult in the family has moved into continuous employment.<sup>68</sup>

“Sustained and significant progress” was defined locally and set out in the TFOP for each authority. “Sustained” was a minimum of six months.<sup>69</sup>

For the school attendance outcome, a claim could only be made where all children in the family had been attending for an average of at least 90% of sessions across three consecutive terms. Authorities had discretion to decide whether this applied to authorised absences and to alternatively use distance travelled where attendance started at a very low base (40% or less).<sup>70</sup>

“Continuous employment” was defined in the [April 2020 Framework](#) as an adult in a family meeting one of the following thresholds:

- Working age/legacy benefits (such as Jobseekers Allowance): move off out of work benefits and be in employment continuously for 26 out of the last 30 weeks
- Universal Credit: reach the Administrative Earning Thresholds (AET)<sup>14</sup> or above continuously for 26 weeks out of the last 30 weeks.
- Not required to actively seek employment (i.e. in legacy benefits under Employment Support Allowance / Income Support type arrangement): be in continuous employment for 13 weeks.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> [As above](#), p22

<sup>69</sup> [As above](#), pp13-14

<sup>70</sup> [As above](#), p13

<sup>71</sup> [As above](#), p23

### Box 3: Differences between the 2012-15 and 2015-21 TFPs

The post-2015 scheme sought to achieve “significant and sustained progress” against all problems identified at point of engagement or during the time a family was on the TFP, or for an adult to move into “continuous employment”. This compares to the original scheme’s aim to “turn around” families.

The post-2015 scheme aimed to work with 400,000 families, compared to 120,000 in the 2012-15 scheme.

Although the payment-by-results system was retained for 2015-21, it featured a less generous pay-out per family to reflect broader criteria for inclusion.<sup>72</sup>

In response to the [2016 PAC report](#) (PDF), which was critical of how 2012-15 TFP was evaluated,<sup>73</sup> the DCLG set out several changes for the TFP from 2015. These included regularly reporting throughout the programme and post-2022; measuring 60 outcome indicators; tracking outcomes up to five years after intervention; and establishing an independent advisory group to provide external support and scrutiny of the evaluation.<sup>74</sup>

## 2.3

### Developing local services

The TFP also aimed to transform the way public services work with families with multiple problems and to reduce demand for reactive services by helping them adopt an integrated, “whole family approach.”<sup>75</sup> This included identifying families at risk more proactively, recording and sharing data between local services, and improving relationships with schools, health and the police.<sup>76</sup>

In 2018/19, the UK Government supported 30 areas whose performance was below the national average across several measures, arguing that they had a “narrow approach to delivery of the programme, missing out on the benefits of spreading whole family working to broader public services.” It also developed a performance diagnostic tool to share good practice.<sup>77</sup> In

<sup>72</sup> HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), (PDF) march 2017, para 3.2

<sup>73</sup> Committee of Public Accounts, [Troubled families: progress review](#), (PDF) 20 December 2016, HC 711 2016-17, recommendation 2

<sup>74</sup> HM Treasury, [Treasury Minutes: Government responses on the Committee of Public Accounts on the Twenty Sixth, the Twenty Seventh and the Twenty Ninth to the Thirty Fourth reports from Session 2016-17](#), (PDF) March 2017, para 2.3

<sup>75</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the TFP 2015-2020: Findings](#), (PDF) 2019, p7

<sup>76</sup> [As above](#), p6

<sup>77</sup> MHCLG, [Building Resilient Families: Third annual report of the TFP 2018-19](#), (PDF) March 2019, p11

2019/20, the MHCLG said there had been a “162% increase in successful family outcomes for lower performing areas between 2018-19.”<sup>78</sup>

The MHCLG published an [Early help system guide](#) (PDF, April 2020) to guide the “whole family” approach in an authority. Best practice was also shared on the [TFP blog](#). [The Digital Economy Act 2017](#) allows public service providers to share information to provide support for households facing multiple disadvantages. Section 2 of the accompanying [Code of Practice](#) explains this power in more depth.

Ipsos MORI’s [Survey of TFP keyworkers](#) (PDF) in 2018, commissioned by the MHCLG, found the proportion of key workers employed by a specific TFP team fell from 29% in 2017 to 13% in 2018, with 39% working as part of a children, young people and families team and 38% in an early help service (usually defined as providing support prior to engagement with statutory services).<sup>79</sup> In terms of the support they provided each week to a family, 81% helped address parent/parenting issues; 58% adult mental health issues; 57% child mental health issues; and 54% school attendance.<sup>80</sup> Full results can be found in the report: [Survey amongst TFP keyworkers](#) (PDF, May 2019).

## 2.4 “Earned Autonomy” model

In 2018, 14 local authorities moved to an up-front funding model to test whether this would better deliver family services.<sup>81</sup> This moved away from the payment by results model, where authorities received a proportion of funding once they had achieved significant and sustained progress or continuous employment with a family.

The selected areas were Barking and Dagenham, Brighton and Hove, Bristol, Camden, Cheshire West and Chester, Durham, Ealing, Islington, Kent, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield, Staffordshire and Westminster.<sup>82</sup>

Ipsos MORI [research](#) (PDF) commissioned by the MHCLG found local authority respondents were “positive” about earned autonomy. The system created efficiencies, as they didn’t have to submit claims, and allowed them to pay their partners upfront, which aided planning and the maintenance of infrastructure. Authorities also reported an administrative burden in handling the transition, requiring planning to reduce local risk.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> MHCLG, [Improving families’ lives: Annual report of the TFP 2019-2020](#), (PDF) June 2020, p11

<sup>79</sup> Ipsos MORI, [TFP: National evaluation: Survey amongst TFP keyworkers](#), (PDF) May 2019, p18

<sup>80</sup> [As above](#), p24

<sup>81</sup> DCLG, [Financial framework for the expanded Troubled Families Programme, January 2018](#), (PDF) pp4-5

<sup>82</sup> MHCLG, [Improving families lives: Annual report of the TFP 2019-2020](#), (PDF) June 2020, p10

<sup>83</sup> Ipsos MORI, [TFP: Qualitative case study report: Phase 2: Wave 2](#), (PDF) May 2019, Section 7

## 2.5

## Devolution to Greater Manchester

The [2016 Plan for Further Devolution to Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) (PDF) enabled Greater Manchester to bring together funding from the TFP, including the service transformation grant and payment by results allocation, into a single pot. Funding totalled around £35 million for the three years from April 2017 and was around £10.7 million in 2020/21.<sup>84</sup>

In its position paper on the TFP in February 2020, the Authority said there was “positive evidence of the impact that Troubled Families funding has had in improving the support offer available to many vulnerable families.”<sup>85</sup>

The University of Manchester’s Innovative Social Investment (InnoSI) network published [case study research](#) (PDF) on the TFP in Greater Manchester in 2017. Following interviews with TFP staff and families, the authors argued the TFP in Manchester had led to better information-sharing and co-production of family plans. It identified a need for more support for mental health services and said the financial mechanism of payment by results “had some support from senior decision makers but at street level is seen as inhibiting collaboration”.<sup>86</sup>

## 2.6

## Youth Crime Fund

In October 2018, the Government announced a Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund, which would be channelled through the TFP. The fund supported early intervention and prevention and was available over the financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.<sup>87</sup>

In February 2019, £9.8 million was announced for projects in 21 areas to tackle knife crime and gang culture.<sup>88</sup>

The Government said in June 2020 that preventing and tackling youth crime “continues to be a priority for the TFP”.<sup>89</sup>

Research was commissioned from Ipsos MORI to evaluate the fund and inform future policy.<sup>90</sup> The [Supporting Families Against Youth Crime fund evaluation](#) (PDF) was published in January 2021. Multi-agency working was identified as “crucial” to success. A further success was “the integration of SFAYC

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<sup>84</sup> Greater Manchester Combined Authority, [Troubled Families Funding](#), (PDF) 14 February 2020, paras 1.1, 1.3

<sup>85</sup> [As above](#), (PDF) para 5.1

<sup>86</sup> InnoSI, [Case study briefing: TFP in Greater Manchester](#), (PDF) 2017, p2

<sup>87</sup> MHCLG, [TFP: Supporting families against youth crime: Fund prospectus](#), (PDF) 2018

<sup>88</sup> MHCLG, [£9.8 million fund to confront knife crime and gang culture](#), (PDF) 22 February 2019

<sup>89</sup> MHCLG, [Improving families lives: Annual report of the TFP 2019-20](#), (PDF) June 2020, p9

<sup>90</sup> MHCLG, [Improving families lives: Annual report of the TFP 2019-20](#), (PDF) June 2020, p9

initiatives with Troubled Families funded services.” Overall, participants thought the fund resulted in positive impacts:

...delivery partners and families thought SFAYC funding had a sustainable, positive impact on children and families at risk of youth crime. Although some parts of the interventions are likely to continue being effective once funding subsidies, some families and stakeholders were concerned about what would happen once intervention support ends.<sup>91</sup>

## 2.7

## Evaluation of TFP outcomes

### National evaluation

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government conducted a National Evaluation of the TFP, which published several reports through the course of the programme.

The fourth update report of the National Evaluation was published in March 2019. This brought together findings from national and local datasets, a cost benefit analysis, case study research and survey research to look at how well the programme was achieving its three aims to:

- improve outcomes for families;
- transform local services;
- provide savings for the taxpayer.

### Improving outcomes for families

The impact analysis compared the outcomes of individuals on the TFP with a matched comparison group over a 24-month period. Outcomes were split into six monthly periods after joining the programme.<sup>92</sup>

The results suggested the programme had had a positive impact for a number of outcomes, including:

- A reduction in the proportion of Looked After Children: 2.5% of the comparison group were looked after compared to 1.7% of the programme group.
- A reduction in the proportion of adults receiving custodial sentences (1.6% of the comparison group compared to 1.2% of the programme group.)

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<sup>91</sup> Ipsos MORI, [Supporting Families Against Youth Crime fund evaluation](#) (PDF), January 2021, p7

<sup>92</sup> MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), (PDF) March 2019, p10.

- A statistically significant difference in the proportion of adults claiming Jobseeker's Allowance 19-24 months after joining the programme (10.5% of the comparison group compared to 9.3% of the programme group). There was no statistically significant difference for adults claiming Employment and Support Allowance.<sup>93</sup>

The analysis also found some negative impacts, including a greater proportion of children on Child Protection Plans at 7-12 months and 13-18 months after joining the TFP. The report suggested this could be the result of uncovering unmet need and preventing children from becoming looked after. No statistically significant difference was found in the proportion of Children in Need after joining the programme.

The report said the evidence showed “the programme is making a significant contribution towards improving life for disadvantaged families” and the scale of impact was “consistent with or better than other programmes working with people with multiple complex problems.”<sup>94</sup>

Further details on the findings relating to outcomes for families was provided in a further report: [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 – 2020 - Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4 \(PDF\)](#).<sup>95</sup>

### Economic impact

The National Evaluation said the Cost Benefit Analysis, based on the results of the impact analysis (see above), suggested the programme was “providing a net benefit for society.” It estimated that for every £1 spent on the programme for the 2017/18 cohort, it delivered £2.28 of benefits. Although the impact was modest in numerical terms, the report said, “they have significant cost implications through demand reduction on high-cost acute services, particularly in children’s social care and the criminal justice system.”<sup>96</sup>

### Transforming local services

The report said case study research and staff survey results “provide further evidence that local services are being transformed and that the programme has been successful in driving transformation.” This included evidence that families at risk were being identified more proactively and receiving support earlier, and an improvement in multi-agency working. The report added, however, that “barriers remain and there is further work to be done.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: Findings. Evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, pp4-5.

<sup>94</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: Findings. Evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, pp4-5.

<sup>95</sup> MHCLG, [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 - 2020 Family Outcomes – national and local datasets, Part 4](#), (PDF) March 2019.

<sup>96</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: Findings. Evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, pp4-5.

<sup>97</sup> MHCLG, [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: Findings. Evaluation overview policy report](#), March 2019, pp6-7.

Further analysis, including on whether the programme had been more effective for some families than others, was published alongside subsequent annual reports on the TFP (see below).

## Annual reports

Section 3 of the [Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016](#) requires the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to report annually to the UK Parliament on the TFP.

The last report on the TFP was published in March 2021: [Improving families' lives: annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020 to 2021](#).<sup>98</sup>

Among other things, the report said the programme had achieved a total of 401,719 successful family outcomes as of January 2021.

Previous reports can be found on the [Department's website](#).

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<sup>98</sup> MHCLG, [Improving families' lives: Annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2020-2021](#), (PDF) March 2021. Further information on how successful outcomes were measured is provided on page 10 of the report.

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## 3 The next phase: Supporting Families 2021 onwards

### 3.1 Launch of Supporting Families

The Conservative Party's 2019 general election manifesto committed to improving the TFP programme:

We will improve the Troubled Families programme and champion Family Hubs to serve vulnerable families with the intensive, integrated support they need to care for children – from the early years and throughout their lives.<sup>99</sup>

In March 2021 the Government announced the programme would continue in 2021-22 as the Supporting Families Programme (SFP), with “a refreshed vision, strengthened objectives and an even stronger momentum to tackle barriers and create lasting change.”

The Government said £165 million would be provided in 2021-22 on the same basis as in previous years.<sup>100</sup> It added that 2021-22 would be used as a transition year to “co-design, test and iterate future improvements to the programme”, including specific commitments to:

- Look at how we can drive the service and system transformation that we know will be crucial to understanding and responding to local need in future as well as what we could do to incentivise progress.
- Co-produce updates to the framework that local areas use to identify families eligible for support and the outcomes we expect them to achieve, in consultation with local partnerships. This will ensure that areas continue to be incentivised to support the right families at the right time and help them deliver the right outcomes to improve their lives.
- Update the programme's funding formula to ensure that it continues to reflect the latest data on need in local areas.<sup>101</sup>

### Reaction

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) welcomed the next phase of the programme:

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<sup>99</sup> [Conservative Party Manifesto 2019](#), p14

<sup>100</sup> MHCLG, [Supporting Families - 2021-22 and beyond](#), March 2021, para 45.

<sup>101</sup> As above, para 48

We hope that the programme's new, and very welcome, emphasis on supporting families is the beginning of a long-term commitment by government. One that has at its heart early help, relationship-based practice and a holistic focus on a child's lived experience, within their family and within their community which would undoubtedly changes lives.<sup>102</sup>

The National Children's Bureau emphasised the need for adequate funding:

The programme promises £165m of new funding over the coming year. But it must be recognised that children's services have been cut to the bone over the last decade, often leaving them capable of providing 'crisis-only' help. The Supporting Families programme has voiced its commitment to earlier intervention - true early help - we must now see that through, ensuring that adequate funding follows the vision.<sup>103</sup>

## 3.2 Announcement of additional funding

At the Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021, the Government announced an additional £200 million for the SFP over the period 2022-23 to 2024-25:

The £4.8 billion of new grant funding includes an additional £200 million for the cross-government Supporting Families programme, around a 40% real-terms uplift in funding for the programme by 2024-25, taking total planned investment across the next three years to nearly £700 million. This funding will help up to 300,000 more families facing multiple, interconnected issues access effective whole-family support and improve their life outcome.<sup>104</sup>

The additional funding was also referred to in press releases published in [February 2022](#) and [April 2022](#).<sup>105</sup>

## 3.3 Changes for period 2022 to 2025

The [first annual report of the refreshed programme](#) was published in March 2022.<sup>106</sup> The report announced a new outcomes framework would be implemented from October 2022, with the programme moving from six headline criteria (see section 2.1 above) to 10 outcomes:

1. Getting a good education

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<sup>102</sup> [Comment on Supporting Families programme | ADCS](#), 26 March 2021

<sup>103</sup> [Successor to Troubled Families programme may fail without long-term funding \(ncb.org.uk\)](#), 26 March 2021

<sup>104</sup> [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 \(PDF\)](#), HC 822, October 2021, para 4.57

<sup>105</sup> DfE, DDCMS & DLUHC, [Package to transform education and opportunities for most disadvantaged](#), 1 February 2022; DfE, DHSC & MHCLG, [Infants, children and families to benefit from boost in support](#), 2 April 2022.

<sup>106</sup> DLUHC, [Levelling up for families: Annual report of the Supporting Families programme 2021-2022](#), 31 March 2022; [HC Deb 31 March 2022, cc69-70WS](#).

2. Good early years development
3. Improved mental and physical health
4. Promoting recovery and reducing substance abuse
5. Improved family relationships
6. Protecting children from abuse and exploitation
7. Preventing crime
8. Protecting families from domestic abuse
9. Secure housing
10. Financial stability.<sup>107</sup>

Other developments set out in the Annual Report included:

- Using an updated funding formula to calculate funding allocations across the period 2022 to 2025. Funding allocations for [2022-23](#) and [2023-24](#) are available on Gov.uk.<sup>108</sup>
- Publication of a [refreshed Early Help System Guide](#) alongside the annual report.<sup>109</sup>
- The launch of a new process for local authorities to apply for Earned Autonomy status, which connects Earned Autonomy more closely with system maturity. Further information was provided in [guidance published alongside the annual report](#).<sup>110</sup>

More detailed information on the objectives of the SFP for the period 2022 to 2025 was provided in guidance published by the Government in April 2022: [Supporting Families Programme guidance 2022 to 2025](#).<sup>111</sup>

Among other things, the annual report also recorded “a total of 55,421 successful family outcomes” by January 2022 (since April 2021).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> [Levelling up for families: Annual report of the Supporting Families programme 2021-2022 - GOV.UK](#), 31 March 2022; [Children & Young People Now, Supporting Families revamp as programme enters 10<sup>th</sup> year](#), 6 April 2022.

<sup>108</sup> DLUHC, [Supporting Families Programme: funding allocations by local authority area 2022-2023](#), 3 February 2022; DLUHC, [Supporting Families Programme: funding allocations by local authority area 2023-2024](#), 8 March 2023.

<sup>109</sup> DLUHC, [Supporting Families: Early Help System guide](#), 2 April 2022.

<sup>110</sup> DLUHC & DfE, [Supporting Families: Earned Autonomy prospectus](#), last updated 10 February 2023.

<sup>111</sup> [Supporting Families Programme guidance 2022 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#), 2 April 2022

<sup>112</sup> [Levelling up for families: Annual report of the Supporting Families programme 2021-2022 - GOV.UK](#), 31 March 2022

Qualitative research was also published alongside the annual report looking at effective practice and service delivery.<sup>113</sup>

## 3.4 Annual report 2022-23

[Ten years of Supporting Families: Supporting Families programme Annual Report 2022-23](#) was published on 8 March 2023.<sup>114</sup> An additional 64,589 families had been supported to achieve a successful family outcome since March 2022. Since April 2015 to December 2023, the report says a total of 534,961 successful family outcomes were achieved.<sup>115</sup>

Key developments included:

- Funding over 2022-23 of £205 million.
- Local authorities and partners implemented the updated outcomes framework in October 2022. New outcomes can now be claimed for by local authorities, eg for recovery from substance abuse.
- Local areas are working towards the vision set out in the [Early Help System Guide](#).
- 15 authorities achieved Earned Autonomy status which removes the payment by results model so all funding is provided up-front.
- The 2022 Data Survey showed improvements in local data systems.
- [Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation was published in February 2023](#) following publication of [the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care](#) in May 2022. The implementation plan “proposes Pathfinder projects to test new approaches to children’s social care and early help.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> [Supporting Families - Effective practice and service delivery \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), (PDF) February 2022

<sup>114</sup> [Ten years of Supporting Families: Supporting Families programme Annual Report 2022-23 - GOV.UK](#), 8 March 2023; [HC Deb 8 March 2023, cc18-19WS](#); DLUHC, [Up to £233.5 million allocated to the Supporting Families programme for 2023/24, in addition to the £1.9 billion allocated over the past 10 years](#), 8 March 2023.

<sup>115</sup> As above, executive summary

<sup>116</sup> As above, executive summary

## 3.5

# SEND and alternative provision improvement plan

In March 2023, the Government published its [SEND and alternative provision improvement plan: right support, right place, right time](#).<sup>117</sup> This announced a £450,000 project as part of the SFP to “test approaches to establishing more robust links between SEND and the early help system in each area.” Local authorities will be invited to bid for funding.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> DfE, [The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#), March 2023.

<sup>118</sup> DfE, [The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#), March 2023, para 44.

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