



## **Evaluation of the Sheffield Building Successful Families Programme**

### **Phase One Interim Report July 2014**

#### **Executive Summary**

##### **Introduction**

Ecorys was commissioned by Sheffield City Council in April 2014 to evaluate their Building Successful Families (BSF) programme: Sheffield's local response to the national Troubled Families programme. This interim report reflects findings from phase one of the evaluation which primarily involved a review of relevant documentation and consultations with key stakeholders, including core BSF staff, partner organisations, senior strategic leads at Sheffield City Council and other stakeholders with a strategic role in planning, overseeing or implementing the programme.

##### **Background to the BSF Programme**

BSF aims to achieve positive outcomes for families facing multiple challenges and achieve a shift in expenditure from reactive service provision towards early intervention. BSF identifies families based on data and also by screening referrals from local professionals. Eligible families have a BSF Whole Family Action Plan which reflects their needs and an allocated key worker to devise an appropriate support package and coordinate services.

BSF is not a 'new', separate service. Instead, BSF invests in existing services, delivered by a range of public and voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners, to increase their capacity to embed "distinct ways of working" across services, supporting the 'whole family'. Investment has included employment of some specialist staff: BSF (whole family) Specialists, Social Workers, Employment and Skills Specialists, School Attendance Specialists and Adult Mental Health Workers. There has also been investment into contracts for localised and specialist delivery.

##### **Stakeholder Consultations: Development of Building Successful Families, Management and Service/Partner Relationships**

Stakeholders generally felt that BSF has enabled whole family working to be extended, more quickly and intensively, across services within the council and the

voluntary sector. This was seen as laying the basis to improve the quality of support offered to families. Building on existing structures was universally recognised as the correct approach; however, doing so has to some extent made it more difficult for BSF to differentiate itself from what went before it.

BSF has benefited from support from senior council staff including the Chief Executive and Cabinet, which has stimulated commitment to the programme, and some strong examples of joined-up working between partners were provided by stakeholders. These included co-location of services and closer integration between one of the VCS organisations involved and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

As with any new initiative, awareness and engagement by services and practitioners has improved with time, often once services are able to 'see' or benefit from BSF. Those closer to BSF (for example, the Multi Agency Support Teams (MAST) involved in delivery and children's services) understood BSF and bought into it more quickly. It was evident that communication with partners further away from the core of BSF should continue to be improved in order to further the reach of the programme, along with helping to overcome the perception that capacity and resource constraints are barriers for services to engage with the programme. Stakeholders reported some confusion caused by the replacement of the 'Original Core Group', a virtual team who originally led on the development of BSF, with the 'New Core Group' who are now responsible for its on-going management.

### **Stakeholder Consultations: Distinct Ways of Working and Systems Change; Working with Families; Progress and Outcomes**

Stakeholders felt that awareness and implementation of the distinct ways of working have improved over time and were generally positive that this trend would continue. Those services and partners closer to BSF, or with more of a tradition of whole family working (e.g. MAST, children's services), tended to be using action plans and 'distinct ways of working' practices more consistently at the time of the research relative to others. A suggestion was for distinct ways of working to feature more prominently in policies and job descriptions to reinforce the need for their adoption across services.

Specialist staff have universally been seen by stakeholders as adding significant value to delivery, bridging gaps that existed prior to BSF, acting as 'BSF champions' and helping embed the model across services. For example, the role of Employment and Skills Specialists (seconded from Jobcentre Plus) in supporting key workers to help families move towards employment was often positively commented on. These specialists were seen as helping to instigate "a huge culture change" around sharing information and improving key workers' understanding on welfare to work issues.

BSF was also seen as increasing robustness in the way practitioners work in many instances. In particular the initiative was seen as enabling practitioners to provide more intensive support focused on outcomes, utilise the new Action Plan and monitor progress and outcomes more closely. It was also noted that those delivering BSF have come to appreciate the importance of recording data through the Action Plan, as services recognise the importance of demonstrating their impact on families.

Action planning as a process was largely seen as the norm amongst those involved in delivery and as a crucial component in bringing in other agencies to work with the family.

It was noted that a key challenge in implementing BSF has been joining-up data from different sources to establish a clear picture of a family. Employment and Skills Specialists' access to DWP data was seen as making a significant positive difference in this though it was also acknowledged that this remains a challenge. A further issue raised in some quarters concerned the potential for the processes involved in identifying families for support to involve the sharing of data prior to those families giving informed consent for their information to be treated in this way. This issue also pertains to the national Troubled Families programme.

In terms of outcomes to date, the general view of stakeholders was that families have responded well to BSF and better than BSF's predecessors. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that families have ownership of their support plan, feel empowered and do not have to duplicate discussion of their circumstances with several services. Key to this is the Action Plan, which promotes multi-agency working.

Data provided to DCLG shows that good progress has been made with BSF having met its local target of identifying 1,680 families, of which 1,520 are currently being worked with (91% of the 1,680 target), at the end of March 2014. Progress on outcomes has been slower, particularly around employment outcomes. Partly explaining this, a number of stakeholders noted that a long lead-in time had been required and that it was inevitably challenging to 'turn around' 100% of the cohort. Outcomes will be further explored in subsequent rounds of the evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

BSF has added value to support for families in the city in the form of specialist support and robustness in approach, primarily led by the BSF Whole Family Action Plan and a more cultural shift towards monitoring outcomes. There is recognition that such work requires commitment from partners at an early stage but that the potential future savings likely to be created are particularly important in a time of public sector austerity. Multi-agency working is widely recognised as the best way to deliver an intensive support programme.

While it has taken time for BSF to start having an effect, the positive outcomes for families now being generated are proving important in engaging new and existing stakeholders in support of the approach. Awareness and engagement with the model is continuing to increase and in time it is hoped that the model will be embedded as the model for family working across the city, regardless of the service that works with the family. The distinct ways of working have been the key facilitator in positive progress towards mainstreaming this approach. There is a clear intention

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