

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET 15<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2010

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

### FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING – EFFICIENCY INVESTMENT FUND

---

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends that the Efficiency Investment Fund is used to expand the Family Group Conferencing Team in Social Care at a cost of £138,000 pa. The additional intervention work by the team will reduce costs by up to £500,000 and contribute to the key performance indicator to safely reduce the number of looked after children and secure more children permanently within their families.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is accepted nationally as an effective intervention to secure more children in stable, safe family placements. The approach has its origins in New Zealand and has been developed in Wirral since 2005.
- 1.2 The growing interest in FGC's reflects an increasing recognition that working collaboratively with families within and outside statutory social work services can assist families to take responsibility for their lives and their children's needs. It can also ease tensions between the role of families and statutory services when there is a need to support parents to meet their child's needs.
- 1.3 If Family Group Conferencing is applied effectively in Wirral, this will lead to more consistent preventive practice and provide an effective forum for sharing different agency views. The service links well with other preventative initiatives including Family Nurse Partnership, Multi Systemic Therapy and the Team Around the Child.
- 1.4 In 2008 the President of the Family Court Division introduced The Public Law Outline which placed additional requirements on Local Authorities. These included that where the Local Authority is considering care Proceedings a Family Group Conference is an important opportunity to engage friends and wider members of the family at an early stage of concern about a child either to support the parents or provide care for the child. It also required the Local Authority to provide Family Group Conferencing to encourage parties to resolve disputes during court proceedings.
- 1.5 Family Group Conference assist in meeting the main objectives of the Public Law Outline. They provide a mechanism for informed family led resolution of concerns. A thorough investigation of kinship options ensures applications for care proceedings are only made after all safe, appropriate alternatives have been explored.
- 1.6 The DCSF have just commenced consultation on the new Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance. It is intended that the Guidance features a section on Family Group Conference with a clear statement that Local Authorities should ensure that they have arrangements in place to offer a Family Group Conference as a means to engage families at an early stage to support them.

#### 2. Current Situation

- 2.1 The Family Group Conferencing Team currently comprises a Team leader, a coordinator and a Family Support Worker. The teams work focuses on children in need and/ or looked after children.
- 2.2 The team have continued to deliver results. In the last 12 months there have been 53 Family Group Conference held, involving children in need or children that may otherwise have become looked after. The team have recently been successful in intervening to reduce care costs significantly for children formally placed in high cost out of borough residential care.

### **3. Additional Family Group Conferencing Capacity**

- 3.1 The additional resources required to develop the FGC team are 4 Support Worker posts, 1 Part-time administration post and funding to re-grade the project manager post to provide increased management and supervision.

The savings from this investment can be illustrated as follows:

There were 53 Family Group Conference in the period January 2009 – January 2010. There were 57 children in these families that were at risk of becoming Looked After. The cost for these children had they become Looked After is a minimum, of £10,000 per child, per annum .

### **4. Potential to Reduce Costs**

- 4.1 The additional staff within the team would more than double the capacity for Family Group Conferencing. This will have a positive impact on the ability of the Council to secure more children within their families and consequently reduce the numbers of Looked After Children. On the basis that 2.5 staff were able to provide this service to 53 families in the last 12 months, this investment would enable the service to work with 120 families, reduce waiting times and maximise the effectiveness of the approach. Management costs include capacity for marketing to ensure a continued request for the service. Demand for the service currently exceeds the capacity, the team do not market the approach and have in excess of a four week waiting period for new referrals. The team would be closely linked to the sources of referrals and would market the service to generate the work for the team.
- 4.2 In cases involving children on the edge of care, and where a Family Group Conference was determined to be appropriate and provided, we would anticipate that in 37% of cases the children would remain with their families. The average additional saving in placement costs over a full year when the team is fully operational (based on 50 foster care places) would be £500,000 as shown below.

### **5. Financial Implications**

The estimated additional costs of the FGC team will be:

Salaries: 4 family support workers at £27178pa (on costs included)	£ 108,600
Equipment and materials	£ 2,500
Travel costs	£ 4,500
Training costs	£ 2,500
Management and administration costs	£ 20,000
Total costs for 12 month project	£ 138,100

Funding of £138,100 is requested from the Efficiency Fund.

The anticipated reductions in Foster Care costs are:

	New Cases (Net of current capacity of 53)	Anticipated reduction in Foster Numbers	Cumulative reduction	FTE	Reduced cost pressures £	Budget saving £
2010-2011	67	25	25	13	130,000	-
2011-2012	67	25	50	37	300,000	70,000
2012-2013	67	25	50	50	300,000	130,000

The profile assumes a saving of 2 years foster care costs for new cases.

It is anticipated that the investment will by 2012-13 ease pressures on the fostering budget by £300,000 and deliver a permanent budget saving of £200,000.

At the end of the period the service will be reviewed

## **6. Staffing Implications**

- 6.1 This proposal will involve the creation of four family support workers and the conversion of an existing post to provide the management capacity for the additional staff.

## **7. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 The proposed services will be available Wirral wide and are responsive to the diverse needs of the community

## **8. Community Safety Implications**

- 8.1 The proposed service is being developed to ensure young people can live safely with carers who will encourage young people to behave in pro-social ways.

## **9. Local Agenda 21 Implications**

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report

## **10. Planning Implications**

- 10.1 There are none arising directly from this report

## **11. Anti-poverty Implications**

- 11.1 The approach proposed strengthens the resources of families to meet the needs of children and reduces the impact of poverty

## **12. Social Inclusion Implications**

- 12.1 The approach proposed reduces the risk of children becoming looked after and therefore more effectively maintains them in their community.

## **13. Local Member Support Implications**

13.1 There are none arising directly from this report

#### **14. Background Papers**

The Public Law Outline 2008 Ministry of Justice  
Revised Statutory Guidance on Court Orders of the Children Act (Volume 1) DCSF (2008)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That:

- (1) The Family Group Conferencing Team be increased as described and the cost be funded from the Efficiency Investment Fund.
- (2) Members note the anticipated budget saving of £70,000 in 2011 –12 and £130,000 in 2012-13.

Howard Cooper  
Director of Children's Services.