

**OPTION: AREA TEAMS FOR FAMILY SUPPORT**

**BUDGET SAVING: £200,000**

### **DESCRIPTION OF OPTION**

Area Teams provide preventative services for vulnerable children and families. The team and partners provide support to these children and families to prevent their situation getting worse.

***The option in this area is to reduce the number of Area Teams from 11 to 4, remove some duplication and have them work across the borough based on need.***

### **RATIONALE FOR SAVINGS**

Area Teams were established to support early intervention with children and families through encouraging agencies in using the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child process. They currently have a budget of £517,000.

The role of Area Teams is to support a multi-agency team in each of 11 areas and. The Area Team Leaders (ATLs) provide training, support, quality assurance and reporting of activity in each area supported by Information Sharing Coordinators (ISCs). There is an Area Team in 11 areas in Wirral (matched with area forum geography) and supported by 7.5 ATLs and 7.5 ISCs (some areas are managed under 1 ATL).

Wirral has recently had a peer challenge facilitated by the Childrens Improvement Board which looked at family support and area teams. Colleagues from other local authorities examined our services, processes and procedures and resources in this area and how we were evidencing impact on outcomes for children. The peer challenge fed back many positives about the workforce and the various services but that there needed to be improved targeting and coordination across all services in early intervention, duplication of access points, services and processes needed to be reduced and there needed to be an improved single access route to these services for children and families. The Area Teams needed to be built upon as part of this process, and move from a current facilitative and development role to more directive and managed part of an early intervention strategy.

The department is currently undertaking a review of its services in this area which has involved a detailed needs analysis, review of current best models of practice, developing improved performance and outcome impact processes and a more targeted approach and co-ordinated approach to accessing services and a more coherent evidenced-based model for family support.

The Allen review: Early Intervention: Next Steps (January 2011) and Smart Investment: Massive Savings (July 2011) clearly evidences the impact that that effective early intervention can have on children and families and the longer term cost benefits.

The current thinking is that the Area Teams will evolve into a 4 district based service which is part of a multi-agency locality team model where all requests for service under the early

intervention strategy are accessed through a single point of access in each locality. The current onus on agencies to complete Common Assessments will be removed and undertaken by a member of the locality team who will be trained in a Family Assessment model and who will coordinate a plan with agencies around that family. Where necessary, a member of the team will act as lead professional. Targeted family support will also be provided through the locality team as part of a service re-configuration.

## **IMPACT**

The reorganisation would target services more effectively to meet the needs of children and families. The proposed savings (reducing ATLs and ISCs to 4 posts – one per locality) would lead to an improved service for children and families through improved management of resources. The impact on staff would be 3.5 Area Team Leaders and 3.5 Information Sharing Coordinators.

The evidence from other local authorities is that the proposed approach improves targeting of hard-to reach and hard to engage families earlier and reduces the escalation of concerns to children's social care.

## **MITIGATION**

Area Teams would continue to liaise with agencies who work with children who are adversely affected by poverty, parental and family drug and alcohol use, domestic violence, learning disability and mental health. The proposed service will allow support to reach those families earlier before formal intervention from social care.

The Children's Trust would lead this process on a strategic level as the engagement of partners is critical to its success at a time when all public sector services are under financial pressure but this would provide an opportunity for shared services and approaches.

Where services are currently commissioned from the voluntary, community and faith sector, they would need to be key members of the locality teams as the services need to align with the children and families at need of targeted support. This may mean challenges and capacity building in the local VCF sector to develop the services they provide with hard to reach and hard to engage families through a range of evidenced based interventions and how to report evidence of impact on outcomes.