

Research Briefing:

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Rhagfyr 2016

Petitions Committee | 13 December 2016

Petition number: P-05-728

Petition title: Protect Families First Funding

Petition wording: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to protect the Families First budget in order to protect the most vulnerable families across Wales, including in our own area of Neath Port Talbot (NPT).

Families First is a Welsh Government-funded innovation programme that promotes the development by local authority areas of effective multi-agency systems and support, with a clear emphasis on prevention and early intervention for families, particularly those living in poverty.

At the end of August, the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Communities issued a letter to local authorities about the future of Families First, which is due to end in March 2017. In his letter he outlined the future priorities to address identified gaps in service provision for parents and young people and link the work of the programme clearly with the prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

The Cabinet Secretary is expected to make a formal announcement on the future of the programme in the autumn and budgetary allocations for each local authority will not be known until late December 2016. With Communities First coming to an end in March 2017, this reinforces the need for Families First to be protected.

In its first full year of operation, NPT's 'Think Family' early intervention and prevention programme supported almost 100 families to make positive changes and tackle issues before they became critical. Based on Government estimates that one troubled family can cost the taxpayer in the region of £75,000 per year, this represents a return on investment of £3.32 for every £1 spent and more than £7.3 million savings to the economy.

The Welsh Government reduced the Families First Grant in NPT by £260,000 for 2016/17, with a grant of £1,964,194. 2,586 individuals accessed a Families First service during 2015-16 in NPT.

What is Families First?

The Welsh Government's Families First Programme was established in 2010 with the aim of improving the design and delivery of the services local authorities provide to families.

The Welsh Government aims for the programme are for:

- working age people in low income families to gain, and progress within employment
- children, young people and families, in or at risk of poverty, to achieve their potential
- children, young people and families to be healthy and enjoy well-being
- families to be confident, nurturing resilient and safe.

Local authorities develop a Families First Action Plan which sets out how they will implement Families First locally. When the plans have been approved by the Welsh Government, local authorities commission services to deliver them. Families First aims to **'develop effective multi-agency systems of support for families, particularly those living in poverty'**¹. It also 'places an emphasis on **early intervention and prevention**, and on bringing organisations together to work with the whole family to help stop problems

¹ Welsh Government, Children and young people wellbeing monitor for Wales, December 2015



escalating towards crisis. A key feature of the programme is that services are bespoke and tailored to individual family circumstances to maximise the effectiveness of interventions.’²

Further information can be found on the Welsh Government’s [Families First webpage](#) and in the [Families First Guidance](#).

Welsh Government’s response

In a letter, in response to the petition under consideration, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children said that ‘**at this point I am unable to commit funds to the Families First Programme beyond March 2018** as the Welsh Government is currently working to a one year budget planning period.’

He referred to his recent [Statement](#) regarding the future of the Communities First Programme and said:

Following a transition period next year, **I have decided to refocus the strategic projects commissioned by the Families First Programme** to ensure we are able to address identified gaps in the areas of support for parents and young people and to clearly link the work of the Programme with the prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

I have not made a decision on the future of Communities First as yet. We are in a consultation period in terms of that process. My intention is to make ensure we are absolutely sure we are tackling the issues around poverty and that all our programmes are working well and can intervene in the areas where we are trying to see success. I am not yet convinced that the Communities First programme alone is the only programme that can deliver and tackle poverty, and that is why I’ve asked my team to look at it very carefully. [our emphasis]

Referring to the next financial year he said that **the Families First budget for 2017-18 would remain at the same level as 2016-17**. He also said he was ‘in the process of finalising the allocation of funds within the Families First Budget and that indicative allocations would be sent to each Local Authority in accordance with our normal time table for notifying Local Authorities of their indicative allocations for the coming year. **It will be for each Local Authority to determine how best to allocate its Families First Programme grant** as they are best placed to ensure the interests of the families they serve are best achieved.’

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

² Ibid