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# Evaluation of Families First Year 3 Report Executive Summary September 2015



# **Evaluation of Families First Year 3 Report: Executive Summary**

**Julia Pye, Steven Ginnis, Alexander McCallum,  
Rowena Stobart (Ipsos MORI)**

**Korina Cox, Jenny Molyneux, Rachel Blades (Ecorys)**

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

For further information please contact:

Hayley Collicott

Children, Young People and Families Division:

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

02920 823111

[hayley.collicott@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hayley.collicott@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

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## 1.1 Introduction

This summary provides an overview of the Families First programme, and summarises key findings from an evaluation of the first three years of full programme delivery.

In July 2012 Ipsos MORI and Ecorys were commissioned by the Welsh Government to evaluate the national Families First programme over the period 2012-15. This is the final reporting output under this three year evaluation contract.

Families First aims to improve the design and delivery of the services local authorities provide to families. In particular, it aims to improve families' experiences through offering support that meets the specific needs of whole families, rather than individuals within families. Where families receive support from more than one agency, the intention is that agencies will work together so that families receive a coherent package of support.

Families First comprises five main elements, including a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) to provide a comprehensive evaluation of families' needs, a Team Around the Family (TAF) approach to working with families, a strategic approach to commissioning family support services, and specific provision for families affected by disability. The programme also contains an action learning element, to ensure that local level learning is shared at local, regional, and national levels. A key principle of the programme is that local services should be commissioned and designed based on an assessment of local needs.

The Year 1 evaluation reported that local and national stakeholders acknowledged there was scope to enhance the services provided to children and families before Families First was introduced, through improving the effectiveness of working practices.<sup>1</sup> In particular, there was scope for more efficient delivery of front-line services by coordinating the agencies involved in delivering services to families; for more consistency in the services provided to families with disabled children; and for a more strategic approach to commissioning services. The second year of the evaluation found that staff involved in implementing the programme, and families in receipt of services, endorsed the key design elements of Families First and felt they improved the quality and range of services on offer.<sup>2</sup>

Families First was introduced against a background of Wales experiencing a relatively high level of child poverty for the UK. The latest population data, reviewed in the full report, indicates that Families First continues to address a need among families experiencing the causes and consequences of living in poverty: for example, children from the least affluent families demonstrate lower rates of academic achievement than those from more affluent families at all levels. The programme is a key part of the Welsh Government's approach to tackling child poverty, and was designed to address the strategic objectives set out in the 2011 Welsh Child Poverty Strategy. These objectives are to prevent poverty and make it less likely over the long term; help people out of poverty and to take up job opportunities; and mitigate the impact of poverty here and now, by offering support to improve the lived experience of poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/131219-national-evaluation-families-first-year-1-report-en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw\\_101850-8.pdf](http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_101850-8.pdf)

## 1.2 The evaluation

The three-year evaluation sought to answer a number of questions about the programme including: whether the programme design is fit for purpose; an assessment of how the programme is implemented; the quality of the programme's implementation; the impact of the programme on families; and the impact of the programme at an overall population level.

This report provides an update on local authorities' progress in delivering the programme, before assessing the outcomes of local authorities' work on the way family support services are designed and delivered; and the impact of Families First on families. The evidence is based on a range of sources, including but not limited to: a review of local authority progress reports; local authority data relating to the outcomes of families who have benefitted from Families First; an online survey of 584 local stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of Families First; in-depth case study visits to four local authorities; and repeat case study visits to 21 families who have received Families First interventions.

Specifically, this report will provide:

- A review of the policy context;
- A review of progress in implementing Families First;
- An assessment of impacts and outcomes three years into the programme's delivery;
- Consideration of the programme's design and whether it is fit for purpose in delivering against the rationale for intervention; and,
- Examples of good practice in the implementation of Families First.

## 1.3 Key findings

### 1.3.1 National management

The Welsh Government's leadership and vision for Families First are highly rated by local stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> Consultations with the national programme team revealed they have a clear narrative about the programme and what it has achieved to date.

By the third year of the evaluation many national and local stakeholders acknowledged that more prescriptive guidance, and greater national oversight of local authority delivery plans, would have been beneficial at the outset of the programme. Effective local delivery of the programme is reliant on expertise as well as responding to local need; more guidance from the centre on those aspects of the programme where local authorities lacked the experience or capacity to deliver effectively would have improved the efficiency of the programme, and ensured that delivery was in line with Welsh Government expectations earlier. For example, local authorities reported hiring external consultants to assist with conducting needs assessments, the process of commissioning projects, and designing local delivery models.

National monitoring requires local authorities to report on a number of key progress measures quarterly, such as key inputs, outputs, and outcomes.<sup>4</sup> The nature of national monitoring data

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<sup>3</sup> The local stakeholder survey covered a range of staff including: members of core Families First teams; staff based in local authorities; staff working for local charities involved in delivering elements of the programme; staff based in a range of local mainstream services that play a role in delivery (such as health visitors, teachers etc.).

<sup>4</sup> For example, key inputs include details of staffing and finances; outputs include the stock and flow of families through JAFF, TAF and commissioned projects; outcomes include progress in establishing systems and outcomes of family support.

presents significant challenges when trying to compare outcomes across local authorities to draw conclusions about performance and delivery models. Apparent differences in performance – such as differences in the number of staff delivering the programme, and the flow of families – could be due to the different designs of local programmes and/or differences in the way family outcomes are measured. This limits the extent to which the national team and Account Managers can identify and challenge under-performance.

### 1.3.2 Local management

Local teams are making effective use of monitoring data to refine the design and delivery of Families First. In every local authority there are examples of staff refining the delivery of the programme based on analysis of local monitoring data.

Local level coordination and joined-up working with other family support programmes is currently more evident at operational levels. However a small number of local authorities have managed to achieve joint strategic management across family support programmes and, where this is the case, the evaluation team found evidence of less duplication in delivery and better use of resources. Staff claim that joint strategic management has also helped gain the buy-in of other teams to early intervention approaches.

In addition to the Families First team, a wide range of local agencies – including, for example, teachers, health visitors, charity workers – are involved in delivering Families First through activities such as referring families to JAFF, taking part in Team Around the Family meetings, and (in some local authorities) acting as key workers. For the programme to be successful, local authorities need to engage local agencies so they are aware of the programme and its processes and willing to play an active role in its delivery. The second year of the evaluation found high levels of awareness and engagement with Families First among potential delivery partners, but concluded that it could be improved among staff based outside the local authority. Stakeholder survey data from the final year of the evaluation demonstrates that staff based in organisations outside local authorities have an increasingly good understanding of their role in the programme's delivery.<sup>5</sup> However, engaging staff in the health sector continues to be a challenge, especially at the operational level. Families First teams are finding ways to overcome these challenges by, for example, consulting health practitioners for their input in advance of TAF meetings they are unable to attend.

### 1.3.3 Progress in implementing Families First

Spending across the key elements of the programme is similar to 2013/14: commissioned projects account for 72% of programme spending nationally, and JAFF/TAF account for 18% of spending. Services for families affected by disability (10%) and the running of learning sets (0.4%) account for the remainder of the programme budget.<sup>6</sup>

By March 2015, a total of 216 projects were running across the 22 local authorities.<sup>7</sup> There was an expectation that the projects commissioned under Families First would change from those run under Cymorth, with a particular focus on fewer, larger-scale, projects that were better aligned to population needs. Over the life of the programme, local authorities have realigned the suite of projects they commission: by 2015, less than 10% of spending on

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<sup>5</sup> The proportion of staff based in organisations outside local authorities who said their organisation's role in delivering Families First was 'very well defined' has increased from 38% in 2014 to 54% in 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Figures add to 100.4% due to rounding.

<sup>7</sup> This includes strategically commissioned projects only, and does not cover the commissioning of external providers to deliver JAFF/TAF.

projects was spent on former Cymorth projects that remained unchanged.<sup>8</sup> This change did not occur as a one-off response to local needs assessments, but has evolved over the life of the programme. Typically, authorities commission 'packages' of projects each of which are delivered by a consortia of providers, and aligned to particular local objectives. While a large number of providers may still be involved in providing support, the use of packages helps to improve collaboration among the providers under each package, and helps local authorities to reduce duplication across providers.

The evaluation's annual stakeholder survey suggests that local stakeholders were generally satisfied with both the process of commissioning, and satisfied that the services available meet the needs of families (95% of local stakeholders say the services available meet local needs well). Over the course of 2014/2015 commissioned projects were accessed by individuals 199,748 times.<sup>9</sup>

JAFF models were operational across all local authorities by 2014/15, although authorities have continued to make significant changes to models in cases where delivery was proving inefficient. The volume and quality of referrals to JAFF have improved over time. Compared with the previous year, there was a 20% increase in the number of families referred to JAFF in 2014/15. The flow of families through JAFF and TAF has also improved. There was a significant uplift in the proportion of JAFF-assessed families going on to sign a TAF action plan in 2014/15.<sup>10</sup> In total, 3,648 families across Wales completed a TAF action plan in 2014, a 48% increase on 2013, and 2,037 families supported by TAF achieved a successful outcome, a 61% increase on 2013.

Local authorities are at various stages in the delivery of activities related to the disability strand. Nationally, spending is in line with ring-fenced allocations, although seven local authorities spent less on disability than the ring-fenced budget allocation in 2014/15. At present almost a third (seven) of authorities have instigated wholly new disability activities this year and just over half (12) continue to provide specific training related to the disability element. The number of families with needs due to disability entering the programme has doubled compared with a year ago: twice as many families completed a JAFF (1,164 in total) and 974 signed a TAF action plan.

As in previous years, local authorities report a greater degree of underspend on learning sets than on any other strand of the programme. However, local authority progress reports highlight that across the board, multi-agency learning set activity has gathered momentum recently. Between July 2014 and March 2015, 18 new multi-agency learning set activities were established and 36 were completed.

#### 1.3.4 The impact of Families First on the design of family support services

Families First was intended to act as a catalyst to encourage local area system redesign, and the development and sharing of learning about how to better support children and their families. In particular, local authorities were encouraged through Families First to align services with local population needs; monitor service quality and efficiency; deliver greater efficiencies in services; participate in local, regional and national learning sets; and ensure appropriate Welsh language provision across family support services.

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<sup>8</sup> Please note that these figures should be treated with caution, as local authorities may have classified projects differently and were not always comfortable in attributing financial values to projects. However, the data indicate the scale of change in commissioning under Families First compared with Cymorth.

<sup>9</sup> Monitoring data captures the number of times projects are accessed but does not allow a judgement of the total number of families accessing projects (since the same families may access more than one project, and/or access the same project on more than one occasion).

<sup>10</sup> Some 82% of families referred to JAFF signed a TAF action plan in 2014/15, compared with 65% in 2013/14.



Families First has been effective in prompting system redesign. As illustrated in Table 1.1, local stakeholders perceive that Families First has played an instrumental role in transforming the process and quality of commissioning, and the quality of local provision. For example, just 40% of stakeholders considered the process of commissioning projects 'good' prior to Families First; following changes instigated by the programme, 81% see an improvement in the commissioning process with most attributing the improvement to Families First.

Table 1.1 Overview of Families First systems changes

	% 'good' prior to introduction of Families First	% citing an 'improvement' since introduction of FF (change cf. 2014)	% Improvement was direct result of FF or it was a significant contributor (change cf. 2014)
Process of commissioning projects for family support	40%	81% (+8ppts)	81% (-2ppts)
Quality of projects commissioned for family support	58%	82% (+5ppts)	81% (-2ppts)
Quality and range of local provision to support families affected by disability	41%	74% (+5ppts)	80% (+1ppts)
Sharing and learning of good practice both within and outside your local authority	44%	84% (+10ppts)	80% (+1ppts)

Source: Ipsos MORI stakeholder surveys, 2014 and 2015

Changes to the culture of commissioning and project monitoring should be considered one of the great successes of the programme. For most local authorities, the commissioning of services through formal procurement channels, with projects commissioned and decommissioned on the basis of needs assessments, represented a significant change in working practices. These changes have been challenging to implement, but local authorities and providers recognise the benefits. Changes to commissioning practices have been instigated because the Families First policy guidance stipulated that clear evidence of formal commissioning based on needs assessments was required; the guidance and monitoring requirements also helped to promote the use of results-based accountability techniques, and a focus on measuring the quality of delivery as well as outputs. Over time, there has been growing support for monitoring arrangements among local authorities as they recognise the benefits for delivering efficiencies and driving improvements to the quality of services.

The stakeholder survey and consultations highlight that, generally, the provision of services through Families First meets the needs of local populations: 95% of stakeholders report that projects and services commissioned through Families First meet the needs of identified families 'very' or 'fairly' well. However, stakeholders have been consistently less positive about the provision available for families affected by disability: only 45% consider that local provision is sufficient to address the needs of families affected by disability within their local authority area. To some extent, this could reflect the particular sensitivities in decommissioning support in this area to realign services. However, some of the greatest unmet needs are likely to be associated with constraints on accessing over-stretched mainstream services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and support from Educational Psychologists. It is likely that, as mainstream services are cut



further, the ability of TAFs to coordinate appropriate support for families could become more challenging.

Local authorities scrutinise the quality of projects via a range of monitoring data. Working with new monitoring protocols for Families First has affected the work of both local authority staff (83%) and providers (69%) beyond Families First. For example, providers have found it invaluable to be able to evidence the impact of their work with families when bidding for other contracts. There are also a number of instances where service and strategic level reviews across wider local authority provision have been informed by Families First monitoring data. Local authorities will need to ensure that formal monitoring requirements are proportionate so that high quality providers are able to bid for contracts; providers that underestimated the time/budget implications have found monitoring requirements onerous. It will also be important to ensure local authorities support those providers with the potential to provide high quality services, but which lack the skills or systems to engage in the commissioning or monitoring processes required by Families First. Local authorities report that they are encouraging providers to work in consortia with other agencies so that monitoring requirements do not impede the ability of agencies to bid for projects.

National stakeholders highlighted the establishment of effective multi-agency teams as one of the great successes of the programme. While multi-agency working pre-dated Families First in many local authorities, most report that Families First gave impetus and direction to multi-agency collaboration and has led to the development of much stronger networks. Staff across a wide range of agencies are enthusiastically embracing the advantages of multi-agency working and seeing the benefits for families and their own organisations.

TAF continues to sit at the heart of effective multi-agency working, and ongoing funding for TAF is essential if multi-agency working is to be sustained at its current scale. Beyond TAF, there is scope to improve the coordination of other Families First services at the point of delivery: families accessing commissioned projects without a TAF do not always experience joined-up services. There is also the scope for more authorities to develop systems that underpin joint working – such as common databases, directories of local providers – to ensure local provision is joined up at the point of delivery, and that multi-agency arrangements are sustainable. In the next phase of programme delivery, exploring the extent to which cross-authority partnerships and delivery could improve service quality and efficiency could also be valuable; the recommendations of the Williams Commission may stimulate greater cross-border working in future<sup>11</sup>.

Families First has also encouraged the development and sharing of learning to drive improvements in the quality of services. Programme staff were broadly positive about how the learning strand of the programme had operated, and the associated impacts. However, the impact of *informal* local learning appears to have been more significant than formal learning on local authorities' practices. The programme's emphasis on needs assessments, monitoring, and using ongoing feedback from the programme's implementation has also been instrumental in supporting a 'test and learn' culture. In general, local authorities appear to have concentrated mainly on establishing their local-level approaches, and using local learning to refine processes, rather than seeing opportunities for cross-authority learning to have a more fundamental impact on strategy and design. Local partners may have understood the intentions of formal learning sets better had national expectations been better articulated, particularly regarding aspirations for cross-authority collaboration.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://assemblyinbrief.wordpress.com/tag/williams-commission/>

The stakeholder survey data paints a mixed picture on authorities' progress on Welsh language provision. Some 72% of stakeholders considered that the projects and services commissioned within their local authority meet the Welsh language needs of families very or fairly well. However, only half (52%) agreed that the services and resources provided by their organisation through the Families First programme meet the Welsh language needs of families. Authorities reported challenges in recruiting appropriately-skilled staff with the requisite language capabilities.

### 1.3.5 The impact of Families First on the way family support services are delivered

The Families First guidance sets out a number of principles that should characterise the delivery of JAFF, TAF, projects and disability services: support should be **family focused** rather than focused on individual family members; it should be **bespoke** so that it tackles the needs families want to address and builds on their strengths; it should be delivered by integrated **multi-agency** teams working together; it should be **proactive** so that families receive help early and before their problems escalate; and it should be **intensive**. The evaluation suggests these principles are sound. Where case study families had poor experiences of Families First, it was often because one of these delivery principles was missing in the support they received.

The delivery principles are embedded in JAFF and TAF processes. Local stakeholders are confident that JAFF allows all members of the family to input, and that it forms the basis for tailored family plans. TAF encourages agencies to think creatively to design bespoke support for families that is based on their needs, rather than on what services they can offer. The attitude, flexibility and skills of key workers are as essential as the JAFF and TAF systems: key workers were often singled out as the most effective part of the intervention by families. In fact, families with negative experiences of Families First services often reported that the programme had a positive impact on their lives thanks to the key worker alone.

Some of the delivery principles are more evident in JAFF and TAF than in the strategic projects delivered under Families First, and there may be scope to extend some practices more broadly. For example, there may be a greater role for practitioners based in commissioned projects to identify additional needs in families beyond the immediate service user, and to work with or refer these cases appropriately.

Families First reaches families across a broad spectrum of needs. JAFF/TAF thresholds are high in some (though not all) local authorities, but families with less complex needs are able to access commissioned projects outside of TAF support. Many authorities with higher thresholds have introduced services to signpost families with lower-level needs to appropriate support (for example, several local authorities have introduced telephone services). However, practitioners and Families First Co-ordinators perceive that the nature of families accessing TAF are more complex than originally envisaged for the programme, mainly due to raised thresholds for statutory support having a knock-on impact on Families First referrals.

### 1.3.6 The impact of Families First on families' outcomes

The outcomes data and case study evidence show that families supported through TAF are achieving positive outcomes that can have a transformative effect on their lives. Local authorities record a case as 'closed with a successful outcome' where the objectives identified in the TAF action plan are met. These goals differ according to the TAF model and individual family needs. The way in which successful outcomes are defined varies by local authority: practitioners always play a role in defining success, but families have varying degrees of input into determining whether the case is categorised as 'successful'. Some 56% of families supported through TAF recorded successful outcomes against their objectives when their

TAF was closed. Among families affected by disability 66% recorded a successful outcome against their objectives. Significantly more families record progress against 'softer' outcomes than more easily quantified measures, which highlights the difficulty of observing the impact of Families First at the level of national population indicators. Unsurprisingly, the case studies highlight that progress on 'softer' outcomes are prerequisites to achieving hard outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth considering what constitutes success in terms of families' outcomes, and the point at which the full benefits of support are likely to be realised. In practice, a monitoring system that does not capture families' progress after exiting the programme is unlikely to be able to demonstrate the full impact of Families First, particularly for shorter-term interventions. Success for short-term interventions could be defined as equipping families to live more independently by building their resilience to address future challenges; and to enable them to reach their potential in the future, with less need for further state-funded support. Under this concept of success, the current monitoring data – which does not capture families' outcomes beyond their exit from the programme, nor measure the rate at which families require further state-funded support – will capture little of the impact the programme might achieve on harder outcomes nor the associated financial savings made by the state.

Cases with longer durations are more likely to record forward movement against hard outcomes within the timeframe of TAF support. Extending interventions may not be necessary for all families to achieve in the longer term, and extending interventions would reduce the flow of families through the programme. However, some local authorities appear to have protocols that mean most or all TAF cases close within six months, and there may be value in ensuring that practitioners have the scope to extend TAF support in cases where it may be useful.

Engaging families continues to be challenging, with around one in five families disengaging from services before cases are concluded. However, it is difficult to interpret these data: practitioners highlighted that family disengagement can reflect that families have achieved their goals quickly and exit the programme before signing off TAF plans, or they can reflect that families with complex needs are not yet ready to engage. Furthermore, a focus on disengagement figures could provide perverse incentives for delivery staff to target 'easier to reach' families.

Illustrative financial analysis conducted as part of the case study element of this evaluation demonstrates that Families First has the potential to offer substantial savings to the state where it helps families to avoid experiencing crises that require relatively costly interventions. For example, the help provided to one case study family (assuming their outcomes are sustained without the family accessing further support, and assuming the family's assessment of the trajectory they would have followed in the absence of Families First support is accurate) could be in the region of £77,000 per year until the child reaches adulthood. However, Families First interventions are based around family-specified goals which may not lead to progress against hard outcomes – and often do not, at least when cases close – and some families require intensive and sustained key worker support with little apparent chance of achieving material gains. The cost analysis is limited by the absence of an estimate of additionality for the programme. Robust, statistical data on the long-term outcomes for Families First-supported families and a comparison group of similar families not engaged in the programme would be needed to make definitive conclusions about the economic benefits of the programme.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Soft' outcomes include, for example, improved relationships within the family, and improved wellbeing for family members. 'Harder' outcomes include children's attendance at school, or parents moving into employment.

The evaluation suggested a number of ways in which Families First promoted ways of working with families that practitioners and families perceived as being conducive to positive outcomes. Key workers were able to advocate for families to achieve 'quick wins' on issues families faced to give families the capacity and space to start to tackle other issues. Key workers also provided a range of practical help and emotional support which families felt helped equip them to tackle their problems on their own. Families often referenced coping strategies that key workers had taught them and which they continued to use after their involvement with Families First. Various other aspects of key worker support were highlighted by families as useful, including organising family activities, and providing positive adult role models for their children.

Table 1.2 Overview of successes and challenges for Families First

	Successes	Challenges
National management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The national governance and leadership of the programme, including the Account Management function, is highly rated by local authorities.</li> <li>▪ Local teams appreciate having face-to-face contact with members of the national team, and access to Account Managers to resolve problems quickly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The variety of local delivery models and monitoring tools used by local authorities makes it difficult for the national team and Account Managers to compare the performance of local authorities to identify particularly good or poor practice.</li> <li>▪ The flexibility allowed in the programme guidance is viewed as helpful in some respects, but most local and national stakeholders now acknowledge that more prescriptive guidance at the outset of the programme would have been helpful.</li> </ul>
Programme design and progress in implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The feedback and experiences of families and practitioners endorse the design and delivery principles of Families First as being sound.</li> <li>▪ The key programme elements - including JAFF, TAF, and commissioning - and the guidance on how they should</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It may be worth reviewing whether the programme's design and delivery is optimal for families with more complex needs than it was originally envisaged an early intervention programme would support.</li> </ul>

be implemented, have helped to instigate significant organisational change in local authorities. Local stakeholders are confident the programme has prompted improvements in the quality and delivery of local family services, and the way services are commissioned.

- The key programme delivery principles – family-focused, bespoke, integrated, proactive, intensive, and local – are endorsed as important through qualitative feedback. JAFF, TAF and key workers are instrumental in ensuring services are delivered according to these principles.

#### Strategic commissioning

- The programme requirements have helped to transform commissioning through the use of formal procurement processes, commissioning based on needs assessments, and the use of RBA-based monitoring approaches to review the quality of project delivery.
  - Local authority teams are monitoring providers' delivery of services and challenging poor delivery. Local authorities are using data to realise efficiencies in commissioning.
  - The commissioning of consortia ('packages') in the delivery of family services has promoted collaboration across provider agencies, and
- Commissioning activity *across* local authorities is fairly limited at present. Given the potential for efficiencies in cross-local authority working, there may be value in encouraging this further in future.
  - As services are recommissioned, there will be challenges in maintaining high quality services during the recommissioning period. Local authorities will need to ensure that monitoring requirements are proportionate so that provider agencies are willing to bid for contracts within Families First.

	<p>helped realise efficiencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both local authorities and provider agencies have developed useful skills and data by generating and analysing monitoring information. Skills and data are being applied beyond Families First.</li> </ul>	
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The disability strand of the programme has prompted the introduction of new types of disability provision, including services targeted at whole families (rather than disabled individuals) and pre-diagnosis services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress against the disability element of the programme has been relatively slow. There are particular sensitivities around adjustments to non-statutory disability provision. This has meant that a significant amount of stakeholder engagement work has been needed to reassure communities and prepare for changes that align provision with Families First principles.</li> <li>Local stakeholders have been consistently less positive about the quality and range of provision available to families affected by disability than services for other families. To some degree this reflects cuts to core services beyond the scope of Families First.</li> </ul>
Multi-agency working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While some multi-agency working was in place prior to Families First, the programme has accelerated progress by increasing the number of agencies collaborating and the extent to which they</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scope for Families First teams to coordinate services when core services are being cut is a significant challenge, particularly in the area of disability provision.</li> <li>There are challenges in</li> </ul>

<p>collaborate.</p> <p>Early intervention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ TAF is fundamental to multi-agency working and ongoing funding for TAF is necessary to maintain multi-agency working at its current rate.</li> <li>▪ Families First has helped to raise the profile and promote the value of early intervention among many practitioners and local authority teams.</li> <li>▪ Families First works across the spectrum of need. Thresholds to access TAF vary by local authority, and in some cases are set relatively high.</li> </ul>	<p>engaging partners from all sectors, especially those working in over-stretched services such as health and mental health teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More systems to underpin joint working, such as joint databases, could help to sustain multi-agency working.</li> <li>▪ Cuts to services and rising thresholds to access social services means that Families First is often operating at a higher level of need than originally envisaged. Further cuts to public services may exacerbate this trend, and could undermine support for early intervention.</li> <li>▪ Practitioners highlight that families might not be receptive to support until they reach crisis point: a significant challenge in achieving early intervention is that families may not always want it.</li> </ul>
<p>Family outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The final year of the current evaluation suggests the programme is maturing, with more appropriate referrals over time. There is an increased flow of families through JAFF and TAF, with a higher proportion of families at each stage progressing to the next. This is also the case for families affected by disability.</li> <li>▪ Some 56% of families report successful outcomes against their own objectives when they exit the programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disengagement of families continues to be problematic, with around a fifth of families starting a TAF plan disengaging before completing it.</li> <li>▪ Managing families' exit from the programme can also be difficult, with some families with particularly complex needs becoming dependent on key worker support.</li> <li>▪ The lack of long-term monitoring data on families' outcomes makes it impossible to judge the full impact of the</li> </ul>



	<p>Among families affected by disability, 66% record successful outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cases with longer durations are more likely to record successful outcomes within the timeframe of TAF support.</li> </ul>	<p>programme, nor assess the cost savings it may contribute. The intervention primarily aims to build families' resilience, equipping them with skills to respond to issues more proactively in the future. Short-term monitoring data does not allow an assessment of how far this ambition is achieved. It can also be challenging to evidence families' progress on these 'softer' outcome areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ While illustrative cost analysis of family case studies shows Families First has the potential to generate large cost savings for the state where it helps families avoid poor long-term outcomes, the outcomes data available do not allow us to gauge extent to which this is the case.</li> </ul>
<p>Learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is strong evidence of a learning culture among local authorities. Families First teams are responding to local monitoring data and feedback to refine the design and delivery of the programme over time.</li> <li>▪ In the final year of the evaluation there has been some evidence that formal learning activity has gathered momentum, with new learning sets being formed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learning sets have been less significant than informal learning in driving improvements to the programme. There are particular challenges around large-scale formal learning sets (such as teams being reluctant to be open about the challenges they face), and difficulties in applying learning when local authorities are using such different delivery models.</li> </ul>