

Parent and child services - stakeholder engagement event 2nd May 2017

Summary of feedback - What's working well, what hasn't worked well and what can we do about it?

Coherent range of services

What's working well?

- When parents are in accommodation near to family, friends and work and get peer support from other parents
- Access to specialist support such as the Family Nurse Partnership and specialist health visiting
- Children's centres and other community resources are a popular way to get additional universal services

What hasn't worked well?

- Placements far away from support networks increases the need for input from staff and can increase a sense of isolation as being too disruptive to work, education and childcare.
- The lack of assessment placements and supported accommodation for couples, fathers and for older vulnerable parents in supported accommodation.
- Parents are often ready to move on from supported accommodation - but do not have anywhere to move on to.
- Parents can see supported accommodation as a route to settled housing and some parents are placed in low support accommodation when they just need accommodation.

What can we do about it?

- Better triage into supported accommodation and a challenge around support needs
- Increased capacity for fathers, couples and high support accommodation for young parents.
- Developing move-on options and holding open vacancies when move on from assessment placement is required.

Working together / collaborating across the system

What's working well?

- Working relationships between supported accommodation and health on the whole work well although there is a greater emphasis on this relationship in young parent's accommodation.
- Working relationships between in-house parenting support (Priority Intervention Team) are stronger with some supported accommodation placements than others and the relationship with Home choice team does vary.
- Signposting to the BCC 'Roof over my head' tenancy accreditation course has had a good take up and is good preparation for young parents.

What's not working so well?

- Parents being placed in inappropriate supported accommodation, often based on referrals that do not include sufficient detail about the parents' needs.
- There have been poor links and communication between social workers and supported accommodation and challenges in sharing information due to a plethora of systems and assessment formats.

- Residential assessments are unable to effectively link parents back into community resources due to the fact that they are located out of the area.
- There is a drop off in mental health services when a young person turns 18 and transfers to adults mental health services.

What can we do about it?

- Change the process of allocation to ensure services match need – involve the providers of supported accommodation to ensure a (a) good match and (b) a good fit with existing service users/customers.
- There needs to be a greater emphasis and clear expectations around the responsibilities of sharing information, including when a family moves on to health and education.
- Residential family centres should be tasked to support transitions back into the community as part of a process/pathway for parents with a beginning middle and an end.

Reducing costs/spend

What's not working so well?

- Placing families in supported accommodation with higher levels of support than the parents need.
- Parents remaining in supported accommodation when are ready to move on.
- Residential family centres have high fees and the use of them should be reduced unless they are strictly needed.
- Extended family support network isn't identified early enough - Often children that are removed are placed under special guardianship orders with extended family.

What can we do about it?

- Matching parents to the right place - lowest cost assessment placement/supported accommodation to meet their needs.
- Having available move-on options parents into lower cost housing solutions including the private rental market to reduce the number of parents taking up a placement in supported housing when they no longer have support needs.
- Having a range of interventions in residential family centres - varying from low supervision and monitoring to high, challenging these providers to offer a lower cost solution.
- Using the Family group conferencing model (FGC) earlier to explore potential of keeping the baby in the family could save time and money for placements which end with the child being removed and then placed with a family member.

Working with and assessing parents - challenges

What's working well?

- The use of clear, jargon free language and pictorial diagrams with all parents, whether or not they have been identified has having a learning difficulty.
- Checking back with parents every week during the assessment, so they understand the risks and concerns of professionals.
- Having clear expectations about the placement with both parents and professionals.

What's not working so well?

- It is often not clear if a parent has learning difficulty, particularly when they have strong language skills, often social workers don't notice that parents have learning difficulty.

- Engagement with parents who have been historically non-compliant/disguised compliance can be a challenge for professionals that are trying to take an independent view of the parent.
- Residential and foster placements can be very intense when high risk families are placed there and can break down if not well supported. Sometimes families have had a number of unnecessary moves (due to pressure to reduce cost to local authority) which has a negative impact on the whole process and increase stress to both parent and baby in a formative period.
- There is a lack of foster placements that will take fathers and couples due to perceived increased risk and residential family centres which do take more complex cases, couples and fathers but can be false environments to assess parenting capacity.
- Out of area assessments can produce positive assessments of parenting capacity that then fail as the client then has to move back into their community and previous risks/temptations.

What could we do about it?

- We need to explain better to parents why they are under assessment and what the goal is.
- Ideally we would identify if learning difficulties were present earlier. This usually takes a psychologist to assess but could be identified by looking at school records/EHCP assessments. This should be done early in court proceedings as understanding parent's cognitive ability also helps them to participate in the proceedings.
- Always do reports in easy read format.
- Psychotherapy can also be used to identify where there is disguised compliance.
- Specialist recruitment for foster placements that will take couples/fathers.
- For placements that will not take fathers, could assess in the community with father present only during the day.
- Bolt on support for foster placements may enable them to take on couples with higher support needs.
- Increase the use of local assessments. Have a step down arrangements following on from assessment places.

Working with and assessing parents – quality

What is working well?

- Quality assessment are those that - involve fathers, take a multi-agency approach, provide evidence and analysis, show where the conclusion comes from.
- Having specialists in learning difficulty, CAMHS, domestic violence, substance misuse and incorporating their views into the assessment works well.

What's not working so well?

- Parents can be on several plans that are not congruent.
- Assessments that take place outside the community do not address community based issues well.
- Assessments are starting from scratch when there is often historical information about the parent and parallel assessments being undertaken by other professionals.
- There is a lack of consistency in outcomes/expectations that vary across services.
- Assessment recommendations are not always followed after court has made decision whether child remains with parent or is removed and these parents may then go on to have subsequent babies and have subsequent removals.

- Many foster placements don't accept fathers and parents may have a favourable assessment as a 'lone parent' but still be in domestic violent/ abusive relationship when they return home.

What can we do about it?

- Make sure everyone has information and is clear about what is happening and why - understanding of which part of the assessment each organisation is contributing and a pathway for the parent / family, working towards clear outcomes.
- More assessments taking place in the community environment and widen support networks to include positive community/family friends.
- Increasing the use of common/shared assessments between Family Nurse Partnership, supported housing, social work and foster/residential.
- Increasing the use of intelligence/cognitive ability/prompt psychological assessment as the start of assessment process in all settings will allow better tailoring of support to parents.
- There is a need for environments where we can manage risk of domestic violence.

Working with and assessing parents – homelessness prevention accommodation and support

Pros and cons of Young parents (under 25) only service

Pros

- Young parents are housed separately to families with entrenched issues and high support needs.
- Having young parents specific accommodation and support allows specialist support, easy to access to this cohort.
- The current young parent's service is very joined up – integrated knowledge and information sharing across floating and accommodation leads to fewer tenancy breakdowns.
- BYPA take all the floating support referrals (no waiting list). 50% referrals to BYPA currently from health and self-referrals, education/ children centre refer into floating support.
- Would meet the gap in services for vulnerable parents aged 25+ years.

Cons

- If mixed age services are introduced, the gap could be that expertise for younger parents is lost by the provider.
- There is a concern that if young parents were living with older parents, they would be negatively impacted on although equally parents in young parent accommodation can't get peer support within their accommodation from older parents (who have low/no support needs).
- There is a concern by professionals that mixing young parents with older parents with high support needs and entrenched behaviours would be high risk.
- If young parents have the same support worker throughout from a floating support service it could create dependence.

What can we do?

- Expertise could be retained by keeping young parent expertise in floating support service or having specialist staff within a team.
- If there is a shared resource for parents under 25 and older parents it may need to be self-contained accommodation and be in separate housing, creating more flexible contracts could allow this.

- Closer liaison with BCC accommodation services would ensure that there is a balance in the accommodation and assess whether it is appropriate to place a parent there.
- Mixing parents with high support needs and entrenched behaviours with younger parents carries a high level of risk due and accommodation for these adults with high support needs may need to be commissioned separately.
- Explore the possibility of joint service between the Family Nurse Partnership and a housing related support floating support service for young parents.
- Clear communications protocols needed between providers, housing advisors and social workers are needed with direct phone numbers available.