



# ***It takes a village***

Building environments for  
Children to thrive



*Solace in  
partnership  
with PwC*

# Foreword

by Solace president, Jo Miller,  
Chief Executive Doncaster MBC



*“Every child has the right to grow up in an environment where they feel safe and secure, have access to basic services and clean air and water, can play, learn and grow and where their voice is heard and matters.”*

This statement is the basis of UNICEF’s Child Friendly City initiative. And, while we may not all be aiming for the official *Child Friendly* stamp on our city, county or town, we can surely all agree that it’s an ambition we should be striving for every single day.

I know that the challenges of children’s services are keeping many of us awake at night. Child protection enquiries have risen by more than 150% in a decade. At the same time, government funding has fallen to the point where we are now facing a £2 billion gap in children’s spending.

However, as I said in my LGC article earlier this year, while we must continue to fight for the sustainable funding of children’s services, we must not lose sight of the fact that “it takes a village to raise a child”. This means thinking more widely about the places we are creating for our young people. It means accepting that we cannot protect budgets for acute need at the exclusion of upstream investments which create the right conditions for all children to thrive.

In my last major project as Solace President, I wanted to shift the focus away from acute services towards understanding how leaders can and are using the wider network of support – the ‘village’ – to address some of the causes of demand and create places where children can grow, play and have their voices heard.

In producing this report, we wanted to explore the different drivers for demand in children’s services, as well as some of the theories and evidence about how those drivers can be addressed. Most importantly, we wanted to showcase what is already being done on the ground to harness our power as placemakers for children, not just because it makes sense financially but because it is the right thing to do.



The case studies we are sharing are intended to show what creating ‘the village’ looks like in practice, encompassing the wider network of services, interactions, spaces and communications local authorities can impact to build resilient communities where children thrive without any acute interventions from the state. Whether it’s embedding a whole family approach in social services, signing the council up to a child-first approach or simply letting children into the planning department for the day, it all helps us rebalance and refocus on what’s important to the child.

I’d like to extend my thanks to the team at PwC for providing their insight and resources to bring this report together, and to all of you who took the time out of your busy schedules to tell us about the brilliant work you are doing. I am a believer in *telling the good stories as much as the bad* in times like these. Even with depleted finances under greater scrutiny, it’s right that we show what we’re capable of. We’re here to create places that help people thrive, not just keep them safe.

As we approach the next Comprehensive Spending Review, we are urging public spending decisions to be made with the impact on children in mind – across every department or service – from building affordable housing to investing in libraries and early years help.

If it takes a village to raise a child, then councils and partners need to be able to use all their powers and resources to strengthen that village. We hope this report helps and encourages you to do so – and build places where all families can truly thrive.

Yours sincerely



Jo Miller  
Chief Executive







The background of the page is a photograph of a dirt road, showing a mix of brown, tan, and grey tones with some small stones and patches of green vegetation.

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# Introduction

In meeting their statutory obligations to vulnerable children, local authorities are facing a perfect storm. A combination of chronic underfunding and rising demand is causing an unsustainable level of stress across the entire system. Moreover, attempts to protect core services by cutting non-statutory programmes often simply transfer that stress to another part of the system, adding to the pressure on parents and families and stoking the furnace of future demand.

This chapter explores how local authorities are all wrestling with the challenges of balancing funding with demand, just as scrutiny and criticism from regulators, the media and the public is on the rise. It makes the case that ‘it takes a village’ to find a solution. That is, only by understanding the multiple pressures on local authorities holistically can we hope to identify sustainable solutions to the challenges facing social services today.

## A decade of budget cuts is taking its toll

The story of local authority finances over most of the last decade has been one of swingeing budget cuts.

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# 49.1%

The National Audit Office has recorded a 49.1% real-terms reduction in local authorities' government funding between 2010/11 and 2017/18 ...

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# 28.6%

... as well as a 28.6% reduction in their spending power.

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# 3%

And while the 3% reduction in social services spending has been comparatively modest, it has been achieved at the expense of a 32.6% reduction in spending on all other services.

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Recent moves to increase social services funding, such as the additional £150 million Adult Social Care Support Grant from central government in 2018/19, and the power to raise a social care precept, must be seen against this wider backdrop.

Many of the steps that authorities have taken to manage shrinking budgets have done little more than postpone the need for fundamental change.

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# 66.2%

of authorities with social care responsibilities drew down financial reserves in 2016/17.

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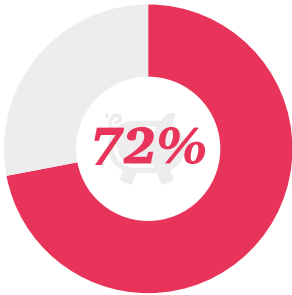
Stop-gap measures like this cannot be repeated year after year (the same is true of asset sales and increased borrowing). Nor can back-office efficiencies deliver recurrent savings on the scale required.

Worse still, cuts in non-statutory spending such as Early Help, housing and economic investment are building up bigger problems for the future. Before long, these cuts will simply add to the already growing number of children at risk and in care. It is symptomatic of the fact that many local authorities have felt obliged to focus on delivering a narrow statutory definition of 'core' services rather than the wider, long-term aim of helping children, families and communities thrive.

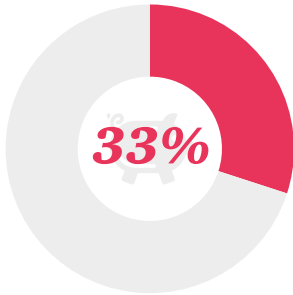


# PwC's 2018 Local Government Survey

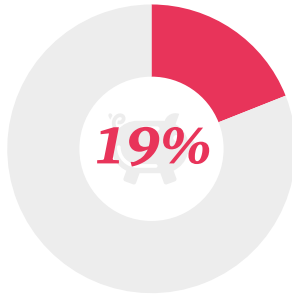
Council respondents confidence of delivering savings without impacting quality of service or outcomes.



Next year



Next 3 years



Next 5 years

What optimism there is in local authority finances extends no more than one year into the future. In PwC's 2018 local government survey, 72% of council respondents said they were confident of delivering savings next year without impacting quality of service or outcomes. But thereafter confidence plunges (to 33% over the next three years and to 19% over five years).

Moreover, the present confidence is fragile:

74%

Almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents expect that some councils will get into serious financial difficulties in the year ahead. That compares with only 54% in the previous year's survey.



The reality is that, unlike the NHS, local government knows there is no prospect of significant additional funds being made available.



## Demand for social services – and the scrutiny that comes with it – keeps growing

Money is not the only major cause for concern in social services. Demand has risen steadily and appears set to continue growing. Indeed, in its comprehensive annual review, *How safe are our children?* the NSPCC paints a gloomy picture. The few bright spots in the review, such as the long-term decline in child deaths by assault across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the downward trend in looked-after children in England experiencing three or more placement moves during the year, are eclipsed by evidence of the growing demands placed on children's services.



The following examples illustrate the point:

# 200,000

The number of children in need due to abuse or neglect in England rose from just under 150,000 in 2009/10 to more than 200,000 in 2016/17, an increase of 31% in the rate per 10,000 children.

# 45,000

The number of children in care due to abuse or neglect is the highest on record in England, having risen from just over 35,000 in 2001 to just under 45,000 in 2017.

# 68.6%

Between 2002 and 2017, all parts of the UK have seen increases in the number of children who are the subject of a child protection plan (CPP) or on a child protection register. In England, the increase was 68.6%, and, furthermore, a growing number of children were the subject of a CPP on multiple occasions.

The pressure on social services departments is compounded by the growth in online child abuse, increased regulatory scrutiny and heightened public and media attention. Those involved in child protection are inevitably affected by the spotlight they are placed in. They are also sensitive to the criticism that follows high-profile cases such as the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly. Indeed, this has arguably led the child protection system to become too interventionist and overly risk averse. Whether that's true or not, children's services are certainly feeling the strain of a dual burden: more children at risk requiring their help and heavier reputational penalties for any mistakes (actual or perceived) made in providing it.

## ‘It takes a village’ to solve the crisis in child social services

This current child protection crisis cannot be solved with ‘more of the same’. Focusing narrowly on statutory services, cutting non-statutory programmes, sticking with traditional approaches to service delivery – none of these will deliver the necessary step-changes in efficiency and improved outcomes. Instead, we need to understand what is really driving demand for child social services. We need to adopt place-based interventions which reduce that demand at source. And we need to reinvent the role of the local authority as a ‘facilitator of outcomes’ rather than a service delivery organisation.

These needs all come together in the idea of *‘It takes a village’*. It calls on local authorities to think broadly about how they can work with other public bodies, as well as voluntary organisations, businesses and communities, to create a single system – the ‘village’ – which not only keeps children safe, but also provides a nurturing environment in which they can prosper and flourish.






It is one thing to call for change, quite another to make it happen. Most councils are acutely aware that demand for social services on all fronts will continue to rise unless we collectively refocus on the social determinants of children's health and wellbeing and engage and empower our communities in a different way. And, while taking risks in the current climate is not easy, many councils are rising to the challenge. This report aims to build a sense of pride and empowerment within local authorities by showcasing a range of different case studies already underway from councils in varying political, demographic or financial situations. They powerfully demonstrate the changes that can be made – in staff mentality as much as investment programmes and pooling budgets.

Moreover, by highlighting the successes of place-based initiatives in child and family welfare, we aim to strengthen the case for them to be recognised as core council business. That implies that national policy and budget reviews should reflect the fact that councils want to do more than just safeguard children; they want to create engaging, active communities and spaces where children and families thrive. After all, it takes a village, it takes a council working together with its community, it takes a mindset of 'doing with' not 'doing to'. In the long term, it's the only way to reduce the unsustainable burden on social services.

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The case studies we showcase in this report are just a snapshot of some of the brilliant work going on around the country. If you'd like to share your own experiences, please watch this space as we continue to build content and share best practice online.

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# Drivers of demand

What's changed in the last ten years?

**The numbers of children in need, in care and requiring protection have grown at an unprecedented rate over the past decade. Data suggests the rate (or reporting) of child abuse and neglect has risen by between one-third and two-thirds over the same period. But what is behind these bleak numbers? What is it about the way we live now that is driving such intense demands on social services?**

No doubt the world looks different now than it did ten years ago. We've seen the emergence of social media, growing reliance on technology in most aspects of our lives, the rise of nationalism and populist politics, and a shift in welfare policy and total welfare spending across the country.

A wide range of factors are now influencing a complex web of social interactions and changing the environment in which children are growing up, including:



Growing levels of poverty and child deprivation



A housing crisis in which homelessness has more than doubled since 2010



Growing but unmet needs, from both adults and children, for timely mental health support



Cuts to traditional community-based, early intervention and support services for families

The picture is complex. And that complexity means there is no 'silver bullet' solution. Instead, we need to think more holistically about how the different parts of the system, and different areas of policy, work together to impact children, their families, and their experiences.

## More children are living in poverty, with impacts on their outcomes lasting well into adulthood

The positive progress that had been made to lift families out of poverty since the 1990s, has begun to unravel. Since 2013, changes in the tax credit and benefits system have disproportionately impacted those on low incomes.<sup>1</sup>

# 4.1 million

In the year 2016/17 there were 4.1 million children living in poverty in the UK, representing 30% of children in the country.<sup>2</sup> In a class of 30 pupils, that equates to about 9 children in poverty.



Poverty blights childhoods. Poor children are often cold, hungry and unable to join in activities with their friends. But poverty can also have a much longer-lasting impact.

# 28%

By the time they take their GCSEs, there is a 28% attainment gap between children who receive free school meals, a standard measure of poverty, and those that don't (measured on the number achieving at least five GCSEs at grade C or above).<sup>3</sup>

This trend continues well into adulthood and across an entire lifetime. Adults born in England's most deprived areas have a life expectancy almost a decade shorter than those born in the least deprived areas.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2017). *UK Poverty 2017: A comprehensive analysis of poverty trends and figures*.
- 2 Households Below Average Income (2018). 'Statistics on the number and percentage of people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2016/17', Tables 4a and 4b. *Department for Work and Pensions*.
- 3 GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics: 2014 (2015). *Department for Education*.
- 4 Health state life expectancies by national deprivation deciles, England and Wales: 2014 to 2016 (March 2018). *Office of National Statistics*.



## More children are growing up in poor accommodation, with a stark impact on their health and wellbeing

Stable homes and surroundings are fundamental to children's wellbeing. A longitudinal study by Shelter and the National Centre for Social Research found that living persistently in poor housing conditions is significantly associated with being bullied in or out of school, getting in trouble with the police and having a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity. It also found that living in overcrowded accommodation is associated with children feeling unhappy about their own health.<sup>5</sup> Other studies have found similarly negative impacts from overcrowding and poor living conditions<sup>6</sup>:



Children living in overcrowded housing are up to ten times more likely to contract meningitis



Children in deprived areas are three times more likely to be hit by a car



Children in unfit and overcrowded homes miss school more frequently due to illnesses and infections



Poor housing conditions increase the risk of severe ill-health or disability by up to 25% during childhood and early adulthood



Homeless children are more likely to show signs of behavioural problems such as aggression, hyperactivity and impulsivity

Homelessness in England is on the rise.

# 83,740

The number of homeless households grew 26% between 2010 and 2017 (from 62,420 to 83,740).<sup>7</sup>

The lack of affordable housing poses a particular challenge for low-income families holding down poorly paid, part-time or contract jobs.

# 33,000

In July 2018, a study by Shelter reported that 55% (33,300) of families in temporary accommodation are now working families.

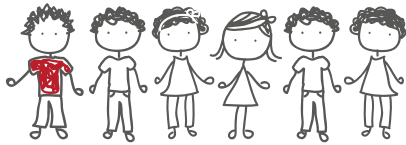
# 73%

That represents a 73% increase in homeless working families since 2013.

- 5 Barnes, M., Butt, S. and Tomaszewski, W. (2008). 'What happens to children in persistently bad housing?', *NatCen*.
- 6 Harker, L. (2006). 'Chance of a lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives'. *Shelter*.
- 7 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 'Live tables on homelessness'. Table 770, Accessed September 2018.

Adult mental health disorders are more prevalent, and parental mental health can have negative impacts on children

The prevalence of common mental disorders has risen by around a fifth since 1993. Today, one in every six people say they experience a common mental disorder each week.<sup>8</sup>



And over 2 million children are thought to live with a parent who has a common mental disorder.<sup>9</sup> For those children, this can have a detrimental impact in several ways, including:



Increased risk of developing behavioural problems (such as physical aggression) by school age



Increased risk of developing their own mental health issues



Need to take on a carer role for their parent – with consequential impacts on friendships, education, and their ability to deal with their own needs and feelings



Increased risk of bullying and isolation



Increased risk of suffering abuse or neglect from parents<sup>10</sup>

Most parents or carers with mental health issues will not abuse or neglect their children. But mental health is frequently a factor in cases of child abuse or neglect.

53%

A review of 175 serious case reviews in 2016 found that 53% of cases featured parental mental health issues.<sup>11</sup>

8 Mental health statistics for England: prevalence, services and funding. House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 6988, 25 April 2018.

9 Manning, V. et al (2009). New estimates of the number of children living with substance misusing parents: results from UK national household surveys. *BMC Public Health*, Vol.9. pp 377.

10 Aldridge, 2006; Cleaver et al, 2011; Cooklin, 2013; Gajos and Beaver, 2017; Gatsou et al, 2017; Grove et al, 2015; Henninger and Luze, 2012; Stallard et al, 2004; Tunnard, 2004; Wolpert et al, 2015.

11 Sidebotham, P. et al (2016). 'Pathways to harm, pathways to protection: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2011 to 2014: final report'. *Department for Education*.

## Children and young people are facing growing challenges with their emotional wellbeing

The Macquarie Youth Index<sup>12</sup> shows the happiness and wellbeing of 16- to 25-year-olds is at its lowest level since the study began in 2009. Young people do not feel in control of their lives and lack confidence in their abilities. And the findings are even worse for those not in education, employment or training (the 'NEETs').

# 24%

24% said they wouldn't confide in anyone if they thought they were suffering from a mental health issue.

Childline's 2016/17 annual review also highlighted the growing anxiety of children and young people.

# 17%

It showed a 17% increase in counselling sessions about anxiety on the previous year ...



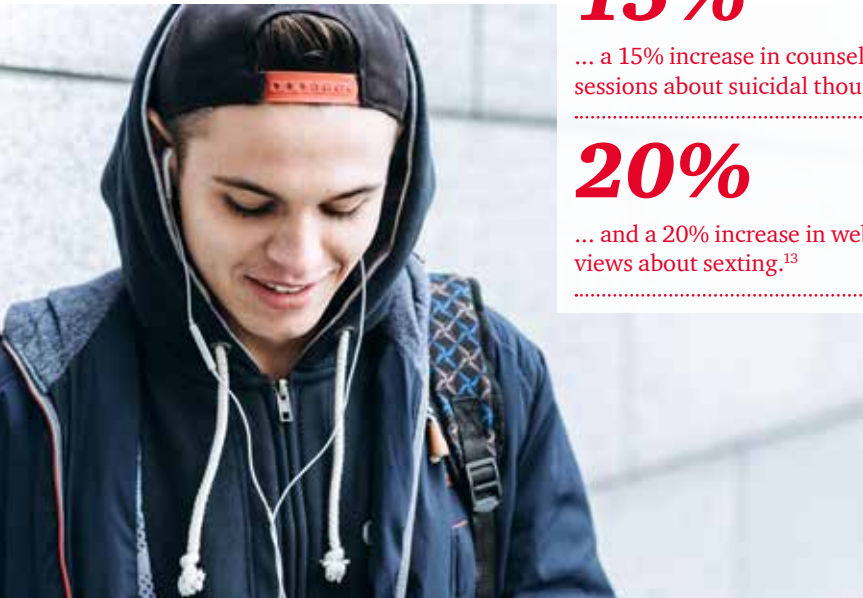
# 15%

... a 15% increase in counselling sessions about suicidal thoughts ...



# 20%

... and a 20% increase in website views about sexting.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>12</sup> The Prince's Trust Macquarie Youth Index (2017).

<sup>13</sup> Childline (2017). 'Not Alone Anymore. Childline annual review 16/17. Childline'.

These are just some of the challenges we must consider fundamental if we are to support children better

How can we help parents and families achieve more stable living conditions? How can we help them feel more supported in their mental health and wellbeing? How can we alleviate the societal pressures on children and ensure they have individuals around them they can confide in? These are the questions we must answer if we are to resolve the crisis in child social care?



\* Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services



# Reducing demand

A long-term investment  
for the right reasons



The growing numbers of children in need, or requiring care and protection, cannot be attributed to any single root cause. Individual drivers of demand for social services rarely, if ever, operate in isolation. Children exposed to one adverse experience are also likely to be exposed to several others.

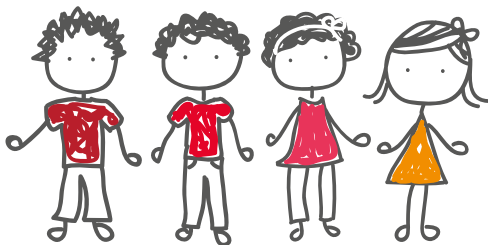
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# 420,000

Estimates suggest, for instance, that 420,000 children and young people under 18 live in a household where an adult suffers from the ‘toxic trio’ (frequent mental health issues, substance/alcohol abuse, and domestic violence).<sup>14</sup>

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Our most vulnerable children have complex issues. They cannot be solved by the current remit of statutory children services alone.



## How can we create ‘the village’ to stem demand?

Councils have a critical role in providing children’s services to meet their statutory duties. Doing so sustainably in the current financial climate is a growing challenge. But slashing early intervention and prevention services, a frequent method of achieving tactical savings, has already had a detrimental impact. It has reduced councils’ ability to stem the drivers of demand for children’s services and build ‘places’ that give children the future they deserve.

To develop and shape these places, councils need to recognise both the responsibility and the *power* they have. They need to shift the focus from ‘firefighting’ towards early intervention – and thus curb the need for more intensive involvement further down the line. However, with resources limited and the pressure of immediate need ever-present, this cannot be achieved by children’s directorates alone. Instead, councils must invest in partnerships with the voluntary, community, and private sectors, as well as the wider public sector, to develop a holistic network of services.

Ultimately, councils should look to a future where they act as **placemakers**, facilitating the various players within the system to create ‘a village’ capable of truly supporting children in need.

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14 Children’s Commissioner (2018). ‘Estimating the prevalence of the ‘toxic trio’: evidence from the adult psychiatric morbidity survey’, Vulnerability Technical Report 2.

## Placemaking to create secure and stable environments in which children prosper

Placemaking is not a new concept for local government.

*A multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces. Placemaking capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well being.<sup>15</sup>*

Urban planning term of placemaking

To be a placemaker is thus to lead, to agitate and to provoke. It means facilitating the integration of networks, people, services, etc., so that the various parts of the system are empowered to prosper, to support one another, and to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The placemaker is not necessarily responsible for providing the infrastructure, networks and services, but instead can facilitate their creation and development. In children's services specifically, this would entail facilitating the development of a network of assets (and connecting children and families with that network) with the goal of not only keeping children secure, but also stabilising their environment and allowing them to prosper.

To be a place-maker we need to assume that two key approaches are taken:



### **Asset-based (or strength-based) approach:**

This operates by encouraging children and families to gain awareness of the assets within their network that can help them. The focus is on working collaboratively with an individual and their family to develop a plan to overcome their challenges rather than dictating a level of service provision.<sup>16</sup>



### **Place-based approach:**

This puts the child at the centre of service provision design. Around them is built a comprehensive set of services that work collaboratively as an accessible network. This multi-agency way of working reflects the complexities of the root causes of the demand for children's services, but also seeks to offer support before acute interventions are required. A place-based approach thus reinforces and facilitates the success of asset-based working by maximising the assets available to children and families.<sup>17</sup>

15 What is Placemaking?, Project for Public Spaces, Available at: <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking> (Accessed 12/10/2018)

16 SCIE, (2015). 'Care Act Guidance on Strength – based approaches', SCIE, Available at: <https://www.scie.org.uk/strengths-based-approaches/guidance>, (Accessed 10/10/2018).

17 Munro, F (2015). 'Iriss on Place Based Working', Iriss. Available at: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/irisson-place-based-working>, (Accessed 10/10/2018).

## Promoting the value of place in partnership working

The importance of creating ‘places’ where children can prosper has been recognised by leaders in children’s welfare. For example, UNICEF’s ‘Child Friendly Cities’ initiative promotes communities that allow children to participate fully, feel safe and influence their environment through effective policies, initiatives and decision making.<sup>18</sup> The organisation describes it as a “child rights-based approach” in which, similar to an asset-based approach, partners and local authorities work jointly with the child in an empowering way. Children not only develop knowledge of how to access services available to them, but are also able to take a lead role in the decisions that affect their lives.

Similarly, Child Fair State adapts Maslow’s hierarchy of needs for a child, assuming that a child’s core needs are love, safety, purpose, home and health, underpinned by the ‘roots’ of a sustainable economy and environment, an authentic democracy and the existence of human rights. Child Fair State asks services to focus not on any individual need, but instead on the whole range of a child’s support needs so as to not “undermine any of [those needs] inadvertently”.<sup>19</sup> In addition, following Maslow’s hierarchy, it calls for the basic needs of the child and the family to be met before deciding what their further needs and support should be.

Furthermore, in assessing the impact on children of the North–South divide in her recent report ‘Growing up in the North’, the Lead Children’s Commissioner looked beyond schooling to wider ‘place-based’ factors such as access to the arts, economic opportunity and community life. The report argued that children in the North don’t feel they will benefit from the region’s economic regeneration, and this consequently impacts their aspirations and the decisions they make for their future. Among the report’s nine key recommendations was a call for the greater prioritisation of children’s prospects, promoting it to the same status as economic regeneration.<sup>20</sup>

The literature on place-based interventions accepts that the evidence base is currently limited and calls for robust data collection to be in place from the inception of any initiative. However, the studies are unanimous that we need a network of partnership working to truly allow our most vulnerable children to flourish. We therefore need councils to develop ‘system leaders’ – individuals with “the ability to work across services and organisations to meet the needs of the growing number of people with complex needs”.<sup>21</sup>

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18 Unicef (2018). ‘Child Friendly Cities’, *Unicef*. Available at: <https://childfriendlycities.org/>, (Accessed 10/10/2018).

19 Darlington, C., (2018). ‘The Child Fair State Enquiry’, *Child Fair State*. Available at: <https://www.childrenengland.org.uk/childfairstate>, (Accessed 10/10/2018).

20 Children’s Commissioner (2018). ‘Growing Up North. Look North: A generation of children await the powerhouse promise’. Available at: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Growing-Up-North-March-2018-1.pdf>, (Accessed 10/10/2018).

21 Kings Fund (2015). ‘The Practice of System Leadership: Being comfortable with chaos’. Available at: [https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field\\_publication\\_file/System-leadership-Kings-Fund-May-2015.pdf](https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/System-leadership-Kings-Fund-May-2015.pdf), (Accessed 10/10/2018).

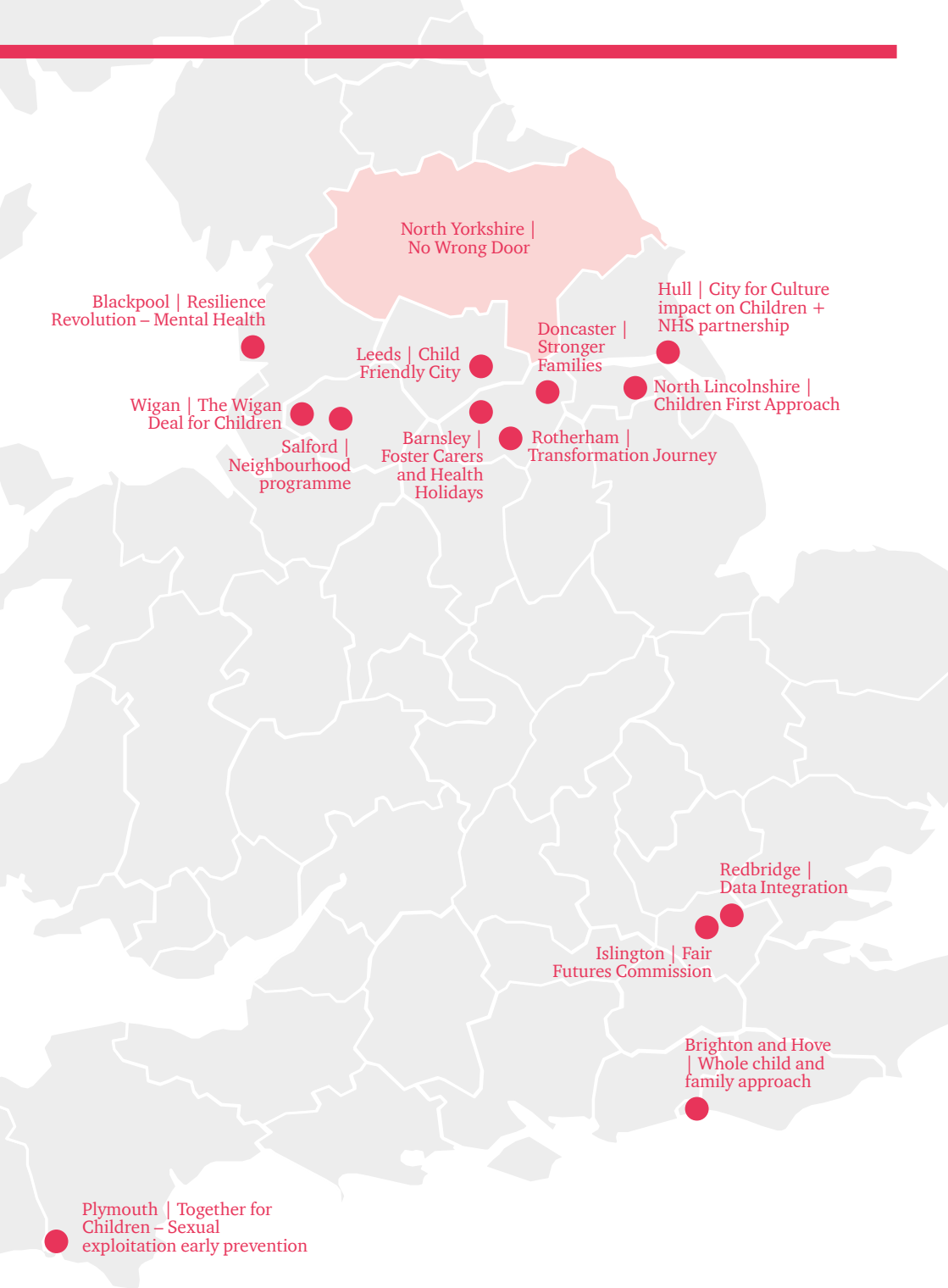
# What does creating the village look like in reality?

‘It takes a village...’ is not a nostalgic plea for a return to smaller, less transient communities. Rather, it is about recognising the powerful networks that exist both inside and outside a local authority and understanding how to make them work for the benefit of children. In exploring what this looks like on the ground, the strongest, most unifying theme is that ‘communities know best’.

In making this a reality, we must continue to break down the barriers between councils as ‘service providers’ and the public as ‘service users’. As such, we must focus on empowering ‘the village’ through the greater devolution of decision making. Our case studies are intended to show a range of different ways in which councils are already doing so. Some are choosing to get their ‘whole council’ approach to children right first. Some are shifting power into their communities and ensuring children are embedded in decision making, not just consulted occasionally. Others are already more advanced with their placed-based approaches and speak about the benefits of using pooled budgets to make the public purse stretch further for children.

In talking to you over the last few months, we’ve heard another powerful message: the old favourite, *a shared vision*. Every chief executive and senior manager is responsible for place-shaping and building safe and stable communities where children can thrive. But not every senior management team reinforces a shared vision daily, either with themselves or across the workforce. That needs to change. The strength of the messaging in programmes such as “The Wigan Deal for Children” or Islington’s Fair Futures Commission is a huge part of their success, uniting an often-disparate workforce to recognise the long-term contribution of every service to a future generation.

The key is to shape, agree and sustain that shared vision, together with a shared set of priorities, with a broader set of partners and, crucially, the affected communities themselves. Partnership working will bring the benefits of increased resources, greater expertise, integrated planning and delivery, and improved outcomes for people, particularly those in the most deprived communities. While there are risks in the approach (professional barriers, reluctance to share information, unclear accountability and competing organisational priorities), these can be overcome. Moreover, initiatives in areas with a history of collaborative working will likely make quicker progress.





### Barnsley

## Background

A local authority foster family can be a highly cost-effective way of supporting a child in need. Indeed, it costs on average just £500 a week (compared with £800 for an independent fostering agency and £2,500 to £3,000 for a private external agency). But, despite huge efforts by Barnsley's fostering team, the number of people coming forward to be foster carers in 2016 was just 52. In the context of 'it takes a village to raise a child' the team decided to explore whether a more community-focused approach might deliver different results.

## The project

In 2012, Barnsley developed a local governance model in which 6 area councils and 21 ward alliances worked closely with local people to develop strong and resilient communities. The fostering team partnered with the North-East area council to co-produce a plan to take the issue to the community. A steering group was established, a campaign created, and workshops delivered to four ward alliances, using community reps to act as advocates for fostering in their local villages. A great deal of marketing information was produced and taken into the community, including articles in area council or village magazines and church bulletins and attendance at local fairs. Through the local intelligence of the area team, the fostering team was also able to target other organisations working in the area to spread the word.

## Results

In the six months from April to September 2017, the fostering team received 81 enquiries – 29 more than they had received in the whole of 2016. Several of these enquiries are now in the application stage, and the approach is being rolled out across the other area councils over the course of the next year.

## Who is involved?





### Barnsley

#### Background

Feeding Britain's December 2017 report 'Ending Hunger in the Holidays' revealed some stark facts about the challenges faced by children in the school holidays. It found as many as 3 million children in Britain who are at risk of hunger when they're not at school. Almost one in five children under 15 experience moderate or severe food insecurity, with the loss of free school meals during the holidays costing a family between £30 and £40 each week. The report also showed how, in poorer areas, children's spelling skills can stagnate or even decline over the six-week Summer break. It can take teachers several weeks to make up for this lost learning.

#### The project

As part of the Feeding Britain national pilot, Barnsley was able to access Department for Education (DfE) funds to test the efficacy of school holiday support to families on low income. Over the Summer school holidays in 2018, overseen and supported by the Feeding Barnsley Food Access Steering Group (FASG), areas with the highest deprivation were selected for Barnsley Healthy Holidays 'holiday clubs'. The idea was that these clubs would provide fun activities and healthy food for families, delivered in their own communities by trusted local partners.





## Results

- Recruitment of new volunteers.
- Supported youth engagement survey and the libraries review survey.
- New families signed up to family centres.
- Oral health input.
- Local organisations and projects working together to deliver shared resources, skills and expertise.

## Lessons learnt

The project faced several barriers and challenges, including:

- **Financial.** While DfE funding helped grow the partnership delivery in 2017, Barnsley will need to continue partnership work, and perhaps initiate crowdfunding, to support ongoing sustainability.
- **Reputational risk.** Barnsley was conscious of the potential for negative press coverage, but this was carefully managed via a proactive publicity campaign.

### Blackpool

#### Background

There is a widely-recognised correlation between a family's degree of social deprivation and its level of involvement with social services – a linkage that partly reflects the terrible impacts of poverty on children's mental health and wellbeing. As a town that ranks as the most deprived in England, Blackpool is a place where local young people and their supporters are taking a systems-based approach to these issues. This involves applying what is termed as an 'inequalities imagination' – essentially an understanding of how inequalities impact people's lives – to enable actions to be taken alongside the community and level out the playing field. In this way Blackpool can both address individual challenges and also tackle the wider context of adversity that the town's children and young people face. This is captured in Blackpool Council's working definition of resilience, which is to "beat the odds while also changing the odds".



#### The project

Blackpool's young people are taking the lead in developing a 'Resilience Revolution' supported by the Council and other local organisations. This is a world first – a 'whole-town' approach to addressing the inequalities that impact young people in relation to their mental health. Funded by the Big Lottery Headstart programme, the approach to resilience that Blackpool's youth and their adult supporters have adopted is called 'Resilient Therapy', or RT. Professor Angie Hart developed this approach with collaborative partners at the University of Brighton and Boingboing, a social enterprise that helps people with experience of complex life challenges to take leadership roles in advocating for change. The RT approach is rooted in social justice thinking, which means it not only recognises the impact of inequalities on people's lives, but supports people in making resilient moves for themselves and others to help address these inequalities. The approach goes beyond an individualised definition of resilience, and advocates a systems-based, social ecological perspective. This involves addressing children's and young people's difficulties holistically, and not blaming them and their families for what are often seen as individual 'failings'.

In practice, this means galvanizing a community-based development approach to build a social movement, rather than simply implementing a series of health and social care interventions. One of the main tools is the Resilience Framework, which brings together knowledge from resilience research, the experience of practitioners, and families living with adversity. With the framework acting as the 'glue', the Resilience Revolution has moved beyond discreet projects. Instead, children, families and their supporters advocate a series of 'fundamentals' applied across all systems and contexts within the town. This involves working with children, families, community groups, education, social care, health services, and culture and leisure providers to adopt one language and one approach.





The fundamentals include working co-productively; being asset-based; thinking in terms of whole system change; embedding research and evaluation; and being brave and innovative. Examples of how this approach is working in practice include:

- Within a year, 18 of Blackpool's schools have set up Resilience Committees involving 137 children. Much more than just being one off 'activities', these committees are at the heart of the Academic Resilience Approach (ARA) developed by Professor Angie Hart and her colleagues, a 'whole-school' movement to embed a culture of resilience building from pupil to parent, and from teacher to school cook (<https://www.boingboing.org.uk/academic-resilience-approach/>). This focus on the school system means all children – including those who need additional support – are learning in an environment focused on, in the language of RT, 'up-building'. This means recognising, conserving and building on assets, both within individuals and systems. The ARA approach involves the whole school, and is about taking the emphasis away from the individual and focusing on building an environment that promotes resilience. In other words, it's about effecting a change in system and culture.
- The core programme team of adults supporting the youth leaders is located within the Local Authority. This sends out a strong message around systems and 'whole-town' thinking. It also helps the Resilience Revolution have the authority to push for change in some of the key decision-making forums, as well as providing a direct route for children and communities to 'disrupt' or 'nudge' unhelpful practices within their Local Authority.
- In cases where increased individual support is needed, 'Resilience Coaches' – people who have gained expertise in the co-productive resilience building approaches of RT – are matched with children over a two-year period. These individuals have supported some 363 children and their families over the past year alone. This approach demonstrates strong commitment as well as working across different systems, with the Resilience Coaches focusing on the child and supporting them in their environment, whether that be in a health, education or leisure context. They go beyond a mainstream caseload management system by helping young people to get involved in championing the Resilience Revolution, and supporting them in developing social action projects to the benefit of all young people, not just themselves.
- Young people in Blackpool have led a unique project to plan and build a 'resilience pathway' in the centre of the town. The development of a new tramway extension has offered the opportunity to have the Resilience Framework etched into paving stones, thereby embedding the Resilience Revolution into the very fabric of the town. The pathway, linked to a website connecting each paving stone to resilient building activity, will be funded through fundraising activities led by young people.

## Results

As Blackpool enters year three of the Resilience Revolution, strong signs of the progress it is achieving are starting to emerge. Young people are learning about resilience in multiple environments including through school staff, social workers, Voluntary and Community Sector staff, parents/carers, other young people and social media. The Resilience Revolution is encouraging everyone who lives, works or volunteers in Blackpool to get involved.



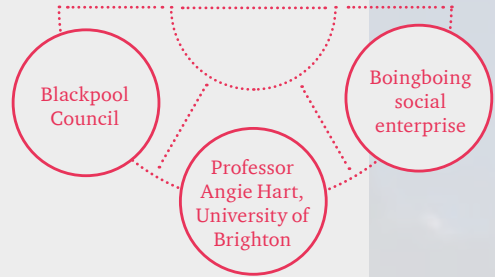
### Lessons learnt

Realising the goals of the Resilience Revolution is a complex undertaking. Navigating multiple systems, reconciling competing priorities and managing uncertainty and risk are all tasks that arise on a daily basis. Implementation of a town-wide strategy that embeds new, ground breaking, co-productive activity not previously tested on this scale has proved to be a challenge. However, the partnership has embraced this challenge, and has and thrived on it.

Blackpool's young people and their supporters are committed to a test-and-learn approach – and numerous elements of the programme and its activities have been changed based on what's been learnt to date. While this has challenged the flexibility of the programme's governance and delivery mechanisms, there is now a tangible learning culture embedded across the breadth of the programme, underpinned by flexible structures specifically developed to support this iterative improvement process.

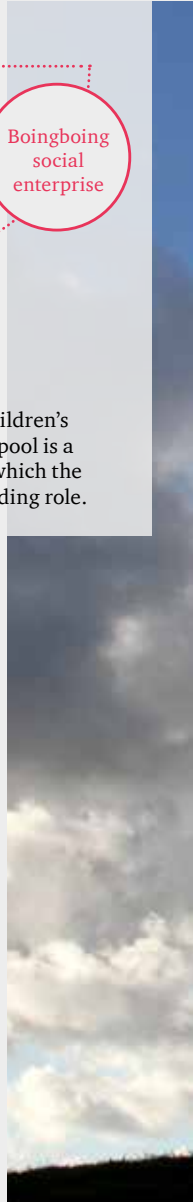
Overall, the approach being used has been designed by, with and for the most disadvantaged children and families. Many of the tools and resources associated with it are freely available on the Boingboing website ([www.boingboing.org.uk](http://www.boingboing.org.uk)). For Blackpool, the ultimate aim is to achieve a step change and create a resilient town. Once the impact the Resilience Revolution has had in Blackpool can be demonstrated in full, the vision is to replicate the Resilience Revolution in other towns and cities across the world, led by their young people. It's an ambitious and challenging goal. But the potential benefits mean pursuing it is definitely worth the effort.

### Who is involved?



### A 'village' approach

Tackling the impacts of poverty on children's mental health and wellbeing in Blackpool is a community-wide effort – and one in which the town's young people are playing a leading role.





### Brighton & Hove

#### Context

Over the last year Brighton & Hove has continued to see improved outcomes for children and young people. In July 2018, following an Ofsted inspection, its overall rating moved from 'requires improvement' to 'good.' But the council recognises there is still more to do and the journey now is to move up to 'great.'

The Ofsted report noted a number of strengths:

- The senior leadership team, supported by strong cross-party political and corporate support, has worked effectively to improve services, and overall effectiveness is now good.
- Children's services provide a joined-up response to the needs of vulnerable children and families.
- Children at risk of harm are protected.
- Social worker morale is high. They enjoy working in Brighton and Hove and are tenacious in seeking to build meaningful relationships with children.
- Social workers and managers are aspirational for the children in their care and demonstrate a strong focus on improving their experiences and outcomes.
- Young people have good access to a range of housing and living options.

#### A whole child and family approach

Back in 2013, the council was afflicted by a great deal of silo working. To improve outcomes for children, particularly the most vulnerable, it needed its constituent parts to work together with shared objectives and without blame attributed to other parts of the system. Adopting the mantra that it should 'move away from lots of different services for children towards a single children's service', the council improved internal arrangements and articulated a vision for a whole family strategy and a city for all. This involved working with families as a whole rather than working separately with children and adults.

This was particularly important in a city with high levels of mental ill health. The council therefore extended its family group conferencing to support families earlier and has been successful in achieving 'earned autonomy' in its Troubled Family programme through a focus on parental substance misuse and mental ill health. It is also in the process of integrating the children's disability service with the adult's learning disability service with a 0-14 team, a 14-25 team and a 25+ team.

#### Consistent leadership

It is clear from Ofsted inspections that a key feature of good and outstanding children's services is consistent leadership, both at a DCS level and in the wider leadership team. Previously, the council had the highest turnover of DCSs in the country. But the current DCS in Brighton and Hove has been in post for five years now, recognising the need to reduce turnover and limit incentives to move every couple of years. Across the directorate the DCS has achieved a stable leadership team, steering away from interim leadership and offering a consistent vision and focus on what needs to be done to deliver a good service.



## Partnerships and the authorising environment

Partnership working – both across the council and with external partners – has strengthened. Within the council there are clear governance arrangements, and working with different minority administrations has meant engaging fully with three political groups and three local MPs. It was also important to ensure that children's services moved to the centre of the council agenda, with decisions about a range of issues now including consideration of their impact on support for vulnerable children and families.

Brighton & Hove has built relationships that allow wider partners to share agendas but also challenge each other in a trusting and open way. The council recognises it doesn't have all the answers and certainly doesn't control all the resources. An early example was the development of the MASH (multi-agency safeguarding hub). The council worked well with police and health colleagues to ensure a single contact can be checked across different teams and systems. It is also now in the process of integrating with the clinical commissioning group, with the hope that budgets, commissioning arrangements and objectives can be fully aligned.

## Model of Practice – it's about trusting relationships

At times of trauma no-one likes sharing their most personal stories with strangers, and certainly not doing so repeatedly. Brighton & Hove has therefore sought to reduce the number of different professionals that families and children need to work with. The clearest example is social work teams. Three years ago, the council restructured its social workers into small "pods" who pick up referrals from the MASH and stay with a family for as long as they require social work support or interventions. There is no longer a separate assessment team, child in need team, and child in care team – so the number of different social workers the city's children have to work with has dramatically reduced. Families and children have been positive about this change, as have staff and partners. The results have been dramatic: last year the number of children in care reduced by 26%.

## Management grip

Early on, Brighton & Hove introduced robust performance management and quality assurance arrangements. This means that areas of strength and weakness can be quickly spotted and addressed. The quality assurance framework also involves engaging with, and listening to, parents, children and young people, as well as learning from complaints and compliments. These honest and direct contributions have informed the council's change plans.

## Culture eats strategy for breakfast

Through successive management restructures and new initiatives, staff in Brighton & Hove continued to work much as they had previously. As the council introduced further change, it therefore needed to provide reassurance that it would be sustained and that staff and the families they work with would be fully engaged. In addition, it needed to provide space for new creative approaches to develop while ensuring a focus on the evidence about what leads to improved outcomes. It also needed to move away from a blame culture. The council recognised that this would all take time, and that, when something went wrong, it would be important to accept it with humility, reflect on why things didn't work, and learn from it. After five years, staff are motivated, engaged and reflective – and focused on making a difference.

## A 'village' approach

Educational standards in Brighton & Hove are high. Engagement with young people is strong. Partnerships are stable. And the number of children being referred or re-referred to social care is reducing. Ofsted judge children's services to be Good, but leadership recognised they must never be complacent. New challenges to families and threats to children and young people emerge all the time. There is a need to be ever responsive – striking a difficult balance between supporting families and intervening where there is risk of harm. To achieve this, all parts of the system need to work in harmony, both within the council and beyond. The Ofsted inspection team recognised the strengths of the council's collaborative arrangements. They could see that it had taken a 'one children's service' approach and, more recently, a 'one family' approach. This will continue to be the focus for Brighton & Hove.

### Doncaster

#### Background

A mother of two young boys (aged 2 and 3 years) was suffering from severe anxiety. The oldest boy attended nursery for 15 hours a week. While the father had contact with the children, he did not live with them and did not take the youngest child out as he couldn't handle the boy's complex needs. The family home contained several broken appliances, causing difficulties for the mother in caring for her children and increasing her anxiety. The mother felt unable to parent her youngest child due to his complex needs.

A health visitor (HV) had been working with the family. As she began to reduce her involvement, she introduced a parent engagement worker (PEW) to offer ongoing support. The PEW subsequently took on the role of lead practitioner for the family with the mother's agreement.

## Stronger families

#### A successful early intervention

The PEW discussed the option of a parenting course with the mother to help improve her confidence, and subsequently supported her application. The PEW also engaged other agencies to acquire new appliances for the family through the Stronger Families Innovation Fund. The mother completed the parenting course and reported feeling more able to parent her children, especially the youngest.

These two interventions have had a positive impact on the mother's overall wellbeing. She has now begun to look at her own needs and has asked to attend the Freedom Programme to learn more about herself and the impact of her previous relationship with the children's father, who had been very controlling.

The children's nursery have supported the intervention by providing a free session so the mother could attend Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings without distraction.

The mother's financial situation has been reviewed and she has been supported in a successful application for disability living allowance. She is using the extra money to support the youngest child's sensory needs following a loan of equipment from the Family Hub.

She also disclosed that she didn't get on with her HV and felt unsupported with the health needs of her children. She was supported in raising this issue and engaging a new HV.

#### Why it worked – and is being sustained

The intervention worked because agencies stepped in to offer support when it was needed and worked together in the interests of the whole family. The mother now feels more supported and is growing in confidence – this is also having a positive impact on her ability as a parent. She has taken steps to understand herself better and this will further build her confidence and resilience for the future, reducing her reliance on social services.



## Lessons learnt

Small issues often become big issues when a person is in difficulty. But small steps and practical support are often the most effective interventions. In this case a broken cooker and a leaking washing machine were adding to the mother's anxiety. She felt she couldn't care properly for her children. The Stronger Families Innovation Fund allowed the PEW to apply for a small amount of money to replace these appliances quickly. This alone helped the mother feel better and more in control.

There are three additional steps that could have had a positive impact on this case:

1. For the Freedom Programme to be offered and delivered for free (the referrer has to pay £25 on referral). Without the Innovation Fund to approach, it's not clear the mother could have spared £25 to access this support.
2. A professional or emergency telephone line for dealing with non-payments. There is no way the mother could have waited 46 minutes for her call to be answered if she had been alone with the boys – at no fault of her own.
3. Personalities can occasionally clash and this gets in the way of building a trusting professional relationship. In this case, the mother felt unsupported by the original HV but did not realise she could request a change. This possibility needs to be made much clearer from the outset by all professionals involved in a case.



### Background

Challenged by high levels of child deprivation, poor educational attainment, numerous safeguarding issues and an increasing number of looked after children, the City of Hull needed to develop a multifaceted solution for its complex problems. This included a focus on tackling the root causes of demand, and shifting the focus away from investment in adult services towards children's services. Within this context, key public sector providers (clinical commissioning groups, the police, fire authorities, and the local authority) came together to formulate Hull's 'Place Plan', which explored the benefits of a long-term partnership to take a proactive approach to identifying and supporting the city's most vulnerable residents.

### The project

The Place Plan set out a vision and single set of outcomes for all partners to work towards. It made children the priority cohort for support, focusing on a number of initiatives that take advantage of partnership working to deliver better health, wellbeing, and safety outcomes. Hull's emphasis has been on changing behaviours and the way frontline staff work at an operational level to see tangible benefits on the ground. Its key initiatives include:

- Greater collaboration with the 'City of Culture' (Hull is UK City of Culture 2017-2020), with volunteers engaging with children on the edge of care (often teenagers) to broaden their interests, aspirations and ambitions. The City of Culture are also part of the Place management group.
- A whole 'place' approach to supporting care leavers. The council has worked closely with local businesses and mental health services to provide comprehensive support for all care leavers. The group has developed strong place-based working arrangements and relationships ensuring each care leaver's requirements can be understood and met.





- Co-location of staff between agencies to facilitate partnership working at a practical and operational level. For example, co-locating community support officers with council officers focused on early help and edge of care.
- Joint implementation of the 'No Wrong Door' best practice with the police and fire authority for children on the edge of care (this is particularly effective because police and social services populations often overlap).
- 'Teaming up for health'. Working closely with two rugby clubs to engage with residents in different ways about their active lifestyle priorities (including messages on healthy eating, preventing childhood and adult obesity, and encouraging locals to engage with sport).
- Testing data-sharing arrangements (initially on the city's frail and elderly population, but with key learnings for the children's agenda).

## Who is involved?



## Results

The 'Place Plan' gave partners in Hull a clear set of priorities to work towards, and built momentum across the system to drive tangible, operational change on the ground. The emphasis was on identifying initiatives that would test and operationalise different behaviours and ways of working on the front line. This has resulted in initiatives that have demonstrated Hull's ability to work together differently to drive better outcomes, which can be scaled in the future.

## Lessons learnt

The work in Hull has highlighted the importance of strong relationships, networks, and coordinated responses to reap the benefits of partnership working. Partners were often targeting similar population cohorts. They recognised the importance of having a key relationship holder with individuals who required support (who could be from any agency) and using networked working to collaborate and direct the right kind of support. Being able to operationalise this approach in frontline teams has been key in driving different outcomes and building confidence in a new way of working for Hull.

## A 'village' approach

The Hull 'Place Plan' truly brings together the local 'village' around children and young people. It changes how support is delivered on the front line to the city's most vulnerable children and young people. Through practical changes and a focus on operationalising the culture and behaviours of the system, the plan has built momentum for a longer-term shift towards a more 'village' like way of working.

### Islington

## Background

Islington has world class cultural, learning artistic and sporting facilities on its doorstep. Yet although Islington can be a fantastic place to grow up in, it can also be challenging. Everyone has a part to play to help build resilience in children, young people, their families and the local community. Despite significant budget challenges, we believed that there were still opportunities to drive innovation and positive change. To unlock these, we needed to re-imagine a child and youth friendly Islington to make it a great place to grow up, learn, work and have fun.

## The project

During 2017, Islington Council appointed the Fair Futures Commission, chaired by young adults, Jermain Jackman and Kadeema Woodbyrne, took a radical look at how the council and its partners can help to make a fairer future for children and young people, to listen to the next generation and give them the power to shape the things that directly affect their experiences growing up. The Commission had three key questions:

1. Islington, the PLACE: What will help to live in a safe and prosperous community with space and room to grow, live, play and work?
2. POWER: What will help them to have the power and networks to shape and support their own lives and the community?
3. Their POSSIBILITIES: How can we better equip children to 'thrive by five' and young people to be 'life-ready'?



## Fair Futures Commission

The Commissioners brought together children, young people, parents, teachers, the third sector, police, health partners, researchers and many more to share their experiences and knowledge. Commissioners sought these voices with a series of events and discussions held in schools and youth hubs, and youth/parent-led walks through the borough to see it through the eyes of children, young people and parents themselves. The Commission was particularly interested in those we don't particularly hear from. It heard incredible and hard hitting stories about the ups and downs of growing up today.

Following a year of co-creating insights and ideas, the Commission published its final report, 'A Future for Us', in February 2018.

## Results

The Commission's recommendations fall into five long-term ambitions:

1. 21st century skills for growing up:
2. 21st century skills for work and the future world of work
3. Connected communities
4. A child-friendly place to live and grow
5. Alliances for ambitious and fairer futures – making our community a great place to grow up in

It includes messages to central government and other organisations such as the National Citizen Service, universities, housing partners and businesses to work together in pursuit of fairness for children and young people.

Mindful of our budget challenge, the Council's response reflect opportunities to drive positive change and prevent challenges for children and young people in the first place whilst remaining pragmatic about what can be achieved with our potential resources and assets in future.



## Lessons learnt

Supporting children's wellbeing and building resilience includes issues such as the built environment, community safety and protection, housing, economic development, employment and skills. This goes beyond one department such as Children's Services. Nor can it be achieved by the council alone.

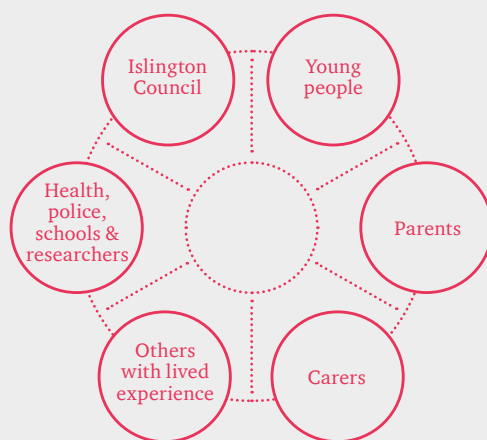
Aside from delivering services, we have a role as community leaders, facilitators and advocates. But we should also build social capital for long-term change - by ensuring people have a voice and stake in improving their local areas, and where they feel that if they want to influence something then they are able to do so.



## Who is involved?

The Commission was made up of local young people, academics, creative thinkers, and residents. This gave us a rich mix of experts from a variety of fields and, more importantly, experts of lived experience – young people and parents/carers.

Over 200 individuals and organisations took part in the Commission's work over the year. This ranged from urban and transport planning, greenspace, health, play and youth work, public health, businesses, learning, skills, employment and housing.



## A 'village' approach

Resilient children, young people and families are essential to a socially connected and economically vibrant community. The Commission explored practical solutions so that individuals, communities and organisations can play a part in promoting good social and health development in the early childhood, the middle years and adolescence/young adulthood phases of life. The approach emphasised that creating communities which are great places to grow up in is a collective effort.

### Leeds

#### Background

Leeds children's services were rated as inadequate by Ofsted in 2010. A key part of the subsequent improvement journey was a commitment to make Leeds a child-friendly city. This meant answering a single question: 'what is it like to be a child or young person in Leeds?' The council believes this can only be answered through the collaboration of the widest possible partnership of public, private and third-sector bodies, harnessing the commonwealth of the city. It has put children at the heart of its growth strategy. By disproportionately investing in children and young people, and ensuring they have access to the best social and educational opportunities, it hopes to develop a skilled workforce capable of ensuring Leeds's future economic prosperity.

#### The project

Central to the council's mission to be a child-friendly city has been the introduction of restorative practice. The approach of working with children and their families rather than doing things for or to them permeates all aspects of the way children's and families' services function. It has also underpinned significant changes in the culture of children's services over the past five years. Along with the introduction of family group conferencing, the restorative way of working has enabled improved outcomes for children, young people and their families. It has also radically improved the way Leeds deals with complaints by enabling it to resolve issues quickly – thereby preventing escalation and creating savings. Led and supported by the children and families trust board, the council's child-friendly ambitions are expressed in the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan 2015–2019. The five outcomes in the plan have not changed over the past five years, bringing clarity and focus to working with partners to improve the lives of children in the city. They are:

1. All children and young people are safe from harm.
2. All children and young people do well at all levels of learning and have skills for life.
3. All children and young people enjoy healthy lifestyles.
4. All children and young people have fun growing up.
5. All children and young people are active citizens who have a voice and influence.





## Results

- 200 council officers signed up as ambassadors.
- Working with city centre management to consult with children and young people about the design of the city centre, culminating in a competition from which some ideas will be taken forward.
- Working with the council events team to host a weekend of free family fun.
- Working closely with the communities' team to support children arriving in the city as refugees and asylum seekers.
- Working with the Youth Service - West Leeds Activity Centre to run regular activity sessions for looked after children aged 13-17.
- Children's services budget savings of approximately £20m, thanks to Leeds' child-friendly ambitions, and the service changes and developments they have enabled. Achieved at a time when other local authorities have seen numbers in care and associated costs increase.

## A 'village' approach

Other directorates in the council are actively involved in supporting CFL, including libraries, museums, parks (adopt a park), highways (20mph zones outside all schools in three years) and city development (city centre and public realm visioning to create a more child-friendly environment) as well as mentoring opportunities.



### North Lincolnshire

#### Background

In 2012, Ofsted's inspection of North Lincolnshire's safeguarding and looked after children services was overwhelmingly positive, with solely outstanding or good judgements. Recognising that to maintain excellence in performance they could not stand still, North Lincolnshire sought to build on their position to drive forward service improvements and outcomes. This ambition for excellence came against a backdrop of reductions in government grants and the introduction of the Single Inspection Framework (SIF) which raised the bar for securing the highest accreditations, as well as specific local challenges.

#### The project

The foundations that North Lincolnshire identify as key to consistently sustaining good and outstanding services for children and families include:

- **A shared ambition and vision, with a 'whole council' approach and focus on resilience.** A 'whole council' approach is founded on ambitious aspirations for improving outcomes for children by building community resilience to enable, and where necessary equip, children to stay together with their families, their communities and their schools. Strong communities and strong families are at the heart of everything the council does. The enduring nature of this culture is key – it is larger than any one individual or organisational change. This vision is shared, owned and embedded throughout the organisation, permeating all aspects of the council's activities, from policies and practices through to priorities and personal ownership.

#### Whole council approach to children's services (reproduced from LGA online case studies)

- **Authentic leadership at every level that is invested, and willing to invest.** Driven by a genuine belief in North Lincolnshire's ability to make a positive difference for children and families, leaders at all levels articulate, drive and model this ambition – including political leadership and senior officers, middle managers and frontline practitioners. Both the political and senior leadership have first-hand contact with children and young people, resulting in a depth of understanding. They are personally invested and committed to achieving better outcomes. The council is strengths-based, building on an organisational history that retains the ethos and consistency in political and cultural leadership which has been instrumental in sustaining investment in services to the vulnerable year on year.
- **Views of young people are central to service development.** The views of children and young people are truly valued and heard at all levels. Their voices are creatively sought, considered and central to service development, such as through a youth and children in care council. Co-production with children, families, elected members and partners is the default operating model, where circumstances permit.
- **Effective and coordinated partnership working.** A system leadership approach across partner agencies (including the police, education, health, foster carers and adopters) ensures effective and coordinated partnership working at both a strategic and operational level. It creates shared goals and aspirations, meaning partners also buy into the council's vision and place children and families at the heart of their activities. To ensure accountabilities are embedded and performance issues progressed, this is coupled with comprehensive performance management and quality assurance systems.



- **An equipped, enabled and stable workforce.** Investment in staff creates an experienced, well-trained and stable workforce that feels supported and motivated to deliver best practice, and has a long term commitment to North Lincolnshire and its communities. Fostering this environment involves focusing on retention, being proactive in recruitment practices, supporting professional learning and development, listening to frontline staff, and taking an outward-facing sector-led improvement approach. A long-lasting assurance system, based on an agreed relationship between ‘high support’ and ‘high challenge’, as well as a strengths-based approach encouraging shared responsibility between professionals, means staff feel supported and valued. The resulting team longevity, particularly in the contact with children and families, ensures children are engaged fully and delivers measurably improved outcomes.
- **A relentless ambition to improve.** Since 2012, North Lincolnshire has sought to effect change rather than maintain the status quo. They recognise that the route to improvement is continuous. It requires that they always look forward, challenge themselves and learn from others. This continual focus on new ways to deliver better outcomes, being open and responsive to creating and implementing change, and embracing innovation has led to creative approaches to securing better outcomes (such as a social enterprise model for the provision of accommodation and support for care leavers). Although the workforce is stable, officers and politicians actively seek opportunities to participate in external peer reviews and challenges to test their own practice and learn from others.

## Results

North Lincolnshire’s overall services for children were judged outstanding by the most recent Ofsted Inspection in Summer 2017 – one of only three councils to achieve that rating. Ofsted noted in particular that the “focus on keeping children and young people at the heart of everything is the most striking element of this outstanding local authority.”[1]

## Lessons learnt

There is no magic ingredient or single intervention that can deliver and sustain excellence in the provision of services for children and families. It takes a ‘whole system’ approach, with clear shared strategies and priorities across the council and its partners. It needs a culture of high expectations, strong management and personal accountability at every level. For North Lincolnshire, success flowed from an intrinsic belief that with the requisite knowledge and skills, coupled with a relentless drive for improvement and a whole council approach, they could make a real and positive difference to outcomes for children and families.



### North Yorkshire

#### Background

North Yorkshire has a number of high-needs young people with poor long-term outcomes, with whom the system struggles to cope. The council found that these young people were expiring multiple placements and hand-offs between services. Moreover, the approach to caring for these individuals was sometimes doing more harm than good.

#### The project

No Wrong Door (NWD) was launched in April 2015. This is a unique model for rethinking care for adolescents in the UK. It is a ground-breaking initiative that is improving the chances of some of the most vulnerable and complex young people in care (for example by reducing the number ending up homeless or in the criminal justice system).

Centred around two 'hubs', NWD covers the whole of North Yorkshire with a range of integrated provision. The innovative model includes a dedicated team based in each hub with a range of specialist roles: life coach (clinical psychologist), communication support worker (speech language therapist) and police liaison officer. The embedded nature of these roles enables young people to naturally develop trust with the team. It means they can build healthy relationships with the professionals who can provide 'wrap around' services for young people when they need it the most.

## No Wrong Door

#### Results

Since its inception, NWD has seen:

- A reduction in overall LAC figures (against national trends).
- Young people spending less time in residential care.
- A decrease in the use of Independent Fostering Agreements.
- A decrease in the criminalisation of young people.
- Fewer missing incidents.
- Fewer emotional difficulties.
- Better identification of previously unknown speech and language communication needs.
- Fewer admissions to A&E.
- Savings for partners in healthcare and the police.

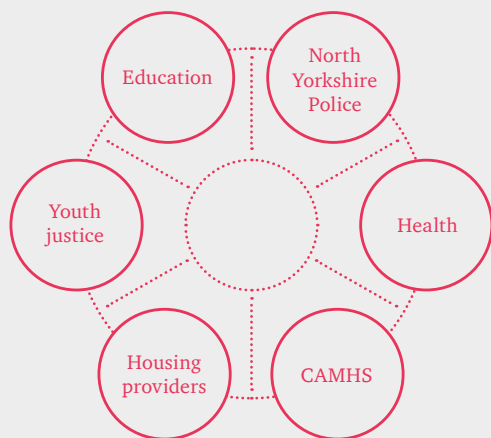
#### Lessons learnt

- Multi-agency work is key to success.
- High-quality data is essential for demonstrating model success.
- The methodology can be applied in other areas: social, emotional and mental health, and leaving care.
- The council must challenge itself to continually improve the NWD service.





## Who is involved?



## A 'village' approach

The key to success is having a multi-agency team under one roof. Each hub has a clinical psychologist, a speech and language therapist and a police intelligence officer, who work with our residential and edge of care workers. There are also portfolio leads for risk, activities, relationships, transitions, education and employment and emotional health and wellbeing. This means North Yorkshire can work within an integrated methodology, allowing smoother transitions. By having these specialisms under one roof, they can also enable young people to become involved with professionals such as clinical psychologists without stigma and without the need for pre-arranged appointments.



### Plymouth

## Together for Childhood – Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Plymouth City Council and NSPCC

### Background

The significant long-term harm and costs of child sexual abuse are well documented. Victims and survivors can suffer lifelong psychological harm, with serious consequences not only for their own health and wellbeing, but also for society as a whole. However, there is growing evidence that with the right interventions abuse can be prevented. We know that certain things make abuse more likely, so we need to do all we can to deal with the root causes and prevent abuse happening in the first place.

### The project

Together for Childhood is a place-based approach to prevention, seeking to understand and address problems at a local level in an integrated way. Its focus on community capacity-building and evidence-based development aims to radically improve the way Plymouth prevents child sexual abuse. By working together, the approach can combine NSPCC and local resources and expertise to help realise a shared vision of keeping children safe.

The project will see children's charity NSPCC join forces with Plymouth City Council, Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Board, safeguarding partner agencies such as the police and health bodies, community groups, fellow charities and the voluntary sector, as well as schools and the wider public sector. Its aim is to build a better future for young people by identifying and addressing problems at a local level in an integrated way. It is expected to run for at least five to ten years and will be led by a multi-agency committee.

The ambition is to prevent sexual harm to children before it starts by:

- Supporting communities to confidently develop a shared sense of what it takes from everyone to keep their children safe from sexual abuse.
- Collectively agree what healthy relationships look like.
- Build clear expectations about safe situations and safe behaviour at home, at school, and in shared or public places.







## Outcomes

- This vision of a safe community will be agreed on and worked towards by children, young people, families, community members and professionals together.
- Forming happy and safe relationships will be the expectation for children, whatever the context of their home, school and social lives.
- Developing a healthy and secure sexual identity will be a normal, open and supported part of children's wider physical, social and emotional development from birth.
- Children of all ages will be able to rely on help from a range of peers, family, community members and professionals, with long-term trusting relationships between children, young people and their chosen sources of support.
- Children will be able to speak up and know they will be taken seriously if they are worried or have been hurt.





### Redbridge

## Background

In recent years Redbridge has seen significant issues for young people with missing episodes, gang and county lines activity and child sexual exploitation – often all interlinked. This had led to an increase in expenditure in care placements. But, while some of these placements were clearly appropriate and necessary, in many cases the council felt that they could have been avoided with targeted intervention. This would have not only benefited the child and the family, but also represented a financial saving for the local authority.

## The project

During 2017, Redbridge council's children and families service began a project to reduce the number of children and young people coming into care. The data from 2016 showed that 58 children between the ages of 12 and 17 were accommodated, ten of whom were placed in local authority residential care due to their involvement in gangs/county lines. Assuming the average cost of each placement was £3,500, this equates to a total annual cost to the council of £1,820,000.

The project aimed to reduce this cost via intervention from specialised commissioned services delivering bespoke interventions, conflict resolution, and one-to-one direct work. The team looks to target its work on males in particular, who are typically seen as perpetrators rather than victims. They aim to change perceptions, approaching the issue from a social care perspective rather than a youth justice model, and starting to work with children aged 12 rather than 16 (as is currently the case).

The typical actions in starting a case will include:

1. Attempting to engage with the young person, ideally face to face, but by phone or social media if needed.
2. Engage with and offer support to family/carers.
3. Look to agree a way forward with all the agencies involved. This is critical because there is often disagreement on the fundamentals of a case (such as whether a young person should be treated as victim or perpetrator).





## Results

The Family Intervention Team (FIT) went live in April 2018 and are currently working on 66 active cases. The council is estimating a cost reduction of roughly £400,000 in 2018/19 as a result, providing the team can keep some of the affected young people from entering care placements. They are also developing a dashboard to map child sexual exploitation and gang activity across the borough using data from their case management system and strategy meetings with partners (including the police and schools). The dashboard analyses relationship and geospatial data to provide insights on locations and trends in the hope of identifying further potential victims and targeting services in areas of concern.



## Lessons learnt

These children are often difficult to reach. The importance of direct outreach cannot therefore be overstated. The service is designed to be flexible and engage children in their homes, schools and communities, working in collaboration with statutory social workers to provide the right type of specialist intervention for their needs.

## Who is involved?

The FIT is part of the same management structure as the borough's Child Protection and Early Intervention Service, which enables closer working partnerships with the police and child protection services. The team itself comprises commissioned services such as St Giles Trust, Safer London, Barnardo's Tiger project, Refuge and internal services such as the council's Missing team, Youth service, and four social workers that will specialise in assertive outreach. Each of the services offer very specific expertise, enabling a bespoke intervention and approach based on the child's needs.

## A 'village' approach

Redbridge's approach demonstrates a change in the way it works with young people and their families. By implementing an 'invest to save' model it is addressing needs upstream in order to improve outcomes and reduce costs downstream. Alongside the FIT, it has also introduced the Family Intervention Assessments team who provide intensive holistic parenting assessments and family group conferencing, using assessors with knowledge of the local community and services, providing a systematic 'whole family' approach.

### Rotherham

#### Background

In 2013, the widely reported Jay Report, an independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, was published. The report lifted the lid on the terrible abuse suffered by children aged 10-16 in the South Yorkshire town between 1997 and 2013. As a result, the Council's Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire all resigned. Then, in 2015, central government intervened and replaced the council's elected officers with a team of five commissioners. At this point the whole council (RMBC), not just children's services, began its transformational journey.

#### The project

To transform services in Rotherham, the entire council had to get behind the change. RMBC therefore adopted a partnership approach to supporting children. Its premise was that improving outcomes "for all children and young people in Rotherham is the responsibility of everyone who works and cares about children and young people". Examples included:

**Early Help assessments.** The promotion of the Early Help Assessment both among partners and within RMBC ensured a consistent and robust process for managing, monitoring and clearly recording outcomes for cases stepping down from Duty and Assessment teams and/or those coming off a Child in Need plan. This created clearer pathways for signposting demand to partners and elevated the awareness of Early Help.

**Integrated Early Help offer in the local authority.** An integrated approach, underpinned by a common operating model for Early Help and Social Care, meant Early Help was easily identifiable by partners and the rest of RMBC. As a result, partners could more easily understand their role in supporting and working with Early Help.

**Asset-based models of practice.** RMBC implemented restorative practice with a guiding principle of 'leave our knowledge and skills with the family'. This was further supported by placing Early Help in localities alongside social care, driving collaborative working and an asset-based approach to care and support.





## Results

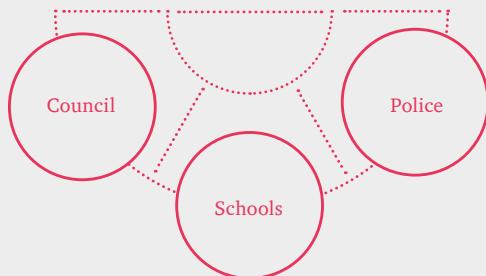
The November 2017 Ofsted inspection gave Rotherham's children's services an overall "good" rating, a substantial improvement on 2014's "inadequate" rating. In particular, the inspection noted that the "quality and impact of services for children are transformed".

Looking to the future, Rotherham faces mounting pressures, just like many local authorities across the country. These include rising numbers of looked after children, increasing costs of delivering care and support, and the tightening of council budgets. These pressures require councils to think creatively about how they deliver the best outcomes for their populations. In Rotherham, the work to date has achieved its goal. But there was always an understanding that a second-stage review would be needed once overall performance had improved. The shift in focus now required is towards early intervention and prevention, partnership working and place-based thinking. And to continue improving the long-term outcomes for children in Rotherham.

## Lessons Learnt

- The role of multi-professional leadership is crucial in driving a place-based approach. It requires individuals to lead outside their area at a first-line level, not just at the top level. This makes the right kind of preparation necessary.
- Involve and work with partners as early as possible – they need to be taken along the journey. Don't be afraid to show that the local authority is learning. The change is much more effective if you don't wait to 'have your own house in order first', but instead learn, develop and grow together.

## Who is involved?



## A 'village' approach

Improving outcomes for all children and young people in Rotherham is the responsibility of everyone who works and cares about children and young people.



### Salford

## Background

Salford's reform journey is focused on delivering a single vision for the city – to create a better and fairer Salford. This approach emphasises the need to bring economic growth, the reform and strengthening of our people-based services and the strength of our community together.

Partners have come together to address inequalities across the city, including the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy and a Social Value alliance. Part of this approach is to reform early help services for children, young people and families. The approach delivers an integrated neighbourhood model that brings this together with health and social care primary and community services, as well as the universal all-age people services that are crucial to early help, intervention and prevention.

## The project

Salford is delivering this through a series of workstreams:

- A place-based approach to early help, which uses integrated local hubs to bring together partners in one place e.g. the police, school staff, health workers, etc.
- Collaboration with the clinical commissioning group (CCG), including shared budgets which underpins this partnership approach with:
  - Mental health – focused on providing a range of emotional health and wellbeing support in schools and creating a more responsive environment for early help, supporting parents, schools and children. This has had a positive impact on educational outcomes.

- Special educational needs and disability – focused on collaborative working with health and education experts and parents to meet needs. Emphasis is on co-producing innovative solutions that work outside educational health and care plans (EHCPs) that can meet specific needs more responsibly. The approach has brought a collaborative group of individuals together to find innovative solutions for specific needs in order to maximise inclusion in Salford.

## Results

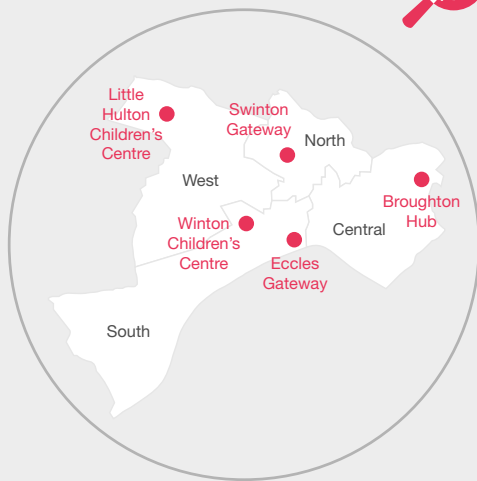
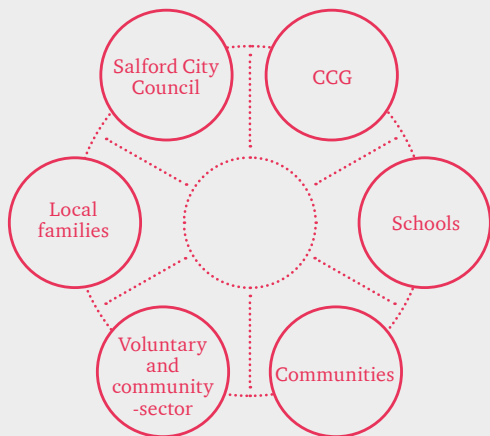
- Early help approach: early indication shows some reduction in referrals and positive feedback about impact from those involved.
- Absolute numbers of looked after children are still growing, but the per 10,000 rate of children open to social care has reduced.
- Willingness from the clinical commissioning group to invest in children's services and support including providing one-off transformation funding for agreed priorities and the development of joint budgets and shared commissioning for specific areas of responsibility such as emotional and mental health.

## Key learnings

- It is important to create a responsive system and capability with strong partnership working that is able to deliver local responses in local places. Salford has given staff the authority, freedom, and tools to come together more effectively and work out how to best to meet children's needs outside the traditional service pathways and processes.
- A lot of work has been invested in building strong relationships with partners locally, which means that partners are now in a willing position to invest jointly in further support for children, and are working together with the council to develop a pooled budget approach.



## Who is involved?



Integrated Early Help Family Hubs in Neighbourhoods

Multi-Agency Triage, Allocation and Case Management





### Wigan

## Wigan Deal for Children and Young People

### Background

Wigan faced increasing pressure on its children's services, with more complex cases presenting to social care. At the same time, the council needed to ensure that outcomes for children and young people continued to improve under this rising demand. Health outcomes for Wigan children remain worse than the national average on several measures, including dental decay, hospital admissions for alcohol-specific conditions and self-harm, and rates of teenage pregnancy.

### The project

Wigan's Deal for Children and Young People is an informal contract that provides the basis for reforming children's services. It aims to deliver the council's vision for children's services, acknowledging the importance of residents as its most important asset. By having different kinds of conversations with those residents, and connecting them with new opportunities, the council has an ambition to build more resilient communities with children and families at their heart.

A good example is the Start Well model - a vision to deliver integrated, place-based services and offer an intelligence-driven, asset-based, whole-life course approach to early intervention and prevention in communities connected to and built around clusters of General Practices and schools. The redesigned early years and early intervention offer has seen the creation of five Start Well Centres, which represent a completely new approach to early years services. Located in the areas of greatest need, these centres integrate council, children's centre and health staff, and, crucially, are based in and led by Wigan's schools.

In addition to reforming the early years offer, significant progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of early help. The previous Gateway Service has been transformed into a new Start Well Locality Offer, supporting families with children from 0-19 years. This new service provides greater frontline resource to support families with new kinds of conversations, making use of community resources and adopting an integrated approach with broader partners.



## Lessons learnt

While a significant amount of progress has been made, Wigan recognises that more work can be done to bring whole-life course services closer to residents. That means working in partnership with schools, early years settings, GPs and communities to provide an integrated, holistic and place-based offer that is easily accessible and responsive to need.

Political leadership in the council demonstrates commitment to and ambition for children and young people and a real engagement with the programme of improvement. The council is an effective corporate parent, with senior officers and elected members working together to improve all aspects of service provision for looked after children and care leavers.

The lead member, an active participant on the HWB and LSCB and chair of a subgroup, demonstrates strong understanding and knowledge about the priorities for children's services.

A real strength has been Wigan's use of feedback, research and intelligence from children, young people and the community as part of its service development and redesign. It forms a significant strand in the strategic vision. Young people have been central to the redesign of personal education plans, influencing the development of 'The Deal' and the service review of targeted services, while assisting in the co-design of the child sexual exploitation innovation project.

# Key themes

While every local authority showcased in our case studies is taking a different approach based on their particular needs and the circumstances of their local partners, a number of common themes emerge

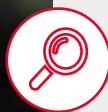




Leadership in partnership working requires different (and high-level) skills. This is particularly evident in influencing and negotiating, and taking account of professional and organisational boundaries to facilitate cross-cultural working. These skills can be found at different levels within each authority, including with those involved in coordinating joint provision.



Community involvement is critical in ensuring success, but often hard to achieve in more disadvantaged communities. Involving and training individuals from community groups can help overcome resistance create champions in the community, and improve network strength.



Organisations can make good use of data and evidence in informing decision making, monitoring and evaluating progress. Moreover, community groups and professionals gain skills and insights from a shared approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation. This does not always need to be part of a significant data-sharing programme, and can start from finding simple, ground-level operational solutions to data-sharing challenges. Some initiatives have though faced challenges in analysing data from different sources and at different spatial and temporal levels.



Staff training in partnership and team working improves collaboration and reduces the impact of professional boundaries. But it can be expensive. The role of project coordinators is very important here: they can engage in multiple operational and strategic tasks, such as project planning, governance, and resource management, and grow into leadership roles.



Some initiatives had concerns about the longer-term sustainability of funding. Given enough time and sufficient skills and data, it is possible, although difficult, to come to broad and indicative conclusions about the value for money of place-based interventions. But precise measurement of costs and social value in multiple programmes is challenging and not proven in many places.



Reducing entrenched disadvantage takes time. Ensuring continuity of personnel can help sustain skills and momentum over the longer term. But it is important to be realistic and manage stakeholders' expectations about what can be achieved.



Many children's services departments have been forced to reduce staff numbers to make cost savings. Even for those that haven't, increased demand has overstretched staff capacity. This has led to vastly increased caseloads, less time spent on each case, and reduced capacity for strategic planning and relationship-building with providers and the community. But it also emphasises the need for better working with partners across the community, and the importance of prioritising building relationships and trust, to make the best use of the scarce resources available at a system level.

# Conclusion

As we approach the next Comprehensive Spending Review, we believe it is essential that our future public spending decisions are guided by a vision of the kind of country we are striving to create for our children.

If we are to offer those children the best start in life, we need to strengthen the family and community support networks around them. From good homes to libraries and from playgrounds to schools – these are all the building blocks of strong and supportive family life.







The current trend of concentrating public spending on acute need simply cannot continue. Children and families experience far better outcomes when they can access the right support at the right time and can thus avoid coming into contact with the care system altogether. The support they need will often come initially from their extended families and neighbours, rather than a local authority. That means we must move on from just investing in a *care system* and collectively build an entire *system that is caring*.

The case studies in this report show that councils and local partners are already taking this approach all over the country. Their efforts are down to a shared vision for their place and the shared leadership to make it a reality. For the most part, they are successful in spite of – not because of – the funding and policy framework they have to operate in.

We have an opportunity in the years ahead to build a real movement across the country, one that focuses on building places that enable families to thrive. It is vital that we do so. Our children deserve no less.



## Acknowledgements

**Piali das Gupta**

Head of Policy at Solace

**Katie Johnston**

Director at PwC

**Vanessa Lucas**

Senior Policy Officer at Solace

**Vivienne Tong**

Senior Manager at PwC

**Victoria Shepherd**

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