

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## REPORT TO: Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 14 September 2009  
**Report of:** John Weeks, Strategic Director – People  
**Subject/Title:** Think Family

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### **1.0 Report Summary**

- 1.1 This report identifies some of the dimensions of the Think Family agenda.
- 1.2 It then recommends how that agenda might be taken forward by Cheshire East Council and by the whole system in Cheshire East.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

Committee is recommended that this report is accepted for information.

### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 Think Family was one of the Big Ideas which underpinned the proposals for establishing two new Unitary Authorities in Cheshire.
- 3.2 Several strands were apparent within that Big Idea:
  - 3.2.1 It was felt that the organising principles often used by Councils when they set up Departments were artificial and irrelevant.
  - 3.2.2 There was an ambition to bring services together not on the basis of the ideas of the professionals, but more on the basis of the experiences and the perceptions of the people who use those services.
  - 3.2.3 In particular, it was believed that a fundamental experience of most people is that of being, or of having been, part of a family.
- 3.3 There is no doubt that those who put together the “People and Places” bid in support of reorganisation into two new Unitary Councils were influenced by the example of Councils which had brought Children’s Services and Services for Adults together under a single Strategic Director. The East Riding of Yorkshire was one such Council whose arrangements were scrutinised.
- 3.4 Those who put that bid together wanted not just a new structure, but new ways of working. They were determined to put in place arrangements which

would support corporate rather than Departmental commitment, and an orientation to working on themes and programmes rather than simply on services.

3.5 The Think Family agenda is a classic example of the new way of working which Cheshire East Council and its partners should be taking forward.

3.6 Cabinet considered this report on 11 August 2009 and endorsed the recommendations that:

(1) a Think Family Strategy should be developed by Cheshire East Council.

(2) the Strategic Director (People) to take the lead in developing that strategy in collaboration with colleagues across the whole Authority, and

(3) that work be shared with partners in the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Partnerships.

#### **4.0 Wards Affected**

4.1 The ideas set out in this report, if implemented, would be relevant to the whole of Cheshire East.

#### **5.0 Local Ward Members**

5.1 The Think Family agenda is relevant to all Members of the Council.

#### **6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate change - Health**

6.1 A Think Family Strategy would contribute to and would need to connect with all of the objectives and priorities agreed by the Council in its Corporate Plan for 2009/10 – Children and Young People, Adult Health and Wellbeing, Stronger Communities, Safe Communities, Exclusion and Equality, Economic Development and the Environment.

6.2 It would also underpin and contribute to the Council's Transformation Programme.

#### **7.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)**

7.1 There are not likely to be any implications for Transitional Costs.

## **8.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)**

- 8.1 Some specific resources have been made available by central government, through the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Those are detailed below in paragraph 11.22.
- 8.2 It can be anticipated that if the Think Family approach is effectively implemented, not only will it improve the experiences and wellbeing of families, it will also have preventive impact and reduce duplication. At this stage, however, it is not possible to estimate the consequent savings.

## **9.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)**

- 9.1 There are not likely to be significant legal implications.

## **10.0 Risk Management**

- 10.1 There is a risk of wastage and ineffectiveness if the range of interventions currently made with families is not better orchestrated.
- 10.2 There is also a risk that our assessment of need and our planning upon that basis may be flawed if it does not see individuals in the context of family and if it does not sufficiently support the strengths and the resilience which can often be found within families.

## **11.0 Background and Options**

- 11.1 “Think Family” is a slogan. There is a danger that as its use becomes widespread, assumptions are made that everybody knows what it means and that we are all using the phrase in the same way.
- 11.2 It may be helpful first of all to define the concept of family.
- 11.3 There are some who are concerned that the term, “family”, may have the effect of excluding some people. Not everybody, it is argued, lives together under a single roof with partners, children and siblings.
- 11.4 In fact, that is a narrow use of the term and a particularly recent one, heavily influenced by our modern emphasis upon the nuclear family.
- 11.5 For most of our history “family” has had a much more inclusive meaning, referring to people connected either by blood or affinity, whether or not they happen to live together.
- 11.6 There are certainly some who have no current experience of family. An obvious example is single, homeless men whose contact with

relatives has been completely severed. Most of them, though, would have experienced family life of some kind in the past.

- 11.7 One of the most striking demographic changes during the last quarter of the twentieth century was the increase in the number of single person households. Many of those were households of Older People.
- 11.8 However, it is impossible to respond sensitively to the needs of an Older Person living alone without acknowledging their family and their family history.
- 11.9 This is particularly relevant to Cheshire East, for we have a larger than average Older Person population. For many years our younger people have been obliged to pursue Higher Education well beyond our borders, and many of our working age population have been mobile. As a consequence we have many Older People living on their own in Cheshire East, who have family elsewhere in England and the world. The care needs of those Older People cannot be planned in isolation from the contributions, opinions and interests of their distant families. That calls for a distinctive way of working on our part.
- 11.10 The point being made here is that we should use “family” in an embracing and inclusive way.
- 11.11 As for the phrase “Think Family”, it seems possible to distinguish a **general** and a **particular** usage.
- 11.12 In general terms, Think Family is an aspiration to get Local Authorities to move away from responding to needs narrowly and instead to put their activities and services together in ways which much more relevantly reflect the ways in which people live their lives.
- 11.13 Underpinning that aspiration there is usually a belief in the importance of strengthening families. For some that belief rests upon religious or political values. For others it is associated with the challenge of building social capital – the argument is that if there is an objective to develop capacity in local communities, a good place to start is in the family, the building block of communities. Think Family offers the opportunity to give more emphasis to the need to build and build upon the resilience of our children and their families.
- 11.14 On that **general dimension**, Think Family would embrace families of every sort. One example can illustrate this. The People Directorate has recently submitted a bid, in the context of the National Dementia Strategy, to become a Demonstrator Site for the development of Peer Support Networks:-
  - 11.14.1 The idea is to develop Peer Support Networks in Cheshire East, to benefit people with Dementia and those who care for them.

The idea is felt to be particularly relevant to isolated people and those living in rural areas.

- 11.14.2 In particular, the proposed pilot will take a new approach, by testing the extent to which ICT can play a part in helping people to communicate with one another, sharing experiences, finding information and getting mutual support.
- 11.14.3 Support to dementia sufferers and their carers is not a novelty. However, the Directorate has decided to adopt a Think Family approach. Part of the pilot will be about seeking to involve grandchildren and great-grandchildren in these networks and groups. Older People with dementia live within families. They have grandchildren and great grandchildren. Increasing numbers of children and young people will have experience of seeing an elderly relative develop dementia. They can be helped to understand what is happening, to respond in appropriate ways, and to retain positive feelings and memories about the relative whose personality is slowly eroding away. Continued contact with children and young people can also be very positive for Older People with dementia.
- 11.14.4 That specific orientation in our bid exemplifies the general “Think Family” agenda. Our services have traditionally focused upon the dementia sufferer and their carer. “Think Family” is about widening the field of vision, to take in much more of the whole of that person’s experience.
- 11.15 **The particular dimension** of “Think Family” has its origins within the Social Exclusion Task Force and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It is focused upon vulnerable children and young people, but it seeks to see them and to respond to them with their family context.
- 11.16 Along that dimension, “Think Family” is defined as an initiative to reform the systems and services in both Children’s Services and Adults’ Services to ensure they work together to:
  - 11.16.1 Identify families at risk, so that they can provide support at the earliest opportunity.
  - 11.16.2 Meet the full range of needs within each family they are supporting or working with.
  - 11.16.3 Develop services which can respond effectively to the most challenging families.
  - 11.16.4 Strengthen the ability of family members to provide care and support to each other.

- 11.17 There are four strands to that particular Think Family initiative:
- 11.17.1 Continuing the momentum of the Think Family programme and drawing both corporate and whole system players into it.
- 11.17.2 Setting up Youth Crime Family Intervention Projects (FIPs), to provide intensive support to those families in the greatest difficulty.
- 11.17.3 Establishing Parenting Early Intervention Programmes (PEIPs), to help mothers and fathers of children (aged 8-13) at risk of poor outcomes to improve their parenting skills.
- 11.17.4 Sustaining Parenting Experts, an existing programme.
- 11.18 Think Family is not just something for the People Directorate to get on with. If Cheshire East is genuinely committed to putting people at the heart of all it does, then Think Family must be prominently on the agendas of every part of the Council.
- 11.19 Nor is it only part of the Council's service orientation. Think Family has relevance to our staff, as much as it does to our service users and general public. One example will be sufficient. Many of our staff, as family members, have significant informal caring responsibilities for children, for partners with long-term conditions or disabilities, and for elderly relatives. Our workforce strategy should set out the ways in which we will be a family friendly employer. In particular it should explicitly address the issues of informal caring undertaken by staff. There are examples from other Authorities which can be borrowed. A starting point would be to identify, through self-referral, those colleagues who are willing to acknowledge that they have significant informal caring responsibilities.
- 11.20 Think Family extends well beyond the Council into the whole system of Cheshire East. The Guidance published by the Cabinet Office makes it very clear that changes arising from the implementation of the Think Family agenda should impact not just upon Council services for children and adults, but upon the whole local system. That guidance identifies the following players as "Delivery Partners":-
- The NHS
  - The Third Sector
  - The Youth Offending Team
  - Connexions
  - The Police
  - Housing

- Regeneration

Obviously, the Cheshire East Children's Trust will play a key role in bringing those players together on the children side, and the Health and Wellbeing Thematic Partnership of the LSP on the adult side.

- 11.21 Some illustration of the potential scope of a Think Family Strategy is given in Appendix One of this paper, where a number of Think Family issues are listed, in no order of priority.
- 11.22 For the specific Think Family initiative the Department for Children, Schools and Families has made some additional resources available:
- £100,000 was already allocated to the Parenting Experts programme, and that will continue.
  - £237,991 has been allocated as new funding from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009. Of that, £143,000 is to go into Parenting Early Intervention Programmers, and the remainder will resource Youth Crime Family Intervention Projects and the general Think Family programme.
- 11.23 Of course, the resources available are far greater than that. One of the potential benefits of having, and of generating ownership of, a Think Family strategy is the scope which it gives for lining up lots of resources more coherently in support of the implementation of agreed objectives. There are significant resources, for instance, in the hands of the Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs). In some EIPs resources are already being used in support of the Think Family agenda. EIP resources are deployed, for example, to employ Family Support Workers. In others more could be done to take the agenda forward.
- 11.24 There are significant mainstream resources, and it will be important to review whether they are being used effectively to advance the Think Family programme. Within Services for Children and Families there is some evidence of fragmentation of service, with separate sectors not connecting as much as they should with others. The working relations between schools and Children's Centres are not always as positive as they ought to be. In many situations the need may be to get better value out of the existing resources by ensuring that they really do wrap around families. The Children's Trust has recently agreed the development of Multi-Agency Prevention Teams and they will make a vital contribution to this agenda.
- 11.25 The universal services have their part to play – Library services, Leisure services, Arts services, Museums, Green spaces. One of the challenges in implementing a Think Family Strategy will be that of “flexing the universal services” – getting those services to own their part in implementing the strategy and to reprioritise their activities so that they offer more to support it. And the universal services are, of course, by their nature relevant to all children and families, not just

those with particular challenges in their lives. There is work to be done in joining up those universal services, making them better known and making access to them easier. One of our aspirations in terms of access to services is that there should be “No Wrong Door”.

- 11.26 A key mechanism in this will be the Case Committees, which are to be developed as part of the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs). Those Case Committees will be looking at specific cases and posing fundamental questions about the ways in which local resources might be used differently to get better results. In essence the Case Committee will be an important arena for the practice of locality commissioning, and it will be crucial for them to be imbued with the Think Family ethos.

## **12.0 Overview of Year One and Term One Issues**

- 12.1 As this work is taken forward during Year One it will be necessary to ensure that all the parts of the Council become engaged with it and also that it is appropriately connected with the Thematic Partnerships of the Local Strategic Partnership and with the Local Area Partnerships.
- 12.2 It should be anticipated that during Term One a Cheshire East Think Family Strategy will have been agreed by the Council, that it will have been supported by the Local Strategic Partnership and that a first phase of implementation will have been completed.

## **13.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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- Specific Think Family material can be found on the website of the Department for Children, Schools and Families – [dcsf.gov.uk](http://dcsf.gov.uk) – and of the Cabinet office – [cabinet\\_office.gov.uk](http://cabinet_office.gov.uk)



## APPENDIX ONE

### Think Family Issues

**1. Commissioning.**

Traditionally commissioning has been done separately, on the basis of user groups – children, adults with learning disabilities, adults with mental health problems and so on. Adopting a Think Family approach, we would weave those separate strands together. And as commissioners address their task, a Think Family orientation ought to help them to break down and think across the boundaries and demarcations which have developed between services over the years.

**2. Young Carers.**

Young Carers provide support to adults with needs. A recent survey showed, for instance, that 30% of young carers were supporting an adult with mental health problems.

**3. Volunteering.**

A lot of our volunteering is based on the 1:1 model. Some of the experience of foster care shows how positive it can be to introduce a family to a family.

**4. Building Schools for the Future.**

If this programme is still running when Cheshire East's turn comes, there will be an opportunity to implement it not just by upgrading some school buildings but through a radical rethink of the potential offer of schools to local families and local communities.

**5. Domestic Abuse**

Debates have taken place as to whether Domestic Abuse is a Children's Services issue because we are primarily concerned about the children in those situations, or an Adults' Services issue because we are concerned about the safety of women. A thorough Family approach renders those debates irrelevant.

**6. Transitions.**

Children with disabilities have experienced a "care precipice" when they move into services for adults. They and their families, having enjoyed the very much higher funding level of Children's Services, are shocked when they learn how poorly Adults' Services are resourced by comparison.

**7. Housing.**

If we want to improve the experiences of those who live in our more troubled estates, that can only be done by taking a whole family approach.

- 8. Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.**  
The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment would get much closer to informing our understanding of what it is like to live and grow up in Crewe, or Macclesfield or Alsager if it was organised around the theme of family rather than by age-groups, medical conditions or problems.
- 9. Obesity.**  
We do a great deal already to address obesity, particularly amongst children. Good work is done in schools, for instance, to get children to grow, prepare and eat vegetables. But that work is undermined if it focuses only upon the child and not upon their family. Organic broccoli at school will achieve little if the diet at home is chips, cola and chocolate.
- 10. Library Services.**  
We have Rhyme Time for young children in our libraries. We organise Reading Groups for older customers. Do we know how many grandparents take their grandchildren with them when they visit a library? As with many universal services, Library Services can assist positively in support of those who need targeted interventions. One example would be the input in relation to literacy, which can be particularly fruitful if it is made in a way which brings together the generations of a family. Parents reading to and with their children help their children and they help themselves.
- 11. Safeguarding.**  
At present we maintain pretty rigid separation between the Safeguarding of Children and the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults. One or two Local Authorities have now taken the step of developing generic Safeguarding Units.
- 12. Inter-Generational Work.**  
In one part of Cheshire work was done to bring Older People into school playgrounds to get them to share with the present generation some of the playground games which they enjoyed many years ago.
- 13. Teenage Conceptions.**  
We are relatively poor performers in terms of our numbers of teenage conceptions. We know from the research that here is a very significant family dimension to this phenomenon. Many young women who conceive during their teenage years are the daughters of mothers who did the same themselves.
- 14. Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.**  
Part of the Think Family approach is about reinforcing parental responsibility for the behaviour of their young people. The Department for Communities and Local Government is keen to encourage Housing Providers to apply for Parenting Orders, where that sort of response seems likely to be effective.