

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 12 March 2019

Report Title: Commission of Families Achieving Change Together (FACT)

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jos Saunders

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report provides a summary of the impact and progress of the current FACT initiative and proposes a way forward to embed the approach for the long term. FACT is an acronym for Families Achieving Change Together and is currently delivered across Cheshire East by an external organisation Catch 22. The service was previously known as Project Crewe and was established through a successful joint bid with Catch22 for innovation funding from the Department for Education (DfE). The intention of the innovation fund was to stimulate and support improvements in the delivery and structures of children's social care and to help spread proven innovations more rapidly. FACT is currently commissioned by Cheshire East to offer intensive support to children in need and their families, using a solution focussed approach.
- 1.2. FACT supports Council objectives 3 and 5, ensuring children grow in supportive family arrangements so they develop the life skills and get the education they need to thrive and above all that they live well and for longer. Children in need often have poorer outcomes in respect of their health, education and life chances and the FACT approach aims to improve that situation.
- 1.3. The FACT service aims to achieve positive and sustainable change for children and families. It has been in place since August 2015 and independent reviews / data analysis have proven the approach to be successful, with evidence of a reduction in the rate of repeat referrals and escalations to child protection.
- 1.4. The FACT approach has been used to replace one of the five social work teams in Crewe Child in Need (CIN / Child Protection (CP) between 1

August 2018 and 31st March 2019 as part of a fully integrated and innovative approach to working with children in need. The approach has worked with continuing improved outcomes for our families in need and the smoothing of social worker turnover within the teams

- 1.5. It is proposed to commission three FACT teams, with each team consisting of a qualified social work consultant, four family service practitioners supported by a cohort of skilled and trained volunteers. The estimated cost of the commission is £600,000 pa which will be funded through Children's Social Care base budget. In order to embed the approach over the long term it is proposed to commission for five years (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025) which takes the contract value over £1m and therefore requires Cabinet approval.
- 1.6. Time has been taken to assess whether the FACT model can be delivered efficiently and effectively through internal delivery whilst maintaining the fidelity of the innovation model. One of the main factors in arriving at the decision to commission rather than replicating the approach through internal team structures has been the staff turnover that occurs within our social work teams and the consistency of practice and caseload variation that this can create. As the decision to commission or develop the model internally has been carefully considered over recent months a long period of a settled state across our social work teams has been interrupted by periods of staff turnover. This has resulted in a delay in the decision to commission.
- 1.7. In order to assess the appetite and ability of the market to deliver the FACT model as a long term approach a period of market engagement and testing is needed prior to a competitive procurement process. This will require a further one year contract award (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020) to the existing commissioned provider in order to ensure there is no break in the delivery of FACT.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1. Directly award a contract to Catch 22 to deliver the Families Achieving change Together (FACT) service for the period 1 April 2019 to 31st March 2020.
- 2.2 Approve the re-commissioning of the FACT service via an EU compliant competitive procurement exercise.
- 2.3 Delegate authority to the Acting Executive Director People, in consultation with the Children and Families Portfolio Holder, to award the FACT contract for a period of five years (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025).

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. FACT is an innovative project supporting children in need. Ongoing research findings are supportive of the positive impact the service is having in reducing repeat referrals and escalations to child protection.
- 3.2. There has been a positive impact on social work caseload which mitigates the negative impact on families of staff turnover and temporary arrangements. Embedding the approach for the long term via a five year contract allows the model to thrive.
- 3.3. The Council has a statutory duty to protect children and young people from significant harm and to provide support so they can do well. If FACT or a similar service was not commissioned then the cohort of children identified as in need would transfer as open cases to the Child in Need/Child Protection Service.
- 3.4. The direct award of a contract to Catch 22 for a period of one year (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020) will allow effective service continuation across the child in need social work teams and provides time for market testing and engagement, review of the specification for services and consider the inclusion of an invest to save approach and an effective procurement process to be undertaken.

4. Other Options Considered

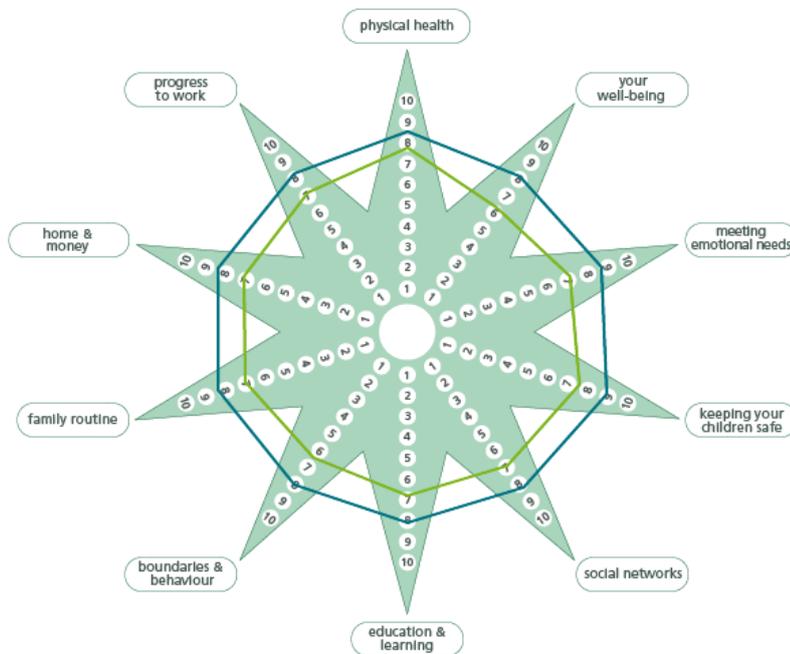
- 4.1. The option to apply the FACT model internally has been considered however the continued turbulence in staff recruitment and retention means that the ability to deliver consistent and lasting support to our vulnerable children and families is best served by a commissioned model. It will also ensure that the fidelity of the model is maintained.
- 4.2. There is an option to do nothing and allow the current contract with Catch22 to naturally end. This would result in current caseloads transferring to core children's social work teams and urgent recruitment to vacant posts at a time when effective recruitment can be difficult to achieve.

5. Background

- 5.1. The FACT service strives to achieve positive sustainable outcomes for families with children aged 0 to 18 years old who are identified as children in need. Each team is led by a suitably qualified and experienced Social Work Consultant, who is responsible for supervising four Family Service Practitioners and ensuring that statutory requirements, such as visits and completion of child in need plans are met. Families are provided with a holistic, whole family approach. Family Practitioners have protected caseloads and are able to offer an intensive offer to families. The team is supported by a cohort of skilled and trained volunteers who are suitably

matched to families and children. They can complement a current child in need plan(s) or provide support to families once their plans have closed.

- 5.2. Family Practitioners aim to complete a Family Star Plus assessment (see below) with all parents at various points during intervention; at the start; as an interim measure (every 3 months); then at closure. This cohort star includes the impact of all parents who have completed 2 or more stars. The Green line represents the average scaling of parents at the start of the intervention and the blue line represents the average scaling of parents at the interim or end of any intervention. Consistently the service has seen more change in areas of “your wellbeing” and “boundaries and behaviour”.



- 5.3. Fact capture feedback from children, families and professionals on a regular basis and use this to inform service delivery and change where needed. Some examples of the feedback the service has received are below:

Parents:

"Excellent. Taught me invaluable tools. Provided a solid support system and was always available"

"Brilliant service! Down to earth, understanding, really helpful and approachable. Project Crewe are there to help, not judge. Social workers aren't scary!! Very supportive and helpful!"

Children:

"I feel like they've made us all as a family see the changes we needed to make. We all communicate a lot better with each other I just feel like I'm in a totally different place now and haven't got the weight of the world on my shoulders"

"I don't think I've ever heard so many positive things about myself"

"Mummy doesn't shout as much. Things at home are good."

5.4. During the period that FACT has been in place:

- There was a reduction in referrals to children's social care of approximately 8%.
- Repeat referrals have reduced from 25% to 22% and we are now in line with the national average.
- FACT data shows a current re-referral rate of 12.7%.
- The average open caseload in Crewe CIN/CP has reduced from over 1000 to around 600
- The cared for children population has risen during this period, similar to other local authority areas, however when it is necessary to make an application to court to safeguard a child, there is significant evidence to demonstrate that the family have been offered support to make the changes required to keep their child safe from the risk of significant harm. There is also early evidence that the rate of admissions to care is beginning to reduce.

5.5. FACT (Project Crewe) is one of only 9 of the 50+ Round 1 Innovation Programme projects invited to take part in a longitudinal study. This follow up evaluation will track the outcomes for the families involved in the original Randomised Control Trial in order to assess sustained impact and will be a great opportunity to showcase how the service model has impacted positively on the areas children and families.

5.6. Catch 22 and Cheshire East have also contributed to research conducted by Research in Practice, a national training and development resource that supports evidence informed practice with children and families. This research looks at best practice in effective Commissioner-Provider relationships when commissioning innovative services.

5.7. The FACT approach has been used to replace one of the five social work teams in Crewe CIN/CP between 1 August 2018 and 31st March 2019 as part of a fully integrated and innovative approach to working with children in need. Given the success of the FACT approach it is proposed to expand the number of pods from 2 to 3 rather than recruit to vacancies within the traditional social work teams in Crewe.

- 5.8. It is proposed to commission three FACT teams, with each team consisting of a qualified social work consultant, four family service practitioners supported by a cohort of skilled and trained volunteers. The estimated cost of the commission is £600,000 pa which will be funded through Children's Social Care base budget for staffing. In order to embed the approach over the long term it is proposed to commission for five years (1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025) which takes the contract value over £1m and therefore requires Cabinet approval.
- 5.9. Time has been taken to assess whether the FACT model can be delivered efficiently and effectively through internal delivery whilst maintaining the fidelity of the innovation model. One of the main factors in arriving at the decision to commission rather than replicating the approach through internal team structures has been the staff turnover that occurs within our social work teams and the consistency of practice and caseload variation that this can create. As the decision to commission or develop the model internally has been carefully considered over recent months a long period of a settled state across our social work teams has been interrupted by periods of staff turnover. This has resulted in a delay in the decision to commission.
- 5.10. In order to assess the appetite and ability of the market to deliver the FACT model as a long term approach a period of market engagement and testing is needed prior to a competitive procurement process. This will require a further one year contract award (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020) to the existing commissioned provider in order to ensure there is no break in the delivery of FACT.

6. Implications

6.1. Legal Implications

- 6.1.1. The Council has a statutory duty to work with children in need to promote and safeguard their welfare. Cheshire East has devolved its responsibility for children in need that are open to the service provider.
- 6.1.2. The total value of this 5 year contract is such that these services must be competitively procured in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and in compliance with the Council's Finance and Contract Procedure Rules. This will require a fully OJEU compliant procurement exercise. The Service is engaging with Legal Services and the Council's Corporate Procurement Team in this process. The impact of TUPE on existing provision will need to be considered during the course of the procurement process.
- 6.1.3. Whilst the procurement process is undertaken it is proposed that a contract be directly awarded to the incumbent provider. A contract for a period of one year is below the EU threshold (for competition) and, whilst it could be challenged on the basis that the value of the direct award should be combined with the previous contracts, the risk is low if the

Council can demonstrate it is in the process of competitively procuring the service going forwards.

6.2. Finance Implications

- 6.2.1. The proposed FACT service of three pods (estimate annual value of £600,000) will be funded from the Children's Social Care staffing base budget. Whilst there are no savings expected at the current time from the provision of this service, it is expected that longer term savings could result from the reduction in escalations of children in need, a reduction in repeat referrals and a different approach to young mums who are repeatedly having babies taken into the care of the Local Authority.
- 6.2.2. The Children's Social Care Service has a budget of £35m for 2018/19. The budget is subject to a number of pressures from care placements and associated costs plus staffing. The staffing budget will be re-cast for 2019/20 to include the additional FACT service and monitored effectively during the year. The mainstreaming of FACT and the invest to save approach surrounding the repeat requirement to take babies into the care of the Local Authority is one of the strategies to be applied in order to balance the budget over a two year period.

6.3. Policy Implications

- 6.3.1 This commission will put children in need at the centre of Council policy and decision making. The invitation to tender will be undertaken with clear reference to the Children and Young People's Plan and Signs of Safety approached being adopted across children's social care.

6.4. Equality Implications

- 6.4.1. The proposals contained in this report look to enhance the social care offer to vulnerable groups of children and families, in particular young mums. An equality impact assessment will be completed early in the commissioning process.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

- 6.5.1. The Council has a workforce strategy which is designed to recruit and retain qualified Social Workers and Managers. It is important that this is effective so that the Council retains the capacity to respond to children and young people at risk of significant harm. This service provides an innovative alternative to delivering statutory children's social work services with less Social Workers being needed to provide high quality child in need planning. This means that Social Workers can focus on more complex work such as children subject to child protection planning and court work.

- 6.5.2. When the FACT service is advertised for tender any TUPE implications will be taken into account.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

- 6.6.1. There are risks associated with the devolving of authority to Catch22 to deliver some statutory services to children as Cheshire East was one of the first Councils to do this. There are clear performance measures in place, alongside a quality assurance framework. There is a joint working protocol that is regularly updated and has evolved over time. In order to mitigate the risk, Children's Social Care have consulted with Ofsted and invited the Chief Social Worker to visit the service.
- 6.6.2. The appetite of the market to commit to an innovative model of delivering statutory children's social care over the long term is a potential risk. Market engagement will be undertaken during March / April 2019 in order to assess whether an active market exists that has the required experience to deliver devolved statutory children's social care responsibilities on a long term basis and whether it is possible to deliver invest to save surrounding repeat removal of babies into care within the new delivery model.

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

- 6.7.1. Children and families in need of social care support can come across Cheshire East, including our rural communities.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

- 6.8.1. This report sets out the progress being made to reduce the impact of harm on children and young people and the positive impact of the FACT service on wellbeing and the understanding of families surrounding boundaries and behaviour.

6.9. Public Health Implications

- 6.9.1. There are wider benefits to the general public health of children and their families from effective family support and reduced intervention of social work teams.

7. Ward Members Affected

- 7.1 FACT currently works across the Cheshire East footprint. There has been an increased focus on provision of service within the Crewe area, although for specific families, identified as benefitting from the service, there remains the potential to work with FACT wherever they reside.

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1 The implementation of FACT has been scrutinised by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Due to the service being innovative, there has been significant consultation and engagement with partner agencies and the wider community through attendance at meetings and open days.

8.2 The development of the service takes place in consultation with children and families. FACT have recruited their first volunteer who was previously a parent with a child open to the service.

9 Access to Information

9.1 There is no information provided in addition to this report.

10 Contact Information

Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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