



Case Study Briefing

Troubled Families in Greater Manchester



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1 Overview

The Greater Manchester “Troubled Families” programme was evaluated from the perspective of Social Investment.

In broad terms, Social Investment is a distinctive approach in social policy that perceives welfare spending as a form of long-term investment, with an emphasis on improving human capital and expanding labour market participation. The underpinning principles of Troubled Families include early intervention with children and sustained employment for parents. In this way the programme aligns with Social Investment

This report shows that local contexts of this national programme influence how it is delivered across the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester.

2 Key policy implications

Troubled Families in Greater Manchester has supported a shift towards more service integration.

- The main achievements in Greater Manchester include:
 - Advances in better communication and information sharing, despite IT systems not being up to date.
 - Co-produced plans taking families’ perspectives into account.
- More support for mental health is needed
- The financial mechanism of Payment by Results has some support from senior decision makers but at street level it is seen as inhibiting collaboration.

3. Context

Troubled Families was nationally launched in 2012, supported with central government investment of £668 million against a background of austerity and cuts in public services. It has been claimed as a success by government but also attracted extensive critical analysis, particularly as a concept that individualises societal ills. The media coverage of the policy links the programme's launch with the riots that took place in several UK cities in the summer of 2011. Those engaged in the riots were often described as unemployed, young, from challenging backgrounds with histories of criminal and anti-social behaviour. Greater Manchester (GM) was one of the original Troubled Families pilot areas. The intervention is part of a broader programme of reform across the county.

According to the Department for Communities and Local Government "the programme is designed for families with multiple problems who will benefit from an integrated and whole family approach." (DCLG, 2015). The programme is relevant to policy areas such as early intervention in the life course (parenting, improving school attendance); active labour markets; crime and anti-social behavior, and mental health.

The original national programme (Phase one) ran from April 2012 to March 2015. It defined troubled families as households who meet 3 of the following 4 criteria, namely families that: (a) include individuals involved in crime and anti-social behaviour; (b) have children not in school; (c) have an adult on out of work benefits; and (d) cause high costs to the public purse (DCLG, 2011). The government estimated that there were some 120,000 families in England who would satisfy the requirement of meeting 3 of the 4 needs criteria. The expanded programme (Phase two) was launched in April 2015 and is planned to run through until March 2020. DCLG has estimated that around 400,000 families (over and above the 120,000 included in the original programme) are eligible for the expanded programme. To meet the threshold, families need to meet 2 out of the 6 following criteria:

- children who have not been attending school regularly;
- children who need help: children of all ages, who need help, are identified as in need or are subject to a Child Protection Plan;
- adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion or young people at risk of worklessness;
- families affected by domestic violence and abuse; and
- parents and children with a range of health problems (DCLG, 2014b)

For both the original and the extended programme, DCLG provided each local authority with social services responsibilities with a number of troubled families in their area that were eligible for the programme. As part of the expanded programme, DCLG estimated that there were some 27,000 troubled families in Greater Manchester (compared to around 8000 under the original programme).

4. Sources of evidence

The evaluation team used a mixed methods approach to review and assess the Troubled Family programme in Greater Manchester. It focused more specifically on two specific Local Authorities in order to offer a meaningful insight into the programme.

Evidence presented in the report draws on 42 interviews with programme managers and leaders, delivery staff, and beneficiaries. The evaluation team reviewed strategic documents (e.g. Troubled Families Outcomes Plan, existing impact studies) and mostly existing data in order to avoid research fatigue. They undertook 25 observations (team meetings, strategic meetings, family visits) to gain a greater understanding of the processes and relationships underpinning the implementation of the programme. Media coverage of the Troubled Families programme (48 most relevant articles) and videos produced by community reporters was also examined in order to provide an understanding of the public's perception. The evaluation team facilitated four workshops to clarify how the programme was intending to bring about change (theory of change). Findings based on the different sources of evidence were used to test the assumptions underpinning the programme and identify factors contributing to its success or failure.

5. Main findings

Key findings from the process evaluation indicate that the programme's implementation varies greatly across Greater Manchester. The local context strongly influences how the programme is delivered, which services are involved, and what needs are addressed. The target population is reached retrospectively as the 'troubled families' are identified amongst all the families engaging in early help services in order to claim payment-by-results (PbR).

Overall, PbR is viewed as a political process. The central benefits of this approach seems to be its potential as a catalyst for change. Some participants perceived it as a mean to systematise service integration through incentivising partners. Yet, the processes are time consuming and the prime benefit appears to be at a strategic level rather than for family outcomes.

“[PbR] is a massive consideration. There is an awareness. It doesn't drive the nature of the work, but it makes sure that you record things.”
(Greater Manchester staff)

Whilst service integration is not an innovative feature as such in the UK, the Troubled Families programme has been systematising some of its elements (service integration, strengths based approach to family needs) and therefore supports the implementation of a wider political agenda. Through the establishment of Hubs and the co-location of its teams the programme has, to some extent, supported an important cultural shift from inter-agency working to service integration. This allows for better communication and information sharing, which supports a holistic view of the family needs and rapid response. Several challenges were associated with this shift (e.g. anxiety about redundancy and loss of professional identify, rigid legislation that is not up to date with practice).

The impact evaluation points out that attribution is an issue in a context where several programmes with similar objectives targeted the same population. Evidence available from the national evaluation suggests that the programme had no significant or systematic impact on family outcomes. However, the great variation in the implementation of the programme at local level may mean that Troubled Families in Greater Manchester achieved different effects to that identified nationally.

6. Impact & Implications

The great variation in the implementation of the Troubled Families programme at local level makes data capture challenging. Monitoring systems are currently under review and should improve in order to allow for an harmonised data capture across Greater Manchester.

The contribution analysis identifies successful elements of the programme. Teams communicate well and information is shared in order to offer a personalised approach to families. The majority of families engage with the programme and speak highly of their key workers. The programme is shifting dynamics through creating better relationships between families and public services. It also empowers families and gives them a sense of agency through co-producing the family plan, using strength-based approaches and providing information about services available to them. Families reported an increase in confidence and self-esteem.

However, the contribution analysis also points out that some of the supporting factors are not yet in place for the programme to be effective. For instance, the lack of mental health services available to families could seriously hinder the success of the programme as it is a common need amongst families and is identified as one of the first outcomes to be improved in order to successfully address other challenges.

Consequently, whilst the programme theory might be plausible, it is unlikely to be successful if services are not available. This is especially the case given the pressure to meet PbR targets within the tight timeframe requested.





7. Further information

For further information on InnoSI: Innovation in Social Investment: approaches to social investment from the scientific perspective, visit our website at <http://innosi.eu/>

To view Community Reporting videos with personal experiences of the case study please follow the link below

<https://communityreporter.net/feature/stories-family-life>

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