



University  
of Glasgow

**Renfrewshire Families First Evaluation  
The Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change**

*Final Report June 2015*

# **Renfrewshire Families First Evaluation**

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The Integrated Children's Services Plan indicates how we will work towards delivering this long term vision and explains how services working with children, young people and their families will provide support to achieve improved outcomes for Renfrewshire's children over the next three years.

The most significant influence on children making the best start in life is the care and nurture of their parents. Our universal services of education and health work to support parents to make a positive impact on children and young people. It is our aim to prevent problems or difficulties from arising where at all possible, but when they do, we want to act with parents to resolve issues as quickly and effectively as possible.

Reach for a Better Future outlines our approach based on prevention and early and effective intervention.

The prevention approach means that parents, with the support of services when needed, will continue to focus on positive outcomes for most children by stopping problems before they arise.

The second element of our approach is to identify and intervene early when problems do occur. Evidence and research shows that early and effective intervention improves outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Using these approaches will help services support families, children and young people to achieve the outcomes that all of our children deserve.

**Councillor Jacqueline Henry**  
Chair of the Children and Young People Thematic Board  
Renfrewshire Council

# 1 Key findings

Findings from the major stakeholders in the Families First neighbourhood projects; parents, Core Team members, and partner organisations have been overwhelmingly positive. Interviews with parents have clearly demonstrated that the initiative has had a positive, and in some instances a profound, impact on the lives of families in the Linwood and Ferguslie neighbourhoods. For many of these families referral, from partner agencies or by self-referral, has brought immediate support from dedicated Core Team members. Often, initial presenting problems have represented the tip of an iceberg and many of the families that the project has worked with have, over a period of time, revealed a series of additional and often complex underlying problems and difficulties. Yet even in these situations the Core Teams have shown themselves able to cope, both with the range of issues and with the complexity of some family situations. Many of the partner agencies that the project has engaged with over the last two years have reported that the Project's presence has resulted in benefits to their organisations. For some this has been the result of referring families onto a service that they believe is better placed to deal with their clients' issues, for others it has meant an improvement in their working environment. For example, class teachers spoke about how, with Core Team support, disruptive children have become more settled in class and better able to learn. Consequently, teachers then spend more time thinking about teaching rather than worrying about class control. Social work and health visitors noted that support from the Core Team had frequently prevented situations and issues from becoming more serious.

If the *Core Team Initiative* is as successful as the evaluation indicates then there are important implications for local authority services. It is clear that the nature of the project has resulted in a service to local families which is proactive and responsive to a wide range of needs. Indeed, parents often contrasted their 'positive' experience of the team with their 'negative' experiences of other local and central government authority services. The messages from this evaluation are clear, to better meet the needs of families, services should be:

- Faster in response and more able to devote time to building up and maintaining relationships with families. Initial presenting issues may just be one of many that families face and it takes time to understand parents and children's, often complex, situations
- Willing to model appropriate behaviour for families rather than merely 'instructing them what to do'
- Building relationships with families based on mutual respect and relating to them on their terms
- Prepared to 'go the extra mile'. Services which are able to operate in a flexible manner and go beyond families expectations of what is required are held in high esteem by the community
- Sensitive to the number of agencies families have to deal with at times of crisis. Having a one-stop service with an emphasis on building strong professional client relationship helps maintain parental confidence at times in their lives when self-belief and self-esteem is often low. At such times families are often ill

prepared to cope with the demands imposed on them by any number of professional agencies.

Findings from *Core Team* staff, parents and representatives of partner services indicated broad agreement on the impact of the project and underline the recommendations on 'how organisations should work' contained in Tackling Poverty in Renfrewshire (Renfrewshire Council 2015) when it highlights that good services should:

- Address stigma
  - Involve people
  - Remove barriers
  - Use evidence
  - [Make best] use of resources
- (p26)

## 1.1 Core Team staff

- The Core Team have helped many local families deal with a wide range of issues, from financial difficulties, through parent and child health issues, relationship difficulties and child behavioural problems.
- The financial advice workers have brought an added dimension to the work of the Project, so much so, that benefit checks for families have become routinised into the work of the project. Between November 2013 and March June 2014 the project secured over £573,000 in additional income for local families. They also helped local people manage more than £25,000 of debt.
- The Project's approach to working with families, adopting a 'walking with them' ethos while encouraging parents to take increasing responsibility for dealing with the issues appears to have been highly successful and there is little evidence of families becoming dependent on family workers.
- Staff highlighted the benefits of having a locally based team operating in a flexible and responsive manner with an ability to deal with a range of issues and difficulties.

## 1.2 Parents/carers

- The *Core Team Initiative* quickly established itself in the Ferguslie and Linwood neighbourhoods and built trusting relationships with local families.
- The project has made a notable positive impact to the lives of families in the two communities. In some instances the support has had an immediate impact on families lives, for example, in preventing eviction and securing additional benefits. In other instances impact may take longer and, in the case of families with mental health problems, may require cyclical support from the project.
- There is good evidence that the approach used by workers in modeling behaviour, advocacy and 'walking' parents through issues has begun to build

the skills and resilience of those in vulnerable families and, therefore, contribute to the wider social capital of their communities.

- Many parents contrasted the positive ethos and approach of the Core Team with that of other public services including; social work, health visitors and the jobcentre where personnel were regularly viewed as patronising and judgmental.
- Parents also commented on the fact that Core Team members were able to spend more time with them than they had experienced with other public services where engagement time was more limited.
- Parents who had engaged with the energy advice service spoke positively about the help they had received. Among the encouraging outcomes were instances where families had switched to more economical tariffs, been supported to apply for insulation grants, or been informed on how to manage their heating systems more efficiently.
- Those parents who had been matched with a Homestart volunteer were very pleased with the support they received and were particularly appreciative of the fact that the volunteers had given up their own time to help other families.

### **1.3 Partner agencies**

- Partner agencies regularly reported the *Core Team initiative* as an asset for supporting families in the communities in which they worked.
- There was little evidence of service overlap between the Core Team and other public services.
- Referral systems from other agencies had grown over the life of the project. Local schools, nurseries, and health visitors had become regular referrers.
- A number of partners suggested that the *Core Team project* was playing a role in building the social capacity and resilience of the communities.
- The *Core Team project* was having a positive impact on the work of other services in the neighbourhoods.

## 2 Introduction and context

The Scottish Government published its Early Years Framework in December 2008. This framework was designed to foster the best possible start for all children in Scotland. In particular it highlighted the necessity to address the needs of children and families whose life chances including: educational outcomes, health and well-being, and employment prospects are reduced through the effects of deprivation. One important aim of the Framework (2009) was to equip services, practitioners, and families with the resources required to give every child in Scotland the best start in life. The Early Years Framework aspires to reform practices by shifting the focus from crisis management to prevention and/or intervention at the earliest possible stage. It is intended that this will be achieved firstly through the early identification of needs and secondly through providing effective support services to address those needs, and by empowering individuals, families, and communities to overcome the challenges they may face. Subsequently, the Framework has been complemented by the establishment of a national Early Years Taskforce and the more recent Early Years Collaborative initiative<sup>1</sup>.

*The Early Years Collaborative is a coalition of Community Planning Partners - including social services, health, education, police and third sector professionals - committed to ensuring that every baby, child, mother, father and family in Scotland has access to the best supports available.*

*Scottish Government (2013)*

Across Scotland, local authorities have a degree of autonomy in their implementation of the Early Years Framework. Renfrewshire's own Early Years strategy recognises that there are significant numbers of families and young people living within the authority who would benefit from additional local support to achieve their potential. Part of the Authority's response has been to develop a,

*... comprehensive family-centred approach which identifies the needs and challenges faced by our most vulnerable families ..... This will include early intervention to provide a range of practical support including financial advice and support; access to relevant information; childcare; health and well-being; educational support; family support; and employment and training.<sup>2</sup>*

The Council adopted a multi-component Early Years strategy called 'Families First'. This investment programme aims to provide additional support for families in target areas to address the issues that impact on children's development. Following consultation with professionals and families, the *Families First* initiative has been developed in three distinct strands:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years/early-years-collaborative>

<sup>2</sup> Giving our Children the Best Possible start in Life: Renfrewshire's Strategy for the Early Years. Report by Director of Education and Leisure Services. March 2013

1. A family centred approach in Linwood and Ferguslie
2. A family centred outreach approach to support families across Renfrewshire
3. Support for families with older children – specifically to reduce exclusions and increase educational attainment by vulnerable and looked after children.

The family centred approach in Linwood and Ferguslie is the subject of this evaluation. The aim of the Linwood/Ferguslie project is primarily to improve outcomes for children and families, reduce inequalities, and to ensure that effective support can be sought by any family, when it is required. In doing this the initiative offers practical advice and support for; health and well-being, education, finances, and employment and training.

To avoid confusion with the two other strands of the *Families First* strategy we will henceforth refer to the subject of the evaluation as the '*Core Team Initiative*' or '*Core Team Project*'. In addition we use the term parents to mean both parents and carers.

The *Core Team Initiative* involved the setting up of two family-centred neighbourhood-based initiatives aimed at supporting families with children up to eight years old. Based on analysis of SIMD data, Free Meal Entitlement (FME), health data and other relevant local intelligence two neighbourhoods, one in Linwood and one in Ferguslie were identified as suitable locations for the project. It was anticipated that a team of core workers would be based in each neighbourhood and direct their efforts on the identification and subsequent development of relationships with vulnerable and disadvantaged families. These workers would then help co-ordinate services and support families in accessing services. Through the deployment of additional resources it was anticipated that local families would receive co-ordinated, flexible support where and when required. This support was to include:

- *Increased access to additional early years teachers, who will have a focus on improving learning and teaching, particularly at the transition from nursery to primary*
- *Early intervention and nurture approaches*
- *Parenting advice and support*
- *Additional wraparound care and out of school care for our most vulnerable families*
- *Free meals in early years establishments for our most vulnerable children*
- *Breakfast clubs for our most vulnerable children*
- *Free school meals and activities during holiday periods for children in P1-3 who are entitled to free school meals, and*
- *Family support in the form of parenting, homemaking and health and well-being advice and support.*<sup>3</sup>

The Core Teams were subsequently based in Glencoats Primary School, Ferguslie and in Woodlands Primary School, Linwood. Initially each Core Team comprised; a Co-ordinator (line managed by the Primary Headteacher), three workers, a shared

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<sup>3</sup> Giving our Children the Best Possible start in Life: Renfrewshire's Strategy for the Early Years. Report by Director of Education and Leisure Services. March 2013

emotional health worker and a shared financial advice worker. The two shared posts were subsequently supplemented by the employment of a second emotional health and second financial advice worker (each of the new posts had a geographical remit beyond the Core Team locality). Finally, in November 2013 an induction week was organised for the newly appointed Core Teams.

The initial aims of the *Core Team Project* evaluation as presented to the University team were fairly general. These were:

- Working with the Early Years Strategy evaluation sub-group in order to ensure that the external evaluation is consistent with the overall evaluation framework of Early Years Strategy
- Undertaking research to evaluate the extent to which the Renfrew Early Years Strategy has achieved its stated aims and outcomes as agreed with the Early Years Taskforce and Early Years Collaborative and partners and evaluate the impact the strategy has had on the families, services and community that have been involved, and
- Preparing a research report for dissemination to the Early Years steering group by March 2015.

In summer 2014 the Core Teams were enlarged to include:

- An energy advice worker with a remit for both neighbourhoods.
- A 'Homestart' project involving a coordinator based in each of the neighbourhoods with a small team of family support volunteers attached to each coordinator.

Following appointment as *Core Team Project* evaluators the University team were involved in a number of meetings with Council officers to refine the focus and approach of the evaluation to best suit the evolving nature of the Initiative. The result of these meetings was a revised evaluation proposal submitted to Renfrewshire Council in October 2013. This had three key aims:

1. Producing an overview of literature on early years interventions to help set the context for the initiative and, perhaps more importantly, provide the rationale for the anticipated outcomes of the *Core Team Project*
2. Detailing the impact of the *Core Team Initiative*. This would include impact on local families, the community, and partner organisations
3. Assessing sustainability and replication of the work of the Core Teams. To what extent could similar work be developed elsewhere without additional resources having to be deployed?

Each of these main aims had a number of associated research objectives and questions that guided exploration of the underpinning issues and factors and informed the design of the research methods. These research questions were:

## 2.1 Research Aim 1: Associated research questions

- What does the research literature tell us about effective interventions and approaches that share the same aims as the *Core Team Initiative*?
- Can this literature contribute to the evolving design of the Initiative and inform the analysis and interpretation of the evaluation findings?
- What forms of data gathering and evaluation approaches are appropriate to evidence impact of the Initiative?

## 2.2 Research Aim 2: Associated research questions

- What do Core Team member, parents/carers and other partners of the Initiative understand as the aims of the Project? What success criteria do they apply?
- Within the timescale of the evaluation, to what extent has the Initiative made progress against its stated aims and objectives? In particular, what evidence is there that the Initiative has made a positive difference to the lives of families in the communities it covers?
- Has the *Core Team Initiative* had a broader impact on social capital within the communities? Has the Initiative had an influence on partner organisations and agencies and collaborative working between the Initiative and these organisations?
- What are the key factors and processes responsible for any positive impact?

## 2.3 Research Aim 3: Associated research questions

- What evidence is there that the *Core Team Initiative* can be sustained and what resources would be needed?
- What resourcing or re-deployment of existing resources would be needed to expand the Initiative more widely across Renfrewshire?
- Does the Initiative's outcomes have implications regarding redefinition and flexibility of professional roles?
- What other considerations and factors are likely to influence the sustainability and expansion of the approach adopted: for example, what are the implications for recruiting appropriately skilled personnel?

## 2.4 Scope of this report

This report summarises findings from the *Core Team Initiative*. These findings are primarily derived from interviews with Core Team members, parents in the two communities served by the Initiative and representatives of partner agencies also working in the neighbourhoods. In addition it details a series of issues and implications arising from interviews with senior local authority staff.

### **3 Methodology**

This section of the report summarises the evaluation methodology. The adopted approach is predominately qualitative with a major emphasis on individual interview. Given the nature of the research aims and research questions, a largely exploratory and qualitative methodology was required. The initial evaluation plan included questionnaire survey of representatives of partner organisations. However, it became clear from the nature of the developing project and the complexity of the issues involved that interviews with partner organisation representatives should replace the proposed partner organisation survey.

Interview was regarded as the best method for capturing the nature and detail of impact from the *Core Team Initiative* on families. Moreover, this approach is better at illuminating the processes involved in gauging progress. Qualitative methods have particular strengths in capturing the perceptions of those involved and, in this instance, are particularly suitable for producing detailed narratives of the impact of the project on families. The findings from this study are considered very robust because of; the large number of interviews conducted (128), the range of sources, and the consistency in the findings across the different stakeholders. More than half of the interviews (71) were conducted with parents.

The ethos guiding the overall external evaluation was one of collaborative working, with the University research team acting as a 'critical friend' to the Core Team and senior local authority staff to:

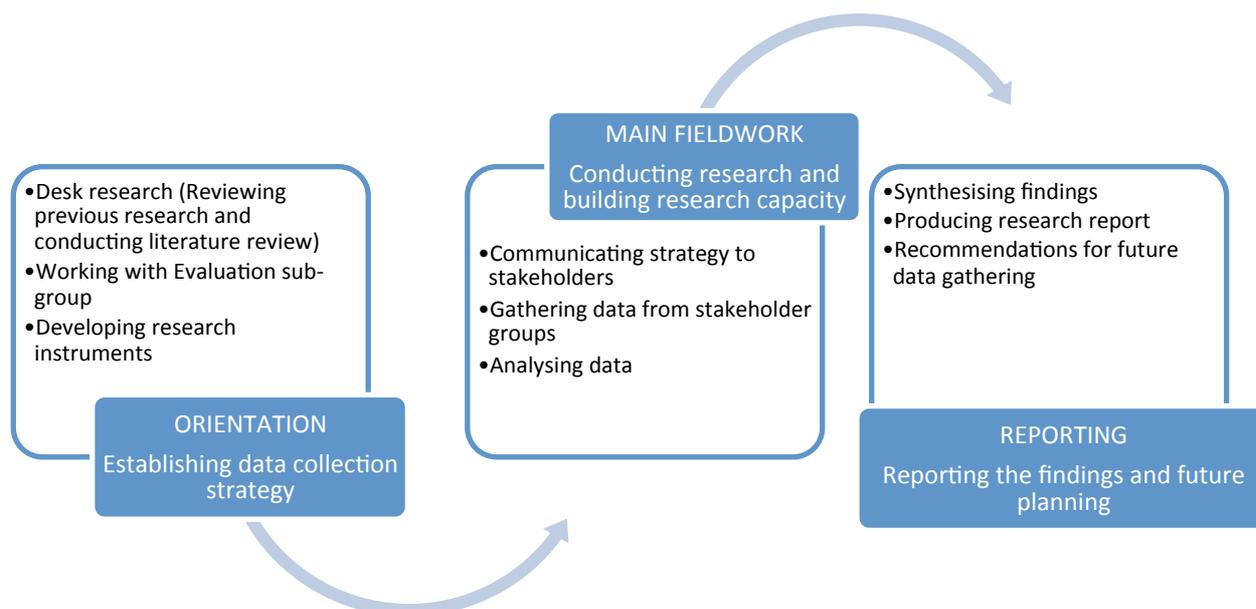
- co-construct an appropriate evaluation approach
- contribute to the evaluative capacity of the Core Teams and the Council researcher to self-evaluate their project, and
- help develop an appropriate analytical framework to interpret findings.

As the evaluation moved forward it created a stronger formative strand than was initially envisaged. This included a number of feedback sessions, involving Core Team staff and more senior officers within the council, reflecting on findings from interviews with staff and parents. Such feedback was regarded by the research team and Core Team members as an important mechanism in capitalising on the evaluation findings at an early enough stage to influence future planning and development of the initiative. Following the production of the interim evaluation report the research team presented findings at a day conference organised by Renfrewshire Council in August 2014.

#### **3.1 Methodological overview of the evaluation programme**

The evaluation methodology had three key stages: Orientation, Main Fieldwork, and Reporting (See Figure 1). Discussion about the nature and approach of the evaluation began with Renfrewshire officials before the Core Team workers were appointed. This was a particularly welcome development and allowed the University and Renfrew colleagues time to ensure the final evaluation plan had been well thought through and that appointed core staff could be made aware of the evaluation, its purpose and its proposed methodology during their induction week.

**Figure 1: Overview of methodology**



### 3.1.1 Stage 1 – Orientation

The initial stage involved a number of key activities which are described below.

- Discussion with the local authority to: determine the ‘full scope’ of the evaluation, establish the research resource commitment from Renfrewshire and the subsequent generation of a final workplan. Renfrewshire allocated a proportion of time from one of their existing research staff to work on the evaluation. This development was welcomed by the University team since the Local Authority researcher brought additional existing knowledge of the Authority’s systems and procedures to the evaluation team. In addition, an initial in-depth interview was conducted with both headteachers to obtain a detailed understanding of the project and the context of the work.
- Review of existing relevant Renfrewshire evaluation reports and materials.
- A short focused literature review of similar intervention initiatives to the *Core Team Project* in Renfrewshire. This was initially focused on UK research and evaluations over the last 20 years and subsequently expanded to include Europe, the USA and Australasia over the same period. This task was taken up by the Local Authority researcher supported by one of the University team members.
- Development of research instruments. Construction of interview schedules for parents, Core Team members and partner agencies (available from the University team on request) took place in collaboration with project co-ordinators and workers.

### 3.1.2 Stage 2 - Main Fieldwork

Table 1 provides an overview of the major stakeholders in the programme, research methods and main research areas.

**Table 1 - Research aims, informants and methods**

Main research aims and questions	Informants and sources of evidence source	Evaluation methods
<p><b>Aim 1.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does the research literature tell us about effective interventions and approaches that share the same aims as the <i>Core Team Initiative</i>?</li> </ul>	<p>Research literature regarding findings from evaluations of family-centred initiatives.</p>	<p><b>Literature review</b> conducted jointly by Council Research Assistant and UoG team.</p>
<p><b>Aim 2.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within the timescale of the evaluation what evidence is there that the Initiative has made a positive difference to the lives of families in the communities it works with?</li> <li>Has the Initiative had an influence on partner organisations?</li> <li>What are the key factors and processes responsible for any positive impact?</li> </ul>	<p>All <i>Core Team Initiative</i> workers and management including headteachers.</p> <p>A purposive sample of parents involved with the services.</p> <p>Representatives of partner and referring services.</p>	<p><b>Interviews</b> with HTs, Core Team members and parents. Interviews took place in Feb/Mar 2014 and again in Dec 2014/Jan 2015.</p> <p><b>Interviews</b> with relevant professionals and partner organisation representatives involved with the Initiative. November 2014 - January 2015.</p>
<p><b>Aim 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What evidence is there that the Initiative should and could be sustained or expanded?</li> <li>What resourcing or re-deployment of existing resources would be required?</li> <li>Are there implications regarding redefinition and flexibility of professional roles?</li> </ul>	<p>Professionals (including Core Team workers, The two Headteachers, senior management representatives and representatives of partner organisations.</p>	<p><b>Interviews</b> with Headteachers. November 2014.</p> <p><b>Interviews</b> with senior stakeholders and service representatives. Interviews were conducted after the draft final report (findings from which were used as basis for interview). May/June 2015.</p>

### 3.1.3 Stage 3- Reporting

The University research team produced an interim report in August 2014, a draft final report in March 2015 and the final report, this document, in June 2015.

## 3.2 The research informants

Tables 2, 3 and 4 provides details of the research informants by designation and neighbourhood. In addition to interviewing Core Team members the research also focused on interviews with parents and with relevant partner representatives. The final selection of parental interviewees included families in different circumstances who demonstrated the typical range of presenting issues, and different modes of engagement with the services offered by the two Core Teams. Follow-up interviews were conducted with as many of the original parent interviewees as possible. In addition the second round of parental interviews also included families with relatively recent involvement with the project. In total 128 people were interviewed as part of the main data collection programme.

**Table 2 – Core Team interviewees (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rounds)**

Core Team interviewees	1 <sup>st</sup> round interview		2 <sup>nd</sup> round interview		Total no. of Interviews
	Ferguslie	Linwood	Ferguslie	Linwood	
Headteacher	1	1	1	1	4
Co-ordinator	1	1	1	1	4
Core Team workers	3	3	3	3	12
Adviceworks advisor		1*	1	1	3
Family wellbeing advisor		1*	1	1	3
Admin. officer	1	-	1	1	3
Energy Advisor	-	-		1*	1
Homestart worker	-	-	5	1	6
<b>Total number of interviews</b>					<b>36</b>

\* worked across both centres

**Table 3 – Parental interviewees (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rounds)**

1 <sup>st</sup> round interview		2 <sup>nd</sup> round interview		Total no. of Interviews
Ferguslie	Linwood	Ferguslie	Linwood	
16	15	22 (including 10 interviewed at 1 <sup>st</sup> rnd.)	18 (including 9 interviewed at 1 <sup>st</sup> rnd.)	<b>71</b>

**Table 4 – Partner professional interviews**

Organisation/service	Centre attached to (if applicable)		Total no. of Interviews
	Ferguslie	Linwood	
Education – primary, early years, CLD	7	7	14
Health – Health visitor and improvement team	2	2	4
Social work	1	-	1
Dance instructor	1	-	1
Church Minister	-	1	1
<b>Total number of interviews</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>

Following circulation of the draft final report interviews were conducted with a number of senior council officers and officials associated with the Core Team initiative. In addition both Headteachers were re-interviewed as part of this strand of the research. Table 5 details interviewees.

**Table 5 – Senior council officials/employee interviewees**

Designation	Interviewees
Education Convenor	1
Head of Service Children’s Services	2
Principal Educational Psychologist	1
Education Officer Children Services	1
Project Manager (Early Years Strategy)	1
Headteacher (facilities manager)	2

### 3.3 Approach to Analysis

The overarching framework for the analysis was determined by the research aims and research questions documented in the evaluation specification and outlined in section 2 of this report. These also take into account the Renfrewshire Outcome Measures developed by the Council.

Qualitative evidence gathered during the individual and group interviews was recorded both in note-form and digital audio recording. The analysis of this material drew on both full and partial transcriptions for clarification and illustration. The iterative and flexible nature of qualitative data collection and analysis meant that salient themes that were un-anticipated at the outset of the research process were identified and included in the findings.

In addition to the detailed research programme, members of the research team also conducted a joint discussion with the two Core Team Coordinators in February 2015. This session was organised to help validate a number of findings from the interview programme. In addition it was an opportunity to explore the extent to which the two Core Teams were similar or different in relation to ways of working, types of work engaged in and the nature of the issues presented to the team.

This report also includes a number of case studies in order to provide a contextualised account of how the programme addressed the, often complex, needs of individual families. **Three** of these case studies are drawn from parental accounts of involvement with the Core Team: **two** are provided by Core Team members while **two** others are provided by partner professionals. In all cases the names of individuals have been removed.

During the data gathering phases of the project it was apparent that Adviceworks staff were routinely securing additional benefit and resource entitlement for families in the two neighbourhoods. In Section 5 of this report we include a brief analysis and discussion of this strand of the work and the impact it has had at an economic level.

## **4 Summary of relevant Literature**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section of the report provides a brief overview of relevant findings from the literature. A more extensive review is available on request.

### **4.2 Summary of findings from the literature review**

In the literature search, the focus and priority was given to projects/research which made reference to, or focused on, what early intervention projects managed to achieve within two years – the original specified duration of the *Core Team Initiative*.

Similar projects identified in the literature have demonstrated outcomes related to impact on children, home environment, and parents. Arguably, these areas will often be interconnected. What follows is a brief overview of key findings in these areas.

#### **4.2.1 Impact on children**

*Eager and Able to Learn* (EAL), an early intervention strategy aimed at improving children's eagerness and ability to learn involved children attending early years establishments in Ireland, demonstrated notable improvements in children's social skills after two years (McGuinness, Eakin, & Connolly, 2012). Similar results were achieved by *Invest Early*, an early intervention programme which involved adult education, childcare and mental health support (Wilder Foundation, 2007). *Community Mothers Programme*, through which mothers were encouraged to share parenting experiences, reported significant cognitive developments in children after one year. (Johnson, Howell, & Molloy, 1993).

The *Home-Start* (Asscher, Hermanns & Dekovic, 2008) parenting support programme in Holland, along with the *Brighter Futures* initiative in England, and the Dundee Early Intervention Team (DEIT, 2013) have all demonstrated improvements in child behaviour following the provision of effective family support for a range of issues. Additionally, positive outcomes for children's health have been reported by early intervention programmes such as the *Community Mothers Programme* (Johnson et al., 1993) and by the *Family Nurse Partnership* pilot in England, which specifically aimed to improve child nutrition (Barnes et al, 2008).

#### **4.2.2 Home environment**

Invest Early (Wilder Foundation, 2007), DEIT (2013), EAL (McGuinness et al, 2012) have all also demonstrated significant improvements in children's home environments, and these include important changes such as greater regularity of parental participation in play; parents reading more frequently to children; and a safer home environment for children.

#### **4.2.3 Impact on parents**

Improved parenting skills, as may be expected, are a key aim of many early years initiatives, and such improvements have been shown through early intervention

projects (Little, Berry, Morpeth, Blower, Axford, Taylor, Bywater, Lehtonen, & Tobin, 2012; Miller & Harrison, 2013; West Lothian Council, 2010).

Importantly, some intervention strategies have also reported positive effects on parents' health behaviours (Johnson et al., 1993); and also on patterns of domestic abuse (Fergusson, Horwood, Grant, & Ridder, 2005).

Early intervention strategies have also been shown to encourage improvements to overall family well-being, including parental self-esteem (Johnson et al., 1993) and increased confidence (Miller & Harrison, 2013). West Lothian Council's *Sure Start West Lothian* showed decreased levels of parents' feelings of irritability, anxiety, and depression (West Lothian Council, 2010).

There have also been consistent reports that families function more effectively, and that family relationships and routines benefit from early intervention programmes (DEIT, 2013; Little et al., 2013).

#### **4.2.4 National initiatives**

In order to effectively review the impact of early years support and intervention efforts, it is helpful to consider approaches which have been adopted nationwide in other countries. The aim of such approaches is to challenge core beliefs, attitudes and practices so that a widespread cultural shift towards supporting children and families, in the early stages of life, may occur.

Examples of such nationwide success have been demonstrated in Scandinavian countries and in the Netherlands. In league tables, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands consistently perform highly among developed nations when it comes to the well-being of their children (Unicef, 2007). The UK performed poorly in comparison to less affluent countries and ranked bottom of the child well-being league in 2007 (Unicef, 2007). In addition, The Wave Trust (2013) reported on comparisons made in 2005 between Sweden and the UK. The figures showed that in Sweden the infant mortality rate was half that of the UK; the teenage pregnancy rate was 1.6%, compared to 7.1% in the UK; and 55-60% of Swedish mothers exclusively breastfed at four months (7% in the UK). These successes are a result of the consistent implementation of early intervention and prevention programmes and a drive to witness this change over a 20-30 year period. These examples clearly demonstrate that, to effect real change that can be evidenced from many sources, a consistent and effective strategy towards early intervention and support is required. The publication of the Scottish Government's Early Years Framework the development of the Early Years collaborative, and the UK Government publication, The Allen Report (Allen, 2011) signify the growing movement towards adopting this approach to supporting children and families in the UK.

The findings from the literature demonstrate that early intervention has potential for a positive impact on families and children. In line with this, the current project was designed to evaluate the *Core Team Initiative* currently being supported by Renfrewshire Council.

## 5 Findings

This section of the report presents the main findings from the evaluation. It comprises three sections. Section 5.1 contains the main findings from the Core Team interviews, section 5.2 presents the summary findings from the parental interviews while section 5.3 details findings from interviews with partner agencies. Each of these sections concludes with a short summary of key points.

### 5.1 Summary of findings from Core Team interviews

#### 5.1.1 Interviews with Project Staff

Thirty-six Core Team interviews were conducted over the first and second interview rounds. Thirteen staff members were interviewed across the two centres in February/March 2014 and 23 were interviewed at the end of 2014 or beginning of 2015. The increased number of interviewees at the second round reflected the additional staff who joined the project after the first round of interviews. These extra staff comprised a second well-being worker, an additional Adviceworks advisor, an energy advice worker and two Homestart project coordinators with several volunteer home visitors attached to each coordinator (see Table 2 for details).

#### 5.1.2 Reflection on Staff interviews

At both interview stages topic guides were circulated to project team members prior to interview. This allowed staff the opportunity to reflect on questions and provide more considered responses. Interviews ranged in duration from 45 minutes to just over an hour.

Over the project duration, a small number of staff changes took place and these changes unavoidably resulted in some minor disruption. In the main this meant some additional work being taken on by other team members until the situation was resolved. However, in the case of absence of an Adviceworks advisor, a more specialised role within the team, this did result in a few months of reduced impact in the local community. In some instances allocation of annual leave entitlement meant that other team members took responsibility for absent colleagues client families. Indeed the relatively small size of the teams offered the advantage that Core Team workers were generally familiar with their colleagues' caseloads. As one of the Coordinators said,

*The very good thing in the team is that if somebody was off on holiday most of the families know someone else or most of the team so it's quite interchangeable in a sense that somebody else will pick up support. We had a mum over last week, health visitors has actually sent her over. She was in crisis, very upset, very emotionally upset. [Her Core Team worker] wasn't here... but [another Core Team worker] was able to pick up on that because she knew about that family, she knew the issues in that family...*

Reflecting on responses from Core Team members at the first and second interview rounds there was strong agreement from Core Team members on the following points:

- The original aims of the project and its methods of working have been maintained
- Core staff are highly motivated and have a strong support ethos for each other
- Team members have developed their confidence and skills to deal with a wide range of issues and problems presented by parents and children
- Core staff have appreciated the CPD opportunities made available to them
- The ability to build strong, trusting, non-judgmental relationships was seen as key in developing successful work with families.

### 5.1.3 Setting up the Initiative

The interviewed headteachers indicated that the *Core Team Project* was regarded, by senior Council staff involved in its development, as very different from existing Council services - both in terms of its organisation and remit. The focus on working holistically with families rather than individually with parents and children was a distinctive feature. One of the headteachers illustrated the need for such a programme,

*I knew we weren't meeting the needs of the families - we were trying to be there all the time for parents. My office in the morning used to have parents [requiring support]. I felt we needed to have time to respond to this. So this service emerged from discussions on this.*

*(Headteacher Core Team)*

The Initiative was seen by the headteachers as a method of contributing to building and sustaining communities and, 'not just about solving problems but building community capacity and resilience for the longer term, building capacity for them to help each other'. Given this vision for the *Core Team Initiative*, recruitment criteria devised by senior managers stressed that family workers required particular skills, attributes and dispositions. There was to be a strong emphasis on: empathy; having respect for clients; and a willingness to work flexibly. These attributes were reflected in Core Team workers comments,

*[The Core Team] see themselves as different from other agencies because they are [given time and permission to be] flexible and they 'walk with' the families, we don't mind going out to houses at the high tariff times when it's a struggle'.*

*(Core Team worker)*

*You have to know how to say the right things and not labelling and not judging.*

*(Core Team worker)*

The recruitment team looked at the candidates' commitment and skills and whether they had awareness of or had 'lived the experience of the target families'. Successful recruits did indeed possess a wide range of previous experience and qualifications. This was felt to be a major strength in both of the teams with Core Team workers and their managers underlining the view that life skills and experience were the most important attributes for staff. For example,

*Being able to listen, your life experience brings a lot to the post because in a lot of instances you've been there, you've experienced so many different things in your life that you can empathise with people.*  
(Core Team worker)

*... it's about people who have had rounded lives and who have had the experiences in their lives but they don't have all that knowledge about attachment theory and about synapse development ... you can sort out bits about knowledge and skill development [later].*  
(Headteacher Core Team)

#### **A wellbeing worker's story**

Well there's another young lady, that when I first joined the team she'd not long discovered that she was pregnant. Because of my background as a midwife it was decided I would work with her.... I've walked along beside her through her pregnancy. She's had loads of appointments through her pregnancy that I've supported her to, helping to promote her overall wellbeing. Other family and financial issues have arisen and she's turned to me for support with these.... I've had her along to see the Adviceworks advisor and she ended up getting more money for the household which is brilliant. She then asked me to be her birth partner so I went with her. I put myself on call for the fortnight before she was due... I went with her and watched our little Families First baby come into the world which was a great privilege ... She's been back in touch again with issues with her ex-partner, issues with a boiler and things. She just doesn't know who to turn to get advice for these things, but she always turns to me and yes I'll get that sorted and I'll phone them. I think I'll continue to walk along beside her hopefully till her wee boy goes to nursery and that would be very nice. Yes it's almost like a lifelong tie for this wee boy which is lovely, it's really special.

Family wellbeing worker

Initial interviews confirmed that Core Team workers understood the *Project* aims, ways of working and expected outcomes while the follow-up interviews indicated that the project's core aims and methods remained largely unchanged.

Available training opportunities were seen as useful and appreciated. However, it was also felt by interviewees that there was no requirement for all team members to undergo the same training since they worked as a team and shared knowledge. In one or two instances workers reported that they had 'felt their way' through an issue with support from their co-ordinator and other team members.

Resourcing for the Initiative was generally felt to be adequate. However, informants from both teams did report that initially there had been issues regarding the availability of basic office supplies, marketing materials, leaflets, telephone and computer/internet access. Nevertheless, all of the workers indicated that the work had continued in spite of these difficulties. As the project progressed, the 'late arriving' publicity materials helped to increase awareness of Core Team services among partner organisations.

## 5.1.4 Expanding the team

As already indicated, the Core Teams expanded with the arrival of the energy advice worker, two Homestart project coordinators and several Homestart volunteers. In addition an additional health and wellbeing worker and Adviceworks advisor was employed. This meant that each of the neighbourhoods now had their own health and wellbeing worker and Adviceworks advisor. The energy advice worker acted across both communities while each Core Team had a Homestart coordinator attached to it. Interviews with these coordinators suggested that it had taken longer than initially expected to bring the two organisations together in terms of ethos, age range of children worked with, and physical presence. An initial lack of IT access did not help this process either, demonstrated in the following quote,

*it's taken a lot longer than we anticipated to streamline the ethos and the goals particularly the IT for example. I've had no IT access other than at the Home Start office so the plan had been when I was first recruited that I would be part of the Families First team based in [neighbourhood], but that hasn't happened that way ... In terms of the personalities and the relationships I feel I've built those up well, so that we can influence future practice.*

*(Homestart Co-ordinator)*

However, even at an early stage the Homestart coordinators could see advantages for their organisation from being based in the local communities:

*I think the benefit actually of being based in the locality is that I've been able to build up really strong relationships with families as well... Traditionally Homestart hasn't had a huge amount of referrals from the [neighbourhood] area and that may be because it's more difficult at times to break down those barriers and gain the trust. I think with me being here it has allowed me to be in the locality and when I'm in the nursery doing a stand I see lots of parents that I've already met coming in. I might not speak to them other than a hello, but it kind of builds that relationship so I think that's been a huge positive.*

*(Homestart Co-ordinator)*

From the Core Team perspective the presence of Homestart volunteers afforded an additional resource for the parents they were engaged with, for example:

*Third sector-wise ... we made inroads with Homestart being part of the team and it's becoming more established.*

*(Core Team Co-ordinator)*

*If I'm supporting somebody and there's maybe not ... too many issues, but it's maybe somebody that could just be doing with some company they can go along and say 'How are you doing, how's things?' that kind of social experience, then I would contact [Homestart]... I think it's a great opportunity for people. I think from what I know it was quite difficult to get things going on in the [neighbourhood] for Homestart historically, but from what I'm seeing it's been quite successful.*

*(Core Team worker)*

Initially the Energy advice worker had spent time with each of the Core Teams explaining the nature of his role and what he could do to support families. Subsequently, he became involved in group working and visiting families to help increase his profile in the area. As he said,

*...it's been arranging one-to-one visits which usually lasts about an hour in people's homes, it's been about attending activities and getting myself known and also helping out the team. So for example the FAST programme which is in Ferguslie on a Wednesday after school .... and also Terrific Tuesdays with parents with young children; there are pre-schools in Linwood on a Tuesday morning so I've become involved with those activities. I also take some referrals from the Renfrewshire-wide energy service because they're quite inundated just now and they help with the odd referral, usually in the same post code as I'm working in already.*

*(Energy Advisor)*

### **5.1.5 Working with partner agencies**

In addition to working with statutory and voluntary sector services as part of the referral process, Core Team workers in both communities networked with key agencies to develop the signposting element of the work. While Core Team workers generally saw this involvement as helping to promote the referral process, they believed that contact or involvement with key agencies had not been crucial to the success of their work, rather it was a desirable advantage. In working with other agencies and partners, the Core Team staff believed that their work and the Initiative had been generally positively received, particularly as partner organisations began to see the impact of the project in the local communities. However, one headteacher sounded a note of caution, suggesting that there were still hurdles to be overcome if the project was to work with partner agencies in a more co-ordinated and systematic fashion.

### **5.1.6 Initial challenges for the Project**

Overall, *Core Team Project* staff reported no serious issues or challenges in their work to date. The initial shortage of office supplies and publicity materials was eventually rectified and was not felt to have greatly affected the development of the project.

Some families who had been referred to the Core Teams from other services had not been ready to engage and declined to be involved. In most instances this was felt to be the result of the referring agency making an inaccurate assessment of family needs. However, this did not mean these families could not have benefitted from engagement with the initiative. As one of the Headteachers noted,

*A lot of our families didn't take advantage of the service and some of these families could really have benefited. Their kids could have benefited from it.*

*(Headteacher Core Team)*

As the project has unfolded, each of the Core Teams has been investigating the best methods for recording progress and impact of the initiative on families. A few interviewees from both teams indicated some initial anxiety over this process, both in terms of the method but also the time requirement. As one family worker noted,

*Are we going to spend a lot of time writing up notes? [This] takes away from the valuable pieces of work.*

*(Core Team worker)*

Drawing on previous experience of record keeping one of the co-ordinators said,

*Don't let yourself get bogged down worrying about the paperwork: trust where it has been tried and tested....*

*(Core Team Co-ordinator)*

This concern over record keeping monitoring progress has begun to reduce as teams themselves have come to see what information on progress is useful and what information is essentially redundant. However, there are still on-going issues over the instruments used to record progress and the context in which they are being used. This topic is further discussed in 5.1.13.

### **5.1.7 Professional development of the Core Team**

As already reported, staff were very aware of available CPD opportunities and were grateful for access to this. They were able to identify a range of CPD that they thought would be helpful and those who had accessed CPD reported that it had been both relevant and useful. Early on in the project a few staff requested additional training in dealing with mental health issues. However, this was prior to the appointment of the wellbeing workers who subsequently took on a greater role in dealing with these health issues.

There was a range of complementary skills and expertise in evidence across the teams with some possessing specialisms in dealing with domestic violence, additional support needs, mental health issues, and the benefits system. However, for these skills to be of maximum use there was also a need for the worker to recognise their central position in supporting families. Headteachers both highlighted the importance of providing staff development opportunities, so that core team staff are well-placed to respond effectively to the particular needs of families:

*It's about up-skilling yourself. I know a lot about the Autistic Spectrum, I know less about ADHD and I know very little about Dyspraxia ... it's not someone else's job. There is nobody best placed to do what needs to be done for a child than the people that are there with him every day.*

*(Headteachers' joint discussion)*

It was also evident from interviews that project co-ordinators played a key role in fostering team spirit but also recognised their central role in the on-going professional development of their Core Team members. As one family worker stated,

*We all get on really well, [Our co-ordinator] is outstanding, she pushes you as well. We've been going along to different agencies to let them know who we are, where we are and what we are doing. We would normally go along with [co-ordinator's name] and she would speak but*

*she said 'right who's doing the talking today' and she puts you on the spot and now I've got the confidence, I've done it twice and I feel I'm getting more and more confident.*

*(Core Team worker)*

Indeed, throughout the interviews project co-ordinators came in for a lot of positive feedback in relation to their management skills, understanding of the project and general support for family workers. In some instances they gave particular support to workers who were dealing with families on issues that they were less confident or less experienced in dealing with. In this respect the following comment was typical,

*We all come from different backgrounds .... I draw upon her [co-ordinator] experience .... If I'm struggling with a family and I don't feel I'm having a positive effect I go to [co-ordinator] and say 'look I think [other key worker] might be better suited for this family..... and being able to have that backup there is good.*

*(Core Team worker)*

### 5.1.8 Engaging with families

By March 2015 the Core Team initiative had engaged with 349 families (177 in Ferguslie and 172 in Linwood) in one capacity or another. However it was apparent from reviewing the first and second round interview material that the nature and complexity of the issues being dealt with by the Core Teams were well established at the early stages of the project. Family need varied from those in severe acute crisis to those with longer-term chronic need.

### 5.1.9 Referrals

Families became involved with the project in a number of ways. Table 6 lists the major referral routes for families to date.

**Table 6 - How are families referred to the Core Team Initiative?**

Self	Health visitor
Word of mouth/friend	School nurse
School staff	Women and Children 1 <sup>st</sup>
Nursery/early years centre	Previous relationship with Core Team member
Home link	

As the project developed, and knowledge of it has spread, self-referral and referral through word of mouth became increasingly common with parents recommending it to friends. For example,

*A prime example at a birthday party was a mum who said to this other mum "she (HomeStart worker's name) can get you a volunteer that helps you with the weans". That was the words. She's (Homestart worker) going out to see her [parent] this week so that ... being out and about in the community really, really works you know.*

*(Core Team Co-ordinator)*

*Self-referrals have been excellent. Health visitors have made really good appropriate referrals ... Social work have made some referrals where five families have needed support ... that's worked very, very well because it's families that otherwise wouldn't have had so much support*  
(Core Team Co-ordinator)

Referrals from statutory organisations have most frequently come from education partners such as local primary schools and early years centres.

In order to establish effective working relationships, workers set up surgeries twice a week in the local school and other sites in the community where parents could see the worker either by appointment or by just dropping in. Considerable effort has gone into establishing links with the full range of statutory/voluntary agencies and services present in the communities. Interviewees reported that other professionals were noting parents' willingness to approach *Core Team Project* staff because they were seen as distinct from Social Work and did not carry the stigma often attached to the agency. However there were a few instances where working relationships had been quite difficult to establish. Across both centres the co-ordinators agreed that slow progress had been made with midwifery.

### **5.1.10 Presenting issues**

Core Team workers reported that the initial presenting issue frequently concerned a child's behaviour, however, this was often just one element of a wider set of inter-related issues which could include:

- Financial difficulties
- Health issues (mental and physical)
- Substance misuse
- Agoraphobia
- Isolation
- Housing problems
- Relationship issues
- Domestic abuse
- Behavioural issues
- Bullying

The following statements by those involved in the project exemplify the issues and their interconnectedness being dealt with regularly by Core Team staff, and demonstrate how immediate measures are able to be applied in crisis situations.

***Domestic violence, child behaviour*** - *We had a recent scenario where there was a very serious domestic violence incident and the woman was very badly injured ... she and her son moved away for a period of time ... he ended up moving back to the area [and] back to the school ... he was delighted to be back but his behaviour reflected the kind of trauma that he had experienced.*

(Headteacher Core Team)

**Substance misuse, mental health, offending behaviour** -... we're talking about some cycles of extreme disadvantage in some families, involving drugs, parents' mental health issues, and criminal behaviour ... following support from the team, the child is not acting out hugely at school but is still acting out a bit.

(Headteachers' joint discussion)

**Child protection, mental health** - There have been a few cases where there is social work involvement ... one in particular that [Core Team worker] is working with has heavy social work involvement, the children have just been placed on the CP [Child Protection] register, no one else was supporting this family, it's a young child pre-school who wasn't getting to nursery because of Mum's medical ... emotional, mental medical condition. We are supporting that child to get to nursery and we have made it very specified and time limiting so that there is not that dependency.

(Core Team Co-ordinator)

**Housing, parenting, financial difficulties** - One of my families was served an eviction notice and I was able to help them sort out their rent arrears and also arrange a referral to Adviceworks to see if all their money was adding up to what they could pay for. It turned out they had been underpaid benefits they were entitled to, and this resulted in them getting served an eviction notice ... we stopped that and we've also put an application in for them to move to social housing... We're now helping the parents to support the daughter's behaviour - which wasn't good - ... we've been doing some Triple P [Positive Parenting Program] work ... the daughter also hadn't been in attendance at nursery for 3 months ... now we are assisting in getting mum into a routine .. so sometimes our involvement starts with one problem and goes on.

(Core Team worker)

These quotes all underline the complexity and interconnectedness of many of the issues that *the Core Team Initiative* is working with in the two communities. The following section provides a description of the approaches adopted by the initiative.

### **5.1.11 Approach to working with families**

The Core Team's methods of working with parents are grounded in practical flexible support and characterised by an approach that engages directly at crisis points. It was evident from interviewees that referred families were very quickly seen by a co-ordinator and allocated to a key worker with a programme of response. For staff (and parents) this was in sharp contrast to the slower and less flexible responses of other statutory services. Part of the process following referral involved the offer of a benefits check to ascertain if families were receiving their full benefit entitlement. Support for families could range from a 'one-off' involvement through to longer-term support. In such cases, Core Team workers spent time 'walking with parents', that is being on hand when and where needed to provide necessary support and advice. This could take the form of listening, providing reassurance through to modelling behaviours such as helping to establish children's bedtime routines and positive behaviours. Core Team workers use goal-orientated approaches and monitor the progress of those they support. The following examples give a good indication of the processes involved.

*We try to get them to come up with their own solutions and agree a plan with them (to help develop independence). I would say 'right so for us to*

*go forward I could meet you ... if you're saying you cannot cope with taking him down to the nursery because he'll not walk beside you ....., what if I come up to the house and we walk down ... you know, it's about giving mum the tools ... and then I'd say 'how about I meet you half way?... so that you are not creating a dependency.*

*(Core Team worker)*

*You go with your instinct, when you get to know the person [parent engaging with Core Team Project] you build up a relationship ... and you build up that trust ... we're walking with the families, whatever they want to do, whatever pace they want to do it at we're just going that way.*

*(Core Team worker)*

*We continue to walk along with families...when need be. She (one of the parents) now has the confidence to be part of an interview panel... she's one of the parents we'd like to give ownership to of the mothers and toddlers group ... [We] motivate and encourage them and we know there are other issues... it's a very soft and gentle manner... it's not a 'we know best' manner... helping them [the parents] identify goals*

*(Core Team Co-ordinator)*

### **5.1.12 The issue of dependency**

Both the first and second round of interviews explored the issue of families becoming overly dependent on the Core Team for support and then failing to move on to take control of their lives. In the main, Core Team members did not regard this as a serious issue - in many responses they spoke about how the 'walking with families' approach ensured that parents understood that the support they initially received would be reduced as they became more capable of dealing with the problems they faced. For example, as one Core Team coordinator mentioned:

*Dependency in the early days, when we didn't have a lot of families, I felt could have been an issue, but it rectified itself in a sense. I wouldn't say there's any major dependency issues. We have families who have been with us since the beginning still getting maybe a weekly visit from a key worker with some kind of support or if things go pear-shaped or crisis point that will be increased as need be, but on the whole I don't see any.*

The other coordinator also spoke about conducting reviews of families with Core Team workers every few weeks. During these reviews she would routinely pose questions such as, 'why are we still doing this? what's happening next? how do we move this on?' Such reviews were obviously about encouraging Core Team workers to adopt a critical approach to their work and maintaining the focus on developing parental skills to cope with problems.

In one or two instances Core Team workers recognised that there was a danger of one or two parents becoming dependent. In such situations they suggested adopting strategies with families to minimise this happening. This could include not responding immediately to requests for support on minor matters as well as reminding parents that they themselves were more than capable of dealing with particular issues.

With the development of universal services and activities the project was looking to increase the responsibility given to parents. For example, in one of the

neighbourhoods the coordinator and team were looking at transferring ownership for groups to parents, and noted:

*The other nice thing ... was a conversation that I had with some of the team members recently ... looking more at giving ownership to some of our groups to parents, looking at that sustainability kind of model of things and the hope is that we can now look at that ... we're thinking about the likes of our mother and toddlers group that runs on a Wednesday morning.*

*(Core Team co-ordinator)*

### **5.1.13 Evaluation and record keeping**

The monitoring and assessing of families' progress by workers has been an iterative process to develop an appropriate approach. It has been informed through on-going dialogue with colleagues and the external University research team. In general, each worker keeps a record of progress that includes a qualitative narrative that allows an understanding of processes and factors but also periodic measurement (on a scale from 1-10, where 10 represents feeling fantastic and 1 represents feeling very bad) of the worker's impact and/or family progress. Gathering feedback from family members for this monitoring is systematic but usually occurs when the worker uses his or her professional judgment to decide when it is appropriate and meaningful to engage the parent in reflective questioning.

Core team workers indicated general acceptance of the need to keep records for evaluation and monitoring progress although a number indicated that they were not entirely comfortable with the scaling element of the process. It was also evident that workers differed in the frequency with which they used the ten point scoring instrument. Core Team workers were also less likely to use the scaling instrument when parents were visibly depressed or upset, as its use at such times was felt to be insensitive. In some instances, Core Team workers completed the scale themselves shortly after such a visit.

Both Co-ordinators made comments regarding the development of the evaluation instrument, one felt the instrument required some additional refining to maximise its usefulness while the other suggested using it to widen the scope of the evaluation by capturing the views of children and class teachers, saying:

*"What's missing? I think we need to [gain] children's views. We've maybe not got that correct and that's always something, the impact, what does the child see as the impact? The impact on class teachers. That's what I think is kind of missing ..."*

### **5.1.14 Core Team worker parity and terms of employment**

During the follow-up Core Team interviews a number of people spoke about the need to review their remits and terms of employment. One Core Team worker summed up a number of issues around the need to provide flexible support.

*We're very flexible, the whole team is very flexible and that is just very fortunate. They don't need to be because they're not employed to be flexible and that's probably something else as part of the job evaluation*

*has to be looked at, but they are very flexible in the sense of they would think nothing of if somebody was needing support with bedtime routines or being out later at night so that you're actually doing that along with a family and then reflecting on it as well... A lot of hospital appointments come through for a Sunday now at radiography. We've taken time out on a Sunday to go and do that. Some of your PIP appointments up in Glasgow for benefits will maybe be on a Saturday, they'll [Core Team workers] do that.*

In one or two other instances Core Team workers questioned the remuneration of their work in comparison with individuals in other support services. In some instances they suggested that there was a need to consider regrading posts. As the authority looks towards options for sustaining the work then this issue is likely to become more important.

### **5.1.15 Physical space within the current Core Team bases**

Physical space within the two primary schools in which the Core Teams are currently based is limited. Both coordinators indicated that this was becoming a factor in developing their services within the school. In some cases they have secured additional space within other community resources but this could also mean additional costs.

### **5.1.16 Impact on families**

From the perspective of the Core Team workers, there was widespread agreement that the project had successfully established a unique programme and '[brought] the vision to fruition'. In addition it had succeeded in both neighbourhoods in building a cohesive team with shared practices and a willingness to 'go the extra mile' for families. In addition the project has been successful in raising its profile among professionals and families in both communities.

The accounts from Core Team staff regarding impact on local families indicated many notable successes across a wide range of issues and difficulties experienced by families. For example, one Core Team coordinator noted:

*There's loads ... of stories out there ... from the impact on environments to the impact of finances, to the impact on emotions, children's emotions, to the impact on people taking part in things and not being stuck in a house and the impacts on emotional and general wellbeing ... we've got a couple of parents who are now working, so that long-term kind of impact ... that impact ... we really wanted*

We would have to ask ourselves, what would the consequences have been for such families had it not been for the intervention of the project? Some of the many documented examples of impact from the Project included:

- Promoting resilience among parents and children
- Immediate financial gain as a result of workers' advocacy to negotiate bureaucratic processes and address incorrect benefit decisions. This had the effect in some cases of helping families and vulnerable individuals to avoid

eviction and a considerable number of local families realising an increase in their benefit entitlement

- Preventing the likely suicide of two individuals
- Parents becoming less isolated and more confident and so taking part in community activities.

Several examples help to demonstrate the range of work, approach to relationship building, and provide an indication of how *the Core Team Initiative* positively impacts on local families, and helps them to build resilience. For example, one Core Team worker described how she was able to help parent overcome agoraphobia, to the extent where the parent then became a parent volunteer in school. Relief from previous stress was also very evident in some other parents, and one core team coordinator identified the 'hierarchy of needs' – including the provision of food, electricity and gas which would ensure children stayed fed and warm - which the initiative had been able to help address. Another parent had indicated that previous levels of stress which could potentially have led to suicide, had been much alleviated by the work of the Core Team.

Looking ahead, one of the co-ordinators suggested that the *Core Team Initiative* work would help build capacity in the community for peer support and resilience.

*Use the families that are successful to .... Build capacity in the community. It's about two women getting to know each other through universal services and strengthening that bond. So it's a ripple effect and we're the starting point, those links grow organically and become part of the community.*

*(Core Team Co-ordinator)*

### **5.1.17 Impact on staff**

In witnessing a positive impact on families *Core Team Initiative* staff experienced a high level of job fulfilment and clearly took satisfaction in the job they were doing. These successes may well have helped sustain staff enthusiasm and morale in what is a demanding and potentially stressful position. As one of the co-ordinators noted,

*I'm actually really satisfied ... it's been a learning curve, it's probably been a lot more than I expected. The hours I've put in are unbelievable ... but it's been really satisfying to see the impact on families.*

*(Core Team Co-ordinator)*

Family workers regarded the local project management (Headteachers and Co-ordinators) as appropriate and highly supportive. This respect was reciprocated by management. Reported levels of satisfaction among family workers was very high, with morale boosted by the fact that they felt valued by managers and the belief that they have been making a demonstrable difference to the lives of local families.

### A core team worker's story

This lady, (parent's name) was involved with social work. I think she's been quite highly involved with social work. She's got older kids, ... and then a younger one that I'm helping with ... and I know the aim of the project to begin with wasn't really to step over into social work, but she had health issues so it was difficult getting the wee one to nursery. So I would go up and take him to nursery, but then they were talking about her parenting ability at meetings and I think one of the things that I was able to do was to help her to prompt him on what the boundaries are and what's his expectation... but that's the kind of walking with families type thing, get in, let people know...just coaching them saying that's the right thing to do, maybe try that a wee bit ...

Core Team Worker

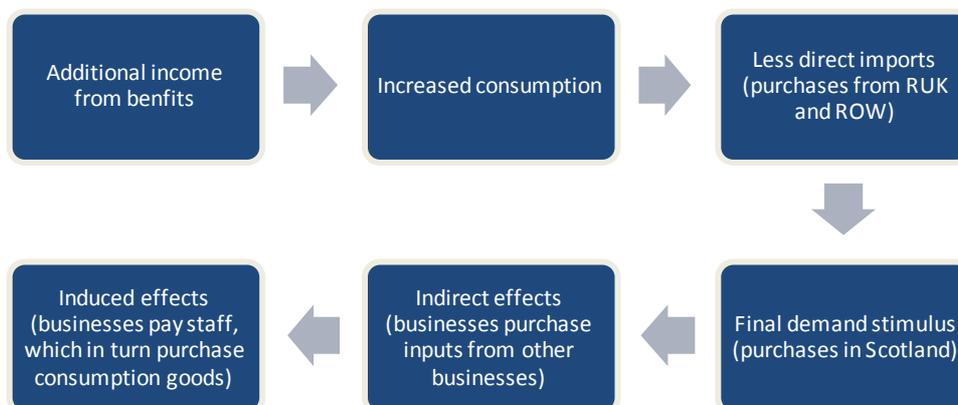
## 5.1.18 Financial impact

The financial advice workers (Adviceworks) have brought an added dimension to the work of the project, so much so, that benefit checks for families have become routinised into the work of the project. Between November 2013 and March 2015 the project secured over £573,000 in additional income for local families. In addition it also helped local people manage more than £25,000 of debt.

The Core Team Initiative's role in assisting families to access benefits that they are entitled to from central government lends itself well to economic evaluation. The role of benefits systems are complicated and dynamic and the inclusion of financial advisor on the Core Team was regarded by Renfrewshire as an important addition in supporting families to fully access the financial support that they are entitled to.

This additional income strengthens the financial situation of the families that receive it, but in turn is likely to benefit the Scottish economy more widely as it supports extra consumption expenditures, setting in train a multiplier effect (this process is illustrated in Figure 2. To gauge the scale of these impacts the 2011 Scottish Input-Output tables are used to assess the indirect and induced impacts on output, GVA (Gross Value Added) and employment that result from increased household consumption. Information on the amount of benefits income attributable to the *Core Team Initiative* was obtained from the Adviceworks advisor.

**Figure 2 Transmission channel from benefit income to economic impact**



In order to carry out the analysis a number of simplifying assumptions are adopted:

- The benefits income is assumed to be 100% additional, in the sense that it would not have been obtained without the assistance of the Core Team and it

originates entirely from central government provided benefits (i.e. not subject to the budget constraint of the Barnett formula).

- Income is transformed 100% into consumption expenditures, i.e. none of it is saved. Assisted households have the same consumption patterns as households in Scotland on average.
- Multipliers are derived from the 2011 Input-Output, which is the latest input-output table available from the Scottish Government.
- 

**Table 7 - Direct, indirect and induced impacts of benefits income attributed to Families First on the Scottish Economy**

Calendar year	Household income in Renfrewshire attributed to social work activities		Direct imports	Regional final demand	Output impact	GVA impact	Employment impact
	£	£m					
2013	1,965	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02
2014	454,852	0.45	0.12	0.33	0.54	0.29	5.30
2015	116,780	0.12	0.03	0.09	0.14	0.07	1.36

Since its inception in 2013 the *Core Team Initiative* is attributed with assisting households in Renfrewshire obtain over half a million pounds in under-claimed benefits income. The only full year data is available for is 2014. In this year benefits income attributed to the activities of Families First amounts to £m0.45. Once direct imports have been allowed for this results in a final demand stimulus to the Scottish economy of £m0.33. Adding indirect and induced impacts, the total output in the Scottish economy attributed to Families First amounts to £m0.54. This is estimated to support Gross Value Added of £m0.29 and 5.3 FTE jobs.

From the point of view of the Scottish economy as a whole it is therefore clear that the activities of the Core Team provide a direct economic stimulus, which is disproportionate to the scale of the operation. The impact upon Renfrewshire itself is likely to be less, as due to the open nature of local economies, indirect and induced impacts are likely to leak out, particularly to the central business district of Glasgow. It goes without saying that this modelling approach does not take into account other less tangible benefits of Core Team staff activities.

### 5.1.19 Key messages for replicating the project elsewhere

There was a strong consensus among Core Team workers on the key considerations required to successfully replicate the work of the Core Team in other neighbourhoods. Time and again respondents stressed the importance of the initial recruitment processes and getting the right people in post. Among the identified personal qualities were:

- A willingness to work flexible hours
- Able to work as part of a team
- Solution orientated, always looking for a way forward and being prepared to go the extra mile when required
- Non-judgmental in relationships with families
- Self-reflective of own practice.

More generally respondents suggested:

- Ensuring project resources in place from outset
- Good skills mix among Core Team members
- Management which recognises and supports professional autonomy and provides guidance without being overly directive.

### **5.1.20 Core Team Initiative staff interviews summary**

Core team staff in both neighbourhoods have engaged with families experiencing a wide range of issues and problems including: financial difficulties; health problems; relationship issues; children's educational difficulties and isolation.

Interviews with *Core Team Initiative* staff highlighted a number of key points in dealing with such issues. These included the benefits of having a locally based team operating in a flexible and responsive manner with the skills and abilities to deal with a range of issues and difficulties faced by families.

Moreover, the project's approach to working with families, adopting a 'walking with them' ethos while encouraging parents to take increasing responsibility for dealing with the issues appears to generate success with less likelihood of families becoming dependent on family workers.

Up to March 2015 the project has helped local families secure more than half a million pounds in additional benefits and entitlements as well as helping others deal with more than £25,000 of debt.

## 5.2 Summary of findings from parental interviews

### 5.2.1 Interviews with parents

In total the research team conducted 71 parental interviews across the two neighbourhoods. Nineteen parents were interviewed on both occasions (see Table 3 for details) which means the research collected information from 52 parents. Looking at the total number of families engaged with the project to date (349) we can see that the research sample represents 15% of the total number of families who have had contact with the *Core Team initiative*.

### 5.2.2 Reflection on Parent interviews

Interviews were usually conducted by two members of the research team with one leading the interview and the other responsible for recording and note taking. The second researcher would also contribute prompts or additional questions when the opportunity arose. Researcher debriefs indicated that parents were more than willing to share their experiences of involvement with the *Core Team Initiative* as well as give, often quite detailed and in some cases graphic, accounts of the difficulties they and their families had experienced. Indeed, subsequent discussions with Core Team members about the confidence shown by parents to engage with researchers was regarded as an indication of progress on the part of parents since initial Core Team contacts with parents were often characterised by quiet withdrawn meetings. Both co-ordinators also confirmed that they believed almost all of the parents that they had worked with would be willing to engage with the research team. Interviews generally lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

### 5.2.3 Nature of issues

In both centres the co-ordinator would be the first point of contact for referred or self-referred families. Families could present the co-ordinator with one or more issues from a considerable range of problems. However, it was soon clear to staff that the initial presenting issue could be one of several and in many cases was not necessarily the most problematic. Indeed, as reported in the previous Core Team interview section, it was quite common for Core Team workers to uncover a number of interconnected issues and problems faced by families as their work with them developed and the families trust in the Core Team worker grew.. Child behavior difficulties, financial problems, housing arrears, health issues (mental and physical), isolation, agoraphobia, relationship issues, substance misuse and domestic abuse were experienced by parents interviewed by the research team. The examples below give an indication of how some issues may be symptomatic of other underlying problems or compounded by them.

*She [daughter] was just acting up, she was hitting, screaming ... it was really really bad behaviour issues. She wouldn't tell me what was happening ... I had this wee nice girl and then all of a sudden the devil had appeared ... we [parent and Core Team worker] realised that there was a lot more going on ... we realised it was the bullying at school...*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

*With [son] I was fine but I had lost a lot of weight ... my partner ended up in prison and I ended up a single parent, from one day with him being there to one day him not being there, I found it a bit hard at the beginning ... I wasn't eating right and she [Core Team co-ordinator] said 'right that's where we'll start then'. I don't like going on buses myself, I'm kind of funny that way ... I was always stuck in the house.*

*(Parent C, first round interview)*

*I was going through a domestic abuse situation and basically I looked to [Core Team project co-ordinator] for help, she was brilliant. She put me in touch with [Core Team worker] ... I had known her through a school project. I knew her enough to get in touch with her when I was having a bit of a hard time ... I knew if anyone was able to help in the situation especially with [daughter's name] and keep me safe and everything I knew [the co-ordinator] would be the one to go to ... it was a case of getting [daughter] established back in school because I had kept her off as we were in homeless [accommodation] and I was too frightened to bring her to school. [The Core Team co-ordinator] was there to help reassure me ... and let me know she's [daughter] going to be fine. I felt that in the last eight months the family has really come on, [daughter] was being sick constantly, she was going into selective mutism because of the situation in the house until I left him [husband], now you look at her record and she is a happy wee girl, she's been discharged from hospital because she is not vomiting.*

*(Parent R, first round interview)*

*It's a long story, but I was involved with social work because I smoked cannabis ... half my income support was taken off me, that's when [Core Team worker] said go and speak to [Adviceworks advisor] ... I've been to the food bank with them.*

*(Parent Q, first round interview)*

A number of parents spoke about being isolated within the community and in a few cases this appeared to be related to agoraphobia. For some parents their isolation was compounded by a lack of finance and resources meaning they and their children were often unable to travel or take part in activities and events in the local and wider community.

#### **5.2.4 Initial contact with Core Team Initiative**

Whatever the presenting problem, parents reported a similar response from *Core Team Initiative* staff. Following referral from a partner agency or self-referral, an early meeting with the Core Team co-ordinator usually resulted in allocation to a Core Team worker. This worker would then engage with the family to devise a strategy to tackle the problem(s), 'walk with them' through the issues and incrementally increase the parents confidence and ability to take on greater responsibility for dealing with the problems.

Having positive first encounters with local families is a key consideration for a service attempting to build trust and cooperation with families in difficulty and who may have had poor previous experiences of local authority services. Indeed, the difference between the *Core Team Initiative* and other services was something that nearly all of the parents commented on within their interviews. Parents believed that the *Core Team Initiative* had several advantages over other services.

### **A dad's story**

I got in touch with [the Core Team] really because it was about my daughters, ... I had just separated from my wife and it was one of those situations where the guy, me, didn't really do much... I'm suddenly having to try and figure out what I need to do and it's all a bit mental so [Families First] helped me a lot like stuff with... I didn't know what benefits I was entitled to because I wasn't working and I couldn't work because I was looking after the girls and I wasn't actually getting any money at all before I met Families First. I was getting nothing. I was just kind of sponging off my mum and dad and I was staying with them because I had moved back in with them. [Families First] sorted me out with the benefits that I would be getting and stuff like that and they helped me with the applications and talking and dealing with stuff on the phone for me and all that so it took a lot of pressure and stuff off and a lot of stress away from me. That sort of thing was picking me up and I was getting loads of confidence back and stuff like that as well because of it, but it was that way when I was thinking about it I probably would have just completely fell apart if it wasn't for them guys helping me because I just had no clue what I was doing or what to do and then I was thinking about dealing with people like I was saying it's just much more dealing with people like the Job Centre and that because it's not the same type of thing, it's not the same type of atmosphere.

I really had nothing, absolutely, totally I had nothing. Now I'm getting all these benefits that I'm entitled to so I'm actually getting money, they helped me. I was living with my mum and dad because... so they helped me dealing with getting my own place as well. I kept saying to [Josie] that she's helped me too much do you know what I mean because pretty much most of the stuff that's in my flat just now Josie has got it for me. It's like they're not just doing what they have to do.

It was pretty much [Adviceworks] and [Core Team worker] that were working with me. [Adviceworks] was helping with all the finance stuff... so she pretty much sat with me and did this online application form for me and I got a lot of stuff again for the house... I started doing things like I started getting driving lessons which was good because you've got money. You can do this now you've got money and my confidence... I started going to the gym and just really good positive things. I started really building myself up and it's all because these guys were helping me and helping me build myself up and I'm writing a lot of music again... I just didn't do anything for ages and then recently that's me right back into it again. The confidence is up and I'm writing stuff all the time now so I'm actually really happy since this has all started and that's just been like a year. It seems like it's been a longer time than that because in that short space of time I've gone from pretty much rock bottom I feel pretty much on top of the world. I mean there's not much more that I think they could help me out with apart from just the times that you're feeling down or something like that and you just need someone to chat with, Josie did that a lot. She spent loads of time with me just walking about [location] on my crappy days just listening to me talk or just talking to me about her experiences and those sort of things really help you out. That's another thing that you just wouldn't get from somewhere else. You're not going to get someone walking about your town with you just listening to all your crap. You'd have to go into something like therapy for that to actually pay someone for that... I mean that helps a lot when someone actually cares enough to think about you and listen to you.

Families First I just can't praise them enough because they pretty much do the opposite from what everyone else has done and that just actually makes you feel good, makes you feel like a human being and actually help you and they go beyond helping you. It's like they don't just do what they're supposed to do and then just leave you alone. [Core team worker] is still in touch with me, just "How are you doing?" and stuff like that and making people feel good is the way to go. It's not about just what you have to do, you need to make people feel good as well.

My relationship with my daughters I think in the long term that will just get better and better because I've always had this worry that when things are bad between you...if that goes on for a long time I've always got this fear that they will just become so distant from me and just start hating me eventually and stuff like that. I actually really think that will reverse and I'll actually just get closer to them and I'll get happier with them. That's one thing that I think will come in the future. I've not really thought about anything else, but I've always had that dream of being famous and stuff like that, a famous musician, and I don't know if that was to happen one day. I'm not saying I would be famous or anything like that, but if I was to actually be doing something, achieving something with that, I would give a lot of credit to the Families First for that for backing me up in the first place to get me motivated enough to do stuff like that.

Most notable was the amount of time that the Core Team spent listening to and working with families from the initial referral through the various stages of involvement. As a result of spending more time with the parents and the non-judgemental approach taken by the team, parents felt more able to make disclosures to the Core Team. Often the parents commented that this was not something they had experienced with other services.

*Because when you talk to them [Core Team] they don't turn their nose up at you [...] And they listen to you to what you've got to say and they try and get it done and they get it done a lot quicker than what they would with going to an ordinary... like a doctor or whatever.*

*(Parent AA and BA, second round interview)*

*I would say it's been different like even the doctors and that I always felt as if they were judging. I've always felt that and like the counsellors. I've went to counsellors up at Charleston Centre and things which I've stopped doing. I just felt like no matter what you would say they just sit and judge. They might not say it to your face, but they've always got that kind of look I've always felt so you couldn't really open up.*

*(Parent BB, Second round interview)*

Interviews with parents suggested that Core Team staff were accepted by families and trust appeared to be established quickly. Many parents spoke very positively about their initial contacts with the *Core Team Initiative*. Some indicated feeling nervous at the outset but it was evident from their responses that this nervousness was quickly overcome as a result of the approach used by the staff. Many of the parents commented on the friendliness of all of the Core Team staff they encountered during their initial contact with the initiative. In addition parents also perceived the service as less official than other services, which was again valued by them.

*That's the one thing that's really key for me is not feeling pressured and not feeling like I don't have control and stuff like that. Like things are more friendly and less official. I still don't know how to describe what I'm actually getting here, but it's that way that obviously they are professional and they're doing their job, but it's not in a daunting way.*

*(Parent CC, second round interview)*

Parents expressed a range of comments on their initial contacts with the Project. All of which were positive and encouraging. Parents reported; being listened to, always having someone on hand to help, and having some control over their involvement as well as progressing at a pace dictated by themselves. Moreover, a strong feeling of working on equal terms with, and not being judged by, Core Team staff was evident in many of the interviews with parents. The following examples were typical,

*They've been there, for example, if I text [Core Team worker] just even with a wee niggle, she's right there and she's helping, if she's not there then there is always someone on hand to offer support ... it wasn't a case of someone is going to take over, it was a case of I needed someone to walk alongside me and that is exactly what they have done.*

*(Parent E, first round interview)*

*This is going to sound strange, but it's like you are coming here [Core Team project office] to have a cup of tea with your pal but you're getting help at the same time, you don't feel dead silly or a bad mother, the fact is that the girls [Core Team staff] have all been through what we're going through, it makes you feel a lot more calmer.*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

*They don't force anything on you, it's up to you, they let you know they are there if you need them.*

*(Parent Q, first round interview)*

*They let you go at your pace rather than them saying 'try A,B and C' they'll give you suggestions but to try when you feel comfortable to try it, they let you go at your own pace.*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

The approachability and openness of the staff was something that was very evident to parents. Several parents remarked that when they approached the Project for help the response time was very quick. Parents were surprised that when co-ordinators or Core Team workers said they would get something done, it happened very quickly. For example, one parent who was helped to secure new furniture and toys for her children was amazed that the items were delivered the very next day. Furthermore, a number of parents said that if they were relying on social work things moved very slowly. *Core Team Initiative* staff were able to put things into action almost immediately and that stopped the issue lingering and becoming more serious. Parents were also impressed by the ability of the Core Team to get other services to take action. One parent said that she had been very ill and had called the GP, however, on her own she was unable to get an appointment. She explained that a Core Team worker then called the surgery on her behalf, secured an immediate appointment, and was taken to the GP by another Core Team member. This ability to access quickly other resources and services was highly valued by parents.

Interviews with parents also revealed that, from the outset, *Core Team* staff were seen to 'go the extra mile' for families. This appears in part to be a result of both flexibility in approach and flexibility in hours worked. However, even the most flexible system benefits from committed professional staff who will extend their support to avoid a problem being compounded. The following quotation exemplifies this point,

*We were put out [rehoused in emergency accommodation] in Renfrew which is quite far from the school and [the co-ordinator] was actually picking [daughter's name] up personally and taking her to school for us, that was great so then I knew she was getting into school safe.*

*(Parent R, first round interview)*

Other parents noted that the Core Team often helped their family outwith their working day. One parent, for example, shared that he had just moved into a new home and had no furniture. Staff were aware of this and one member of the team sourced a sofa and then delivered the sofa to the family on the core team members day off work. Other Core Team members were directly involved in the promotion of parents health and wellbeing. One example of this is a Core Team member going to a slimming class with a parent. Moreover, parents were often also accompanied to hospital appointments.

Given the range of services provided by the Core Team it is not surprising that many of the parents had an awareness of the flexibility of the approach adopted by the *Initiative*. This flexibility of approach was something the parents clearly valued. For example:

*I think people like myself who come with a multitude of problems they're maybe not being quite so apparent at first sight, but have come to light as time has gone on so obviously I think they've been able to be flexible and adapt to the different situations as they arise and I've just felt that they've been first class, they've just been really good with coming up with ideas and helpful hints in what to do. They've been quite helpful in the parenting skills and I can go to them and ask. There used to be a health visitor so I've been able to ask them about problems I've had with [son] with feeding and things like that.*

*(Parent HH, second round interview)*

## **5.2.5 Impact on families**

Findings from the parental interviews support the views of Core Team staff on the impact of the Project and indicate that the *Initiative* has had a positive impact on the lives of many local families. The numerous detailed accounts from parents regarding how the Project had made a positive impact on their lives provided further insights into the nature and value of the support provided by the Initiative. A number of these insights are discussed below.

### **5.2.5.1 Reducing social isolation and building resilience**

Parents frequently talked about how support from Core Team workers had helped reduce the social isolation that they had experienced. This isolation arose from a number of reasons including: lack of confidence; having little money to go out; and having to spend most of their time caring for children. Being isolated had further compounded parents' problems by affecting their mental health and inhibiting access to sources of support. For example,

*They've got me going out now on a Tuesday to the wee group they've got called 'Terrific Tuesday' and I help out with that. I used to come here with [son] but he's in nursery now in the mornings ... it's getting me away from my kids for 2 hours ... I feel a lot healthier and happier as I don't have all that stress with [daughter's] going on.*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

Indeed parents often commented on their own development over the course of the intervention. They suggested that through engaging with the Core Team, and also with other parents, they had become more confident in themselves. A number of the parents recognised that a previous lack of confidence had been having an adverse impact on their lives and the lives of their children. In working with *Core Team Initiative* staff, parents were supported and encouraged to engage in community activities such as, shopping, taking part in other social activities and mixing with other parents at universal services supported by the Core Team. These parents then provided mutual peer support that helped build the individual's confidence and resilience through wider social/community involvement. One parent detailed this journey succinctly,

*I suffer really bad anxiety and I have a really bad socialising side like say seven months ago I wouldn't be able to sit and talk to you like this. I just couldn't do it. I used to feel physically sick, but doing relaxation with my keyworker has helped me come out. I think it was also lack of sleep as I've said and everything else just used to hold me back a bit, but since meeting Families First I've met a load of other mums and kids and we all meet up and have play dates and everything which has kind of brought me out of my shell more and more people to talk to and more kids for my kids to get on with.*

*(Parent DD, second round interview)*

A common theme in parents' interviews concerned Core Team workers' filling the void of missing family support and taking on the role of an extended family member. One parent, who migrated to Scotland several years ago said that, with no extended family in the country, it was good to have people whom she could talk to. She appreciated the fact that Core Team staff treated her like a 'normal person' despite her being from another country. The value of having someone to talk to was described by another parent as having a friendly face on difficult days.

#### **5.2.5.2 Increasing children's confidence**

Parents were aware that the project was putting effort into working with children in order to raise their confidence, were highly appreciative of this effort, and talked about how it had impacted on children:

*It's made them [the children] a bit more confident, being around other children, when we moved here it was just nursery but here they have met wee friends, they know who everyone is, they come in and they play. My two [children] are really shy ... before it would have been a screaming match to get them in the door.*

*(Parent A, first round interview)*

*Yes she was in that homework club, and although the kids would do their homework they would get something to eat that was healthy plus there was a lot of confidence... game-playing, confidence-building to make her and to make all the kids more confident and ask if they've got a problem or whatever. A lot of confidence-building and it was really, really good.*

*(Parent EE, second round interview)*

#### **5.2.5.3 Negotiating bureaucratic systems and alleviating financial difficulties**

It was clear from interviews with Core Team staff that financial difficulties were a key factor underpinning many families' crises and problems. Parental interviews reinforced this finding and revealed how the Project had made a major difference to many families facing such challenges. The contribution of *the Adviceworks* financial advisor came in for particular praise from parents.

*I got a lot of help from [Adviceworks advisor] she helped us with a lot of forms, got us all the money which I was due. My money had been stopped and [Adviceworks advisor] filled out the forms and took photocopies. She took us over to the benefit agency and got me an appointment.*

*(Parent C, first round interview)*

The financial support provided by the project was bespoke and extended beyond advice to include advocacy to overcome bureaucratic hurdles perceived as initially daunting. Many families witnessed increased financial benefits (more than £500k of additional benefits accrued between Nov 2013 and March 2015). Parents also valued the Project's support in helping them to obtain essential material resources and child safety equipment for their homes.

*They got me a community care grant so I could get a bed for [son] and a washing machine.*

*(Parent Q, first round interview)*

The provision of essential equipment such as beds and cookers was also felt by parents to promote healthier lifestyles and encourage stable and effective household routines.

Several parents reported that Core Team staff had helped them to correct errors made in benefits and housing arrangements. One parent commented that the financial advisor at *Adviceworks*, had helped her over the crucial Christmas period when her benefits had been stopped, leaving her and her children in severe financial hardship. The parent was keen to point out that the matter would never have been resolved so quickly if the Project's financial advisor had not intervened.

In another instance a single parent with a disabled child said that her Core Team worker had arranged transport to the local children's hospital. Until this point the parent had had to rely on public transport which was extremely difficult for her to deal with on her own with a wheelchair bound child. Not only did the keyworker arrange transport, but she also accompanied the family to the appointments to provide support for the parent. The parent remarked that the support she received from the keyworker was invaluable and that until now she had struggled to cope with difficult situations on her own.

Parents also greatly valued the advocacy role of the workers and the support which helped them negotiate various bureaucratic processes and other systemic procedures. This support, included helping parents to complete application forms, attend official appointments and prepare CVs to enhance their learning and employment potential. Parental accounts indicated that such support not only provided greater access to opportunities and benefits but also helped them to develop the skills required to undertake such activities themselves in future. These abilities also contributed to the broader life skills that improved resilience.

*They [Core Team] are not just there to talk to you, they give you the tools and how to deal with things whereas before I would have just cracked up and started shouting and now since talking to the Families First team, I don't, I take time out ... long term it's made a difference.*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

### **A mum's story**

I had concerns with [son] and I got to know a bit about the Families First. She [Core Team Coordinator] got me to join the first FAST [Families and Schools Together] group and that's how I got to know things about all the kind of things they do... It was more or less round about dinnertime. He wouldn't settle at dinnertime so that's when they got [Core Team worker] to come out and give me a hand with him.

Well [Core Team worker] came down and it started off on the Monday right through to the Friday. He was coming down after school at dinnertime helping me settling [children] while I prepared the dinner and got them to sit at the table. Usually it was like madness, like them throwing their dinner about and stuff. He kind of helped me out like that to calm them down which was pretty good actually because it's a lot better now. It's made a big difference. If it wasn't for the Families First or for [Core Team worker] I would probably still be in the situation I was in.

[Core team worker] has backed off. It used to be like the five days a week, but then it would go down to four then two and then it was like once a week and I no longer needed him any more. I felt I could control it myself. I still get contact with them like if there is any things I really need and maybe bits of advice I would contact them and they've been really helpful in that way as well.

I just started a wee job there and I had a lot of help from [Adviceworks advisor]. She gave me advice on what kind of benefits I would be entitled to and stuff like that, what kind of tax credits and stuff and my rent situation. She told me all that.

Before obviously they came along me and the kids didn't really... we did bond, but we didn't really bond as much. I think it was the situation with the move and their dad and stuff and when I got involved with them it was like we bond more. We do things together and it's like a big difference that they've really done. They've really helped really well.

Before I had obviously got involved with them I didn't really have much of a social life because I didn't know about the schemes that they had done, [Core Team worker] had also helped me with the Fathers Club for my son as well. He got him into that so now they've got loads of things to do down here as well, but until I found about the things that they're doing I didn't really have much of a social life. I was more or less stuck in the house all the time and the kids didn't have anything to do because where I stayed in [location] they didn't have anything like that, but when I came back down to Ferguslie it's like wow what a difference... people like talk to other parents and now with the FAST you speak to everybody.

Every time I've bumped into somebody from the FAST they say "You're looking great, you look a lot better, you look a lot healthier". In fact then I was drawn down and tired all the time, but now it's we've got things to look forward to.

[Adviceworks advisor] did a calculation on how much rent I would have to pay if it was depending on the hours, how much Council Tax I would need to pay and how much working tax credits I would get kind of stuff and she had sent me a text and gave me a summary and also just said if you've got any more questions just get in touch and we'll have a look into it.

Families First has made a big difference. I'm more confident about myself and feel that I could just get out there and I could talk to anybody and back then I couldn't. I wouldn't talk to anybody. There's nothing they can do more, nothing. They've done everything they can and everything they've done it's achieved a lot

#### **5.2.5.4 Wider impact on families: aspirations and wellbeing**

Parental interviews also revealed how the Project helped parents address complex issues by; providing advocacy, modeling behaviours, and working with other services. This could include improving children's behaviour and relationships with other pupils and schools staff and seeing better engagement in school.

*She's [daughter] back to being the wee happy girl she was, whereas before you couldn't have taken her anywhere. Since [Core Team worker] got involved she found out more of what was going on, clearly we had to deal with the issues in the school and I got rid of the boyfriend that she*

*[daughter] didn't like ... it's all back to a happy house. I've got a new partner now and we are getting married and she's not even had an issue with him.*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

Parents' comments provided numerous salient examples of how the advice and support from Core Team workers had facilitated positive life changes for them and their children. For example,

*They helped me to escape [domestic abuse situation], I didn't feel that I had to go back, eight years this went on and I always went back to him [husband] because I had no escape. Knowing things were getting put in place to keep my [daughter] safe within the school, that was really helpful.*

*(Parent R, first round interview)*

Often parents commented that their children had developed a great deal during the programme. For example one parent discussed how her child had come on "leaps and bounds",

*He's really coming on leaps and bounds. He's really, really friendly, he's not shy around other children. He's maybe a wee bit more shy and unsure of himself around adults. I think that's what's to be expected at his age, he's only coming up for 20 months, but he's really good mixing with other children, playing with other children and that's all because he's been getting out and about and going to all the different activities. His language and communication skills are coming on leaps and bounds. He's now starting to string two words together to make a sentence and as I say it's because of all that stimulation, all that positive stimulation.*

*(Parent EE, second round interview)*

One parent had asked the *Core Team Initiative* for help in securing a place for her daughter at nursery. This parent was concerned that her daughter's English language skills were not developing, English was not the language spoken at home. The parent was delighted that the co-ordinator of the project was able to secure a place for her daughter within a week. She reported being happy that her daughter would have the opportunity to develop her language skills and would be better able to integrate when she went to school.

It was evident from both the parental and staff interviews that much of the initial support required by families was to address fundamental needs such as a lack of money, dealing with domestic abuse, and heating a damp house. This often meant that requests for support to find employment and pursue educational opportunities, were secondary. However, parents recognised that such aspirations were important for their longer-term benefit and security and some were already looking to access educational courses to improve their prospects. For example, one parent for whom English was not her first language reported that she had been talking to a Core Team co-ordinator about accessing English language courses. As a result of the conversation with the co-ordinator, the parent enrolled in a local English language class which she was very pleased about. The parent also commented that if the course went well and her English improved, she would be able to look for employment when her daughter went on to school.

With the support of the Initiative some parents had already taken steps back into education and looked forward to employment, for example,

*I've also been put on a course called 'steps to excellence'. It was [wellbeing worker] that referred me on to that and basically that's actually personal development for myself which will help me as I go to find work. I'll also be doing other courses in the New Year as well which will help me to gain new skills or brush up on the old skills and do whatever other personal development courses are out there. They said that they can help me with employability as well so I'm looking forward to that*

*(Parent FF, Second round interview)*

The holistic impact of the *Core Team Initiative* on parents and their children was often demonstrated during the interviews. Parents spoke about improvements to financial and material situations leading to improvements in their mental health as more harmonious family relationships developed which in turn reduced stress,

*[Involvement with Core Team project] made a huge difference, I've got a 13 year old, a 9 year old and a 3 year old ... we're all getting on now as a family whereas before it wasn't like a family ... now we all do things together whereas before we couldn't because [daughter] if she wasn't centre of attention it was a whole palaver and a big fight ... it's a big difference they have made.*

*(Parent J, first round interview)*

Parents also commented on their improved ability to bond with their children as a result of the intervention. Indeed, parents often suggested that at the end of the intervention their relationship with their children was getting stronger and would continue to grow.

Parents were also encouraging their children to attend homework classes and often went along with them to these classes. Further, some parents believed that the *Initiative* had provided their children with better opportunities in life through increasing access to additional support,

*Most of all is changed for my young one's education because at that time he was looking for a maths support teacher to come home to teach... since we joined Families First and got financial advice from Adviceworks) we can pay for someone to come two hours a week to help them.*

*(Parent EE, Second round interview)*

Improved physical health was also reported through core workers helping to develop parents' food preparation skills and encouraging parents to think more about their own diet and their children's diet.

The response from parents with regard to the service provided by The Core Team was overwhelmingly positive. Every parent interviewed was in agreement that the project could not have done any more for them or their family. The following response was typical,

*They're just generally amazing. I actually can't say anything bad about them. It's probably the same for most people they can't help enough and the differences might not be big major differences, but they are there and they are making to me personally they are making a difference.*

*(Parent GG, Second round interview)*

### **A mum's story**

Mum is a single parent with three children. She has a chronic health condition.

[The headteacher said] we've got this group starting up and it's to support parents like yourself that are on their own all the time and have nobody to turn to... so I put my name down and then [Core Team Coordinator] visited and allocated me to [Core Team worker] At the time I was seeing issues with [her daughter] regarding her homework... she's not concentrating in the class so when she's coming home because she's got to do work again she's kicking off so [Core Team Coordinator] got involved... and she pulled [daughter] right up to the grade with her reading and different things.

Core team worker] got me in to Slimming World to help with my weight because she knew I was already going to the gym. I never had the confidence to go on my own so [Core Team worker] came with me every week until I got the confidence to go on my own.... I'm getting a lot of support and somebody to talk to and [Core Team worker] told me too if I've got hospital appointments or anything like that they'll be there with me if I need support that way. They've got me into a lot of groups. I've been to the wee group they have running it was the homework club with kids that's got problems and you take them and they get the support that they need. Other ways they've helped me with cookery classes to get into healthy cooking, cooking on a budget and the groups are absolutely great. [Another Core Team worker is helping] because I said I'm interested in walking groups just to get exercise and it's something even if the kids are off school I can still take my kids with me.

My kids were taking time off school before because I wasn't physically fit to get them there, they have no time off now because I know I can 'phone the school, ask for one of [the Core Team] and they'll be down to take them up. That's a lifeline for me. I know sometimes I've got to get rushed to hospital and my kids are at school and I'm saying there's nobody else to take my kids. I know I've got a number now and one of the girls will be with me as soon as possible. Really for me it's a lifeline.

[The cookery class]... it's great because it's healthy eating on a budget and it makes you realise you're not having to pay through the nose because when I started this diet at first through veg and fruit I was out a fortune, but through that it's taught me you can do it cheaper.

The school knew [daughter] had concentration problems, but I just felt there's nothing really getting done about this. I said there's support needed in there for her and it was one of the days I had spoke to [Core Team workers] who said we're getting a homework club started up. We used to have it down in the wee sports centre and I took the kids to that every week and they loved it.

She was in that homework club, but although the kids would do their homework they would get something to eat that was healthy plus there was a lot of confidence... game-playing, confidence-building to make [daughter] and to make all the kids more confident... A lot of confidence-building and it was really, really good and not only for the kids it was for the parents as well plus if they took the kids away, have a game with them, gave the parents a cup of coffee and we would sit and just... the chance for parents that's maybe isolated to sit and get to know one another.

Families First is great. As I say years ago when my other two kids were growing up you didn't have any support from the school. There was nothing there available and this has just opened a huge big thing that was really needed within this area within any area where there's ill health or maybe families struggling. It's been a big benefit to me as I say because I could be carted away at any time and the last couple of times it's happened I've been totally on my own, lying in hospital on my own and I know that's not going to be like that from now on and I know that there's somebody that I can say well get my kids there, get them safe. I could call the school and I know the school will make sure that the right person is contacted .... I know there will be something put in place for my kids. I know they deal with a lot of families and every parent that they're dealing with will probably feel the same way because they know any struggles they can lift the 'phone and it will be dealt with and it can only better our kids' future because through maybe parents at times the kids don't get to school and it's not that the parents don't want to send them it's just when they're too young and they can't get there themselves and it's a great thing.

### **5.2.5.5 How parents have used additional benefits/income**

As discussed in the Core Team findings section, many families in both neighbourhoods received additional benefits and income as a result of the interventions of the Adviceworks service. Some of the parental interviewees went on to speak about how they had used this additional income. In a few instances the monies were used to directly support their children's education, in one scenario a parent had used the extra money to enlist a maths tutor.

Some of the parents remarked that with the additional financial resources they were now more able to socialise with other families in the community.

In other instances the money had allowed parents to take children to the science museum or to other leisure activities such as the cinema. A few parents also noted that they themselves had been able to join gyms to help improve their own health and fitness and in another instance a parent had put the money towards driving lessons which he felt would improve his employment prospects.

In one interview a single mum said that, through the support of Adviceworks, the family were now £200 better off each month. Having this extra money available had allowed the Core Team worker to introduce a behaviour and reward chart at home. The rewards, including family outings to the cinema, would not have been possible without the added income. Moreover, the mum also felt that her own health had improved as a result of living in less stressful circumstances.

### **5.2.6 Summary statements from parental interviews**

Parental interviews provided a large number of detailed accounts that supported the findings arising from the Core Team interviews. It is clear that the *Core Team Initiative* quickly established itself in the two neighbourhoods and started building trusting relationships with local families. The project appears to have also made a notable positive impact on the lives of many of the families in the Linwood and Ferguslie communities. In some instances the support provided has had an immediate impact on families, for example, in preventing eviction and securing additional financial benefits. In other instances impact has been a slower process, but, there is also good evidence that the approach used by workers in modelling behaviour, advocacy and 'walking' parents through issues has begun to build the skills and resilience of those in vulnerable families and, therefore, contributing to the wider social capital of their communities.

Over the period the project has also secured more than half a million pounds in unclaimed benefits for local families. Many of these families spoke about how they have been able to use these new resources in ways which reduced their overall vulnerability and improved the living situations and experiences of themselves and their children.

## 5.3 Summary of findings from partner interviews

### 5.3.1 Interviews with partners

Representatives from other agencies and services with a presence in the Linwood and Ferguslie neighbourhoods were interviewed between November 2014 and January 2015. In total 21 individuals were interviewed. Table 4 provides details of the agencies/services represented by neighbourhood. The majority of interviews (14) were conducted with education staff, these included both primary and early years staff as well as an Educational Development Officer.

Unlike the Core Team and parental interviews partner interviews were conducted on only one occasion, towards the end of the evaluation period. This was to allow sufficient time for the Core Team to establish a presence in the neighbourhoods and develop working relationships with the other agencies.

### 5.3.2 Finding out about the project

Many partner professionals became aware of the *Core Team Initiative* through the proactive approach adopted by the Team. Early in the project life the coordinators and other Core Team members committed substantial amounts of time to visiting other services in the neighbourhoods and providing an input on the project's aims and its target audiences. In a number of instances partners recollected that these visits occurred prior to the actual launch of the project and recognised that local professionals were aware of the initiative at the earliest possible stage. Several interviewees also indicated that a number of visits were made to their organisation to explore the developing work and look at how they could work together.

*I think [the Core Team coordinator] came to one of our staff meetings.... and spoke about the service that was going to be introduced then it was probably a few weeks before or maybe even a few months before it all sort of kicked off, but we were aware of it before it started. She did come and speak to the staff and said in principle what they were hoping to do although it was very much just wait and see how the service pans out... once it got started she came back in and told us in more detail what she was hoping to do...*

*(Health visitor)*

A few education staff pointed out that that they had been involved at the Project consultation stage and had taken part in workshops held in Renfrew town hall. For other teaching staff the location of the projects in local primary schools meant that many of them also became aware of the initiative at an early stage. Two of the interviewed health workers suggested that they had been looking for partner agencies to link with prior to the arrival of the *Core Team Initiative* and quickly became involved with the team. In a few instances partners also noted that the publicity materials of the project had raised their awareness of the project and the activities it was aiming to develop. However, not all partners immediately saw the relevance for their own service. For example, two informants indicated that they were initially uncertain of the project's relevance to them, as one said,

*[Initially] it was quite hard to see how it was going to link in with our parents because again maybe 90% of our service users are working.*  
(Partnership nursery manager)

However, she then went on to note,

*I would say over the last year ... we have got maybe four or five families who are engaging with the service. It might just be going to the baby massage... but then they've taken along other parents and I think it has really improved the community feel about our setup. We didn't have a lot of links with the community before whereas obviously just with our leaflets maybe parents have asked and things like that so I think it's really improved our service that way in getting involved in building links with other services.*

(Partnership nursery manager)

It is noteworthy that, according to this interviewee, the *Core Team project* has supported increased community engagement. Such responses were common in many of the partner interviews.

### **5.3.3 Getting involved with the Core Team Project**

Many of the partners spoke about referring clients to the Core Team for support. Often these referrals were made because the Project was felt to offer appropriate support for the clients needs. For example,

*The fact that we don't have to do screeds of form-filling because in every other area of health we have to fill out you've no idea the paperwork, whereas here we can do... we've actually encouraged a lot of our patients to 'phone and do self-referrals actually. We give them the details, but we really encourage them to do it and a lot of them do and the fact that they've [Core Team Project] got an open door sort of thing that people just wander in and ask for help that helps, but the fact that I think they looked at the processes at the beginning and realised that if you had multiple forms it would be more difficult to access so we can do it with 'phone calls or popping in or sending emails even just with some basic details.*

(Health visitor)

This example also highlights two advantages for the referrer, that there is no lengthy bureaucratic process to go through when referring clients to the *Core Team Initiative* and that the initiative operates an open door policy.

It was also evident that the schools in which the projects were based frequently and routinely referred parents and children to the Core Team. Teachers in these schools had everyday contact with families, which afforded them an opportunity to identify changes in family circumstances and those experiencing difficulties. A member of the senior management team in one of the Project schools illustrates this point,

*A member of staff could alert a problem to me that we have in the class, maybe it's a welfare issue or a health issue or a child has made some reference to something and I would maybe have the parent in to talk about it in an informal chat and usually that's the kind of back door into finding out that this parent actually has a problem that they feel they*

*can't deal with and usually within a conversation you would bring up well I know maybe there's somebody there that could help you depending on the problem and then you would introduce them to Families First. You would need to sit and tell them a wee bit about Families First. The good thing about Families First now though is that they're well known out there and we actually have parents that will come to me now asking for me to refer them to Families First so they've got a good reputation.*  
(School senior management team member)

This member of staff went on to talk about her role as a 'service broker' and someone who played a key role in the school strategy to support parents,

*Sometimes I have social work that will phone me in regards to a parent and we're trying to come up with a plan of action. One of the plans that I would normally say is well instead of going down the road of social work could we try this first and they're now more aware of Families First. Now I find that social work are now saying to me oh how about Families First would they be interested.*  
(School senior management team member)

#### **5.3.4 Benefits from working with the Core Team Initiative**

The majority of partners noted benefits for their organisations and for the families they worked with through involvement with the *Core Team Initiative*. For example, one early years worker, when talking about how the project had supported a parent using their nursery also highlighted the ways in which the nursery had benefitted from this support,

*It takes pressure off of us because we don't have to go and phone up Housing, we don't have to go and phone up the energy people. We just have one phone call to Families First .... I think parents like you to respond like that and say well I'm getting somebody to deal with this problem right away so that makes them feel better.*  
(Early years worker)

Clearly this example demonstrates how working with the project allows nursery staff to continue to focus on their core activities while the project addresses the immediate needs of a parent. Another informant reinforced this point,

*It means that we have somewhere to refer to. We've got another agency who can actually support some of the work that we're doing and it frees us up a little to then move on and work with more of our families.*  
(Health visitor)

A second health visitor spoke of the benefit of being able to contact the Core Team when they themselves lacked expertise in particular areas. In this instance they were looking for financial advice.

*We know about health and child welfare, but we don't really know a great deal about budgetary things or if people are stressed it tends to be financial. Anyway we could refer them to other agencies however now that Families First are there and [if we're not the best person to advise them] we're like "I know somebody that will". We just sort of bring them up here so it's fantastic.*

(Health visitor)

This response also underlines both the quick response of the Core Team but also the teams mobility and willingness to visit both clients and partners in their own setting. In a similar way, a social worker from the Paisley area team spoke about how becoming engaged with the *Core Team Initiative* benefitted both the families and supported their own services ability to identify families at risk.

*It's very supportive and it's warm and it's nurturing and I think this is what we need. We need that warm nurturing part for our families because I think it's just been so lacking in their own childhood and it's good, it's fantastic role-modelling for their children as well... for the families that work with Families First I think it's about that positive role-modelling for them as well. You're building that confidence and self-esteem for our families. For us it's about having the extra pair of eyes out and support out for... it's that wee bit of monitoring that's out there to make sure that the families are going well because what often happens is we do those initial pieces of work and everything is going well and then as time goes along I think families start falling into old habits again and that's where it's quite good because Families First can point that out to the families without it getting to the really bad stage again and they can have that initial intervention.*

(Social worker)

In some instances partners referred parents to universal services provided by the Core Team. This included activities such as baby massage, cooking groups or the 'Terrific Tuesday' group in Linwood. One or two partners also highlighted benefits to themselves through attending training sessions provided by the *Core Team project*. This training included parental interaction skills and specific therapies including baby massage.

Partners also highlighted gains for the wider community from the work of the Core Team. This included helping to build community spirit, reducing social isolation and encouraging the use of community resources. For example,

*I'm very happy how Families First work within the community. I think they're making a community again which I think we've lost over the years and they're building that up through the different groups that they're doing and having the groups and the different activities within the community also gives me the opportunity to say to families if they might not be working with Families First at the time "Look you need to go out there and socialise, go there and then that's a link there"*

(Homelink worker)

A health visitor also stressed the community development role when discussing the aims of the project,

*I think it's to galvanise the community. It's to get the community to do some stuff for themselves. It's to encourage the families to work themselves to actually make things better. It's not a case of going in and doing things for them. It's to try and empower them and encourage them to become involved in their own care and I think that all the research has shown that if you're involved in something you're more likely to continue with it rather than... they have to be engaged and they*

*have to work with you and I think that's exactly what they've been doing for the families that we've referred to them.*

### **5.3.5 Duplication of services**

Partners gave no indication that the *Core Team initiative* was duplicating services that were already present in the neighbourhoods. Indeed, as already highlighted partners saw the Project as 'filling a gap' in provision and in a number of instances reducing the demands on their services. Demands that were not necessarily best met by these other providers.

#### **A health visitor's experience**

I've referred quite a few families [to Core Team]... There is one [woman] she had a new baby... I see mums as soon as they're dismissed from the midwives and I have them until their children go to school so when I went out to see this mum... there didn't seem to be much going on in the house. The house was in poor condition and mum seemed a wee bit down and she had other kids that she was struggling with and it was round about the school holiday time and we were sort of chatting and I'm thinking "How's your finances going?" She said "I'm sort of struggling a bit". I said "well I know somebody that might be able to help you out with that" and when we referred them on [to Core Team] what they were able to do was they got the older sibling into nursery over summer, they worked out her finances and she wasn't getting what she should have got and she got a lump sum for something, she got carpets, she was going to the groups, she started feeling better, she was working with the energy fellow. She started going to the massage classes and she did something else with the wee one and everything was going very well.

(Health visitor)

### **5.3.6 Partners' views on the future of the Initiative and its development**

Interviewees commented on sustaining the project and how it could develop and work with their services.

#### **5.3.6.1 Views on the sustaining the Initiative**

While all of the parents interviewed stressed that the project should be continued to serve the needs of more families in their communities, their position meant that they had less to say about what would be needed to develop the project. However, partners, while having little to add to how the project could be improved, were better placed to offer views on sustaining and developing the project. Above all, these professional stakeholders stressed that the impact that they had witnessed to date meant that that it was essential for the project to be maintained if the needs of families were to be met. For example, one primary teacher stressed that the project articulated with national education policies to address the attainment gap but was also helpful in tackling broader inequality in the community.

*For me personally I think it would be something that has to be ongoing. For me I see it as actually you talk about inequality in areas such as here and achievement levels and the links between achievement and poverty, this to me is actually something that's physically evident ... I just think it's initiatives like this that actually you could see can make a change ... the thing is it's got to be sustained because if it's just there for*

*a couple of years, when things need to be life-changing or you're wanting to change a community it's got to be so much longer than that. I think to give people the skills to deal with things rather than just ... labelling people if they don't have those skills... It's helping families by giving them skills to be more independent. That's how I see Families First and FAST moving things together in the same direction.*

Others strongly believed that any reduction or cessation of the project would have a hugely detrimental effect on the community.

*I think it's a good service. I would hate to lose it. I hope the funding stays for them and it does roll out further afield because it does help a lot, a lot of families I would say in this area it's probably been a huge benefit to a lot of parents with issues that need resolved*

*(Early years worker)*

*My fear is that funding would run out and that they would take this away from us and whereas the school would just carry on as normal it would be such a hardship for the community who have come to rely on this because it is hard for our families in this kind of area... I'm not saying that they're dependent on it, but it's been a great resource for them to access when they need it. When they're on their feet that's fine and my fear would be that this would be taken away and the people would be robbed of this and it would be the worst thing they could ever possibly do.*

*(Depute Headteacher)*

A Public Health Nurse in Linwood stressed that it was extremely important for the project to be sustained given its broad impact to date and the fact that it could often respond to families' needs faster than other services.

*I think this is the closest I've ever worked with a partner agency and I think that's been a huge thing for me or for health. The only disadvantage would be if the service gets cut because I think it's so well utilised and I think it's now become part of the community and I think it would be devastating for the people who use it on a regular basis and also for the health professionals and other people that are linking in with it. I think it would be shocking if the funding was cut for it, I really do.*

*(Public health nurse)*

### **5.3.6.2 Thoughts on developing the Initiative**

Like the other professionals who were interviewed, a Homelink worker in one of the communities highlighted the immediate and likely longer term impact of the project and called for it to be continued and expanded to other communities where need was apparent. She believed this would make a dramatic difference to families in those locations and made particular suggestions regarding how the project might be expanded.

*I would love it to be extended out to other communities... I think you would have to have a team per community. I don't think one team could do Renfrewshire because then they would lose the benefits that they're bringing on a wider scale... But the benefits in the way forward would be to have a team per cluster as we would call it... You would need to have an area co-ordinator for Renfrewshire then you would have team leaders*

*and depending on the capacity of that cluster or the [level of] deprivation within the cluster would determine how many key workers you would have...If I could get it in my other clusters just now...It would make a huge difference. I think more in the pre-emptive scale of things if we can get the practical support in from zero to five years I don't think we would have the same issues when they're older. Families First in my eyes just now are pre-empting a lot of things that could be issues in five or 10 years' time.*

*(Homelink worker)*

A pre-five representative echoed these words and stressed that many families from other communities would benefit from the type of service that has been piloted in Linwood and Ferguslie.

#### **A teacher's story**

This girl in my class it's actually her wee sister she had come through to school this year and she has real issues there. Nobody is particularly sure what's going on, but it does make home life very chaotic for the whole... and I know [Core Team worker] been in and tried to help establish sleep patterns and sleep routines which has really helped the girl in my class because of late-coming and things. She would be up all night so that's helped her getting to school on time more often so rather than a punitive letter going out and "you must get your child to school" it's recognising that it's not because people are fancying an extra half hour in their bed, there's actually something happening. It's not focusing on the problem, it's focusing on what the root of the problem is and then helping, giving that mum the skills to help solve it so the girl in my class isn't coming in and feeling awful every morning because she's late every morning, she's getting a better night's sleep. I know just through working in FAST there's a family in another group again has behavioural type issues and real issues with poverty and it was making sure that mum got the right benefits with things and through no fault of her own just things particularly well hidden the things that she was really entitled to and the difference that's made to her also and it's just that people being on their side. I think that's... and because it's such a vast array of skills they're bringing into the school like the money [the energy advisor] helped her save with changing provider and things like she's not got internet access and which various people just presume, but he helped her access things that she would never have access to and it saved her a huge amount of money and just put in a much better place. The Adviceworks staff very much focused on what could be done to [the mother] with benefits, and accessed things otherwise she didn't know she was entitled to.

Class teacher

#### **5.3.6.3 Partners' suggestions for improving collaborative working with the Initiative**

There was consensus across partner agencies that it was the project's flexibility and not being confined to a particular focus that made it so effective in addressing families' needs. Two homelink teachers involved with the project stressed that the service was always able to respond to new needs in the community as they arose. Some of the professional stakeholders did make suggestions on how the project could improve in the ways it worked with them.

Partner ideas for developing the nature of collaboration with the project usually concerned relatively small-scale refinements and developments. For example, greater sharing of information and joint working in the same locations to increase effective access to parents.

*I think through time it would be nice if we knew it was going to be a long-term project that we could do drop-ins and do pieces of work like that. Even doing some of our assessment clinics and things it might*

*actually be quite good like our developmental assessment. I don't mean the medical assessments, but obviously like the 30-month assessment and stuff it might be nice to actually get out of the health centre and come to an environment kind of like this to actually do stuff.*

*(Linwood Public Health nurse)*

One of the interviewed teachers suggested that there could be a more systematic way for teachers and the project staff to meet, plan responses and work together. She suggested that this would also improve teachers' awareness of how they could better refer parents.

*I do know [energy advisor], but maybe some staff who haven't been as active in FAST are not quite so aware of what other people's [from the Project] roles are so just if there was any way there could be something built in that there was time where teaching staff and the Families First could have some time to work together.*

*(Primary school teacher)*

A community dance representative suggested that there could be scope for more collaboration between the project and her work. For example, elsewhere similar initiatives had used dance to work with children, parents and grandparents and address intergenerational issues.

In another instance a Homelink worker, whilst recognising the importance of confidentiality, suggested that there could be improvements made to the way in which the project recorded and shared information on clients and called for a linked system that would, enhance the way agencies worked with families.

*Just now we have the single child plan that's been the new initiative here and social work and education can input on to this child's plan. I can understand the ideals behind it, the rationale behind it for the families to have their confidentiality and things like that, but maybe me knowing beforehand that Families First has been involved rather than me going in and the family might not choose to tell me. Resources might be duplicated...I'm not asking for full disclosure of families of the work they're doing, but just to say right Families First has been working with this family from this time to this time. I don't want to go in and confuse a family if they're already having advice from another agency...just if Families First could have access to like click and go sort of thing and could just put on the system FF.*

*(Homelink worker)*

An early years social worker reported that the project was always responsive to new ideas from her service and a recent example of collaborative working had been the two services working to develop and improve strategies to deal with domestic abuse. Similarly, a health worker suggested further collaborative work between health and Core Team staff would be welcome and could enhance access to, and expand the range of services available including more baby massage groups and weaning groups.

## **5.4 Summary statements from partner professionals**

It is clear from partner interviews that the *Core Team Initiative* established a visible presence in the two neighbourhoods early in its development. This appears to be

partly the result of the early consultation and development activities on the part of the local authority but also the result of much early activity by the teams to engage with local partners and publicise Core Team activities.

The partner interviews provided substantial evidence to support both the views of the Core Team and interviewed parents that the project has had a positive impact on the lives of many families in the Ferguslie and Linwood neighbourhoods. Moreover it is also clear from partners that there have been important benefits to their own work from involvement with the project. For some this has allowed them to focus on work with fewer distractions while for others it has meant being able to draw on additional resources to improve the services they offer to families.

It was also evident from a number of partners that the project was having an impact on the wider communities social capital through reducing isolation and providing additional universal resources within the neighbourhoods.

## **6 Progress over two years**

Early in the project development the research team produced a checklist for the Core Teams on the nature and extent of progress which may be expected from an early intervention project over a two-year period. This checklist was derived from the literature and previous University team experience of intervention and early years programmes. Prior to the final report production Renfrewshire asked the research team to revisit the original document and provide a commentary on the progress of the project in relation to each of the criteria. This section of the report provides an overview of this exercise under the three main questions used in the original document:

- What could we reasonably expect to see among families engaged with the initiative within 2 years?
- What would we expect to see if an interagency team was operating well?
- What would we expect to see in the wider community if the project was successful?

Given the nature of this exercise and the qualitative evaluation material generated we are not in a position to provide a quantitative value for individual criteria. However, we are able to indicate the frequency and strength with which informants provided examples of progress and the extent to which informants'; Core Team, parents and partner professionals' comments triangulate.

The complete document is contained in the Appendix.

### **6.1 What could we reasonably expect to see among families engaged with the initiative within 2 years?**

Amongst the findings of this evaluation which relate to the immediate outcomes for families, there are also indicators which suggest that the initiative is having, and will continue to have, longer term impact. The Core Team, parents and partners all attested to the improvement of inter-family relationships as a result of work which has been conducted in the areas of parenting, bonding and child behaviour. Parents also reported a reduction in stress levels as a result of wellbeing counselling and workshops, which in turn will help to support better mental health. The empowerment of parents was also cited as an indicator of longer-term impact. Parents who engaged in the initiative were supported to develop their confidence and self-esteem which then led them to engage proactively with other agencies and develop meaningful relationships and networks with other parents. Whilst the evaluation was unable to evidence some other impacts such as a decrease in child protection cases or drug and alcohol dependency, there are some 'soft' indicators (parents mentioning that involvement with the initiative has helped them feel less isolated and less likely to 'relapse') which suggest that this will happen if the initiative continues supporting vulnerable families in the areas.

## **6.2 What would we expect to see if an interagency team was operating well?**

Participants in this evaluation have been overwhelmingly positive about the *Initiative*. The Core Team were praised by parents for their balance of respect, empathy, flexibility and professionalism. Parents reported that they were meaningfully consulted by the Core Team and that their views were taken into consideration before decisions on how to progress were made. One major success of the initiative is in the low number of family 'drop outs' which suggests that the approach taken by the teams in Linwood and Ferguslie is both relevant and effective in dealing with the needs of the families involved. It has frequently been suggested, by informants, that one of the key differences of the initiative, compared to other agencies, is in providing a comprehensive service including financial advice, health and wellbeing and energy advice. While it is difficult through an evaluation such as this to provide quantifiable evidence that the Core Team approach is more effective than a single agency approach parents were abundant in their praise for the holistic support they received from the *Initiative*.

## **6.3 What would we expect to see in the wider community if the project was successful?**

Amongst the initial goals of the initiative were expectations that the impact would reach the local and wider community, and the evaluation suggests that to some extent this is beginning to happen. For example, families reported that through their engagement with the initiative, they are now accessing and contributing to local community clubs and organisations. Moreover, there were suggestions from parents, teachers and partners that as families engage more in activities within the community, there is an increase in community spirit, ethos and civic pride. Furthermore, informants in both communities reported that there are parents enrolling in pre-employment college courses and parents looking towards employment. Teachers also reported that there had been some visible impact on classroom behaviour among the children of families supported by the *Initiative*. At this stage the evaluation is not in a position to provide evidence for some of the longer-term impact on pupils such as improved positive destinations and/or improved exam results. Moreover, impact on the wider community such as a decrease in crime or visible deprivation (i.e. boarded up houses) is also a longer-term aspiration.

## 7 Strategic stakeholders reflections on the evaluation findings

This section of the report presents findings from individual interviews carried out with a number of senior council representatives and key personnel associated with the Core Team Initiative (see Table 5 for details). In total eight individual interviews took place during May/June 2015. These interviews were conducted after the production and circulation of the draft evaluation report to allow interviewees the opportunity to review and comment on the report findings. Interviewees are referred to by the stakeholder designation 1-8 to preserve anonymity. The interviews focused primarily on:

- implications and lessons for local authority services from the *Initiative*, and
- issues of sustainability and development of the *Initiative*.

Just prior to the interviews being conducted, and following delivery of the draft evaluation report, the Local Authority announced that additional funding would be made available to allow the *Core Team Initiative* to be sustained for an additional two years in the current localities and extended into at least one other neighbourhood.

Overall, key stakeholder responses exhibited a high degree of consensus regarding both the implications for local authority services emerging from the *Initiative* and the sustainability and development of the work.

### 7.1 Implications and lessons for local authority services from the *Initiative*

Interviewees identified a number of key lessons and implications for the local authority and its services arising from the success of the *Initiative*. All of the interviewees spoke about the very positive evaluation of the *Project* and the strong evidence of its success in engaging with families in the Ferguslie and Linwood neighbourhoods. This was felt to provide a compelling argument for adopting the approach across the authority.

#### ***Disseminating lessons learned from the Initiative***

A number of informants spoke about the importance of staff across the authority finding out about the *Core Team* work. Stakeholder four suggested that all staff should have access to the findings from the evaluation and be made aware of the positive impact that the approach was having on families. The 'walking with families' approach was highlighted by several of the interviewees as a key component of the *Initiative*, the lessons of which should be drawn out and disseminated across other local authority services. This point was picked up by the Stakeholder three who went on to suggest that there was still a need for the local authority to explore fully what was meant by 'walking with families' and from this develop a set of key underpinning principles for staff.

#### ***Supporting families at the neighbourhood level***

Informants clearly saw the *Core Team* and its approach to working at a neighbourhood level as an important method of delivering council services to local people and one that should be developed in other areas. For some this

neighbourhood approach succeeded in part because the *Core Team* adopted an intermediary role between the communities and central government and local authority services. However, interviewees agreed that the *Initiative* should not be viewed as a 'one size fits all' approach that merely required the *Initiative* to be rolled out across the authority. A number of the interviewees pointed out that the *Initiative* was successful precisely because it was grounded in addressing the specific needs of the communities in which it was based and that these communities needed to be consulted during the planning phase. One head of service exemplified this discussion,

*This model of development is the way that we need to work. It doesn't need to work across every area of Renfrewshire however there are a number of areas where we need to look at how we build services in the same way that we built them in Ferguslie and Linwood and I'm ..... not saying replicate or roll out because part of the key I think to what we've done in those two communities is engaged fully with families before [the project] started, work out what the issues are and then build the service to support.*

*(Stakeholder one)*

Another informant suggested that it was important that the neighbourhood approach was aligned closely with existing services whilst still retaining its distinct ethos and way of working.

### ***The importance of building relationships between professionals and families***

The second head of service picked up on the theme of successfully engaging with local communities and highlighted the key importance of the relationships that professionals build up with their clients. For her, it was important that local authority services operate in ways that engage and empower local communities rather than be seen as stigmatising families and disempowering them. In a similar vein a number of other comments stressed the importance of locating the Core Teams in universal provision such as a school - not generally associated with stigmatising people. A few informants developed this theme further and spoke about the importance of collaborative working and maintaining a generic rather than a specific focus to the work.

*[When] there is a very specific health focus, a specific social work focus you lose something ... [Things] become more clinical and formal approach to things which scares people off and puts people off so I think the generic focus has been absolutely crucial and who's best placed to do that than people that are working every day with children. Again it brings me back to the non-stigmatising thing ... I think it much, much more beneficial to have a generic response, people working together, collaborative work.*

*(Stakeholder six)*

Comments about the fundamental importance of the relationships between professionals and their clients were echoed by both headteachers. Throughout their interviews they made regular reference to how the Initiative had 'fundamentally' changed the way they were able to work in the school, a message they were keen to deliver to colleagues in other schools.

### **Recruiting Core Team members**

The recruitment process for *Core Team* staff was regarded by all of the interviewees as a key component in the *Projects'* success and one which would become more important if the *Project* was to be developed in other areas. As one of the informants said,

*...this was a new arrangement ... get everybody in post together, get them all trained together, get them out doing induction together so that helped form the team and also you were able to hand-pick the absolute best people to be able to deliver that.*

*(Stakeholder two)*

Clearly this process may be more difficult to repeat if the *Initiative* was to be rolled out across more neighbourhoods within Renfrewshire. Equally, new or replacement staff joining a *Core Team*, after it was up and running, would be unlikely to experience this recruitment and induction process. Stakeholder three offered one way forward when they suggested that existing *Core Team* staff could provide a mentoring/coaching role for new staff. This interviewee was also keen that some additional exploration of the management and leadership styles adopted in the two *Core Teams* could be helpful for the authority in drawing out lessons and implications from the *Project*.

### **Importance of flexible working**

Finally, a number of informants indicated that having staff who were willing to 'go the extra mile' and work across traditional agency boundaries was an important lesson from the project and one which would be important in the development of future local authority services.

*I think that what we've seen ... is that willingness to go beyond traditional boundaries and I think in the public sector in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we need more and more people able to go beyond traditional professional boundaries and that's not to diminish or decry professional specialism. There will always be a requirement for professional specialism [...] but actually there's something really exciting about seeing those individuals working beyond their professional boundaries.*

*(Stakeholder one)*

## **7.2 Issues of sustainability and development of the Initiative**

It is the research teams' understanding that the current local authority plan for the development of the *Initiative* involves the *Core Team Project* being maintained in the two original neighbourhoods while, at the same time, being replicated to some extent in one or more additional neighbourhoods. All of the informants recognised the major successes of the project in supporting families in the two neighbourhoods in which it was based and were keen to support the authority plans. However, informants raised a number of issues regarding the longer-term sustainability and development of the *Project*. While the *Core Team Project* had received additional funding to sustain it for an additional two years informants were aware that questions remained over its longer-term future. On-going funding for the *Initiative* will have to come from within existing resources and this could mean savings having to be made in other services.

### ***Working more closely the third sector and other services***

A number of suggestions were made regarding the sustainability of the *Initiative*. A few interviewees suggested that, given the successful developments in working with Homestart, additional support could be realised through fostering more work with the voluntary sector. Equally one of the interviewees spoke about how the development of an Integrated Children's service meant that issues regarding the deployment of agencies across the Authority and sustainability of the work in localities were already being considered at a senior level in the authority. However, this stakeholder was aware that the answer would not be as simple as merely adding a social worker to *Core Team* staffs.

### ***Building community capacity to support sustainability of the Initiative***

A number of the stakeholders spoke about the growing capacity of the communities to support themselves. For example, one interviewee suggested that a number of the neighbourhood groups could become self-sustaining with the support of current attenders,

*.... the universal services that are ongoing just now I think they're great, but I think the deal for them would be to look at making them self-sustainable so actually training people up .... coaching current long-term attendees to then take up the role of keeping groups going so that other groups could be set up with that same thing in mind.*

*(Stakeholder seven)*

Another informant gave an example of the likelihood of this happening when they described meeting a parent at the door of one of the groups.

*.... a mum waiting to get in as well.... and she is basically saying now when you lot go I am going to keep this going. That's the transition, but that is what we are aspiring to.*

*(Stakeholder five)*

### ***Potential challenges to sustainability***

To some extent all strategic stakeholders were concerned about the longer-term sustainability of the *Initiative*. In some instances these were expressed more fully. Stakeholder three feared that the level of input required on the part of the *Core Team* members would be difficult to sustain in the longer-term without addressing a number of key issues,

*The challenge to sustaining it if you are relying on that level of input by professionals I don't think it is sustainable in the long term unless you look at contracts, conditions of employment and salary scales and I think unions would need to be involved in discussions about this and I think there need to be notions of time off in lieu, flexitime.*

*(Stakeholder three)*

On a similar note stakeholder five also talked about the implications of flexible working among *Core Team* members in the success of the initiative and having to formalise this in the future contracts of workers.

### ***Maintaining the holistic nature of the Project***

Stakeholders stressed that a large part of the success of the *Project* was due to its holistic nature. For them seeing the *Initiative* as a series of core and secondary components was not necessarily helpful when considering sustainability. One of the stakeholders had thought about this issue at length and concluded,

*...we asked about what bits can we stop doing and what bits are not helpful? There wasn't a lot on that list. You know there were plenty of things to maintain doing, there were plenty of things to think about extending, there were things to think about doing slightly differently, but there wasn't a lot that we actually could identify that we could do without..*

*(Stakeholder six)*

Similarly, one of the informants also suggested that recognising the importance of maintaining the integrity of the *Project* meant that the size of any new Core Team shouldn't necessarily directly reflect the areas population size but should reflect the nature of issues arising. Other informants underlined the success of the current teams and suggested that any new teams should mirror their size and ways of working.

### ***Overarching principles and ethos***

Informants identified a number of overarching values and modes of working which were seen as central to the success of *Core Team* work. Chief among these were be ethos, commitment and flexibility. One of the stakeholders highlighted the central role of ethos and commitment in promoting the success of an initiative,

*These areas were chosen very carefully, that staff were chosen, leaders were chosen very carefully and I've seen in the past something rolled out this is the structure, this is your staffing, get on with it and it just falls on its feet because there isn't the glue, the sort of ethos, the attitudes, the beliefs, the care that people bring to this and the commitment, the passion....*

*(Stakeholder three)*

### ***Developing the Core Team model further***

Informants made a number of suggestions regarding the future developments of the Initiative. While most stakeholders recognised that the *Core Team* approach could be deployed in a number of neighbourhoods across the authority two informants went further and speculated about comprehensive decentralisation of local authority services and giving more control to local people in communities.

*Is there a future public services out there [where] core teams become the hubs for everything? I suppose that's one model isn't it? I don't know if it exists anywhere so that level of decentralisation would mean that localities or clusters would receive funding, would have to manage it, there would have to be community involvement in the committees as there is in the Pengreen approach.*

*(Stakeholder three)*

A number of suggestions were made to support the expansion of the *Core Team Initiative* across other neighbourhoods in Renfrewshire. Several stakeholders raised the possibility of using existing *Core Team* staff to mentor new staff in additional

neighbourhoods. One or two stakeholders focused on the importance of training for new staff, suggesting that it needed to be a core component in the roll out of the initiative. For example,

*Training needs to be factored in, it can't be an add-on, it's core and the way it was done with these core teams ... I think it worked reasonably well?*

*(Stakeholder three)*

Reflecting on the growth in parental confidence in the neighbourhoods, one interviewee suggested that the Initiative would have to look at developing closer links between the *Core Teams* and employment schemes such as Invest in Renfrewshire to promote parents employability and life chances.

### ***Integrating IT systems for more effective knowledge mobilisation***

Integration of IT infrastructure was also highlighted as an issue for the future development of the *Initiative* in other neighbourhoods. One of the stakeholders described the various systems used by different agencies and the access protocols in operation. If the development was to maximise its responsiveness then this may be an important area for change.

## **7.3 Concluding statement**

Renfrewshire Council's *Core Team Initiative* represents a bold investment on the part of the Council to develop a locally based early intervention approach. It is clear that the success or otherwise of this project will influence the future development of Council services including Education and Social Work and they become part of the Council's Integrated Children's Service. Findings from the evaluation indicate that the project has had a substantial and positive impact on the lives of many parents and children living in the Ferguslie and Linwood areas. Moreover, in terms of measurable impact the project has secured more than half a million pounds in additional benefit income for families in the localities.

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# **Appendix**

## **Renfrewshire Early Years Strategy Evaluation**

### **Two-year outcomes Summary**

## 1 What could we reasonably expect to see among families engaged with the initiative within 2 years?

What would we expect to see?	Evidence for this? From whom?
Happy, confident and thriving children.	Core Team, parents and partners reported this impact – happy and engaged children.
Improved pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills.	Some parents spoke of homework classes which supported literacy and numeracy development. No specific references to pre-lit. and pre-num.
Good parenting skills and good relationships with children (responsive, engaged, understanding and able to manage behavior, improved bonding).	Core Team parents and partners frequently report this impact – improved behaviour and increased rapport between child and parent. Core Team modeling strategies appear very helpful here.
Healthy and health promoting families (mental and physical wellbeing, balanced diet, exercise).	Some parents report going on to wellbeing workshops, healthy eating sessions, gym. Some project workers also provided examples of parent clients doing these things.
Relaxed and able to cope with stress.	Many core team members and many parents report feeling more relaxed and better able to cope with life following involvement with Project.
Confident parents with self-esteem who value their children and other family members.	Many instances of parents reporting improved confidence and self-esteem that has promoted their ability to engage with children and family.
Parents who encourage and support each other and other family members to pursue individual interests and activities.	Numerous accounts of parents who have been supported by Core Team have then encouraged and facilitated involvement of others in universal services and clubs.
Families who are knowledgeable of and confident in drawing on available support (empowered).	Parents' consensus that they would be willing and able to identify support as necessary, however, many would first contact Core Team because they trust information.
Families who engage positively with education and recognise its value and role in promoting life chances.	A number of accounts from parents and partner agencies of parents now taking children to homework classes and investing in additional tuition.
Families who are active in the community.	Many instances of parents reporting increased social engagement and involvement in clubs and making new friends as a result of increased confidence.
Families who are free of addiction and dependency. (or at least managing the addiction so it doesn't impact on the family).	Little evidence on this other than two parents who reported previous addiction saying that Core Team had helped avoid stress that could lead to relapse.
Children living in a safe home environment with parents providing good family structure and routine.	Many accounts from parents and project workers of improved sleeping, health behaviours/diet as a result of Core Team involvement. Some parents and partner agencies report reduction in parent stress avoided potential child protection issues.
A decrease in the number of children involved in child protection procedures (fewer child protection plans, fewer cases of child abuse/neglect).	No quantitative evidence but some accounts from parents and partner agencies of Core Team intervention reducing potential circumstances where neglect or physical abuse might have occurred

## 2 What would we expect to see if an interagency team was operating well?

What would we expect to see?	Evidence for this? From whom?
High levels of satisfaction among families.	Overwhelmingly high levels of satisfaction from the families involved.
Good, respectful/empathetic relationships with parents and children.	Consensus across parents that Core Team have adopted very empathetic but professional and respectful relationship with families.
In-depth knowledge of client families.	Parents and partner agencies report Core Team take time to obtain relevant information on family and context in developing their support approach.
Knowledge of local area.	Yes. Many of the Core Team are local residents which has assisted building trust and rapport
Empowered families (informed, consulted, onboard).	Parents report being consulted and their views and needs taken into account when Core Team develop their response. Parents see this as distinct from other services and promotes their engagement with Core Team
Low levels of dropout from programme(s).	Almost no reported instances of drop out.
Avoidance of dependency.	Core Team approach designed to work with families to reduce likelihood of dependency. This is borne out in parent and partner agency accounts.
Higher proportion of positive outcomes than single agency services.	Evaluation cannot provide a definitive answer / quantitative measure on this yet – would require further research. However, parents frequently report a more positive experience and impact from the Core Team compared to other services.
Evidence of team working practices.	Very evident in Core Team, partner agency and parental accounts. Skills range and mix within the Team an important factor.
Robust and visible review process.	Core Team Coordinators provide monitoring and review informed by appropriate evidence.
Flexibility in approach.	This has been a key feature of the Core Team work and is seen by parents and partner agencies as a main factor in the success of the initiative to date.
Focus on 'sustaining the gains'.	Core Team uses reflective practice to assess progress and 'what works' and formatively inform CPD and shape practice.
Positive feedback from other colleagues/agencies.	Very apparent; consistent high level of positive feedback from those partner agencies consulted.
High levels of job satisfaction.	All Core Team report very high levels of job satisfaction arising from seeing efforts make a difference to people's lives.
Low levels of staff absenteeism/turnover.	Some limited turnover in staff – difficult to gauge its significance given the fixed term of the project.

### 3 What would we expect to see in the wider community?

Expect to see (less likely to see in short term)	Evidence for this? From whom?
Less crime, graffiti, drug use, violence, gang activity.	Not within the current evaluation remit.
Increased employment.	No statistical evidence but some parents report pre employment college course enrollment and removing barriers that would have meant having to stop work or seeking work.
More community activity, more clubs, increased attendance.	Following their involvement with the Core Team Parents frequently report being more active in the community as volunteers and participating in clubs and other activities.
Fewer empty/boarded up houses.	Not within the current evaluation remit.
Improved area profile and greater civic pride.	Some evidence from parental and partner agency (including teachers) interviews that there is a sense that the community is improving in terms of ethos, civic pride and capacity.
Improved health statistics (mortality and morbidity).	Not within the current evaluation remit.
Achieving stretch aims.	Not within the current evaluation remit.
More diversity in local facilities and amenities.	Not within the current evaluation remit.
Increase in local business set up.	Not within the current evaluation remit.
Increased expectations of pupils among teachers.	Teachers report improved behaviour and engagement in learning and the life of the school from those pupils whose families have been involved with the Core Team.
Improved exam results.	The focus mainly on Early Years and Primary means that formal exam data not available and this is outwith the evaluation's remit. However, teachers do report improved engagement in learning as noted above.
Improved positive destinations.	Not within the current evaluation remit.
Improved literacy and numeracy.	Not within the current evaluation remit.