

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**8 September 2015**

**Report of the Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults**

**SAFE FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN**

**1 Purpose of the Report**

To seek the Cabinet Member's approval for the County Council to join the "Safe Families for Children" pilot project across the East Midlands.

**2. Information and Analysis**

Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a volunteer organisation that gives support to families in crisis. It was founded in Chicago in 2003, by child psychologist Dr. David Anderson. In the U.S., it has apparently proven highly effective in the fight against family breakdown, preventing child neglect and abuse, and has brought about significant reductions to the numbers of children entering the care system. SFFC is now operational in 65 locations across North America. Around 12,000 volunteers are involved and 15,000 families have received help through the scheme.

A pilot of SFFC has been running in the UK since 2013-14, across 13 Local Authorities in the North East. SFFC claims that this has already delivered significant financial cost savings to participating Authorities.

In 2015-16, SFFC has secured funding from the Department for Education's Innovation Fund to extend the pilot scheme into 5 new regional 'hubs', one of which is the East Midlands. To date, six Local Authorities have indicated that they are interested in participating in this pilot: Nottingham City; Nottinghamshire; Lincolnshire; Northamptonshire; Derby City and Derbyshire.

Dartington Social Research has agreed to evaluate the impact of the pilot and whether it delivers cost savings to Local Authorities through the prevention of care.

What is the SFFC 'Model'?

The model works through the creation of a regional 'hub', staffed by paid employees including a manager, qualified social workers and volunteer recruiters/co-ordinators. The social workers are responsible for training and

supervising the volunteers to ensure safe practice. The SFFC safer recruitment process has been approved by Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children Board.

Through its network of trained volunteers SFFC offers:

- Safe, short stay accommodation for children with 'host' families; this is typically for a couple of nights to a couple of weeks, but can be for up to 28 days in any 12 month period. (This is viewed in a similar way to support from a 'good neighbour or grandparent', and is not deemed to be private fostering, although SFFC are seeking legal advice to put this beyond doubt);
- Befriending support for parents/carers;
- Donations of goods and services for families who are being supported by SFFC volunteers.

SFFC takes referrals from Local Authorities, not directly from families. This allows the referrals to be screened, to make sure that SFFC receives only appropriate referrals where the service will be able to provide early, short-term help (usually no longer than 6 months) to enable families to cope or to resolve difficult situations. SFFC targets families who are in need of 'Early Help', where problems are 'emerging or escalating'. It can also target some families where there is a risk of the child(ren) coming into care, by providing timely support at a time of crisis, or support a 'step down' following a period of foster care. SFFC does not work with families where there is a child protection plan in place, however, and will only work with families where there is at least one child under 10 years of age.

Examples of situations where SFFC might be able to provide help are:

- Supporting parents of young children in challenging circumstances
- Supporting parents seeking to rebuild their life after domestic abuse
- Teenage parents coming to terms with new responsibilities
- Short term hospitalisation of a primary/lone carer of children
- Incarceration of a carer prompts stress or family instability
- Enduring mental health issues result in erratic or declining parenting ability
- Grandparents caring for grandchildren under a Residence Order
- Children 'stepping down' from Looked After status

The SFFC volunteers receive no financial reward; they are not paid any expenses. Recruitment takes place predominantly through Christian churches, but SFFC also work with other faith and non-faith groups. (This is also a specific requirement of the DfE Innovation Fund).

### **What is the proposal for Derbyshire?**

It is proposed that the Council joins the regional pilot in October 2015, and continues to participate in the 2016-17 and 2017-18 financial years subject

to successful outcomes. The SFFC service would roll-out to families in Erewash, with priority being given to families in the Cotmanhay area.

In its first year in 2015-16, the East Midlands 'hub' is expected to serve over 100 families (approximately 240 children). This would include approximately 40 children from Derbyshire.

Although it cannot be guaranteed that SFFC will deliver financial savings to the Council, the emerging evidence looks promising. The involvement of Dartington Social Research is also positive. The Social Research Unit at Dartington is an independent charity that seeks to increase the use of evidence of what works in the design and delivery of services for children and their families. They are also a strong advocate of prevention and early intervention based approaches. The Unit has over fifty years' experience of researching what works in improving children's outcomes across the education, health, social care and criminal justice systems.

Given its emphasis on empowering volunteers within local communities to support local families in need, the SFFC 'offer' would be consistent with, and add value to, the Thriving Families work which is currently taking place within Erewash. In view of the budget reductions the Council needs to make, and the potential impact of these budget cuts on Early Help services, it will be increasingly important to empower local communities, and to be able to access community resources to support families in need.

### **3. Financial Considerations**

#### Financial cost of participating in the pilot

The DfE has awarded SFFC £2.35 million from the Innovations Fund in 2015-16, to extend its activity into 5 new pilot areas, including the East Midlands. Therefore, there will be no cost to the Council to participate in the scheme in 2015-16. The Council will not receive any funding directly from SFFC as a result of joining the scheme in 2015-16, but will benefit from access to a free volunteer service for up to 40 Derbyshire children and families between October 2015 and March 2016.

Participating Local Authorities will however be asked to sign up to a "Public Social Partnership" between the East Midlands region, Safe Families for Children, the Department for Education and the Dartington Social Research Unit.

The draft Partnership Agreement states that, if the results from the first year of the pilot are positive, Local Authorities in the East Midlands who are part of the programme will commit to pay Safe Families for Children £60,000 per year during 2016-17 and 2017-18 as part of the scale up phase. This commitment would be triggered by the achievement of stretching targets, including demonstration that SFFC can reduce the flow of children into care

by 10 per cent; better child mental health and reduced parental anxiety for those supported by Safe Families volunteers.

There is no specific budgetary provision to meet the £60,000 per annum contribution, the cost for both 2016-17 and 2017-18 will therefore have to be funded from CAYA's previous years' underspend.

It is proposed that the Council's participation in the pilot is approved under Protocol 8 of the Financial Regulations (sole supplier). Safe Families for Children has already applied successfully to the DfE Innovations Fund, which was a competitive procurement process with clear award criteria (more information is available about the Innovations Fund criteria and awards process at <http://springconsortium.com/about-the-programme/faqs/>). SFFC's successful Innovations Fund bid was based on a model of partnership working with Local Authorities, through which it proposed to secure commitment to continue the pilot using local funding in 2016-17 and 2017-18. One of the key benefits is the commitment by Dartington Social Research to carry out a large scale, controlled evaluation of the costs and benefits to participating Local Authorities. SFFC is the only organisation which can currently offer this.

#### Analysis of financial costs and benefits

DfE consultants have calculated the Safe Families maximum unit cost to be £400 (per child). Related cost-benefit modelling by the Dartington Social Research Unit has conservatively estimated that the unit value of the intervention is £5,482. This cost-benefit analysis will be tested in greater depth through the planned evaluation of the pilot by Dartington Social Research.

#### **4. Legal and Human Rights Considerations**

The procurement in relation to the project has been undertaken by the Department for Education and SFFC have been awarded innovation funding to be the sole supplier for the provision of the services as outlined in the Public Social Partnership (PSP).

SFFC has sought clarification from the DfE regarding the legal status of the children whilst with host families. The DfE has confirmed that the support would be deemed to be provided under Section 17 of The Children Act 1989 as opposed to Section 20 of that Act and the Children would not be deemed to be accommodated by the authority. SFFC has confirmed that the period of host family accommodation will be restricted to less than 28 days to ensure that the private fostering threshold is not reached.

#### **5. Human Resources Considerations**

None.

**6. Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: Equality and Diversity, Health, Environmental, Transport, Property and Prevention of Crime and Disorder considerations.

**7. Key Decision**

No.

**8. Is it necessary to waive the call-in period?**

No

**9. Background Papers**

Presentations and reports prepared by SFFC containing more detail about their service and delivery model are available on request from the CAYA Commissioning Team.

**10. Officer Recommendation**

That the Cabinet Member gives approval for the County Council to join the “Safe Families for Children” pilot project in 2015-16, and to continue to participate in 2016-17 and 2017-18 if the pilot achieves the outcomes specified in the Partnership Agreement.

**IAN JOHNSON**  
**Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults**