



## BRIEFING NOTE

TO: CYPS Scrutiny Committee

### Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC): One Year Update

Author: Jenny Swift, FDAC Team Manager/Jo Hooper, Head of Safeguarding & Quality

Dated: 15 February 2019

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Family Drug and Alcohol Courts offer an alternative model of care proceedings. Parents coming into FDAC have difficulties with drug and/or alcohol misuse, usually accompanied by various other issues around mental health, lifestyle, domestic abuse, loss and trauma. The team work to support parents to first achieve abstinence and then recognise and understand the other issues impacting on them and their ability to meet their children's needs.
- 1.2 The FDAC process takes a problem solving approach and reduces the adversarial aspects of care proceedings. Parents are given intensive support and rigorous testing to help them to make changes and develop their reflective capacity. The aim of this is to either enable the parents to address their drug/alcohol misuse, improve their parenting capacity and resume caring for their children OR for the parents to understand the reasons that their children cannot be in their care and involve them in making decisions in the best interest of their children.

#### Outcomes – 2017/18

Throughout the last year the service has really strengthened its capacity and impact in working with families

- The team worked with 32 families (16 MKC, 16 BCC)
- 23 cases concluded
- 43% of families had children return to or remain in their care at the end of proceedings
- Only 2 cases went to a contested final hearing (both in respect of Placement Orders)
- Only 1 independent expert was used (3 day residential placement)

#### Outcomes Quarters 1-3 of 2018/19

- The team have worked with 20 families to date (8 MKC, 12 BCC)
- 11 cases have concluded
- There have been no contested hearings
- 10 of the 11 cases have had children return to or remain in their parents' care at the end of proceedings (90%) [n.b. this figure is not representative of the expected level at the end of year – we have multiple cases due to conclude where children cannot return to their parents' care but the vast majority of these cases are likely to result in family placements, with one child likely to be placed for adoption.]

## **2. Current Position**

- 2.1 The MK & Bucks FDAC is a jointly commissioned and funded project established in 2014 by Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council. Each LA pays £180,000 per year and BCC pay MKC an additional £20,000 to cover management costs. The MKC contribution is now base budget funded.
- 2.2 Joint funding is agreed until March 2020 but there is uncertainty about future funding and the arrangements continuing with Buckinghamshire County Council in the current way.
- 2.3 FDAC cases are highly cost effective compared to standard proceedings, which are significantly more likely to be contested and to use expensive barristers and external experts.
- 2.4 FDAC costs approximately £16,000 per family, per year. Standard care proceedings are estimated at around £24-26,000 and above, depending on the length of contested hearings. It is recognised that across Children's Services the legal budget has shown an overspend over successive years but the FDAC has helped mitigate this challenge.

## **3. What Next / Future Developments**

- 3.1 An options paper will be presented to the FDAC Steering Group in March 2019. This will explore how the service can develop after March 2020, in order to sustain and further develop the positive impact of the problem-solving court model for children & families. Options will consider the likelihood of the partnership and associated funding ceasing.
- 3.2 Milton Keynes Children's Services recognise the significant value of the model. We are therefore looking at whether the service can expand within this authority to take on the role of a Problem Solving Court, covering traditional FDAC cases and also neglect (which is the primary reason for care proceedings being initiated). There is scope to incorporate additional post proceedings work and Early FDAC (similar to Pause); these services would aim to intervene at an earlier stage to offer specialist / prevention work and to support parents after proceedings to prevent recurrence. If the team did not also cover the Bucks area, the workload capacity and output could be more than doubled.
- 3.3 There are ongoing meetings with finance around how this might be resourced and how to evidence the medium to longer-term cost avoidance but would like to seek Scrutiny Committee's view on us exploring further the widening of the FDAC approach.

## **4. Conclusions**

- 4.1 FDAC is a highly successful model in terms of both outcomes and cost effectiveness. The joint funding arrangements for FDAC are likely to cease in March 2020 and the current service is not sustainable on the MK funding alone.
- 4.2 There is an opportunity to review the service and funding arrangements to take a more innovative approach in developing the problem-solving court model and seek views on the available options.