



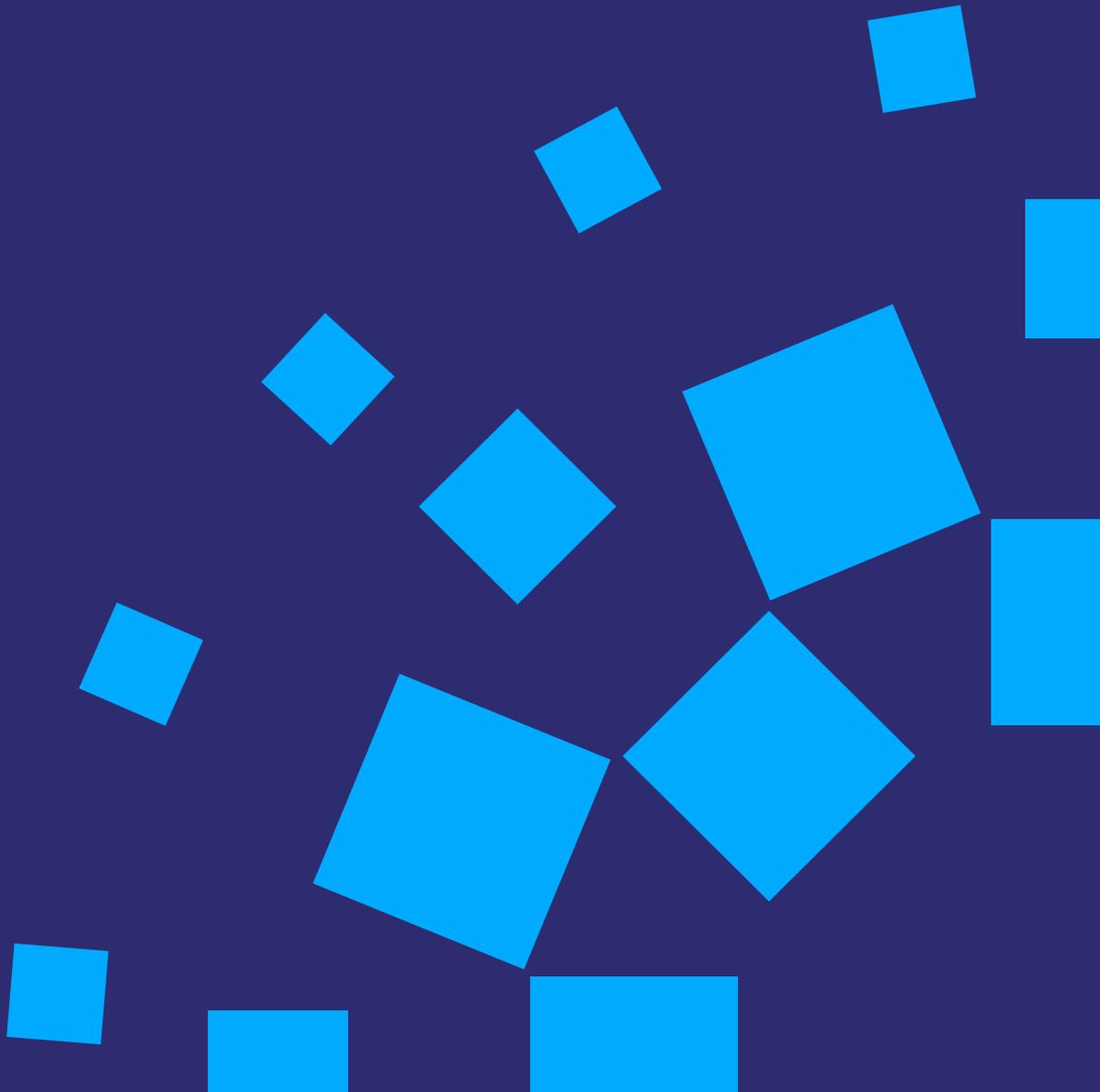
College of  
**Policing**

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**Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme**

# Evaluation of the use of family safety plans in cases of neglect

**Key findings and implications for practice**



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## Contents

<b>Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
Does it work?	4
Background	5
<b>What are FSPs?</b>	<b>5</b>
How was the intervention evaluated?	6
<b>How did the intervention perform?</b>	<b>9</b>
Effect - what was the impact of the intervention?	9
Mechanism - how did it work?	10
Moderator - where did it work best?	11
Implementation - how to do it	11
Economic cost - how much is it?	13
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>14</b>

### Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP)

The College of Policing was awarded a grant through the Home Office Police Transformation Fund to develop the evidence base on vulnerability and serious violence. The programme focused on key areas of interest to policing, including knife crime, gangs, county lines, criminal exploitation of young people, and child sexual abuse and exploitation. This is one of nine summaries accompanying ten reports delivered as part of the VVCP.

If you have any questions about the VVCP, please email:

[research@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:research@college.pnn.police.uk)

## Overview

Family safety plans (FSPs) are used as a form of early intervention, presenting an opportunity to create or raise awareness about what is expected in terms of caring for children. The FSP intervention aimed to adopt a joint agency approach for cases of child neglect that enabled the police to maintain responsibility for cases, support parents to achieve better outcomes and enable better evidence gathering.

The intervention was delivered by the Child Abuse Investigation Teams (CAITs) in Hampshire Constabulary and involved the use of family safety plan working agreements. The FSPs were completed with a family during joint visits by police and social workers, where they agreed and set out clear SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based) goals for the family. FSPs were felt to provide an opportunity to make families aware of what was expected of them in terms of caring for children, highlight the consequences of non-adherence and provide earlier support to parents/carers where there was a concern with the level of care the children were receiving. Where parents/carers did not comply with the FSP and where improvement was not seen, the FSP provided documented evidence of wilful neglect.

### Does it work?

When compared with a sample of cases from 2017, the new FSP process was associated with a 45% decrease in cases receiving an Outcome 20<sup>1</sup> and a 12% increase in cases resolved through an out-of-court disposal order (OOCDO). In addition, the proportion of children placed on a child protection plan (CPP) in a six-month follow-up period decreased by 18%. In relation to longer-term victimisation or involvement in crime, analysis of small samples found that children in families who had been engaged in FSPs were no more or less likely to become a victim of crime than those in the control population. However, they were slightly less likely to be suspected of criminal or antisocial behaviour. These events were found to be significantly correlated with each other. Children who were not suspected of criminal behaviour were less likely to be victims and vice versa. Officers generally welcomed the increased focus on, and recognition

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of Outcome 20 is: 'Further action resulting from the crime report will be undertaken by another body or agency subject to the victim (or person acting on their behalf) being made aware of the action to be taken.'

of, the neglect of children but interviews showed mixed views about the FSPs, from both officers and social workers. These included concerns around: the consistency of its application; its legal value in court; whether it was a proportional response to all cases of neglect; and how it was implemented.

## Background

### **About this report**

This report summarises the findings of the full independent evaluations of FSPs in cases of neglect undertaken by the University of Birmingham as part of the College's Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP). This summary describes how FSPs work in practice and outlines key findings from the impact, process and cost analysis aspects of the evaluations. Emerging implications for practice are also discussed.

[Read the full Neglect report](#)

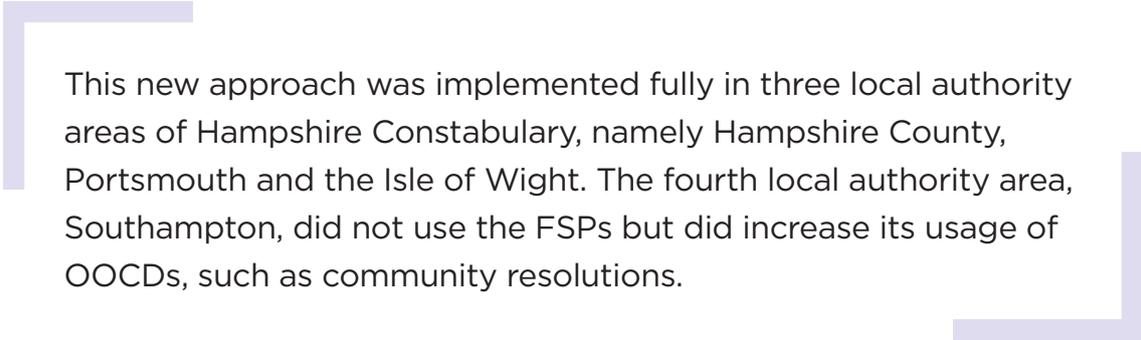
## What are FSPs?

Family safety plans (FSPs) are used as a form of early intervention, they give police and social services an opportunity to work with families to raise awareness about what is expected in terms of caring for children, and put plans help address cases of neglect. Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment in the UK, accounting for approximately two in five children on the Child Protection Register (Department for Education, 2020). In policing terms, one difficulty is that the criminal definition of neglect includes the need to demonstrate 'wilfulness', meaning that the action has been done intentionally or recklessly.

One of the key aspects that underpinned the intervention established in Hampshire Constabulary was how to demonstrate that wilfulness. FSPs were introduced to develop a joint agency early intervention system that would, hopefully, enable parents to achieve better outcomes, which would ultimately be better for the child, but also enable better evidence gathering.

To achieve this, Hampshire Constabulary took action to ensure that all cases of child neglect coming to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) were referred into the police CAITs for joint work with Children's Services. They also implemented the use of a new FSP working agreement to be completed with a target family during a joint police and social worker visit with the aim of developing clear SMART goals for families to tackle neglect, for example improving a child's school attendance by a set amount over a given time period.

FSPs are used as an opportunity to create or raise awareness about what is expected in terms of caring for children, but also set out the consequences of non-adherence, with the police presence deemed to support that perception. FSPs are also used to provide earlier support to parents/carers, where there is a concern for the level of care children are receiving. FSPs can mandate parental use of support packages such as parenting classes or substance misuse programmes. Where parents do not engage/comply with the FSP and where improvement is not observed, the FSP also provides documented evidence of wilful neglect should further action need to be taken.



This new approach was implemented fully in three local authority areas of Hampshire Constabulary, namely Hampshire County, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. The fourth local authority area, Southampton, did not use the FSPs but did increase its usage of OOCs, such as community resolutions.

## How was the intervention evaluated?

Following the development of a logic model<sup>2</sup> for FSPs, a mixed methods evaluation design was developed, including three evaluation strands.

The **impact evaluation** collected quantitative data on referrals (n=258) made within a three-month period (July to September 2019) with three-month follow-up data from October to December 2019 and six-month follow-up data up until March 2020. Outcome data collected included the case outcome (eg, OOC, Outcome 20) and changes in rates of Child Protection Registration. In addition, data on the child's experience of victimisation (of any crime), offending behaviour (being a suspect of any crime) and missing person episodes were also collected. The research design was quasi-experimental, meaning it allowed a comparison between the intervention groups and a control group with similar characteristics<sup>3</sup>. The control group (n=268) were selected from historical data from 2017. A comparison was also made between Southampton (where FSPs were not formally introduced but there was increased use of OOCs) and the other three local authority areas.

As part of the **process evaluation**, qualitative interviews were conducted with 21 police officers and 21 social workers (including six in their role within MASHs). Unfortunately, planned interviews with parents and children could not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

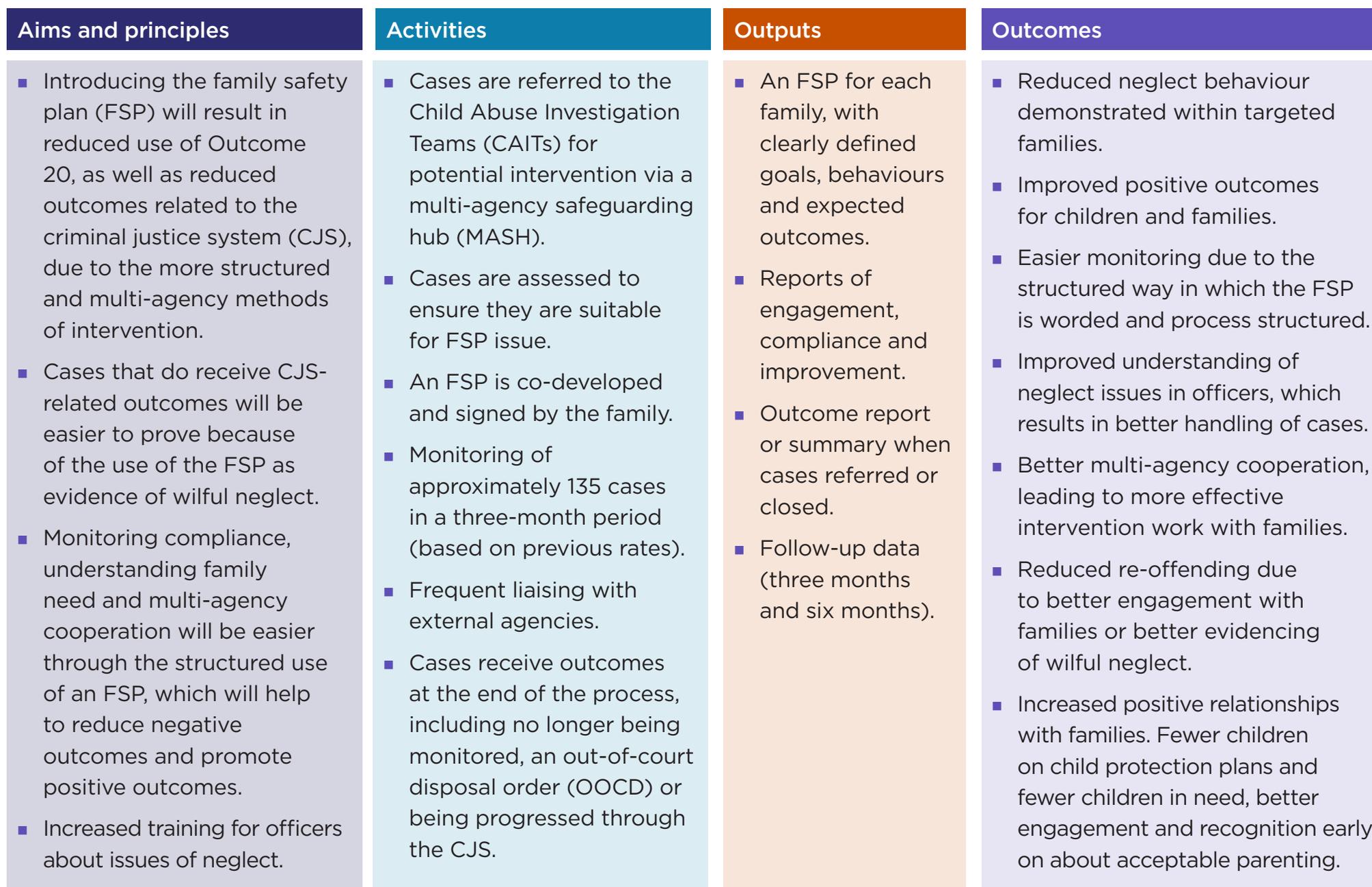
A full **cost analysis** was not possible with the available data but an illustration of possible cost savings was conducted based on nationally available data.

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2 A logic model helps you think critically about the links between your problem, your intervention and your measures of success to show how and why your intervention might work. More information can be found at: [whatworks.college.police.uk/Support/Pages/Research-guidance.aspx](https://whatworks.college.police.uk/Support/Pages/Research-guidance.aspx)

3 The comparison group was created using propensity score matching (PSM). PSM is a quasi-experimental method in which statistical techniques are used to construct a comparison group by matching intervention participants with individuals not receiving the intervention but who share similar characteristics. Using these matches, the researcher can estimate the impact of an intervention.

**Figure 1: Family safety plan logic model**



## How did the intervention perform?

Evidence is presented using the EMMIE framework, which was developed to help practitioners and decision-makers understand and access the evidence base quickly and easily. The EMMIE framework describes findings across five dimensions:

<b>Effect</b>	Impact on crime or offending	Does the evidence suggest that the intervention led to an increase or decrease in crime or offending, or that it had no impact?
<b>Mechanism</b>	How it works	What aspect(s) of the intervention could explain this effect?
<b>Moderators</b>	Where it works	In what circumstances and contexts is the intervention likely (or unlikely) to work?
<b>Implementation</b>	How to do it	What conditions should be considered when implementing an intervention locally?
<b>Economic cost</b>	How much it costs	What direct or indirect costs are associated with the intervention, and is there evidence of cost benefits?

### Effect – what was the impact of the intervention?

Evidence on the overall impact of the intervention is limited by both the duration of the evaluation period and available data sources. In the absence of longer term data, the best available measures of change were used to give an indication of potential impact. Future follow-ups using longer term data would help us to understand better the overall impact of the intervention.

When compared with cases identified in 2017, under the new FSP process, more neglect cases were referred to CAIT teams. There was a 45% decrease in cases receiving an Outcome 20 and a 12% increase in cases resolved through an O OCD. In addition, the rates of CPPs decreased by 18% in the six-month follow-up when compared with cases being managed prior to the new approach being introduced. All of these findings were statistically significant.

In relation to future victimisation and offending, children in families that had been engaged in FSPs were no more or less likely to become a victim of crime than those in the control population. However, they were slightly less likely to be suspected of criminal or antisocial behaviour (5% less, significant at 10% level), or to be reported as a missing person (5% less, statistically significant).

However, interviews showed mixed views about the FSP from officers and social workers. These included concerns around: the consistency of its application; its legal value in court; whether it was a proportional response to all cases of neglect; and how it was implemented. Officers generally welcomed the increased focus on, and recognition of, the neglect of children. There was a consensus that the broader changes led to increased workload for police, with some social workers noting that at times the police are unable to conduct joint visits due to workload. Similarly, practicalities of arranging joint visits (for example, different shift patterns) were highlighted as another barrier.

## Mechanism – how did it work?

Qualitative evidence highlighted four perceived mechanisms:

- **Engagement** – Working with and engaging the family in the process of setting conditions of the FSP felt to help raise awareness of the identified neglectful behaviour. It was also thought to formally demonstrate the family’s commitment (through the family signing the agreement) and frame their subsequent compliance with the conditions of the FSP.
- **Additional support** – The FSP allowed officers and social workers to identify where additional support for the family was required. Interviewees felt this enabled them to facilitate families’ early connection to the services outlined in the FSP requirements.
- **Clarity of expectations** – Although the emphasis of the new approach was on providing early intervention and support, the process was also intended to ensure the family understood the consequences of not complying with the FSP. Interviewees felt the plan was helpful in raising awareness with parents/carers of what was required from them and contributed to producing the intended change.

- **Monitoring compliance** – The more structured use of an FSP reportedly made monitoring compliance easier and led to better quality evidence of wilful non-compliance. However, officers also felt that the lower risk threshold meant their attention was diverted to monitoring relatively minor cases of neglect alongside major ones, and that the minor ones may have been more appropriately dealt with by social workers.

Overall, police officers felt that most families responded positively to FSPs and knew what was required to keep their children at home with them. FSPs were seen as more informal than OOCDs and were received more positively. Officers felt that OOCDs were viewed formally as a criminal record (because it would show up on an enhanced DBS check) and led to worry among parents that it might affect their employability. The different police and public perceptions of OOCDs were noted by some police officers, who felt that OOCDs are seen by police as a ‘non-criminal’ route, but the officers felt that this view is not shared by families. Similar views were expressed by social workers.

## Moderator – where did it work best?

Interviews with police officers and social workers revealed some differences between the way individuals or teams implemented the approach. For example, how often the FSP was used or whether there was a greater reliance on other OOCDs varied across individuals and teams. Where the FSP was not being used, social workers were using alternative forms of a working agreement and police officers were recording necessary conditions on OOCDs, which potentially had similar effects (but was not explored as part of this evaluation). It is hard to separate the effect of the FSPs from other changes taking place, such as the referral of all cases from MASH to CAITs, the review of the use of Outcome 20 and encouraged use of OOCDs. It was not possible to identify whether the variability in implementation led to different outcomes for families in this evaluation.

## Implementation – how to do it

Joint working between the agencies was highlighted as a benefit in interviews, with social workers noting that the presence of a police officer highlighted the seriousness of current neglect to families.

However, in several ways the intervention appears not to have been implemented entirely as proposed. Police and social workers reported that there was a lack of formal training, with many social workers appearing to be unaware of the development of FSPs and/or reporting that they had noticed changes in approach but not been formally told about it. On top of this, some police and social workers reported either that they were not using the FSP and/or they felt others were not. Also, some social workers reported adapting the FSP or using their own version of a working agreement, while some police officers were using OOCs and recording conditions.

### **If implementing this intervention, forces should:**

- Ensure high quality training is available, so that there is a broad base of knowledge and understanding of the potential benefits of FSPs and staff feel motivated to use them.
- Be aware that being put on an FSP can be highly stressful for parents, carers and families, and take appropriate measures to enable them to meaningfully engage.
- Alleviate time pressures for undertaking joint visits for police and social workers, to allow for shift patterns to join up.
- Encourage police and social workers to fully co-develop the FSP.
- Clarify the terminology used between police and other stakeholders. The term ‘family safety plan’ is not universally understood and some organisations have different terms for the same interventions.
- Clarify the process about which cases should follow the FSP route, including guidance on:
  - how to set appropriate, realistic and reasonable goals and plans for the parent(s)
  - how to determine time frames for how long a parent should have to show change

- what factors should be considered for determining whether the conditions in the FSP have or have not been met
- how to seek an alternative outcome

It is also important that forces are aware of potential unintended consequences when considering the impact of FSPs or other OOCs, in particular the difference between police and public perceptions of OOCs. For police, an OOC is seen as a 'non-criminal' pathway where the offender does not formally enter the criminal justice system. However, interviews with social workers suggested that some parents still feel 'criminalised' due to their ongoing contact with the police and other agencies. Forces should make sure their staff are aware of this perception and can address families' concerns where appropriate.

### Economic cost – how much is it?

Information was not available about the costs of putting this new approach into practice (such as parenting or substance misuse programmes). Instead, an illustration of possible cost savings was conducted based on nationally available data on the costs of implementing CPPs based on a reduction of 40 children in a three-month follow-up period. This modelling shows a potential yearly benefit of £182,320 for CPP costs – but this figure would need to be considered in light of the costs and resources associated with the new approach.

## Conclusion

There is preliminary evidence that structured, early intervention in cases of neglect, where 'wilfulness' can be evidenced, has positive outcomes for children. Where FSPs are used, the use of both Outcome 20 and CPPs decreases and more cases are referred to CAITs or have OOCs used, all of these have the potential for cost savings. In addition, many officers and social workers welcomed the increased level of joint working and collaboration. Further analysis found that children in families who had been engaged in FSPs were no more or less likely to become a victim of crime than those in the historic control group, even if they were slightly less likely to be suspected of criminal or antisocial behaviour or to be reported as a missing person.

However, the efficacy of the intervention was likely diluted by a lack of clarity about both the process and police and social worker roles, in part due to insufficient training, and a lack of attention paid to the practicalities of implementation, such as the format of the FSP document. In addition, attention needs to be paid to the unintended consequences (such as stress for parents) and other concerns raised by professionals (such as additional workload). Although many police and social workers felt the FSP form itself was not necessarily time consuming, there was a strong consensus that the overall changes have led to increased workloads. These increased workloads, at times, impacted on the ability to co-work cases. Longer-term follow-up data, plus the views of parents and children, would benefit further evaluation.

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