Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST)

Preventing Family Breakdown and Supporting Young People Into Independent Living

The Family and Adolescent Support Team’s (FAST) primary objective is to promote and safeguard the well-being of the young person and prevent family breakdown and homelessness. To do this it focuses on two main areas of work: Firstly, it aims to provide a rapid family support service to vulnerable young people aged 11 to 15 and their families, where there is a risk of family breakdown. In this aspect of its work the team undertakes intensive work with families for up to 9 months. Secondly in regard to 16 and 17 year olds it tries to prevent homelessness through use of mediation etc and if young people cannot stay at home then support them into independent living.

The overarching principle of the FAST is that children and young people are best looked after within their families and it endeavours to ensure families stay together and fundamental to that work is building individual and family resilience. Interventions are delivered in line with the principle that the Safety and Welfare of the Young Person and the Protection of the Community are Paramount. Accommodating a young person will always only ever done as a last resort when all efforts to keep the family together have failed. If a return home is not possible, the FAST will find the most suitable accommodation for the young person; and support them to remain in, and move on from, their accommodation when appropriate.

Utilising the Signs of Safety model FAST does intensive work with young people and their families in order to deliver a solution focussed approach that empowers and enables the family to establish and maintain their own support networks. For 16 and 17 year olds mediation remains the key intervention to resolve difficulties and disagreement between young people and their parents/ carers and additionally, the FAST is also increasingly making use of Family Group Conferences. Young people aged 16-17 years who were experiencing family breakdown and at risk of homelessness, and who would otherwise be taken in to care (LAC) are therefore supported to return home, reside in kinship care, or become accommodated in semi-independent, or independent living.
16 and 17 year olds who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness can self-refer to FAST, or can be referred from other agencies e.g. Colleges, Youth Offending Unit, SPOE etc. 11 to 15 year olds can be referred to FAST by Children’s Services Referral and Assessment Team, once an assessment has been undertaken if it is assessed that there is a risk of family breakdown which could lead to a young person entering the care system.

The charts included below detail the numbers of referrals to the FAST over the past three years, and the resulting outcomes of these referrals as a result of the work undertaken by FAST. This data is presented in terms of the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds who have been referred, or self-referred to FAST as homeless or at risk of homelessness (broken down by gender, age and ethnicity, referrer, referral category and outcome), and the number of 11-15 year olds referred to FAST at risk of entering the care system as a result of breakdown in the relationship with parents (broken down by gender, age and ethnicity, referrer, referral category and outcome).

NB: The numbers of referrals into FAST have reduced significantly in the last year. The reasons for the fall in referrals are twofold:

- Firstly as a result of significantly reduced capacity – previous data included the data for a larger team of social workers within FAST, and also included data from the re-unification Team (RAST), which worked with a similar client group, but with an emphasis on supporting re-unification from care. This was part of the larger Family and Adolescent Support Hub, which came to an end at the end of March 2017.

- Secondly, there has been a significant decrease in the numbers of young people approaching FAST for accommodation. The reason for this is that FAST has been delivering a consistent message to young people and families; that a full and comprehensive assessment of the young person and family’s needs will be carried out before any decision is made on eligibility for supported accommodation (unless it is clear that the young person is in immediate need of accommodation). It is also made clear that the family and young person will be required to engage fully in the assessment, and with the support plan aimed at enabling the young person to remain cared for within their family network before consideration is given to providing young people with supported accommodation. This has had the effect of FAST now targeting their work more effectively. However, the cases FAST are working with are presenting with increasing levels of complexity, requiring ever more intensive and creative social work interventions in order to continue to secure positive outcomes.
Comment

Referrals have reduced by 56% from an average of 16.5 per month in 15/16 to 7.25 per month in the year to date 17/18. However, the team is only about a third of the size of the old FASH [which was mostly funded by the Government’s Innovation Fund].

Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Referrals

Comment

Referrals of 16/17 year olds requiring accommodation have reduced by 57% from an average of 14 per month in 15/16 to 6 per month in the year to date 17/18 [and an even greater
reduction over the last 5 years]. This is reflective of the good work the team have done over the last three years in getting the message out that young people will not automatically be accommodated because they have presented and claimed to be homeless but will need to prove they are genuinely homeless e.g. FAST will check with family and find if they can actually remain living at home but are just wanting to leave.

**Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Referrals by Gender**

![Graph showing total number of 16/17 year old young people presenting as homeless by gender.]

**Comment**

Regarding gender of referrals of 16/17 year olds requiring accommodation for the last two years has shown a higher proportion of females compared to 15/16 when more males were referred. However historically the service has tendered to support more homeless females and the data suggests we are now approaching an equal balance of males and females being seen. With 53% of the referrals over the three year period being male [due to the rise this year] it is likely we will see more males than females going forward.
Comment

Regarding ethnicity of referrals of 16/17 year olds requiring accommodation. While the data shows in 15/16 white young people made up 35% of referrals and black young people 34% and that in 17/18 white young people reduced to 31% and black you people increased to 33% the representation of both groups has remained roughly the same. Of note is that mixed race young people being referred have dropped by about 75% and Turkish young people have risen by 140%. 
Young People Supported to Stay in the Family Home

Total Number of Referrals for Prevention Of Family Breakdown Work

NB: Team reduced substantially and thus the amount of referrals FAST taken have had to be reduced.

Comment
Since the end of the government innovation fund grant referrals to FAST for intensive family support work have reduced by more than half but the level of need and complexity of the families worked with has risen.
Family Support For 11/15 Year Old Referrals by Gender

Comment

Regarding gender of referrals of 11/15 year olds requiring family support there was a very disproportionate female/male balance in 16/17 but in 17/18 more males have been referred.

Family Support For 11/15 Year Old Referrals by Ethnicity

Comment

Regarding ethnicity of referrals of 11/15 year olds requiring family support there were 11 white [35% of all referrals] and 13 black young people [42%] referred in 2015 and in 17/18 it is 4 [19%] and 10 [48%] thus while the representation of white young people has halved the representation of black you people has increased slightly.
Family Support For 11/15 Year Old Referrals by Age

Total Numbers of referrals for 11-15 year olds by age

Comment

Regarding age of referrals of 11/15 year olds requiring family support 13 to 15 inclusive remains the predominant age range of referrals. 19 young people were referred in 2015/16 [61% of referrals] and in 17/18 it is 20 [95%].

Family Support For 11/15 Year Main Reason for Referrals

Main Referral Reason

Family Relationship breakdown  Overcrowding  Offending and other anti-social behaviour

Apr15-Mar16  Apr16-Mar17  Mar17-Feb18
Comment
The main reason for referrals is family relationship breakdown.

Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Referrals

Comment
The majority of young people who present/are referred as being at risk of homelessness are supported to stay with their own family. In 15/16 out of 167 referrals 106, 63%, were supported to stay at home, in 16/17 it was 60 out of a 113, 53% and in 17/18 it was 51 out of 66, 77%. This demonstrates the good and improving work being done by FAST in preventing family breakdown and ensuring young people do not become homeless.
**Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Referrals by Gender**

![Bar chart showing numbers of 16-17 year olds referred to FAST who were supported to remain at home by gender.](chart1)

**Comment**

When compared to proportion of referrals the data shows that FAST are more successful in ensuring young females remain in the family than they are with males.

**Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Referrals by Gender**

![Bar chart showing numbers of 16-17 year olds referred to FAST who were supported to remain at home by ethnicity.](chart2)

**Comment**

Regarding ethnicity and family breakdown FAST has similar levels of success with all ethnicities.
Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Referrals by Gender

Comment

The data suggests that FAST is far more effective at preventing family breakdowns with 17 year olds than it is with 16 year olds but this is not the case. More young people aged 17 are referred and the proportion of those helped to stay at home compared to number referred is approximately the same for both age groups.
FAST And Referrals Who Become LAC

![Chart showing numbers of young people who became LAC]

Comment

Most people referred to FAST, whether 11 to 15 or 16 and 17 years old are prevented from becoming Looked After. Evidence, e.g. from the National Audit Office 2014 report is clear that young people who become LAC after the age of 11 tend to have far more negative outcomes from the population in general and so a great deal of effort is made to prevent young people becoming LAC. As the numbers above show it is a small number who but as the caseloads become increasingly complex a higher percentage.

**NB:** Anyone under 18 can become LAC if they meet the criteria and want to. In the case of most 16 and 17 years old’s who cannot live with their family they do not want to become LAC and the law allows for this age group to be supported under the 1996 Housing Act. However, some young people who present/are referred to FAST regarding risk of homeless want, or in some cases need [e.g. SEND issues or emotional and mental health issues etc] to become LAC.
Comment

At 4 out of 5 [80%] and 4 out of 6 [67%] young female are the young people most likely to need/want to become LAC and thus be supported in this way.

Comment

Regarding numbers accommodated who become LAC the appears to be proportionate regarding the different ethnicities.
Comment
When compared to referrals of these age groups there is no specific trends shown re age and LAC status. Most referrals are 13 to 15 and most becoming LAC are 14 and 15 but only small numbers so it looks like numbers becoming LAC are proportionate to referrals.

Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Placed in Accommodation

Comment
The numbers being found places in supported accommodation is reducing demonstrating the success of FAST.
Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Placed in Accommodation - Gender

Comment
57% of those found a place in supported accommodation over the last 3 years have been female

Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Placed in Accommodation - Ethnicity

Comment
No specific trends are identifiable in the data.
Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Placed in Accommodation - Age

NUMBERS OF 16/17 YEAR OLDS PROVIDED WITH SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION BY AGE

Comment

Over the last three years 56% of those placed in supported accommodation have been 17.

Prevention of Homelessness 16/17 Year Old Placed in Accommodation – Who Pays, Length of Stay and Number of Placement Breakdowns.
Comment

Over the last three years 69% of young people supported had their placement cost met through housing benefit. The average length of stay in accommodation is 6.67 months. Of 108 placements only 24, 22%, broke down.

LAC Status and Judicial Review

Comment

Of the 16 and 17 year olds placed in supported accommodation some, often after they had turned 18, would approach a solicitor and be advised that they should get a judicial review, under the the Southwark judgement, to get LAC rights [usually retrospectively]. This was done for a variety of reasons but mostly based around it being financially advantageous. This was costly to the council. Initially, due to errors in advice given/recording of advice given to the 16/17 or assessment, LBE had to concede and grant LAC status. Due to far better procedures and practice the number of judicial reviews and successful judicial reviews has reduced considerably from 7 to 2.
Summary and Conclusions

As can be seen from the data provided, the FAS Team are successful and becoming increasingly so in preventing family breakdown and ensuring young people remain at home.

Young people who have needed supported accommodation have received a high level of ongoing support from FAST social workers working in conjunction with keyworkers in order to ensure that placements are stable and to avoid placement breakdowns. Young people in supported accommodation are therefore supported to either move on to follow a housing pathway to independent living, or return home to live with their family. It is essential that young people in supported accommodation are assessed regularly as an ongoing process to ensure that their changing needs continue to be met and careful consideration is given as to whether or not these young people should be considered for support as a Looked After Child, or are supported as a Child in Need. Whilst in supported accommodation whilst plans are put in place for their successful transition to adulthood. The fact that the number of judicial reviews issued on these cases leading to young people becoming LAC retrospectively, have been declining year on year is a sign that practice is improving in this respect, and the aim is for this figure to reduce to 0.

The key to effective practice in terms of achieving positive outcomes for young people referred to FAST, whether supported to remain at home, or referred to supported accommodation has been establishing and forming effective relationships with young people and their families, with an emphasis on increased face-to-face working and greater flexibility of operation. In order to achieve this, the work of the FAST is designed around the following model:

• a lower case load per social worker, which enabled workers to provide a more effective range of support to address need and achieve change

• positive and trusted relationships with clients

• consistency of support

• practice focussed on improving family resilience and coping skills within family networks

It has also proved important, as discussed above, to remain very clear with young people and families accessing the service, what they can expect of FAST and what expectations are placed on them. All young people presenting to the FAST are:
• expected to cooperate with the assessment process over a maximum of 5 working days, working in partnership with the FAST;

• given a copy of the homeless young people pack containing information and advice including a copy of the FAST Charter and Council complaints procedures;

• asked about their general health and asked if they know where to access advice and assistance with sexual health;

• asked about their personal relationships including parents, partners and peers;

• assisted to access on-site family mediation services during their assessment period;

• expected to sign up to a charter outlining the duties and responsibilities of the FAST and the expectations of the young person. This gives particular regard to taking responsibility for their behaviour with an understanding that should they be evicted from accommodation provided by the FAST because of their or their friends’ behaviour they are at risk of not being offered further accommodation;

• informed about information sharing and data retention explicitly via the Charter

The following case studies are provided as an illustration of the type of work FAST undertake with young people and their families at risk of homelessness in order to support them to live at home (as in case study 1), or to return home to the care of their families after a period of time in supported accommodation (as in case study 2):
Case Study 1:

AN is a 16 year old female of Turkish origin. She self-referred to FAST in September 2016, reporting that her mother had told her to leave the family home. AN stated that she had been asked to leave due to constant arguments with her parents. She reported having a difficult relationship particularly with her father whom she stated did not want her to engage any activities outside of college, and had taken her phone away to stop her from engaging with friends and peers. She further stated her father had slapped her whilst they have been arguing and had also spat in her face. She also stated she has not been sleeping well over the last two months because she has been angry and has not been happy at home and there had been some difficulties in her friendships. AN was not engaged in education training or employment, and had two missing episodes prior to her coming notice of FAST.

The allegations which AN had made against her father were investigated and found to be false following a strategy meeting with the Police (AN later retracted the allegations against her father), and an assessment was carried out which concluded AN was not homeless and not at risk of significant harm from her family and therefore not in need of supported accommodation. AN’s mother had not insisted that she move out, but the risk of homelessness was present, as AN’s parents were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with her behaviour at home. The assessment recognised there were difficulties in the family relationship due to factors around parenting style; AN’s developmental search for autonomy and identity; possible difficulties in AN’s transition into adolescence (having previously been bullied at school, and attachment difficulties), and therefore family support was put in place, consisting of a focussed intervention to support the family including: Support with AN to engage in an alternative college course, Mediation between AN and her parents, A ‘Parent Champion’ was allocated to provide support to AN’s mother, both parents agreed to attend a parenting programme and therapeutic support was offered to AN and her mother individually (mother was suffering with anxiety and depression).

Throughout the FAST intervention AN would consistently state that she did not want to live at home and wanted to be moved into semi-independent accommodation. However, the FAST social worker who conducted the assessment and delivered the intervention was very clear that AN would not do well in semi-independent accommodation, and needed to be at home with the support of her family in order to achieve positive outcomes. This message was given consistently to AN and her parents, and although AN was at times not happy about this, by the time her intervention with FAST was closed, she remained at home, was positively
engaged in a college course, was working part time and there had been no further missing episodes.

Both parents reported that they felt more confident in dealing with issues of conflict with AN at home and were able to enforce boundaries more effectively. Although AN’s relationship with her father remained strained, they were able to agree some basic ground rules. Both parents appeared to see that they needed to adapt their parenting approach for AN, and needed to allow her some space. After undergoing mediation, AN and her mother’s relationship appeared to have improved and stabilised. On a scale of 0 – 10 (0 being the worst it could be and 10 being the best possible), mother rated her relationship with AN as 8 – it had previously been as low as 2 on this scale. Although the family were no longer in need of further statutory social work intervention to prevent homelessness, it was recognised at the time the case was ready to be closed to FAST that there was a need for further support to be in place and the case was therefore stepped down to the Change and Challenge Unit to receive on-going support.
Case Study 2:

BZ is a 17 year old Black female who presented to FAST in October 2017 as her grandmother had thrown her out and would not have her living back at home. The grandmother was contacted on the day that BZ presented to FAST, but she was adamant that BZ could not return home, stating that BZ had been ‘too rude’ to her. Other family options were explored, but there was no-one within the family who BZ could stay with. BZ was therefore housed at in semi-independent accommodation, whilst a full assessment of her and family’s needs was undertaken.

Once the assessment had been completed it transpired that BZ had been resident outside her family home for approximately 3 months, prior to her presenting to FAST. She had been staying with her boyfriend and his family, but was unable to continue living with them. Within a few weeks of being resident in Supported Accommodation and feeling safe and supported, BZ highlighted her past and ongoing domestic abuse being perpetrated by her boyfriend e.g. emotional/psychological and physical violence; controlling behaviour; including him deliberately separating BZ from her family and friends.

This all escalated and BZ experienced a crisis in November 2017 when her (ex) boyfriend reportedly assaulted her. The FAST Social worker worked closely with BZ to agree a safety plan and to encourage her to report the incident to the Police and accept additional support as a victim of domestic violence. BZ did agree to report the incident and work with services to help protect herself, but did not want the social worker to disclose what had happened in terms of current and past abuse to her grandmother. It was decided however, that in order to safeguard BZ and to successfully implement her safety plan, that her grandmother should be informed. Although BZ was initially unhappy about this and felt that the social worker was betraying her confidence, the disclosure to the grandmother was the key to eventual re-unification and re-establishment of a very positive and protective relationship with the grandmother for BZ. Once the grandmother was aware of what had been happening, she was able to view her disagreements with BZ in a different light and in the context of her being in a very controlling and abusive relationship. This led to forgiveness on grandmother’s part and BZ and her grandmother were able to talk very productively about how BZ could be helped to stay safe. This resulted in a planned move back to live with her Grandmother. Both BZ and grandmother declined Family Mediation support as they felt that their relationship had been re-built to such an extent that this was not needed. However, BZ did agree to work with a
therapeutic mentoring service which FAST agreed to fund in order for one to one work to be done with BZ on developing healthy self-esteem, health relationships and staying safe. BZs case was also referred to and discussed at MARAC in order for safeguarding measures to be put in place to prevent further instances of assault from the ex-partner, who had now been arrested and was due to go to court for the assault on BZ.

Away from the pressures of the relationship that BZ had been in, she was able to re-build positive relationships with family and friends, but also successfully supported by her FAST social worker to enrol and engage in college course in order to begin to fulfil her goal of training to become a midwife.