

PIP: Parenting Implementation Project

Delivery Resource: Fathers

Working with Fathers: Practice in Luton

This document was developed to underpin and inform a future 'Working with Fathers' strategy in Luton. It serves as a means to evaluate current activity and involves mapping current services in the context of the best available demographic data.

The process has involved seeking feedback from services and from service users. Its conclusions will underpin and inform future strategy in relation to the Think Father and related aspects of the Think Family initiatives. While specific to Luton it provides a snapshot of one authority's work to 'Think Fathers'.

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Working with Fathers: Practice in Luton

Introduction

At its meeting on October 6th 2008 the Parent Support Strategy Group adopted 'Working with Fathers' as one of its priority areas. Luton's Positive Parenting Strategy, formally adopted by the Children and Young Peoples Board (the immediate predecessor to the Children's Trust Board) in February 2008 had already emphasised the importance of engaging with fathers – indeed there are more references to fathers than to mothers within this document. These developments may be taken as evidence that work to engage fathers was already established within Luton, whilst the status of such work had already been recognised at the highest strategic level within Children's Services. This raises the question of why this document was initiated in late 2008.

This document was developed to underpin and inform future strategy. It serves as a means to evaluate current activity and involves mapping current services in the context of the best available demographic data. The process has involved seeking feedback from services and from service users. Its conclusions will underpin and inform future strategy in relation to the Think Father and related aspects of the Think Family initiatives.

The national context

In February 2007 the Fatherhood Institute produced a "Research Summary of Father's Influence Over Children's Education" (www.fatherhoodinstitute.org). This article brought together research findings from the mid seventies onwards that had, collectively, clearly evidenced that positive father engagement in a child's life produces a wide range of protective factors that lead to desirable outcomes across the spectrum of the 5 Every Child Matters Outcomes. Such evidence has influenced the development of national policy and contributed to the launch of the Think Fathers campaign.

In November 2008 the Children's Minister, Beverly Hughes, launched 'Think Fathers' to help and encourage professionals across the board to deliver more father-friendly practices. A rallying event was held in March 2009 which emphasised the following:

Adopting a strategic approach

To include the appointment of local Think Fathers champions who would secure support from senior management and strategic boards and who would promote best practice at a local, regional and where appropriate at a national level – Luton was one of the Parenting Implementation Project's 'Working with Fathers' theme local authorities represented at this event.



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Taking a proactive approach to father engagement, including making ante natal services more father friendly and routinely collecting contact data for all fathers, including absent fathers.

These objectives are consistent with developments underway locally in Luton, where the Parent Support Strategy Group has agreed to fund some services commissioned through the Teenage Strategy Board that includes promoting the voice of young fathers and making local ante natal services more father friendly; and where most children's centres and some schools have begun to routinely collect contact data, including details of absent fathers.

Promoting the active involvement of fathers within Shadow Boards and in service review and development

Practice within Luton is at an earlier stage of development in these areas but is developing in line with these objectives through the Parent Support Commissioning Team which had begun to support, and in some cases commission, new Father Support Groups across a range of communities of interest, including groups aimed at meeting the needs of fathers of children with disabilities and those of Black African Caribbean fathers; whilst the Investors in Families Strategy Group has introduced a new essential criteria that settings demonstrate a father focused approach in order to secure the Investors in Families award – it has also linked the programmes assessment visit to feedback processes that will inform the refresh of the Children and Young People's Strategic Plan and of the Positive Parenting Strategy.

Focusing on the extended family, including engaging grandfathers

This approach is highly consistent with Think Family. As part of its Think Family bid made to the Department of Children, Schools and Families in March 2009, Luton proposed to conduct a multi agency, multi generational focused Mental Well-being Impact Assessment as a means to developing a Think Family protocol across adult and children's services. In March 2009 the Investors in Families Steering Group learnt that settings awarded

Investors in Families status were reporting increased engagement with extended families, including grandfathers.

Promoting father friendly work practices

This development will be pursued on a national level including discussions with the Federation of Small Businesses, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors.

The local context

General population trends in Luton

According to the Census 2001, less than two-thirds (64.9%) of the Luton population are White British. The town is ethnically diverse, with approximately 35% of the population being of Black and Minority Ethnic origin (ONS [2007] Mid-Year Population Estimates 2006), with significant Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and African Caribbean communities. Evidence from Luton Borough Council's Luton Pupil Level Annual Census, October, 2007 indicates that the Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations contain a greater proportion of school aged children than the other established population groups in the town. At the time of the 2001 Census Luton also had the largest Irish resident population outside London.

According to more recent data twenty per cent of the Luton population was born outside the UK, and 43% of children (aged 0-15) are of Black and Minority Ethnic origin (ONS [2007] Mid-Year Population Estimates 2006). Subsequent data from the annual school census shows that 54% of the school age population are from non-British groups. This also highlights the recent in-migration to Luton with 1.4% of pupils being identified as Polish (Luton Borough Council's Luton Pupil Level Annual Census October, 2007).

In recent years the diversity of the Luton population, not least that residing near the town centre, has been further increased with foreign students coming to the University of Bedfordshire and the arrival of citizens from other European Union countries, in particular from Poland and from other countries in Eastern European.

Working with Asian fathers

The largest ethnic minority group in the town is South Asian, accounting for 18.2% of all residents (nearly 34,000 people) at the time of the 2001 Census. About half of these are Pakistani, with the remaining half split fairly evenly between Bangladeshi and Indians. Each of these two groups represents about 4.1% of all Luton residents.

Figures from schools (Luton Borough Council's Luton Pupil Level Annual Census October, 2007) indicate that there are more Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils than these figures suggest – due to the demographic balance of these ethnic groups - whilst the Indian community has a proportionately small school age cohort.

In 2001 the Census indicated that the Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations represented over half of the populations in the central Dallow and Biscot wards, two of the most deprived Super Output Areas in the town. One response of Luton Borough Council to the challenges faced by local families was to appoint Luton's first wave of Family Workers to schools in targeted wards. Family Workers initially worked with families of children at Key Stage 1. The role has had a similar remit to that of the later national Parent Support Adviser role but with a greater emphasis upon Family Learning and universal as well as targeted approaches.

The appointment of Family Workers in schools was not specifically aimed at promoting work with South Asian families, still less with South Asian fathers. Nonetheless, many of the first Family Worker appointments were of women from the South Asian communities, typically women in their twenties and early thirties. Like Family Workers of other ethnic backgrounds working in other parts of the town – as the initiative expanded – the focus was on working with parents and in practice this meant almost exclusively with mothers. However, over the course of recent years increasing numbers of men from the same age cohort have begun to take senior roles within existing community organisations or have set up inclusive community

organisations themselves. Some have also moved on to become male Family Workers.

It is of interest that the first staff specifically appointed as male Family Workers in both children's centres and schools were South Asian. It is suggested that several factors may particularly explain this dynamic – the fact that Family Workers have been embedded in settings in Dallow, Biscot and neighbouring wards for longer than in other areas may have raised the awareness of the relative deficit in father engagement in these settings first. The fact that the recent demand for a Fathers Network arose within these settings may further illustrate this point. Other factors to consider are traditional family dynamics within these communities and the positive contribution to male and female awareness of whole family needs (i.e. a Think Family approach) facilitated by the development of a number of local social action and support organisations in the locality over a period of several decades.

Traditional family dynamics within the South Asian community have tended to emphasise the centrality of the mother's role in direct engagement with the family's children, their health and education. Working practices for many fathers within these communities also impact on father engagement for many work as taxi drivers and within the catering trade – both employments involve unsocial hours of working.

Many successful South Asian community organisations have developed within Luton over the course of the past three decades. These have promoted the engagement of both male and female members within social and political organisations in the town it has led to both the general empowerment of young men and women within these communities and for many this has led to specific voluntary and paid work related experiences.

Through their own experiences of education and of working in community support networks, a number of South Asian men have identified gaps in male engagement within the family and

have developed new groups to meet the current needs of their community. These initiatives have emphasised the importance of engaging with fathers, although conversations with providers indicate that these organisations tended to initially focus upon positive activities for children and young people.

The local On Track programme, developed in response to the Joseph Rowntree commissioned Luton based study "Where to Turn" (Quereshi, Berridge and Wenman, National Children's Bureau) facilitated partnership working between South Asian voluntary organisations and local schools. A network was recently formed between South Asian Family Workers and a number of the more recently formed community organisations based in central Luton, including one with a specific focus on helping fathers support a child with significant disabilities. The new Network is increasing weekend and school holiday activities for local fathers to participate in together with their children.

Many South Asian organisations have gone on to develop initiatives of benefit to the entire Luton community, such as Mitalee's development of the multi lingual Diverse FM community radio station.

Working with Black Caribbean and Black African fathers

At its October 2008 meeting the Parent Support Strategy Group made developing links with the Black Caribbean and Black African communities a priority. This reflected an understanding that partnership links with these communities were generally less developed than those with the South Asian communities. Successful programmes had been developed within these communities but significant challenges remained.

Evidence from the census suggests that in 2001 Luton had a sizeable black population of about 11,500, or 6.3% of the total population. Roughly two-thirds were of Black Caribbean origin. This population continues to be significant, with increasing numbers of Black African families now resident in the town (Luton Borough Council's Luton Pupil Level Annual Census October, 2007).

Discussions with community leaders from the Black African and Caribbean population (reflected in the Fathers Worker feedback section) suggest that much local formal and informal voluntary and community sector parenting and family support is delivered by female members of the community. Many of these are active within local Church organisations. It has been suggested that this development has left many men within the Black community, particularly in the Black Caribbean community, feeling further marginalised. Attempts to meet this challenge have included work through Black Boys Can and Dad Talk.

Black Boys Can and Dad Talk are connected with other important initiatives within the community, the Family Relationship Crisis Centre and the Luton Young Leaders Forum. Both of these initiatives have placed an emphasis upon engaging young people and fathers, but this has often proved challenging. Feedback from local community leaders, in line with national research (Guishard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton) indicates that there are a large number of non resident fathers within local Black African Communities. Engaging with non resident fathers will form a major focus within Luton's Think Fathers campaign – to be initially developed during April–June 2009.

There are currently three male Black Caribbean Family Workers located in different schools across the town. Whilst there are no current female Black Family Workers, although one former member of staff was subsequently promoted to a senior post within the Family Support Team overseeing the development of the Family Worker programme. This staff member continues to advocate for the further development of partnership working with local Black African Caribbean organisations.

The development of partnerships with local Black African Caribbean groups has been a priority of the Parent Support Strategy Group and informed the allocation of places on the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities and Triple P training programmes (as part of Luton's Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder) in early 2009.

Of the nine males (out of a total of thirty eight) local trainees in the first waves of Luton's PEIP training, three were Black African Caribbean. Four women from these ethnic groups were also trained in the first wave.

Another indication of Luton's diversity lies in the size of its population from the mixed ethnic group. At 2.6%, or 4,700 people, it is nearly twice that of the average for England.

Conversations from consultations with voluntary organisations with a particular focus upon the Black Caribbean and Black African communities indicate a level of engagement with families of joint White and African Caribbean heritage. These conversations support general evidence that this population includes a significant proportion of non resident Black Caribbean fathers.

Engaging Black Caribbean and Black African fathers and fathers of mixed ethnic heritage will be a major objective of the Think Fathers initiative in Luton.

Working with White fathers

Whilst Luton is ethnically diverse – and has become increasingly so since the completion of the 2001 census (the most up-to-date whole population data to which we have access) with large influxes of families from Africa and Eastern Europe, particularly from Poland – the White British population still represents the largest ethnic group within the town. Census data, and subsequent school surveys, have demonstrated that the White British group remains the largest although relative family sizes mean that there are proportionately less White British school pupils than in the White British population as a whole. Further information derived from school staff demonstrate that there are substantial differences in the profile of different white communities across the town, with white families who are located within communities in the most deprived Super Output Areas across the town as a whole being more likely to be single parent. The father is the parent absent from the family home in the overwhelming number of such cases.

White fathers are very underrepresented in the parenting, family and community inclusion work forces. For example there are only two White British male Family Worker in Luton schools and none in the Children's Centres. The relative under representation of white males may reflect a number of factors. These include a perception that the Family Worker role is not seen as a traditional main male breadwinner's role and the absence of male support networks which may reinforce the value of this role or of paid work in third sector organisations, as is the case in a number of other ethnic communities in the town.

The Polish community in Luton has expanded rapidly in recent years. Luton schools admitted 450 pupils of Polish origin in 2006. (Statistical Issues relating to the ONS Population Estimates of Luton, Luton Borough Council Research & Intelligence Team, LBC Intranet 07/04/08). Further evidence of the rapid increase in the Polish population is shown through Police translation costs, which rose from under £1,500 in 2002-03 to over £47,000 in 2006-07, representing a third of all Police translation and interpreter costs in that year. (Statistical Issues relating to the ONS Population Estimates of Luton).

Whilst most members of the Polish community have only arrived in the town since the middle of the current decade, it is already well organised, with active community groups emerging that include a focus on engaging male members and with a Polish father amongst the first February 2009 cohort of those trained to deliver the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities programme.

Evidence from the Investors in Families programme in Luton suggest that there may be proportionately more white male volunteers within Roman Catholic schools, themselves ethnically diverse, with proportionately more Irish and Polish (and Black African) students than in other Luton schools. Working with fathers has now been introduced as a priority area specific to the Investors in Families assessment process in Luton.

Conversations with staff connected with the local University of Bedfordshire suggest that whilst white males are well represented on Youth and Community and Criminology courses, they remain significantly underrepresented on Social Work and are even less evident on Health and Social Care and Adolescent Studies courses.

Engaging White fathers through the Think Fathers initiative is anticipated to be a significant challenge across Luton.

Strategic developments

A number of strategic developments are providing opportunities for co-ordinating and developing work with fathers. These include the launch of both the Think Families and Think Fathers initiatives, the work of a local Family Support Commissioning Review and the impact of the Investors in Families initiative within Luton.

Parent Support Strategy Group – Positive Parenting Strategy

This is the strategic group to which the Parenting Commissioner and the Parent Support Commissioning Team report. It has oversight of developments related to the Positive Parenting Strategy – the latter having been agreed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Board in February 2008.

Working with Fathers was agreed as one of the Parent Support Strategy Groups priority areas of focus at its meeting on October 6th, 2008. One consequence has been the offer of support to a series of Father's Forums, including one primarily centred on Black African Caribbean fathers within one locality and another focussing upon meeting the needs of fathers whose families include a child with a disability. This initiative is primarily focused upon South Asian fathers. The model for this group was influenced by that of an established DADS Group for fathers with a child on the autistic spectrum.

A Family Support Commissioning Strategy Review

The final report and recommendations of this review will be considered by the Children's Trust Board in July, 2009. It has suggested, in an interim report, that Luton's Positive Parenting Strategy be reviewed and reframed in the context of the Think Family approach.

In addition the Family Support Commissioning Strategy Review has highlighted the need to add value to the early intervention and preventative work across all four Levels identified in the current Children and Young Peoples Plan and the Positive Parenting Strategy.

Parent Support Strategy Group –Think Family

The Parent Support Strategy Group endorsed the importance of encouraging the development of a Think Family approach across Luton services, as suggested through the Family Support Commissioning Review process, when it met on March 24th 2009. The Strategy Group nominated a Think Family Champion, a senior manager at Assistant Director level, within Children's Services – a position that was accepted. The Group also decided that it would nominate further Think Family Champions across Adult and Children's Services at subsequent meetings. A father focus, whether the father is located within the family home or elsewhere, was also agreed to be an important element within Think Family.

Luton, like other local authorities, is to receive additional Think Family Grant funding in 2009-11 to develop Think Family innovations across Luton. Think Family incorporates the development of whole family approaches across services in adults and children's services.

As part of its Think Family initiative Luton is planning to hold a series of local meetings in May and June as part of a Mental Well-Being Impact Assessment. This process will secure the engagement of fathers, mothers, other carers, front line staff, managers and senior staff across local

agencies. The process will provide an opportunity to incorporate a father's focus within the Mental Well-Being Impact Assessment.

Luton has secured Playbuilder Pathfinder status. This will include the development of an adventure playground, the employment of several Play Rangers and the development of twenty eight play sites. This initiative will provide a further opportunity to deploy a Think Family and Think Fathers focus.

One potential recommendation from this process would include the conducting of a Turning the Curve exercise specifically focussed upon securing increased engagement with fathers across all age groups and all levels of intervention.

Children's Centres Development Team

Working with fathers is one of the required areas of work within children's centres nationally and is included within National Sure Start Planning and Performance Management Guidance (www.fatherhoodinstitute.org). Working with Fathers is an agreed area of focus of the Children's Centre Development Team in Luton, with a member of the Development Team having this area of work as a specific remit.

A detailed Working with Fathers Action Plan has been developed. This includes:

- developing awareness of father friendly practice – training has been commissioned from the Fatherhood Institute; further training is planned to lead to the introduction of the Fatherhood Quality Mark across all centres;
- working closely with the Parenting Support Commissioning Team;
- Promoting a father friendly environment within Children's Centres by ensuring that the ethos, imagery and language used in children's centres is male friendly;
- actively consulting with parents through children's centres – one centre now has three fathers on its committee;

- ensuring that fathers contact details are collected – major progress is reported across most centres; and
- seeking to engage with fathers through the centres and through home visiting, wherever possible achievements include:
 - regular weekend trips with substantial father take up;
 - regular Dad's Rhyme time sessions; good father attendance at a baby clinic;
 - positive links with a Young Father's Worker through Brook Services;
 - positive engagement by fathers and grandfathers at family activities;
 - good attendance at an Every Child a Talker session; and
 - a successful ICT course for dads in a centre, weekly breakfast clubs with some father engagement.

Investors in Families Luton Steering Group

Luton was the first local authority to sign up to the Investors in Families initiative and the first to successfully take its initial wave of settings through the formal accreditation process. A second wave of seven schools are expected to secure Investors in Families status by early June, making for a total of twelve accredited settings, with several other settings at earlier stages of the assessment process.

The Investors in Families Luton Steering Group was set up to oversee and further promote the initiative across the town. Three parents have recently been trained as assessors, including one Black African father and these parents have been invited to join the Steering Group.

The Steering Group has adopted Working with Fathers as an additional priority area that settings seeking Investors in Families accreditation will need to demonstrate across the programmes' five standards (which reflect the 5 Every Child Matters Outcomes).

The focus on adopting a father friendly focus has also influenced settings within the first cohort. For example, staff in an infant school realised that they were not addressing literature specifically to fathers and that this was unintentionally excluding numbers of male carers from engaging in many of the wide range of events organised through the school. Correspondence now identifies "dads", "mums" and "carers" (in a variable order). Early successes have seen the regular attendance of a grandfather and a male childminder in Stay and Play sessions. Discussions with both established that neither had previously seen this activity as relevant to them.

Drawing on the perspectives of former Father's Workers

Three former Father's Workers have moved into more senior roles within Extended Services, Parenting Support Commissioning and in Youth Work – with a focus on children and youth participation. These staff members are variously involved in developing a Fathers Network, starting in central Luton but with an intention of extending its remit across the town. These staff members had previously worked as Father's Workers in a primary school, a children's centre and in the voluntary sector. Their participation led approach is influencing the development of strategic partnerships across local authority services and with local voluntary sector organisations. They represent a valuable local resource, both individually and collectively.

Consultation

Father's Workers' perspectives

Twelve front-line workers from across the borough, who provide dedicated services for fathers, were consulted: five male Family Workers in primary schools and early years settings, two female workers whose settings provide dedicated fathers' services amongst other parent support, and five male workers from voluntary groups set up to support fathers. This represents a majority of the nine male Family Workers in post and of voluntary sector staff whose work with fathers is explicitly linked with the Parent Support Strategy Group and the Positive Parenting Strategy.

The consultation exercise was carried out at a time when a number of other consultations in relation to the Family Worker role had also recently occurred or were currently underway (research by the University of Bedfordshire and in relation to the Family Support Commissioning Strategy – neither of these exercises specifically focused upon engaging with fathers but there was concern that a degree of research fatigue may be reflected in our response rate; final reports in relation to both these other consultation exercises have yet to be produced).

What attracts people to Father's work roles?

All of the male workers in schools felt that, in their experience, schools were not welcoming to fathers, and the challenge of being able to change this had motivated them to apply for their positions. Other reasons included the belief that they would be in a position to help fathers, either to engage in school and/or their local community, to support their children more, or to improve their work prospects through training.

Are there barriers to males applying for such roles?

Not all male workers felt that there were any barriers to applying. However, over half of respondents felt that the 'female' work environment could be off-putting. Other barriers were a lack of general understanding and support of the role. The school-based respondents felt that schools should be more encouraging to prospective male applicants, and develop sound support systems for them. Advertising positions using more community-related forums was suggested. Training for colleagues around fathers' work was also called for.

What are the challenges in engaging fathers?

Almost all workers felt that work and work life balance issues created barriers for men to engage in fathers activities. However, more than half of the respondents felt that fathers did not prioritise these activities, rather than not have time for them. The traditional role of the father was felt to *prioritise* work and other social activities above spending time with their children. It was suggested that fathers may not understand the importance of being involved with their children's lives/ education. Raising the awareness of both fathers and across settings of the positive difference that father involvement can make was felt to be a priority requiring concerted action.

Two respondents felt that fathers were not motivated to become more involved. Another suggested barrier (four respondents) was the lack of understanding and support from other staff in trying to engage fathers. Other barriers suggested were timings of services which did not fit around work, language issues, traditional 'female' environments and a lack of consultation to find out what fathers want.

To overcome these barriers, workers suggested offering work-related training, which would be attractive to fathers, providing more information on what was available, reducing the female 'feel' of settings, and encouraging employers to recognise fathers' roles in working conditions.

Does gender make a difference in carrying out father's work?

Most respondents felt it was much easier to engage fathers as a male worker, although it was pointed out that this varied culturally, so would be more the case in the South Asian community, for example.

What is successful in engaging fathers?

Success factors varied between respondents. Two workers felt that they offer activities that are attractive to men, a mix of learning, sport and recreation activities. A children's centre found that Saturday breakfast sessions were very popular with fathers. Other factors included offering structured time for fathers to spend with children. Incentives that have proved popular included certificates for personal development, using regular and varied means of promotion (in appropriate language), specifically offering 'Dads' sessions, and offering free activities.

What are the positive outcomes of work with fathers?

The majority of school-based workers, and one community worker, felt that a positive outcome of their work was that fathers were more engaged with their children's education, and half felt that father-child relationships were improved. Two respondents suggested that fathers who attended their services had developed supportive friendships with each other. Other positive outcomes were that fathers were more confident, had a better relationship with their child's school, and services were able to improve due to feedback from fathers.

What should be considered in developing a Father's Strategy for Luton?

Over half of respondents felt that consultation with fathers should be a priority in the development of any Father's Strategy. Most of the workers consulted

suggested that there should be more services targeted at fathers, or more dedicated fathers' workers, with a need for training aimed at fathers particularly highlighted. A number of respondents felt that there should be an objective to encourage more male workers in support services. Other suggestions included parenting programmes for fathers, and the provision of weekend activities both in schools and in local community settings.

Female workers perspectives

The views of female family workers providing general parent support services

Why have Family Workers previously focused on engaging mothers?

Luton has some 100 female Family Workers based in schools and Children's Centres. These work to encourage parental involvement in education. A little above ninety per cent of Family Workers are female – this is in line with Training and Development Agency national figures for male and female recruitment to Personal Support Advisor positions (TDA Regional Workshop, March 26-27, 2009, Bedford; Luton's Family Workers predate the creation of the PSA role but are viewed as synonymous). Whilst Family Workers have a strong track record of engaging parents, this is usually with mothers, rather than fathers. As part of this exercise Luton consulted female Family Workers in the town.

Schools currently providing services targeted at parents generally attracted mothers although specific events, such as a school nursing presentation about managing diabetes, sometimes attracted fathers although fathers tended to leave sessions early if there were low numbers of fathers within the room.

Whilst some schools and children centres have succeeded in appointing male workers, the general view expressed was that both schools and children centres have tended to be female dominated and this makes it difficult to recruit and when recruited to retain male workers. The absence of male workers in a majority of these settings is seen as a barrier to engaging fathers by most female staff consulted.

How can we remove the barriers to engaging fathers?

Many female Family Workers who had not previously sought to focus on the needs of fathers were nonetheless motivated to remove the barriers to the engagement of fathers in the future. Activities built around sporting activities, do it yourself projects and the use of information technology were all thought to be worth exploring, particularly if these activities could involve aspects of family learning. Father-only events were also felt to provide an important opportunity to engage fathers.

One of the schools where staff were consulted holds an annual Cricket Event, which features a team of fathers playing a team of male staff. This event has led to greater engagement by fathers in the school's sports day. The school plans to use the next game to recruit fathers on to the Parent Teacher Association through peer advocacy and the use of an information stall. Meanwhile the fathers are planning to hold a challenge match with fathers at a neighbouring school.

It was suggested that the employment of a male worker in the evening and weekends could successfully target fathers. A whole school approach to engaging fathers was advocated. Because Luton is a very diverse town every area has different needs and settings should be encouraged to access fathers according to local needs, taking into account prevalent working patterns amongst local fathers. A school in one area runs activities for Fathers during the day because most local fathers work in restaurants or drive Taxis at night. One in another area ran evening and weekend activities for dads and children because the majority of fathers worked in 9am-5pm jobs during the week.

Would appointing more male workers make a difference?

We interviewed some female Family Workers whose roles did not specifically focus upon the needs of fathers and whose settings did not include male family workers. The majority of female Family Workers consulted felt that appointing a male Family Worker within their setting would make the school feel and present as a more gender balanced environment and would encourage father and extended family involvement.

Some schools have appointed male Sports Coordinators and these have successfully encouraged father and son involvement in sports activities. These male staff had also agreed to undertake some other fathers centred work informally. Whilst this approach seems to offer an option in these schools, a more common practice has seen schools build partnerships with local voluntary organisations. Two schools linked through a children's centre, with exclusively female Family Workers, formed a partnership with a local voluntary organisation to deliver an Information Technology project aimed at local fathers.

How could we appoint more male workers?

A number of female Family Workers suggested that settings could adapt the generic model of Family Worker Job Description and Personal Specification to attract more male applicants. This has already occurred across two linked schools who having already recruited female Family Workers had secured additional funding and now chose to target the appointment of male Family Workers. One of these schools had also developed long established links with a local voluntary organisation characterised by a participation based approach.

Would a Father's Strategy make a difference?

There were mixed views as to the value of developing a specific Father's Strategy.

Father's Group perspectives

Research was also conducted with fathers attending three dedicated groups in Luton: 'Dads' Rhyme Time' run at the central library; 'One Nation', a voluntary organisation offering sport and education activities for fathers and children; and 'Active Dads', a community organisation providing sport activities for fathers in the Dallow and Biscot wards.

The fathers participating in the groups all felt that being involved with their children was a high priority. It should be noted that these fathers were already engaged with a service, showing their willingness to spend time with their children, however lack of awareness of services available to them was still a barrier. Over 50% of the fathers at Rhyme Time were unaware of the Children & Families Information Services and those who were aware did not know how to use it. Fathers suggested that more accessible websites would be helpful.

All fathers consulted felt that timing and location were major barriers to engaging with services. Most fathers thought they were not involved in their children's lives as much as they would like to be due to work commitments and because most activities took place during the day. They requested more frequent sessions held at more flexible times, with a particular interest in events held on Saturdays. But fathers also felt that employers could provide more flexibility to enable them to fulfil their roles as fathers. One suggested: '1 year's maternity compared to 2 weeks paternity shows how the government wants parents to bring up the children.'

The fathers consulted at the groups felt that more consultation should be carried out with all fathers, to inform future developments. The importance of male workers was highlighted at the Active Dads group. Suggestions from fathers also included: schools to be encouraged to engage fathers more, more training and parenting programmes to be aimed at fathers, and more activities for fathers to be provided on a more regular basis.

Service mapping

For this Document we also reviewed the work that was taking place. The tables below summarise the local activities currently available to support families:

Voluntary sector

Organisation	Activities
One Nation (Voluntary Group)	Swimming, Badminton, Archery, Five – Aside Football Home Work Club
Active Dads Projects (On Track funded)	Badminton
Centre for Youth and Community Development (Bangladeshi Youth League/Bengali Women's Project)	Swimming Badminton Luncheon Club Food hygiene training
Mitalee	Volunteering Summer Projects Radio shows
Dad Talk	Support group for fathers of young and adolescent black boys
DADS	Support group for fathers of autistic children
Kingsway Outreach centre	Football, Cricket and swimming Computer Club CV assistance

Activities in schools

Dads Zone (Beech Hill Primary School)	The first session will start on Sat 6th Dec (Dads Zone)	Has not yet started
Most Valuable Parent (Downside Junior School)	Monthly Sunday Dads and kids play	8-10 Dads
Downside Infant school	Badminton (in partnership with voluntary organisation NGS)	
Crawley Green Infant School	Play zone: Dedicated club for children and Fathers/Male Carers, Monthly (Saturdays)	

Children's Centres work with fathers

ARC (CC)	Fortnightly Stay and Play
Chapel St (CC)	Regular Weekend Trips
Allow (CC)	Occasional sports activities
Denbigh (CC)	ICT classes for dads
Greenside (CC)	Fathers section website
Hart Hill (CC)	Saturday Allotment Club aimed at Male carers
Leo cubs (CC)	Dads day Event
Lewsey (CC)	One off events held for male carers
Marsh Farm (CC)	Dads group starting Saturdays
Pastures Way (CC)	Dads and Co Monthly Saturdays

Luton Pre School Learning Alliance has been employed to develop work across Luton Children's Centres. They support positive practices in some centres and are facilitating father friendly activities across all children centres through a detailed Work Plan – representing a major thrust of the Children's Centre Strategy in example and leading to many examples of best practice which should now inform practice across other sectors.

Conclusion

This Document has demonstrated that progress is being made to 'Think Fathers' across many sectors and communities. Much of the feedback from fathers attending services and from those directly involved in providing services to parents, children and local communities is encouraging. It suggests that the approach increasingly offered through many of Luton Children's Centres, particular school is in line with the needs of fathers accessing those services. Similar feedback was received with regard to a number of voluntary sector organisations, particularly those working closely with Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

These providers also evidence an awareness of the importance of recording fathers' contact details as a key component in engaging with fathers. Feedback suggests that these settings are providing activities and events that are making their services increasingly accessible to fathers, grandfathers and other male carers.

The Document also showed that further consultation is required to find out what fathers in different communities want from local services for parents, children and young people and their families. We need to carry out further consultation, linked to the Father's Network, before deciding whether a specific Father's Strategy would be appropriate for Luton or whether an alternative strategic document would best promote working with fathers in Luton – for example through the revised Positive Parenting Strategy, the original version of which is generally seen as father focused but insufficiently linked to outcomes. The Father's Network also needs to be more explicitly linked to the Parent Support Strategy Group.

Services need to consider how they might most effectively engage with fathers – placing particular emphasis on the timing and location of activities. A variety of activities are needed to engage with different fathers, with increased flexibility about when services are held and the use of more community venues including greater use of schools, community centres and children centres should be considered. Providers of parenting courses will be encouraged to deliver father only sessions, courses and to ensure that all courses promote the positive engagement of fathers (except in specific instances where there are welfare and safety issues for other family members).

As a means to seeing the employment of more male Father's Workers the development of generic Father's Worker Job Descriptions will be considered by the Parenting Support Strategy Group. The desirability of employing more male workers within settings, either as full or part time male Family Workers or Father's Workers was emphasised. Deploying staff already based within settings to encourage father engagement through particular events was also suggested – with examples that Sports Development officers in certain schools had successfully fulfilled such a role.

The development of a local Father's Network is seen as offering increased opportunities for fathers to engage with networked services delivered across children's centres, schools and through voluntary sector input. The Network is demonstrating a capacity to expand across the Borough and a 'Luton Father's "Best Practice Network Evening"' is now planned for June, 2009. This Network should also help Father Workers feel less isolated in their role – identified as a factor behind the decision of some of the first Father's Workers appointed in Luton to move on after a limited time in their innovative roles.

Raising awareness of the importance of fathers' roles in their children's upbringing and education needs further promotion. A Parenting Commissioning Team Service Mapping exercise will lead to greater publicity of current services for fathers through the Children and Family Information Service and other local media. Diverse FM, a local radio station, has already signed up to regularly promoting information about such services.

Whilst there is a focus on taking a proactive approach across many of the settings identified in this Document, the process has clearly illustrated that a more strategic approach is required across the Borough, building upon the strategic leadership being provided through the Parent Support Strategy Group and the Family Support Commissioning Review process. The 'Think Fathers' campaign, launched on March 25th will provide an opportunity to develop an increased momentum in Borough wide initiatives to engage with fathers. This is expected to provide an opportunity to link existing and developing Father's Forums explicitly with the Parent Support Strategy Group. This may see the development of a Shadow Board, along the lines successfully established in Nottingham, in the longer term.

On April 1st, 2009 Luton's Parenting Commissioner received an invitation to act as a local 'Think Fathers Champion' from Richard Stubbs, Project Administrator for the Think Father's Campaign. This development creates an opportunity to promote the Think Father's approach across Luton, securing support from strategic management and strategic boards, as is already underway with Think Family in Luton, following the Parenting Support Strategy Group on March 24th, 2009.

This Document, linked to the Think Fathers campaign, will serve to spread good practice across the town, promoting the use of father friendly practices promoting the employment of more Father Workers across local services.

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Appendix 1

Luton Population: 184,371 at the time of the 2001 Census Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics

Ethnic group/sub-group		Population	Proportion compared to national average	
White		132,566	71.9%	Luton
			90.9%	National
	British	119,793	64.9%	Luton
			86.9%	National
	Irish	8,569	4.64%	Luton
			1.27%	National
	Other	4,204	2.28%	Luton
			2.66%	National
Mixed		4,728	2.56%	Luton
			1.30%	National
	White and Black Caribbean	2,414	1.30%	Luton
			0.47%	National
	White and Black African	389	0.21%	Luton
			0.15%	National
	White and Asian	1,058	0.57%	Luton
			0.37%	National
	Other mixed	867	0.47%	Luton
			0.30%	National

Ethnic group/sub-group		Population	Proportion compared to national average	
Asian		33,677	18.2%	Luton
			4.57%	National
	Indian	7,538	4.08%	Luton
			2.09%	National
	Pakistani	17,012	9.22%	Luton
			1.43%	National
	Bangladeshi	7,641	4.14%	Luton
			0.56%	National
	Other Asian	1,486	0.80%	Luton
			0.48%	National

Black		11,684	6.33%	Luton
			2.30%	National
	Caribbean	7,653	4.15%	Luton
			1.14%	National
	African	3,204	1.73%	Luton
			0.96%	National
	Other Black	827	0.44%	Luton
			0.19%	National

Chinese		1,096	0.59%	Luton
			0.44%	National

Other ethnic group		620	0.33%	Luton
			0.43%	National