

ANCHOR EVALUATION

Report to Shetland Islands Council

Abstract

The third evaluation of the Anchor Project presents findings from recent research and findings from earlier evaluation activity. The report also proposes key learning and recommendations designed to inform future activity.

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Anderson Solutions (Consulting) Limited
Registered Address: 29 Hailes Avenue, Edinburgh, EH13 0LZ
Registered Number: SC339229
VAT Registration Number: 928 9976 43

www.andersonsolutions.co.uk

Executive Summary

The Anchor Project is a four-year early action system change project funded by the National Lottery Communities Fund and in its later stages also The Promise Scotland. The Project is designed to give families and services space to try new ways of working together and is due to conclude in March 2023.

The third evaluation of the Project is informed by monitoring and interview data provided by Project Officers and consultations undertaken by Anderson Solutions.

Aim

The Project works with families who are struggling to cope with their current circumstances, but who have not yet reached a crisis.

The aim of the Anchor Project is to:

facilitate learning and action that demonstrates the value of family-led problem solving and early intervention.

Rationale for the Project

There are weaknesses in the current system of support which limit its benefit to families. Understanding the impact of these systemic weaknesses on families has improved because of the Anchor Project. The weaknesses include service-led rather than family-led service delivery, late rather early intervention, insufficient capacity, and family-based barriers to engagement.

The family-led approach of the Anchor Project is designed to mitigate these systemic weaknesses. The Anchor Project is designed to result in better outcomes for families because its approach looks at the whole family, is led by family priorities, explores root causes of problems, and improves connections between families and existing services.

The expectation is that Anchor support helps families to avoid or halt a worsening situation, thereby reducing future harm to the family and supporting better family outcomes.

A changing environment and a changing delivery model

The Anchor Project has evolved in its four-year lifetime. The Covid pandemic, swiftly followed by a cost-of-living crisis were significant and unforeseen events which have impacted on families. The Project has adapted to its own learning and in response to needs which have arisen due to the crises. The current range of family support services provided by the Anchor Project are described under three headings¹:

- **Family-led planning and support** – an in-depth support service usually provided to a parent/carer and designed to deliver against the aim and rationale described above.
- **Enquiry response service** – guidance on a specific issue and/or signposting to other services. This is a lighter touch service also helping to mitigate some of the systemic weaknesses.
- **Crisis support** – a new and time-limited response service from Anchor to help families cope with external and universal shocks. This was an unforeseen role that grew in response to need.

In the most recent period, there has been an average of 2.2 FTE Project Officers delivering all three types of service. In the first two years, there were 1.4 FTE Project Officers.

¹ These descriptions were developed to support evaluation analysis and reporting.

Impact on families

Over the duration of the Anchor Project, 67 different families have benefitted from the Family-led Planning and Support service, with some returning for follow-up support. The average time a Project Officer spends supporting a family is around 11 hours, including direct and indirect support. There is reassuring consistency in the evaluation findings on the impact of the Project on families across all three evaluations.

The findings show that the Family-led Planning and Support service provides supported individuals with confidence and a feeling of being more in control, and this appears key to the Project's and the family's success.

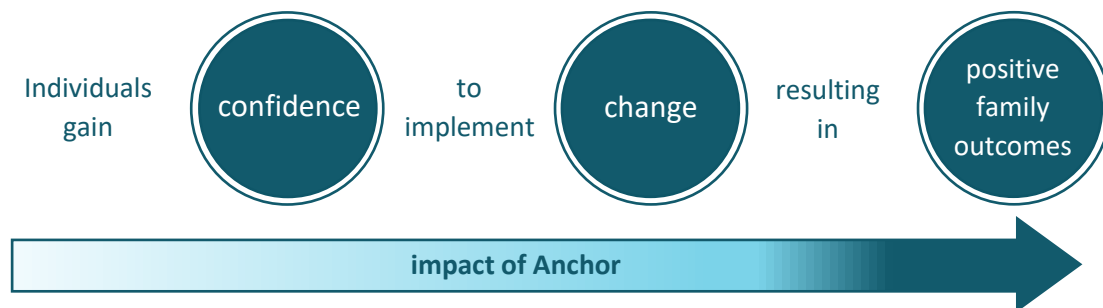
Findings from the second and third evaluations show that the individual often attributes this confidence boost and feeling of control to one or more of the following:

- they gain reassurance from being listened to;
- they realise that improving their situation is possible; and/or
- they feel supported to make a change.

An improvement in confidence and sense of control, and encouragement from the Project Officer, supports individuals to take actions or make changes that in hindsight most respondents do not believe they could have taken without Anchor support. The type of actions and changes include accessing practical support and benefits, better relationships with their child's school, pursuing new opportunities such as employment or training, and accessing new services and support.

The implemented changes often lead to benefits for the whole family. Common benefits include:

- improved financial circumstances for the family;
- a calmer and more settled family life, with family members experiencing less stress; and
- improvements in child's or children's wellbeing and behaviour.



When asked what it is about Anchor that helps them, one person appeared to sum up many of the comments by saying "someone to listen and get things moving". Supported individuals commonly believe Anchor is effective because of the following characteristics: officers are friendly and approachable, the individual feels listened to, and they receive support to act.

The impact described is from research with families who have received help from the Family-led Planning and Support service. There is more limited information on the impact of the other two services: the Enquiry Response Service and the Crisis Response Service. Monitoring data shows the Enquiry Response Service has supported 106 individuals with guidance and signposting since the Project commenced. Consultees suggest that the crisis response actions undertaken by Anchor have provided new knowledge and insights on current challenges for families and have given the Project a much higher profile locally, encouraging more engagement with the services. Since the crisis response service commenced, at the peak of demand, food parcels were being provided to 86 families and fuel vouchers to 45 families.

A lasting impact?

The rationale for the Anchor Project's Family-led Planning and Support service is that it can help avoid or halt a worsening situation for families. It is therefore important to consider whether, after the support has ended, the family is on a different and better pathway. While it is relatively early to comprehensively judge long-term success, a case study in the main report offers encouraging evidence that for one family, family-based barriers to engagement with the wider support system have been overcome to the benefit of the family.

Impact on the wider system

Given its ambitions, the Anchor Project could reasonably be expected to contribute to change in three areas associated with system and culture change: policy and strategy, language, and service design.

The Anchor Project, led by its Board, sponsored a person-centred vision in late 2020 describing how households in Shetland will be supported in the future. Consultees report that the language of this vision is in regular use in strategic meetings in Shetland. There is also a commitment to early action in Shetland Islands Council's current Corporate Plan. Both the vision and the Corporate Plan are potentially impactful although there is limited evidence, they have trickled down to mainstream decision-making as yet, although the focused research activity for the evaluation may have missed some examples of success.

In terms of system change, of greatest consequence is the decision to evolve the family support activities of the Anchor Project into an expanded service called [Anchor for Families](#). The evolution of the Anchor Project into a new and expanded service is a convincing and significant sign of the Project's success in providing valuable and effective support to families.

Understandably, much of the Project effort in 2022 focused on creating Anchor for Families, the new service, and providing support to families during the cost-of-living crisis. However, this effort inevitably comes at a cost to other activity and consultees report there has been a reduction in effort at a partnership and strategic level – activity which was highly praised in the first and second evaluation. There may be a sense with the creation of Anchor for Families that the job of the Anchor Project has been completed, but some consultees feel differently. Consultees still believe there is work to be done and the following questions remain around the Project's impact on wider system change:

- How can learning from the Anchor Project be used to influence service design in established services?
- How can system change and the introduction of new services such as Anchor for Families be managed in a more cohesive manner?

Learning, observations, and recommendations for Anchor for Families

The Anchor Project's evolution into Anchor for Families means that observations and issues raised by consultees could be used to inform development of the new service. There are three areas where feedback has been turned into recommendations: clarity of role, value for money, and robust and efficient processes and systems.

Clarity of role

The blurred line between the Anchor Project and Anchor for Families has added complexity to the evaluation process, and this uncertainty is echoed in comments from all types of consultee. There is a sense from consultees that Anchor is at another crossroads where confusion is emerging amongst Board members, staff, and partner agencies, and this creates longer-term risks for the service. The following recommendations are made around clarity of role:

- Review and clearly specify the intended outcomes from Anchor for Families, and particularly who and where the target beneficiaries are, and how they are expected to benefit.
- Clearly describe the range of activities Anchor for Families will deliver to achieve the intended outcomes, and under which circumstances these activities will be delivered. It can also be useful to state activity which Anchor for Families will seek to avoid delivering.
- Describe how Anchor for Families fits into the wider system of universal and specialist support services, including other new and similar services.

Value for money

Until now Anchor's success has been judged on whether it met project objectives set for it as a learning and development project and, against these original objectives, the Anchor Project has been a success. However, the value for money calculation will change now that Anchor can be viewed as a new service and in receipt of funding that could feasibly be spent elsewhere in Shetland. The following recommendations are made:

- Develop a new logic model for Anchor for Families that shows how investment is linked to action and improved family outcomes.
- Define and agree the wider systemic benefit expected from Anchor support, for example fewer social work referrals, and put in place standards and processes which can be used to reliably measure impact over time. Establishing a baseline is also recommended.
- Collect feedback from supported families by building in efficient monitoring and evaluation to the everyday activity of Project Officers. Investigate adding feedback checkpoints to the Anchor process for Family-led Planning and Support interventions.

Robust, efficient, and effective processes

Anchor's success is commonly attributed to the people who have been managing and delivering it. A small initiative can work well with relatively informal systems and processes, often wholly reliant on direct communication between people. As initiatives grow, assuring the same success will usually require more formalised systems and processes. Challenges encountered when the Anchor Project expanded to include additional staff have already led to some improvements such as the creation of a senior coordinator and formal supervision activities with officers. The following recommendations are made to support robust processes:

- Review current Anchor processes and identify where time consuming and low skill activity is tying up valuable resource.
- More automated data sharing is expected to be one key target for improvement, benefiting both Anchor and other services. The recommendation is to appraise existing Council information systems to understand the pros and cons of utilising different systems.
- Once the above recommendations have been implemented, evaluate the options for improved process and system efficiency and their associated costs and benefits.

Conclusion

The Anchor Project was given the space and time to make a difference to families, and it has. Anchor has shown that meaningful change for families can be achieved through a service delivery model that is approachable, flexible, and led by family priorities. It has also demonstrated that positive family outcomes can come from small interventions. Compelling evidence of its success is the transition of the family support element of the Project into a new service Anchor for Families.

The Anchor Project, and those who champion it, have also significantly impacted wider discussion around a more person and family-led approach to service delivery, a change also supported by Government policy and other local initiatives. More widespread system change will take time, and will be challenging, but there are still opportunities for the Anchor Project and its Board to benefit a wider change process. Therefore, as the Project reaches its conclusion, it will be important to synthesise the learning gained, both good and bad, to ensure it can be communicated in a meaningful way to those who continue to pursue a more person and family-led system of support.

1 Introduction

The Anchor Project is a time limited research and development project overseen by a partnership of public and third sector organisations. The four-year Project was created with funding from [The National Lottery Community Fund](#) from its Early Action Systems Change Fund. Additional funding was provided by [The Promise Scotland](#) in 2020.

The Anchor Project is designed to give families and services space to try new ways of working together. The Project works with families who are struggling to cope with their current circumstances but have not yet reached a crisis or situation which requires intervention from statutory services. The Project is intended to have two different but connected outcomes:

- the supported families improve their situation, and avoid potential crisis; and
- the wider support system in Shetland changes to provide more early action support which better meets the needs of families.

The system change outcome is the ultimate purpose of the Project, as directed by the Fund's name: Early Action Systems Change Fund. When the Anchor Project was designed, it was decided that the best way to support system change was to actively test a new approach to family support to collect and provide evidence of what works.

The Anchor Project commenced in December 2018 and concluded in March 2023. A leaflet developed in the early stages of the Project stated, 'We have an ambitious vision for change and know that four years is unlikely to see it fully realised but we hope to demonstrate the value of thinking and acting differently to resolve problems we too often feel powerless to address.'

Prior to the Project's conclusion, it was decided on the basis of the evidence collected that the Project should evolve into a new and expanded service called [Anchor for Families](#), which has received four years of [Whole Family Wellbeing Funding](#) from the Scottish Government. The evolution of the Anchor Project into a new and expanded service is a convincing and significant sign of the Project's success in providing valuable and effective support to families and providing the evidence to demonstrate its success.

Role of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to answer the questions:

- What has been the impact of the support provided by Anchor Project Officers on the supported families?
- How sustainable is the impact of Anchor support on families that no longer actively receive support from Anchor Project Officers?
- How effective are the monitoring and communication activities for the Anchor Project so that learning is shared with those outside the project?
- How well has Anchor supported a shift in attitudes and opinions in the wider support system?
- Has a shift in attitudes and opinions led to new or different policy, approaches, or activity in the wider support system?
- How can the cost effectiveness of Anchor best be assessed, either now or over time.

Methodology

The report presents findings from the third evaluation process for the Anchor Project. Information from previous strategy and evaluation activity to support the analysis is included as appropriate. Anderson Solutions is fortunate to have supported the Anchor Project since its early days and this experience is

drawn on as appropriate. The report is not a summative evaluation, and to understand the Project well it is recommended that the two previous evaluation reports are also reviewed.

The evaluation is informed by the plan developed as a logic model in the early days of the Project and the accompanying monitoring and evaluation framework. The model for evaluation used Project Officers to undertake research tasks so that respondents might feel most comfortable in describing their progress and so that Officers could learn directly. Anderson Solutions designed all research tools and conducted consultations and desk research. The research tasks included:

- consultations with five Project staff and four Board members;
- Family Centred Impact Assessment (FCIA) undertaken by Anchor Project Officers, with support and training from Anderson Solutions; and
- a desk review of activity and financial data provided by the Anchor Project.

The FCIA is a bespoke monitoring and evaluation toolkit developed to evaluate the Anchor Project's direct support to families. The interviews for the FCIA are undertaken by Anchor Project Officers so that families are as comfortable as possible sharing their experience. The FCIA aims to understand the benefit families gain from Anchor support, the importance of that support, and the characteristics that people most like about the support. There are four different questionnaires in the FCIA which are used by Anchor Project Officers in the following ways:

- The first questionnaire is used in interviews with individuals who have recently received support to understand the benefit to them and their family, and the role and importance of Anchor support in securing those benefits.
- A second form is used by Project Officers to record their own observations on the support provided to the family and the benefits achieved.
- An adapted questionnaire is used with individuals who have not been in receipt of support from Anchor for some time to explore the extent to which benefit has been sustained.
- A fourth questionnaire is used by Project Officers to interview school staff and professionals who refer families to Anchor to collect their perspective on the benefit of Anchor support to the families they know.

The FCIA is designed to triangulate findings from different sources to get a rounded view of benefit to families, and the role Anchor plays in helping families to secure that benefit. Anderson Solutions undertook all analysis and reporting.

Report structure

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 describes the Anchor Project in further detail;
- Section 3 explores the impact of the Anchor Project on the families it has supported;
- Section 4 explores the impact of the Project on the wider system and issues for consideration by the Early Action Programme Board; and
- Section 5 identifies key learning points and provides recommendations to those managing the new Anchor for Families service.

2 The Anchor Project

Responsibility for delivering the Anchor Project sat with the Early Action Programme Board (formerly the Anchor Project Board), the Early Action Programme Manager, and the Anchor Project Officers. Section 2 describes the Anchor Project in further detail including:

- the Project's aim and objectives;
- the underpinning rationale for early action;
- its delivery method, which has changed over time; and
- the investment and staff resource available to the Project since it commenced.

Aim and objectives

The aim of the Anchor Project is:

to facilitate learning and action that demonstrates the value of family-led problem solving and early intervention.

The objectives of the Project are to:

- facilitate family led problem-solving;
- record and share learning on barriers and opportunities for family-led problem-solving; and
- facilitate system change.

The Project was designed to achieve these objectives through the following activities:

- Working directly with families to discuss their needs and facilitate problem-solving, engaging with existing services to secure support for family-led solutions as necessary.
- Collaboration with strategic, network, and community partners to ensure delivery of aim and objectives.
- Delivery of a learning and communications plan so that learning is recorded and shared to enable continuous Project improvement and to inform wider improvement.
- The sharing and promotion of evidence from the Project with partners to inform and influence decision-makers.

Rationale for the Anchor approach and early action

Anchor works directly with families so that evidence on what is effective can be used to inform and stimulate a wider systemic shift towards early action. However, influencing such a shift in approach in the wider system is not easy – and 'early' action may be defined differently in different contexts.

The rationale for the Anchor approach has strengthened over time and the description which follows has been drawn from previous work and the findings of the third evaluation.

There are four interconnected characteristics of the current support system which define the rationale for the Anchor Project and its support for family-led problem-solving:

- Families receive support from a **service-led system**, which compartmentalises a family's issues and may only address isolated issues in a more complex and challenging whole family environment.
- Additional and meaningful **support often begins late** in a family's journey towards crisis, resulting in poorer outcomes for the family and high financial cost to the services.
- The support system has **limited capacity to provide early action** in its current form. Capacity is influenced by financial resource, staffing, knowledge, skills, and efficiency.

- **Barriers to engagement** hinder early connection between families, who have a need for support, and existing services which can offer early support.

All four are discussed further below.

A service-led system. Existing universal and specialist public sector services for families are service led, i.e., the service defines the offer to families, with different professions often operating within clearly understood boundaries. However, a family may not often be experiencing an isolated issue, or the service may be helping a family to address a symptom not the cause. Therefore, a service-led response can fail to support the potential improvement available to a family because indicators of need for a different type of support can be missed or not responded to. Recognition of this issue has led to new Scottish Government policy around ‘Whole Family Support’.

Late intervention. The current system of support is largely driven by public sector services which often, by definition, only step in once a family has begun to experience a specific type of crisis. Stepping in late to a family’s journey towards crisis is costly to both public sector finances and to families. Providing meaningful support only once a crisis has occurred is likely to require more intensive and therefore expensive intervention and may mean some opportunities for better family outcomes have gone forever or are more difficult to pursue². Recognition of this issue, particularly the consequences for families, is leading to an increasing focus on the benefit of ‘early action’ across Scotland.

Insufficient capacity. There are multiple reasons which can help to explain why the current system is designed in this way, including specialism versus generalism, but another explanation for the focus on crisis support is capacity. The capacity to provide early action and whole family support is influenced by financial resource, staffing, knowledge, skills, and efficiency. For example, if a professional is supporting a family, they may well recognise that there is a further need for support but may not have the skills, capacity, or knowledge of alternative services to help the family to address it. Furthermore, the ‘system’ is constrained by finite financial resources which inevitably limits the scope and scale of available services. These challenges are not new, and there are multiple and ongoing initiatives aimed at improving the capacity to provide better support to families, including partnership working at strategic and operational levels, workforce development, and the type of change funds which are supporting Anchor.

Barriers to engagement. There are many services in the public, third, and private sectors that are designed to offer support to individuals outside of crisis situations, and yet people who could benefit do not always access these services, with some ending up in crisis as a result. Therefore, it is unlikely that fixing the problems described above will solve everything. There are also barriers which exist between people in need and services which could provide support³.

Anchor Project Officers have found that as they get to know the system better and as more people contact them, they are increasingly signposting individuals to existing services. Indicating that in some cases it is a lack of information or awareness of available support that is standing in the way of engagement. However, addressing an information failure is not always a sufficient response because other family-based barriers may also exist. For example, they may not understand the solutions or help they need, or they may be struggling personally because of challenging conditions and reaching out to services may just feel too difficult. Previous evaluations, backed by findings in this evaluation, show that

² A comparative illustration between the potential support to a family where intervention is service-led and focused on statutory or crisis intervention and the potential support to a family under an early action model was contained in the second evaluation report [Year 2 evaluation of Anchor project \(shetland.gov.uk\)](https://www.shetland.gov.uk/evaluation-reports/Year-2-evaluation-of-Anchor-project).

³ The second evaluation report also discussed barriers. The original barriers have been refined further in response to learning from the third evaluation process and inform the wider rationale described above.

in some cases taking the time to build a trusting relationship between an individual and a Project Officer will bring down the barriers described above, build the confidence of the individual, and lead to significant and lasting benefits for families experiencing challenging circumstances.

Project Officers identified the following can be barriers to engagement:

- the individual does not recognise the potential value of support or is not ready to ask for help;
- they misdiagnose the problem or the potential solution;
- they are unaware that support exists which could help them;
- they are unwilling to access support because of a previous negative experience; and/or
- they might simply be too exhausted from dealing with day-to-day challenges to seek help, with poor mental wellbeing a common factor.

Approach and intended benefit of Anchor

The justification for the family-led problem-solving approach of the Anchor Project is that it will mitigate the weaknesses described in the rationale and result in better outcomes for families because it:

- looks at the family as a whole;
- helps families to address the root causes of their challenges; and
- removes barriers to engagement between families and existing services; and
- helps families to address issues before they escalate into more complex crises.

Which can lead to the following outcomes:

- improved family life in the short to medium-term;
- better longer-term outcomes for children and adults in the family;
- fewer families reaching crisis; and
- therefore, a reduced need for intensive and expensive crisis services.

Investment in the Anchor Project

The investment of resource into Anchor takes two forms:

- financial investment; and
- senior management time to support and guide the Project, through both the Board and supervision support.

Financial investment

The financial expenditure on the Anchor Project was expected to be in the region of £495,000 by the end of March 2023. Almost all the expenditure (98%) is funded by external national organisations, with approximately 70% from the Communities Fund, and 28% from Promise Scotland. The remainder of the funding (2%) was contributed by Police Scotland and Shetland Islands Council. From a Council perspective, for every £1 of Council spend, the Anchor Project attracted £63 of external funding.

Senior leadership time

The structure of the Anchor Project included a Project Board which met quarterly and had two tiers: a Core Board and a Wider Board. The Board was Chaired by the Chief Inspector and Shetland Area Commander for Police Scotland. Others in the Core Board included directors and senior managers from NHS Shetland, Shetland Islands Council, Integrated Joint Board, and Voluntary Action Shetland. The Wider Board included managers from many of the same organisations. The Board evolved over time and transformed into the Early Action Programme Board in May 2021.

The Anchor Project Board had two primary roles. This first was to support implementation of Anchor by enabling connections and removing blockages. The second was to embed the learning from the Anchor Project into their own area of responsibility. To achieve this the Project Board established a clear vision to have in place strong working relationships: respect each other; trust each other; learn from each other; value each other equally, recognising everyone has something to bring to the project; openness and honesty.

The successful development of the Project Board demanded time and energy from Board members, and in the first phase of Anchor their commitment undoubtedly helped the Project to thrive and make progress against its objectives.

Staff resource

A senior officer has managed the Anchor Project on a part-time basis since its inception, first as part of another role and later as part of the Early Action Programme Manager's role. The service was delivered by two part-time Project Officers from 2019 through to late 2022. The two officers were joined by additional staff resource drawn from existing services to boost capacity for two periods during the Project. The first period was described as the Early Help Team, where staff were loaned to the Anchor Project, and the second period was when funding from The Promise Scotland allowed staff from a diverse range of services to be seconded on a part-time basis to the role of Anchor Project Officers. All the additional staff remained in their substantive post but made a set number of hours per week available to the Early Help Team/Anchor Project. The amount of staff resource available to Anchor has hovered between 1.4 FTE and 2.4 FTE during the Project's lifetime.

A changing environment

The Anchor Project has evolved in its four-year lifetime. The Covid pandemic, swiftly followed by a cost-of-living crisis were significant and unforeseen events which have had the following impacts on the Anchor Project:

- The Covid pandemic accelerated the desire and commitment to pursue a new way of working with individuals and families, effectively reducing the requirement on the Project to 'prove' the value of more family-led support and early action.
- The Covid pandemic and the subsequent Cost of Living crisis created new challenges for families and therefore new demands for support for which there was no single obvious delivery mechanism within the established system of support.

Another event which had an impact on the Project was the approval of an application for additional funding from The Promise Scotland, which boosted the capacity of the Project.

Delivery of direct family support

The knock-on effect of the events described above is that the management and delivery of the Anchor Project evolved to deliver a wider range of services. For the benefit of the evaluation, the services delivered by Anchor are described under three headings:

- **Family-led planning and support** – an in-depth support service where an Anchor Project Officer formally agrees to work with an individual to explore, plan, and implement family-led action to improve their family's situation.
- **Enquiry response service** – following one or two contacts with an individual, an Anchor Project Officer will either offer guidance on a specific issue and/or signpost the individual to specialist support.

- **Crisis support** – a new and time-limited response service from Anchor to help families cope with an external and universal shock. Anchor has undertaken this role twice, the first time in response to the pandemic and the second time in response to the cost-of-living crisis. Connections made through crisis support activity may lead to further engagement as described above.

Table 1 shows the number of FTE⁴ staff and the activity level for the Project’s support services.

Table 1: Staffing resource and number of families supported in each evaluation period by service received			
	Dec 19 – Aug 21 (21 months) ^a	Sep 21 – Jun 22 (10 months)	Jul 22 – Jan 23 (7 months)
Number of FTE Project Officers	1.4	2.4	2.2 (average)
Family-led planning & support (67 different families across all periods)	20 families	30 families	30 families
Guidance and signposting	56 individuals	36 individuals	14 individuals
Crisis support – food parcels	62 households per month from Spring 2020	86 households per month	56 households per month
Crisis support – fuel vouchers	not applicable	data not available	45 households since 1/9/22

^a a date correction for data presented in previous evaluation report

All data provided by Anchor Project Officers

The three different forms of support provided by Anchor are described in more detail below.

Family-led planning and support

The title of family-led planning and support is intended to differentiate this more intensive family support provided by Anchor Project Officer’s from other activities undertaken by Project Officers. When providing family-led planning and support, the Project Officers’ remit is to work closely with individuals to support them to overcome challenges they are facing in their family unit. When working with an individual, Anchor Project Officers work with them to break-down challenges into issues for which specific action can be taken or support can be sought. This is the direct delivery support that was envisaged when Anchor was devised. It is also this more in-depth support service that is the subject of the FCIA.

Figure 1 simplifies the process which is followed when an individual is connected to Anchor. The connection can be made by another service referring families to Anchor, or an individual can self-refer via a direct message on Facebook, by phone, or via an [online form](#).

Once a connection is made, the enquiry will be assessed and flow through the process described in Figure 1. If put forward for the family-led planning and support, the senior Anchor coordinator will allocate a Project Officer to the family based on location and need. Early conversations are used to develop a better understanding of the individual’s circumstances and build a relationship.

⁴ FTE is calculated as 37 hours per week.

Before progressing any further, the service is clearly explained to the individual and they are asked to sign an agreement to work with Anchor. This agreement allows a certain degree of data sharing with service providers as well as confirming the individual's agreement to participate and the support they can expect to receive.

The discussions then progress to at least one cycle of problem identification, planning, and action. The support from Anchor is not time limited but the Project Officer will encourage the individual to act and will then check-in with the individual to reflect on progress. After one cycle, both parties might agree that the original goals have been achieved and that there is no need to continue working together, but there is no hard-stop and in Figure 1 this is described as an Open Exit, because the individual can reconnect with Anchor whenever they choose.

Guidance and signposting

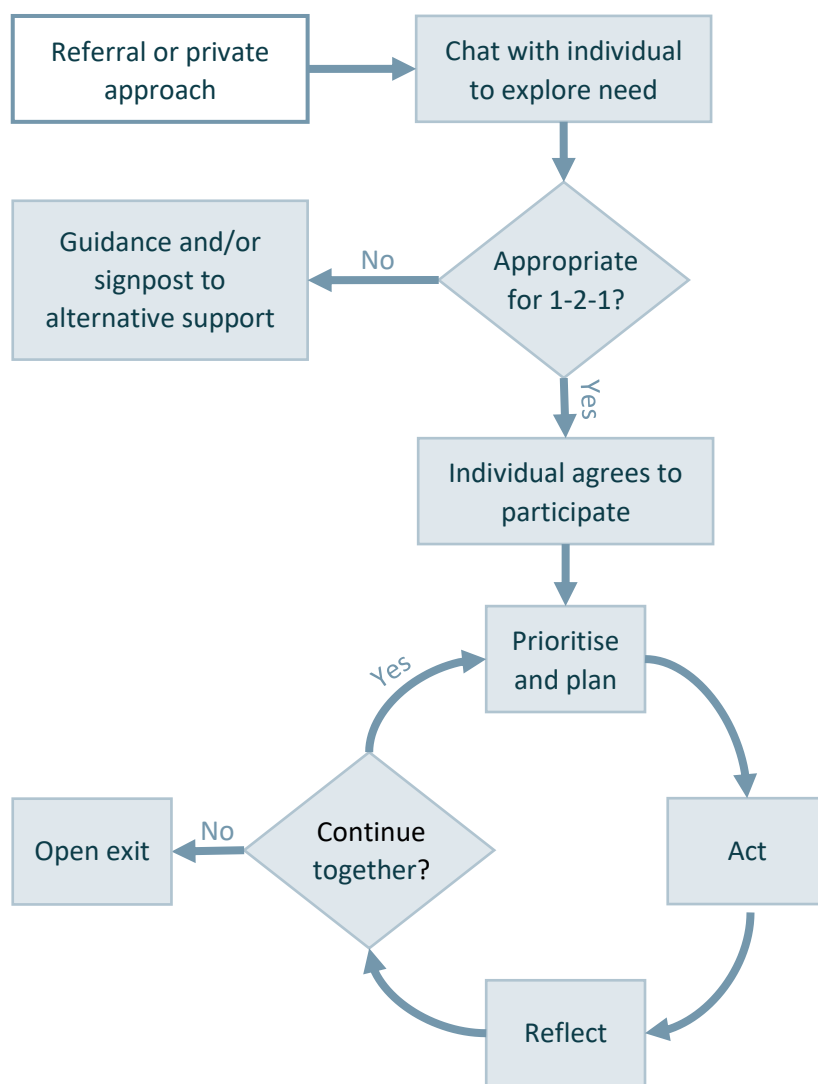
If, at the beginning of the process described in Figure 1, initial discussions show that the need is clear, and the most effective support is to supply information or guidance and/or signpost the individual to an existing service then this is what the Officer will do. This can be done quickly if the enquiry from the individual has an obvious response, and the individual is willing to pursue it.

Crisis support service

It was not anticipated at the beginning of the Anchor Project that the crisis support role would be part of the Project but, as needs in the community arose, the Project had the flexibility, capacity, and cross-agency relationships required to respond effectively. The crisis support provided during the pandemic was described in the second evaluation report. In 2022 the range of crisis support provided or coordinated by the Anchor Project but not promoted under the Anchor brand, included:

- Participation in a coordinated response to the cost-of-living crisis, including partial staffing of a helpline; and
- Coordination of St Ringans Hub and other pop-up locations to provide children's clothing and cold weather items such as blankets, duvets, hot water bottles, and thermos flasks. The hub is also partially staffed by Anchor Project Officers.

Figure 1: Anchor Process



This has inevitably absorbed some of the Project's capacity but has also had benefits. It has provided the Officers with good knowledge of the issues that families are facing in the current crisis, and it provides families with an access route to the other support services provided by Anchor.

For general support in making sure your household is receiving all the financial support and benefits you're entitled to, speaking to services on your behalf, practical help and a friendly ear contact the **Anchor for Families** Team or phone our central Council number.

0800 0308780 • anchor@shetland.gov.uk
www.shetland.gov.uk/family-support/anchor-early-action

A leaflet arising from the coordinated cost of living response describes the Anchor Project (see above), already being referred to as Anchor for Families. It is interesting to note that the paragraph focuses on advice around financial support, and this may have influenced recent activity as Project Officers have noted that a higher proportion of contacts are focused on relatively straightforward practical support, such as enquiries around benefits.

3 Impact on families

Section 3 provides analysis of findings from the Family Centred Impact Assessment (FCIA), an evaluation process only undertaken with families who have received family-led planning and support. In 2022, 12 supported individuals were interviewed for the FCIA out of 30 individuals who were supported.

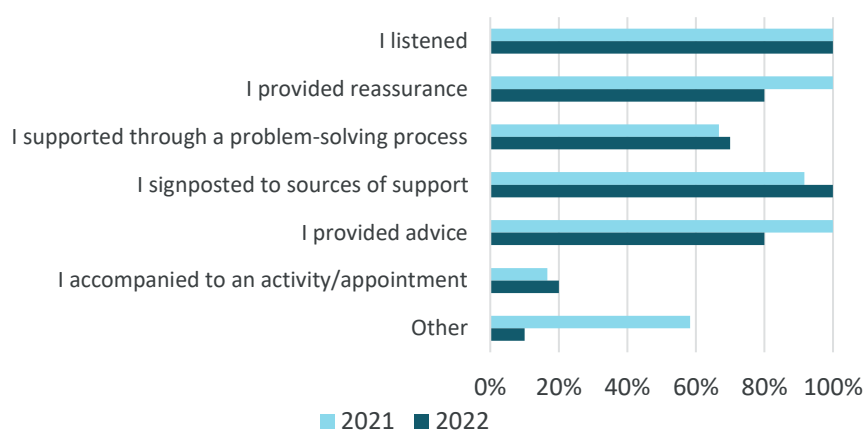
All the families who participated in the FCIA were identified and interviewed by Anchor Project Officers. The sample of people interviewed is self-selecting as potential interviewees are approached by Project Officers to participate and not all agree. The reasons for not participating are not sought but it is perhaps wise to avoid assuming that every family who interacts with Anchor achieves the same benefits as those described by interviewees. This issue was not foreseen when the FCIA was developed as all families who receive family-led planning and support are made aware of the need to contribute to the learning element of the Anchor Project. Any future monitoring and evaluation activity should consider how non-participation might best be addressed.

Support provided to families

As part of the FCIA process, Project Officers are asked to identify the type of support they provided to each family from a list of potential support types developed from early learning in the Anchor Project. Figure 2 compares the type of support provided to 10 families in 2022 compared to support provided to 12 families in 2021.

In 2022, all the families were supported by listening and with signposting to sources of support. Compared to 2021, there was a slight drop in the families who officers feel they provided reassurance and advice to. This can be explained as the interview data seems to suggest there were more families in 2022 who were primarily provided with practical support around access to benefits and vouchers, which was less evident in 2021. With a relatively small number of interviewees, it is difficult to say whether this is a change in the needs of families due to environmental factors such as the cost-of-living crisis, the promotion of Anchor as a service which provides advice on benefits, or simply a natural variation caused by the specifics of one or two interviewees.

Figure 2: The nature of support provided by Project Officers to the FCIA sample of families



Based on information on the support provided to 10 families, Project Officers provided on average 11hrs 20 minutes of direct and indirect support to families. Indirect support encompasses time working on the family’s behalf, for example exploring avenues of support. The total time spent supporting each family ranged from 4 hours to 24 hours (Table 2).

All three evaluations suggest that the average amount of time spent by a Project Officer on a family is relatively consistent, albeit with individual variation and some outliers (Table 2). Project Officers record

their own time, which may extend beyond a 12-month period. If this data is to inform future service design, it could perhaps be assumed that an average of 12 hours of Project Officer time is required per family over a twelve month period.

	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Average Project Officer hours (direct and indirect support)	11hrs 20mins	10hrs 30mins	11hrs 10mins
Variation in time spent per family	4hrs to 20hrs	2hrs to 21hrs	5hrs 30mins to 22hrs

Unlike some services, there is no limit on the time that Officers can spend with a family, and this can lead to concerns about an excessive commitment or even dependency. However, as shown above, the available data suggests an average family will require less than two days of an Officer’s time.

Furthermore, of the 20 families supported with the more intensive family-led planning support in 2020-21, the available data shows five were still in touch with Anchor in 2021-22, and three were still in touch with the service in 2022-23. This data indicates that most families will exit from support in the first year, but that a small number may require recurring episodes of support.

The presentation of findings on the family impact of Anchor support begins with a case study of one individual’s response to questions in the FCIA alongside observations by the Project Officer who supported the family. This provides a relatively succinct summary of the circumstances and type of impact which are evident in the families supported by the Project.

Support provided to Family A by Project Officer	Listening, Reassurance, Problem-solving, Signposting, Advice (Selected from a list co-designed with Project Officers)
Time spent by Project Officer	7 hours in direct contact with family, 2.5 hours of indirect support
Feedback from supported individual on benefit of Anchor support	<p>“When I first came to Anchor, I was lost, and my family had no one to turn to. I feel more able to make phone calls and attend formal meetings without too much support now, I couldn't have done that before. It has been so good to have someone to speak to about my kids too, it hasn't just helped me, but I have offloaded to you, and this has helped me be less stressed and (hopefully) I've put less pressure on my kids.”</p> <p>“We had no-one when our family hit crisis point and I wouldn't have known where to go had my friend not suggested Anchor. It feels that there’s lots of formal support services but nowhere that would sit and have a chat or come along my house.”</p> <p>“I feel more confident definitely.”</p> <p>“[Without Anchor] I would be more depressed. My kids would be worse off as I wouldn't be able to function with day-to-day tasks, it would have been a negative spiral. I'm just about keeping it together as is but with no Anchor support, I would've felt lost.”</p>
Feedback from supported individual on why Anchor makes a difference	<p>“Having a friendly approachable person to speak to in an informal way.”</p> <p>“Being able to chat and speak openly... Having someone on the end of the phone to answer any queries that have been worrying me.”</p> <p>“It's flexibility. Being able to come to the house and helping with practical stuff as well as just listening.”</p>
Additionality of Anchor support	Individual does not believe the same benefits could have been achieved without Anchor, not in a different way nor over a longer timeframe.

Project Officer comments on benefit to family	<p>“For this family it feels like Anchor acted exactly as an Anchor - to steady the rocky boat and a constant that they could turn to when they didn't know who else to speak to.”</p> <p>“Someone to speak to when they felt there was no-one else. Other services had been approached but others said that it wasn't in their remit. I think Anchor has connected the dots... with services. Anchor had an overview of what support they were receiving and could hear the benefits from the school-end, the kids were feeling more secure. I can see a change in [parent's] willingness to engage with me and others for help and feeling more able to speak up for themselves.”</p> <p>“Family still battling with a few issues, but they know that Anchor can signpost them to others if they can't receive the help themselves.”</p>
Benefits to supported individual, as observed by Project Officer	<p>Supported individual gained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new knowledge/understanding; • new perspective on the challenge(s); • more willingness to engage with support; • reassurance that their issues/concerns are important; • a new willingness to act on issues of concern; and • confidence. <p>(Selected from a list co-designed with Project Officers)</p>

The case study presented above was selected and edited to highlight benefits without revealing identifying details of the person or their family life.

The role of confidence and control in achieving change

In the earlier evaluation, individuals provided with one-to-one support used words and phrases suggesting it was improved confidence and a feeling of being more in control which enabled them to implement a change that improved their lives. Similar feedback came through in the third FCIA, for example “I feel I have more of a positive mentality”, “[I'm] feeling more confident”, “I have more confidence in asking for support” and “[I] feel more positive sometimes... has been slow but [I'm] feeling more confident”.

Individuals interviewed in 2022 often explained their statements around positivity, confidence, or control with reference to one or more of the following changes:

- They gained reassurance from being listened to, for example “been good to have someone to offload to”, “feeling listened to” and “Had a listening ear and felt supported, nice to have someone to talk to and have a coffee with”.
- They realised that improving their situation is possible “someone reassuring me that i can ask more questions about decisions and say that i am unhappy with a decision”.
- They feel supported to make a change “reassured that asking for help is positive” and “[I] feel supported”⁵.

The changes implemented

Each individual and family are unique. The intention is that by supporting an increase in confidence and sense of control, the individual is better equipped to take action, which the Anchor Project Officer also

⁵ All quotes in Section 3 are from the FCIA undertaken in 2022. In a bullet point list of quotes, each bullet point is from a different respondent. If there is more than one relevant quote from a respondent, they are included in the same bullet point. The default approach in presenting quotes is to remove references to specific services and genders to protect anonymity unless it is considered crucial to the point being made.

works with them to plan and implement. Four common types of action or change implemented by supported individuals were described in the second evaluation and are repeated here. The most recent evaluation interviews (2022) demonstrate the same type of actions and changes but there is more evidence of signposting activity, so a fifth bullet point has been added:

- accessing immediate practical support such as food parcels and vouchers;
- proactively seeking and securing practical assistance around finance, including benefits, and housing;
- developing better relationships with the school, including additional support;
- pursuing opportunities such as new employment, training, or community connections; and
- accessing new services and support.

Interviewees for the third evaluation said the following about the action they took or the changes they made because of support from Anchor:

- “Access to foodbank, fuel vouchers, cooking sessions, new bike, and someone to talk to.”
- “Knowing we are receiving all we're entitled to. Fuel bank support particularly useful.” “I have signed up for a HENRY programme and am on a waiting list for Incredible Years.”
- “Anchor has helped me share my views with the school.” “They helped me look at jobs and consider if I wanted any training.”
- “Signposted to other services – mixed experience [of services]” “Help to fill in forms [to access benefits], and spoke to school”
- “Was signposted to the service that has created a huge difference.”
- “Support with food, clothes, laptop, fuel voucher, offer of support with training - although I didn't need that bit.”
- “You sorted me out with Best Start Grants that I didn't know about, which was hugely helpful. You've helped me fill out forms. you've directed me in many ways to get me the help that I need.”
- “The Mark Brown Project was excellent, meeting some new people through this group was helpful.” “I guess the energy support has been the biggest help, to be honest. It's one less thing we need to worry about spending money on.”
- “Financial support has helped greatly with energy vouchers and practical support has been appreciated.”
- “The cooking sessions were great for me and my [child] to do together.”
- “[Anchor] offered support and ways of support and ideas. And some we used some we didn't but there was no judgement.”

Benefits to family life from the changes

The actions described above can lead to positive outcomes for the family. The previous evaluation highlighted three common but significant outcomes for families that were brought about by the changes and actions implemented through support from Anchor:

- improved financial circumstances for the family;
- a calmer and more settled family life, with family members experiencing less stress; and
- improvements in child's or children's wellbeing and behaviour.

There is again consistency between earlier evaluation findings and the interviews in 2022. Comments from the interviews in 2022 include:

- “I am less stressed, I have made ongoing links for me and my family.”
- “[We are] eating healthier, we are eating more vegetables after getting the veg boxes through Anchor.”
- “We can hopefully now get some help to give us a break and also give me time with my other child.”
- “Helped my kids to have activities, support, and fit in. This helps me feel better and takes off some pressure.”
- “Far less stressed, stress levels had gotten really high. So my stress levels are much lower, so that has to be good for the [children] too.”
- “You've made me leave my house and my [child] getting [support] is making [them] happier”

People were also asked what they think might have happened if they had been unable to get support from Anchor support. This line of questioning is an attempt to undertake counterfactual analysis to explore outcomes that did not actually occur, but which could have under different circumstances i.e., without Anchor support. Comments include:

- “[we would have] struggled, financially”
- “Not much would have changed. It got to the point where I had to choose between electricity and food. Scared about the coming winter. My mental health would perhaps be worse than it is just now.”
- “I would have felt more isolated, and I would not have got activities for the children.”
- “I would have got in a real mess with not affording food and electric and this was messing with my head.”
- “We would have been worse off for food and electric and I don't know if I would have looked at jobs so soon. The school probably would have got mad with me as I don't always answer my phone at times.”
- “Probably back on drugs.”
- “Don't know where we would be I hate to think... it was heading for a very bad place.”

What is it about Anchor?

Supported individuals were asked what it is about Anchor that has made a difference to them. The following comments sum up the type of responses received:

- “I find it hard to open up and trust folk but that hasn't been a problem with Anchor.”
- “Really supportive, especially being a single parent, questions were asked, and solutions/possible solutions given.”
- “The staff are so friendly and so welcoming. When I walked in, I felt like I was safe. For me to go into somewhere where I don't know anyone is a big deal.”
- “Actively trying to help not just say they are and not follow through. Listening and being real about what she can do. Helped me keep off the drugs. Working with Amanda at the Recovery Hub, which I didn't know existed”

At the end of the family feedback interview, each respondent was asked ‘what is the one most valuable thing about Anchor?’. The responses have been coded and the three most referenced characteristics are:

- Project officers are **friendly and approachable** “having a friendly approachable person to speak to in an informal way”.

- Linked to the earlier point, respondents highlighted the importance of **being listened to** “being able to go somewhere to vent and feel heard”.
- The **support provided** “the support, I can’t say enough how good the taking the pressure off has been” and “Someone to listen and get things moving”.

Other words and phrases used include “warm and non-judgemental”, “I trust them” and “the cup of tea was a bonus!”. Reference was also made to its flexibility, with officers able to come to the house and that they are contactable by text.

The Anchor Impact Model

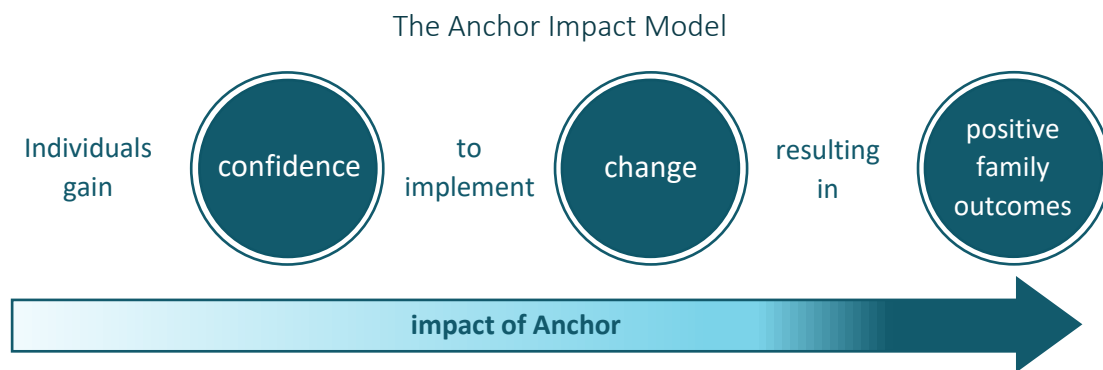
In its simplest form, the impact of Anchor support can be modelled as follows:

The Anchor Project Officer builds a supportive relationship with one key individual in the family and

→ the strengths-based approach helps the individual to gain confidence and a sense of control

→ which leads them to take positive action

→ that improves their own life and the life of their family.



Additionality associated with Anchor

The extent of additionality associated with an intervention is a vital evaluation question, essentially the question is: could the observed and experienced benefits have been achieved without the intervention? If the answer is yes, the investment in Anchor is having limited impact. Previous evaluations have all shown high additionality, and the same is observed in the latest FCIA findings. Of the 12 respondents:

- 75% said they would not have got the same benefits without Anchor, suggesting the benefits they experienced can be attributed to the Anchor support;
- 17% said they would have got the same level of benefit, but it would have taken them more than three months; and
- 8% said they would have got the same level of benefit, and it would have taken them less than three months.

Three-quarters of respondents attributed the benefits achieved to their work with Anchor. One-quarter of respondents said some benefit can be attributed to Anchor as it helped the benefits to happen earlier for the individuals and their families. A useful check is to ask these respondents how they believe they would have achieved the benefits without support from Anchor. One respondent said they were aware of some of the potential support but had been delaying pursuing it; and the other two didn’t know how else they might have achieved the same benefits. The additionality associated with Anchor support is very high and, with two of the three respondents who reported partial additionality not knowing how else the benefits might have been achieved, the findings suggest it might even be higher than indicated.

Observations from external referrers

School staff and professionals who referred families to Anchor were asked for their perspectives on the impact of the support on the families they know. Five responses were received from individuals who between them were aware of 17 families in receipt of Anchor support.

Observations on the benefit to families

The referrers were asked whether they had seen changes in the children or parents/carers of the supported families. The findings were:

- Two respondents had seen positive changes in the children of supported families, one had not. The other two did not know.
- Four respondents had seen positive changes in the parents/carers of supported families, and one did not know.

The following positive changes were seen relating to the children:

- “.. we have seen engagement at times being more positive. We know for our food parcel families the children look forward to deliveries.”
- [following clothing support] “The children were visibly happier in school wearing their new things.”

The following positive changes were observed for parents/carers:

- “I am witnessing parents become more receptive to input from relevant stakeholders. They seem assured and emboldened after interactions with the Anchor team.”
- “Better engagement and buy-in with supports for them”
- “Direct support to parents seems to have helped them resolve some financial burdens and focus on getting things sorted.”
- “The [parent] was relieved to know that this support was available. Although willing to work with other agencies previously, they had been worried about the stigma of asking for help.”

Observations on additionality

Of the four respondents to a question on the additionality of Anchor support, three did not think the positive changes could have been achieved without Anchor. One thought that the positive changes could maybe have been achieved. When all were asked to explain their perspective on the additionality of Anchor, they said:

- “It would have taken longer, and for some it might not have happened. Some haven’t needed a lot of support, if we were better equipped with up to date information we could have offered some supports.”
- “Family are not proactive in getting things done... and don’t like asking for help.”
- “Anchor were able to be directly involved in supporting and then following up this support.”
- “I believe the focus and approach of Anchor has a unique appeal to the families who use the service.”

Satisfaction

All five respondents said their experience would make them more likely to refer families to Anchor in the future. Their observations on Anchor include:

- What is it about Anchor that makes a difference?
 - “Doors and ears open! That attitude of 'give us a try and we'll see what we can do'.”

- “Time, ability to build supportive relationships and persevere with families.”
- “Someone to prompt parents... and hound them a little to get it done.”
- “I believe the approach that Anchor has adopted will only become more relevant as we move forward, and families begin to feel under attack from ever increasing directions. Anchor serves as a welcoming, non-threatening first stop for members of our community to explore their options and possibilities.”
- “We are grateful for the Anchor support we have in our school; we would like to explore how we can incorporate it further and build their presence with the school community.”
- “It’s a good support for families who need more encouragement to get things done.”
- “The Anchor staff are approachable and knowledgeable. Their input and support can often come more quickly than from other agencies.”
- “I think the Anchor team is an excellent service to help support families in Shetland.”

One referrer included a comment about how staff turnover in Anchor had caused upset for one family due to a perceived lack of engagement. However, this had been resolved and the referrer is confident that the relationship with Anchor “will be of huge benefit to the family”. With Anchor’s success so dependent on the trusting relationship built with families, it will be important for the new Anchor for Families, which is larger in scale and distribution, to have clear procedures in place for staff departures and sickness to avoid or minimise any potential loss of trust.

Legacy of Anchor support

The rationale for the Anchor Project is that it can help avoid or halt a worsening situation for families, thereby reducing future harm to the family and supporting better family outcomes. It is therefore important to consider whether Anchor support simply delays what would have happened anyway or whether the action taken by a family, with Anchor’s support, permanently improves the family’s future, i.e., the family has shifted onto a different and better pathway. This question is challenging to gather reliable information for. Not least because enough time must pass before such a judgement can be attempted, and because a family on a better pathway can still encounter challenges that may lead to difficult situations, perhaps requiring further support.

An interview questionnaire devised as part of the FCIA seeks to collect information from individuals no longer working with Anchor to investigate the extent to which they believe they are still experiencing benefit. In the previous evaluation, four interviews were undertaken, in this evaluation a single interview has been undertaken. The feedback from that interview is shared in Case Study 2.

Case Study 2: Family Centred Impact Assessment - retrospective interview with Family B	
Feedback from supported individual on whether they are still experiencing benefit of Anchor support	<p>“Yes and no. A lot has happened... [<i>potentially identifying information removed</i>]. Life has been chaotic and feeling overwhelming at times, but I’ve reached out to Anchor on 3 or 4 occasions for support because I know I can. That is different for me, I would normally avoid asking for help or not know who to bother but Anchor are easy to approach and quick to get back to me and offer advice or support.”</p> <p>“I think I have maintained some of my independence I built during our time together and if I can just get things sorted then I feel I can start a clean sheet given what we have been through.”</p>
Feedback on whether they’ve increased their contact with other services, projects, or community activities	<p>“Yes, I have increased contact.”</p> <p>“I’m still speaking with my kids’ schools and services supporting them, CAMHS etc. Anchor has made me see I need to keep being proactive in asking for help when I need it but that’s hard to do. I have reached out to a few new supports via Anchor for specific concerns with my children, I wouldn’t have known which to contact if I hadn’t emailed Anchor.”</p>

<p>Additionality of Anchor support</p>	<p>“Benefits would not have happened without Anchor support.”</p> <p>“Anchor has just made me realise that I need to accept help or even ask for it at times. Things I find hard to do, I have family but don’t ask them for help much as we aren’t close. I often feel very alone and don’t put my needs first. These are all things I chat about with Anchor, and it does help when I can put it into practice.”</p>
<p>Feedback on most valuable thing about Anchor</p>	<p>“The support they are to me and having chats about everything, big and small. I appreciate their time and the relationship we have together.”</p>

In section 2 of the Report, part of the rationale for Anchor is that there are people in need of support and services who can support them but family-based barriers to engagement mean an effective connection is not made. The feedback from the supported individual in Family B clearly demonstrates how Anchor support has helped to reduce and perhaps remove a barrier as the individual has learned how to develop better and more positive relationships with the services who can support them.

While this is just one example, it is a very encouraging example of the longer-term effectiveness of the Anchor approach, and how the Anchor approach supports confidence and better connection between family need and available support. It will be useful to attempt a follow-up interview with more families who have received the Family-led Planning Support service to find if this type of long-term impact is common.

4 Impact on the wider system

The earlier evaluation reported on how the Anchor Project, through the work of its Officers and Board, was contributing to system change. While Anchor is not the only advocate for early action in Shetland, it is an important one. Key senior stakeholders were represented on the Anchor Project Board which later became the Early Action Programme Board⁶.

The Anchor Project concluded in March 2023, and it has received good success in its visibility and recognition. The success of the Anchor Project is clearly recognised in the decision to rollover the family support services from the Project into a new service Anchor for Families.

Strategic partners and key stakeholders, particularly the schools, clearly recognise the value of the Anchor approach and have sought to support the rollover of the Project into a new service, and to increase its staffing so that it can operate in new schools across Shetland. This is a persuasive and significant indicator of successful system change through service design for the Anchor Project, as family-led early action support becomes further embedded into the school landscape.

Given its ambitions, the Anchor Project could reasonably be expected to contribute to system change in three areas: policy and strategy, language, and service design. In combination, these three factors offer a good indication of whether system change is occurring.

Policy and strategy

As reported in the previous evaluation, one action co-sponsored by the Anchor Project was the development of a new vision for household support. The vision was developed during workshops with Anchor Project Board members and invitees. The vision is focused on more person-led service delivery with early action being one of its three strategic pillars. The vision envisages that Shetland residents:

- Access **early support**: *so that residents are supported to address challenges early to avoid crisis.*
- Receive **strengths-based support**: *so that residents gain confidence and ability to enact changes that are important to them.*
- Find that **no door is the wrong door** when seeking support: *so that residents can engage with a connected and accessible system.*

The Anchor Project aligns to all three strategic outcomes described in the new vision for household support. The Project's family-led planning and support model of support to families shows commitment to supporting the families to address their own priorities (strengths-based support) and connects individuals to the most appropriate service (no door is the wrong door). The location of Project Officers within schools, and the relationships the Officers build with school staff, is designed to connect families to support in response to early indicators of problems (early action).

An evaluation of the Early Action Programme, which evolved from the Anchor Project Board and was designed to support delivery of the vision, shows that progress has stalled. However, there continues to be interest in the pursuit of the vision, and it may be that further progress is made in future. The previous evaluation highlighted that Shetland Island's Council Corporate Plan for 2021-26 states that one of the Council's five imperatives is a stronger focus on early intervention and prevention and it was understood that the Anchor Project, and the discussions it triggered, had a significant impact on the inclusion of this. While this is positive, it is not clear from the consultations conducted that this has trickled down into new policy. Perhaps the observed reduction in effort at a strategic level has hindered

⁶ The evaluation methodology did not include research in the wider system to assess the impact of the vision or the Anchor Project. Therefore, the evaluation is reliant on feedback from Officers and Board members.

greater impact on strategy and policy across the system. However, it may be that the small number of consultations for the evaluation did not pick up more evidence of change.

Language

The Anchor Project has stimulated learning around the value of pursuing early action and family-led support. Consultees observed that the language of the strategic outcomes: early action, strengths-based support, and no door is the wrong door, is being increasingly adopted in Shetland, indicating the Project and the vision it sponsored are having some impact on discussion. The challenge is to turn learning and language into action.

Service design

The findings from the second evaluation raised two strategic questions for the emerging Early Action Programme Board. They ask for strategic thinking around service design:

- **Is the Anchor delivery model of support for families a service or a methodology?** In other words, is it an approach that can be adopted by others or is it unique to Anchor?
- **How can complementary early action initiatives be connected to generate greatest benefit for Shetland?** There were concerns that the enthusiasm for early action and strengths-based support was creating a new but equally complex layer of support that would get in the way of 'no door is the wrong door' and that investment of effort and money in new services may underperform as a result.

Understandably, much of the operational effort in 2022 has been focused on creating Anchor for Families and the creation of responses to help families through the cost-of-living crisis. However, this additional effort inevitably absorbs capacity, and it appears there has been a reduction in effort at a strategic level. Consultees have raised concerns about the lack of Board meetings, the information shared with Board members, and transparency in decision-making. There may be a sense for some that the creation of Anchor for Families means that the job has been done, but consultees feel differently and would like to see some outstanding issues addressed. Focusing on the two questions raised in the previous evaluation might be a good starting point.

A service or a method?

Arguably, the creation of Anchor for Families appears to conclusively answer the first question, i.e., Anchor is a service. However, consultees still believe that that Anchor Project also offers a service delivery approach, particularly lessons from the approach to family-led planning and support, which could be adopted by others, but that opportunity is not yet being realised. The route to this form of knock-on impact seems to be limited to the learning taken away by temporary Project Officers to their substantive post.

The learning taken away by temporary Project Officers indicates that the opportunity to influence change in existing services does exist and therefore there are opportunities to multiply the benefit of Anchor by using the learning to inform service redesign.

How can you optimise benefit from complementary early action initiatives?

During the previous evaluation it was becoming clear that there were numerous new initiatives being launched or considered in Shetland that were seeking to address many of the same issues described in the rationale for the Anchor Project. Concerns were raised at the time that this could lead to confusion and duplication of effort and when it was created the Early Action Programme Board was tasked with mitigating risk and improving cohesiveness across different initiatives.

While there has clearly been operational activity, there is little evidence of significant strategic thinking or action around the concerns raised. Consultees have expressed concerns that the broader partnership

working, and relationships built in the early years of Anchor have begun to fade with less joined-up thinking and observations that “people are just charging ahead”. Another observed “you can’t do system change without all partners being involved”.

Observations on the impact of the Anchor Project on the wider system

During the previous evaluation a Board member pointed out in response to a question on whether the Anchor Project is achieving its ambitions around informing and influencing wider system change: “I think it's important to remember that it will take time and sometimes the change might be happening in ways that don't appear connected to the Project itself, for example, changes in thinking in relation to core service developments or changes in understanding and awareness of issues.”

This is an important reminder of how change occurs, often incrementally and quietly, and that system and culture change is difficult. Yet, feedback from consultees indicates there is still an unmet wish for Partners who oversaw the Anchor Project to consider how new and, in some cases, temporarily funded services such as Anchor for Families help contribute to permanent change within the established system of support. Investing effort in this tricky and complex area will help to avoid change being limited to the creation of a new layer of service on top of existing but unchanged services.

An additional question specific to the Anchor Project, is whether Anchor for Families continues to have a defined role in contributing to wider system change, and how learning from the Anchor Project can continue to contribute to wider learning and change.

5 Learning, observations, and recommendations for Anchor for Families

Success factors

The earlier evaluation identified success factors for the Project and for its model of support, and these remain true after the third evaluation.

Success factors for the Project

Research with Board members suggested the following factors initially combined to support Anchor's success as a Project:

- Effective senior-level partnership working and engagement.
- Permission to experiment and do things differently.
- A design approach which focused on learning by doing.

However, the interviews with Board members for the third evaluation show leadership commitment and input has reduced. Though this may affect ambitions around system change, it has not materially affected the performance of the family-led support which has evolved into Anchor for Families.

Feedback from families suggests that the success of the Anchor approach to its most intensive form of support, its family-led planning support is enabled by Project Officers who are prepared to:

- build a trusting relationship;
- provide the opportunity to talk about any issue;
- enable access through a communication channel that suits the individual (Facebook, email, phone, face-to-face meeting);
- listen without judgement;
- support access to services and information at the right time for the individual, which also requires the Project Officer to have a breadth of knowledge about available support; and
- maintain an open door to enable potential follow-up if further support is required.

Anchor for Families

Nationally there is a strategic shift supporting the move towards whole family support, early action, and more strengths-based and person-led support. All of which is embodied in the Anchor approach. Furthermore, Anchor has proven its methodology works.

The consultations undertaken for the evaluation have highlighted conditions and concerns that appear to warrant further consideration in the design and implementation of the new Anchor for Families service. The views of consultees have informed three topics associated with the transition from a learning project to a service and these are recommended as topics for further consideration:

- clarity of role;
- value for money; and
- robust, efficient, and effective processes.

All three areas will benefit from leadership buy-in and strategic thinking around the role of Anchor for Families in the wider landscape.

Clarity of role

The direct family support element of the Anchor Project has provided three main types of support:

- **Family-led planning and support** – an in-depth support service where an Anchor Project Officer formally agrees to work with an individual to explore, plan, and implement family-led action to improve their family's situation.
- **Enquiry response service** – following one or two contacts with an individual, an Anchor Project Officer will either offer guidance on a specific issue and/or signposts the individual to specialist support.
- **Crisis support** – a new and time-limited response service from Anchor to help families cope with an external and universal shock. Anchor has undertaken this role twice, the first time in response to the pandemic and the second time in response to the cost-of-living crisis.

The family-led improvement planning support is the heart of the original Anchor service, and was the only role initially envisaged for the Project. However, with growing awareness of Anchor and rising number of engagements – a consequence of both Project success and its highly visible crisis response role – a complementary role has emerged which may best be understood as an enquiry response service. Not all individuals who contact Anchor are immediately seeking the in-depth support Anchor can provide, their problem might be relatively easily solved with some information, for example around how to access benefits, or an Anchor Officer might be able to signpost them to specialist support.

The third role played by the Project is the crisis support role, the value of which was recognised by consultees because of its responsiveness, visibility, and value to families in response to the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

The definition of the Anchor Project in this way, with three distinct services, has not previously been stated. However, it can be extremely beneficial for Project Officers, stakeholders, and families if the services offered by the Anchor for Families can be clearly described. It is not assumed at this stage that Anchor for Families will continue to deliver all three types of service.

Consultations have highlighted that new sources of funding for Anchor for Families (Whole Family Support Funding, Pupil Equity Fund, and Strategic Equity Fund) are pulling the service in new directions, such as more direct support for children. This may create a fourth type of service which can be expected from Anchor for Families, and there may be others.

The blurred line between the Anchor Project and Anchor for Families has added complexity to the evaluation process, and uncertainty around the transition is echoed in comments from all types of consultee. There is a sense from consultees that the transition to Anchor for Families was a crossroads that caused confusion amongst Board members, staff, and partner agencies.

Regardless of the different services Anchor for Families will provide, clear definition of its role and how this fits alongside other services is vital for a new service in a complex, fragmented, and under pressure system. Without clear definition of the purpose and role of Anchor for Families, there are risks which include:

- different assumptions quickly develop around what Anchor for Families does or will do;
- the service is pulled in multiple new directions because of new school relationships and funding sources with the result that resource is more thinly spread; and
- staff become less clear about when, where, and how they should act.

If these risks are realised, they can be expected to lead to further confusion, duplication, and diminishing impact, potentially leading to a loss of support for the service. It is considered vital for Anchor for Families to clearly describe its focus and activity it undertakes.

Recommendations for Anchor for Families: clarity of role

- Review and clearly specify the intended outcomes from Anchor for Families, and particularly who and where the target beneficiaries are, and how they are expected to benefit.
- Clearly describe the service or range of services Anchor for Families will deliver to achieve the intended outcomes, and under which circumstances these services will be delivered. It will also be useful to state any related activity which Anchor for Families will avoid delivering directly.
- Describe how Anchor for Families fits into the wider system of universal and specialist support, including other new services.

Value for money

The need for support services has been rising, alongside cost of delivery, and local authority budgets have not kept pace. Competition for increasingly constrained resource means demand for evidence which demonstrates the value obtained from investments is likely to increase, especially in non-statutory services. Anchor has been somewhat shielded from this in its initial four years because of the external investment attracted and the space given to trial new ways of working.

The calculation on value may change now that the Anchor Project's funding is coming to an end. Until now Anchor's success has been judged on whether it met project objectives, including numbers of family support and impact on the wider system. Against the original objectives, the Anchor Project has been a success. However, the value for money calculation will change under new funding arrangements and the transference of the family support element of Anchor into a new service. New objectives and new success measures should be created so that the new service can be assessed, not against the measures associated with a test of change project, but with measures associated with being a service within the wider package of statutory and third sector services.

The consultations for the evaluation highlight a greater need for Anchor for Families to prove its value, especially as funding allocated to the new service could be used elsewhere in Shetland. Anchor for Families will need to prove that its delivery model is both economic and effective to counter potential criticism of "give anybody a low number of cases and you can expect them to do a good job", which is a comment made by a consultee. To provide evidence on value for money Anchor for Families will need to consistently monitor and evaluate both activity, productivity, and family outcomes.

In the longer-term, as more early action, strengths-based, and person-led support is provided across Shetland through Anchor for Families and other services, the impact should become evident in data from crisis support services. No one expects crisis to disappear from Shetland's families, but with sufficient investment in services like Anchor, the number of foreseeable crises should notably decline. Other observable changes might be changes to the nature and duration of crisis support required, changes in the decisions being made, and a reduction in what might be defined as serious cases. As the impact becomes more remote from the action taken by Anchor for Families it is more difficult to attribute to the service. However, a clear logic model connecting action to outcomes and impact can help, alongside future monitoring and evaluation activity which continues to assess additionality and how else a person might achieve the same outcomes.

Recommendations for Anchor for Families: value for money

- Develop a new logic model for Anchor for Families that describes how investment in the service is expected to lead to improved family outcomes and wider impact.
- Collect feedback from all families by building in efficient monitoring and evaluation to the everyday activity of Project Officers. Investigate building in agreed feedback checkpoints to the Anchor process for family-led improvement planning and support interventions.
- Define and agree the expected nature of impact on different crisis response services and put in place as early as possible standards and processes which can be used to reliably measure impact over time. This will require establishing a baseline for the agreed measures sooner rather than later.

Robust, efficient, and effective processes

Anchor's success is commonly attributed to the people who have been managing and delivering it. However, success which is wholly dependent on people can become harder to assure when an initiative grows. A small initiative can work well with relatively informal systems and processes, often wholly reliant on direct communication between people. As initiatives grow, maintaining the same level of success will usually require more formalised systems and processes. The risk is that as an initiative grows, over-stretched or poorly functioning informal systems result in misunderstanding, mistakes, and confusion leading to reduced quality control and potential lower impact. In some cases, these can be normal and temporary growing pains until fixes are found. There have been indicators of such challenges during the two periods when the Anchor Project grew to include additional staffing. This has already led to important improvements including the creation of a senior coordinator role and formal supervision activities with officers.

Recruitment for Anchor for Families has already occurred and it is known that the flexibility of the role Anchor undertakes can mean officers have to learn to deal with pressure and uncertainty. It is important to build in processes and systems which support efficiency, professional development, and support staff to do their job.

For example, the Anchor Project developed standalone simple information systems and flexible internal processes. Despite being relatively time-consuming, these systems and processes have supported staff, provided learning, and were sufficient to meet the needs of the Project. These systems and processes were sufficient due to relatively low numbers of families, the project's limited lifetime, and the need to quickly develop new systems and processes that enable rapid responses to crises. However, as the Project transforms into Anchor for Families it is reasonable to assume isolated and time-consuming systems and processes will have a high cost. The cost occurs because:

- skilled staff resource that could be deployed on higher value activity is tied up on tasks that could be done more easily and quickly, leading to poor productivity and lower job satisfaction; and
- information about Anchor's activity is difficult to access and therefore its value is diminished, either for spotting patterns or gaps, for monitoring and evaluation purposes, or for sharing with others.

If Shetland's wider system of support to households is to become a connected scaffolding of support as described in the plan for the Early Action Programme Board, and which embodies the vision of No Door is the Wrong Door, greater integration of and interoperability between the systems and processes used for Anchor for Families and wider Council systems can be expected to be beneficial. Consultees have already highlighted issues associated with time consuming data and information exchange tasks. A more

joined up information ecosystem around families could improve the quality and effectiveness of the support offered and provided by Anchor for Families, help avoid duplication of effort, and support No Door is the Wrong Door.

Recommendations for Anchor for Families: efficient (and effective) delivery

- Review current Anchor processes and find where time consuming and low skill activity is tying up valuable resource. More automated data sharing is expected to be one key target for improvement, helping both Anchor and other services.
- Appraise existing Council systems to understand the pros and cons of utilising them for Anchor for Families.
- Once both above activities have been completed, explore the range of possibilities for improved process and system efficiency for Anchor for Families, and their associated costs and benefits.