

Appendix 1: Challenges in measuring the impact of drug and / or alcohol treatment service provision on outcomes for individuals, families & communities

Sheffield Hallam University identified a number of key reasons that outline the difficulties in identifying, isolating and quantifying the direct casual impact of a service on the outcomes of individuals, families, communities and agencies as part of an evaluation of Rochdale Families Project in 2010, all of which are relevant to drug and / or alcohol treatment services in Southwark and have been adapted below.

Attribution of causal effect

- Drug and / or alcohol treatment services are one element of a range of contacts and interactions with an individual. This can include multiple causal factors of intergenerational problematic behaviour and complex vulnerabilities, the effect of continuous influence of other aspects of an individuals lifestyle outside of treatment service engagement such as families, peers and locality/environment and the influence of engagement with other support services.
- External factors impact on treatment engagement at different times which can result in crises & disengagement with the service & non-linear progression towards recovery which is difficult to measure.
- Services are often supporting individuals with deep rooted and longer term issues that have never been addressed and need to utilise interventions whereby progress is not immediately obvious due to the delay between intervention delivery and measurable outcome. Examples of interventions include crisis management, stabilising situations and supporting the development of self esteem and confidence in order to create a stable position for individuals to work towards the achievement of longer term measurable outcomes.
- There are difficulties in assessing the sustainment of longer term outcomes on treatment exit which would provide evidence for cost effectiveness as this would require tracking of individuals over a long period of time following exit.

Measurement of soft outcomes

- Some interventions are crucial in underpinning the building blocks for sustained recovery but are difficult to measure such as crisis intervention which reduces harm and likelihood of escalation of the presenting issue producing a cost-benefit for the council in some cases through prevention of enforcement action or reduced need for a child to be taken into care.
- Many of the outcomes achieved within the services within this report are defined as soft outcomes and difficult to measure as follows: improvements to self esteem, mental and physical health, family relationships, personal and social skills but all services contribute to measurable outcomes such as reduction of drug and / or alcohol use and reduction of criminal behaviour although the influence of individual services is difficult to isolate.

Cost-benefit assessment

- Cost-benefit assessment of substance misuse treatment is often based upon accrued costs if the support had not due to the influence of multiple factors.
- Intervention cost savings are expected to accrue over a lifetime & it is impossible to recoup these within the commissioning cycle that councils are operating within.
- Savings across agencies are uneven and the agencies that observe the greatest benefit from service provision may not be those who are contributing to the budget.