

EARLY HELP UPDATE

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 This report provides a second update on the Early Help Service since its launch on 1 April 2017. The first update was provided in March 2018.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The new Early Help Service was established on 1 April 2017, to replace the previous arrangements which were known as 'Strengthening Families'. It was recognised that the Strengthening Families model had become inefficient and was not working in the way it was originally set up, and the new service was developed to address this.

**3. Current Position – an update since March 2018.**

- 3.1 The three Early Help Locality Teams are now well-established in a) Washington/North; b) East/West and c) Coalfields.
- 3.2 Since March 2018, the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) Team has moved into the Early Help Service from Children's Social Care. This service supports an extended-family approach to support for parents with complex issues. The rationale for moving the service into the Early Help Teams was to allow for much earlier, planned intervention rather than crisis support. A review of the impact of FGC will be conducted in the New Year.
- 3.3 A pilot between Northumbria Police and the Early Help Service saw three Police Community Support Officers (CSOs) join the locality teams for an eight month period to the end of November 2018. The input of the CSOs was of great benefit to the Early Help Service and to families requiring co-ordinated support. Following a review of this pilot and a similar pilot in Northumberland from a Police perspective, the Force has decided to return the CSOs to the neighbourhood policing teams. Further work is being undertaken to determine how police support can be provided directly into Early Help Services force-wide in future.
- 3.4 As previously, further information about the Early Help Service, including referral forms and a leaflet for parents, the Early Help Strategy and a range of services available to support families can be found on the Together for Children website at: <https://www.togetherforchildren.org.uk/families/early-help> and <https://www.togetherforchildren.org.uk/professionals/early-help>

#### **4. Progress to date**

- 4.1 The number of Early Help Plans rose steadily between April 2017 and May 2018 to 762. Of these 534 were being co-ordinated by the Early Help Service and 228 by the Universal Services. The majority of those registered by the Universal Services are being co-ordinated by schools, with increasing numbers from health visitors, although the delivery of Early Help by schools and health visitors is uneven across the localities.

Since May 2018 the number of open Early Help Plans has fallen slightly each month to 705 in September 2018. This is in part due to cases being closed to the universal services around the Summer break and in part because the Early Help Service is now regularly closing cases where 'outcomes met'.

In total 397 Early Help cases have been closed 'outcomes met' between April 2017 and September 2018.

To date, over 3,000 children and their families have been supported by the Early Help processes.

- 4.2 As in March 2018, just under half (43%) of the cases resulting in an open Early Help Plan since April have come to the Early Help Service via Children's Social Care.

Data from April 2017 to March 2018 showed that 94% of the children supported via the Early Help processes remained within the Early Help arena or stepped back down to universal services, an early indication that Early Help is an effective way of preventing families escalating to Children's Social Care. An update on this figure will not be available until March 2019.

- 4.3 In order to increase our capacity to support more families, the Early Help Service has recently employed eight additional fixed-term staff. The impact of these staff on outcomes for children and on the management of demand into Children's Social Care will not be measurable for several months.

- 4.4 We continue to develop the expertise of staff to support families with a range of issues and our most recent training has covered a wider range of parenting interventions, on-line grooming and safety and addressing sexually inappropriate behaviour.

A number of school staff, two health visitors and two school nurses were trained alongside the Early Help staff in the delivery of universal parenting support. The Early Help Service and three schools are now planning sessions for large numbers of parents from January 2019. Our aim is to de-stigmatise the offer of parenting support and make it something that all parents can access as a matter of course.

#### **5. Future Plans**

- 5.1 Sunderland is part of a regional pilot scheme (one of four nationally) to offer support to parents where there is discord in the home or between separated parents. This relationship support will be co-ordinated by the Early Help

Service and will run from April 2019 to March 2021. Through this pilot, eligible parents will have access to a number of internationally recognised programmes previously unavailable in the UK. It is envisaged that the families referred for support will be identified as part of our current Early Help Assessment processes.

- 5.2 Working with the CCG, TfC's Early Help Service will be managing a programme of 10 health and well-being prevention initiatives with schools and the wider community. The programmes will run for three years and will provide an evidence-base for future investment in prevention by the CCG.
- 5.3 Schools have fed back to the Early Help Service that they have limited resources to allocate to early intervention. To support this, we have developed two Service Level Agreements (Attendance Support and Early Help Support) which enable schools to purchase small amounts of support on a termly or yearly basis. To date, five schools have taken up the offer and others have expressed an interest. It is our aim to expand this partnership approach to make the delivery of the earliest intervention both affordable and sustainable.

## **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1 Members are recommended to note the contents of this report.

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