

EARLY HELP UPDATE

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Early Help Service since its launch on 1 April 2017.

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

- 3.1 The new Early Help Service was developed as a locality model, mirroring the children's social care locality arrangements to facilitate step-up and step-down processes.
- 3.2 There are three Early Help Locality Teams working out of Children's Centres and community buildings: a) Washington/North, b) East/West, c) Coalfields

Each team is made up of a Locality Service Manager, a Locality Team Manager, five Senior Early Help Workers, six Early Help Workers, four Children's Centre Activity Workers, four Connexions Personal Assistants and either one or two Attendance Officers.

Connected to the teams are also two DWP Employment Advisers, one Generation North East NEET Worker and since November 2017 three Police Community Support Officers.

- 3.3 In addition there is a new, central Early Help Advice and Allocations Team operating out the Civic Centre as a single point of contact for all information and advice, and the tracking and monitoring of the work undertaken. This team is also responsible for the tracking of Children Missing Education.
- 3.4 The Early Help Service works very closely with the Youth Offending Service (including Wear Kids ASB Service), the Youth Drug and Alcohol Service, the Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator and the Bumps to Babies Young Mums Project.
- 3.5 The revised remit of the Early Help Service is to:
- Develop and embed the concept of Early Help across the partnership
 - Brief partners and train staff in the delivery of early help at all levels

- Work with vulnerable and complex families identified as needing support, but who sit below the Level 3 threshold for social care intervention
- Work with families who meet the criteria for the Troubled Families programme
- Work with families who have stepped down from CIN or CP plans to offer a 'soft landing' and try to address the issue of re-referrals
- Deliver parenting interventions for families mandated by the courts (CIN/CP, attendance, youth offending) and for those identified by the Early Help Service, the universal services and those that self-refer
- Support the universal services to deliver early help at the lower end of Level 2
- Reduce NEETS and Persistent Absence
- Track Children Missing Education
- Act as the single point of contact about early help and to track and evidence progress made by families

- 3.6 An Early Help Strategy has been launched. Consultation with partners took place between April and September and the Strategy was signed off by the Children's Strategic Partnership on 8 November 2017. A link for further information is attached <https://togetherforchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Sunderland%20Early%20Help%20Strategy%202017-2020%20compressed.pdf>

A new suite of Early Help paperwork was introduced in February and launched with partners from April. This uses a straightforward identify, assess, plan, do, review model. Progress is measured using a pre-contemplation, contemplation, action, maintenance and sustainability matrix to enable practitioners to make informed, evidence-based decisions about closure or step-up.

- 3.7 A multi-agency **Early Help Panel** meets fortnightly to consider families where a request for Early Help has been made, but where there is insufficient information to make an informed decision about who should co-ordinate the plan, or about whether a plan is really needed. Attendance from partners at this Panel is very good.

A multi-agency **Early Help Steering Group** has been set up to monitor progress with Early Help and to hold partners to account for their contribution. It has met three times to date. A multi-agency audit workshop to consider externally-held Early Help Plans is scheduled for mid-March.

- 3.8 Following the training that has taken place between April and December 2017, the Early Help Service is now able to offer:
- interventions in Children's Centres (designed with our health colleagues to address poor child health outcomes for the 0-4s)
 - support in the home with routines, home conditions, behaviour, relationships
 - support with school attendance and NEET
 - support with housing, debt management, employability, training

- parenting support (groups) for families directed by the courts – ages 0-12
- parenting support (groups and 1:1 in the home) for families identified by partners and self-referrals – ages 0-12 – co-delivered with schools
- parenting support as above for parents of teenagers
- support for young parents (B2b and Young Mums)
- support through YDAP for children displaying sexually harmful behaviours
- support through YDAP for young people affected by substance misuse
- referrals to the Phoenix Project for young people involved in anti-social behaviours and/or fire-starting (co-delivered between Fire Service and Early Help Service)
- Isolated Girls' Group (pilot project in the West)

3.9 A Neglect Toolkit was published in November 2017 – this will support practitioners with their assessments of need. If received well we will look to develop other toolkits (eg DV, CSE, mental ill-health etc).

4. Progress to date

4.1 In February 2017 there was evidence of 94 families being supported in some way with interventions that could be tracked.

At the end of December 2017 there were 646 open Early Help Plans. Of these 475 were being co-ordinated by the Early Help Service, and 171 by the Universal Services (up from 2 in April). The majority of those registered by the Universal Services are being co-ordinated by schools, with increasing numbers from health visitors.

In addition 171 cases were closed 'outcomes met' between April and December.

Currently, there are 1,446 children being supported on Early Help Plans, out of a total of 1,824 supported since April 2017.

4.2 An Early Help Worker carries an average case load of 20 families. Based on the number of children currently being supported, this equate to an average case load of 45 children per worker.

4.3 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 – December 2017 shows that 93% 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.

4.4 In January 2018 Ofsted conducted its sixth monitoring visit, with a focus on Early Help. The monitoring letter was published on 15 February.

Ofsted commented that:

'TfC is making steady progress in improving services when problems first emerge for children, young people and their families. The refreshed early help service was established in April 2017 and is already demonstrating a significant increase in the take up of early help services: from 252 open cases in April 2017 to 646 open cases in December 2017. Schools and Northumbria police in particular are more engaged and have an increased understanding about the threshold to children's social care and their roles in providing early help to children and their families. However, it is too early to see the full impact of these developments.

TfC is working effectively with other agencies to manage the early help response and to further develop information sharing across agencies. Positively, early help staff within TfC clearly understand what is to be achieved and the flexibility required in their approach. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of assessment, planning and management oversight.

Inspectors found that early help plans demonstrated some effective work with families in offering support where needs were often complex. One parent reported: 'I was angry at first but it's the best thing ever... I'm a better parent to my child.' Early help workers are consistently providing parenting support as well as undertaking direct work with children. Early help workers spoken to demonstrated a clear understanding of their work within a broader context of supporting and protecting children, and could speak with authority about children and families that they are working with. However, the quality of practice is inconsistent.

The self-assessment, provided by TfC for this monitoring visit, reflects well the progress and areas for development of early help services in Sunderland. These correlate with inspectors findings. The action plan to address the areas for development is appropriately focused, guidance has been produced and shared where necessary, and improvements in the quality of work could be seen in the more recent assessments and plans.'

The full monitoring letter can be found at:

<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/sunderland>

5. Future Plans

- 5.1 We intend to monitor progress with Early Help and analyse the number of cases that are closed 'outcomes met' and what has made the difference to those families. This will inform our offer and our workforce development programme.

Families are now able to give us feedback via the TfC website, which will inform service developments.

An Early Child Development Programme will become part of our Children's Centre offer from September. This will help identify children who are under-

stimulated in the early years (age 2) and allow us to put parenting interventions in place.

We have begun a bi-lingual parenting course with one of our primary schools for parents of the Bangladeshi community.

We have booked mediation training for 10 workers for February 2018 to strengthen our family support offer. The North East Regional Troubled Families Network has also been successful in bidding for funding for family mediation training.

The Family Group Conferencing function will move from Children's Social Care to the line-management of Early Help from April 2018. This will strengthen the early help parenting intervention offer particularly for those cases stepping down from CIN or CP plans.

6. Recommendation

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

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