



Doncaster Council

Report

6 February 2018

To the Chair and Members of the
CABINET

EARLY HELP STRATEGY

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Nuala Fennelly Cabinet Member	All	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. A cabinet report was supported in November 2015 which set out the transformation plans of the partnership Early Help offer (Early Help Strategy 2015-18) and local authority early help services. It included proposals and plans for transformation of the Children Centres into Family Hubs and a new delivery model for Youth provision.
2. Significant progress has been made in the embedding of an early help partnership offer. This is evident through robust performance management and reporting, positive external scrutiny, including the most recent Ofsted Single Inspection Framework.
3. 12 Family Hubs are operating in the 4 locality model and are integral in the delivery of the refreshed Early Help Strategy.
4. A cabinet report will be presented in April 2018 which will evidence the significant transformation of Youth provision in Doncaster via EXPECT Youth.
5. The main focus of this report is to inform Cabinet of the refreshed Early Help Strategy that was agreed by the Children and Families Executive Board in September 2017. This new Strategy (2017–2020) provides the opportunity to refocus the partnership understanding of Early Help and importantly how Commissioners and provider services 'think' and 'work' more effectively together over the long term.
6. Early Help should not only be seen as a response to additional or multiple/complex needs requiring a multi-disciplinary Team Around the Family (TAF) alone. Early Help is also an overarching philosophy that promotes prevention and earlier intervention that should influence all Strategies in Doncaster to achieve better outcomes for children and young people with a focus on the whole family's needs. In all cases it should seek to

narrow the gap in outcomes for some children and young people who are disadvantage, either by their circumstance or the environment in which they live.

EXEMPT REPORT

7. This report is not exempt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- i) note the progress made in relation to the partnership Early Help Offer; and
- ii) Endorse the refreshed Early Help Strategy.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

9. The improved state of Early Help means that:

- Families who require additional support is identified earlier, receiving support in a timely manner, thus preventing problems escalating to more intensive levels of statutory intervention.
- The quality of early help support is continuously improving meaning that once families are stepped down to universal services, they are able to maintain their independence with limited additional support needed.

BACKGROUND

10. The past 2 years has seen significant transformation and progress in the partnership response to early help and the following provides some evidence:

Some examples of comments from parent and child audit evaluations include:

“I’ve never opened up to anyone before, they was good and supported me” Young person aged (16)

“Things are better, because they are making it more fun at home” Child aged (6)

“How to cope better with child’s behaviour” (Parent)

11. The early help approach has been embedded and as a result we know:

- 74% of **all** enquiries (8,437 of 11,411) into the early help hub are for children living in the 30% most deprived Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Doncaster, which is a key indicator of need.
- 54% of enquiries (6,163 out of 11,411) to the early help hub have been for children aged 0 to 9, which shows a focus on the younger age range and earlier intervention.
- There continues to be an increase in the number of open early help cases from 1,637 Q3 16/17 to 1,948 in Q2 17/18, representing a 19% increase of children, young people and families receiving support at the earliest opportunity.
- 74% + of cases closed in Early Help (Team Around Child) have been sustained within universal services following closure (Sept 2016 to Feb 2017 cases closed between 6 to 12 month)

- Once children have been identified as having multiple or complex needs these are being assessed earlier resulting in children and young people being supported with a trusted person as their lead practitioner.
- Early Help case file audits (All partners excluding Parenting and Family Support Services (PAFSS) continue to evidence the improvements in compliance and quality of case recording and interventions with children, young people and families.
- Q3 (2017-18) 77% of cases audited (72/94) evidence that the needs of the child/young person are being met by the plan and that the interventions are making a difference to both the child and the family.

12. In stark contrast to the 2015 Ofsted SIF report which stated that the Early Help offer was under developed and fragmented resulting in families only receiving support once needs has escalated to a level where social care intervention is needed; the most recent Ofsted SIF (November 2017) states the following:

‘Early help work is well coordinated across 12 family hubs in four locality areas (0–18). A revised early help strategy has led to the integration of family support services and clearer pathways for parenting support, which ensures timely and targeted support for the most vulnerable families. The recent introduction of an early help hub encourages all agencies to support children and their families promptly. Early help coordinators provide valued support and training to lead professionals and track the timeliness and quality of work across the wider partnership. Cases are stepped up to children’s social care at the right time. Most early help assessments are detailed and child-focused.’

13. The previous Early Help Strategy (2015–2018) was written at a time of significant challenge to improve direct work with families and to evidence multi-agency responses to children and young people’s needs. This led specifically to the development of the Early Help Hub as the first point of contact for all enquiries from practitioners and Early Help Co-ordinators to support and challenge practice. The aim was to help practitioners to share information, seek advice and access services to support prevention and early intervention work with children and young people alongside their family.

14. There was a need to refresh the Early Help strategy in the wake of the development of the Children and Young People’s Plan (2017-20). The Early Help Strategy 2017 to 2020 intends to support the commissioning and delivery of services for prevention and earlier intervention (known as Early Help) to promote and secure better outcome for children and young people with the support of their families. Its focus is twofold:

1. The approach for individual children and young people (with their families) and how to **respond to additional or more complex needs as they arise at any point in a child’s life;** thereby securing better outcomes and avoid more costly interventions in the future.

2. The approach and practice from research and local intelligence to respond to groups of children and young people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable by known circumstances or environment.

15. The strategy identifies early help as a way of thinking and working together as services with families that have additional or more complex needs. Early help can prevent problems from getting worse by providing support to families when a need is identified or as soon as a problem emerges. This can be at any point in a child's life, from conception, through childhood and into adolescence. It can also prevent further problems arising by building resilience with families to find their own solutions in the future. It should not be seen as a specific service, but any service, and crucially how services work collectively through tailored support packages for specific needs in individual families. Any service should therefore be seen as early help as it is the quality of the response to family's needs rather than a specific service.
16. The Children and Families Executive Board has defined early help as the job of all public, private, voluntary and community services as well as citizens in Doncaster by taking a whole family approach and intervening in a co-ordinated way. **All services** and **all practitioners** including specialist services are responsible for delivering early help. Early help is based on needs of families not service thresholds. For example attendance support in schools, mental health services, substance misuse support etc. working with universal services, such as GP's, teachers or health visitors.
17. The effectiveness of Early Help is measured through the Early Help Strategy which details specific outcomes delivered through partnership working, as well as contributing to the child, young people and family outcomes within the Children and Young People's Plan (2017–20)
18. The strategy identifies 4 key objectives which will deliver the Early Help Strategy and approach:
 - Promote early help to families, communities and partners to develop a common understanding of prevention and earlier intervention
 - Embed the early help pathway to support children and young people who have additional or multiple/complex needs. This is being evidenced by the increase in referrals. There is now a Single Agency pathway, which will increase Early Help pathways support at a lower level and increase enquiries made for Early Help. Evidence of this will be reported in Q3 2017-18.
 - Support the lead practitioner role and increase responsibility across partner organisations
 - Develop Family Hubs to promote participation; increased access to services and improve integrated working to secure better outcomes
19. Doncaster Family Hubs are the transformational model designed to bring services together to work with families from conception, through childhood and into adolescents (0 to 18 and 24 where they have a disability) to deliver an integrated local offer. Any service that families may need can be accessed through Family Hubs through the provision of information or direct access to them; from day care and early learning to schools and alternative education; from midwifery and health visiting to mental health; from advice on parenting to family support and adult learning to employment opportunities.
20. There are 12 Family Hubs covering the whole of Doncaster with a number of venues in each geographical area where services are delivered. These are clustered and co-ordinated together in 4 locality areas to make best use of resources and space, along with service partners own buildings with many services delivered in a family's home.

Services should be accessible independently by families but also work together when a family have additional needs, or through an early help assessment and a lead practitioner to support multiple/complex needs. Family Hub's provide support through Early Help Co-ordinators to help any service or practitioner with the lead practitioner role.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

21. Not applicable

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

22. DMBC is a the lead agency for early help through a partnership approach and joint responsibility under section 10 of the Children Act (2004) and restated in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015).
23. With strong support from the Doncaster Children's Services Trust the Early Help agenda has progressed significantly from the 2015 position. Effective challenge and support has been evident at the highest level through the DfE appointed improvement partner Achieving for Children (AfC), the Performance Accountability Board (PAB), Doncaster Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB) and the Early Help Implementation Group. The latter being a small focussed multi-agency group that provided leadership and pace in the early days whilst setting up the infrastructure and driving some of the performance improvements.
24. The previous Early Help Strategy (2015–2018) was written at a time of significant challenge to improve direct work with families and to evidence multi-agency responses to children and young people's needs. This led specifically to the development of the Early Help Hub as the first point of contact for all enquiries from practitioners and Early Help Co-ordinators to support and challenge practice. The aim was to help practitioners to share information, seek advice and access services to support prevention and early intervention work with children and young people alongside their family. There was a need to refresh the strategy in the wake of the development of the Children and Young People's Plan (2017–2020)

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

25.

	Outcomes	Implications
	<p>All people in Doncaster benefit from a thriving and resilient economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i> 	
	<p>People live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost</i> 	Through Early Help families are safeguarded and supported earlier preventing needs from escalating

	of living	
	<p>People in Doncaster benefit from a high quality built and natural environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> 	
	<p>All families thrive.</p> <p><i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i></p>	
	<p>Council services are modern and value for money</p>	
	<p>Working with our partners we will provide strong leadership and governance.</p>	<p>DMBC is the early help partnership lead and the strategy is governed through the Early Help Strategy group – a multi-agency partnership.</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

26. The delivery of the early help strategy is critical in the building of a strong, vibrant Doncaster where families are able to thrive and to live in safe communities.
27. If the strategy is not effectively delivered, there is a strong risk of reputational damage to the Council as the partnership lead.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

28. The Council must make arrangements to promote co-operation between itself and partners with a view to improving the well-being of children relating to their physical and mental health and well-being, their protection from harm and neglect, their education, training and recreation and their contribution to society. When making these arrangements the Council must have regard to the importance of parents and other persons caring for children in improving their well-being.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

29. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. During the period of the previous Early Help Strategy (2015-18), savings of £1.430m were achieved by the service. The total 2017/18 gross controllable budget for the Early Help Service is £2.411m. The Early Help Service is funded from a combination of General Fund Budget (£1.341m), DSG (£0.598m) and Public Health funding (£0.472m).
30. For information, grant funding of £475,000 to be paid over 3 years to EXPECT Youth (formerly Strategic Youth Alliance) was approved by Cabinet on 18th October 2016.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

31. While there are no specific HR implications related to the content of this report it should be noted that there is a functional review taking place covering all services

within the Learning and Opportunities: Children and Young People (LOCYP) directorate including the Starting Well service. The main strategic drivers, including the Early Help Strategy, have been taken into account as part of the functional review when considering any implications on the future structure of the service.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

32. None identified

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

33. We must give due consideration to the extent to which the council has complied with its public equality duty and given due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. The equality of expectation for all children, including those that are disadvantaged, is a core value within all aspects of the early help strategy.

CONSULTATION

34. Families, through the Family Hubs were consulted on the design and implementation of a communications strategy and platform for early help.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

35. The complete strategy can be found at:
<https://dmbcpublicwebsite.blob.core.windows.net/media/Tenant1/Professionals%20Page/Documents/Early%20Help%20Strategy%20Revised%202017%20to%202020%20Final%20with%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

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