

**To the Chair and Members of the  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Overview of outcomes from recent external evaluation:-**

**Review of Early Help - DfE Achieving for Children**

<b>Relevant Cabinet Member(s)</b>	<b>Wards Affected</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>
Cllr Fennelly Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools	All Wards	No

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This report provides a progress report as to the effectiveness of early help services in Doncaster.

**EXEMPT REPORT**

2. This is not an exempt report.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

3. The panel is asked to:-
  - i) Note the progress of Early Help offer to date; and
  - ii) Question and comment on that progress to date.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?**

4. Families who need help at the earliest possible point are much more likely to be identified and supported by the right people at the right time and so reducing the potential for escalation into more costly statutory services.

Families who may need help are screened via the multi-agency staffed Early Help Hub in order to allocate the most appropriate lead worker if needed. Many families simply need some advice and guidance or some more in depth work by the agency they are already involved in.

The Early help Hub sits alongside the MASH to ensure effective step up / step down of families where necessary without 'ping ponging' them between the two.

Services are more coordinated and an early help offer is more defined and

understood by partners and families themselves.

When families do need extra help Early Help Assessments are undertaken by a lead professional and they help the family to understand what their issues are and who can help them resolve or reduce the impacts on their lives.

'Delivering Early Help' training has been delivered to over 250 practitioners across agencies so far, increasing the understanding of early help and improving staff implementation; thus improving their ability to identify and support families early on.

Early Help coordinators are improving the quality of early help by supporting partners to undertake Early Help Assessments and ensure they include SMART targets to achieve outcomes required.

Over the next few months the Early Help offer will be embedded into partner agencies which includes the Whole Family approach driven by the Stronger Families Programme; improving support for families and supporting the Stronger Families Payment by Results claims figures.

## **BACKGROUND AND CURRENT POSITION**

5. *Achieving for Children (AfC)* is the DfE appointed partner engaged to provide challenge and support to the improvement journey for the Trust and the Council. The review commenced in January 2016 following a letter from the Minister directing AfC to consider the Early Help offer in Doncaster. An interim visit took place in May 2016 which led to an interim report and a follow up visit took place over two days on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2016 which led to the most recent final report in August 2016.

The 2015 Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection judged that early help services in Doncaster were fragmented and inconsistent. It found that too many children whose needs could be met by preventative services were being referred to statutory social work services. Inspectors also noted that partner organisations were insufficiently engaged in the provision of a coordinated early help service.

As a result of the Ofsted inspection, a series of progress reviews, directed by the Secretary of State have taken place since January of this year and significant improvements have been made.

In January 2016 the AfC review found that, "*children whose needs could be met at a lower level were not identified and consistently offered support to prevent their needs escalating to more intrusive statutory services.*" This meant that where families needed early help they did not necessarily get it and they were not picked up until their needs met higher statutory thresholds.

The inspection also found that an Early Help Strategy was in place but deemed to be too broad and required greater clarity. The Early Help Hub was in its infancy but showing some signs of effective referral screening. The quality of Early help Assessments was varied and there was a lack of clarity about the multi-agency locality delivery model.

A ministerial letter received in January 2016 requested we undertake an in-

depth review of our early help offer.

These issues were addressed by the establishment of the Early Help Implementation Task Group (EHITG) over the next few months. This multi-agency senior group have gripped the Early Help agenda and driven the implementation of the report recommendations.

The development of early help offer in Doncaster has been rapid and transformational over the past few months. The 'Achieving for Children' (AfC) report for the period April to May 2016 stated that:

***“THE SHARED AMBITION FOR EARLY HELP SERVICES IS GOOD. CONSIDERABLE WORK HAS BEEN ACHIEVED IN SECURING COMMITMENT AND BUY-IN FROM SCHOOLS, HEALTH SERVICES, THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND OTHER AGENCIES, TO CREATE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A COHERENT AND JOINED-UP EARLY HELP OFFER ACROSS THE PARTNERSHIP***

Highlight reports in June and August have shown significant progress in developing our Early Help offer and in improving practice across partner agencies.

The latest (August 2016) AfC report; is attached at appendix 1, but in essence found that:-

- Good progress has been made since the first review in May 2016, which means that by Ofsted grading standards early help services are now firmly in the 'Requires Improvement' category, with a trajectory steadily moving towards 'good'.
- The EHITG has been effective at refocusing improvement work and ensuring good partnership engagement in the strategy and overall direction of travel for early help services.
- Strong multi agency training and promotional work by early help coordinators has ensured that practitioners in partner agencies understand early help and have confidence in identifying and referring children and families who need that support.
- The co-location and transfer of management of the early help Hub with the Children's Trust has ensured that thresholds are more appropriately and consistently applied.
- There needs to be greater input from some partner agencies to ensure that the Early help 'offer' is comprehensive and coherent enough to prevent escalation into more costly and intrusive statutory interventions.
- There needs to be more evidence of the impact of the early help offer on children and families in the next phase.

The next review phase will be in January 2017, with a final review to take place in March 2017, specifically focussed on the impact that early help support and interventions have had on improving outcomes for children and their families.

## IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY PRIORITIES

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	Priority	Implications
	<p>We will support a strong economy where businesses can locate, grow and employ local people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i></li> </ul>	<p>Providing early help means that families (including veterans) are able to seek out and access help when they need it. This help ensure all services are used appropriately and thus the right help goes to the right families by the right services.</p>
	<p>We will help people to live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i></li> </ul>	<p>Ensuring people get the right help at the right time means they are more likely to be able to function effectively and be more resilient to upcoming issues.</p>
	<p>We will make Doncaster a better place to live, with cleaner, more sustainable communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i></li> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i></li> </ul>	<p>Families who access early help are more likely to need less help, be more independent and make a positive contribution to their communities.</p>
	<p>We will support all families to thrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i></li> </ul>	<p>Ensuring people access the right services at the right time will make services much more efficient and so protect the more intensive costly services for those who need it.</p>
	<p>We will deliver modern value for money services.</p>	<p>Early help services are more cost efficient and so provide better value for money where appropriately used.</p>
	<p>We will provide strong leadership and governance, working in partnership.</p>	<p>Early help has strong multi-agency support and leadership via Early Help Implementation Task Group.</p>

## RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

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1. Early help is a partnership responsibility and there is a potential risk that individual agency pressures could impact on the implementation of Early Help services.
2. The fact that Doncaster has a Children's Trust is an opportunity and a risk in

that the model is unprecedented.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8. A negative report from Achieving for Children could have meant that the remaining elements of the service within the Council would be subject to consideration for transfer of the service to another provider. The receipt of a positive report means that a statutory direction from the Department for Education will not be implemented. In addition, the DfE increasingly appreciated that this is a partnership response.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

9. An efficient and effective early help service is fundamental to the delivery of whole family outcomes and in particular ensuring that referrals for social care and / or more complex care are appropriate. It is, therefore a sustainable model and should in the long term reduce the cost of care both financially and to individuals and society more generally.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

10. There are no human resources issues directly arising.

## **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

11. There are positive impacts in that the Early Help offer aims to improve service delivery at the earliest point around whole families, avoid duplication and improve outcomes. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the protected characteristics are likely to be impacted negatively by the Development of the Early Help offer.

## **CONSULTATION**

12. None applicable.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

13. Review of Early Help Services - report of 'Achieving for Children', June – August 2016.

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