

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	1 JULY 2013	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	EARLY HELP STRATEGY		
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SERVICE:	CHILDREN AND FAMILY SUPPORT	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Providing 'Early Help' means intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families. Intervention may occur pre-birth and at any stage in a child's or young person's life. The term 'early help' broadly refers to the range of services below the threshold of Children's Social Care or very specialist interventions.
- 1.2 This report introduces Reading's first Early Help Strategy (attached) and seeks members' endorsement of the draft strategy to go out to consultation more widely to inform the final version of the document. A summary of the approach to consultation is included.
- 1.3 The report explains why a strategy is needed and presents a brief summary of the key strengths and areas for development covered in the draft Early Help Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To endorse the Early Help Strategy as a draft to go out to wider consultation.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

Munro Review of Child Protection

- 3.1 The term 'early help' was first used by Professor Eileen Munro. A raft of recent studies have reinforced that early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges at any point in a child's life, from the foundation stage through to teenage years. The Munro Review of Child Protection included a recommendation that "The Government should place a duty on local authorities and statutory partners to secure the sufficient provision of local early help services for children, young people and families."
- 3.2 The Government has accepted Munro's recommendations, and 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' published in March 2013 is a new guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, setting out the legislative requirements and expectations on individual services post the Munro Review.
- 3.3 Working Together guidance in relation to early help includes the need for local agencies to have effective systems in place to identify emerging problems and unmet needs for individual children and families, and the provision of an 'early help offer' where their needs don't meet the criteria for receiving children's social care services. There is an expectation that all professionals, including those working with adults with children and 'universal' services that are open to everyone, should understand their role in identifying emerging problems and in sharing information to support early identification and assessment of needs.
- 3.4 Working Together expects that local areas will have a range of effective, evidence-based early help services in place informed by the local assessment of need: 'In addition to high quality universal services, specific local early help will typically include family and parenting programmes, assistance with health issues and help for problems relating to drugs, alcohol and domestic violence. Services may also focus on improving family functioning and building the family's own capability to solve problems'. Some of these services may be delivered to parents but should be evaluated in terms of the outcomes for the child.
- 3.5 The LSCB also has a new role in Working Together 2013 in publishing a threshold document that includes both an assessment process for early help and the type and level of early help services to be provided.

Ofsted Inspection Framework

- 3.6 The Evaluation Schedule for the Ofsted Inspection of arrangements for the protection of children includes a requirement to have "an early help offer that reflects the needs of the population and is accessible".
- 3.7 The report of Reading's Ofsted inspection, published in April 2013 found that progress had been made in the further development of early help provision

since the last inspection and “Children and young people in the borough are benefiting from a diverse range of early help and preventative services”... with most services being managed through ‘four well led CATs’ (Children’s Action Teams’).

- 3.8 The report noted that at their best, services are helping children and families to make lasting changes in their lives which improve their well-being and circumstances, but that there was no overall framework or system in place to capture and aggregate data to judge overall impact.
- 3.9 The inspection also identified “a wide diversity of assessment and planning models in current use across different agencies and teams, together with a variety of pathways into, through, and out of services” and noted the need to simplify pathways into and through services.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Reading currently has an *early years* strategy with a focus on children aged 0-5. The new Early Help Strategy covers the provision of early intervention and preventative services for children and young people of all ages.
- 4.2 Effective early help relies upon agencies working together to identify the needs of families and to provide targeted services to improve outcomes for children - at both an individual and system wide level. The strategy therefore aims to be multi-agency, covering the aligned work between Reading Borough Council, other statutory services (in particular Health) and the voluntary sector to provide early help.
- 4.3 Work to produce an Early Help Strategy began in March 2013. The strategy is structured around five priority areas, which reflect the Ofsted inspection framework:
- Early Identification and Assessment of Need
 - Effective Early Help for Children and Families
 - Supporting the Most Vulnerable and Sustaining the Change
 - Listening to and Involving Children and Families
 - Quality of Practice
- 4.4 Each section sets out Reading’s current early help offer, and identifies the key actions to take forward further improvements, and the outcome measures that will be used to monitor progress. The strategy is informed by the analysis of demographic, needs and performance data; national best practice; and feedback from stakeholders - including over 200 interviews with local parents as part of our ‘Transforming Early Years’ project.
- 4.5 Our vision for Reading is of ‘no child left behind and no parent unsupported’. Children can achieve their potential, and families realise their ambitions for themselves and their children, regardless of their background. In Reading, significant progress has been made in many areas to deliver integrated, timely early help and prevention services. This strategy sets out how we aim to

strengthen integration, joint working and consistency across services to ensure that we identify needs and support children, young people and their families at the earliest possible stage, improving outcomes and reducing costs.

4.6 There are a number of key principles that underpin the development of Early Help services for children and families in Reading going forward:

- Improving access to advice, information and support for parents, helping them to find and access the right services
- Intervening as early as possible before issues, needs and costs escalate;
- Targeting services effectively and aiming to deliver lasting change for families;
- Ensuring a focus on the needs of parents in their own right which act as enablers or barriers to nurturing, whilst maintaining a focus on the needs and experience of the child/children;
- To 'think family', ensuring that we are being creative in meeting needs and effectively coordinating the support provided
- Building the capacity of communities and individuals to develop services and to support each other;
- Engaging with children, young people and their families to understand their experience of what works to inform the design of services

4.7 The key strengths of Reading's current early help offer include:

- The strong multi-agency working within the Children's Action Teams and with partners such as schools, health visitors, midwives and the police to identify need and put in place integrated support for children and families.
- The maternity pathway between children's centres and the Royal Berkshire Hospital Midwifery Department to identify potentially vulnerable expectant mothers and the 12 week check and refer them to children's centres for targeted support.
- The good outcomes achieved across Specialist Youth Services and partners, including the reduction in the under 18 conception rate from 60.1 to 34.1.
- A range of evidence-based parenting programmes on offer.
- The existing good work to involve young people and families in service design and delivery, through the Youth Cabinet, Young Commissioners, Young Inspectors, and the Transforming Early Years work to engage parents in shaping services at children's centres. This includes successful approaches to 'Parents Supporting Parents' which we are developing further.

4.8 Some of the areas for further development identified include:

- Simplifying access to services for families - including through the creation of 0-19 Family Hubs at some children's centres, supported by the introduction of a comprehensive resource directory for children and families and in time a single telephone point of contact or 'one front door' to complement the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub).
- Simplifying pathways into and through services where required, and developing and embedding the 'Turnaround Families' approach across

agencies to enable better co-ordination of assessments, support and case records for families.

- Working with partner agencies to increase the level of appropriate referrals into early help services - reducing the level of inappropriate referrals into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) therefore.
- Addressing gaps in service provision, such as support to reduce child and maternal obesity and reviewing the accessibility and relevance of service to BME communities, particularly those where English is an additional language.
- Further aligning early help services with Children's Social Care to ensure seamless processes in transfer of cases.
- Improved ways to record the impact and outcomes achieved for families through the work of early help services, implementing an outcomes based performance framework.
- Further developing approaches to auditing practice quality and linking this to management supervision and practice development (with reference in particular to Ofsted recommendations).

4.9 The Strategy will be underpinned by a Delivery Plan to that sets out how the strategy will be implemented, identifying lead officers, resources and timescales for the delivery of the key actions set out in the high-level strategy.

4.10 Progress in implementing the strategy and demonstrating the impact achieved through the identified outcome measures will be monitored by the Children's Trust, including on the outcome measures identified to demonstrate successful improvements.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Early Help Strategy is aligned with Reading Children's Trust 'Children & Young People's Plan' as well as other strategies covering Special Educational Needs, Edge of Care and Early Years.

5.2 The priorities set out in the Children & Young People's Plan which underpin the Early Help Strategy are:

Keeping children safe:

- Protect and look after children and young people that need our care
- Reduce domestic abuse and substance misuse and support families with these issues

Intervening early:

- Work with families in greatest need as early as possible to build emotional well-being and improved health
- Help young people to have high aspirations and be healthy, active citizens, making positive life choices

Learning and ambition:

- Make sure every child and young person has a fair chance of achieving, whatever their ethnicity, disability or family income

- Help young people improve their employment prospects
- Help families from poverty realise their ambitions for their children and themselves

5.3 The Early Help Strategy is closely aligned with the strategic priorities in the Reading Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-16, which includes a goal to “increase the focus on early years and the whole family to help reduce health inequalities”.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 Key stakeholders across relevant services within Reading Borough Council, in Health services, and in the voluntary sector have been involved in shaping the first draft of the Strategy. Workshops were also held with a limited group of internal Children’s Services and Health colleagues to inform the draft document.

6.2 It is proposed that the Strategy is now consulted on more widely to test out the priorities and actions identified, and inform a final version for endorsement.

6.3 A detailed consultation plan and timetable is being developed. It is proposed that the draft Strategy is formally presented to partnership boards including the Children’s Trust and LSCB, as well as being circulated to a range of internal and external partners and stakeholders to include our own staff, schools, statutory and voluntary sector agencies, and external service providers. This will include an opportunity to attend ‘challenge events’ to test our ambition, future plans and proposed outcome measures.

6.4 Consultation will also include children, young people, parents and carers - and in particular those that have experience of local services. A summary version of the strategy tailored to a wider audience will be produced and will be made available online and through a range of centres/services. The approach will again include focus groups - proactively seeking contribution rather than reliance on written responses alone.

6.5 Responses to the consultation will be used to inform a final version of the Early Help Strategy, to be signed off in November 2013.

6.6 It is proposed that Early Help Strategy is progressed to the following timetable:

What	When	Who
Consultation	July - September	Various partners and wider public; LSCB and Children’s Trust
Strategy finalised	October	Head of Housing,

		Neighbourhood and Community Services
Strategy signed-off	November	Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out during the consultation period and presented with the strategy for sign-off at the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee in November.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are a range of statutory duties relevant to early help services including:

- i) Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 requires each local authority to make arrangements to promote cooperation between the authority and relevant partners to improve the wellbeing of all children in the area, which includes protection from harm and neglect.
- ii) Section.17.1(a) of the Children Act 1989 sets out that local authorities have a duty to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need'. A child is 'in need' if their health, or physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development, will be significantly impaired without the provision of services by a local authority, or if they are disabled. Local authorities can provide a range of services to support children in need and their families and a key route to Reading managing its duty is through the provision of the CAT teams. Children in Need are also supported through Children's Social Care and this is determined by their level of need as set out in a 'thresholds document'.
- iii) The Childcare Act 2006 imposed duties on local authorities to improve the well-being of young children in their area and reduce inequalities between them, and to ensure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated way - to improve access and maximise the benefits of those services to young children and their parents. It also placed duties on Primary Care Trusts, Strategic Health Authorities, and Jobcentre Plus (as statutory 'relevant partners') to work together with local authorities in achieving this.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Strategy is set in the context of reducing resources across the public sector, and the greater need to focus on targeting resources to ensure the greatest impact. A key focus of early help services is to prevent an escalation of needs, and therefore costs, and to reduce demand for higher tier services.

- 9.2 Implementation of an outcomes-based performance framework as detailed in the strategy will start to evaluate the local impact of services - both for individual families and in terms of service impact more widely. There is currently no national benchmarking information available on the effectiveness of early help services. However, nationally as part of the Troubled Families programme, the Government is developing a secure system to collect a range of monitoring information on a minimum of 10% of each authority's 'Troubled Families' cohort. A national model is also being developed to capture both cost avoidance and cost savings resulting from interventions and this could be applied across early help services.
- 9.3 The Delivery Plan sitting beneath the high-level strategy will include greater detail on the use of resources to deliver the actions set out.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Appendix 1 - Consultation draft of the Early Help Strategy