



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 17 March 2020

EARLY HELP STRATEGY UPDATE

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides the committee with an update on the partnership Early Help Strategy 2019-21. It details progress made to date, impact of activity, quality assurance arrangements and next steps.

The Early Help Strategy is aligned to the Wirral Plan 2025 objective:

- Brighter Futures: Working for brighter futures for our children, young people and families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes and raising the aspirations of every child in Wirral.

The Early Help Strategy affects all Wards within the borough.

This report does not relate to a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report and continue to demonstrate their commitment to early help and prevention initiatives.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The report seeks to provide members of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a full update on the progress of the partnership Early Help Strategy 2019-21 and to give assurance that early help is having a positive impact for children and families.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options have not been considered as this is a partnership strategy which is delivering against its agreed objectives.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 **Early help** means taking action to support a child, young person or their family as soon as a problem emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child's life, from pre-birth to adolescence, and applies to any problem or need that the family can't deal with alone. Early help can lead to better outcomes for children, prevent problems escalating or overwhelming families, create social mobility and support communities to thrive.

- 3.2 It is important to note that early help is the responsibility of all professionals, volunteers and agencies and is about taking action to prevent problems getting worse. In spring 2019, systems and processes were reviewed to ensure that assessments, plans and the framework for early help were as flexible as possible to allow any person working with a family to provide early help support. Whilst Wirral Council employs a range of staff in its Early Help and Prevention Services, they are part of a wider partnership response working alongside key professionals such as teachers, midwives, health visitors, police officers, and volunteers.

- 3.3 The Early Help Strategy was published in spring 2019, covering a two-year period. The strategy was deliberately short-term, with the expectation that the development of a new partnership early help model by April 2021 would require a refreshed strategic response. The strategy covers the five thematic areas from the #BeTheDifference campaign:

- Protect me from fear and harm;
- Help me make my daily life better;
- Help me learn and achieve my goals;
- Help me get the services I need; and
- Help my parents take good care of me.

Full details on the progress of each theme is provided in the Early Help Strategy Action Plan 2019-21 attached (Appendix 1).

- 3.4 Good progress has been made in relation to the *Protect me from fear and harm* thematic area, particularly in relation to the deployment of appropriately skilled staff.

Thirty-six Family Workers have been trained to deliver the *Gateway* domestic abuse programme on a 1:1 basis with resource being allocated through the Safer Wirral Hub where referrals for domestic abuse incidents are frequent. The *Reducing Parental Conflict* training package has been rolled out across the multi-agency partnership and is helping professionals and volunteers to better support children and young people who are affected by the impact of parental relationships which are harmful, particularly where there is or has been relationship breakdown. The Detached Youth Work Team has been transferred to the Contextual Safeguarding Service enabling a more proactive approach to disrupting exploitation, as well as educating and supporting young people in the community.

- 3.5 Relationship-based practice is making an impact to the *Help me make my daily life better* priority. Key principles of the SFEF (Safeguarding Families and Enhancing Futures) model focus on understanding the world of the child and the world of the adult. Through quality assurance auditing it is evident that practitioners delivering early help interventions are particularly skilled in this area, with those in Family Nurse Partnership, Family Matters and Youth Matters establishing transformative relationships with individuals and families.
- 3.6 The campaign to improve school attendance and the Youth Offer Review have been the main focus of activity within the *Help me learn and achieve my goals* theme. The partnership response to both strands of work has been very positive with co-operation and commitment being demonstrated. As an example, Wirral has high levels of school absenteeism due to illness which health colleagues are determined to help tackle. Key messages are being shared with parents, GP practices, hospitals, health visitors and school nurses. The Lead Officer for the 0-19 Health Service spoke at the recent attendance campaign launch, committing health services to work in collaboration with schools, the Local Authority, parents and families to reduce absenteeism.
- 3.7 A significant amount of activity for *Help me get the services I need* has been focused on data collection and monitoring. System configuration has enabled robust data collection and development of the Power BI performance reports means that analysis is becoming much more sophisticated. Understanding our data helps to ensure that children are receiving the right help at the right time and will also be vital to inform development of the new model. Early Help data is now reported within the context of the wider children's system and improving our understanding of and response to need and demand.
- 3.8 Much of the focus for *Help my parents take good care of me* is on strategic approaches. The parenting approach, parenting offer, families website, and parenting journey are longer-term pieces of work which are making good progress. These activities will continue in parallel with the development of the new model for early help, informing the process at all times. Pilot approaches, such as the partnership team working with families affected by the trigger trio (or toxic trio as previously known) will provide valuable learning to improve services.
- 3.9 In summary, there are 46 key actions on the Early Help Strategy Action Plan with progress as follows:

BRAG Rating	Description	Number
Blue	Action complete	9
Red	Off track	1
Amber	Delayed progress	1
Green	On track	35

3.10 Performance data evidences that the Early Help Strategy is having an impact on activity levels, with more children and families receiving preventative interventions and support. Data for 2018-19 against 2019-20 shows increases across all key indicators:

Activity	Mar 18-Feb 19	Mar 19-Feb 20
Referrals for early help	5,595	9,435
Early Help Assessments	1,157	1,680
Early Help Plans	1,179	4,658
Closures	1,927	3,686
Outcomes/Needs Met	67.43% (1,299 families)	75.15% (2,770 families)

3.11 It is assumed that the increased activity and improved levels of positive outcomes for early help is reducing demand for Children’s Social Care. The Children’s Services Data Book shows the following reductions:

- Contacts to Children’s Social Care 2018-19 were 14,900, dropping to 11, 766 for 2019-20
- The rate of Children in Need per 10,000 in 2018-19 was 398.8, dropping to 335.9 in 2019-20

3.12 External scrutiny and feedback in relation to the Early Help Strategy and services has been positive:

- “Early help is making a positive difference for children...The number of children getting early help has increased as a result of the effective commissioning of services and the re-configuration of council provision.” (Ofsted, July 2019)
- “I was particularly pleased to note that a greater number of children now benefit from timely and good quality early help.” (Kemi Badenoch MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, September 2019)
- “The MHCLG (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) noted your Community Matters initiative as an area of good practice.” (Kirby Swales, Director: Local Government Policy and Troubled Families)

- 3.13 Over the next twelve months, we will work with Capacity: The Public Services Lab and all stakeholders to design, develop and test a new model for early help. The twelve-month plan is in draft and will be presented to the Partnership for Children, Young People and Families for approval.
- 3.14 Monitoring of the Early Help Strategy and Action Plan will continue over the period and be reported to the Partnership for Children, Young People and Families, and Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership. Scrutiny will be provided by the new Children, Families and Education Committee.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report. It should however be noted that under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children. As referred to in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)*, this includes working with organisations to develop early help services that respond to local need.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report, however, Members are advised that development of the new early help model may have implications for ICT, staffing, budgets and other assets. Future resource implications will be presented to Members for consideration during 2020-21 as the new model is co-produced with stakeholders.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The majority of early help services are non-statutory. Whilst it is necessary to mitigate budget pressures, investment in prevention and early intervention should continue as part of a long-term financial strategy to reduce late intervention by more costly, acute services.
- 7.2 As service remodelling occurs, it will be essential to ensure that the new early help model is designed in tandem with other projects both within the partnership and the Council. The Assistant Director: Early Help & Prevention holds responsibility for ensuring that this programme of work is aligned with other relevant service transformation activity.
- 7.3 It is of paramount importance that early help activity reduces demand for statutory services. Robust performance reporting is well-embedded and monitored through the partnership Accountability Meeting by the Independent Chair, Linda Clegg.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Over the past year three significant consultation activities have been carried out relating to early help and prevention.
- 8.2 Wirral Safeguarding Partnership and the Contextual Safeguarding Committee undertook a survey in which over 2,000 young people participated. The survey sought the views of young people in Wirral regarding how they felt about their safety and the changes they would like to see being made. A *You Said...We Did* report has been published and is available at <https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk/contextual-safeguarding-survey/>
- 8.3 As part of the Youth Offer review a consultation with almost 3,000 young people took place from June to September 2019. The consultation asked young Wirral residents their views on what would make Wirral an amazing place for young people. Their voice was captured in the *Care More About Us* report which listed the top ten recommendations. A set of proposals for the new Youth Offer will be presented to Cabinet in March 2020. The *Care More About Us* report is available at <http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=818&MId=7988&Ver=4>
- 8.4 Through the Community Matters initiative, Capacity: The Public Service Lab have engaged with over 450 local families to learn about how they cope when faced with difficulties. Insight from this consultation will be presented in a report *Why Community Matters*, which is due to be published in March. Learning from this consultation will inform the development of the new early help model.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. There are no equality implications arising from this report. Early Help services are available to all Wirral residents, with differentiated services available for priority groups.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report, however, Members are advised that development of the new early help model will take into consideration those factors. Appropriate expertise will be sought to inform development of the new model and the design will aim not only to negate any potential harm but to promote environmentally friendly approaches and responsible practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Early Help Strategy 2019-21 Action Plan

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Early Help Strategy and accompanying documentation can be accessed at <https://www.wirral safeguarding.co.uk/professionals/what-is-early-help/>

Performance data is available online via the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT).

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee	February 2019