



# **Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board**

## **Early Help Multi-Agency Strategy 2017 – 2020**

**June 2017**

**Version 2**

## Foreword

As Chair of the Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) Board it is my privilege to write the foreword to this Stoke-on-Trent Early Help Strategy.

This strategy makes clear what is meant by the term Early Help, why it is important and the positive outcomes for children and families when there is effective early intervention. Early Help is about tackling issues as they emerge, preventing them from escalating and providing families with the support and tools to succeed and achieve. The key message throughout is that we all want children and young people in Stoke-on-Trent to grow up to be happy, safe and healthy, inspired and enabled to succeed. We want children and young people to have the tools they need to enable them to make good life choices as they grow and reach their potential.

There is already lots of great work happening across the city and we know that by working together we can improve things still further. By continuing to develop the provision of Early Help we have the potential to make significant savings to the high cost to both families and agencies of intervening later.

This important document has been produced in conjunction with parents and partners across the city. As a partnership we believe that to be effective Early Help must be everyone's business and responsibility. On this basis we will continue to develop partnership working not only with statutory agencies but with the third sector, private sector, families and local communities.

Our aim is that all partners, organisations and communities across Stoke-on-Trent work together to enable children and families to receive the right service, at the right time, from the right part of the system.

The CYPSP is committed to making this strategy a reality and will be holding partners to account for its implementation. We want to ensure that it is widely understood and used by practitioners, leaders and commissioners and that children and families are helped as a result. Through the planned audit arrangements and the links to related partnerships the Board will be particularly looking for examples of good practice so that these can be shared and developed to continually improve the services we offer.

I take this opportunity to thank all those involved in the work to develop this strategy and to all those who will be translating this strategy into action.

Councillor Janine Bridges - Chair Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Board

## **Strategic Context**

This strategy is owned and implemented by Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and delivered by all partner agencies across the city. It is a key element of our overall vision to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families through delivery of the Children, Young People and Families' plan 2016-2020 in which Early Help is a named priority. Working alongside a context of changing national policy, our priorities are to:

- Reduce the impact of child poverty
- Make a positive difference for children and young people through parenting
- Provide early help and support for the children and families who need it most
- Improve emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Prepare young people for adulthood
- Improve skills and employability

Working Together (2015) requires local partners to have in place effective ways of identifying emerging concerns and potential unmet need for individual children and their families. It also requires local partners to work together to put processes in place for the effective assessment of the needs of individual children who may benefit from Early Help services.

## **National Context – Drivers for Change**

A number of reviews undertaken over recent years provide a growing body of evidence and a common theme outlining the importance of preventative early help to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. Work from the Early Intervention Foundation, MP Frank Field, MP Graham Allen, Munro, Marmot, Tickell, the WAVE Trust among others provide evidence that early help can reduce demand on more specialist and costly services and enable children and adults to reach their full potential.

5 Allen, 2011, [http://grahamallenmp.co.uk/early\\_intervention](http://grahamallenmp.co.uk/early_intervention) The Marmot Review, 2010, [www.instituteoftheequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmotreview](http://www.instituteoftheequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmotreview) Field, 2010, The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults, [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mwginternal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=nr6WWTobk3A9iXDVCUN-cHf0cg4qd5sMsLl\\_MDENcag](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mwginternal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=nr6WWTobk3A9iXDVCUN-cHf0cg4qd5sMsLl_MDENcag), Tickell, 2011, [www.gov.uk/government/collections/tickell-review-reports](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tickell-review-reports) Ofsted, 2015, [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/410378/Early\\_help\\_whose\\_responsibility.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/410378/Early_help_whose_responsibility.pdf) Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), 2014, [www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/GETTING-ITRIGHT-FULL-REPORT.pdf](http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/GETTING-ITRIGHT-FULL-REPORT.pdf) Local Authorities Research Consortium (LARC), 2015, [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRCN01/LRCN01\\_home.cfm](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRCN01/LRCN01_home.cfm) IMPOWER, 2015, [www.impower.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/IMPOWER\\_BreakingtheLock\\_final\\_web2.pdf](http://www.impower.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/IMPOWER_BreakingtheLock_final_web2.pdf)

A thematic inspection evaluating the effectiveness of the early help services for children and families provided by local authorities and their partners was published by Ofsted in March 2015. The report outlines that it is estimated that over two million children in the UK are living in difficult family circumstances. It is crucial that these children and their families benefit from the best quality professional help at the earliest opportunity. For some families, without early help difficulties escalate, family circumstances deteriorate and children are more at risk of suffering significant harm.

By co-ordinating the work of partners to have a full picture of the needs and circumstances of children, young people and families, early help can be identified and the right help received at the right time. If effective, this will lead to better outcomes earlier, transform lives and reduce the flow of children and families to specialist services. This comes at a time of challenge to available resources and finance experienced by many local authorities and partner agencies

The key national drivers which impact on the development of this strategy include:

The Children and Families Act 2014, which includes:

- transformation of the system for children and young people with special educational needs
- reform of child care to ensure a whole-systems approach delivering high-quality early years education and child care
- Young carers
- reform of the family justice system to tackle delays when children are taken into care
- a requirement for local authorities to publish a Local Offer in partnership with children and young people and their families

NHS reforms including:

- the development of local commissioning groups
- changes to public health nursing

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, including the appointment of Police and Crime Commissioners and their role in supporting preventative initiatives in the community

The Healthy Child Programme.

The Troubled Families Programme

## **Local Context**

Stoke-on-Trent is a great city with strong community pride, a rich heritage and huge potential. The city is home to a rising population of more than 250,000 people, which includes over 61,000 children and young people (0-19).

The English Indices of Deprivation (2015) ranked the city as the 14th most deprived district in England. In terms of Income Deprivation Affecting Children the city is now ranked as 26th most deprived compared with 31st on the 2010 index.

Looking closer at a snapshot of data regarding children and young people that live in Stoke-on-Trent we can see that approximately:

### **Children and Social Care in 2015/16 ;**

1 in 52 Children in the city have a Child in Need Plan,

1 in 157 Children in the city are subject to a Child Protection Plan

67 Children are overseen by the Child and Sexual Exploitation Panel

**Education** - In 2015-16 there were 15.1 % of children who had a Special Education and or a Disability Need. There are 46.7 of looked after pupils with a SEN need.

**Mental Health** ; In 2015-16 there were 647 new cases of children accessing counselling at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Tier 2 and 633 new cases of children accessing Tier 1 and 2 well-being groups.

There is estimated to be 1425 of children and young people currently living with parental substance misuse (under 16) based on the national prevalence.

### **Health Issues:**

1 in 223 young people received substance misuse support in 2015-16.

The city has the highest teenage pregnancy conception rates with 42.4 conceptions per 1000 females aged 15-17 (2014).

The level of Obesity in children is worse than the national average of 10.9% of 4-5 year olds and 24.1% of 10-11 year olds classified as Obese in 2014-15.

## **Impact of Previous Early Help**

Work in the city over the past 2 years has seen partnerships strengthened and positive outcomes achieved with families. Achievements include;

- An increase month on month in the number of partners registering and leading early help, resulting in 634 partner cases open in March 2017
- Parents who use the service have a strong voice and give feedback to enable service delivery.
- Every school in the city now has a named Early Help Champion and 80% are fully engaged in disseminating information within their organisation and stating that they feel confident in the delivery of Early Help.
- Training delivered by the Early Help Services Team has been well attended by partners.
- Development of a practitioner handbook with partners
- Quality Assurance checks completed across the partnership and key findings and learning shared with all champions to improve quality.
- Four main reasons for early helps being initiated in the city are Parenting, Mental Health, Domestic Abuse and Relationships support which have all seen positive outcomes achieved with over 70% of cases.
- Clear impact has been recorded from Early Help Assessments showing cases that started at level 2 resulting in a 47% reduction in need with 14% escalating. Cases that started at level 3 resulted in a 70% reduction and only 11% escalating.
- Increase in the number of Young Carers identified across the city with an additional 170 individual carers assessments completed in 2016.

## **Early Help Vision**

Our vision continues to be that all children and young people in the city are happy, safe and healthy, inspired and enabled to succeed. For some children this can only be achieved with additional support. Our vision is to make Stoke-on-Trent an “Early Help” city by helping families at the earliest point, enabling them to access the right service, at the right time, from the right part of the system.

## **Early Help – A Description of What it is**

The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) describes Early Help as:

‘Early Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years’.

It goes on to say that ‘Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later’.

It is recognised there is a continuum of Early Help from preventing issues from occurring, to proactively identifying and responding to low level signs of unmet need through to more complex needs that require a more coordinated response.

Early Help involves bringing together people with the relevant skills and experience from the voluntary sector, community and/or other services to work in partnership with the child and/or their family to help themselves, build on their strengths to resolve the issue(s) and to become more resilient to prevent the issue from reoccurring. The purpose is to work alongside families to enable them to make the changes that they need to make for themselves.

## **Parents Feedback**

The views of children and families have been essential in shaping our Early Help Strategy. A series of events have taken place to ensure that the parent’s voice is captured and given significance in shaping Early Help within the city. Individual children and young people give feedback on a regular basis about their specific experiences but we acknowledge that there is more to be done in order to gain their views on more general service development. Parents have given us very strong messages, however, about what is important to them:

- We want to feel safe, not judged and we want someone to advocate for us
- We want to be able to walk into any setting and be confident that if we ask for help we will receive it.
- We want all services that are involved with our families to come together in one meeting.

- We want clear early help action plans that mean something to us, that we can understand and have actions that we have agreed with and can achieve
- We want to have a choice in the person that leads our support package and for that person to have a good knowledge of other services that will help us.
- We want Early Help Ambassadors – someone who has received Early Help themselves and can support other parents.

## **Purpose of the Strategy**

The purpose of this strategy is to establish a common understanding of Early Help and ensure that everyone understands how their contribution makes a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families.

This strategy sets out the vision, commitment and approach of the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) statutory guidance states that effective Early Help relies upon local partners working together to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from Early Help
- Provide a targeted Early Help offer to address the assessed needs of a child and their family focusing on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child.
- Identify individual strengths

Early Help requires all those who come into contact with children and families, from universal services to more targeted services, understand their role in identifying emerging concerns and potential unmet need.

The strategy will define the governance and accountability across the partnership and is supported by a detailed action plan to enable us to track progress and measure outcomes.

An annual review will be undertaken by the CYPSP Board and quarterly performance monitoring will ensure that all partners across the city are held to account and that positive progress is acknowledged and developed.

The CYPSP is accountable to the Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Board who receive quarterly updates on CYPSP activity to ensure that priorities are improving outcomes for all children and young people across the city.

## Why we need a Strategy

Local partners should have in place effective ways to identify emerging concerns and potential unmet need for individual children, young people and families. This requires all professionals, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying these concerns and to share information with other professionals to support early identification and assessment.

Within universal services, children and young people may have some relatively minor additional needs, or they may display signs which require a professional from a universal service to identify, intervene and implement the appropriate level of early help to prevent further escalation of need.

It is paramount that professionals share their knowledge with each other regarding those families who are in need of additional support. This will enable the most appropriate intervention and support to be provided in order to achieve positive outcomes.

## Early Help Principles

Our vision is underpinned by a number of Early Help principles developed and agreed with partners, parents and carers.

Early Help:

1. is **everyone's responsibility** – at the first point of contact all partners are committed to responding to the needs of families whether that need falls within their immediate expertise or not.
2. is grounded in a **strengths based approach** – families are central to defining and addressing the concerns they face and are equal partners in the process.
3. is a **'whole-family' approach**. We need to involve children, young people and their parents/carers to ensure all involved have a strong voice at all stages with appropriate respect for age and levels of development and understanding.
4. is **recorded** in a way that is easy to understand.
5. is part of a **clear process** to ensure that families' needs are met at the earliest point. This includes the introduction of an Initial Early Help.
6. is a commitment from all partners to being **curious and ensuring they ask clear questions** in order to understand the key issues families need help to resolve.

7. is a commitment from all partners to **take responsibility** in seeking additional advice and expertise from within their own agency when necessary.
8. is a commitment from all partners to allow parents to choose who their main point of contact is even when an intense Early Help Assessment is being led by an Early Intervention worker.
9. is a commitment from the partnership to **share data** effectively and embed clear communication pathways to enable both the needs and strengths of families to be better understood by everyone.

To ensure that we are all held to account in making the principles a reality every **agency will publish their Early Help offer**. This will provide clarity to families and other partners as to what they can expect. Support will be provided from the Early Help Team to support any partner to develop their Early Help offer.

### **Referral process for Early Help**

The strategy puts the responsibility on all practitioners to identify emerging problems and potential unmet need for individual children, young people and families, irrespective of whether they are providing services for children or for the adults within the family. Those who work mainly in universal services are best placed to identify children and/or their families that are at risk of poor outcomes. Alongside this is the use of local and city-wide intelligence to identify those who are more likely to be in need of Early Help, guiding both focus and resource for those who are less visible or who are isolated from services and/or supportive communities.

Throughout the consultation process we have listened to partners who are already delivering early help which is not necessarily recorded or shared with other partners. This was partially due to the previous assessment paper work being too long or ineffective across the partnership.

In response to this feedback we have developed a simple recording document that we have called an Initial Early Help to assist partners to record the work they are doing around Early Help.

There is now an expectation that all partners will do everything they can to resolve issues that families face at the earliest stage and record their actions on this document, enabling the work that they have completed with a family to be captured and shared with partners. This will be the same document that you will use to register an Early Help.

If the issues cannot be resolved at this lower level and it is felt that someone with more expertise in working directly with families is needed, this document is also used as the referral form into the Early Intervention Service. The Early Intervention Service will be working with families with more intense needs which include those families identified as meeting high level indicators from the Troubled Families Plan. No referral into this service will be accepted without an Initial Early Help having been completed to evidence the work that partner's agencies have already completed.

The use of a MARF will continue to be used when referring into safeguarding and will now require the Initial Early Help to be attached to evidence any work that has already been completed by partners.

The Early Help process chart shows the proposed pathway for partners and includes the new Registration form and the Initial Early Help documents - proposed to be used by all partners( Appendix 1, 2 and 3).

This approach brings the partnership work and approach to Early Help together whilst delivering a timely and targeted Early Intervention service ensuring that Early Help is offered to those for whom it can make the most difference. A commitment to use and embed the use of Signs of Safety will also enable a consistent approach to be further developed to improve outcomes for children across the partnership and will be rolled out across the city in the next year. Advice and support will be available from the Early Intervention Service in relation to specific cases.

The Early Help team will support practitioners to undertake an Initial Early if needed to develop better quality multi-agency working with improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

The role of the team is to offer advice, guidance and support to practitioners from all agencies on thresholds, the assessment process and signposting to appropriate services. The support they can offer includes:

- Attending team meetings to provide information about the Early Help process;
- Supporting individual agencies or practitioners to write initial assessments, develop plans and agree outcomes;
- Chairing complex Early Help meetings.
- Deliver training on key themes to improve quality including the role out of the signs of safety
- Undertake quality assurance audits

Once a referral has been accepted a worker from the Early Intervention Service will complete an Early Help Assessment and work with partners to provide appropriate services and support.

If issues are still not able to be resolved and there are safeguarding concerns the Early Help Assessment will be used to refer on to Children's Social Care.

### **Governance and Accountability**

Overall accountability of the Early Help strategy resides with the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) Board. This strategy has been developed and led by an early help priority group (Early Help Strategy Group) which is overseen and is endorsed / ratified by the Board. It is responsible for developing an annual plan to secure sufficient provision of good quality and effective Early Help in line with local needs. The CYPSPB is accountable for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of Early Help services by:

- ensuring that assessments reflect the views and experience of the child and family
- monitoring the quality of Early Help assessments, plans and management oversight through effective audit arrangements
- developing and monitoring local quality standards.
- critically evaluating the effectiveness of Early Help and sharing the results in its' Annual Report

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) provides added scrutiny and challenge to ensure that an effective Early Help offer is in place.

This strategy has been developed within the context of the Health and Wellbeing Board's directive on Early Help and prevention and will identify the needs of Stoke-on-Trent Children and Young people, and their families as articulated in our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

### **Early Help Performance and Effectiveness**

Early Help will contribute to wider outcomes such as school readiness, reduction of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and reduction in offending levels. We will listen to children, young people and families to understand how well we are doing to achieve the vision and principles set out in this strategy, as well as use all relevant available data.

Performance and effectiveness is reported on a quarterly basis to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board. An annual review of

performance informs the Early Help Action Plan which is overseen by the Early Help Strategy Group.

Several measures have been identified that will monitor the impact and effectiveness of early help and also links into the Troubled Families Targets. As this strategy is progressed a focus will be given to how we monitor and measure our impact to ensure children, young people and families are receiving effective and timely Early Help in order to achieve better outcomes. The measures are;

1. Reduction in the number of looked after children (LAC); Reduction in the number of Child in Need Plans open to children's social services (excluding LAC and Child Protection plans);
2. Reduction in the number of children experiencing any aspect of the Toxic Trio
3. Reduction in the number of children and young people excluded from school;
4. Increase in school attendance and attainment;
5. Reduction in the number of children and young people involved in anti-social behaviour, gang related issues and crime;
6. Reduction of the number of children and young people in custody;
7. Increase in the number of young people and parents/carers in employment training & education;
8. Reduction in the number of teenage conceptions;
9. Reduction in the number of referrals to specialist mental health services through an improvement in emotional wellbeing and mental health
10. Reduction in attendance at A&E departments
11. Increase in the number of EHAs initiated by partner/agency;
12. Improved confidence amongst partners of the Early Help Process;
13. Positive feedback from children, young people and parents / carers on the Early Help offer, their experiences and positive outcomes achieved.

The use of an action plan broken down into four themes will encompass the measures above and the principles on which this strategy is based. The action plan will be used within the Early Help Strategy Group to enable us to provide an effective and qualitative service. The themes in the Action plan are:

- Increasing the confidence of parents

- Increasing the number of Early Helps delivered by partners
- Ensuring that only those families who need specialist support are referred into Early Intervention and Children's Social Care
- Developing a robust quality assurance framework

## **Quality Assurance**

Everyone who works across Early Help has an important contribution to make to ensure we do the best we can for the children and families we work with.

The quality assurance framework supports services in delivering the vision we have for helping children and young people to achieve their aspirations. Stoke-on-Trent's Early Help quality assurance framework is based on a regular cycle of quality assurance activities in order that information can be routinely collected and used to improve services, enabling improved outcomes for children and young people.

The Early Help Team will undertake quality assurance audits twice a year using a dip sample of Initial Early Helps (led by partners) and Early Help Assessments (led by the Early Intervention Service). Following the audit, the Early Help Team will provide appropriate and relevant feedback and training across the partnership to enable continuous improvement. This mechanism has been designed to promote consistency in the application of Early Help Assessments and to support services working with children and families using common processes.

## **In summary**

This strategy outlines our plans to improve the wider system of Early Help in Stoke-on-Trent from 2017 to 2020. It recognises that we have already made good progress and can evidence success but more importantly it shows that we are clear where future improvement is needed.

This strategy focuses on improving the whole system of early help by focusing on a number of key areas identified in an action plan where we know improvement is needed and where by doing so we can ensure that we are best placed to support children, young people and their families across the city.

All the Early Help paperwork is available on the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board website under [Professionals / Procedures / Early Help](#).