

Social Care Services Board

16 March 2017

Early Help and the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Task Group

Interim Report on Activity

Summary of activity

The terms of reference for the task group are attached as **annex 1**. From autumn 2016/17, representatives from the task group met with the following witnesses:

- Garath Symonds, Assistant Director for Commissioning & Prevention, Children, Schools and Families
- Ben Byrne, Head of Early Help, Children, Schools and Families
- Emily Pentland, Partnership & Programme Manager, Children, Schools and Families
- Jackie Lodge, Chief Executive, Walton on Thames Charity
- Rebecca Brooker, Prevention and Communities Lead, Adult Social Care

In addition to the work of the Task Group, the Board has received a report on Early Help at its meeting on 26 October 2016. A further report regarding the Children, Schools and Families commissioning plan, which includes additional detail related to Family Hubs, is being considered at the Board's meeting today (16 March 2017).

The Task Group is grateful to witnesses for their time and input. It presents a summary of its discussions to date, and makes some interim conclusions.

The role of Early Help in reducing demand on statutory services

The Task Group was given a briefing on Early Help, and its role in reducing demand on statutory child protection services.

It was outlined that any Early Help strategy would have to work in conjunction with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which had become the primary front-door for any safeguarding referral in October 2016.

Officers outlined three points of failure within the current referral system:

- **Demand** – Children's Service had received approximately 66,000 contacts seeking to make a referral in the previous year. The Task Group was informed that a quarter of these were repeat referrals. It was also noted that a high

number of these contacts were related to children already known to Children's Services.

- **Thresholds** – Officers highlighted that in the previous year (2014/15) the number of Child and Family Assessments that led to a Child Protection Plan was one in four. This was compared to Kent, where the ratio was one in two. Officers expressed the view that this suggested that the thresholds for a social care intervention were not consistently understood or applied by those making referrals.
- **Follow up/step down** – The Task Group was informed that a high percentage of cases being referred did not meet the thresholds for a statutory intervention.

The Task Group was informed that the development of previous Early Help offers had not proved successful, and that this had an adverse impact on the council's relationship with partners such as schools.

The new Early Help offer would see an investment from the council of £2.4 million in order to realise potential savings of £11.4 million.

The current role of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS)

The Task Group was informed that there were examples of good practice in how the council worked with the VCFS in delivering improved outcomes for children and their families. An example of this was the Streets Apart programme in Elmbridge. The programme overview of which is included as **annex 2**.

The Task Group met with Jackie Lodge, Chief Executive of Walton Charity, to explore the background of the Streets Apart programme. It was highlighted that the original initiative had been proposed by the voluntary sector, with the charity contacting the council in order to discuss how they could work collaboratively to address local need.

The Task Group discussed the benefits of this grassroots approach. It was supportive of a principle of VCFS groups being encouraged to build local models to improve resilience and address need, rather than a centralised county-wide model.

It was highlighted by witnesses that there was potential for the council to support local brokers in developing capacity within the voluntary sector. Witnesses felt that the most critical areas of need were related to ensuring that VCFS organisations had the right governance models, administrative training and back office support.

It was highlighted that there was significant variability in terms of what was locally available. One of the primary aims for the service is to identify and develop ways of VCFS partners in order to support the Early Help agenda.

The sub-group discussed the potential to develop community resources and utilise already existing assets as a means of providing additional space for Early Help services.

Development of Family Hubs

The Task Group explored the development of Family Hubs, a summary of which is attached as **annex 3**. This model has been given strong support by the Children's Commissioner for England¹ and was focussed on putting a team around the family in order to improve support and outcomes for children.

The Task Group explored the prioritisation of resource across the county, and how it could be effectively managed to provide the most efficient Early Help offer to the areas of most need.

Officers shared that there were continued challenge in areas where the voluntary, community and faith sector resource was limited, and appetite for community-driven initiatives was variable. This was a common feature of areas of high deprivation in Surrey, though not exclusively the case.

The Task Group queried whether there was an opportunity to engage more with schools in the Early Help offer and that there was a key point of inclusion, particularly in the Primary Sector, that needed to be addressed. Officers noted that there was a generally strong level of engagement from the Primary Sector and that work was being undertaken to build upon this.

It was highlighted that 48 out of 58 children's centres were situated within the Primary Sector and that some of these would become Family Hubs as part of the new offer.

It was suggested that there was a move within the service to shift the focus of the current offer in children's centres away from a prescriptive approach. Members suggested that there was scope to include more input from the voluntary sector. It was noted that this was a concern present in children's centre workers regarding this change.

A Programme Board, led by the Cabinet Member for Children and Families Wellbeing, is being initiated with a timeline of progress and monitoring. The expectation was that the new Early Help delivery model will be in place by January

¹ 'Family Hubs: A Discussion Paper', Children's Commissioner for England, October 2016
<http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Family%20Hubs%20-%20A%20Discussion%20Paper%202016.pdf>

2018.

It was suggested that there were some instances of early adopters of the initiative that would operational earlier. It was noted that this could be achieved through rebranding some existing services. It was also noted that there were some shared estate opportunities with NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs).

It was noted that the Family Hubs would provide a wide range of services, rather than just an Early Help offer, and that there was scope to improve links with partners to deliver this service.

Lessons learnt from Family, Friends and Community Support

The Task-Group discussed possible lessons that could be learnt by looking at how Family, Friends and Community Support was delivered in Adult Social Care.

It was commonly recognised that the voluntary sector delivered a wide range of impactful, positive support. The challenge, however, remains how this could be targeted to best meet the need of local communities. Officers expressed the view that the County Council was able to provide an oversight of these needs, in respect to social care, and a shaping role in how it supported partners.

It was highlighted that time was required to develop a common vision and understanding amongst partners about what respective roles the County Council and VCFS were to play. Officers outlined how lessons were being shared with respect to developing an Early Help offer, and the Task Group was assured there is a common dialogue between Adult Social Care and Children, Schools and Families in this respect.

The Task Group raised questions as to whether there were opportunities to embed the sign-posting of VCFS in how social care practitioners operated in Children's Services. It was highlighted that there were some critical distinctions in how social care support operated in respect to adults and children, particularly in reference to the statutory framework in which this support was delivered. It was noted, however, that there were opportunities to develop this thinking in reference to family support, and that Family Hubs would support this sign-posting.

Conclusions

The Task Group feels that ongoing development of the Early Help offer is essential in delivering the transformational changes required to improve outcomes for families and manage demand on statutory services.

On the basis of the evidence heard, there is clearly a commitment to work with the VCFS in this respect, though a number of significant challenges in the year ahead. These include:

- Ensuring that VCFS partners are enabled by the work, and given a mandate to deliver, without taking a prescriptive centralised approach;
- Negotiating partner engagement at a time that resource is being reduced and delivery models redesigned;
- Involving all aspects of the VCFS, including faith partners, in order to maximise their contribution to improved outcomes for families; and
- Addressing regional variance in the VCFS infrastructure through resource, support and investment, in order to improve resilience in more deprived communities.

The Board's successor might wish to consider how it maintains oversight in this area, and how it can continue to scrutinise and support the development of the Early Help offer in Children, Schools and Families. The Task Group recommends:

- That the Task Group terms of reference is reviewed by the relevant scrutiny board in the new Council year, and a decision made as whether to continue.

Report contact:

Andrew Spragg, Scrutiny Officer, Democratic Services

Tel: 020 8213 2673

Email: andrew.spragg@surreycc.gov.uk

Annexes

Annex 1 – Early Help and VCFS Terms of Reference

Annex 2 – Streets Apart Programme Overview

Annex 3 – Developing Family Hubs Paper

This page is intentionally left blank