



Children and Education Select Committee  
19 September 2013

**Early Help offer, reducing the need for families to access high support services**

**Purpose of the report:** Scrutiny of policy development and a review of Early Help and Prevention for families, children and young people. The report demonstrates to the select committee the approach and direction of travel taken with partners across the county to enable the development of early help whole system and offers.

**What is early help and why is it needed?**

1. 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<sup>i</sup>.
2. The evidence and case for early help is made across major reviews on child protection (Munro<sup>ii</sup>), health inequalities (Marmot<sup>iii</sup>), poverty and life chances (Field<sup>iv</sup>) and education (Tickell<sup>v</sup>). Both reports by Graham Allen<sup>vi</sup> strongly suggest that by using evidence based approaches to early help, children and young people will achieve better outcomes at less cost. National organisations such as C4EO, the Wave Trust and Innovation Unit have been researching and testing early help approaches and have evidence of considerable impact on child outcomes<sup>vii</sup>. Overall the evidence suggests that early help is needed throughout all phases of the life course as difficulties emerge for families.
3. The Children and Young People's partnership<sup>1</sup> is committed to working together to provide a coherent and effective Early Help offer for children, young people and their families in order to improve positive outcomes and reduce the demand for services. If delivered appropriately we can:

<sup>1</sup> The Children and Young People's Partnership is Surrey's over arching partnership arrangement for children and young people which brings together the key organisations involved in commissioning and delivering children's services in Surrey. Its purpose is to co-ordinate working with all children, young people and families in Surrey with a particular focus on those most vulnerable.

- a) Support children and families before their problems escalate and reach crisis
  - b) Build on the positive elements of families lives
  - c) Build good relationships between families and services (through the voluntary rather than statutory nature of early help services)
  - d) Enhance individual and family resilience at a time when it is easier for them to do so
  - e) Minimise adverse periods and maximise life chances.
4. A desire to support and help families as difficulties emerge has been a shared aspiration of all key partnerships and communities across Surrey for a long time. As policy and language changes we have seen a shift from prevention as the most common terminology to be replaced, following the Munro reviews into child protection and safeguarding, by a descriptor of 'early help', This has been ratified in Working Together 2013; multi-agency statutory safeguarding guidance<sup>viii</sup>.
  5. National evidence, also demonstrates the critical role of early help services in:
    - Achieving positive outcomes for children, young people and families
    - Reducing costs associated with acute and specialist services.

#### What does effective early help look like?

6. 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. Effective early helps relies upon local agencies working together to:
  - Identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
  - Undertake an assessment of the need for early help;
  - Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child. ( Working Together 2013, pg10)
7. More recently there has been recognition that effective safeguarding and well-being systems are those that remain child centred and are inclusively family focussed<sup>ix</sup>. It is significant the move from the carers descriptor as 'parent' to that of 'family' - a construct that has varied meaning. Many of Surreys children and young people in need of support and / or protection are vulnerable or at risk of harm due to their experiences of being cared for. Often families are struggling and vulnerable, with a multiplicity of personal and domestic challenges. To improve the life experience and opportunities of children and young people, interventions often need to be directed towards the adults. Family pressures can be as overt as parental drug and alcohol dependency, mental health difficulties, instances of domestic abuse or more environmental in terms of poor employment opportunities and housing difficulties. What is recognised is that in most cases children and young people will experience better care giving from adults who are not

'distracted' by a multiplicity of problems that reduce their ability to cope and capacity to 'parent'.

### Early Help Thinking

8. Early help is part of a wider safeguarding and well being system, providing support and intervention to families who are experiencing difficulties and temporarily struggling. It has a wide reach and is not just about helping the select few. Based on relationships, it supports and promotes independence and resilience. A system of support in its own right, early help forms an integral part of the step down and avoid step up approach.
9. Ofsted highlighted that effective and prompt responses by the County Council and Police offered protection to children at risk of harm. However, their findings indicated that more work is needed to strengthen partnership working and early help. Key actions to improve the quality of help and protection given to children and young people include:
  - a) Establishment of a joint commitment from the Surrey Safeguarding Children's Board<sup>2</sup>, Children and Young People's Partnership and core partner agencies, to implement an integrated early help offer to ensure seamless support arrangements for those children not yet, or no longer, at risk of significant harm
  - b) Review of the use of the common assessment framework (CAF)<sup>3</sup> for any purposes other than the assessment, planning and delivery of a multi-agency early help offer.
10. Surrey's Early Help Partnership Reference Group<sup>4</sup> has agreed an overarching strategy for early help which recognises that children and young people will move between different levels of need as their needs and circumstances change. As such, Surrey's early help offer should encompass each of the following levels of provision:
  - a) Universal services provided locally in the community for children and young people who are achieving expected outcomes. These services address the entire population of children and young people and aim to

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<sup>2</sup> The Surrey Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) is an inter-agency forum which brings together the Local Authority, police, health workers and all others in the community responsible for child protection to help them work more effectively to safeguard children from abuse and neglect.

<sup>3</sup> A Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a holistic assessment that looks at the strengths and needs of children, parents and the wider environment. It is a consent based form which gathers information with an agreed action plan to help ensure the family get the right sort of help. The aim is to identify, at the earliest opportunity, a child's or young person's additional needs which are not being met by the universal services they are receiving, and provide timely and co-ordinated support to meet those needs.

<sup>4</sup> The partnership reference group was set up in October 2012 to provide steer, guidance and expertise to the early help agenda in Surrey. It is chaired by the Assistant Director for Childrens and Safeguarding, and is made up of a mixture of strategic and operational experts in the area of early help across partner agencies.

reduce later incidences or problems. For example: universal services of health and education.

- b) Early Help services and timely intervention for children and young people at risk of, or who are diverting from expected outcomes.
- c) Specialist support and therapy involving a response when the problem has become serious, e.g. Child Protection.

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- 11. While Surrey has a good universal and specialist offer at either ends of the spectrum, there is recognition of, and an appetite for amongst partners, improving and strengthening the offer of services for children in need of early help and timely intervention to prevent problems becoming entrenched and more complex.
- 12. An underpinning principle of the strategy is that services are provided locally in the community creating greater opportunity for collective social responsibility by partners and the community within the system. This in turn will help to generate the environment for community budgets and social investment from all partners / organisations in the community as well scope to develop both philanthropy and private investment.

#### **What has been achieved so far?**

- 13. Surrey's Early Help project was established as a partnership-owned project in October 2012, as part of Surrey County Council's Public Value Programme. This built on the work that had been undertaken in 2010-12 to implement the Common Assessment Framework as part of the then Preventative Approach 2011 and Interim Early Help Strategy 2011/12. The objectives of the project are to develop and implement a co-ordinated early help offer across services and agencies working with children and young people, to improve outcomes and reduce the need for formal referral to children's social care.
- 14. An Early Help Partnership Reference Group was setup to provide steer, guidance and expertise to the Early Help Project. To act as a sounding board and a creative forum for the testing of options. It is chaired by the Project Sponsor, the Deputy Director of the Children, Schools and Families Directorate, and is made up of a mixture of strategic and operational experts in the area of early help across partner agencies.
- 15. The partnership group held a successful two day event in June to consolidate developments to date around the Early Help Strategy and operational tools and processes. Professionals from across partner agencies in Surrey came together to agree a partnership early help strategy, endorse new thresholds for accessing services and sign-off proposals for an 'early help assessment', building on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).
- 16. There is a commitment from the partnership to achieving the following vision:

‘Everyone works together to offer early help and timely intervention to support the resilience and well-being of children young people, families and communities promoting well-being and positive life opportunities.’

17. Partner agencies have co-designed and agreed to:

- Commission early help and timely intervention services to achieve agreed outcomes and priorities – e.g. To provide family support for families with multiple problems
- To strengthen communities by developing the market of local preventative services that can provide / support early help
- Support the philosophy and approach of an Early Help system that ensures through good communication, networks and referral /care pathways families experience a coherent ‘step up’ and ‘step down’ process as levels of need and /or complexity change.

### **Outcomes generated collectively for Early Help**

18. At each stage of their lives all partners want children, young people and families to achieve the following outcomes:

- Families are resilient and feel supported to tackle issues and problems as soon as they arise
- Families receive a minimum intervention as early as possible to prevent escalation of problems
- Children and young people make good relationships
- Children and young people are happy, healthy and well
- Children and young people maximise life opportunities.

19. A more extensive outcomes table can be found in Appendix 2.

### **Overarching partnership outcomes**

20. The partners have recognised overarching outcomes to benefit all parties/agencies and deliver the collective outcomes for families, children and young people, these are:

- Children and young people have better life opportunities, are safe, healthier and happier
- Crime reduction
- Reduction in A &E attendance
- Improved health and well-being
- Children more available to learn, better attendance
- Reduction in need for children and young people to become subject of a CP and LAC
- Expectation management of families living with disability- personalised budgets
- Less dependency on state
- Adults ‘more available’ for learning and work

## Partnership working

21. Partners will work together as a single system to drive improvement in the provision of early help services for children, young people and their families. In order to achieve our vision the following priority areas will need to be addressed:
- a) Provide well co-ordinated multi-agency early help services that are accessible, of good quality and of best value to meet the needs of the local population
  - b) Ensure that early help services are effective in identifying and improving outcomes for children and young people and particularly for groups of young people at risk of poorer outcomes e.g. children with disabilities
  - c) Improve communication, information sharing and recording across partner agencies who deliver early help and preventative services so families know what services are available and how to access them
  - d) Work with children and families as equal partners to develop the provision of early help and preventative services
  - e) Build capacity in communities and the voluntary sector to deliver early help
  - f) Prevent and protect young people from suffering the long-term effects of neglect.
22. There have been 4/5 partnership key focus areas of activity identified, these are:
- Good start in life- preschool health, learning and care giving to combat the negative impact of neglect
  - Reducing impact of domestic abuse- focus on causal factors; alcohol misuse; drug abuse; and mental health problems
  - Challenging and vulnerable adolescents
  - Vulnerable and disadvantaged children
  - Living with disability.
23. Appendix 1 illustrates this approach. It shows that children and young people will move between different levels of need as their own needs and circumstances change. A flexible pathway is therefore required to respond to these changing needs of children and young people and their families.
24. In the last year there has been a renewed focus on partnership working across the County. Different localities and/ or different agencies have focussed on targeted priorities and trialling new ways of working (e.g. Surrey Family Support programme, public health campaigns) while partnership governance groups have been establishing an overarching strategic approach to the development of an umbrella Surrey wide Early Help strategy.
25. There has been a continued emphasis across key partners in Surrey to deliver early help services to improve outcomes for children and young people and to reduce their need for intensive, acute or specialist support not least because of:



- Resilient families are more able to support good life chances for children
- Rising demand for specialist services for children and young people
- Improved national evidence of the role of early help in achieving positive outcomes
- Budget restraints
- Recognition of the importance of early help by all agencies
- It makes sense.

### Initial Implementation

26. In Children's Services there is already work underway to improve the interface and process between partner organisations, social workers and managers from Children's Service. The service has now joined up with the Surrey Police Central Referral Unit (CRU)<sup>5</sup> based in Guildford Police Station. This new way of working began on 1st July 2013. This shared ambition to manage the safeguarding 'front door' differently is the first steps towards a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) that can provide the gateway to a future comprehensive Surrey wide early help and safeguarding system. The LA and police have now committed to explore the requirements necessary to expand the CRU into a MASH; including wider partner conversations. The benefits of the CRU are expected to be: a partnership approach and sharing of responsibility between agencies; joint decision making; greater information sharing; and better consistency in the application of thresholds and in turn better safeguarding outcomes for children and families in Surrey.
27. Surrey Police referrals account for a significant number of all the referrals to Children's Services. The aim is to improve the county's joint safeguarding response to child protection and child in need referrals and develop a shared responsibility across partner agencies for managing and sharing risk. This will include gaining partnership sign up to new ways of working collaboratively. The first phase of work is in the early stages of development with children's social care staff co-located with the police; new processes and procedures are still being tested with the police to manage 'child coming to Police notice' notifications. This work feeds into the Public Value Programme and is in line with the directorate's vision, strategy and the 4P's - prevention, protection, participation and potential.
28. An Early Help operating model incorporates intervention providers as part of a whole Early Help System. Referral pathways navigate the Early Help and Safeguarding systems, adopting the 'step up and step down' principle. Early help is something that can be delivered through a multiplicity of formal and informal 'providers' and 'vehicles of provision' e.g. schools, family support programmes, children centres, health visitors, church and faith groups, youth centres, GP surgeries, local community groups, family networks.

<sup>5</sup> Surrey police have a central referral process for all children and adult safeguarding and domestic violence referrals. The Central Referral Unit (CRU) will receive and grade all referrals to ensure that the right level and consistency of response is given to agencies.

29. Provision should be locally based and sourced, supported by statutory services. The model should adopt a team around the family approach with an identified lead professional. To succeed, an understanding of good information sharing is imperative as well as collaborative working throughout the system e.g. public health have a crucial role to play in terms of the JSNA<sup>6</sup> and commissioning resources; CCG's have a key commissioning role and the Surrey Family Support programme is an important delivery vehicle along with other local and community offers.

### **Conclusions:**

30. The key points of the report for select committee to consider and review are:
- a) Early help needs to be considered as a whole system and brings together a number of operating vehicles and offers for families, children and young people
  - b) The system will not be effective without fostering the environment for relationships to develop and the recognition by all agencies of the collective responsibility to delivering the needs of the families, children and young people in Surrey.

### **Recommendations:**

31. There are two recommendations for Committee to consider:
- a) That the Early Help approach and direction of travel are endorsed by the Committee, and the Council and key partners are encouraged to develop a whole system and offers within the system, including shared resource and budgets.
  - b) That the Committee review the development of the strategy, model of delivery components and offers being generated in partnership at a future date.

### **Next steps: Operating model generation**

32. The next steps are to:
- a) Work with families as equal partners to produce a child, young person and family friendly version of the Early Help Strategy. (August 2013 – September 2013)

<sup>6</sup> The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) identifies and describes the health, care and wellbeing needs of the whole population in Surrey. It is used by Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Board to set priorities and plan services to meet those needs. The Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board was established as part of the Government's recent changes to the NHS. It became a statutory committee of Surrey County Council on 1 April 2013. The Board is the place for the NHS, public health, social care, local councillors, district and borough representatives and user representatives to work together to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Surrey.



- b) Develop an early help commissioning strategy and action plan (September 2013 – March 2014)
- c) Development of a partnership training and induction programme (September 2013 – March 2014)
- d) Training workshops to be rolled out to focus on use of the single Early Help Assessment, and development of lead professional role (October 2013 – March 2014)
- e) Develop an Early Help implementation plan to ensure partners work together to deliver the Early Help strategy across Surrey (January 2014 – March 2014)
- f) Implementation of early help system in line with Public Value Programme options for the CSF Directorate (April 2014 – March 2015)

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**Sources/background papers:**

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Department for Education (2013) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. HM Government.

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Marmot, M. (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010*. Published by The Marmot Review

Munro, E. Professor (2011) *Munro review of child protection: final report - a child-centred system*. The Stationery Office.

Tickell, C. (2012) *The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning. An Independent Report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to Her Majesty's Government*.

**END NOTES**

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<sup>i</sup> Department for Education (2013)

<sup>ii</sup> Professor Munro, E. (2011)

<sup>iii</sup> Marmot, M. (2010)

<sup>iv</sup> Field, F. Chances (2010)

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<sup>v</sup> Allen, G. (2011)

<sup>vi</sup> Tickell, C. (2012)

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyintervention/>, <http://www.wavetrust.org/>,  
<http://www.innovationunit.org/>

<sup>viii</sup> Department for Education (2013)

<sup>ix</sup> Allen, G. (2011)