

Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Report subject	Children's Services Early Help System
Meeting date	19 March 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	This paper sets out the diagnostic of the Early Help system within BCP. It explains the changes that have occurred within these services to lead to a better, more efficient, and effective Early Help and prevention offer. These improvements future proof our delivery methods and incorporate elements of the Care Review. In addition, it will cover Family Hubs and how we are transforming to work with all children and all age ranges within this service, with the support of our communities.
Recommendations	For information and scrutiny
Reason for recommendations	For information and scrutiny
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Richard Burton
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley – Director for Children's Services
Report Authors	Tracy Ryan – Early Help & Partnership Lead Pippa Emmerson – Service Manager, Targeted Support and Youth Services Juliette Blake – Director of Safeguarding & Early Help
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	Information

1. Background

- 1.1 As a part of the ongoing Children's Transformation Programme and Improvement work, a review of Children's Early Help Services has taken place, and comprehensive transformation programme is being implemented. This report summaries the findings and recommendations of the review and provides an update on progress to date.

2. Why are Early Help Services being redesigned?

- 2.1 Families tell us that when they need additional help, they want to be able to find and access services easily. Families want a seamless experience, and not to be passed between agencies or left to navigate a complex range of services alone.
- 2.2 The council and its partners are required to deliver services within a defined budget and have responsibility to provide these as efficiently and effectively as a possible. The council also has a responsibility to liaise with and coordinate the wider partnership of services delivering early help. The overall aim of the redesign is therefore to:
- Improve the public's awareness and accessibility to the wide range of services that can support children, young people and families.
 - Coordinate a wide range of services so families experience more joined up and seamless help.
 - Ensure that any duplication of effort or service is avoided, and that professionals from different agencies are working in an integrated manner.
 - Ensure the staffing and financial resources available are being used to maximum impact.
 - Strengthen partnership working when developing services and setting priorities that support family functioning.
 - Reduce the demand for more costly statutory interventions.

3. What is Early Help?

- 3.1 Early Help is a term used to refer to a system of services working together to provide support to children & young people (CYP), and their families.
- 3.2 Most families will experience times when they would benefit from additional advice, information, and guidance during normal key life changes such as becoming new parents, dealing with early childhood development or adolescence, bereavement, or key transitions during education. Some families may also need additional support if they experience challenges such as poor emotional health and wellbeing, adjusting to parenthood/ Baby's needs, childhood developmental delay and learning difficulties, poor school attendance, housing challenges, cost of living and debt issues, alcohol and substance misuse, domestic violence, or relationship breakdowns.
- 3.3 When Early Help provision is working well, families should be able to access support services easily. All professionals in contact with children and their families should be able to identify their needs and know how to get the right help, by the right service, in

a timely manner. Families should not have to share their information with different professionals multiple times, and they should not experience being passed between services.

- 3.4 Effective Early Help aims to prevent challenges in families becoming more complex and resulting in families needing to access more costly statutory services.

4. Who Provides Early Help?

- 4.1 Early Help is a partnership responsibility set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (refreshed in 2023)*¹. All services working with children form a part of this partnership, and between them they should offer support from pre-birth to 19 years, or up to 25 years for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The offer of support available should form a **graduated response** to a CYP and family's needs. This should include prevention activities or low-level advice and guidance that may be provided by single universal services such as Midwifery, Health Visiting services, Nurseries, and schools; through to more intensive support for families with more complex needs, provided by agencies such as Targeted Support Services, CAMHS, Youth Justice and SEND services.

This diagram below illustrates the partners in an Early Help System.

Early Help System



Effective Early Help requires these services to work together to identify a CYP and family's concerns and to understand the root causes of these issues. This is often achieved through a holistic assessment of the family, and resolved by coordinating the support to be offered where there are multiple needs identified.

5. BCP Council Early Help Provision.

- 5.1 Children's Services in BCP Council has provided several dedicated teams and services that coordinate Early Help support. These are:

- **Children's Centres**— providing coordinated support for families with children pre-birth to 5 years, supported by Midwifery & Health Visiting. (please note these are now family hubs with a wider scope and reach)
- **Targeted Support Services** – providing coordinated support for families with complex or multiple support needs.

¹ [Independent review of children's social care - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672222/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-2016-2020.pdf)

- **Youth Services** – providing youth diversionary activities and targeted support for vulnerable young people with more complex needs.

5.2 These teams are supported by services in Early Years (0-5 years Childcare), SEND services, Youth Justice Services and Children's Safeguarding teams.

5.3 BCP Council also commissions a small number of Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (VCS) to enhance delivery options.

5.4 The local authority is responsible for coordinating the Early Help response across partner agencies. This is inspected under the Ofsted ILACs inspection regime.

6. BCP Early Help Diagnostic Findings and Recommendations 2023

6.1 The *Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022)*ⁱ, often referred to as the *Care Review*, promotes the development of 'Family Help' stating there must be a fundamental shift in the Children's social care response, so that families receive more responsive, respectful, and effective support. This report recommends services should be delivered by multidisciplinary teams made up of professionals such as family support workers, domestic abuse workers and mental health practitioners - who, alongside social workers, would provide support and cut down on referring families onto other services. These Family Help Teams would be based in community settings, like schools and family hubs, that children and families know and trust, and the service they offer will be tailored to meet neighbourhood needs based on a robust needs assessment and feedback from the families.

6.2 Alongside the wider Children's Services Improvement and Transformation Programme, and in preparation for a shift from Early Help to Family Help, in Spring 2023 a full independent review of Early Help services across the partnership was undertaken by a sector specialist within BCP. This reviewed the effectiveness of the current provision across BCP and provided a report on findings and recommendations for improvement and development.

6.3 The 2023 Early Help Service Review Findings

- BCP has a good range of services and resources to provide a comprehensive Early Help response. This includes a good Children's Centre offer supported by Health partners. BCP is in a good position to transform some Children's Centres into Family Hubs.
- While BCP partners were individually providing Early Help, there was no agreed multi agency pathway for the identification, assessment and coordinated care planning for children and families with complex or multiple needs. This is resulting in silo working and too many single agencies trying to meet all the child/family's needs, and a duplication of some interventions. This is an ineffective use of the available resources across the partnership.
- The lack of an agreed partnership pathway is causing frustration among partners as they try to refer or signpost families to each other.
- Partners do not hold a common understanding of what a 'graduated response' in Early Help provision means, nor who is responsible for supporting low level to complex needs. As a result, some families are being referred incorrectly to the wrong service, and some professionals are providing services to families at the

wrong level of intervention. This is contributing to too many referrals for statutory assessment and support before effective Early Help has been provided.

- Some families are therefore receiving fragmented support, must tell their story repeatedly, find services difficult to navigate and, as a result, needs can escalate.
- There is no strategic partnership group operating to lead the defining of joint working pathways or to agree joint priorities and plans. This is needed to monitor the effectiveness of Early Help services and to make ongoing improvements.
- The local authority Early Help teams are managed across different Children's Directorates, under two lines of management. This is limiting the local authority's ability to provide a more comprehensive graduated response to all children, young people, and their families.
- Under council savings plans to remove the Youth Service, there is a significant risk of the local authority having a limited early support offer to vulnerable young people.
- The local authority lacks a dedicated resource to support the partnership to coordinate Early Help services.

6.4 Recommendations for Transformation & Improvement

- Establishment of a Strategic Early Help Partnership Board to:
 - Develop an Early Help Strategy and Improvement plan.
 - Develop the common understanding of a graduated response, joint identification, assessment, and care planning pathways to create a more seamless service experience for families and reduce duplication by services.
 - Develop and implement a performance management framework to provide evidence of the impact of Early Help.
 - Develop a partnership workforce development plan.
- The local authority Early Help Teams would benefit from redesign, to place dedicated Early Help services under a single management structure within and for the whole of Children's Services
- To redesign all the existing Early Help teams into an integrated 0-19yrs (25yrs with SEND) team, which provides a graduated response to service delivery and provides capacity to better support partners to coordinate services.
- The service redesign to be aligned with the transformation of Family Hubs, with enhanced outreach, more flexible and responsive provision to increase the accessibility of services by families.
- To maintain a qualified youth work professional workforce within the wider redesigned Early Help service to maintain a targeted response to vulnerable young people.

6.5 Progress to Date

Children's Services have fully embraced the findings and recommendations of the Early Help Review. A comprehensive programme of transformation commenced in July 2023 and progress had been made in the following areas:

Leadership & Governance

- 6.5.1 An Early Help Partnership Group has been reestablished and is well represented by all key partners including representatives from health, schools, Voluntary and Community Sectors.
- 6.5.2 The group has developed an Early Help Strategy and agreed new partnership assessment and care planning pathways. A workplan for further development and implementation has been agreed, and this will be implemented between 2024-2026.

Family Hub Transformation

- 6.5.3 The Early Help Partnership Group has been complimented with a partnership board that has met throughout 2023/24 to transform Children's Centres into Family Hubs. BCP Council has historically operated nine centres with services for families aged 0-5 years. The transformation programme launched in November 2023 will see seven existing sites enhanced to coordinate and deliver services for families with children pre-birth – 19 years (25 years with SEND).
- 6.5.4 Access to the service will also be available through a new 'Virtual' Family Hub, where families can engage with advice, information, guidance, and home resources options through more 'self-help' accessibility.
- 6.5.5 Existing services for families run by partners and delivered through a wide range of venues such as voluntary and community groups, health clinics, nurseries, and schools, will be invited to adopt the new 'Family Hub Network Service' branding. This aims to provide more joined-up promotions and delivery of services to families not accessing dedicated family hub locations.
- 6.5.6 The remaining Children's Centre locations will act as linked outreach bases form one of the seven main hubs and will provide a more targeted programme, as part of the Family Hub Network brand, delivering services based on local needs.
- 6.5.7 Family Hubs will be complemented by two linked youth bases, and three detached mobile youth units. This will provide a more 'youth friendly,' flexible and responsive provision to young people. The local authority provision for young people will be targeted and focused on the identified needs of more vulnerable young people who require more intensive support. This will be supported by enhanced promotion of youth provision led by voluntary and community groups through the virtual hub.
- 6.6.8 The Family Hub Transformation Programme is being supported by ongoing consultation with services users. A public consultation on these changes took place throughout February to March 2024 and the results of this will be available in April 2024. This will help shape the next implementation stage. Parent Panel have been established and are being strengthened to support ongoing developments. Services at each hub will be enhanced with new provision between April – September 2024. Any significant service changes to a particular location will be subject to further consultation with directly affected service users at that location.

Early Help Service Redesign

- 6.5.9 The Family Hub, Targeted Support Service and youth services workforce will be redesigned as part of the improvement programme. All staff within these services will be integrated into a single service under a single management structure. The 6.5.10 new service will comprise of two operational delivery teams that provide place-based services across the graduated response. Each delivery team will comprise of staff with specialism in early years (under 5yrs'), adolescents (11-19yrs), young carers, parenting support, and case managers for families with multiple and complex needs. These will be supported by partner agencies in health from midwifery, health visiting and school nurses.
- 6.5.11 A third infrastructure team will lead in the allocation, development and deployment of programmes and resources for the local authority teams. In addition, it will provide support to partners to operate within the new Early Help pathways through practical support and training to nurseries, schools, health and voluntary organisations in the assessment and coordination of care planning. This team will also monitor engagement of partners in the new pathways and monitor the impact of Early Help services.
- 6.5.12 The redesigning of these teams has allowed for the streamlining and integration of management posts but protected frontline operational staff.

7. Community Development

- 7.1 A key aim of the Family Hub and Early Partnership work has been to develop and build more community resilience where possible. To enable this the following areas of focus are being implemented:
- Virtual Family Hub to enable more self-help for individual families.
 - Family Hub Network Services branding linking and promoting community-led services to wider partner services.
 - Community infrastructure support through a grant to an organisation that will support Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise sector organisations to be a key partner in Early Help improvements and workforce training.
 - Small grants programme – pump priming for the start-up or development of small groups to develop services for children and families.
 - Multi-agency Workforce Development Plan – To upskill practitioners in core areas with key competencies required within a maturing Early Help system.
- 7.2 It is anticipated this work will strengthen links between the partner agencies and enable new opportunities for joint working and commissioning to be identified and developed.

8. Options Appraisal

- 8.1 The planned programme of work is based on a comprehensive diagnostic review of services in early 2023, and a range of proposed recommendations. The review found existing services and structures are not an efficient use of resources. At a time of reducing budgets and financial pressures it is therefore essential a more

coordinated use of resources is developed if the council is to support positive outcomes for children.

- 8.2 The new service design has been aligned with wider developments in the Children's Services Transformation programme and the proposed actions and progress is in support of these wider transformation activities.
- 8.3 If Early Help services are not redesigned, families may continue to receive fragmented support and a poor experience of navigating services. There is a likelihood that some children and families will not receive timely and effective support. This will continue to contribute to higher than necessary requests for statutory intervention, particularly in relation to SEND assessments and Children Social Care.
- 8.4 BCP has received grant funding as part of the national programme of Family Hub development. A review and development of Children Centres is therefore in line with these transformation requirements. They provide a protection of existing services with an enhanced and more flexible offer going forward.
- 8.5 Maintaining a dedicated Youth Services is no longer within the financial scope of the council. The proposals protect services for young people with more intensive or complex needs, supported by an enhanced programme of outreach provision and linked voluntary and community provision.

9. Summary of financial implications

- 9.1 Nationally research has taken place to understand the impact of Early Help services on reducing more costly statutory interventions. [*The cost of late intervention: EIF analysis 2016*](#). This analysis estimates that for every £1 spent on Early Help provision, it saves £3 on higher cost services and interventions.
- 9.2 Providing Early Help services are not currently a local authority statutory responsibility. These services are therefore always vulnerable to cuts when Councils are experiencing budget pressures.
- 9.3 The *Independent Review of Children's Social Care* clearly states that to rebalance the system and relieve pressure on higher tier services, an investment in Family Help is required. Realising the potential of the workforce, upstreaming and sharing skills across thresholds, unlocking the potential of families and their networks, provides a relentless focus on the needs of children and families. Sensitive decisions are therefore required to balance budget pressures against the risk of raising demand for more costly statutory interventions.
- 9.4 There is an agreed and planned budget reduction to the Council Early Help Service of £1.1 million from 2024/25. This saving will be delivered through the reduction to management staffing costs following the service redesign; repurposing of buildings and asset transfers to the voluntary sector reducing building running costs; and a review and recommissioning of contracts.
- 9.5 Spend in 2024/25 will be approximately £4.8 million on dedicated local authority teams and services. This will be primarily through an ongoing commitment from Public Health and the Supporting Families Grant.

10. Summary of legal implications

10.1 Local Authorities have the following statutory duties that is currently provided by or related to Early Help:

- A duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of **children in their area who are in need**. And, so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, **by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs**.
- Under the Human Rights Act, every child and family have the right to a private family life, therefore ethically the LA should not be intervening in a private family life, unless safeguarding concerns. By offering preventative services at the right time, this could prevent the need to intervene later for the child and family.
- A duty to secure **sufficient children's centres** to meet local need, so far as this is reasonably practicable.
- A duty to ensure that **consultation is carried out before children's centres are opened or closed or have significant changes made to services**.
- A duty to secure access to **positive activities (youth)**.
- General duty to **improve the well-being of children under five** and reduce inequalities.

These duties will be met going forward under the planned transformation programmes.

11. Summary of human resources implications

11.1 Staff within all Local Authority teams and key partner agencies have contributed to the review and recommendations that have led to this transformation programme.

11.2 Redesign of the Local Authority Teams will be subject to subject to formal staff consultation and HR procedures for staffing redesigns and restructuring. The use of natural staff over, vacancies management and Voluntary Redundancy scheme will support in the mitigation for minimising the need for compulsory redundancies.

11.3 The transformation programme is supported by a comprehensive workforce development plan that will support Local Authority teams and partners to work to new systems and procedures, in addition to providing new services where there has been in identified skills amongst professionals.

12. Summary of public health implications

12.1 Public health and wellbeing are at the forefront of these proposals, helping to ensure that right services are provided to the right children and families in a timely manner.

13. Summary of equality implications

13.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on the proposed changes. The panel noted that the proposals places equality of access to services at the heart of the proposed changes.

14. Summary of risk assessment

14.1 Children and Families that cannot access help and support in a timely manner are likely to see the challenges they experience becoming more prolonged or more complex, which can result in poorer outcomes for children. An ineffectively Early Help system is unlikely to reduce the high demand for statutory intervention.

14.2 The children centre portfolio of buildings is being developed into a revised, more flexible and response Family Hub offer to meet the needs of families that prefer not to access a dedicated hub. The changes may however be seen as a reduction in provision or closure of centres. Mitigation of this is needed through ongoing engagement and consultation with services users and partners.

14.3 The transition from having a dedicated Youth Services to placing qualified youth workers into integrated teams may be viewed as a lack of services for young people. However, a programme of work has been undertaken to transfer most universal open access youth provision to the voluntary and community sector. This is being supported by a targeted youth offer through the newly redesigned early help teams to ensure our most vulnerable young people receive and more focused and timely intervention.

15. Background Papers

None

16. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Early Help Strategy 2024-26

Appendix 2 - Family Hub & Start for Life Guidance

Appendix 3 - Family Hub Model Framework (Annex E)

Appendix 4 - Family Hub Expectations (Annex F)

Appendix 5 - EIA Early Help Redesign

