

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL **15TH MARCH 2019**

Annual Early Help report

Early Help is firmly established in Middlesbrough. The delivery model for Early Help is being continually developed in line with national best practice to include Restorative Practice, Signs of Safety and Trauma Informed Practice.

The multi-agency approach to Early Help has been delivered through the Early Help Strategy and the Partnership and Prevention sub-group of the Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children's Board and Children's Trust. This has seen a significant increase in the number of cases now being led by partners who are supported by the Family Partnership Team and through the Early Help Forum. Despite the developments made in Early Help, we are aware that demand on statutory services is significant.

The Early Help and Prevention Service (Stronger Families) has moved from a 0-19 service to a wider remit of the whole family with an emphasis on providing Early Help. The service offers a wide range of direct, individual, and group work support to children, young people and parents. A complete restructure of the service was implemented in November 2016, with a move to a more specialised approach and the introduction of four themed teams: Family Partnership, Family Casework, School Readiness and Work Readiness.

The development of the My Family Plan, which is Middlesbrough's Early Help assessment tool, encourages a greater solution focused approach to empower families to achieve their goals. As a result, the service was judged as Good via the national Matrix Quality Standard.

The School Readiness team, including the Children's Centre's, have adopted an integrated working model with Health Visitors which has been evaluated by the Early Intervention Foundation, and more recently by Public Health England who have identified this as a national good practice model. The results have supported some positive measured outcomes with regard to engagement rates of children and parents in nursery readiness interventions. In 2017/18 the Children Centre registrations were 83.5% (Ofsted – Good) and vulnerable target groups reached 80.7% (Ofsted – Outstanding).

As part of the broader Early Help offer Middlesbrough has also improved performance with regard to the September Guarantee and NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). The September Guarantee ensures that all school leavers from year 11 and year 12 have a suitable offer of learning by the end of September. The impact of this has been to strengthen identification and support for vulnerable adolescents who do not have a place in learning and who are at risk of NEET. Middlesbrough's September Guarantee is 2.4% higher at 97.1% than the national average and 0.4% higher than the North East average.

The proportional NEET rate in Middlesbrough has seen a year on year reduction and latest figures (Jan 2017) show Middlesbrough's proportional NEET (4.2%) as lower than the North East (6.2%), our statistical neighbours (5.7%) Tees Valley (4.4%) and England average (6%).

Impact and plan

A review of Early Help was completed in November 2017. Areas of strength were identified and a number of areas for improvement focused on information management systems, duplication of processes and risk management within Early Help. This continual improvement process has included actions listed below;

Actions completed over the last 12 months:

- Created 'trauma informed' Family Partnership Team to strengthen support to partners.
- Integrated the Early Help Hub into the 'Front Door'.
- Embedded social workers within Early Help to strengthen management oversight of risk.
- Revised the Early Help Assessment tool (My Family Plan) to improve identification of risk.
- Developed and embedded an Early Help Performance Framework.
- Implemented a new integrated Early Help case management system (Liquid Logic Early Help Module).
- Provided additional capacity to support planning and service development to underpin the improvement programme.
- School Readiness Team have produced evidence of impact and outcomes.
- Produced a partnership Early Help Strategy through the Children's Trust and MSCB.
- Rolled out cross service workforce engagement to ensure all staff understood the findings from the review, the plan and what it meant for them.
- Further developed a performance culture through performance clinics and established monthly Director Performance Clinic.

What difference are we making to children and families and how do we know?

- There has been an increase in referrals to Early Help. The outcomes for families receiving Early Help support are good with 75% of internal cases closing with positive outcomes met (April 2018 – November 2018).
- The vast majority of families who receive support from Stronger Families do not re-enter Children's Social Care, we know that 87% have not re-referred following 12 months from the case closure point (April – November 2018).
- The multi-agency approach to Early Help has been delivered through the revised Early Help Strategy and the Partnership and Prevention sub-group of the Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children's Board and Children's Trust. This has seen a significant increase in the number of cases now being led by external partners who are supported by the Family Partnership Team and through the Early Help Forum. This has increased from 178 families in April 2018 to 380 families in October 2018. Our aim is to continue to encourage and support partners to undertake and lead on Early Help work and next steps are to focus on improving consistency in the quality of partners Early Help work and outcomes.

- The addition of children's Social Workers into the Early Help teams along with the revisions to the My Family Plan (Early Help Assessment) and Signs of Safety has strengthened the approach to risk management in Early Help and this has led to an increase in the number of Step Ups from Stronger Families into Children's Social Care, where required. When accepting a Step Down from Children's Care, the Social Workers within Early Help can provide more robust risk management and oversight of cases and manage these effectively to prevent escalation.
- Early Help Practitioners are supported by specialist workers to improve practice and provide a holistic response to families, for example, Adult Social Worker, Mental Health worker, Clinical Psychologist along with a Health Visitor and School Nurse working within the teams, who all offer case consultations, practice skills sessions and training. This has resulted in improved direct work with families and the voice of the child being evident within assessments and planning, which is clearly evident in the monthly audit findings of Early Help casework.
- Improvements in key performance measures in terms of compliance, for example, with case allocation and assessment timeliness. Early Help allocations now take place daily to avoid delay and Early Help assessments are consistently completed within the 30 day timescale.
- Following feedback from families it has been evaluated that the My Family Plan assessment tool provides a sound basis for effective direct work with children, young people and their families. These plans evolve appropriately over time to meet the changing needs and circumstances of children and families with evidence of the voice of the child.
- Managers have good oversight of cases. Senior managers make sure work gets completed to the right quality using the quality assurance framework which includes monthly auditing and monthly performance clinics. Challenge clinics also take place to monitor thresholds and risk. The monthly audits have told us that timescales and compliance are strong and practitioners use a range of evidence based approaches to gain the voice of the child. Improved management oversight has also demonstrated the need for robust risk management within Early Help.

What are our plans for the next 12 months?

- To develop Trauma Informed Practice within Early Help to improve outcomes for 'revolving door' children, young people and families who do refer back into Children's Care following Early Help, or who have multiple safer referrals.
- To increase the number of Early Help Assessments completed (My Family Plans) by partners and to ensure consistency in the quality of external Early Help work through regular multi-agency Early Help audit activity.
- Integration of Early Help School Practitioners to encourage and support schools to lead on Early Help work, and focus specifically on increasing confidence and effectiveness in the Early Help lead professional role.

- To develop a young person's digital version of the Early Help Strategy to ensure that children and young people find Early Help easy to access.
- Ensure that the step-up/step-down process is effective and responsive to the changing needs of children and families, and demonstrates effective joint working between Early Help and Children's Care.
- To implement learning and improvements from monthly audits and challenge clinics within the Early Help workforce.
- Embed the use of Signs of Safety and Restorative Practice into the Early Help workforce and within this embed group supervision.
- To introduce further strength based approaches within Early Help including family group conferencing and community based family network meetings.
- Embed the use of EHM within Early Help to improve the journey of the child and the Early Help performance management framework.
- Integrate Public Health prevention services within Prevention and Partnerships directorate to deliver more streamlined and fully integrated prevention services in particular with the health visiting and school nursing services.

SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disability

Revisits to local areas with a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) for SEND

As mentioned in the December report the Department for Education announced on the 9th November 2019 a programme of revisits to those local areas which were asked to produce a WSoA following their SEND inspections.

The revisits programme started in December 2018 and will run alongside the current programme of local area SEND inspections, which is in place until 2021.

The revisits do not represent a re-inspection of SEN provision. Inspectors from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will only revisit those areas which were asked to produce a WSoA and the focus of the visit will be on the progress made since the original inspection.

The purpose of the revisits will allow Ofsted and the CQC to assess the progress which local areas have made against each of the actions in their WSoA. They will also provide additional reassurance to families on the progress local services are making, identify where further work is needed, and enable local areas to demonstrate the improvements they have made to SEND services and in delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

Local areas will usually be revisited within 18 months of their WSoA having been accepted as fit for purpose by Ofsted and CQC. The local area will receive 10 days' notification of the revisit, which will last between 2-4 days, depending on the number of actions in the WSoA. A report will be published on the Ofsted and CQC websites, usually 33 days after the inspectors have finished the revisit. It will set out whether the local area has made sufficient progress against each area of the WSoA.

Where a local area is considered to have made sufficient progress against its WSoA, monitoring visits from the DfE and NHS England will cease. DfE and NHS England will determine on a case by case basis the next steps for any local areas that have made insufficient progress. This may include the Secretary of State using his powers of intervention.

Middlesbrough could face a revisit anytime. Hartlepool who had their inspection 5 months before Middlesbrough have just had their revisit. The outcome of which has not been made public. Middlesbrough Strategic Leaders across Education, Health and Social Care are now in the process of preparing for our visit and have a day planned on 1st March to review all required evidence.

Annual Designated Teachers Conference for Looked After Children

On 6th February Middlesbrough held an extremely successful training event at the Riverside Stadium aimed at designated teachers who support and champion our Middlesbrough Looked after children. The event attracted a wide audience of professionals from schools, Local Authority and other agencies who are supporting Looked after children and their learning.

The conference was opened by Helen Watson, Executive Director of Children's Services who introduced a high profile guest list of speakers. Andrew Baxter from the Department for Education gave a frank account of the current picture for Looked after children and shared a great deal of excellent practice. Dr Catherine Carroll, Senior Research Associate with UCL, discussed the importance of pupil relationships within school and emotional and mental health concerns. She explained about the research behind some of the learning and well-being interventions to support children and young people who are looked after.

We also heard from Sally Gray Designated Teacher at Kings Academy who spoke passionately about her years of experience supporting staff to fully understand the needs of Looked after children. Finally Michael Bettencourt, Virtual School, Head Teacher explained about the work of our Virtual school and how his team of staff support not only children in Middlesbrough schools but those placed outside of the area too.

A key message came from Sally Gray "Every child needs one adult who is irrationally crazy about them". This is the role of staff in schools, including the Virtual school. We need to consider this in our role as Corporate Parent.

Councillor Janice Brunton Dobson
Executive Member for Education & Skills