

# A STRATEGY FOR EARLY HELP IN HERTFORDSHIRE

*Families First - Early help, brighter futures*



May 2016

# Our Vision

The needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families are identified at the earliest opportunity, are well assessed and met by families and agencies working effectively together. Improved and sustainable outcomes will be achieved through building a family's resilience to, and increasing their capacity to manage, challenging circumstances.

Our Aims	Objectives	Means of Delivery	Performance Measures
<p>All children develop and thrive, enjoy their childhood and develop into confident adults who reach their full potential and contribute positively to their community</p>	<p>Develop a locally focused, holistic family model of early help, identifying need at the earliest opportunity to provide swift and easy access to support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deliver learning and development opportunities across all services to ensure the workforce has the skills and confidence to deliver early help and manage risk</li> <li>Using the key working model as a cornerstone, take a needs led rather than service led approach to service delivery</li> <li>Review and rationalise current multi-agency meeting structures and forum</li> <li>Develop a robust outcome framework for early help</li> <li>Strengthen information sharing mechanisms</li> <li>Ensure there is consistent application of thresholds at each stage of a child's journey and that there is clear pathways through the care continuum.</li> <li>Strengthen co-production to ensure service users are engaged in service planning and future delivery of early help services</li> <li>Develop innovative ways of working which draw on local knowledge and experience and respond to changing needs within the local community.</li> <li>Create multi-agency partnership panels working together to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families with agreed accountability for the delivery of the outcomes</li> </ul>	<p>Increased number of Family First Assessments and Plans</p>
<p>Families have a strong sense of responsibility for their children, are resilient and have the capacity and confidence to be at least 'good enough' parents</p>	<p>Ensure resources are targeted effectively by refocusing resources from crisis intervention to prevention/ early intervention</p>		<p>Reduction in no of referrals to Customer Service Centre that are appropriate for Early Help</p>
<p>Families are supported to care for their children whenever possible and where it is safe to do so; children are allowed to live and thrive within a family environment</p>	<p>Develop personalised, family focused action plans which are driven by improving outcomes</p>		<p>Reduction in the number of repeat requests for Early Help support</p>
	<p>Develop a local model of early help in which key partner agencies understand their role and are accountable for the delivery of services</p>		<p>Increased uptake of children attending early years education programmes</p>
	<p>Ensure that families are actively involved in service design and planning and agreeing the support they receive</p>		<p>Increase in the number of young carers identified and their families supported</p>
	<p>Develop service level agreements which enable Children's and Adult services to work more effectively together</p>		<p>Reduction in the number of children and young people living in workless households</p>
	<p>Develop a skilled and confident workforce which has a shared understanding of early help</p>		<p>Reduction in the number of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse</p>
			<p>Reduction in no of children and young people impacted by parental mental ill-health</p>
			<p>Reduction in no of children and young people impacted by parental substance misuse</p>
		<p>Reduction in the number of children requiring safeguarding interventions</p>	
		<p>Reduction in the number of children looked after</p>	
		<p>Reduction in children / young people who are affected by crime and / or anti-social behaviour</p>	
		<p>Increase in the proportion of children / young people attending school regularly (over 90%)</p>	
		<p>Increase in the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who stay in learning</p>	

## Introduction

From pregnancy and throughout childhood, things happen that affect a child's health, development, attainment and wellbeing during their life. We want to minimise the impact of any disadvantage for Hertfordshire children by working with families and providing support as soon in at the earliest possible stage.

The aim of this strategy is to empower families, professionals from all sectors and local communities to work collaboratively in order to make Hertfordshire the best place in which to grow up. This approach will form Hertfordshire's early help offer for families, known as **'Families First'**.

## What is Early Help?

*'Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, ideally as soon as it emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child's life from pre-birth to adulthood, and applies to any problem or need that the family cannot deal with or meet on their own'*

## The Challenge

From the first thoughts of having a baby through to when their child becomes an adult, parents can access a range of health, education and family support services to help them provide the best possible start in life for their children. But it can be a complicated picture of services for families to navigate:

Support is available at different levels of the care continuum depending upon the level of support required by each family ranging from universal/ preventative services available to everyone through to intensive support based on a specific assessment of need.

Whilst not exclusive, fig 1 provides an indication that support is offered through a range of services and organisations.

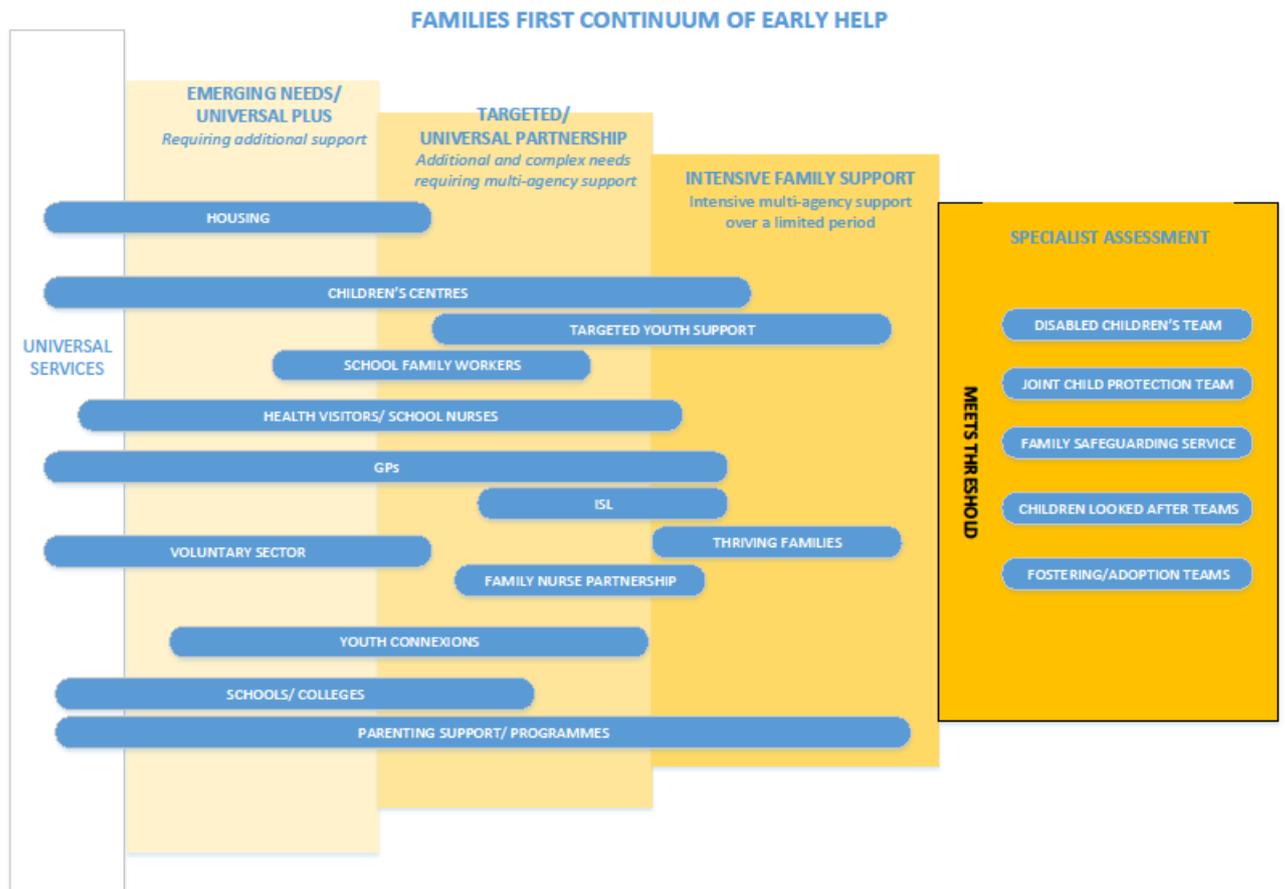
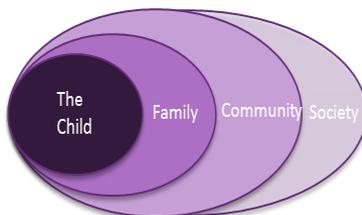


fig 1

## Early Help – whose responsibility?

A child's development is shaped by the relationship between the family, the community and society.



An ecological model of child development

Independent reviews and research have long championed approaches that provide early help for these children and their families. As Professor Eileen Munro highlighted in her review of child protection, *“preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services”*. It is only right that local authorities and their partners are focusing increasingly on early help and prevention services for families. Many are now establishing a more coordinated and structured approach to this crucial role.”

Ofsted's inspections of local authority help and protection arrangements since January 2012 have found evidence that many local areas have begun to establish early help services for families. Other supporting reviews include the work of Graham Allen on the benefits of early intervention programmes, Dame Clare Tickell on the Early Years Foundation Stage and Frank Field's review on poverty. These reviews identified a growing body of evidence of the effectiveness of early help for children and their families

'Working together to safeguard children 2015' identifies specific groups of children who would benefit from early help. Professionals should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence
- is showing early signs of abuse and/or neglect.

## Why is Early Help important?

*The traditional approach to public services, in which individual agencies focus on just one element of a complex problem, for which they are accountable to Government departments, is simply not working. Approaches which ignore the complexity of individuals' lives as well as local community circumstances and instead deliver one-size-fits-all solutions are likely to fail.*

Ref 'Bolder, Braver and Better: Why we need local deals to save public services – Service Transformation Challenge Panel Nov 2014

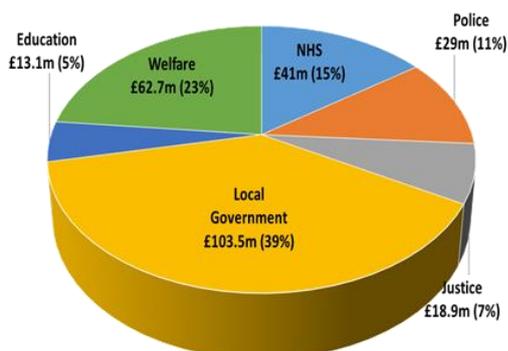
It is estimated that over two million children in the UK today are living in difficult family circumstances. These include children whose family lives are affected by parental drug and alcohol dependency, domestic abuse and poor mental health. It is crucial that these children and their families benefit from the best quality professional help at the earliest opportunity. Without Early Help for some families, difficulties escalate, family circumstances deteriorate and children are more at risk of suffering significant harm.

There is increasing evidence that supporting children and families at the earliest opportunity has significant impact in improving life chances and increasing outcomes long in to adulthood.

A recent study found that 48% of adults will have suffered at least one adverse childhood experience, with 9% experiencing at least four (equating to over 150,000 adults in Hertfordshire based on current demographics). The research showed that this cohort is nine times more likely to be involved in violence and eleven times more likely to use heroin/ crack or be incarcerated during their adult life. As these type of issues (others including mental health, domestic violence and worklessness) also impact on children in the family, not only will this have an adverse outcome on the child's outcomes but often likely to create a generational cycle of adverse impact.

Reducing the need for high cost statutory and child protection services is evident in managing the sustainability of resources and changing expectations.

Nationally, The Early Intervention Foundation estimates that nearly £17 billion is spent by the public sector on late intervention, much of which could be avoided by significantly less spending on early help. More specifically the analysis estimated that annual late intervention costs is estimated to be over £269.2m per year in Hertfordshire (as shown in graph below):



The economic argument for Early Help and family focussed approaches is that more effective assessment and a swifter, coordinated response will ultimately lead to a reduction in the numbers of families whose needs have to be met by specialist and high cost services. 'Backing the Future' a report by the New Economics Foundation and Action for Children estimated that for every £1 invested in early help, there is a financial benefit to society of between £7.60 and £9.20.

The factors leading to family breakdown are clearly emerging in Hertfordshire, the impact of domestic abuse, parental substance misuse; mental ill health and parenting capacity have resulted in a demand for high cost services and highlighted gaps in service delivery. We need to reshape our partnership arrangements and our early help services so that we can focus on families not individuals to ensure that they are fit for purpose and deliver improved outcomes through clear, decisive leadership and are structured with a consistent approach across Hertfordshire.

## Families First – The Vision

*The needs of vulnerable children, young people and families are identified at the earliest opportunity and that those needs are well assessed and met by families and agencies working effectively together. Improved and sustainable outcomes will be achieved through building a family's resilience to, and increasing their capacity to manage, challenging circumstances*

There is a need for us to reimagine what services we should provide in the future and where our services in Hertfordshire need to be focussed. The provision of direct services and support should only be offered when we are confident that all the resources available within the family and communities themselves have been explored to help resolve difficulties when

they emerge. The majority of children, young people and families in Hertfordshire are engaged with, and have their needs met, in Universal Services. Children and Young People are achieving good outcomes; enjoying good health; achieving at school; feel safe; engaging in positive activities; have aspirations and good prospects for the future. However, there is a significant minority of children and young people for whom outcomes remain poor. The Families First core offer of early help is to support children, young people and their families who are “just coping” or “struggling to cope” across the Continuum of Need at an emerging, targeted and if necessary at an intensive level for families who have become “stuck” and for whom more main stream services are not changing the outcomes for the family. Where there is clearly an identified need for direct intervention, then we need to always aim to build the resilience of the family to take control of their own lives without prolonged support and that the response is timely, effective and integrated with other agencies and providers of services.

Early Help Services should be shaped by the views and experiences of the children, the young people and the families themselves, building resilience and increasing their capacity to manage challenging circumstances before the situation escalates and poor outcomes develop.

In order for us to achieve this we will bring together all of the current Early Help Services provided and commissioned together into a single offer with a clear early help brand. This will include Early Years, Early Childhood and Family Support Services, Services for Young people and Thriving Families and potentially other County Council Service areas including Public Health and Community Safety. Multi-agency contributions from the Health Service, Police, District Councils and the voluntary sector partners will help shape the design, development and delivery of this service model.

The vision for Hertfordshire’s Early Help strategy is to secure a county wide approach within which all partners coordinate, prioritise and maximise their collective efforts to enable families to achieve success, cope with stress, manage change and uncertainty and make safe decisions about the future. It provides a framework to support partners in reshaping existing services and work together more effectively, avoid duplication in order to secure better outcomes for families. Ultimately, a completely, integrated model across all partner agencies will broadly speaking have considerable impact in:

- Improvements in indicators and outcomes for the individuals concerned, such as mental health, family relationships, attainment in school, offending or substance misuse;
- Reducing demand for service provision of a more acute and reactive nature, such as care placements, alternative schooling, health service admissions or prison and probation.

It is recognised that all partners continue to face reductions in budgets and therefore have to re-evaluate how they continue to deliver their priorities in the future

# **Delivering Families First In Hertfordshire**

## **Aims**

There are a broad set of aims which underpin the strategy, which are that:

- All children develop and thrive, enjoy their childhood, manage adolescence successfully and develop into confident adults who reach their full potential and contribute positively to their communities
- Families have a strong sense of responsibility for their children, are resilient and have the capacity and confidence to be at least 'good enough' parents
- Families are supported to care for their children whenever possible and where it is safe to do so; Children are allowed to live and thrive within a family environment.

## **Principles of Early Help**

There are a number of key principles for effective early help which should:

- Be empowering and focus on building resilience and family strengths;
- Promote personal responsibility and not create dependency;
- Be flexible in providing longer and shorter term support depending on the needs of the family;
- Involve as few professionals as possible, who can coordinate and prioritise support to make things simpler and more manageable for families;
- Work with whole families, including fathers and other family members;
- Leave parents, children and young people feeling that the situation has improved for them;
- Promote life skills for young people including; alcohol and substance misuse awareness, education, sex and relationships, financial skills, cultural awareness, community cohesion and sustainable living;
- Be based, and designed, within communities, making the most of local resources and delivering services at the most local level;
- Provide a seamless interface between specialist services with a critical focus on the needs and safety of children and young people.

## **Strategic Objectives**

The Hertfordshire Early Help Strategy requires a whole partnership approach and coordinated response from all key partnership agencies to equip families with the skills they need to deal with their problems effectively and build resilience to manage any issues which may arise in the future, not just a single time bound solution to a problem. The role of public services should be to support families gain the confidence and skills to succeed independently and subsequently support other people in their community.

The Early Help Strategy is explicit about the need to target early help intervention towards those experiencing the kind of issues and the severity of issues that are likely to lead to needing statutory social care intervention without any evidence of early help. Therefore, we expect families to be offered early help before the point where the threshold has been met for statutory child protection by improving the early identification of need and timely early responses from early help services.

Our challenge is to ensure all families can access appropriate and effective support and intervention at the earliest stage in order to reduce demand on higher level services.

- Develop a locally focussed, holistic family model of early help and identifying need at the earliest opportunity to provide swift and easy access to support;
- Refocus resources from crisis intervention to prevention and early intervention and ensure that resources are targeted effectively;
- Develop personalised, family focused, action plans for children, young people and families which are driven by improving outcomes;
- Create multi agency partnership panels who work together to improve outcomes for children, young people and families and ensuring agreed accountability for the delivery of outcomes;
- Ensure that families are actively involved in service design and planning and agreeing the support they are offered;
- Develop service level agreements which enable Children's and Adult services to work more effectively together;
- Develop a skilled and confident workforce who has a shared understanding of early help, by delivering learning and development opportunities across all services to equip staff to work together;

### **How the Strategic Objectives will be achieved**

- Developing a model of early help for families which key partner agencies understand what their role is and are accountable for the delivery of services;
- Ensuring that the Family First assessments are used consistently across all agencies to assess need and strengths;

- Taking a needs led rather than service led approach, using the key working model as a cornerstone of service delivery;
- Reviewing and rationalising current multi-agency meeting structures and forums to increase efficiency and maximise attendance;
- Developing a robust outcome framework for early help;
- Strengthening information sharing mechanisms so that partners have access to the information they need to effectively work together and have access to advice and support from professionals;
- Ensuring that there is consistent application of thresholds at each stage of the child's journey and that there are clear pathways between the levels including step up, step down arrangements;
- Developing a performance management framework for early help, which has clearly defined outcomes, milestones and monitoring arrangements including quality assurance focussed on outcomes and robust recording;
- Investing and promoting training and development to ensure the work force has the skills and confidence to deliver early help services and manage risk;
- Strengthening mechanisms to ensure that feedback from service users is integral to service planning, informs an assessment of success and is used to design the future delivery of early help services;
- Developing joint commissioning arrangements, including the development of multi-agency teams of professionals to provide services for families which are easily accessible and locally based;
- Developing innovative ways of working which draw on local knowledge and experience and respond to the changing demographics in communities and develop a good practice portfolio underpinned by clear and consistent evaluation.

### **Success Criteria**

In order to assess the success of the Early Help Strategy, a clearly defined and measurable outcomes framework exists against which performance can be measured, monitored and evaluated on a quarterly basis. A report will be prepared and disseminated to key partner agencies through the Families First Board, summarising progress achieved against the priorities, highlight examples of good practice and identify any difficulties in the implementation of the strategy.

Furthermore success will be evidenced by:

- Good coordination of family focussed work across a wide range of agencies;
- Family focussed services, working with children, young people and their families and involving them in service planning to meet their needs;

- Family resilience is increased and the capacity to help families find their own solutions is enhanced
- Needs analysis can respond to the changing demographics of communities and there is a timely access to services and prompt delivery of agreed actions.
- Children, young people and families are satisfied with and positively endorse the help and support they receive.
- Risk is managed by all agencies who clearly understand their role in the delivery of Early Help Services
- There is reduction in the level of demand for specialist services.

## **Policy Framework**

The Early Help Strategy is part of Hertfordshire County Council's 'Shaping the Future Programme' and is designed to develop a safe, sustainable partnership approach to providing early services. It aims to build on the good work already being delivered under an overarching framework to deliver a coherent and consistent early help offer in which everyone understands the pathways and their role in delivering services.

The strategy has incorporated the Early Childhood Strategy in accordance with the Health and Wellbeing Board commitment to delivering a collaborative and integrated strategy, which builds on the existing services and best practice for how services work together in the future.

The Early Help Strategy has been developed within the context of National and local policy:

- Hertfordshire County Councils Corporate Plan-Opportunity to Thrive
- Children Strategic Plan 'Shaping their Future' 2015- 2018
- Public Health Strategy 2013-2017 Start Healthy and Stay Healthy
- Early Childhood Strategy 2015
- Childcare Act 2006 – to secure the wellbeing of Children under 5 years
- National Healthy Child Programme 0-5 and 5-19
- Clinical Commissioning Group Strategic Plan, Priorities and Ambitions
- SEND reforms 0- 25
- Family Safeguarding Service
- Commissioning Strategy 0-25
- Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2015