Wandsworth’s Early Help Strategy

July 2015

‘It is important that children receive the right help at the right time. For that to happen, everyone who comes in contact with them has to play a role in identifying concerns early, sharing information, and taking prompt, informed action.’

(Working Together to Safeguard Children 2012)

http://fis.wandsworth.gov.uk/earlyhelphub

www.wscb.org.uk
Introduction

The aim for all children and young people is that their outcomes improve and that they are safe. For some children integrated working is needed to achieve this aim. Where children and young people experience difficulties at home, school or through inequality the challenge is to get the right help to them as early and as effectively as possible to stop problems escalating.

Research has shown that between 20-30% of children will at some stage require additional support, and that when this is planned and delivered in a timely and integrated way across all services it will lead to:

• Improved outcomes for the child, young person and family
• Improved standards through increased accountability and integration
• Better safeguarding through early identification and promoting of welfare.

Early Help

Professionals and parents need to identify and intervene early if a child experiences difficulties that may result in them not reaching their full potential. Safeguarding and improving children’s outcomes are the responsibility of everyone in the children’s workforce. Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at anytime in a child’s life, from early years through to the teenage years. Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together and having one plan to support a family or young person.

The Children Act 2004 requires Local Authorities to have in place, policies and process to support early identification of need, integrated working and information sharing. The Wandsworth Children’s and Young People’s Partnership and the Wandworth Safeguarding Children’s Board, have agreed protocols and policies that are used by all partners. These are set out in ‘A Guide Early Help Processes – a handbook for all staff working with children and young people’, which is accessed on line at:

www.wandsworth.gov.uk/fis or wscb@wscb.org.uk

This Early Help Strategy sets out the key strands of the early help offer in Wandsworth including the processes, the services and how the outcomes for families and young people who access early help services and support in Wandsworth are quality assured.
Identifying children and families who would benefit from Early Help

In 2010 the Wandsworth Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Children and Young People’s Partnership adopted the London Continuum of Need, which sets out the four levels of need and the services that work at the different levels. It provides a common terminology and language for use by all professionals working with children and young people to describe their needs, whilst accepting that every child is unique and will not necessarily fit easily into one of the levels of need. The continuum is there to provide indicators and inform discussion and planning between services and agencies who are working with a family who requires additional support. Children and families requiring early help would be at level 2 or level 3 on the continuum of need.

Effective assessment of the need for Early Help

The framework for supporting children who require early help is the Signs of Safety and Well Being. The framework provides a common approach and language for all practitioners. It is solution focused; supporting practitioners to have difficult conversations, ensuring clarity about what the concerns are, identifying when things have worked well and how this could be applied to support current challenges. This forms the core of the Early Help Assessment (EHA) and the Team Around the Child (TAC) processes.

Accessing help and services

When carrying out an EHA with a parent or young person consideration will be needed on whether a service can meet the needs of the family or whether another service may be required.

In Wandsworth a range of effective services are in place to address assessed needs and to provide early help, through a universal service’s own targeted offer or through a specific targeted and preventative service. Information on the range of services available can be found through contacting the FIS either via their website (see front page) or via phone on 0208 871 7899.

Through the quality assurance (QA) process Wandsworth will ensure that the services provided are the most appropriate and that they make an impact by improving outcomes for families.

Information sharing

At the Early Help stage consent to share information with other practitioners and services should always be sought from a parent or the young person. The EHA and TAC review ensure that consent to share information is gained from the parent or young person at every stage of the process.

To support agencies in working together and sharing information, Wandsworth and its partners have adopted the DFE ‘Information Sharing: Guidance for Practitioners and Managers’. They have developed Practice Guidance to support staff on what they need to consider when sharing information. These documents are accessible on the FIS website (see front page).
The Early Help Information Technology Systems (EHITS) website has been set up and is accessible to all practitioners working with families. It is a secure web based site where EHA and TAC reviews can be uploaded and where all members of a TAC can access the information securely. For more information on how to access the site please see A Guide to Early Help Process (see front page).

An integrated response to Early Help needs

The following list sets out the main processes and steps that have been developed in Wandsworth which are explained in detail in ‘A Guide to Early Help Processes (see front page).

The key components of early help include:

- London Continuum of Need Thresholds agreed through the WSCB by all services and partners working with families in Wandsworth
- The Signs of Safety and Well Being framework for working with families requiring an integrated response to planning and delivery of services, wherever they may sit on the London Continuum of Need.
- Early Help Assessments, used by all service and partners when they identify a child or family requiring early help support or services.
- The EHITS website for sharing the assessment, the plan and TAC review with all services engaged with a family.
- TAC meetings held to review and develop a shared action plan and to provide clear statements of dangers or worries and safety goals that set out what needs to be happening for a family to ensure outcomes for a child are good.
- The Lead Professional (LP) identified from each TAC to take the coordination role for the parent, young person and other members of the TAC.
- Information sharing protocols agreed through the WSCB by all services and partners working with families in Wandsworth.
Quality assuring Early Help work

The QA of the EHA and TAC process in Wandsworth will include three sets of processes, which are outlined below.

**Frontline** – all services, both contracted and centrally delivered, which provide services through an EHA action plan should use some form of pre- and post-intervention outcome measurement tool e.g., Star, Chime. They will report the outcomes data this gathers as part of their accountability arrangements. Frontline staff will use the tool to measure their own performance and to support self-improvement. The evidence collected should be sufficiently robust to measure the impact of services as a whole, support commissioning decisions and identify areas where further support or training is required.

This data will be systematically reviewed by operational managers within the LA as part of monitoring of the commissioned services or review of in house services. Emerging training needs will be passed to the Workforce Development and Training Service and the final report taken as part of a fuller annual report to Youth Overview Group.

**Functional** – the Early Help Team in the FIS will provide quarterly data reports on the use of the EHITS system, this will included number of new EHA, who start EHA, and the gender and ethnicity of children with and EHA.

**Assessment and Effectiveness** – A stratified sampling of 10 EHA and their accompanying TACs will be carried out by the Change Managers Group three times each year (approximately 2 EHA per Change Manager each year). They will use an audit tool based on the one that has been developed for the WSCB multi-agency audits (which was based on the Ofsted audit tool). Individual Change Managers will take one EHA to sample using the tool. They will then provide a short summary identifying any key themes, strengths and suggested next steps.

The Early Intervention and Prevention Lead will draw these together in a short annual report which will go to the Prevention and Intervention overview group, and will make up part of the annual report on Early Help provided to the WSCB sub monitoring group.

Managers of Lead Professionals for the EHAs and TACs sampled will receive a copy of the assessment and effectiveness audit to support staff development through supervision.

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| Delivery of high quality early help services that improve outcomes for children, young people and their families | • Agree the KPi framework for evaluating early help services and outcomes from interventions  
• Set up a quarterly reporting process for the data with the Early Intervention and Prevention Overview Group  
• Look at the data and cross reference this with data about the needs of YP coming into CSS and use the information to help identify local needs to feed into the commissioning process for early help services | Lucy Davies   | March 2016       |
| Embed the QA process and use the information to continue to improve the way practitioners apply this when working with early identified need | • The QA process will continue to align itself closely with the Safeguarding Standards Unit  
• Introduce, as part of the process, an impact questionnaire for families whose cases are being audited. | Lucy Davies   | March 2016       |
| Improve the early identification, assessment, planning and review of children who require early help | • Focus support and development to ensure that all services use the EHA and upload this on to EHITS and continue to record TAC meetings and action plans. Work with Service Heads to identify and resolve issues with agency response to EHITS service referrals and what they will do if referrers are not using EHAS. | Lucy Davies   | This is a 5 year development programme due for completion September 2017 |

The strategy and action plan will be reviewed by the Prevention and Intervention Overview Group annually.

**Last reviewed June 2015**

*Early Help Hub:  [http://fis.wandsworth.gov.uk/earlyhelphub](http://fis.wandsworth.gov.uk/earlyhelphub)*