

CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

<p>EARLY HELP IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES An Update</p>

5 July 2016

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel with information on its previous review of Early Help – Improving Outcomes for Children, Young People and Families.

BACKGROUND

Aim

2. The purpose of the review was to investigate local practices, which aim to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families in respect of early help, early intervention and prevention.

Terms of Reference

3. The agreed terms of reference, in respect of the review, are outlined below:
 - a) To define the term 'early help' and establish its aims, principles and the key themes.
 - b) To determine how the Local Authority engages with its partners to ensure that problems for children, young people and families are identified early, and responded to effectively and as soon as possible.
 - c) To examine Middlesbrough's provision of preventative and early intervention targeted and specialised services.
 - d) To explore measures and strategies that could be implemented to further improve outcomes for children, young people and families.
 - e) To examine relevant guidance.

Conclusions

4. Based on the evidence gathered throughout the 2015 scrutiny investigation, the scrutiny panel concluded:

Early Help

- a) Early Help is about addressing the root causes of social disadvantage, it ensures that children, young people and families are able to realise their full potential by developing the range of skills that they need to thrive. The most striking message

is that early intervention clearly works – when it is an appropriate intervention, applied well, following timely identification of a problem (as early in the child’s life as possible and/or as soon as possible after a difficulty becomes apparent). It is better to identify problems early and intervene effectively, to prevent their escalation, than to respond only when the difficulty has become so acute as to demand action.

Early Help in Middlesbrough

- b) Early Help services have aligned their resources to ensure that the most deprived areas of Middlesbrough have the most support, whilst ensuring that all families can access their services. Considerable progress has been made in recent years, with a Common Assessment for Families (CAF) being developed and embedded in all organisations and interventions. Middlesbrough’s approach to Early Help is to focus and invest in prevention and early intervention to ensure that children, young people and families receive support in a timely way, tailored to their individual circumstances.
- c) The 0-19 Service, Public Health and the Stronger Families Programme provide crucial support to children, young people and their families. The outstanding achievements of the Stronger Families Programme evidence this and the planned future measurement of specific outcomes, pertaining to Early Help - including school readiness, will demonstrate the impact of these services.

Partnership Working

- d) The importance of agencies working in partnership, to meet the needs of children and families, lies at the heart of recent changes to service development and delivery. However, the Local Authority would benefit from developing an information sharing protocol to ensure the effective collection, sharing and use of information, intelligence and data. Effective information sharing is crucial in identifying those children, young people and families who may be in need of vital support.
- e) With commissioning responsibility of children’s 0-5 public health services transferring to local authorities, further work is required to improve the alignment between Public Health, the 0-19 Service and the Troubled Families Programme. Currently, partnership work is key to the delivery of joint targets, including increasing breastfeeding rates. Breastfeeding groups support the achievement of this shared target, however, Middlesbrough would benefit from a local breastfeeding initiative in order to achieve and sustain significant improvements. In addition to this, the Local Authority would value receiving notification of local pregnancies to promote the work of children’s centres and enable staff to work with families earlier in the pregnancy.
- f) To ‘close the gap’ for vulnerable children, young people and their families, the active engagement of key partners in both identifying need at the earliest opportunity, and helping meet these needs, is crucial.

Early Years Development

- g) Children's centres are extremely important in transmitting knowledge and information to ensure a good start – but many of the most vulnerable do not even make it to children's centres without significant encouragement. Children's centres lie at the 'hub' of a continuum of support for children, families and communities with additional needs. Children's centres are often where emerging difficulties can be first spotted, or where children, young people and their families will themselves first ask for help. Children's centres are also the most appropriate setting where extra help for children can be sourced and delivered. An effective outreach strategy is required to ensure that interventions target and support the most vulnerable in the community.
- h) A skilled and confident workforce is critical, with the ability to identify any emerging issues at an early age so that appropriate interventions can be put in place.
- i) As parents are the most significant influence on children, and parenting has profound consequences for their future lives, it is important to persuade parents that engaging in their child's development can make a difference. Although parenting support is a key part of the Early Help offer in Middlesbrough, this work could be further developed by offering one-to-one intensive home-based outreach support, combining parenting skills, speech, language and communication skills, and play sessions.

Investing in Early Help

- j) The temptation to cut back on investment in early intervention in times of austerity needs to be resisted, as the Local Authority may regret, with hindsight, the long-term costs of making such short-term savings. Early Help represents an intelligent approach to spending, making small investments to deal with root causes, rather than the much greater costs of dealing with the after-effects. Spending should be prioritised on children's centres and early years; speech, language and communication needs; parenting programmes; targeted family support; and young people on the edge of care. Of all the potential areas for intervention, it is the combination of early years development, including language and communication skills, and parenting support that the most significant impact could be made.

Recommendations

- 5. Based on the evidence given throughout the 2015 investigation, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel recommended to the Executive:
 - a) That the Local Authority, in consultation with partners (including schools) defines a more effective, and inclusive process for assessing school readiness - to be reported upon by the Supporting Communities Service.

- b) That specific outcomes pertaining to Early Help, and measured throughout 2014/15, be reported to the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel.
- c) That the excellent work of, and approach taken by, the Stronger Families Programme is commended and embedded within the service area, to ensure it is not wholly dependent upon fixed-term funding.
- d) That an Overarching Information Sharing Protocol is devised that conveys agreed guidance for sharing personalised information between agencies. All partners to be asked to sign up to the protocol at the event referred to in recommendation i) – this includes the health service, the police, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and schools.
- e) With commissioning responsibility of children's 0-5 public health services transferring to local authorities, that the Local Authority holds joint planning meetings with the health service to:
- Fully reinstate and review the process whereby children's centres receive early notification of all local pregnancies i.e. midwives completing a form with the mother, at the booking appointment, which gives the children's centre permission to contact the mother.
 - Establish a breastfeeding initiative, like Blackpool's, to increase breastfeeding rates and promote the benefits to the baby - which go on into later life. The initiative should reach out to young mothers from disadvantaged areas, who are less likely to breastfeed.
- f) That all children's centres develop an effective outreach strategy, including measureable targets and outcomes that reflect OFSTED's framework for inspection, to draw in isolated and 'hard to reach' families.
- g) That workforce development plans be further developed to ensure that everyone working with children and families, especially disadvantaged groups, receive appropriate training on language development, in addition to engaging and working with parents. The importance of language skills needs to be more actively promoted. This will ensure that every member of staff is equipped with:
- The knowledge and skills required to make an assessment of need.
 - Knowledge and understanding of children's early language development and how to support it.
- h) That there is an increase in capacity with regards to early language and development specialists. The purpose being to enable the delivery of one-to-one intensive home-based outreach support to disadvantaged families - combining parenting skills, speech, language and communication skills, and play sessions. This outreach work will focus on the crucial importance of the early stages of child development and support will be planned and tailored to meet individual circumstances.

- i) Alongside the partnership meetings already taking place - That the Local Authority organises an event, and the Mayor be invited to host, whereby all key partners – including schools, are invited. The purpose of the event being to specifically focus on:
- Discussing how Early Help services can be improved and developed.
 - Signing up to the Overarching Information Sharing Protocol (see recommendation d) - The event will provide the most appropriate platform to convey that information sharing is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and families.
 - Discussing and agreeing new ways of working, referring to examples of local practice validated by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO). For example, Operation Encompass - a protocol whereby schools are informed of when a child or young person had been involved in a domestic incident, this allows for the provision of immediate early intervention support.
- j) That the Local Authority continues to be committed to identifying problems early and intervening effectively in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

6. The Assistant Director for Supporting Communities will be in attendance to provide an update on the progress made with the implementation of agreed recommendations/actions, since the panel's report was submitted to the Executive on 17 March 2015. **Appendix 1** provides an update, in respect of the department's action plan, which was prepared in response to the panel's recommendations.
7. Alongside this update, the scrutiny panel will also receive information on:
- The Incremental Change Model, which has been developed to track and improve the development of pre-school children.
 - The overall early help offer (including the early help strategy).

BACKGROUND PAPERS

8. Final Report of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel and departmental action plan, Executive 17 March 2015.

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