

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	20 October 2016
Title of report:	Early help strategy 2016-2018
Report by:	Cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the county.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To approve the early help strategy 2016-18

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) **The early help strategy 2016-18 (appendix 1) be approved**

Alternative options

1. The alternative option to the proposed early help strategy is to continue with the current arrangements. However this is not recommended as it does not maximise or coordinate early help in Herefordshire, and has contributed to a higher than necessary number of referrals through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Many of these are inappropriate to be dealt with at the agreed Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board's level 4, threshold of need. Herefordshire has experienced higher comparative levels of child protection referrals and increased numbers of looked after children. The current system is 'overheated' resulting in extra activity, a greater level of intrusive work with parents and families than is ideally required, and higher costs to partners and the council. There is a need to build on current early help activity and provide a clearer approach across Herefordshire that will improve effectiveness to ensure where appropriate, children and families access support at an earlier stage of need; and contribute to reducing pressure on the statutory child protection system.
2. In considering alternative solutions to this issue, the provision of early help is a nationally recognised, cost effective use of resources and an appropriate way to organise and manage the delivery of services. Whilst there are a number of national models, the proposed strategy aims to develop service and budget arrangements that best suit Herefordshire, to focus the early help service arrangements in communities across the county and maximise the collective approach in all agencies.

Reasons for recommendations

3. The early help strategy will play a key role in securing outcomes set out in Herefordshire's children and young people's plan 2015-2018 and contribute to meeting the expected commitments to the troubled families (families first) programme; and contribute to delivery of Herefordshire's health and wellbeing strategy.
4. The development of the children and young people's partnership's early help strategy is at a time of increased financial pressures on all agencies and organisations, including early year's settings, schools, colleges, NHS, public and mental health services, police as well as the council. At the same time there is an increased pressure on resources, with higher numbers entering health and social care services. Herefordshire has experienced comparatively high numbers of MASH and child protection referrals and the number of looked after children are at comparatively high level against statistical neighbours. Whilst the local authority and partners do not set activity by statistical comparisons they do point to potentially different ways of meeting needs. There are significant cost pressures, with capped budgets, that need to be absorbed. The early help strategy provides a vehicle to maximise the council's and partner's work and resources to meet need in a more preventative way. It also recognises that there are strengths and services within local communities than can play a strong and effective part in supporting families. The council has been clear that it is families and communities who bring up children, and this proposed approach will build on that theme.

Key considerations

5. The early help strategy is priority one of the children and young people's plan 2015-2018 and underpins all other aspects of the plan. It aims to ensure provision of early and effective help and support to children and families when they need it, with the

long term aim of helping families in Herefordshire to be able to help themselves and improve their overall wellbeing and quality of life.

The Early Help provided will be:

Family focused – and designed to address the issues of the whole household in a holistic way;

Community Focussed – drawing on the strengths and services in each locality

Targeted – to ensure the right level of support at the right time;

Multi-agency – to reflect the complex and multi-faceted issues that families can often face;

Aimed at building resilience in families, to provide them with the tools and skills to help and support themselves in the future.

6. In order to be able to help and support children and their families at the earliest stage, the range of core partners who form the health and wellbeing board and the children and young people's partnership have both committed to the early help strategy and are working together to plan and deliver services. Strong partnerships that understand the role each agency plays and the impact each service has on supporting families will be essential.
7. To provide accurate assessments and target resources appropriately for children and their families, the Early Help strategy aligns with the Herefordshire four 'Levels of Need Thresholds':
 - Level 1** – Universal; Children making good overall progress in all areas of their development, receiving appropriate universal services such as health and education.
 - Level 2** – Early Intervention; Children, young people and families are experiencing emerging problems, whose needs require some targeted support. They are likely to require early help for a time limited period, to help them move back to Level 1.
 - Level 3** – Complex/Family Intervention 'Light'; Children, young people and families with identified vulnerabilities who are experiencing significant additional complex needs and are likely to require a more targeted, multi-agency coordinated approach with possible longer term intervention.
 - Level 4** – Acute/Family Intervention 'Plus'; Children, young people and families who are experiencing very serious or complex needs that are having a major impact on their expected outcomes or there is extreme concern for their safety. These acute needs may require statutory intensive support.
8. It will be important that these levels of need are understood and accepted across the authority and partner agencies to ensure their appropriate application and contribution to early help assessments. The work of the early help strategy will mainly identify support for families within the level two early Intervention.
9. The strategy has a community focussed approach that recognises the importance of the families themselves and the communities in which families live and work. Developing and building relationships based on the families' links within their communities, is a key part of the work.

10. The strategy also acknowledges that a rebalancing of resources across Herefordshire's multi-agency services will need to occur in order to create a sustainable service provision that will benefit families. The approach builds on and coordinates current early help activity to:

- enable families to organise and access help themselves through and with their local communities and services
- enable communities to help themselves
- fundamentally improve the way that services are identified and delivered to the county's most vulnerable children and their families
- build upon existing provision to ensure a more robust and coordinated range of early help services across the county that are easier to navigate for both families and practitioners
- maximise a multi-disciplinary/multi-agency approach to family help

Herefordshire's Early Help Key Messages

- Think Independence
- Think Family
- Think Whole System
- Promotion of Whole Well being
- Flexible Workforce
- Make Every Contact Count

11. The implementation and operation of the early help strategy will be governed through the multi-agency children and young people's partnership executive group. Developments and progress will be reported bi-annually through a scorecard which will track quantitative and qualitative outcomes as outlined in the strategy document. The focus of this work will be towards the outcomes achieved for each family and how those outcomes align with the key indicators of each agency's targets along with the cost-effectiveness of programmes of support. The joint and integrated approach will provide clearer access for families to support and services. Alongside which will be an integration of data to enable the identification of gaps in provision but also identifying where support services are improving the wellbeing of families.

Community impact

12. Evidence that underpins the need for early help for vulnerable children and their families is provided in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) – Understanding Herefordshire (July 2016, version 1.1) and the children and young people's plan 2015-18.

13. The population of children 0-19 years at mid-2015 in the county, is 39,900.

14. The October 2015 census of primary and secondary schools shows that the year groups with the highest number of pupils were in reception (1,976), year 1 (1923) and Year 3 (1900). This reflects the increase in the population of young children seen locally and nationally in recent years. Whilst the numbers of children had been declining in Herefordshire throughout the whole of the last decade, levelling out over the last five years. However, the number of under-fives and births has been rising over the last decade with the next 10 years expecting to yield a gradual increase in the numbers of children.

15. There are 120 children with child protection plans.
16. There are 278 Looked After children
17. There are 4,300 children under the age of 16 years who live in income deprived households. There are one in four children within ten areas of the county who live in income deprivation. Six of these areas are within the 20% most deprived in England.
18. The performance of children whose parents claim free school meals (FSM) for their children is still performing below their peers nationally. At all key stages the gap in attainment between pupils who have FSM and those who do not, remains wide as it has been for the last three years. Of the 266 young people in 2016 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), 70 of this cohort were eligible for free school meals during their years of compulsory education.
19. Childhood obesity has a wider social impact with children who are overweight experiencing more emotional and behavioural problems as a result of stigmatisation, bullying and low self-esteem. In 2013/14, 19% of reception children locally were either obese or overweight, while 31% of children in Year 6 were either obese or overweight.
20. Recent Public Health England (PHE) data (mid-2014) on tooth decay among five year olds showed that 41% have tooth decay.
21. As core part and contributor to the early help strategy the troubled families, families first programme in Herefordshire aims to identify and support the work with 1090 vulnerable families in the period 2015-2020. This aims to identify support for vulnerable families across six key outcomes:
 - Parents and children involved in crime and antisocial behaviour
 - Children who have not been attending school regularly
 - Children who need help
 - Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness
 - Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
 - Parents and children with a range of health problems
22. The early help strategy will build on and be dependent on the identification and engagement of community resources in each locality. It has a focus on four of the seven key priorities of the health and wellbeing strategy:
 - Giving every child the best start in life
 - Helping vulnerable children and families
 - Empowering communities to take better care of themselves
 - Improving mental wellbeing throughout their lives
23. The early help strategy will be integrated with the council's supporting communities and connecting communities programme and provided through community resources, adapting to each locality's needs.
24. In practice this means that we will enable children and families to access information, advice and guidance and support them through their own network of contacts, through their local community resources, and through contact with public and private

services; to support children and families to work with services to assess their needs and determine the best way to meet them.

25. This will require engagement with communities and community organisations across the county, which is underway through consultation work with the council's children's wellbeing and adults and wellbeing directorates has been informed by the design council community engagement project. The feedback from this will inform how early help services will be developed and local organisations and inter-agency services might be harnessed to deliver the early help support. It will also identify where there are gaps to inform the partnership commissioning arrangements.

Equality duty

26. The early help strategy will pay due regard to our public sector equality duty and the attached equality impact assessment attached at appendix 2 will ensure that we have considered and paid due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under this act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it."

Financial implications

27. Alongside the commitment to the early help approach, there is an expectation for the commitment of resources across the directorates and partner agencies. This will be through the identifying and bringing together partners current and existing early help work and pathways. This includes the early help and intervention work across Public Health, CCG, criminal justice agencies, schools where there is already money allocated to schools to support early help. There will also be an impact on the workforce development across all the agencies to ensure a common understanding on the approach and assessments.
28. There will be a need and requirement to commit to an inter-agency communication strategy and practical briefings to ensure a combined approach.
29. As part of the early help strategy there will be a re-alignment of service arrangements in the children's wellbeing and adults and wellbeing directorates and with partners to a more community focussed, locality based approach. In time, reductions in the numbers of children and young people subject to child protection plans, or becoming looked after will free up council and partner time and resources.
30. The strategy will also play a key role in meeting the expected commitments to the national troubled families (families first) programme, which will provide funding to the council and the children and young people's partnership over the period 2015-2020. The troubled families programme in Herefordshire, on agreeing to and meeting the troubled families' outcomes, will attract a combination of payments from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This is made up of attachment fees for each identified family, an annual transformation grant and a payment by results, amounting to a potential £2.276m by 2020.
31. Through the use of the DCLG's troubled families cost calculator and as a result of the early intervention work undertaken we will be able to develop an Early Help cost-benefit analysis, identifying the achieved costs avoided across the partnership. This will include improved child health, identifying reducing number of police call outs, improving school attendance and attainment, and increasing employment. The

DCLG have estimated that the following average annual costs of interventions could be avoided (2012 figures)

Truancy £44,468/lifetime

Mental health services £81/hour

Neighbourhood disputes £778-£9,500

Child being taken into care £36,653/year

Legal implications

32. Local authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area. They have a number of statutory functions under the 1989 and 2004 children acts which make this clear. They have a duty to provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child. Local authorities, under section 10 of the children act 2004, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children.

Risk management

33. The risks to consider in implementing the early help strategy include; the length of time it will take to engage partners in this early help model. To align and integrate with each agency's early help provision and achieve the desired positive impact in the communities with an identified improvement in the number of families worked with at the appropriate level of need and their long term outcomes.

34. Over previous years there has been a similar approach within the county which was very dependent on council only funding and services. These have been significantly reduced or cut completely over the period of austerity. There may now be negative perception of the strategy as 'we have been here before' and at the same time a real or perceived reduction in funding for services. To ensure that there is an understanding that a fully integrated early help support and provision will be more cost effective for all partners and agencies than having to commit resources to the higher level and higher cost child protection work. It will therefore be important to consider these views and experiences and develop ways to integrate and engage partners in this new strategy through communication, briefings, workforce development and training.

35. With the implementation of a planned re-alignment of referrals to the early help community model there will need to be careful management of the current workload within MASH and the higher level children's wellbeing services to early help support. The early help strategy will take time to develop and identify work with the community resources, whilst at the same time referrals are still ongoing and requiring appropriate support. This will be managed through close work and liaison between children's wellbeing teams and services to ensure that any referrals are managed appropriately and access early help as this support is identified and developed.

36. There is a risk in the delay of implementation in ensuring that children and their families get the support they need. The impact of delay would have the detrimental

effect of those children being subject to child protection plans for longer periods than may be necessary.

Consultees

37. There has been a programme of work with the design council, where a project team from CWB, AWB and Public Health has engaged and consulted with them over several months to inform the development of the early help approach of involving the community in the decision and design process of early intervention. This work is now integrated into the current prototype project in Leominster to trial and adopt the methodology.
38. Through the work of the community connections prototype in Leominster and building on the design council consultations. The community connectors have been since July, engaging with members of the Leominster community to understand their needs, to find out their views and through this inform and develop early intervention practice across both CWB and AWB. This work is current and on-going and is planned to take the approach to other market towns and areas across the county.
39. The proposed early help strategy has been taken to the health and wellbeing Board. Whilst recognising the developments in the market towns, they wanted to insure that that there is a timetable to roll-out the prototype work from Leominster and to ensure that the communities between the market towns are given consideration and how the development of the approach will meet their needs.
40. The strategy has been taken to the Herefordshire children and young people's partnership board in July and September, to consult and to gain commitment to the strategy on an inter-agency basis. This is on-going partnership work following their commitment to the strategy with the current focus on the commitment of resources and combining early help pathways of support from across the partner agencies.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Early help strategy

Appendix 2 - Equality impact statement

Background papers

- None identified.