



Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Early help task and finish group

Draft Terms of reference

Background

Herefordshire's Early Help offer includes both universal and targeted services aimed at supporting children, young people, and families before statutory intervention is required. The offer includes:

- **Universal services:** Provided largely through Talk Community, voluntary and community organisations, schools, health, and public health-funded initiatives.
- **Targeted early help:** Led by the Early Help team within Children's Services, working directly with families who require structured support.

Key developments in this area in recent years include:

- Integration of Early Help into wider Children's Services through locality models.
- Introduction of Families First and Lead Practitioner roles.
- Recruitment of two new children's-focused community development workers within Talk Community.
- Partnership commissioning (such as with the PCC) to support local early intervention initiatives.

To build on these developments, work is underway to identify and address weaknesses in current practice, including:

- Persistent confusion around distinctions between universal and targeted Early Help.
- Limited public visibility of the Early Help offer and recent developments.
- Variability in provision and access across different localities.
- Pressure on schools to deliver Early Help without sufficient funding or infrastructure.
- Need for improved coordination between statutory and non-statutory partners.

Purpose

The group therefore aims to provide a constructive and collaborative space to:

- Recognise strengths in current Early Help provision.
- Identify good practice across different communities.
- Highlight gaps or inconsistencies in provision and the work in place to address them.

Scope of Inquiry:

In recognition of the broad and varied nature of early help available in Herefordshire, the group intends to carry out two distinct but closely interdependent streams of work:

Community and Universal Offer

- Mapping and showcasing local Early Help initiatives.

- Exploring partnerships with Talk Community hubs, voluntary groups, parish and town councils.
- Engagement around youth activities, access barriers (transport), and local innovation.

Targeted Early Help and Families First

- Understanding the Families First implementation.
- Exploring the role of lead practitioners.
- Clarifying the role of schools and multi-agency collaboration.

Work Programme

The group will determine its programme of work to meet the above objectives. This programme is likely to include:

- Local Appreciative Inquiry events in Hereford City and each of the five key market towns (Ross, Ledbury, Kington, Leominster, Bromyard), Supported by Talk Community and Children's Services.
- Case studies
- Meeting with families and professionals, individually and in focus groups

Proposed Timeline

- Summer 2025: Agree task and finish group, establish membership, agree programme of work
- Autumn 2025 to Spring 2026: Community engagement events, interviews, focus groups.
- Spring/Summer 2026: Reflection and analysis.
- Summer 2026: Presentation of findings and recommendations to Children and Young People Scrutiny.

6. Next Steps

- Democratic Services to arrange internal briefing on Early Help progress and Families First from officers in the Children and Young people directorate
- The Children and Young People Scrutiny committee to agree the terms of reference and build a work programme to deliver its objectives.
- Democratic Services to advertise the task and group and collect expressions of interest from councillors.
- Democratic Services to coordinate with Talk Community to develop logistics and stakeholder engagement.