

Report of: Executive Member for Children and Families

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Joint Board	3 November 2015	All

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SUBJECT: Early Help – Response to the report of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 The Executive received a report from the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee which reviewed the impact of early help on preventing escalation to statutory services. The scrutiny report proposed 10 recommendations to further improve outcomes for families with multiple problems. This report proposes actions to be taken in response to the early help scrutiny.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To welcome the findings of the Early Help Scrutiny Review.
2.2 To agree the responses to the recommendations of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 4 of this report.
2.3 To agree that officers report back on progress to the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee in one year’s time.

3. Background

- 3.1 Between September 2014 and April 2015, the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee conducted a review of the impact of early help. The Committee concluded that early help services in Islington were of a high quality, worked well with partner agencies and took a comprehensive ‘whole family’ approach. The Committee anticipates that by continuing the early help approach will further decrease demand for statutory services. Overall, the Committee supported the work of the Council’s early help services and made several recommendations to further innovation.

4. Response to the Scrutiny Committee recommendations

4.1 Recommendation 1: That the Executive continue to prioritise the Early Help approach to preventing escalation to statutory services.

The Executive recognises the essential role that the early help approach has to prevent escalation to statutory services. It is also a statutory responsibility. Through the Children and Families Board and Health and Wellbeing Board, there is commitment to a long-term focus on early intervention and prevention in Islington. In January 2015, the Health and Wellbeing Board adopted the [Children and Families Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2015 – 25](#) which has a distinct priority to '*strengthen our early help support for children and families who have additional needs.*' This is a long-term priority to which the Executive remains committed.

The Executive also understands that the Children and Families Board, chaired by the Executive Member for Children and Families, monitors the implementation of the early help priority. Similarly, the Islington Safeguarding Children Board undertakes a rigorous and transparent assessment of the performance and effectiveness of local services including our early help approach on an annual basis. These approaches will ensure that the Executive is regularly appraised of issues, impact and future proposals for action.

4.2 Recommendation 2: That the Council's early help services' successes in creating safe and trusting relationships with families be noted, and consideration be given to how similar approaches to positive relationship building can be adopted by other services, including but not exclusive of schools and housing.

The Executive recognises the good practice and success of early help services in creating safe and trusting relationships with families. The Executive will recommend that the Children and Families Board consider how to promote such approaches to other services such as employment services, health, housing and schools.

4.3 Recommendation 3: That early help services better prepare service users for their intervention ending by working further to build resilience, which will reduce social isolation and empower families to live independent and fulfilled lives.

The Executive supports this recommendation. It notes that training will be commissioned for family support workers to support and challenge families and partner agencies to build resilience in preparation for the end of their intervention.

4.4 Recommendation 4: That the Executive continue to prioritise mental health, school attendance, domestic violence and parental employment as key factors in achieving family wellbeing.

As noted in Recommendation one, there is commitment to a long-term focus on early intervention and prevention in Islington. This includes addressing the factors that affect family wellbeing and ensuring that children attend school every day as a means to achieving good educational outcomes.

The Executive has agreed a new [Corporate Plan](#) which prioritises making Islington a place where our residents have a good quality of life. It also commits the Executive to work in new ways to tackle the key social challenges of mental ill-health, domestic violence and long-term unemployment.

4.5 Recommendation 5: That, through the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Council work with its partners, such as clinical commissioning groups, to ensure better access to effective mental health provision.

Mental health and wellbeing are priority areas for both the Council and the NHS, and is one of the four priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Executive is committed to ensuring that

parental and children's mental ill-health are effectively tackled. There are several areas of work to realise this commitment together with our partners.

A CCG-funded parental mental health service – Growing Together - has been developed. This brings together Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Adult mental health clinicians to work in Children's Centres and other venues to provide clinical interventions to parents and children where the parent's mental health is having a negative impact on their children's mental health. Other significant developments include a new model of primary care mental health which embeds psychiatry, psychiatric nursing and psychology in GP practices. This aims to strengthen capacity and support a more sustainable mental health system.

On the 15th of October, the Leader signed off the local long-term transformation plan for children's mental health on behalf of the Health and Wellbeing Board. As part of this plan, services supporting parental mental health will be reviewed in order to develop a coherent evidence-based Parental Mental Health Service which makes best use of resources. The Plan also prioritises improving access to support which aims to build a system without tiers. This will include initiatives such as working with voluntary sector organisations to provide a network of outreach services delivering counselling and therapeutic interventions at locations young people say they will access; training CAMHS practitioners as Approved Mental Health Practitioners (AMHSs); establishing a flexible CAMHS service delivery model that can respond to young people in crisis; and addressing current waiting times for CAMHS treatment.

4.6 Recommendation 6: That consideration be given to introducing 'Early Help Ambassadors', resident volunteers that can assist with outreach, promotion, and reducing the stigma of accessing help.

The Executive will ask the Children's Services department to review any current service user 'ambassador' roles and research the use of 'Early Help Ambassadors' in other local authorities. This will identify the potential risks and benefits of the model.

4.7 Recommendation 7: That the internal monitoring and evaluation of early help services continue to be prioritised through further exit interviews and mystery shopping exercises.

The Executive values service monitoring and evaluation as a means to assessing the impact of Council services. The Families First service will conduct further exit interviews and mystery shopping exercises as part of its internal monitoring and evaluation plan.

4.8 Recommendation 8: To combat social isolation, consideration be given to how information about cultural and social opportunities can be more accessible to families and staff.

The Executive recognises the work and tools already in place to provide accessible information about cultural and social opportunities to families and staff. To further this, the Executive will ask the Children's Services department to enable staff to promote children's centres, school extra-curricular activities, youth provision and employment, training and outreach activities.

4.9 Recommendation 9: That officers investigate if a discretionary fund to support families in extreme crisis situations could be provided within existing budgets.

The Executive will ask the Children's Services department to investigate whether and how a discretionary fund could be provided within existing budgets.

4.10 Recommendation 10: That the service adopts the recommendation of the external evaluation to work further with families with adolescent children, and adolescent children themselves.

The Executive notes that the Children's Services department have adopted this recommendation and have expanded the role of Islington Families Intensive Team to include earlier intervention with adolescents and targeted work to reduce the need for Alternative Provision.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial implications:

There are no additional resources required to implement the majority of the recommendations. Work will be undertaken to investigate if a discretionary fund can be provided to support families in extreme crisis situations, however it should be noted that this is in the context of a fiscal environment where the Council estimates that it needs to make up to £90m of revenue savings over the next 3 years.

5.2 Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications arising from this report. The actions support the implementation of the statutory responsibility outlined in the 2013 Working Together statutory guidance.

5.3 Resident Impact Assessment

Early help seeks to address a range of inequalities in the general population to help them thrive and build resilience to factors that may disadvantage them.

6. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 6.1 This report details the Executive's response to the recommendations from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

Appendix 1: Impact of Early Help on Preventing Escalation to Statutory Services Review – Report of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



16 November 2015

Executive Member for Children and Families

Date:

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