

Report of: Corporate Director of Children's Services

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee	22 September 2016	All

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SUBJECT: Early Help Scrutiny Review: 12 Month Report Back

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 Following the scrutiny of early help in 2014/15, this report sets out progress in meeting the Committee's recommendations and highlights risks to the early help offer in future years due to national funding changes.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee considers the progress made in relation to its previous recommendations and notes risks to the future funding of early help services.

3. Background

- 3.1 A scrutiny of early help was carried out between September 2014 and April 2015. The overall aims were to analyse the extent to which services provided by Islington council and its partners were preventing needs escalating to the point children, young people and families needed statutory interventions; to highlight areas of good practice and; to make recommendations to further improve outcomes for families with multiple problems.
- 3.2 The objectives of the review were to identify how well the early help approach was:
- **identifying issues** at the onset to nip problems in the bud
 - providing a system of support that is **easily accessible** for families
 - providing a **range of services** to meet the differing levels of need of families and how they address issues related to school attendance, offending and employment including parental employment.
 - providing **effective programmes** of support
 - effectively **building family functioning** and ability to solve/overcome problems
 - effectively **solving problems** faced by children, young people and families identified as having multiple needs that can't be met by universal services, preventing offending and the need for entry into social care services.

- making efficient and effective **use of all resources** available

- 3.3 The scrutiny committee found 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 anticipated that continuing the early help approach would 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.
- 3.4 The final report proposed ten recommendations to further improve outcomes for families with multiple problems. This report provides an update on progress made in response to the recommendations.

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

The Executive has continued to prioritise the Early Help approach to preventing escalation through targeted family support in the children’s centres for under fives, Families First for five to nineteen year olds, and a range of evidence based parenting programmes. For families with more complexity, IFIT provides the intensive support with a greater degree of clinical and specialist input (non-statutory).

Through careful management of the families with multiple needs community based budget, services have been sustained and there has been no reduction to the numbers of families served by the teams. However, it is highly unlikely that services can be sustained at this level over the coming period due to a reduced rate of phase two national Troubled Families funding (2015-2020), and the potential impact of implementing a National Funding Formula for Early Years which proposes to reduce the proportion of funding that the local authority can retain centrally.

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 early help services are making better links to other services in order to build on the partnership working and team around the family approach.

Since the Scrutiny, **links to schools** have been revised to give stronger coverage. Families First now link to each primary school in the borough, with IFIT doing the same in the secondary schools. The Family Support Worker attached to the schools connects with their pastoral care staff or team around the school so that children and families with additional needs can be identified and support plans made with the consent of the family. They can also facilitate coffee mornings or attends playground meet and greets with parents to promote easy access to help. A specialist worker in IFIT also links to families where a young person has been identified by the school as at risk of requiring alternative provision.

A further innovation in relation to families and schools is the Islington Mental Health and Resilience in Schools project (**IMHARS**). The IMHARS framework sets out seven components of school practice and ethos that effectively develop resilience, promote mental health and support children at risk of, or experiencing, mental health problems. Schools should reflect the seven components when planning early help for pupils, this complements the work conducted by Families First and IFIT. This project aims to bring these two areas of work together to encourage schools to use the early help assessment tool to identify needs and co-ordinate how support can be provided or make a request for service if there are safeguarding concerns.

The objective is to understand how schools currently identify families who require early help and how they work with the families. The aim is to share good practice and tackle barriers in providing early help and to encourage the use of the Early Assessment to identify and meet needs in school. Five schools are participating from the Autumn term and the process includes:

- Auditing the early help already offered by the school
- Training key staff members on the Early Help Assessment (in addition to other areas depending on audit above)
- Enhancing the team around the school to use the Solihull Approach, and CAMHS and FF/ IFIT practitioners to lead/model if needed.
- Holding advice surgeries on a regular basis in school where FF/IFIT practitioner alongside school staff member provides support to “nip problems in the bud.”
- Running parenting programmes in school and school staff member to shadow to develop their skills in responding to parents about parenting.
- Providing bespoke training from Safeguarding Board Workforce Development.

Learning from the pilot will enable a more schools-led promotion of how to identify and support families in school.

Co-location is now in place with the **anti-social behaviour team in Housing and with the Youth Offending Service**, again to promote the team around the family and relationship building ways of working.

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 **re-referral rate** to Families First has been stable at 18.8% for the last two years. Work is planned this financial year to audit these cases to help us to understand better whether families are returning because their problems were not resolved satisfactorily, or more positively because they have an increased trust in the service and can disclose other issues, or for other reasons. We will also improve our understanding of cases that have had multiple children’s social care and early help interventions.

Both Families First and IFIT have introduced new ways of working to ensure that they are maximising families’ resilience and preparing them for endings. These include:

- Preparing family members for endings more systematically in home visits and this is now evident in an increasing proportion of case records.
- Marking the formal ending and the withdrawal of home visiting family support, the worker now writes a letter to the family that highlights the progress that the family themselves have made and suggests what services families can independently access if they need any further assistance.
- IFIT’s weekly goal sheets are monitored closely to ensure that staff are enabling families to achieve their goals, rather than doing things on their behalf.
- Clearer processes are in place for managing case closures, avoiding ‘drift’ in support, and ensuring management oversight at each stage of the cases.

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

The key factors identified within this recommendation are four of the six national troubled families priorities for phase two of the programme (2015-20 – the other problems are crime/anti-social behaviour and a broad category of children who need help). Changes have been made to **systems and ways of working** in the last year to ensure we can measure these family problem areas more consistently across early help services, assess what progress we have made for each family and across the cohort, and prioritise accordingly. At the point of writing, the new Early Help Module has been rolled out to children’s centres, targeted youth support and IFIT, Families First and the Early Support Team for disabled children will follow. This will mean better information on needs and how we are meeting those but also flags to every member of staff that these are our priorities for children and families and need to be at the centre of our work to improve outcomes.

Ensuring children **go to school every day**, avoiding persistent absence and exclusions continues to be prioritised across Families First and IFIT. A Families First support worker is linked to every primary school and an IFIT worker to every secondary school in the borough. In 2015/16, for young people

with 10%+ persistent absence, 70% (62 of 89) showing an improvement following their Families First intervention. 67% (14 of 21) of young people with previous exclusions were excluded less frequently or not at all after being supported by Families First.

In terms of promoting good mental health, the multi-disciplinary **Growing Together** service provides a range of interventions to address both a parent's mental health difficulty and the way they understand and relate to their child (aged under 5). The key performance indicators for Growing Together are improvements in parenting, improvements in parent-child interaction, reduction in mental health issues and 100% registration of eligible parents with children's centres and they are demonstrating improvements in all of these areas, e.g. using individual therapy for parents, parent-infant therapeutic work, groups, behavioural management, and couples work.

The Psychologically Informed Consultation and Training **Service (PICT)** which was embedded in early help from Nov 2013 continues, funded by the CCG. PICT is part of The Camden & Islington NHS Foundation Trust's Personality Disorder Service. Their remit is workforce development and supporting staff to work more effectively with personality disorder and other complex and challenging presentations. Each team has two days per week of PICT practitioner time for consultation on cases, joint work with the lead professional, support to navigate adult mental health services, and training. It is difficult to measure definitively the impact of families' lives of the PICT service because they are supporting the team around the family rather than doing direct clinical work in the main. However, helping the workers to develop crisis management plans (that include the needs of the children) and staying well / maintenance plans at the end of interventions builds parents' and adult siblings' capacity to self-manage health and wellbeing. The advice provided on how to best deliver interventions that can be accepted and acted upon by parents and to support parents to sustain engagement with mental health services such as IAPT, counselling or higher threshold services is valued and appears to be working well. An audit will be carried out later this year to capture more data on impact.

A recent independent evaluation notes that Growing Together, PICT and I-cope are managing to **engage with families that had previously not engaged with services, but who have pronounced vulnerabilities.**

Progress is ongoing in relation to **parental employment**, with employment advisers attached to each of the early help teams. Progress to work is now expected as a goal for all family plans if there is an adult on out-of-work benefits. This can range from very early support towards work for families with many barriers (e.g. getting out of the house, setting routines, self-confidence building) to more formal work-readiness such as training, work experience, help with CVs and applications for those who are nearer to employment. We monitor all of our early help families where there is an adult on benefits and between September 2015 and Aug 2016, 17 adults supported by our early help teams have moved off benefits and started work. 18 started training and 10 work experience.

Domestic abuse continues to feature highly in referrals (27% of all cases). Again the approach is to embed specialist expertise in our teams so that they can enable staff to feel more confident in the support they offer in managing risk and mitigating the impact of domestic abuse on survivors. Although the main focus of the DVIP (Perpetrators' service) is on families within the statutory services, it is available to early help staff for advice and consultation and is particularly relevant to the IFIT families. For Families First, a six-month pilot involving co-locating a Solace worker in Families First is about to start which has been set up in partnership with the Community Safety Team. They will spend two days a week in one of the teams to increase awareness of domestic abuse and the available services and support LBI staff development and confidence through lunchtime learning sessions and case advice.

A conference for staff on parental conflict and domestic abuse is planned for the Autumn to be run jointly by Early Help and the Islington Safeguarding Children Board with outside speakers to raise awareness of the current research and best practice.

Parents can access the 'Parents as Partners' parenting programme for couples in conflict as well as a male perpetrators' programme. A gap was identified for women and children who have survived domestic violence to avoid future abusive relationships and start to repair the damage of abuse and work is underway to commission two programmes – one for under 5s and one for schools aged children.

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.

Early help services continue to develop closer joint working with **CAMHS and Adult Mental Health**. Across services, goals for intervention are wherever possible incorporated into one family plan.

IFIT clinical staff are able to discuss, escalate and fast-track CAMHS involvement, as a child or adolescent mental health assessment can be completed within the service.

Families First is currently negotiating with CAMHS about the input into their teams in terms of training to family support workers and also relooking at how Solihull practitioners are used in each service and whether they can be used in a consultative way similar to the PICT practitioners. The **Solihull Approach** is a practical way of working with families to help a more secure attachment to develop between a child and their carers. It combines theories from psychoanalysis on containment, from child development on development, and from behaviourism on effective behaviour management. As a secure attachment underpins all other relationships for the rest of a child's life, it is the agreed approach across all Early Help services in Islington.

Families continue to benefit from the embedded PICT service which enables more effective working with parents affected by mental health problems – see Recommendation 4 above – this is funded through the CCG.

There is agreement with CCG managers and the Camden and Islington Mental Health Foundation Trust that further work is required in relation to influencing adult mental health staff to 'think family.' A plan is in place to link into Trust-wide training. An update of information across children and adults' services on the numbers of adults in treatment are living with children and the level of support from children's services will also be carried out.

On the strategic level, Early Help services are represented at the Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Group and on the Islington Mental Health Advisory Group and Programme Board (Adults) in order to bring about a greater focus on early intervention and the whole family approach. Equally, the key health services are represented at the Early Help Stronger Families Steering Group.

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.

Self-referrals to Families First remain high: the proportion was 21% in 2014/15, increasing to 25.3% in 2015/16. Schools are also a key source of referrals at 11% in both years. It is likely that these rates indicate that the service is considered non-stigmatising within the community.

Feasibility for the **Early Help Ambassadors' role** has been undertaken since the scrutiny. This approach to outreach had previously been provided by Family Action but was not sustainable alongside the casework. Funding has now been identified for a new twelve-month pilot of an Ambassador role and a specification developed in consultation with staff, partners and parents. The aim is for an independent Service Provider to provide training and support to a group of parents/carers to enable them to undertake the role. The ambassadors will be previous service users who have either attended a parenting programme and/or had an Early Help service. We expect selection and training of the Ambassadors to take place in Autumn 2016, with delivery from Spring 2017.

The role of the ambassadors will be to:

a) Bring vulnerable families in to Early Help services

Help to reduce the stigma of gaining access to help through taking a role in outreach, including recruitment to parenting programmes, through attending coffee mornings and community events where parents are to promote Early Help services. Attend pre-course introductory meetings for parenting programmes to tell other parents their experience of having completed a programme and the impact on their family, and

contribute to improving recruitment to parenting programmes, including helping improve publicity so that it is engaging for parents.

b) Assist in monitoring the quality of the service families receive

Ambassadors will be invited to be part of interview panels for recruitment of staff to Early Help, as well as to selection interviews for practitioners to train to become parenting programme facilitators. They will take part in mystery shopping and exit interviews as part of the Early Help quality assurance framework. They will attend the pre course coffee morning for parents to meet those signing up for parenting programmes, attend again at some point half way through and give feedback on facilitation of the group, as well as being available for parents to speak to during breaks, letting them know about post course support available.

c) Help families build their own local networks of support at exit from Early Help services

With support from Early Help staff, ambassadors will run a peer support group for parents who have recently exited an Early Help service or parenting programme. The content of the group sessions will be decided by the group, but could include both informal coffee mornings, offering a chance to meet together and improve social networks, through to organising attendance at local community events together or inviting in community speakers on subjects of common interest, for example Family Information Service, employment advisors, community police, play and youth services etc.

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

Mystery shopping and exit questionnaires have continued to be used, with feedback, learning and action taken following on from the sessions.

a) The areas for improvement identified during **mystery shopping** included: ensuring there is always a knowledgeable Family Support Worker with good listening skills available to respond to telephone enquiries; for staff to be clear about what will happen and when once a referral is accepted; the importance of seeking informed consent. Positive feedback related to the politeness and warmth of staff who 'really want to help,' and to the promotion of the employment advisers and family activities.

b) The **exit questionnaires** indicated that 98% of families remembered that their assessment was shared with them and found assessments easy to understand and fair in the way their family's situation was represented. A slightly lower rating was given to the clarity of the family plan and whether it meets needs of family (3/5) and this correlates with internal auditing results and is being addressed. However, service users were clear on who was doing what to help them, including what they needed to do themselves. 100% rated their worker as reliable and said that they felt listened to and supported, and their overall experience was positive for the majority of families.

The Early Help Ambassadors will help the Families First service to reach more parents and ensure their views are fed into service planning and delivery.

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.

Both Families First and IFIT actively encourage all family members to engage in culturally sensitive activities that promote their involvement in work, training and leisure interests. Families First have developed strong partnerships with Caxton House Community Centre and Sadlers Wells Theatre.

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

The early help services make applications to charities for funds for specific needs including white goods and typically basic household items as well as to the resident support scheme. The teams make a request for services to Children's Social Care if families are in extreme crisis so that families can have access to children in need funding under section 17 of the Children Act.

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

Following the early help evaluation and the scrutiny of early help services, the Islington Families Intensive Team (IFIT) was reviewed. The focus for IFIT has shifted to a cohort of families with adolescents where difficulties are less entrenched or younger siblings are at risk of following similar trajectories. Stronger links have been made with agencies involved with the older young people – such as the Youth Offending Service, Targeted Youth Support, and Housing. Co-location and closer joint working were established.

IFIT is now accepting referrals that identify families where there are earlier indicators that the children are at risk of school exclusion, risk of eviction through debt and rent arrears, or antisocial behaviour or offending. IFIT is focusing on those families where the level of concern does not meet threshold for statutory services. By identifying these families earlier, IFIT aims to make more of an impact and facilitate lasting change with families, reducing the need for statutory services in the future. Interventions are shorter, with the aim of making the service delivery better value for money without losing the intensity necessary to make significant and sustained progress.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial implications:

As noted in recommendation 2.1 it is highly unlikely that services can be sustained at the current level in the future due to a reduction in ongoing resources available.

Current financial modelling indicates that services can be maintained in existing formats until March 2018, after which the funding reductions are expected to be a minimum of 30%.

4.2 Legal Implications:

No implications.

4.3 Environmental Implications:

No implications.

4.4 Equality Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

An assessment has not been carried out in relation to this report as it is a progress report on service improvements, rather than a new initiative or change in policy.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to note progress made on the actions being taken forward to address the recommendations of the Children's Scrutiny Committee's review of early help services.

Appendices: None.

Background papers: None.

Final report clearance:

Signed by:



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