

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 14th February 2012
Report of: Director of Children, Families and Adults
Subject/Title: Family Support Services Review
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Hilda Gaddum

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This report is an update on the steps taken to implement the recommendations of the Review of Family Support Services undertaken by the task and finish group of Children and Families Scrutiny Committee presented to Cabinet on 20th December 2010. It follows on from the agenda item presented in June 2011 to Scrutiny regarding the implementation of Cheshire East Family Services (CEFS).

2.0 Decision Requested

- 2.1 That members note the progress made towards implementing early help and take a further report in September 2012 regarding progress made.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The implementation of an early intervention model for family support in Cheshire East is aimed at ensuring children and families' needs are met at the earliest possible point. This will provide an opportunity for improving outcomes for families before issues escalate and will reduce the need for more complex, expensive interventions at a later stage that will have a reduced chance of positive outcomes.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications including - Carbon reduction - Health

- 6.1 A number of central government commissioned reports were published in 2011 all of which were pointing to the need for the greater development of an Early

Intervention offer at a local level. The Allen Review – Early Intervention the Next Steps was published in January 2011. This cross party review highlighted the importance of early Intervention, particularly in the early years and drew on relatively new research into child development that has highlighted the lifelong impact that the early year's environment has on a whole range of outcomes for children.

- 6.2 The second key report published in the summer of 2011 was the Munro Review of Child Protection. Whilst this review largely focused on the child protection system Professor Munro dedicated a chapter of the report to "Sharing the responsibility for provision of early help." Within this chapter she highlights the persuasive arguments for the importance of Early Help (as she terms early intervention) and points out that "Preventative services will do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services." The Munro Review argued that the Early Help offer by Local Authorities and our partners should become a statutory responsibility.
- 6.3 This recommendation was not fully accepted by the government however it has been influential in shaping future inspections of Safeguarding and Looked After Children which will have much more of a focus on the child's journey and the services available within local authority areas that prevent the need for the provision of high end services.

7.0 Financial Implications (Director of Finance and Business Services)

- 7.1 The development of the Cheshire East Family Service is being achieved within existing budgets which are wholly taken from the Early Intervention Grant which is due to end in March 2013.

8.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 8.1 There is no specific legal implications attached to this report

9.0 Risk Management

- 9.1 By not developing a coherent early help offer risks having an adverse impact on families in regard to assisting with issues earlier. Also future Local Authority inspections could be affected. Lack of prevention services will mean that the number of families requiring expensive specialist services will continue to increase at a time when the resources available to the local authority and our partners are static or decreasing.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 In October 2011 the restructuring of resources within Children's Services resulted in the creation of Cheshire East Family Service. A Principal Manager was appointed and came into post in mid-November. These resources predominantly came from the combination of Children's Centres and Family Centres and their associated staffing. These resources are organised into four localities and are aimed at meeting the early help needs of children and families

across the age range from 0-19 and acting as a catalyst for early intervention multi-agency work. The service is built on strong partnerships with all partner agencies both internal and external to the Council. Co-location opportunities with health and voluntary sector colleagues are in place

- 10.2 Much progress has been made in re-engineering the current resource. All staff have a more generic job role and the full restructure is complete. Improved use of data and a streamlining of systems have improved timely access to preventative services. The development of a 'one front door' service – First Contact has resulted in co-located staff from family services, social care and domestic violence. Plans to also have representations from Police and health are well advanced
- 10.3 Whilst it is still early days regarding the introduction of an early help offer the signs are positive that progress is being achieved. Families are feeding back that there issues are being addressed earlier and they are seeing a more joined up offer from agencies. In order to give members a flavour of the work currently being undertaken by CEFS a number of anonymised case studies are attached to this report.
- 10.4 Early indications of the volume of work being undertaken by CEFS are that the First Contact Service has been:
- handling around 2000 calls per month from families and professionals
 - on average around 58% of these calls were dealt with directly by First Contact
 - 29% resulted in liaison with the case-holding social worker
 - 13% were directly referred to the Children's Assessment Team (CAT)
 - Contacts resulted in 178 service requests being dealt with to offer families services in their own locality.
 - Between 18th October and 16th December: 107 practitioners received support and advice from the First Contact regarding more complex cases.
- 10.5 However, there is still much to do which include a number of key developments for the service.

10.5.1

Securing Good Ofsted inspection outcomes for Cheshire East's Children Centres

S

Since April 2010 Children Centres have been subject to inspection by Ofsted. Originally these inspections were based on a framework that inspected children centres as universal provision. We had one inspection under this framework, this being Underwood West in early 2010 which resulted in a 'good' overall rating. A new inspection framework was introduced in September 2011 that has started to inspect children centres as targeted provision. A recent inspection of our children centre in Congleton resulted in an overall rating of 'satisfactory'. It was clear that in the feedback from Ofsted that changes are needed which require

a significant refocusing to target more vulnerable groups. This work is already well underway.

10.5.2 D
Developing the CEFS workforce to work at an early intervention level

Whilst the CEFS structure is in place there is a significant amount of work that was carried out by the former family support staff, based in family centres around facilitating family contact for looked after children which needs to continue but which restricts the availability of staff. We are currently working with our colleagues in social care and commissioning to look at new models for the delivery of contact so that we can free up these staff to increase the volume of early intervention work that takes place across the authority.

10.5.3 T
Training the workforce

CEFS was created from a range of staff with different backgrounds and skill sets. A key priority in the early development of the service is to ensure that staff have a consistent range of competencies across the 0-19 age range that will enable them to meet the service's objectives. The training will be undertaken with a range of partners and is being facilitated in part through the Children's Trust

10.5.4 B
Building strong partnerships

Given the numbers of children and families in any area who may require some form of early help, it is way beyond the resources of a local authority to meet these needs without reference to our partners. When the resources of schools, health agencies and voluntary sector organisations are combined there is much more likely to be sufficient resource and sufficient people with specific skills to meet the needs of the vast majority of children and families without them progressing up the level of needs. Good strong working relationships are providing a solid platform to realise a more joined up approach for families.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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Case Study 1

Background

Alice rang in a distressed state asking for help with her stepson Frank, who was refusing to go to school and had locked himself in the bathroom. Frank is 13 and moved to live with Alice and his father Bob as a young child because of issues with his care. Frank has grown increasingly aggressive over the past few years, verbally abusing Alice, and damaging property in the house. He says he hates her and Bob and does not want to live with them. He has been on the waiting list for counselling for a long time.

Action taken

First Contact staff reassured Alice that she and Bob seem to have been doing well in a difficult situation, and that she had done the right thing in asking for help rather than walking out and leaving Frank alone in the house. First Contact suggested the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) approach which would help them look together as a family at what Frank's needs were so that they could find the right help for him. With Alice's consent, First contact called Frank's school and explained the circumstances. The school did not have any concerns about Frank, but they agreed to meet with him and Alice and assess his needs using CAF. The CAF Support Officer helped them with this, and to make a service request to CEFS. The case was quickly allocated to a Family Service Worker and local voluntary organisation became involved to provide counselling for Frank. Support for the parents was also identified and put in place in discussion with the family

Outcomes for family

By working together, agencies have assessed Frank's needs and are providing the family with services to help meet those needs. Frank is currently more settled and working on the unresolved issues which were leading to his anger. The support they receive helps Alice and Bob to feel less isolated and they are relieved that arrangements have been put in place to help the family.

Case Study 2

Background

A hospital maternity unit contacted Children's Assessment Team (CAT) to make a referral to 'social services'. A new mother with post natal depression had expressed concern that she was not coping. The hospital did not have any specific concerns about the safety of the baby, more about the isolation of the mother and lack of support networks available.

Action taken by agencies

Staff in CAT quickly discussed the situation with the First Contact Complex Needs Officer, and agreed that the mother could best be supported via CAF processes. First Contact staff contacted the Midwife who had already begun compiling information for a common assessment. The CEFS Locality Team assessed the situation and the agencies involved agreed the need for an urgent allocation of a Family Service time. This was arranged and co-ordinated to be available to support the mother as soon as she returned home. The CAT team advised the hospital of the arrangements which had been put in place and they agreed that it was no longer necessary to make a child protection referral to CAT.

Outcomes for family

The situation is now more settled. The Family Support Worker visited the mother and arranged for her to join the new parents group at her local children's centre. She has now made new friends at the group and feels less isolated and better able to meet the needs of her baby. There is now no further need for additional support and the CAF had been closed.

Case Study 3

Background

A report was received in the school holidays from police regarding a domestic incident between 2 adults where an 11 year old child was involved.

Action taken by agencies

Utilising the co-location opportunity provided with the Domestic Violence worker liaison established some of the already known facts regarding this case. Staff immediately contacted the mother and supported her to move to safer accommodation with her child. Following the return of the schools staff liaised with the child's school to update them on recent circumstances and advise them of the change of address. All agencies agreed that the school would monitor the situation and offer support to the pupil. Whilst the school will lead on supporting the mother and son all agencies were agreed that any further escalation of issues would result in a multi agency plan being implemented.

Outcomes for family

The mother was supported to move to an address where she could keep herself and her child safe. The school were engaged in the provision of support and will be able to monitor the child's needs for any further support in the future.