

Children and Families Committee

Date of Meeting:	12 July 2021
Report Title:	Early Help Together Board Quarterly Report April 2021
Report of:	Ged Rowney, Interim Director of Children's Services
Report Reference No:	CF/07/21
Ward(s) Affected:	All wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.** The Early Help Together Board meets on a quarterly basis and is well represented by a wide range of partner agencies. The members and their substantive teams deliver the actions as described in the Early Help Strategy 2019-2022.
- 1.2.** Lead members of the Board, based on the forward plan priorities, provide reports and verbal updates in accordance with the action plan. The Board members discuss, support, provide challenge and celebrate the work that is being undertaken across the partnership to provide quality and timely support and intervention to children and families at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.3.** This report provides a summary of some of the latest actions completed and progress made against the Early Help Together Board Strategic Action Plan.
- 1.4.** The strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 that the work of the Early Help Together Board contribute to include.

An open and enabling organisation

- Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making
- Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation
- Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered

- Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents

A Council which empowers and cares about people

- Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient
- Reduce health inequalities across the borough
- Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care
- Support all children to have the best start in life
- Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs
- Reduce the reliance on long term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Children and Families Committee is asked to consider and note the progress made against the Early Help Together Board Strategic Action Plan.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. The Children and Families Committee is responsible for ensuring children and young people in Cheshire East achieve good outcomes. Our Early Help Together Partnership and Strategy works to ensure that we provide quality and timely support and intervention to children and families at the earliest opportunity.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not applicable.

5. Background

- 5.1. The Early Help Strategy was refreshed in 2019 for the period 2019-2022. The purpose of this strategy is to set out how partners who work with children, their families and carers will deliver services in a way which enables children to maximise their potential, ensures they are kept safe and, where appropriate, prevents escalation of need that requires targeted or intensive interventions from statutory agencies.
- 5.2. The strategy sets out the ambition of all the partners in Cheshire East to 'get it right' for children, their families and carers by providing support and early help that enables children to thrive within their family environment and improves their long term outcome and goals.
- 5.3. The partnership worked collaboratively to design the Early Help Action Plan against the strategy priorities.

- 5.4.** This plan is our commitment to ensure we deliver the strategy and forms the basis of our quarterly board meeting agendas. There are six priorities covered within the strategy and action plan.
- 5.5.** The priorities are:
- Priority 1:** The Partnership has the right infrastructure to support the development of the early help services
- Priority 2:** Children and families get the right service at the right time: all partners understand levels of need and referral pathways
- Priority 3:** Understand the training need required to ensure that our practitioners are enabled to co-produce high quality assessments and plans
- Priority 4:** We understand the quality of our services and act on this to improve outcomes for children
- Priority 5:** We understand the needs of children and families in Cheshire East and we have the right range of services to meet those needs that can be accessed locally
- Priority 6:** Our workforce is equipped with the knowledge and skills to achieve improved outcomes for children
- 5.6.** We hold a quarterly Early Help Together Board that is chaired by the Director for Early Help and Prevention Services, Ali Stathers-Tracey. This is a multi-agency board that is well-represented across the partnership and well-attended. The following briefing information gives the latest overview of some of the key developments and achievements against the action plan that were presented in the last board meeting in April 2021.

Partner engagement with the case management system (links to priority 2, 3 and 5)

- 5.7.** Karen Shepherd, Partnership and Performance Manager within Early Help and Prevention services, Cheshire East Council, led a review of Liquid Logic, ensuring the case management system effectively supported the recording of good quality work with families and early help practice.
- 5.8.** It has been four years since partners gained access to Liquid Logic, the Local Authority case management system and, following the commissioning of several developments and upgrades, it was an opportunity to review how it was being used and how effective it was.
- 5.9.** Some 300 external users have been trained on how to use the system, but there is audit evidence that a high percentage were not actually using it. This has an impact in terms of a lack of confidence around actual numbers of open Early Help Assessments (EHAs) or Early Help Plans

held by all practitioners at any given time. It has also been difficult to undertake data processing and cleansing on multiple systems, particularly when information should have been initially inputted into the Early Help system.

- 5.10.** As a result of the discussion at the board, a number of next steps have been identified including the need to collate how all partners record the early intervention they offer to children and families, even if this isn't recorded on the Liquid Logic case management system. This will ensure we have more accurate data recording and oversight to enable us to look at trends and potential gaps regarding the early help offer across the borough.
- 5.11.** The Locality Support Officers continue to be key to supporting the partnership in improving quality and confidence in delivering the earliest intervention to our children and families. Findings from the audit and the subsequent piece of work will also be shared with the Quality Assurance subgroup of the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) to ensure strategic oversight and scrutiny.

Neglect Strategy (links to priorities 2 and 5)

- 5.12.** Louise Hurst, Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection, Cheshire East Council, advised that the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) has identified neglect as one of its three main priorities this year and subsequently, a revised Neglect Strategy has been developed in conjunction with partner agencies which will be launched this summer.
- 5.13.** Board members were invited to share their thoughts on the paper and the launch of the Strategy and Scorecard. The paper subsequently went to Children's DMT on 26 April and was approved so the launch will now be planned.
- 5.14.** Neglect has long been a difficult concept for both practitioners and families as it means different things to different people. Board members were asked to share cases they had identified within their sector. Good work had been noted and tools and interventions utilised to keep families out of more intensive family support and statutory services but we know that some children are falling through the net as neglect is not being identified early enough in all cases and there are issues with capturing data from partners which make it hard to quantify.
- 5.15.** Practice guidance has also been developed to support the strategy to assist practitioners understanding of neglect along with a series of

questions to help ensure families receive the right support at the right time.

- 5.16.** Use of the Neglect screening tools has improved significantly and that should be celebrated, moving recently from 15% of contacts with a Neglect tool to 60%

Review of the impact of the Step up and Step-Down Policy (links to priorities 2,4.5 and 6)

- 5.17.** Jan Cooper, Service Manager for Cheshire East Family Service, described how the policy had been reviewed and updated at a pan-Cheshire Safeguarding Directors Conference. It was reviewed in conjunction with partners including leads from SCiES and various Health services.
- 5.18.** There are now fortnightly meetings in place where professionals can submit cases to be discussed for either Step up to Children's Social Care (excluding those cases where there is an immediate risk of harm) or step down to an appropriate Early Help service where threshold for social care intervention is now longer met or required.
- 5.19.** Professional challenge is encouraged and supported as necessary in line with learning from national serious case reviews.
- 5.20.** The meeting ensures it is clear who is going to do what and ensures that children are being well supported in a timely way.
- 5.21.** On occasion in line with need, extraordinary meetings will be requested by senior managers to cope with a spike in cases needing to step down. Analysis of this approach is underway currently so we can reflect on the success of this variant to the normal partnership meeting. One consideration is who is involved in the extraordinary meetings that are called at short notice.
- 5.22.** The step up and down meetings have enabled the partnership to have open and honest safeguarding and threshold discussions as early as possible, establishing where and why partners may disagree with decisions, and working out who manages the risk in each case. The policy has provided a real opportunity to get to the bottom of cases in a thorough way.
- 5.23.** Jen Atkinson, Service Manager for CIN and CP noted that the multi-agency meetings were now well established in both Crewe and Macclesfield and are now led by Team Managers from Childrens Social Care, something that Early Help colleagues are also preparing their Team Managers to take a lead on following an initial lead from senior managers

to ensure the process was robust. She reported that caseloads are more manageable, and the situation is constantly under review, with teams advising who should be involved on a case by case basis. The changes have been well received.

- 5.24.** Ali Stathers-Tracey noted that this had been a good piece of work which involved sharing information and devolving leadership. Virtual working has been very successful as more people can log in and contribute. She particularly noted the positive input from the Locality Support Officers (LSOs) and from Nicola Wycherley, Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children and her team.

Child Health Hubs (links to priorities 1, 2 and 5)

- 5.25.** Mandip Sohan, Programme Manager Central Cheshire Integrated Care Partnership shared an update regarding the new Child Health Hubs. The parent and practitioner survey undertaken at the start of the project showed there was an overwhelming desire to see health services for children delivered from Children's Centres as opposed to hospital settings as they traditionally are. The project has now been running for 12 months and there are now two centres, one at Monks Coppenhall Children's Centre in Crewe and one at Broken Cross Children's Centre in Macclesfield. There has been positive feedback from paediatric nurse practitioners delivering in Crewe who describe the new setting as being in a great location as well as tremendous benefit to parents as the site is self-contained and patients can be signposted for both medical and holistic early years help. Likewise, in Macclesfield, there has been very positive feedback including the benefits of a good location, free parking and a child-focused, friendly atmosphere. Blood tests that used to take a couple of weeks to arrange can now be accommodated in a matter of days. Subsequent funding will focus on maternity - pregnancy and perinatal mental health, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and smoking cessation.
- 5.26.** A survey of new mothers is being undertaken to assess need and this will inform decision making.
- 5.27.** There will also be continued focus on obesity in the under 5s.
- 5.28.** Work on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is being showcased at market stall events and all those involved in a diagnosis are invited to view what help is available. The team are also targeting those with respiratory and lower tract respiratory infections.
- 5.29.** Ali thanked Mandip and the team for developing this project noting its success. The initial Sure Start Centres were to be used for children in

their local community and she was delighted that community working was now being truly valued. Members discussed how they could link into the offer creating an even more positive experience for parents.

Early Help Volunteer Commission (links to priorities 1, 2, 5 and 6)

- 5.30.** Heather Baron updated the board about an exciting commission that is due to go out to tender in June 2021.
- 5.31.** The successful provider will deliver a coordinated Volunteer Family Support Service for families that need additional support through early intervention and prevention.
- 5.32.** This offer will provide local support in each of the three localities across the borough to help families with children who need practical and emotional support, to better manage their families post lockdown to promote safety, stability, and independence.
- 5.33.** This service will also provide, where necessary, a 'step down' service from more formal casework offered by Early Help services across the partnership including where a family has an Early Help Plan in place. Their support may also include signposting families to alternative support services who will best meet their needs. Our vision for our children and families is that they receive the right help, at the right time by the right person and this commission supports that.
- 5.34.** Whilst some families may not appreciate more formal early intervention and some will not want to engage which is their right, it is important that we can strengthen our offer of help at any stage and volunteers can assist in that process. If we can recognise risk at the earliest opportunity, then we could steer families away from more formal intervention and reduce the risk of escalation.

Holiday Activity Fund (links to priorities 2, 4 and 5)

- 5.35.** Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager at Cheshire East Council provided an update to members regarding the Department for Education (DfE) Holiday Activity Fund that Cheshire East Council are delivering this year.
- 5.36.** The Holiday Activity Fund programme will run in the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays 2021. The programme is a government scheme with the aim of providing support to vulnerable children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals. Cheshire East Borough Council received £881,340 funding in total.

5.37. To implement, Cheshire East Council approached primary and secondary schools, Council-led groups and charity organisations in the Cheshire East area, to offer a holiday club service free of charge, to vulnerable/at risk children who receive income related Free School Meals (FSM). In order to qualify for the grant funding offered, the providers have to submit detailed information on how they can offer provision that will give the children the opportunity to eat more healthily over the school holidays, be more active during the school holidays and develop a greater knowledge of health and nutrition. Members were asked to consider how they could get involved in the scheme and to contact Douglas should they be able to offer any activities as part of the programme.

5.38. Easter Holiday Overview:

- 92 providers completed an Expression of Interest (EOI)
- 22 providers applied for HAF funding
- 18 were successful
- 4 were unsuccessful
- 1 dropped out at a later date due to lack of take up by FSM children
- £64,708.89 was awarded to providers
- 463 FSM children attended HAF funded holiday club sessions over Easter

5.39. The summer programme is being planned currently with lots of interest from potential providers and an update of the summer programme will be provided in the next quarter report.

Outcomes and Impact

5.40. The Early Help Board enables partners to really focus on the early intervention and prevention priorities across the partnership and helps to hold services to account where quantitative or qualitative data from services indicates we aren't meeting the needs of the children and families we all serve as fully as we need to. The board has the appropriate representation to unblock issues when they arise and appropriately feeds into or takes actions from a vast range of other boards that members are represented on.

5.41. The board members work collaboratively to share experience and expertise and ensure we are all sighted on the latest information and challenges being faced. An example of this is agreeing collectively what our priorities for multi-agency audit need to be for the coming year and who needs to be involved to make it robust. Another is our shared experience and learning from managing services during the global pandemic and the impact of a service standing down elements of their work on other services. The commissioners being present is hugely

important as they hear challenges and gaps in provision first-hand and has meant that issues can be resolved quickly.

- 5.42. The board members' insight and feedback has helped to progress the new, transformational Child Health Hubs forwards and meant that the design was in line with wider partnerships needs and expectations which is crucial to ensure their sustainability and success. It also enabled vital parent consultation and engagement in the early stages of the project.
- 5.43. Revised policies and procedures are shared at the board before their onward journey. Often these have been revised in collaboration with board members or their services. This ensures that all partnership considerations are taken on board before a new policy is agreed and reduces ineffective silo working.

Next Steps

- 5.44. We will continue to work through our forward plan in conjunction with the action plan and strategy but have the flexibility to add to this as required. For example, in the next quarterly meeting in July we will be hearing about the new initiatives of Parents First and Journey First that are being led by Local Authority service managers. In the following meeting, we will be reflecting on and learning lessons from the recent SEND and Youth Justice Service inspections and agreeing any subsequent actions from these.

6. Implications

6.1. Legal

- 6.1.1. There are no legal implications of this report.

6.2. Finance

- 6.2.1. Working effectively as a partnership to support children, young people and families early aims to prevent need from increasing and therefore requiring a statutory intervention, therefore can reduce cost to the Council.

6.3. Policy

- 6.3.1. The report outlines how the Early Help Together Board and Strategy contributes to achieving the Council's Corporate Plan.

6.4. Equality

- 6.4.1. We work with a diverse range of children, young people and families and support practitioners to be respectful and inclusive in their practice.

6.5. Human Resources

- 6.5.1. Working effectively as a partnership to support children, young people and families early aims to prevent need from increasing and therefore

requiring a statutory intervention, therefore can reduce cost the human resource implications to the Council.

6.6. Risk Management

6.6.1. Through effective early intervention we can support children and young people to achieve better outcomes and reduce the risk of harm or other risks associated with poorer outcomes.

6.7. Rural Communities

6.7.1. The report covers provision across all communities.

6.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1. The report details the implications for children and young people.

6.9. Public Health

6.9.1. Early help services are being provided in line with government guidance in relation to COVID-19.

6.10. Climate Change

6.10.1. Services are locality based so children and young people can access support in their area which reduces travel.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Heather Baron Heather.baron@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	Early Help Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2022 Action Plan for 2020-21