

Corporate Parenting Panel

18 February 2022

Place based approach to early help
for children and families in Durham



Report of Karen Davison, Strategic Manager, Early Help and Think Family Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The report provides Durham's Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on Durham's place-based approach to early help for children and families. The report will accompany a presentation delivered by Fiona Smith, Operations Manager from the One Point Service.

Executive Summary

- 2 Durham's place based approach to early help is underpinned by Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help and nationally driven by the Supporting Families Programme, known in Durham as Stronger Families. Early Help in County Durham is governed by the Prevention and Early Help Partnership which is overseen by the Children, Young People and Families Partnership.
- 3 The approach asks partners to work with the 'whole' family, draw on our shared assets across the Early Help System to respond proportionately to a family's needs, have a co-ordinated approach with one whole family assessment, a single multi-agency child and family plan, be outcome focussed, empower families and better connect families to their natural networks and communities.
- 4 Durham's approach to early help recognises the uniqueness of local communities and that not one size fits all. Working closely with partners within smaller geographical areas and using local intelligence and data to understand community and family need has led to the successful development of Locality Early Help Conversations, Team Around the School models and Early Help Forums (to be renamed Prevention and Early Help Forums).
- 5 Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Service adopts a strength based practice approach known as Signs of Safety/Wellbeing which is being shared with partners to provide a model for a shared language and approach in working with children and families.

- 6 Throughout all of Durham's Early Help developments engaging partners, and service users is critical, and this report shares examples of when engagement has influenced and shaped service design and delivery e.g., Reducing Parental Conflict Website, Early Help Assessment, Early Help Video.
- 7 An effective, 'inclusive for all' Early Help offer and additional support for families with children who are looked after, and their carers is driven by the Prevention and Early Help Partnership. This report provides examples of specific work to support Kinship Carers with parental conflict, pathways to provide Post Adoption support and financial help for these families.
- 8 Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help will be further reviewed in 2022 and will be driven and led by the Prevention and Early Help Partnership overseen by the Children, Young People and Families Partnership.

Recommendations

- 9 Durham's Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to:
 - (a) receive the progress of Durham's Place Based Approach to Early Help for children and families living in County Durham and
 - (b) make further recommendations of how best to support the early help needs for families with children who are looked after and their carers.

Background

- 10 Durham's Early Help approach is underpinned by County Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help and the national Supporting Families Programme, known in Durham as Stronger Families.
- 11 [County Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help](#) recognises that Early Help is essential to helping children and young people get the best start in life, so they are able to make the most of opportunities throughout their childhood and adolescence. We know that the needs of parents and the family environment have a significant impact on children, therefore our early help approach takes account of the whole family's needs. We want to better support families, to help them to cope with the difficulties they face and to support families to be resilient and thrive. In County Durham, Early Help is not a single service or team, but a way of working with families that all of our key partners and stakeholders working with children and families can put into practice. This is promoted through a partnership induction programme known as the 'Durham Way'. The partners who contribute to the Early Help System can be found in **Appendix 2**. Durham's Prevention and Early Help Partnership (PEHP) is committed to achieving this vision.
- 12 Furthermore, the National Supporting Families Programme (governed by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - DLUHC), known in Durham as 'Stronger Families' has been running since 2015. Following the Spending Review in November 2021, LAs were informed that the programme will be extended for a further three years. The County Durham Stronger Families programme continues to drive the service transformation required to ensure vulnerable children, young people and families in need of early help receive coordinated, 'whole family', outcome focussed support which reduces duplication, reduces demand on high-cost statutory services and maximises impact of our collective resources.
- 13 The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) sees this programme as providing the framework to progress its vision for the delivery of effective early help for children and their families. DLUHC define early help 'as the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse', which requires all partners within the early help system to embed better ways of collaborative working to mainstream the 'whole family' outcome focussed approach. LA's and partners are required to:
 - (a) know and target children and families in communities most vulnerable to poor outcomes.
 - (b) ensure the use of evidence-based approaches to help children and families achieve positive change; and
 - (c) as partners, work collaboratively at the earliest opportunity to maximise impact and reduce duplication in an attempt to stop the need for high-cost services.

- 15 Durham's Stronger Families programme performance is good. Between April 2015 and September 2021, Durham has seen positive outcomes for 5,851 families which means reductions in children and parents/carers being involved in crime, anti-social behaviour or reoffending, more children accessing appropriate full-time education, improvements in family relationships, a reduction in domestic abuse, fewer families are in financial hardship and more finding sustainable employment and the health needs of families have improved. At the end of quarter 3 (2021/22) Durham has already met its annual target of 761 families with sustained outcomes.

County Durham's Approach to Early Help

Place Based Approach

- 16 In March 2020, a county-wide place based approach was rolled out in Durham. This was developed with partners from the PEHP to improve the way in which professional requested early help for children and families. Locality Early Help Conversations (LEHC) were developed in all 7 One Point Service Team localities and brought together a number of partners from those areas to have a conversation about a child and family, share appropriate and relevant information, share decision making and to draw on our collective resources from across the Early Help System to effectively respond proportionately to a child and family's needs. A review of this new way of working was carried out in March 2021 and found that this continued to be an effective partnership approach in supporting Durham families with early help needs.
- 17 This approach helps provide the right support, at the earliest opportunity by the right service. It enables partners to provide a proportionate response from providing information, advice and guidance to intensive whole family support and more effectively utilising the rich provision Durham's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has to offer. An example being the LA's early help service, One Point which is part of the broader Early Help System having 15 Family Centres offering group work, parenting programmes and support for low level needs and 7 Intensive Family Support Teams providing intensive family support to families.
- 18 This new partnership response to early help has also strengthened relationships as partners tell us they feel better connected to each other and have a better understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities and service offers. This has meant partners feel empowered and better equipped to 'hold' families as can apply their knowledge and learning without the need to make unnecessary referrals for a formal Childrens Service.
- 19 In 2021 Early Help, in line with Childrens Social Care, introduced 'themes' in which they asked professionals making Early Help requests to state their 'main' worry for a family. This information is shared with partners and helps us

collectively better understand the needs of our families and local communities helping partners more effectively plan and focus their resource.

- 20 A new Team Around the School (TAS) model was introduced in Durham in July 2020 following a pilot with a Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) school which provided a blueprint for a sustainable TAS model across County Durham. The TAS model supports schools to have the skills to identify issues, undertake early help assessments of need, make appropriate requests/referrals for additional multi-agency support and ultimately to provide support themselves. The pilot found that the pilot school became more confident in identifying need and delivering empowering interventions following professional advice before the use of external universal, targeted and specialist support services.
- 21 A place-based approach was taken recognising the individual needs of the school, its pupils, parent/carers and its local community. A multi-agency TAS Steering Group has been established to progress these developments in 2022. The Steering Group is made up of Early Help and Think Family Services, SEND, Educational Psychology, Virtual School and Childrens Social Care.
- 22 Prior to the pandemic County Durham had established Early Help Forums in the north, south and east of the county which brought together a range of professionals working within those geographical areas to discuss and address local community needs, emerging issues and action plan collaboratively. It also provided opportunity for professional networking, sharing good practice and information sharing with useful updates on partner's developments and services. These were suspended due to the pandemic but will be reinstated in 2022 and renamed Prevention and Early Help Forums to reflect the name of the PEHP.

Strengths Based Approach

- 23 Signs of Safety/Wellbeing is a practice approach which has been adopted across Childrens Services. It aims to put children, families and those important to them at the heart of planning and decision making, empowering and honouring them in what is working well and guiding and supporting families to make sustainable plans to provide safety and wellbeing for their children by drawing on their own family support network and that of their community. Partner briefings and training opportunities have been available to partners to engage them in this approach to help in having a shared language and a more consistent approach for families.

Engaging the Workforce and Service Users

- 24 Early Help Newsletters for Education and Health partners were introduced in 2021. These provide a useful mechanism to communicate to a large proportion of the workforce early help developments and key messages. The PEHP have encouraged partners to share useful articles showcasing integrated working practices for future editions and all recipients are asked to provide feedback and offered the opportunity to inform future content.

- 25 Children, young people (CYP) and parent/carers (P/C) are regularly asked for service user feedback from Childrens Services and partners which is used to inform and improve how services are delivered. CYP and P/C are also invited to help shape service design and delivery with recent examples being a Community Engagement Commission for Reducing Parental Conflict/Relationship Matters which led to the development of a public facing website where CYP, P/C can access self-help tools, information, advice and guidance on the importance of healthy relationships co-parenting relationships. Another example is a group of CYP, P/C from 'United Voice/Investing in Children' who have helped shape a new Early Help Assessment to be used by partners and are in the process of co-producing a video/animation publicising early help to families in Durham. **Appendix 3** offers feedback from families and partners in relation to County Durham Fun and Food programme and Durham's Early Help practice.

Support for Children in Care and Carers

- 26 The Prevention and Early Help Partnership recognise the importance of ensuring children in care and their carers have access to a range of resources available in local communities at the earliest opportunity.
- 27 Kinship Carers are represented at the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Working Group with staff within the Kinship Carers Team trained in RPC. It was recognised that specialist support to address parental conflict between Kinship Carers and Birth Parents was a gap in provision not just in Durham but regionally. Durham's lead for RPC is working closely with Durham's Kinship Carer Team Manager developing a service specification which is due to be commissioned.
- 28 The Post Adoption Support Pathway has recently been reviewed ensuring clear identification of family need and that appropriate support is delivered at the right time by the right service.
- 29 Poverty can affect every area of a child's development: social, educational, health and personal. Child poverty in County Durham continues to be on the rise and we know that children who are looked after and their carers may need additional support to address this. The County Durham Child Poverty Working Group has continued to be proactive and responsive to the impact of poverty on children and families and the additional burden COVID-19 has had through the development and implementation of a range of support. This has included the County Durham Fun and Food programme, the promotion of Healthy Start as well as providing additional help and support for some families including children looked after and their carers with food parcels and access to the Household Support Fund. A DCC web page [Helping families manage their money](#) has been developed specifically to help families manage their money, apply for grants and seek further debt advice/financial help. Future work lead by the CPWG will focus on supporting vulnerable children including those in care to better access leisure and cultural opportunities which meet their needs.

Conclusion

30 This report has provided an update on Durham's place-based approach to early help aiming to meet the diverse and often complex needs of all families living in County Durham including children and young people who are looked after and their carers. We continue to aim to ensure across the early help system we offer integrated, whole family, outcome focussed support delivered at the earliest opportunity utilising the support of local VCS support wrapped around a child and family. The national Supporting Families programme is providing the policy driver and service transformation to help us deliver on this aim in County Durham. The PEHP are committed to working with partners and service users to better understand the early help needs of all families and to influence and shape service delivery to improve support offered to families.

Next Steps

31 The PEHP will continue to drive Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help and will review its current strategy in 2022. Feedback from the Corporate Parenting Panel on how to further improve our offer is welcomed.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Stronger Families Programme is Durham County Council's response to the Government's Guidance on "Working with Troubled Families". The aims of the Supporting Families Programme are to get children back into school, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour, put adults on a path back to work and bring down the amount public services currently spend on them. This is achieved by providing effective family intervention and encouraging relevant agencies to meet as a "team around the family" to provide the relevant 'whole family' support.

Finance

Risk to an element of funding from Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) if service Early Help transformation progress is not demonstrated.

Consultation

Work on Stronger Families and EA is progressed through the Prevention and Early Help Partnership and involves working closely with a range of partners including the voluntary and community sector and local families.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

Risk to ongoing funding if LA does not show sufficient progress as determined by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: County Durham Early Help System



Appendix 3: Feedback from families and partners

County Durham Fun and Food Programme

“We’d love to do it all again, especially as it’s all free!” (Parent)

“it was so nice not to have to think of activities everyday – you’ve really helped me out this summer, with something to do every week and the food was a bonus” (Parent)

“We had such a magical time just exploring the nature in the fresh air” (Parent)

“I really enjoyed the woodwork and trying something new...I can sometimes get bored over the summer holidays” (Young Person)

“I liked making flowers with my friends the best” (Child)



Early Help

“they were lovely and helped me through everything. K was a school refuser, now leaps out of bed on a morning and is itching to go to Endeavour” (Parent)

“S is an angel; she turns up when she says she will, and O is now more trusting of professionals as previously they have let him down” (Parent)

“you are both such a massive help to us, we could have done with you guys years ago”. (Parent)

“Our jobs can be demanding and challenging and when this is the case, it is always reassuring that we can trust colleagues around us to do their absolute best for the children we work with” (School)

“X was easy to talk to and I don't really like talking to people, she listened to me about what I thought was right and wrong and then explained it all to my Dad. X always told us when she was going to speak to my Dad, what he said to her, and what was going to happen next. X always put us first and never got us into any trouble” (Young Person)

“I like having new friends and playing out in the street now” (Young Person)

“Chill Kids has made my anger better I have calmed down but still feel angry sometimes, J and L are really helpful and really help me calm down when I am angry, now the most I do is slam the door” (Young Person)

“A has helped me to improve my attitude at home & school. A has helped me to also understand risky behaviours & how to keep myself safe. I feel so much better in myself, I feel really happy again and can smile and be giggly. because I feel good, I am able to cope better at home when things are going wrong, I can just ignore it instead of getting so upset.” (Young Person)