

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Select Committee**

**14 October 2014**

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## **Final Report of the Early Help Strategy Task Group**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To advise the Children's Select Committee on how it could monitor the implementation of the Early Help Strategy going forward, including additional recommendations to the current methods in use by the Council.

### **Background**

2. The Children's Select Committee received the Early Help Strategy 2013-17 in draft, which sets out the Council's proposals for Wiltshire's early help offer, including what it currently does, the desired improved outcomes for children and young people and the priority objectives to achieve this.
3. The five objectives of the Strategy have been designed to ensure a coordinated approach in meeting this vision:
  - (1) Getting the best start in life.
  - (2) Gaining the skills required to begin school.
  - (3) Being ready for adult life.
  - (4) Developing a family-based approach to early help.
  - (5) Developing effective structures and processes to access early help – including developing an Early Help Offer.
4. To accompany the Strategy an Early Help Improvement Plan has been drafted and, for each objective, key priorities for action have been identified. In addition, a draft Early Help Dataset has been developed which will be the key tool for monitoring effectiveness and impact of the Early Help activities.
5. On 3 June Children's Select Committee established the Early Help Strategy Task Group to look at how the committee will monitor delivery of the Early Help Strategy 2013-17.

The terms of reference for the Task Group were agreed as follows:

1. To investigate how the Children's Select Committee can efficiently and effectively monitor the delivery of the Early Help Strategy 2013-17, focusing on the Strategy's five core objectives for children and young people in Wiltshire.

2. To make recommendations on the following:
  - How often should the Committee receive updates on the delivery of the Strategy?
  - What should these Strategy updates include?
  - Which key activities and data sets should the Committee place more emphasis on?
3. To aim to bring its final report to the Committee on 14 October 2014.
6. The Committee has also considered the final version of the Early Help Strategy 2014-17 and the Wiltshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) and Children's trust draft joint Early Help Improvement Plan.
7. At its meeting on 5 September, the Task Group discussed further their role and confirmed the following additions:
  - Scoping how the Children's Select Committee will conduct the ongoing scrutiny of the Strategy, including the format and frequency of updates to be received;
  - Identify which elements of the data set should be given more emphasis, key indicators and areas of focus;
  - Evaluate how outcomes are to be measured and how to identify weaker areas;
  - Establish how the Committee will refer elements that require more attention or expertise to the appropriate forum i.e. a Task Group;
  - Define the data set that the Committee should look at on a regular basis and the measures in these areas.

### **Key areas as identified by the Task Group**

8. The Task Group discussed a series of key areas that should be considered by the Committee, these included:
  - Transitions: throughout childhood, extending into adolescence and adult life; with particular reference to those who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and looked after children;
  - Catering for the impact of the military rebasing programme and its impacts on the Strategy;
  - Indicators in education i.e. attainment, exclusions (permanent and internal), number and impact of children registering for free school meals and referrals by in-school counselling services (where they exist or working with partners that provide such services externally);
  - Establish how to prevent children coming into care by identifying trends from the data collected;

- Draw focus on the well-being of young people in terms of what engages them, levels of social skills, whether they are getting adequate exercise and nutrition.

## **Areas of concern**

### **Measures**

9. The Task Group highlighted a number of concerns in terms of how we can measure outcomes, success and added value. One concern was raised with regard to ensuring that issues can be identified further on life effectively and how we measure that in comparison with identification in early years. Another issue came in the form of ensuring that terminology is correctly understood, with particular reference to what the definition of 'early help' is; where early help ends and becomes resolution; and the definition of 'the best possible start in life'.
10. It was also raised that there may be a need to separate measures geographically so that particular areas of need may be identified, including comparisons between towns and urban versus rural areas. This comparison may also include identifying differences in the methods of access to early help services as well as rates of access, referrals and changes in service take up over time.

### **Approach**

11. The Task Group raised concern about a potential lack of a child-centred approach and the number of inter-dependent strategies operating in silos and not engaging in joined-up thinking. It was also raised that it needs to be identified how early help services are being accessed and how easy it is to do so, including the numbers of referrals and the success of these referrals in terms of going to the right service at the right time; in order to highlight areas where a more proactive approach is required.

### **School Environment**

12. In discussing the key areas that the Committee should monitor in terms of the impact of the Strategy, the task group identified a number of concerns and questions that will need to be addressed in order for the Committee to undertake effective scrutiny of the Strategy and for the outcomes of the Strategy to be delivered.
13. One of the key concerns was how the Committee is to measure the impact of the Strategy and how it can be satisfied, that what the Committee receives is suitable for the purpose of monitoring the success of the Strategy. It was also raised that the outcomes are difficult to identify and therefore measure, particularly in terms of adding value.

14. The Task Group identified a number of concerns with regards to the school environment and how they link in with the implementation of the Strategy. One concern was whether data may be collected and used to highlight problems early, because often the indicators of a young person or child requiring additional support will manifest itself in the school environment and that it is one of the only places where data may be collected and measured. Such indicators include: changes in behaviour or overall behavioural issues manifested in reduced attendance, attainment or other performance indicators; non-engagement in social or extra-curricular activities and attendance to in-school counselling or well-being services. With regard to this, it was highlighted that many children may not engage in activities within school or do not like the dynamic of belonging to a club or activity and therefore, how can a personal preference be distinguished from an indication of early help being required.
15. The issue of narrowing the attainment gap was also raised in terms of being aware of nurturing the talents of those with high attainment whilst also improving that of those with lower attainment. It was also noted that not only consistent levels of attainment should be considered but perhaps changes in levels of attainment are more indicative. Furthermore, that attainment is not the only measure to indicate potential issues and should include performance in sport, music and other enriching activities.
16. Another issue that manifests itself in the school environment is bullying and how this can be measured in terms of its impact on the requirement of early help services. This was raised in relation to the concerns of the Task Group with regard to the wellbeing of young people.
17. A key issue in identifying and measuring all of the concerns outlined above is in the communication that takes place between schools and early help services. It is also noted that there is a challenge in schools being autonomous, particularly when it comes to receiving data as much of this is done on a voluntary basis only.

## **Recommendations**

18. The Task Group was asked to look at how the Children's Select Committee could measure the effectiveness of the Early Help Strategy and whether it is achieving its objectives; this is addressed by the first set of recommendations. The second set of recommendations includes additional issues that were discussed in the process of establishing these measurements.
  - 1 **A)** That the dataset indicates whether a high or low number is good for each statistic;  
**B)** The use of RAG ratings would be useful as a quick reference for the Committee; as a method of flagging up problems quickly and easily, including a lack of red items or where an item shows as amber too often, that it may therefore be required to be escalated to a red;
  - 2 **A)** Working with schools is key to recording behaviour, particularly changes in behaviour, in the school environment, including attendance;

- B) To measure how many referrals made by schools to early help services there are and how many of these are escalated, this may be in terms of a percentage;
  - C) Measure how many schools provide early help tools such as listening or counselling services and the age brackets for the provision;
  - D) Measure how effective we are as a Council at challenging schools on their use of pupil premium funding, particularly for the provision of counselling services;
  - E) Compare the levels of referrals into the Strategy for the 76% of 3-4 year olds who attend pre-school and those who do not;
  - F) Measure the number of referrals in the first year of secondary school as a way of indicating whether there were issues at the transition stage between primary and secondary school;
- 3
- A) Compare attainment at Key Stage 2 for those in receipt of free school meals and those who do not as an indicator of the impact of the transition from primary to secondary school;
  - B) Measure whether there is a marked decline in the number of children being registered as eligible for the receipt of free school meals as a result of the universal offer of free school meals in the infant years as well as the subsequent take up once the universal offer ceases;
  - C) That the receipt of free school meals may be an indicator of eligibility for other early help and therefore should be assessed in terms of its merit as an indicator;
- 4
- A) Use the data collected on NEETs as an indicator of the early help offer not being as effective as it could be;
  - B) Examine the effectiveness of the Early Help Strategy with regard to looked after children by measuring any decrease in the number of children coming into care;
- 5
- A) In order to measure the number of referrals and take up from military families, CAF s should incorporate an indication of whether the child is from a military family;
  - B) Measure the impact of military rebasing including the impacts on resources and the percentage of referrals coming from the military and whether there are additional people that would be receiving early help if not for similar military based services;
  - C) Identify and measure the difference in behaviour in military families i.e. occurrences of domestic violence and mental health issues;
- 6
- A) Measure the uptake of positive activities for young people (507B) through Area Boards;
  - B) Compare referral levels for those who participate in enriching activities and of those who do not;
- 7
- As the Committee has active Task Groups looking at issues surrounding SEND, the associated improvement plan for SEND services; for looked after children and schools with particular regard to the impact of 6<sup>th</sup> form

provision and careers advices; it is deemed most appropriate that these Task Groups retain any overlapping elements with the Early Help Strategy within their remit to apply their expertise and more in-depth analysis. This may also be employed in relation to other subtopics within the Early Help Strategy where a more in-depth investigation is deemed necessary.

### **Additional Recommendations:**

- 8** That additional non child specific measures may need to be identified by the appropriate officers to measure the impact of issues such as: poverty, being a military family or family issues such as alcohol and substance abuse on the child;
- 9** There needs to be a method for raising a concern more easily, particularly for partner organisations, such as community youth clubs and how Community Youth Officers may be approached as the go to person. A more simplistic approach is required to raise concerns as a method of prevention to include the communication between partners and Community Youth Officers;
- 10** Support for Town and Parish Councils to signpost issues to communities on their websites is required to enable more effective communications;
- 11** Clarity for partner organisations should be established as to what the package of support could be if information is received to trigger the offer of early help. Partners need to be clear of what referral into the Strategy offers and the benefits of such action in order to tackle reluctance in referring children and young people.

### **Conclusion**

- 19.** The Task Group wish to highlight that, while there are both qualitative and quantitative measures, emphasis and reliance should not be placed on qualitative measures as this can lead to conclusions being subjective. The Task Group concluded that in holding the Executive to account, scrutiny have an important role to play. It was highlighted that as a function, scrutiny has authority to ask for additional measurements to be used that are above and beyond those required by the Department for Education.
- 20.** It is proposed that the Children's Select Committee endorse the recommendations of the Task Group as set out in this report and refer them to the Cabinet Member for a response.

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## **Early Help Strategy Task Group**

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