**Early Help in Staffordshire - Briefing note for team managers**

**Background**

* Ensuring that families receive early help not only improves their life chances, it also reduces demand for costly specialist interventions across public services
* Statutory guidance (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015) is clear that early help is everyone’s responsibility
* In Staffordshire, there are great examples of where early help is already transforming the lives of children and families, but we want to see best practice used consistently across the county

**Staffordshire’s Early Help Strategy**

* To help give clarity and allow consistency in our approach to early help across Staffordshire, members of Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board have written and agreed a new Early Help Strategy (2015-2018)
* There are also a number of simple, practical tools to support frontline colleagues to deliver early help in a consistent way that promotes partnership working and appropriate information sharing
* The early help tools were developed in partnership and launched in November 2014, so have been in place and used by practitioners for some time. They replaced what was the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). There is also a new Quality Assurance Tool.
* Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board have overall accountability for the Early Help Strategy and will monitor and evaluate its effectiveness
* The newly formed Staffordshire Family Strategic Partnership (FSP) is responsible for developing an annual plan to secure sufficient provision of quality and effective early help in line with local needs.
* The launch of Staffordshire’s Early Help Strategy (2015-2018) is therefore the first phase of a wider piece of work to support the consistent delivery of best practice in early help across the partnership

**Briefing your teams**

* Regardless of whether you work in the public, private or voluntary sector, if you work with families, early help is your responsibility
* It’s vitally important that your teams know what the Staffordshire approach to early help is and how to meet their responsibilities
* We have produced a one page summary to help you brief your teams on the key things they need to know and where to get more information
* Please talk you teams through this at your next available team meeting. We have provided briefing notes below if you feel you need them

**Email campaign for frontline colleagues**

* To support the launch of Staffordshire’s Early Help Strategy (2015-18) we’re also running an email campaign to help frontline colleagues so that they can be clear about early help, their role and how to meet their responsibilities
* There will be a series of three emails (one each week) including: an overview of the strategy and Staffordshire approach to early help, can you spot the signs that families need early help and a guide to Staffordshire’s early help tools
* We will be sending this directly to as many frontline colleagues as possible, but we are unlikely to have everyone’s emails, so please cascade and share within your own organisations too

**More information**

* The strategy and more information on Staffordshire’s approach to Early Help can be found online at [www.staffsscb.org.uk/earlyhelp](http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/earlyhelp)
* If you have questions that are not answered here, please get in touch with Lynne Milligan, SSCB Development Officer at [lynne.milligan@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:lynne.milligan@staffordshire.gov.uk)

**Supporting notes for the one page summary**

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| Early help is:  *“The support needed by children and families at the first sign of additional unmet need.”* | * The terms ‘early help’ and early intervention’ are often used interchangeably and this can result in confusion. * They both refer to the support which is needed for children and families at the first sign of additional unmet need. * In reality, they mean the same thing. * The Department for Education and Ofsted both use the term ‘early help’. This has also been adopted in Staffordshire * The term prevention is also often used interchangeably with early help however this means actions taken so that problems do not arise in the first place. * Early Help takes place at the first sign of a problem or to avoid problems getting worse. * Specialist intervention or treatment takes place when needs or problems become more serious. * It is recognised there is a continuum of Early Help from preventing issues from occurring, to proactively identifying and responding to low level signs of unmet need through to more complex needs that require a more coordinated response. * See Appendix A of Staffordshire’s Early Help Strategy (2015-18) for more information. * Every day matters. If you delay in offering help, a family could find themselves in real trouble or danger |
| Early help in Staffordshire recognises and builds upon a family’s strengths. It isn’t about doing it for them; it’s about helping them to find the right solutions to improve their situation | * The language of ‘helping’ a family is complementary to our commitment to working alongside families, using an approach that recognises and builds upon their strengths and that engages them as active participants in plans and activities to address identified needs. * Families are our partners in this work: they are the ones who will sustain the positive changes made to the lives of their children. * When services are no longer involved, it is families and their support in their local communities that will continue to focus on ensuring that outcomes for their children are the best that they can be. * Early Help involves bringing together people with the relevant skills and experience from the voluntary sector, community and/or other services to work in partnership with the child and/or their family to help themselves, build on their strengths to resolve the issue(s) and to become more resilient to prevent the issue from reoccurring. The purpose is to work alongside families to enable them to make the changes that they need to make for themselves. |
| Providing early help is better for families and better for public services. | * There is a wide range of evidence which demonstrates effective early help identification, assessment and provision can have a positive impact on the outcomes of children, young people and families. * Staffordshire’s strategy takes into account relevant reports and research on early help including by Allen, Marmot, Field, Tickell, Ofsted, the EIF, LARC the Wave Trust and iMPOWER. * By increasing the focus on early help, with all local partners taking responsibility for the wellbeing of children and young people, there can be a shift towards tackling the root causes of problems effectively rather than the symptoms. * Early Help can therefore prevent issues from escalating and/or reoccurring, therefore reducing the pressure on statutory services. * There is a high cost to public services for late intervention, nationally estimated at £17 billion per year. * Allen highlights evidence which suggests that £40 million investment in positive parenting could potentially save £400 million over a 15 year period. * The long term impact on society of unresolved conduct disorder can exceed £1 million for one individual over their lifetime. |
| Wherever you work, if you work with families, knowing how to put early help in place is your responsibility. | * Early help is everyone’s responsibility * Statutory guidance (Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015, Ofsted) states that effective early help relies upon local agencies working together * Early Help requires all those who come into contact with children and families, including those in universal services to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and potential unmet need. * The issues for families can either be straightforward or they may be complex - including elements such as relationship breakdown, exploitation and alcohol / substance misuse. Sharing information with others to support early identification and effective assessment is key. * In Staffordshire, we are not starting from scratch; following a successful Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) application to the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), Staffordshire was selected as a national pilot site in September 2013. During this time the EIF provided support to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Staffordshire’s Early Help offer. The Foundation provided challenge, advocacy and signalled national best practice. * We want to see best practice used consistently across the county |
| 1. **Identify** the signs that a family may need early help 2. **Assess** a families’ needs in partnership with them 3. **Address** their needs by agreeing a joint action plan | * In Staffordshire we have thought carefully about how best to harness all available resources to work alongside families when they need support. * There are three main areas that we want you to feel confident in:  1. **Identify**  * Evidence tells us that in Staffordshire, you are more likely to need help if your family has any of the below risk factors:   Influential risk factors   * + Worklessness   + Poverty   + Poor education/no qualifications   + Illness/disability   + Deprivation   + Social exclusion   + Homelessness   + Poor housing   + Overcrowding   Parental risk factors   * Vulnerable parents * Lone parents * Mental ill health * Drug or alcohol misuse * Domestic abuse * Relationship breakdown * Poor parenting * Family transitions * Changing family structure  1. **Assess**  * Frontline colleagues across the public, private, voluntary and community sector are having the first conversations with families who they feel have an emerging unmet need to ensure they get the right help. * Staffordshire’s Early Help Assessment (EHA) is a simple tool to help with this. * It is designed to help anyone who already knows a child and their family to talk to them about their lives and any concerns that they may have. It acts as the basis for an analysis of what action to take together, with other services and community partners to reach a point where extra help is no longer needed.  1. **Address**  * The Staffordshire approach to providing early help is one that recognises and builds upon a family’s strengths and engages them as active participants in plans and activities to address their needs. * By building on family and community resources we aim to reduce the likelihood that extra help is required in the future. |
| There are simple, practical tools to help you with this. Everyone working with families in Staffordshire uses these same tools. | * In addition to the Early Help Assessment Tool, there are other tools to help you. There is an:   + Action plan tool – to capture the actions agreed with a family to address their needs   + Review tool – to check progress against the agreed actions and the impact they’re having   + Completion Feedback tool – to agree the end of a period of support and next steps   + Quality Assurance tool – to monitor the impact that a period of support is having on outcomes for the family * Because every practitioner is Staffordshire uses the same tools, it means that once started, any other practitioners or agencies who become involved with a family simply add to the original: there is no need for the family to tell their story again. |
| And there’s free training to help build your confidence. | * Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board provides a free online training course called [Delivering Early Help in Staffordshire e learning training](http://staffordshirescb.safeguardingchildrenea.co.uk/). There is also face to face training available. |
| More info at [www.staffsscb.org.uk/earlyhelp](http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/earlyhelp) | * The full strategy, downloadable tools, links to training and other resources are available online at [www.staffsscb.org.uk/earlyhelp](http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/earlyhelp) * Save it into your favourites so that you can find it when you need it |