



WORCESTERSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

EARLY HELP STRATEGY 2017 TO 2020

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) Early Help Strategy.

In Worcestershire we believe that Early Help is everyone's responsibility. This includes universal services, the voluntary and community sector and specialist services. The aim of Early Help is, wherever possible, to enable parents, carers and families to raise their children well and safely at home, and avoid family breakdown. As Ofsted identified in October 2016, we know that there is work to do in Worcestershire to ensure that children and young people are supported to achieve the best outcomes possible and families are able to access the right help at the right time.

This strategy is important as it sets out our partnership duties, as outlined in Working Together 2015, to work together to ensure that early help is available for those children, young people and families who need additional help and support in Worcestershire.

This strategy will be delivered via an action plan which will be overseen by the Improving Frontline Practice Sub Group of the WSCB.

We will review the strategy and action plan on an annual basis to ensure that we remain focussed on the right things and improve outcomes for children and young people in Worcestershire.



Derek Benson
WSCB Independent Chair

September 2017

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1 INTRODUCTION

Worcestershire is ambitious for all of its children and young people and has set out a challenging agenda through its Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2017-2021.

The vision is for **Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up**¹ and that all children and young people:

- Are safe from harm
- Reach their full potential
- Make a positive contribution in their communities
- Live healthy, happy and fun filled lives

Supporting children to have the best start in life and ensuring that children and young people and their families can access help when they need it are key priorities within the CYPP. This strategy sets out in more detail how the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board will contribute to this vision and deliver on its statutory duties.

Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage. Providing the right help at the earliest opportunity can help to solve problems before they become more pressing and complex, and may prevent children from suffering from significant harm. The term 'early help' is used to describe support that is made available to children and families at levels 2 (Additional) and 3 (Targeted Support) of our Levels of Need (Thresholds) Guidance, which includes the Early Help Pathway (see Appendix 1).

Ofsted² have commented that Worcestershire's early help offer should be reviewed in order to ensure that pathways are clear so that help is provided to the right children and young people at the right time.

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that:

- All partners understand their duties, roles and responsibilities in line with Working Together³ and the Children Act 2004
- Everyone knows what to do if a child in need of additional help or support is identified and a clear pathway and procedures are in place
- Performance is monitored and the WSCB receives regular reports on the effectiveness of the early help offer

¹ Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board *Children and Young People's Plan 2017-20*

² Ofsted 2017 *Worcestershire County Council Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, of children looked after and care leavers*

³ HM Government *Working together to safeguard children* March 2015

- All partners are committed to the delivery or commissioning of services in line with their statutory duties and comply with the WSCB Levels of Need (Thresholds) Guidance.

2. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Working Together⁴ describes how effective early help services are the responsibility of all agencies. Under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, Local Authorities have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children and this includes early help. Section 14 of the Children Act 2004 sets out the objectives of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, which are:

- a) To co-ordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area; and
- b) To ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for those purposes

Regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Board Regulations 2006 sets out the functions of the LSCB, in relation to the above objectives under Section 14 of the Children Act 2004. The functions that relate specifically to early help are:

- (a) Developing policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area of the authority, including relating to the action to be taken where there are concerns about a child's safety or welfare, including thresholds for intervention;
- (b) Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of what is done by the authority and their Board partners individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and advising them on way to improve; and
- (c) Participating in the planning of services for children in the area of the authority.

Finally, the Local Authority has a role in ensuring that there is oversight of the range and effectiveness of early help services in Worcestershire and providing assurance to the WSCB. This includes the contribution of all WSCB partner agencies, including schools, health, voluntary sector and the police.

⁴ Department for Education *Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* March 2015

3 WORCESTERSHIRE EARLY HELP NEEDS ASSESSMENT

There is considerable evidence⁵ that getting help early is beneficial to children and families. Central to the Marmot Review⁶ was the recognition that disadvantage starts before birth and accumulates throughout life and the Allen Review⁷ subsequently identified the benefits of early intervention and the cost to the state and the individual of poor outcomes due to unmet needs. The Review led to the establishment of Government's What Works Centres of Excellence, including the work of the Early Intervention Foundation⁸ which promotes the use of evidence based practice in the UK.

Worcestershire's Early Help Needs Assessment (EHNA) was produced in September 2015 by Public Health in Worcestershire County Council.⁹ The Assessment identified that Worcestershire has a number of poorer outcomes than would be expected for children and young people, particularly for the under-5 age group and adolescents. Specifically, the relatively low proportion of young children who are school ready compared to the national average, high levels of reported language and communication needs and the unmet emotional and mental health needs of older children and young people were flagged. Also of concern is the consistent gap in outcomes for children and young people from deprived and non-deprived areas with significantly poorer health, social and educational outcomes in deprived areas.¹⁰

An estimate of predicted outcomes for children and young people in Worcestershire indicated that 52% of children and young people are likely to have good or very good outcomes but that 48% of our children and young people are likely to require varying levels of interventions. The likely need for interventions is forecast to rise by 1% by 2020. The need differs by geography with greatest need in areas of deprivation particularly in parts of Wyre Forest, Redditch and Worcester City. Over the last 5 years there has been evidence of rising demand for most targeted and specialist services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Speech and Language Therapy and Children's Social Care.

Worcestershire needs to ensure, therefore, that its' early help offer provides the best opportunities to these children and young people, both from a commissioning and delivery perspective, in order to improve outcomes for these vulnerable groups.

⁵ <http://www.eif.org.uk>

⁶ Marmot, M *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* London: 2010

⁷ Allen, Graham MP *Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An independent report to Her Majesty's Government* 2011

⁸ op cit

⁹ Worcestershire Health and Well-being Board Joint *Early Help Needs Assessment (Age 0-19 Years) September 2015*

¹⁰ Op cit

4 WHAT IS EARLY HELP?

As mentioned above, 'early help' describes services for children and families at levels 2 (Additional) and 3 (Targeted Support) of our Levels of Need Guidance as illustrated below¹¹:



Figure 1

Level 1 represents children with no identified additional needs. Their needs are met through the universal services they access such as early years', schools and health services, such as the GP, Public Health Nurses, and some will also be receiving services from housing and voluntary sector organisations. The majority of children will successfully develop and thrive at this level of need.

Level 2 represents children with extra needs that can be met by a universal service providing additional support or straightforward working by one or more partners e.g. Parenting Support, Schools, Health, Physiotherapy or Speech and Language Therapy.

Level 3 represents children with complex or escalating needs that can only be met by a coordinated multi-agency plan which sets out the outcomes to be achieved and the role of each partner agency and the family in meeting these objectives. Professionals working with the child and family will identify whether there is a need to engage specialist services.

Level 4 represents children who need statutory and/or specialist interventions

¹¹ http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/downloads/file/7962/levels_of_need_guidance_formerly_threshold_guidance

including;

- Children in need including those in need of protection;
- Children looked after and privately fostered
- Young people who have committed an offence;
- Children with acute mental health needs.

The definition of '**children in need**' is defined by the Children Act 1989 s17 (10), which provides that a child is to be taken as 'in need' if:

- a) s/he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority ;or
- b) his/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
- c) s/he is disabled. You are disabled under the **Equality Act 2010** if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

A child in need of protection is described in Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, Paragraph(1):

Where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

It is important to note that **information, advice and guidance** should be easily available to children and families at all levels of need. Some of this is available on line from Worcestershire Council via its Your Life, Your Choice website:

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/ylyc

5 ACCESSING EARLY HELP IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Working Together¹² identifies the importance of partner agencies working together in Worcestershire in order to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
- Undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
- Provide services to address the assessed needs of a child and family to improve outcomes

¹² Department for Education op cit

All professionals need to be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- Has a disability and has specific additional need
- Has special educational needs
- Is a young carer
- Is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- Is in family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance misuse, adult mental health problems, a parent in prison and domestic abuse
- Has returned home to their family from care (or elsewhere)
- Is showing early signs of abuse or neglect

Where a professional is concerned that a child or young person may need some extra help, they should refer to our Levels of Need (Thresholds) Guidance. This includes speaking with the child and their parent/carer and, where appropriate, obtaining their consent to discuss their needs with other professionals.

The professional should consider the following questions:

- What am I and my agency going to do to support this child/family?
- Do I need to talk to or work with anyone else? If there are more people involved then who should take the professional lead?
- What would need to happen/change for professionals to know that needs have been met?
- Does the family agree with me about the need for additional support and will they accept the services identified?

The identification of a **lead professional** may be necessary if there is a need for someone to co-ordinate the provision of support for the child¹³:

A lead professional is someone who takes the lead to co-ordinate provision for a child and their family. This person acts as the single point of contact when a range of services are involved with that child or family and an integrated response is required.

The choice of lead professional will be decided on a case by case basis informed by the wishes and feelings of the child and young person:

...the lead professional will be the practitioner who is most relevant to the child or young person's plan and who has the skills to carry out the lead professional functions.¹⁴

¹³ Department for Education *The Lead Professional: Practitioner's Guide July 2007*

¹⁴ Children's Workforce Development Council *The Lead professional: Practitioners' Guide July 2007*

The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board promotes the use of its Early Help Assessment and Early Help Action Plan¹⁵ to identify and plan for meeting the needs of children and young people who may require additional or targeted support. This should be completed with the child and parent where an additional need has been identified and other professionals may need to be involved.

If parents or the child do not consent to an Early Help Assessment and the needs are such that they are likely to escalate quickly to level 4 of need, the lead professional will need to use their professional judgement as to whether a referral to children's social care may be necessary. Support should be sought from their organisation's Safeguarding Lead and advice also can be accessed from the Community Social Work Team via an on line booking system.¹⁶

6 WORCESTERSHIRE'S EARLY HELP OFFER

Towards the end of 2016 Ofsted¹⁷ inspected Worcestershire County Council Children's Services. Ofsted found that pathways to early help services were unclear and that the Local Authority did not understand the quality and impact of work undertaken by partner agencies.

In response to the messages from Ofsted the County Council has undertaken a review of its own services and put in place arrangements to ensure that it has greater oversight of practice, including new arrangements for the allocation of referrals from the Family Front Door and a new on-line booking service for consultations with a Community Social Worker. In addition, the County Council has brought together a number of its teams under the single heading of Targeted Family Support in order to give clarity to staff, partners and families about where to go to access level 2 and 3 support from the Local Authority.

The revised Levels of Need (Thresholds) Guidance now incorporates an Early Help Pathway (see Appendix 1) to provide clarity to all partners.

Worcestershire County Council's Early Help brochure¹⁸ provides a list of universal, commissioned and in-house services that are available in the county at levels 2 and 3 of need. It is proposed that this is now revised by the Improving Frontline Practice Sub Group in order to fully reflect the contribution of all partners to Early Help in Worcestershire.

¹⁵ www.worcestershire.gov.uk/eha

¹⁶ School based professionals: https://capublic.worcestershire.gov.uk/ChS_Theme/

All other professionals: <https://capublic.worcestershire.gov.uk/FamilyDoorPortal/>

¹⁷ Ofsted 2017 op cit

¹⁸ www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/8060/early_help_in_worcestershire

In 2015 Ofsted¹⁹ undertook a thematic inspection of a number of Local Authorities to evaluate the effectiveness of early help services for children and families provided by Local Authorities and their partners. They found that in all areas visited, arrangements were in place to provide early help but that opportunities were being missed by all statutory partners to deliver outstanding early help.

They recommended that the following actions are taken in order to improve the offer to children, young people and families:

- Promoting the use of evidence and research informed practice
- Improving the quality of analysis in assessments
- Ensuring that assessments reflect the views and experience of the child and family
- Making the purpose of intervention clearer and improving the intended outcome
- Ensuring plans are regularly reviewed and that these reviews evaluate the child's and family's progress
- Provide professional supervision to all staff delivering early help and ensure that their work receives regular management oversight, particularly in respect of decisions about whether families need more formal help
- Ensure that children's needs for early help arising from parental substance misuse, mental ill health and domestic abuse are addressed in commissioning plans

In response to this learning and Worcestershire's Children's Social Care Ofsted inspection, a new set of Early Help Practice Standards and Procedures also have been put in place to provide assurance and guidance for its internal and commissioned services working within the Targeted Family Support Service.

7 MONITORING EFFECTIVENESS GROUP

The Board will need to be assured that all of the above activity is having a positive benefit for children and young people and access to additional support is timely and effective. The Monitoring Effectiveness Group will create a new early help dashboard and reports will be submitted to the WSCB on a quarterly basis to give assurance that early help is effective in Worcestershire.

This will include, but not be limited to, the following Key Performance Indicators:

- Numbers of children achieving a Good Level of Development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including those accessing Free School Meals
- Numbers of Early Help Assessments completed by each agency
- Numbers of Early Help Action Plans completed by each agency

¹⁹ Ofsted *Early Help is Everyone's Business* London 2015

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- Number of First Time Entrants in the criminal justice system
- Number of Fixed Term and Permanent Exclusions
- Numbers of Children in Need
- Numbers of re-referrals to the Family Front Door
- Numbers of re-referrals to Targeted Family Support Service
- Parent and child satisfaction rates as measured via exit interview

Worcestershire County Council will undertake the collation of information and the production of the Dashboard on behalf of the WSCB. Co-operation from partner agencies is essential in order to ensure this is a meaningful exercise and that progress is being measured. It should be noted that some of the KPIs are only reported on an annual basis, however.

In addition, a regular audit cycle will provide information to the WSCB on the quality of practice and identify any required actions and learning sets for the partnership.

8 CONCLUSION

This strategy sets out the expectations and duties of the WSCB and its partners. To deliver on the strategy there are a number of actions which need to be completed so that the Board can be assured that Worcestershire's early help offer is effective. The Improving Frontline Practice and Monitoring Effectiveness Sub Groups will take forward the delivery of the action plan and monitoring of impact on behalf of the Board and ensure that the Chair and the Board are regularly updated on progress and the management of risk.

In addition, there is dialogue which needs to take place via the Health and Wellbeing Board's Children and Young People's Sub Group. This will include discussion about commissioning intentions and future arrangements.

This strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and the associated action plan updated in order to ensure that it remains relevant to the Board's duties and priorities.

**Approved by Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board
13 September 2017**

Appendix 1 – Early Help Pathway

