

CABINET

13 JULY 2021

MEDWAY EARLY HELP STRATEGY

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mrs Josie Iles, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Lead Member)

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People – Children and Adult Services

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Summary

Early Help is a term used to describe support to potentially vulnerable children, young people and their families as soon as a problem starts to emerge. The purpose of early help is to prevent issues and problems from escalating by building resilience and this is achieved through prompt and targeted interventions to families by those who know them best. In summary, early help is a shared responsibility and not a distinct service. In November 2020, the Early Help Partnership Board was established to drive forward a multi-agency approach that would strengthen our offer to families across Medway and ensure that children and families receive early support.

This report presents the Medway Early Help Strategy 2021 – 2024 to the Cabinet for approval. The strategy sets out Medway's early help offer and it covers a period of three years; with the current proposal to hold a launch event in July 2021 and facilitate a 6-month workshop to assess the impact of the Strategy and to identify if the priorities are being driven, in December 2021. The Early Help Partnership Board will be responsible for evidencing the quality, effectiveness, and impact of the Strategy.

The report was considered, initially, by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 June 2021 and the Health and Wellbeing Board on 17 June 2021.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. The Early Help Strategy identifies the range of early help services available across the partnership to children and families, to best support their needs as problems arise.

- 1.2. The Early Help Partnership Board reports to Medway Safeguarding Children's Partnership (MSCP), ensuring that effective early help for children and families is one of the priorities for the MSCP 2020-2022.
- 1.3. Strengthening early help across the partnership remains a priority within Medway's Children's Improvement plan.
- 1.4. The Strategy supports and will sit alongside the proposed Medway Parenting Support Strategy and other key local strategy and policy documents.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Medway Early Help Strategy 2021 – 2024 is a proposed partnership approach to deliver effective early help to children and families. The partnership has worked together at all levels to ensure that our approach and services best support children and families in Medway. We have a single vision, joint priorities and services which are delivered in harmony to ensure the best possible outcomes.
- 2.2. Following the review and subsequent launch by the MSCP of Medway's Threshold Guidance (April 2021), as part of that guidance a continuum of need has been developed to identify the right support at the right time. Early Help is at Level 2 – Children with additional needs, within the model.
- 2.3. The Children that require support from Level 2, are children with additional needs above the support provided by universal services to ensure that their education, health, social and developmental needs are met.
- 2.4. Where additional help is required, this may be provided by a single agency or by a number of different agencies working together, both are led by a lead professional to co-ordinate the work being undertaken.
- 2.5. Within Medway Children's Service we are rebranding our targeted early help offer to Family Solutions who will provide parenting support, focussed group work, intervention plans and early help assessments with families.
- 2.6. The Strategy acknowledges the role of the partnership to deliver effective early help, and strives to offer a single, seamless, and focussed approach to respond to the needs of children and families in Medway, when needed.
- 2.7. A consultation process for the proposed Medway Early Help Strategy was undertaken across the partnership (22 March – 7 May 2021), ensuring that all views were considered, and where relevant incorporated within the Strategy.

3. Options

- Option 1: No formalised strategy for Early Help across Medway
- Option 2: Develop an Early Help action plan rather than a strategy

- Option 3: A single system-wide Early Help Strategy

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. Option 1 – there are very few benefits associated with this option and could result in an un co-ordinated and delayed response to presenting needs.
- 4.2. Option 2 – this option would have fewer governance points and would mean that the action plan can be developed and implemented more quickly. It is less likely to generate cultural change within Medway and will not be able to draw on the system-wide strategy to lead service changes.
- 4.3. Option 3 – Will help to embed a cultural change across the partnership to ensure that early help is everyone’s responsibility; providing a single vision, joint priorities and services which are delivered in harmony to ensure the best possible outcomes. This option links with other strategic developments such as MSCP priorities, the proposed Parenting Support Strategy, Medway’s Threshold Guidance and Child Friendly Medway. This is the recommended option.
- 4.4. A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed (set out at Appendix 3 to the report).

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Finance	When mapping and needs analysis is completed to inform the Action Plan, some gaps in provision may be identified, requiring investment to address	The Strategy facilitates a discussion across the partnership to ensure services are identified and relevant commissioners are approached. This will enable a flexible approach to mitigating any gaps in provision, including changing the type of service delivery provided by some organisations	E3

6. Consultation

- 6.1. On 11 December 2020, a multi-agency workshop was held to support the development of the Early Help Strategy with over eighty partners attending. It was at this event that the partnership developed the vision and the common set of principles included within the Strategy.
- 6.2. There was further consultation across the partnership (22 March – 7 May 2021) ensuring that all views were considered, and where relevant

incorporated within the Strategy. The updated Strategy was shared and reviewed at the Early Help Partnership Board on 14 May 2021 where it was supported, subject to final amendment. It was also presented to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 June 2021 and the Health and Wellbeing Board 17 June 2021 and their comments are set out below.

7. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered this report at its meeting on 9 June 2021 and its comments are set out as follows:

7.2. The Head of First Response and Targeted Services introduced the draft Medway Early Help Strategy which set out Medway's early help offer and covered a period of three years.

7.3. Members then raised a number of questions and comments which included:

7.3.1. Lead professionals – in response to a question about how to ensure a family is designated with the right lead professional, it was explained that the aspiration was for all agencies to use the same information system to make the sharing of information seamless and the discussion around who the appropriate lead professional easier.

7.3.2. Sharing of data – officers confirmed they would share the strategy dashboard data with the committee.

7.3.3. Proactive support – comments were made about whether the early help offer could be highlighted to families who were vulnerable, for example, where a child has complex needs. Officers confirmed that early help support needed to be consensual and there was no statutory right to intervene unless a serious safeguarding concern arose. It was therefore key to ensure that the early help offer was well advertised across the partnership.

7.3.4. Public awareness – in response to a question about how the Council was to ensure parents and carers knew how to access support, officers confirmed that the single point of access (SPA) information was widely advertised across the Council website, social media, libraries, family hubs, schools, Citizens Advice Bureau and many other partner organisations.

7.4. The Committee recommended the Medway Early Help Strategy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, to the Cabinet for approval.

8. Health and Wellbeing Board

8.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board considered this report at its meeting on 17 June 2021 and its comments are set out as follows:

8.2. The Head of First Response and Targeted Services introduced the report and highlighted that the Medway Early Help Strategy 2021 – 2024 was a proposed partnership approach to deliver effective early help to children and families.

8.3. Members then raised a number of questions and comments which included:

8.3.1. **Lead professionals** – members pointed out that families in need usually faced problems that straddled across various issues from health, housing to employment, which might be dealt with by one-stop assistance through a general coordinator who could assist these families to navigate through different systems and link up with the required services. In response, it was explained that the lead professional, through positive engagement with the family, would be able to identify issues and signpost intervention support at an early stage.

8.3.2. **Benefits of early intervention** – members noted that adverse childhood experience at an age as early as 18 months, if remained unresolved, could have a life-long impact. Therefore, early intervention could avoid problems escalating and could reduce demand on adult services in the future.

8.3.3. **Public awareness** – members considered that the best way to boost public awareness was by word of mouth in the form of testimony videos.

8.4. The Health and Wellbeing Board

- a) noted the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee set out in the addendum report;
- b) expressed support for the draft Medway Early Help Strategy set out at Appendix 1 to the report; and
- c) recommended the Medway Early Help Strategy to the Cabinet on 13 July 2021 for approval.

9. Climate change implications

9.1. One of the principles included in the Early Help Strategy is to ensure that services are timely, coordinated, transparent, needs led and adequately resourced, accessible to parents. This includes the option of digital access to services. This should reduce excess travel and bring services closer to the families who use them by supporting innovative digital approaches.

10. Financial implications

10.1. There is no expected additional resource requirement arising from this strategy. However, should additional resources be required, in order to meet the outcomes of the Early Help Strategy, the costs of implementing these new services will be met from within existing Council and partner budgets.

11. Legal implications

11.1. There are no legal implications.

12. Recommendations

- 12.1. The Cabinet is asked to note the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board, as set out in sections 7 and 8 of the report.
- 12.2. The Cabinet is asked to approve the Medway Early Help Strategy, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

13. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 13.1. The purpose of early help is to prevent issues and problems from escalating by building resilience, through prompt and targeted interventions to families by those who know them best. It is a shared responsibility and approving the strategy will help to embed a cultural change across the partnership to ensure that early help is everyone's responsibility; providing a single vision, joint priorities and services which are delivered in harmony to ensure the best possible outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Medway Early Help Strategy
Appendix 2 – Threshold Document
Appendix 3 – Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None