

## **Report to Cabinet**

**27 July 2021**

### **Early Help Service Redesign**

**Report by Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning**

**Electoral divisions: All**

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#### **Summary**

This report seeks approval to implement the *Early Help Redesign* following the outcome and analysis of the public consultation and revisions to the original proposal. The aim of the *Early Help Redesign* is to provide an improved and more effective offer to those children and families considered in the greatest need and likely to benefit most from the support available and to prevent the escalation to the statutory social care services. Therefore, the *Early Help Redesign* proposals also contribute to the development of an integrated service provision between Early Help and children's social care. This integrated service provision is part of the wider service improvements within the Children, Young People and Learning Directorate and specifically implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model. The proposal ensures we retain core universal services in all areas of the council to ensure the most effective use of resources by focusing on those most in need and the facilities to support services that are provided by partners.

The report sets out the details of the full consultation process and analysis of the outcomes. It describes changes to the proposed offer based on responses to the consultation as well as informing on the mitigations to identified adverse impact or risks where the proposed offer remains unchanged.

The report also sets out the further work with partners and communities to manage any impact upon them, to provide more detail on the changes, especially the opportunities for group activity and the work on the use of assets within communities which may be affected. There is also detail about the more specific consultation with staff directly affected, should the decision to proceed be agreed.

#### **Recommendation**

Cabinet is asked to:

- 1) Approve the revised Early Help Service offer for implementation in December 2021.
- 2) Agree plans for a staff consultation from early September 2021 to begin the process of implementing the new offer.

- 3) Agree plans for Early Help to continue to operate out of 12 centres and declare the other centres surplus to the Early Help services operational requirements. The 12 retained centres are outlined in Appendix C.
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## **Proposal**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 This paper outlines the details of the public consultation regarding the *Early Help Redesign* and sets out the amended proposal for the new service model. The *Early Help Redesign* retains the essential aims of the service which are to improve the quality of a child's home and family life, enable them to perform better at school, achieve better outcomes and improve their wellbeing, provide early prevention of harm and improve their long-term outcomes. The improved model for early help is also designed to reduce the need for higher level intervention and therefore reduce demand on children's social care services. The *Early Help Redesign* is therefore expected to improve outcomes for children and families by reducing the need for such intervention.
- 1.2 The current early help offer is delivered in the community but also from 43 Children's centres and 11 Find It Out and Youth centres most of which are open on a part-time basis, with several open as little as 2 mornings a week. This provides a wide spread of availability locally, however, it is an inefficient use of resources especially those needed to maintain and run buildings that are less well used. The offer has become inconsistent and the need to focus on improving outcomes for those most in need has been diluted by the extent of the universal services being supported, many of which can continue without that support. Resources are now severely stretched due to increased demand; the focus needs to be on addressing significant child and family need in the most efficient and effective way. Our experience of delivering an effective early help service during the pandemic has reinforced this conclusion.
- 1.3 Demand in early help, particularly for targeted support, and social care has continued to rise making it vital to ensure that every part of the early help resource is maximised to improve outcomes for children. West Sussex, in line with national trends has seen a significant increase in the numbers of children who are the subject of a child protection plan and an increase in the numbers of children looked after. Targeted support in early help involves a coordinated whole family plan to support families with multiple or complex needs and to prevent escalation towards statutory interventions. Requests for targeted support have increased significantly and continues to rise, with new referrals doubling during 2020. This has resulted in an increase in unallocated children who are not receiving a timely service which is not sustainable. This adds to the urgency to change the way we work to support those children and families in greatest need and where a lack of response at this stage will mean increased demand later for more intensive children's social care services.
- 1.4 The review of the current offer included an evaluation of the service offer, including focussing support where it is likely to have greatest benefit, the model and effectiveness of where we offer services, the group support and facilitation offer, analysing the centres' usage as well as a scoping of the community offer across the county. This review demonstrated that:

- The current 'centre-based' offer does not necessarily reach those children and families who are most in need of help and it is not the most effective way of meeting the needs of these families
- The number of families visiting centres in some areas is very low and, in several areas, the most vulnerable children and families do not visit the centres
- The majority of those who visit centres have access to other universal services
- Each centre requires a minimum number of staff to safely operate and perform tasks related to keeping buildings open, diverting our staff from those most in need. Many centres are only able to be open on a part time basis due to staffing requirements
- The success rate in targeted early help intervention is high with only 3.5% (annual average) of those children who achieve a successful outcome going on to require additional support from social care.

## **2 Context – the aims of the service review**

- 2.1 The service review aimed to support the principles of the West Sussex County Council, [Council Plan 21/22 to 24/25](#). The Council Plan outlines the need to strengthen our support to those in greatest need whilst retaining the capacity to provide or ensure the continued availability of a useful range of universal and other community support services. This means we need to:
- Prioritise the most important things to do – those with most impact
  - Manage the demand on our services better – able to meet priorities
  - Make sure our resources go where they are needed most
  - Make the very best of resources provided by other agencies or community partners
- 2.2 The Council Plan specifically proposes that Children's Services should maintain a 'whole family' approach to ensuring children are safe, with families supported by multi-agency 'early help hubs' to provide coordinated support.
- 2.3 The Early Help review was needed to ensure a joined-up approach with other children's services and partners. Recognising the need to modernise the service to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children a detailed and comprehensive review has now been completed underpinned by the following principles:
- Services are targeted to those in greatest need
  - Services are proportionate to the level of need
  - To put children first and ensure that they are listened to
  - A service that is seamless and integrated
  - Ensure capacity to meet all statutory requirements in a timely way
  - Support partners to provide universal services
  - well communicated and accessible services across the County
- 2.4 The review also considered the findings of the [Early Years Health Development Review: Best Start for Life: A vision for the 1001 critical days](#) published by the Government in March 2021. The purpose of that review was to identify ways to improve the health and development outcomes for babies in England, with a focus on 1001 critical days through pregnancy to the age of 2. The vision

includes 6 action areas focusing on the development of a clear and joined up start of life universal offer. This universal offer seeks to bring together essential provision for every new family. This includes the critical services of midwifery and health visiting, mental health support and infant feeding advice with specialist breastfeeding support. The universal offer will include safeguarding and services relating to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and a universal plus offer targeted at those families that need extra support. The universal plus offer would work as an integral part of the wider structure of the early help partnerships and services already in existence. It suggests in the vision that all families should be welcomed into a family hub. Taking the aims and ambitions of this review into full consideration we have incorporated this into our proposals by ensuring that all the retained centres will be family hubs. To implement this way of working effectively, the current model needs to change, and this will include reducing the current number of venues to prevent stretching resources and dilute the opportunities for bringing service providers together.

- 2.5 The National Children's Bureau report on ['Supporting and strengthening families through early help - A rapid review of evidence'](#) published in June 2021 is a timely reference point for the principles which should drive the early help offer. The findings of their report are in line with this early help proposal. It notes the challenge presented by there being currently no statutory definition of early help services but also indicating that effective delivery is likely to be contingent on strong partnerships delivering a range of support from universal to targeted services in the focused and efficient way the proposals in this report uses.
- 2.6 The proposal has also drawn on evidence and experience from local authorities which have adopted the model and approach being proposed for West Sussex. There is particular learning from our Improvement Partner, Hampshire County Council. This authority undertook a radical redesign of its early help services in 2015 – 16. Whilst Hampshire's services are structured very differently to West Sussex the principles of its redesign were very similar – to target their directly delivered service towards providing the greatest amount of support and intervention to children and families in the greatest need in order to prevent problems from escalating. Alongside this the aim was to work alongside other partners to co-ordinate a package of early help resources delivered in a range of ways, for example, within schools, voluntary sector organisations, health settings. Within this redesign Hampshire reduced their Family Centres from 54 to 11 (plus 2 mobile units) and their Early Help workforce reduced by 60%. During the consultation some identical concerns were raised to the ones that have been raised during this consultation – principally regarding the perceived adverse impact of a reduction in the centres we operate from and the risk of vulnerable families not being identified. These risks were addressed and overcome through ensuring a flexible response i.e. services are not only delivered from centres, but directly to those individual families and by strong and effective partnership working.
- 2.7 Hampshire County Council is recognised as providing outstanding services for its children and families and that includes their early help offer, with specific mention in its latest Ofsted inspection in 2019, some 3 years after the redesign.
- 2.8 John Coughlan, Chief Executive Hampshire County Council and Department for Education (DfE) appointed Commissioner overseeing West Sussex

Improvement, has stated his in principle support for the current proposals and the principles and approach underpinning them, while stressing that these decisions remain the responsibility of West Sussex County Council.

### **3. Early Help Consultation Process**

- 3.1 On 23 February 2021 Cabinet took the [decision](#) to consult and the Council launched a 10-week public consultation starting on 8 March and closing on 17 May 2021. Prior to the public consultation the service also undertook three partner engagement events with the aim of sharing the proposal and seeking early feedback to help ensure the widest possible reach in the public consultation. The partner engagement was also vital for ensuring partners were sighted at an early stage on the proposals and the implications for their own service plans and resources so that these could be taken fully into account in the assessment of the consultation output.
- 3.2 The consultation activity was subject to a quality assurance process and an Equality Impact Assessment. The [Children's and Young Peoples Services Scrutiny Committee held on 7 January 2021](#) also made several recommendations that are addressed in this report. Specifically, regarding the arrangements for identifying vulnerable children and families and delivery to remote service users, the impact on partners, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and learning from other local authorities who have taken a similar approach by reducing centres to increase outreach. These points are addressed in this paper and appendices. The Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee reviewed the revised proposal for the Early Help redesign at the meeting on 20 July 2021 and the outcome of their consideration is included in Appendix G.
- 3.3 Full details of the early partner engagement events and the public consultation are provided in Appendix A, this includes an account of the extensive promotion of the consultation events as well as how the consultation reached specific targeted groups. The consultation was based on the aims and principles of the proposed new model described in the Cabinet report dated 23 February 2021. The consultation questions involved consulting on four options for change:
- Increased targeted support with reduced open access and information services
  - No open access and information services to focus only on those in greatest need
  - Retain current open access centres and reduce resources to those in greatest need – increasing the universal offer
  - Other suggestions – an open option for different service model and approaches to be identified
- 3.4 Engagement with the partner events and the public consultation was high with 84 partners and 65 schools attending the engagement events and 144 attending the consultation events. Visitors to the engagement hub were 10,357 people, with 3,108 visiting the survey page, resulting in 1,604 going on to complete the online survey. These figures include 182 staff and 59 young people. In addition to the online survey a further 301 young people completed a paper survey outlining their preferred options. There were 43 additional contributions either through the consultation mailbox or completed manually.

The total number of responses to the consultation was 1,948 which is comparatively high compared to previous consultations.

#### **4. Consultation Analysis and Key Areas of Focus**

4.1 The information provided through the online survey and from written submission raised a number of issues, many common themes emerged, a number of areas requiring better communication and assurance were noted and a range of constructive ideas and comments were received. Time was taken to review all of these, to assess the weight to be given to proposals from partners and those with experience and evidence and to see what changes to the original design could or should be brought forward. The Consultation Report at Appendix A provides detailed feedback, but the main themes were:

- **The validity and timing of the consultation:** The consultation process was quality assured throughout by a senior consultation and engagement officer and exceeded the expected reach and demography. Extensive information was provided on the Engagement Hub, including data profiles for each Children's centre. 5 formal briefing sessions and 6 mini information events for current service users were delivered during the consultation period providing several opportunities to seek further clarification on the redesign proposal.

The proposed early help offer was designed based on the centre usage data from the 3 years prior to the pandemic. While the Covid-19 pandemic post-dated the initial service review it has demonstrated the need for the service to be more responsive and agile. Early help has not been delivered from centres since March 2020; instead staff who were based in centres have gone out to deliver services in the community and virtually. In the last year there has been a significant increase in demand for targeted support further strengthening the argument that the service needs to prioritise its resources on the direct delivery of support to those in greatest need rather than on managing buildings.

The consultation analysis report addresses the concerns raised about the consultation approach in more detail. The claims that the consultation lacked validity or was poorly timed have not been substantiated and are without clear evidence.

- **The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic:** The pandemic has resulted in more children and families being vulnerable and during 2020 referrals to targeted early help doubled. It has not been possible to keep up with demand in the current model and this was already an issue prior to the pandemic. If early help does not create additional resource for those most vulnerable it is likely that the risk to those children will increase and they will be more likely to require further intensive support from social care. This is likely to be a sustained area of demand rather than one which will reduce in the immediate or foreseeable future. The areas of need which have grown during the pandemic are due in part to the effects of lockdown and increased pressure on children and families and are those which the proposal seeks to address with increased resource

and more focussed provision. These needs are met by the proposed early help service offer.

- **Demographic Equality issues:** Concern has been raised regarding access to services for those living in rural areas access to a centre and the requirement to travel if they wanted to attend a centre in person. The response to these concerns is to re-emphasise the need to move away from a reliance on buildings and expecting families to travel to centres. Where that is the best approach the integrated service hubs will provide access to centre-based services. However, the new service will not require a child or family to attend a centre unless they want to. The service offer will be delivered in the community, either in family homes or a safe location of the family's choice. This will be the approach for both rural and urban areas and will be more rather than less responsive to the needs of individual families and their preferred way to access services.

The proposed retained centres are in areas of highest deprivation, this being informed by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 overall ranking lower tier authorities in West Sussex, while retaining at least one centre in each District and Borough. This should assist in ensuring fair access to services whilst also keeping centres in areas where there is the greatest need. The proposal to keep more centres in areas of highest deprivation recognises that staff and partners often see more demand in those areas and creating bases for those staff to work together supports our offer by building resilience and supportive team working. A higher proportion of the early help offer has always been delivered in the community, with less than a third taking place at designated centres. Early help will continue to prioritise work by need and not location, ensuring that those in more remote locations still receive support when needed.

In terms of population growth, this is predicted to increase by 16% in West Sussex, over the period 2017 to 2041, with the highest proportion increase expected in Arun. An increase of housing development is planned in several areas and this was highlighted in the consultation responses. The communities in areas of increased population will still benefit from the flexible service offer. By increasing our communication and engagement we want to change the perception that we need buildings to offer a flexible offer to those children and families who are in greatest need. Our new service model will be better equipped to local population growth linked to developments than continuing the focus on buildings and their maintenance.

**Identifying vulnerable children:** During 2020 when centres were closed due to the pandemic, an increased number of children and families were successfully identified or able to access early help services. While this demonstrates an increase in demand it also showed that families and partners knew how to access early help support when they needed it. Currently over half of all early help referrals come from partners. We have outlined in Appendix E a range of case studies which demonstrate the variety of ways children and families come to early help and we have used this to evidence the benefits of the new model ensuring effective identification of those in greatest need. Central to the proposed new

offer is a focus on strengthening our ability to identify those in need of help. This will be achieved through a number of approaches. Early help propose providing dedicated teams with named link workers for schools, ensuring we can advise and support schools with the children schools are worried about. Responses to the consultation emphasised the value of establishing better use of schools and their connections to and knowledge of children and young people. Other responses questioned the capacity of schools to step into this area and so the approach is to support and enable this dedicated team and link worker approach to work. The proposed new model will retain the Young Parents Pathway and support to Early Years settings where the need is greatest. In addition, early help has developed a Communication and Engagement Plan that details a range of processes and activities to ensure that information on the service offer is easily accessible and promoted to the public and partners.

The proposal includes and recognises the importance of the Partnership Boards already established and relationships with key stakeholders like Health, the District and Borough Councils and voluntary and community groups. Each early help hub will have a dedicated officer responsible for the promotion and updating of information online and in the community. This builds on the benefits of integrated service delivery and coordination referred to above and which is central to the recent Government report (Early Years Health Development Review: Best Start for Life see paragraph 2.4) on the aims and driving principles for effective joint working on of early help.

- **Access to support groups:** The proposed service offer has been adjusted based on concerns raised during the consultation in stopping group work for under 5s and young people. There has been a further mapping of services offered in the community which demonstrates there is a significant community offer across libraries, voluntary and community groups for all age ranges from 0-19 and SEND. From this work we know there is some duplication with universal groups currently offered by early help services. This informed the original proposals. Prior to the consultation the proposal was to cease all groups and groupwork, however, the revised proposal will retain the capacity to deliver specific group work when a need is identified. For example, if several parents are presenting with similar concerns, such as setting boundaries for young people, it would be possible for early help to deliver group parenting support work in that area. Early help will also retain the Young Parents Pathway which provides additional support to young mothers and fathers. There is also a commitment from the Learning and Skills team to review the delivery of an under 5s SEND group termly programme. This way of offering group work will be flexible and responsive to locally identified needs. It is however important to communicate the arrangements for group support.

**Impact on partners:** An exercise was conducted to map all partners using the current centres. These partners have been informed of the proposal and a number have expressed an interest to continue offering



services from the proposed retained centres. Some partners have expressed an interest in access to centres that we don't propose to continue to operate from. The biggest impact is to health partners, who deliver universal services and this offer is not changing due to these proposals.

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust who deliver the Healthy Child Programme have indicated that a reduction in centres would have an impact on their service delivery, specifically in timeliness and travel. The changes will also result in a cost implication to the Healthy Child Programme where they need to lease additional clinic space. It is proposed that all of the retained centres continue to house health services alongside early help services. The Assets and Properties team are already in discussion with the Trust regarding the use of buildings in which they have expressed an interest in.

Wider than this the West Sussex Asset team is supporting several partners with the options available to them for hiring or leasing buildings beyond those we propose to keep. Several of the centres used by partners to deliver their services are leased, and it may be possible for partners to negotiate space with the owners of those buildings. Early help will work with all partners currently using the centres we propose to retain, to ensure their continued use. For buildings that early help propose to stop using, the Asset team have all the expressions of interest from partners and will work with them directly to explore and settle opportunities to utilise centres.

Central to the proposal is for greater working between early help and social care, which includes having co-located teams. This change will strengthen relationships and more effective working within children's services, improving the journey for children who require help and protection as well as creating better connections locally to partners, promoting a shared responsibility across all service areas to the children within localities. Once a decision has been made on the early help redesign every effort will be made to provide clarity on the options available to partners before the autumn term.

## **5. General overview of the response to the Consultation**

- 5.1 The consultation process provides an opportunity for members of the public to help shape the proposal, suggest other ideas, or highlight concerns to help the Council adjust or mitigate risks associated with the proposed option. The extensive feedback provided has given some helpful insight into stakeholder's concerns regarding the proposed changes to the early help offer. The responses have confirmed that our priority to focus on the vulnerability and needs of children and how services are accessed by children and families is the right one. It has emphasised the need to maintain a clear engagement with the partners whilst driving the need for better integration across children's services.

- 5.2 The pandemic has heightened concerns for young people and new parents but also has led to an increase in those requiring dedicated Family Support at the right time. The volume of demand and the ways in which the service has had to respond to the pandemic have all fed into the evaluation of the proposed model. The pandemic was not anticipated but it is significant that the experience of the service during the last year has reinforced the value of the proposed model. Some responses to the consultation asked for the consultation and any changes to be delayed taking stock of the pandemic and to assess its impact longer term. However, this risks ignoring the pressing needs the pandemic has and will continue to drive. We should not assume that anything will return to how it was 18 months ago, nor can we wait for an unknown period of time for the longer-term picture of need to emerge. Our approach has been to plan the proposal with a full understanding of the current and continuing impact of the pandemic and to ensure an adaptive flexible model is developed.
- 5.3 The consultation also highlighted a degree of confusion among residents and the people who access help between early help delivery and health partner delivery of universal services, e.g. that of midwives and health visitors. We acknowledge these concerns and want to be clear that the proposals set out in this report are specifically related to the Council's early help offer and not the universal health offer. Communication of the final proposals that are approved will be vital to limit this misunderstanding and to prevent unnecessary concern among families and across communities. Key to this will be establishing the new delivery points of these services.
- 5.4 The connection with the priorities in the recently approved Council Plan – developed and adopted after these proposals were first designed has also been a focus of the review and the consultation response. The proposals need to ensure they meet the expectations of the Plan in terms of outcomes for children and families across the County. Early help supports circa 4,000 children a year on early help plans. Early help continues to evidence improved outcomes for children who receive a targeted intervention through an early help plan. This work has the highest success rates both for improving outcomes for children and families and reducing the demand into children's social care. These outcomes support the key performance indicator for early help in the Council Plan to achieve good outcomes without the need for a referral to social care. The West Sussex early help targeted intervention is also recognised nationally as a leader in achieving outcomes for the *Troubled Families* programme. The programme focuses on improving school attendance, helping adults into work and improving the health of families; this is the targeted work early help proposes to continue.
- 5.5 The proposals have also taken into account the Council's imperative to improve the wider children's services and specifically children's social care. With that in mind the proposals have been developed in line with the Council's stated intention to introduce the Family Safeguarding Model of social work practice in early 2022. The proposals within the *Early Help Redesign* include the flexibility to co-locate early help staff with social care colleagues as part of the Family Safeguarding Model in the future and ensure strong and effective working relationships between the two parts of the service.

### **Adjustments proposed based on consultation feedback**

5.6 There were a large number of responses that want to keep more centres open but there is no evidence that this approach will achieve the aims of the redesign to use staff more effectively and an ability to respond to those in greatest need in a timely and flexible way. However, there were many constructive proposals and comments, and these are addressed in the attached consultation analysis document in Appendix A. In considering the consultation feedback the following adjustments have been made to the proposal:

- Implement a communication and engagement plan and a dedicated resource in each locality, responsible for service promotion and publicity. This is to ensure people can still access the service when they need help. It will ensure greater awareness of service options and accessibility. It should also remove some of the misperceptions about other universal and health services which are not affected
- Keep additional staffing to deliver bespoke group work when a need is identified with a specific focus on parenting support, such as understanding behaviour and communication. This will also be built into the communication plan for the new service model. It responds to the extensive feedback on the value of support groups whilst not compromising the need for flexibility and a more focused use of specialist resources
- Support volunteer and parent led open access groups to deliver in the retained centres. These were identified as important by many responders and service users. This approach reinforces the scope of the universal service offer and the benefits of a common set of options being available at the centres to be retained serving each area equally
- In order to ensure that the offer remains accessible and attractive to young people, retained centres will be open after school and as well as the 'Find It Out' drop in offer, face to face appointments will be on offer daily for young people either in centres or the community
- There were requests to keep a number of specific centres open across the Council, but none were deemed to present the levels of need which would result in keeping a centre with the exception of Lancing. The data showed that deprivation levels in Lancing are broadly similar to Shoreham, where we propose to keep a centre. It is acknowledged that Lancing presents specific and discreet geographical factors that give rise to two quite separate communities either side of the River Adur. There are 2 centres in Lancing, the Maintained Nursery School and Lancing Children and Family Centre. It is proposed that Lancing Children and Family Centre be kept due to the size and scope of the building as well its positioning in the community. The budget implications of this proposal are detailed in section 8. This would increase the number of proposed retained centres from 11-12.

## **6. Revised Proposed Early Help Model**

6.1 The new model proposes an increase in staff delivering targeted support with a view to the service operating in a more flexible way in local communities. The review has identified those centres that are in the areas of highest deprivation and therefore highest demand and it is proposed that these

centres are maintained and open full time in the new model to improve their usage. This will extend our reach to the most vulnerable children and families.

6.2 It is proposed that the new service will continue to be based in 6 geographical locality hubs aligned to district boundaries with each district hub containing at least 1 Family Centre. (Arun 2, Adur and Worthing 5, Chichester 1, Crawley 2, Horsham 1 and Mid Sussex 1). The proportion of centres directly correlates to the deprivation levels and ability to meet the most vulnerable children and families.

6.3 The proposed Early Help model is intended to:

- Provide a single point of entry for all families and professionals
- Continue to deliver from 6 locality Hubs which will work closely the new Family Safeguarding social care teams
- There is an increase in the targeted response to vulnerable children and young people
- Increase the *Enabling Families* Offer to those families that usually can cope but may need a little extra help
- It will offer a daily drop in or bookable appointments for young people after school
- Improve early identification of those in need; taking action to respond to problems before they are more difficult to reverse
- Improve collaboration and strengthen support to schools to support children and young people with attendance, achievement, attainment and health and wellbeing
- Promote the Family Safeguarding Model by aligning with social care so that all children and families are accessing the right help and protection from the most appropriate part of children's services
- Support the recommendations in the Early Years review to promote the best start in life for all children through collaboration with Public Health and a range of Health Partners and the use of all retained centres as Family Hubs
- Support local partnerships to collectively improve outcomes for children and better identify when a child needs help. Making early help everyone's business

6.4 Early Help currently provides open access services such as *stay and play* at children centres and *open access youth groups*. Providers of universal services include schools, health, libraries and the voluntary and community sector. In the proposed new model, where limited early help non-targeted services will be provided, the service would support local communities to develop and retain their support to children and young people. Early help would support groups to develop through enhanced and more effective partnership arrangements, supporting their approach to safeguarding, through the provision of data to help inform their delivery and where possible by providing access to remaining centre space. The proposed Early Help Offer on a page is at Appendix B with more detailed description below.

### **Early Intervention through partnership**

6.5 The County Council is still committed to ensuring intervention at the earliest opportunity to support families and this approach will be supported by a

comprehensive communications and engagement plan. The proposals ensure that the County Council continues to identify and respond to problems before they become more difficult to reverse. The wider early help offer is everyone's business and together we can respond early to children's needs, including the use of partner led early help plans. It is proposed that the *Early Help Redesign* will build on the success of *termly conversations* between named link workers and schools. The aim is to support partners to deliver additional support to children through strengthening the service by creating dedicated teams, responding flexibly to support schools and partners as issues arise. Moving away from the *planned conversations* model, this team will actively support schools to lead early help plans by enabling partners to put support in place before problems escalate. The new service will also be available to offer advice and support to improve the identification of vulnerable children. Support will be provided to escalate concerns about a child to the appropriate service, specifically identifying needs and safeguarding concerns.

- 6.6 It is proposed that early help will continue to facilitate locality partnerships through local partnership boards, one in each district. The terms of reference for these boards will be reviewed and they will be attended by early help, social care, health and key stakeholders in the locality. Key stakeholders invited include families who use our service, education, early years, elected members, voluntary and community sector. Boards will provide support and information on how partners can collectively deliver early help and improve outcomes for children and young people. Partner relationships will be critical to improving the identification and support of vulnerable children and families to access support. These boards will serve as a space for local partners who know and understand the early help offer to help families access the services.
- 6.7 *Enabling Families* provision will be increased in the new model. This service provides 1 to 5 sessions of family support work to parents. This is a parent-focused offer providing help where there is one issue or lower level concern, often focused on parenting, behaviour, and communication issues for those who do not require a multi-agency coordinated response. This is another key tool to help parents build their confidence and prevents problems and issues from escalating. The offer can be delivered flexibly to suit parents' needs, in the community, in centres or virtually. Where need is identified this could be delivered as group work.

### **Family Centres – coordinated universal offer**

- 6.8 It is proposed that the new model be delivered from 12 Family Centres open on a full-time basis, providing the opportunity for children's social care staff to co-locate. There will be a minimum of one centre in each district. Some universal services will continue to be delivered from these centres, such as health clinics, whilst maintaining some space to meet with children and families receiving support from children's services.
- 6.9 The core early help centre offer will be the provision of Information, Advice and Guidance for parents, Crisis Support; the provision of emergency essentials and support to access Free Entitlement for 2, 3, and 4-year olds. All Family Centres will offer *Find It Out* for young people, including daily after school drop in and daily bookable appointments where early help will travel to a location that suits the young person.

6.10 Families will have open access to all retained centres even if they are not located in the area they live. For families and young people not able to access a centre this core offer can also be offered by phone or online. Those identified as needing help can also seek support via partners, schools, and the school link worker.

### **Family Support - enhancing the service**

6.11 Family Support is the current early help targeted offer which supports children who are identified as in need of help through an early help plan. These children will receive whole family coordinated support from a dedicated 1:1 support worker in their home and the community. Workers support families to resolve issues, build resilience and seek to prevent them requiring further need for social care services. Early help also provides an enhanced Family Support Keyworker offer for those who are experiencing multiple and complex issues within their family. These staff work directly with children on the cusp of social care and help sustain the changes and progress made while on a child protection or child in need plan.

6.12 The proposal is to increase the number of Family Support staff, increasing the early help reach across the county and delivering more efficiencies across the directorate by preventing the need for a higher cost service. Children and families are usually identified for this support via partners, by school or through an early help link worker discussion. They can self-refer in person or by phone or email to the Integrated Front Door.

## **7 Staff Consultation**

7.1 If the proposed offer is agreed, there is a requirement to undertake a staff consultation to revise the current staffing structure. The plan is to start the process in September 2021 and allow for meaningful consultation with staff and UNISON on the staff impact. These timing may be subject to change. Section 8.2c provides an overview of the possible impact on staffing. UNISON will be consulted ahead of the formal staff consultation on the potential impacts to staff, including possible redundancies.

7.2 Not all the current early help services will be in scope for this service redesign proposal and the planned consultation. Domestic Abuse, Youth Homeless, Intentionally Homeless, Performance and Pause will be developed as part of the wider service redesign that is currently underway within Children Young People and Learning to provide a more seamless service in line with the new Family Safeguarding model.

## **8 Finance**

8.1 Revenue consequences of the proposal are as follows.

**Table 1: Budget Forecast**

	Last Year 2020/21 £m	Current Year 2021/22 £m	Year 3 2022/23 £m	Year 4 2023/24 £m
Revenue budget	9.877	8.877	8.427	8.127

	Last Year 2020/21 £m	Current Year 2021/22 £m	Year 3 2022/23 £m	Year 4 2023/24 £m
Existing savings plan per MTFS	-1.000	-0.550	-0.400	0
Response to consultation	0	0.100	0.100	0
Remaining budget	8.877	8.427	8.127	8.127

## 8.2 The effect of the proposal:

### (a) **How the cost represents good value**

The proposal would allow the early help service to re-focus their offer towards the families and children who are the most vulnerable and provide them with the support they need. Working closely with schools and other partners and reducing the number of buildings we operate from means that the Council can implement a more targeted early help offer and more proactive offer to schools.

### (b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

The current savings proposal is for £1.95m to be delivered over a three-year period, with £1.0m delivered in 2020/21, and a further £0.550m planned to be delivered in 2021/22 and a final £0.400m in 2022/23. Even though the implementation of the proposed model was delayed from last year, the initial £1.0m saving in 2020/21 was delivered through the service not recruiting to a number of vacant posts that had been identified as at risk of deletion in the redesign. The remaining £0.950m saving was then phased over two years on the assumption that the proposed new model would be implemented from October 2021.

The proposed response to the consultation includes retaining an additional existing site and the associated staff at a cost of £0.2m. This means that the original savings target of £1.95m will now be subject to a £0.2m shortfall.

Even though the implementation date has also slipped to December 2021 the revised savings planned for this year of £0.450m are still expected to be delivered due to the strict vacancy management controls put in place last year. The remaining savings are still aimed to be achieved by removing a layer of management in early help, and reduction of in the number of posts relating to the existing buildings we currently operate from.

### (c) **Human Resources**

The proposal, if approved, requires a revision of the current staffing structure. The number of FTE of front line staff will be increased to deliver the new early help offer, and there will be a reduction in or removal of other posts that will no longer be required at the same level or at all, for example some non-targeted duties or youth group work. The proposed changes also present the opportunity to review the management tiers and bring greater clarity on accountabilities.

Overall, there will be a reduction in the size of the current workforce. After allowing for the creation of 30 FTE new posts, the current modelling indicates a net overall reduction in the order of 40 to 50 FTE posts which will create a risk of staff redundancies. The service has implemented vacancy management controls and has not recruited to approximately 30 FTE of vacant positions. This has significantly reduced the number of potential staff redundancies and, with a continued focus on vacancy management the actual number of staffing redundancies will be kept to a minimum

Linked to the proposed reduction in posts, we have estimated the risk of potential redundancy costs to be around £0.7m. However, these costs are expected to be significantly reduced through opportunities for staff to apply for alternative posts within the new structure and through redeployment.

Every effort has been made to limit the impact on service delivery of these staffing measures whilst taking an honest and realistic approach to staff relations given the commitment the senior management has given to the aims and principles of the design and their endorsement so far by the Council political leadership.

#### (d) **Asset Impact**

Asset Plan: If Cabinet endorses the recommendations outlined in this report, the Early Help service will vacate all the properties surplus to its requirements. In the case of a number of properties we will work with Public Health to negotiate lease arrangements with health partners, to try to facilitate the continued delivery of the Healthy Child Programme from those buildings. In addition, during the consultation period the Property and Assets team have already been in discussions regarding the future use of buildings and have started to collate expressions of interest. They will continue with this work once Cabinet has made their final decision and will bring back proposals at a future date.

As Early Help vacates premises that it no longer needs for service delivery there are one off financial consequences which will arise. These are estimated at £400k over the next few years while the properties are re-purposed or disposed of. They comprise additional staffing to handle the extra workload; removals and relocation; and the costs that arise from keeping empty premises safe and secure. These are expected to be off set in time capital receipts, new rental income, reduced utility costs and rental costs, although it is not possible to estimate these until the future of the properties are determined. In addition, it is acknowledged that the remodelled Early Help Service will mean that the number of third party users of buildings no longer required by Early Help will be unable to continue with their current arrangements, however discussions are progressing with our health partners on a number of premises to enable health services to be delivered . It is also proposed to earmark some temporary staffing support for around six months at the estimated cost of £30k to work with interested local partners and to assist these groups to find alternative premises. The additional one-off costs will be funded from the Service Transformation Fund.

**Sure Start Grant Clawback:** When a local authority puts forward proposals on change of use of capital projects which were funded through the Sure Start and Early Years Capital Grant, they must inform the Department of Education (DfE)



and, subject to prior approval, there will be no claw back of the grant where it will be used for a similar purpose consistent with the aim of the grant.

There remains a risk of clawback on purpose built assets where it is proposed to hand-back the lease to the freeholder, or repurpose for alternative uses that are not compliant with the terms of the grant, or where there are plans to dispose of an asset. We will work closely with the DFE to mitigate the risk.

## 9 Risk implications and mitigations

**Table 2: Risks - Impact and Mitigation**

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Mitigating Action (in place or planned)</b>
Reduced take-up of services by limiting the number of centres	The services will continue to be available in all areas and communication plans will focus on engaging those expected to benefit. Experience during the pandemic has supported the flexible non-centre approach to service delivery.
Access to health clinics and financial risk to the Healthy Child Programme if centre access limited.	Public Health continue to work with the lease providers and the County Council's Estates Service to renegotiate service level agreements.
Assets released by Early Help are costly to dispose or re-purpose. Clawback of Sure Start grant by Department for Education	There is a good understanding of the assets being released. Each property will be subject to an options appraisal to inform its future. For example, officers will have regard to financial risks in respect of the potential for DFE grant clawback; and dilapidations in the case of leasehold properties.

## 10 Policy alignment and compliance

### 10.1 Legal Implications

Legal advice will continue to be used to address the potential capital clawback and compliance with statutory duties.

### 10.2 Equality duty and human rights assessment

A full Equality Impact Assessment was completed and cross-matched against the consultation information; see Appendix D. The Cabinet is reminder of the public sector equality duty and the need to have regard to it when reaching its decision. The relevant issues for consideration are set out in the attached impact assessment

### 10.3 Public Health

Early help has a collaborative working agreement with public health. The areas of specific focus are:

- Improved mother and baby health, especially the most disadvantaged
- Good mental health for all children
- Home environment – healthy and nurturing parents

- Healthy weight

These elements are part of the proposed enhanced early help offer and supported by a detailed plan outlining specific activity undertaken by early help to support these outcomes. The plan includes ensuring all early help staff are trained in Make Every Contact Count, complete health assessments with families to identify specific health goals. Early Help will retain the Young Parents pathway and the remaining centres will be Family Hubs for health clinics. Early help will continue to deliver Healthy Start vitamins and breast pump loan and promote key health messages in centres.

#### 10.4 Climate Change Strategy

Care has been paid to the consultation feedback in relation to the possible isolation of families in more rural areas, the impact on travel and car journeys and the need for access to public transport. The centres for retention are in areas of higher population density and so should not lead to increased journeys for users – although this will arise in some areas. This is offset by the move to more responsive service provision direct to families at home or in a venue close to them – reducing their need for travel and limiting both travel time and impact on the environment. The service will continue to monitor the impact on the use of vehicles and public transport in order to ensure the service model reflects the Council's ambitions for a carbon neutral future.

Lucy Butler

**Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning**

**Contact Officer:** Claire Hayes, Service Leader Early Help, 07702 442462

#### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Consultation Report

Appendix B – Early Help Offer on a Page

Appendix C – List of the 12 proposed retained centres

Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix E – Early Help Access Case Studies

Appendix F – Current Centre Overview

Appendix G – Outcome of Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee – 20 July 2021

#### **Background Papers:**

None