

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

7 June 2023

Early Help Service Redesign Review

Report by Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Electoral division(s): All

Summary

This report provides a review of the Early Help Service Redesign following a year of operation. On 27 July 2021 following an extensive public consultation, Cabinet gave agreement for the proposed redesign of the Early Help Service which aimed to provide an improved service to vulnerable children and families in West Sussex (Decision [CAB02 21/22](#) refers).

During this process the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee considered the aims and principles for a proposed redesign and focused on what the proposals were seeking to achieve in the context of the Council's agreed priorities for residents and communities and requested a service review on the delivery and impact of the new model.

This report will provide an overview of the impact of the current offer and model and respond specifically to areas of focus raised by the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee including:

- a) Identifying need, Access to services and Communication
- b) Post Implementation Monitoring and Impact
- c) Partners' Impact and Assets

Focus for Scrutiny:

The Committee is asked to scrutinise the implementation of the first year of the new Early Help Service and how it is delivering improved outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families.

Key Lines of Enquiry:

Key areas for scrutiny include:

1. The evidence provided on the progress and improvements made, and how this demonstrates that the service is achieving the aims and objectives of the new service model (set out in paragraph 1.2). Particular areas for consideration could include the identification of vulnerable children and families at an early stage (including the work with schools and communication of the new service), the impact on number of young people requiring intensive intervention and how well the new service is meeting demand.

2. The feedback and case studies from partners, regulatory bodies and service users on the new service model (section 4 and Appendix C)
3. Any risks identified and the plans in place to address these to ensure planned outcomes are being delivered.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

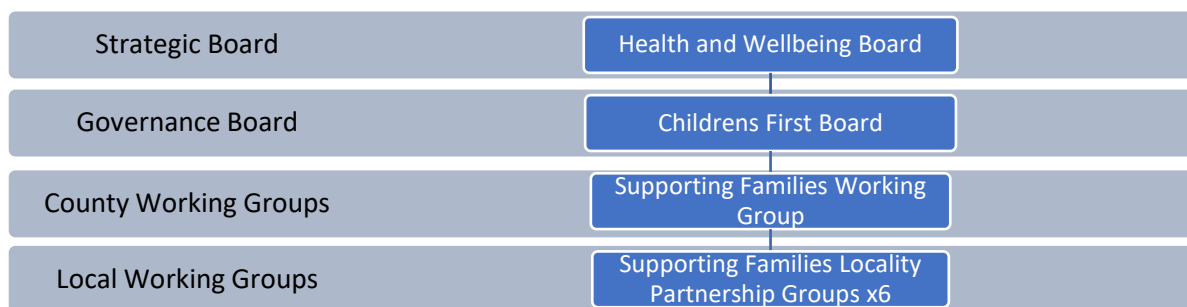
1. Background

- 1.1 Early Help launched the new offer in January 2022 following a staff consultation. The aim of the new Early Help model of delivery was to improve the quality of a child's home and family life, enable them to perform better at school, provide early prevention from harm and improve their long-term outcomes. The improved targeted early help offer also aimed to reduce the need for higher level intervention, including children's social care services.
- 1.2 The new service model aimed to:
 - Provide a single point of entry for all families and professionals
 - Continue to deliver from 6 locality area hubs
 - Increase the targeted response to vulnerable children
 - Increase the *Enabling Families* Offer to those families that usually can cope but may need a little extra help
 - Improve early identification; 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 alignment 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 collaboration with Public Health and the Healthy Child Programme to promote the best start in life for all West Sussex children and young people
 - Support local partnerships to collectively improve outcomes for children and better identify when a child needs help. Making Early Help everyone's business
- 1.3 The new service model supports the principles of the West Sussex County Council Reset Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25. The Reset Plan outlines the need to strengthen our support to those who need it most. This means we will need to:
 - Prioritise the most important things to do
 - Manage the demand on our services better
 - Make sure our resources go where they are needed most
 - Make the very best of resources in the short and long term

- 1.4 The service has now been operating under the new model for over a year and has also been subject to the Ofsted ILACS inspection process in March 2023.

2. Progress and Improvements

- 2.1 Following the Cabinet decision on 27 July 2021 (Decision: CAB02 21/22) the service conducted a staff consultation between November and December 2021. This resulted in 24 staff redundancies which was significantly below the estimate of 40. On launching the new offer in January 2022 there was a need to recruit staff to the increased targeted intervention roles. This did present the service with some challenges as nationally post pandemic recruitment was more difficult and slower to progress. Vacancy rates are now within normal range and the redesign created a number of opportunities for existing staff of which 37 have been internally promoted since the launch of the new model.
- 2.2 The service now offers 12 Family Hubs in areas of most needs and at least one in each district. The service has adopted the National Family Hub model and all 12 buildings offer young people's Find It Out and multi-agency partner delivery spaces which are fully utilised. Hubs have been rebranded and decorated to appeal to the 0-19 age range and are open full time but also offer community outreach. During the pandemic centres were closed and centre staff adapted the offer to ensure crisis support was delivered to families in the community, without the need to access a building. The service has retained this offer and continues to offer community outreach. All centres are open full time and since being closed due to the pandemic we have seen a steady return by the public and partners who deliver services.
- 2.3 Early Help and Social care are more aligned at all levels; structurally led by the same Assistant Director, locality based with social care teams and since October 2022 all case work is on a shared system creating a single view of the children we work with. This is creating stronger communication, better problem solving and joint working creating better transitions for children between service areas.
- 2.4 Early Help have introduced Dedicated Schools Teams (DST), these teams provide a named link worker who is able to support schools to deliver earliest help, support with the identification of needs and redirection to the correct services. Since the new service launched there have been 2 school surveys with positive feedback on the DST. Early Help is also part of the Multi-Agency Mental Health and Education Triage that provides consultation to school's multiple times a week. This is helping the service to identify needs for young people quickly especially post Covid where there has been an increase in need.
- 2.5 A new governance structure has been implemented to drive system change locally with the aim of creating more joined up local services that are better able to identify families in need, provide the right support and track their outcomes. The governance structure is in line with national Supporting Families guidance, establishing Locality Groups and the Supporting Families Working Group which reports into Children First Board. This will accommodate all levels of need and enable evidence-based decisions at county and local area levels.



- 2.6 The Early Help Strategy was published in April 2023, which outlines how West Sussex will further develop the early help system and operations. This was produced in collaboration with partners through a series of workshop events which were informed by the Early Help System Guide 2022 from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and by sharing the new framework and visions from Government. The Early Help Strategy and the new national framework criteria is at Appendix A and B.

3. Identifying need, Access to services and Communication

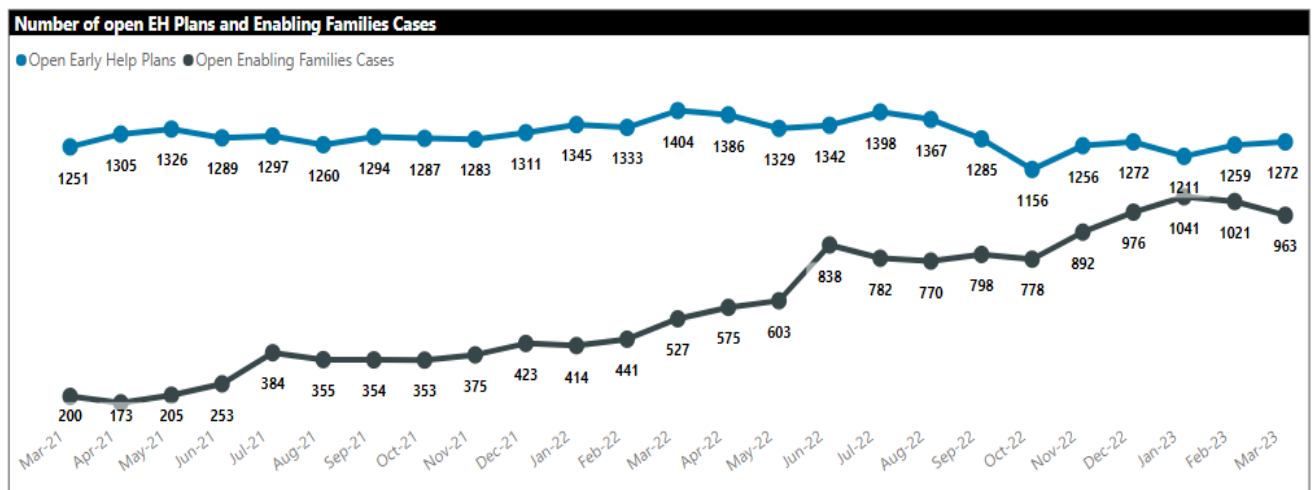
- 3.1 Identifying vulnerable children and families is key to the success of the service. During the pandemic, with no access to buildings, families and partners were still successfully making contact with the service which is a positive indicator of families continuing to be able to access support. It is also important that the service and partners are able to identify need as not all parents and young people directly ask for help. The Dedicated Schools Teams (DST) have played a crucial role here as schools are our biggest partner and the Early Help Strategy and governance structure will ensure that partners are actively engaged and co-ordinated in the identification of need. In addition, the Early Help service is well represented and takes an active role at a range of other partner lead forums and meetings for example attending all District and Borough Community Safety and Wellbeing meetings.
- 3.2 The governance framework is in its infancy but has a broad representation at all levels. These groups are starting to look at how we work together as an early help system to provide earliest help and how we offer support to those providers who have regular contact with children and families. This includes work being undertaken to gather and collate data and information from across the partnership to help us recognise need and build intelligence on characteristics of children, young people and families who may be vulnerable. This will help us to further develop how we 'target' families early and potentially provide more preventative services before the need escalates.
- 3.3 Early Help has been monitoring demand, and since withdrawing a number of delivery points there has been no reduction in families accessing early help. Overall, there has been an increase in demand across our offer. Early help plan demand during the pandemic increased at the same time as partner lead plan decreased due to the turbulence in schools. In 2022 demand stabilised to pre pandemic rates but there was a big increase in requests for Enabling Families with a rise of 83.7% from March 2022 to March 2023. Although a reduction in partner lead plans will have contributed to this, overall, it is reflective of the impact of the DST identifying needs early, so enabling the service to be more preventative and reducing the number of

families requiring a targeted intervention from Early Help or Social Care. The table and graph below show the overall demand for Early Help Plans and Enabling Families. Note the Early Help Plan dip in October 2022 is linked to the move to Mosaic.

Table 1: Year End Figures for Enabling Families (EF) and Early Help Plans (EHP)

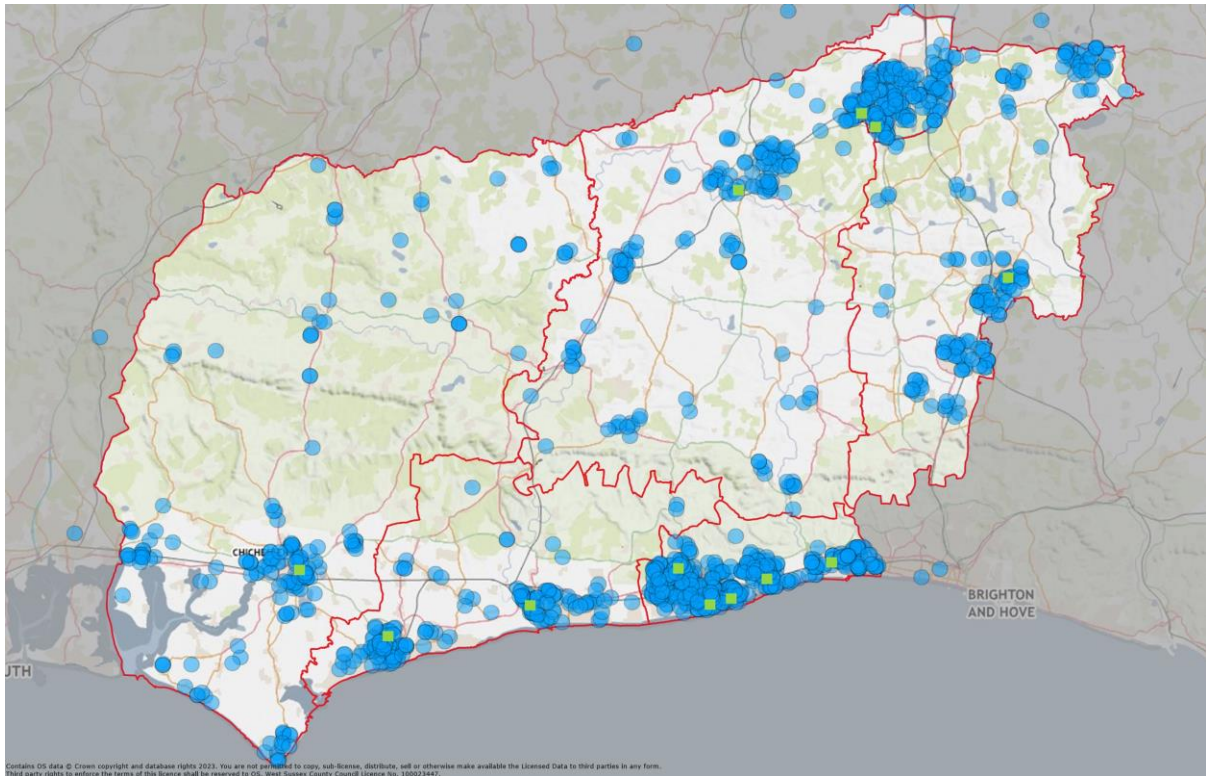
Year	EF	EHP	Overall Demand
March 2021	200	1251	1451
March 2022	527	1404	1931
March 2023	968	1272	2240

Graph 1: Monthly View of Early Help Plan and Enabling Families Figures

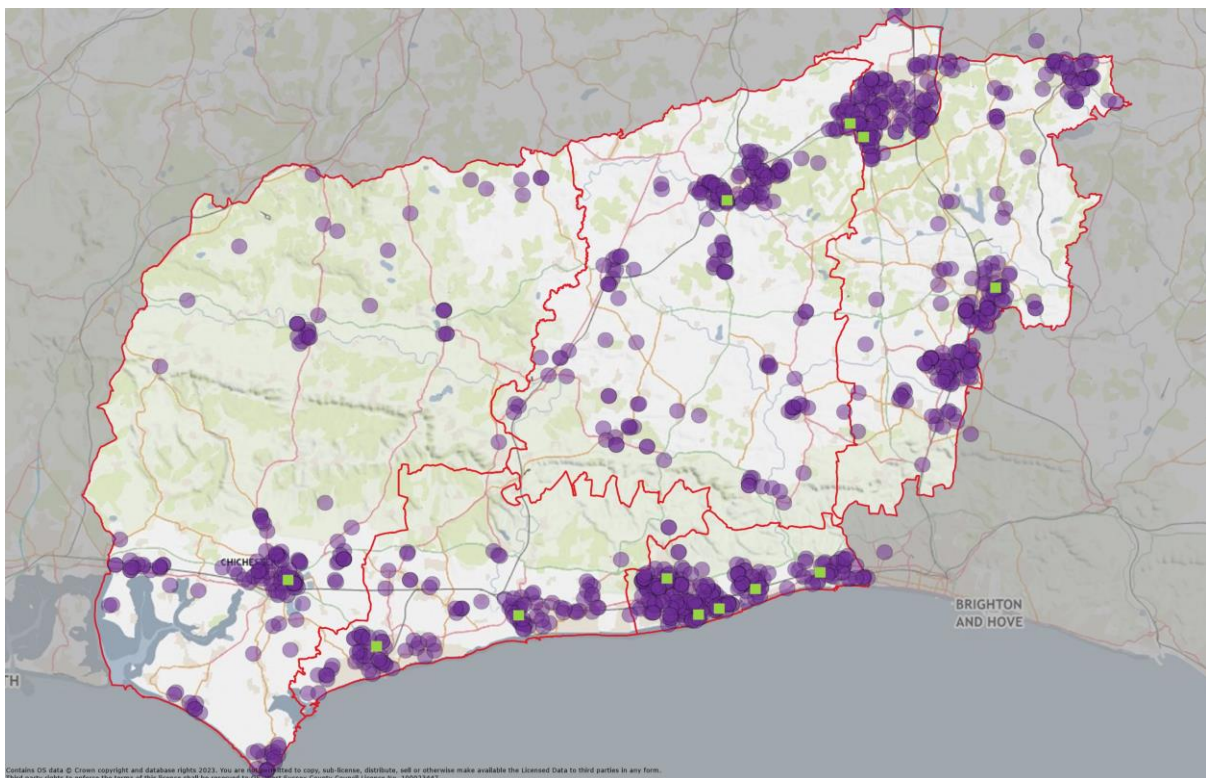


3.4 The service has monitored reach, to assess if the closure of delivery points has had an impact on accessing services. The two maps below provide a visual on the location of Early Help Plan and Enabling Family delivery. While there are expected clusters in urban areas where the highest deprivation is, it can be seen that there is a good reach into rural areas.

Map 1: Early Help Plans by location



Map 2: Enabling Families by location



3.5 Communicating the Early Help offer was a key priority for the service. Following implementation in January 2022 Early Help developed a wide-reaching communications approach and marketing material to ensure that partners, existing users of the Early Help service and future users of the service were:

- Aware of the services provided by Early Help, prevention through to targeted support
- Clear how to access help and support when they need it – including support without the need to access a centre

3.6 The communication and promotion approach included:

- **Website content and social media** - The support for family's section of the West Sussex County Council (WSCC) website was reviewed and updated with the latest information. This included updated imagery and details for all twelve Family Hubs. Prior to the Early Help redesign there were over twenty-five social media accounts for Children and Family Centres. These were reviewed to reduce confusion and duplication and replaced with 6 new accounts representing one for each district:

Horsham area – 2,300 followers

Adur and Worthing – 2,500 followers

Arun – 2,200 followers

Chichester area – 1,000 followers

Mid Sussex area – 2,600 followers

Crawley area – 1,900 followers

- **Animation** – to ensure the information about the Early Help offer was clear and easy to access a short, two-minute animation was created which continues to be shown on our social media accounts and via our partners. The animation is available to view on [You Tube](#) and to date has been viewed over 900 times.
- **Printed material** - not everyone has access to digital information and to ensure this wasn't a barrier to our communities understanding what the Early Help offer is, how to access help and support when they need it and to ensure an inclusive approach, we produced a range of printed material:
- **Signage** - the signage for all twelve Family Hubs was replaced to ensure all hubs are easy to identify and access.
- We produced 300 A4 posters (see below). These posters were distributed in key locations across West Sussex. This included libraries, GP surgeries and noticeboards in over 100 shops and supermarkets with a remit for community engagement. A6 postcards were produced and to date over 10,000 postcards have been distributed by our Early Help teams. These are used to hand out in Family Hubs, given to partners to distribute and

for Early Help staff to use at engagement events for example the six locality summer engagement events. Free standing roll top banners were produced and are available in all Family Hubs. These are used at both internal and external events to promote the Early Help offer.



- **Staff Support** – communications and promotion of the offer is a continuous activity. In Early Help our Partnership Support Officers hold responsibility for this and they have received social media training and continued support from the Family Information Service. This training and on-going support enables them to manage the social media accounts, make regular content posts and manage comments for their relevant local areas. To ensure promotion continues poster templates were produced to allow locality teams autonomy to create professional looking material to promote localised information, events and to create information in different languages, where appropriate.

4. Post Implementation Monitoring and Impact

4.1 Post implementation monitoring, and impact needs to be understood within the context of two factors. First, due to the recruitment challenges there was not a full staff complement during 2022. Secondly, direct comparison of the whole service offer to the pre re-design offer is not possible due to changes in the national Supporting Families Criteria which was implemented in October 2022. Despite this, the change of offer has delivered a number of positive impacts which are demonstrated below through a range of information and performance data:

- A significant reduction of unallocated early help plans from 388 in April 2022 to 120 in April 2023 and remaining on a downward trajectory.

- A significant reduction in waiting times for allocation from average 25 weeks in April 2022 to an average of 7 weeks in April 2023 and remaining on a downward trajectory.
- Recruitment is now within normal rates, and we are onboarding the remaining new starters which will further assist with waiting times.
- More sustainable changes for children - Proportion of re-referrals for an early help plan within 12 months of successful intervention decreased during the pandemic and is within target at 6.2%.
- The improved targeted early help offer has resulted in less children going on to need a higher-level intervention from social care. The proportion of referrals to children's social care within 12 months of a successful early help plan increased during the pandemic but for the year 2022/23 ended within target at 4.28%.
- For the tenth year West Sussex County Council has delivered on the Supporting Families outcomes target of 644 families "turned around" achieved in 2022/2023.

4.2 Early Help was subject to the recent Ofsted ILACS in March 2023 following the Inadequate judgement in 2019. As a result, Children Services has been graded as Requires Improvement with Good for leadership. Ofsted identified significant changes in Early Help and provided the following feedback, stating:

Early help support makes a positive difference to children's lives. Most families receive the right level of support at the earliest opportunity and their situations improve. Meaningful work with parents helps to provide them with insight and understanding about their children's needs and improve their parenting. Safety plans are routinely completed, with children and their families. Many children have their own age-appropriate understanding of what to do when there are risks and concerns. When concerns increase for children, appropriate action is taken to step up to statutory services.

4.3 The service has many examples of good qualitative feedback from partners and families. Below are two examples:

'The service is a better place, and the families of West Sussex are better served all the time that Caroline is in post, and I am really appreciative of the work she has done with X and X under some very challenging and complex circumstances.' Deputy Headteacher, The Angmering School

'If I had to describe Tracey in a few words, it would be fairy godmother! She came to us waved her magic wand and went above and beyond to help and assist my family. She has given me the courage and belief to be able to manage situations I previously never thought I could. She truly is one of a kind and I believe any family would be lucky to have her. I cannot fault her in any way, and I know in a review you should always have room for improvement, but she was incredible in every aspect. She was kind, caring, understanding, and determined. I can't thank her enough for what she has done for my family and wish her all the best in life.' Parent Mid Sussex

- 4.4 The service also produced a brochure for the Ofsted Inspection which highlighted the culture and work of Early Help, this is attached at Appendix C for information.

5. Partners' Impact and considerations

- 5.1 During the consultation period, a number of concerns were raised with regard to the impact on partners as early help were withdrawing from a number of delivery points. An update on progress with delivery of the Early Help Asset Plan was provided to the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee in June 2022. The Committee were provided with the details of all surplus assets and undertook detailed scrutiny of their usage.
- 5.2 Whilst there have been acknowledged challenges Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust (SCFT) who deliver the Healthy Child programme, continue to deliver services from the 12 retained Family Hubs with access in the majority of Family Hubs on a full-time basis. Following extensive negotiations, SCFT are currently leasing three former Children and Family Centres (CFC's) and have a hiring agreement at a fourth; they also occupied a further two centres but withdrew from these due to operational reasons. SCFT also now deliver services from an increased number of libraries. The Midwives currently operate from one former CFC attached to a library.
- 5.3 The County Council's Communities directorate offered additional support to community groups and organisations affected by the closures of the centres. As the buildings had been largely closed due to the Pandemic requirements many of the original community groups and organisations had already adapted and found alternative methods of delivery outside of the buildings such as virtual online sessions. Each Local Member was kept up to date with the progress of vacating and delivering an alternative solution in their division.

6. Finance

Revenue Consequences

- 6.1 Annual on-going revenue savings of £1.750m are now being delivered as a result of the redesign of the Early Help Service. As per the plan reported in July 2021 these savings were delivered over a three-year period, with £1.000m delivered in 2020/21, a further £0.550m in 2021/22 and the final £0.200m in 2022/23.
- 6.2 24 staff were made redundant through the restructure of the service at a cost of £0.359m for loss of office and a further £0.211m for added years pension contributions. All these payments were made during 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- 6.3 Due to difficulties with recruitment to the increased targeted intervention roles after the pandemic, as well as delivering the annual savings of £1.750m, the service also underspent by a further £1.342m in 2022/23. However, with vacancy rates now back within normal ranges the underspend is expected to reduce significantly in 2023/24.

7. Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Reduced take-up of services by limiting the number of centres.	The services have continued to be available in all areas alongside community outreach services. Key partners are offering services from the centres and systems are in place for the development of partner relationships at a local level. The Dedicated Schools teams are effectively engaging with schools for the early identification of concerns and need for support 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.	Alternative access and delivery points have been negotiated and secured 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 and financial impact risks in respect of the potential for DFE grant clawback; and dilapidations in the case of leasehold properties.
Staffing shortages due to recruitment challenges and the realignment of posts together	Targeted recruitment campaigns have been successful in attracting new recruits

8. Policy alignment and compliance

- 8.1 **Equality Duty** - The service recognises the primary importance of child safeguarding, sound family relationships, good parenting, and the nurture of children to fulfil their potential. The provision of the service is based on need, as determined through formal assessment protocols. This need is not explicitly related to formally protected characteristics, but any such characteristic is and will continue (as now) to be respected in compliance with equality principles and taken into account in the way in which the service is delivered.
- 8.2 In terms of those with a protected characteristic, the service will ensure enablement and support across all relevant categories, and this will both continue and be enhanced through the County Council's Children First agenda.
- 8.3 **Human rights assessment** - The County Council has an overriding duty to safeguard the Human Rights of children in need, and this has been recognised in the Children First agenda. The County Council is mindful of

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights – The Right to Respect for Family and Private Life - and has taken relevant factors into consideration in preparing this report. The processing of personal and special category data is subject to the County Council’s Data Protection Act policies and procedures in relation to discharging the County Council’s and its partners’ legal responsibilities.

- 8.4 The County Council is also mindful of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - which states that all children have the right to be consulted and to have their opinions heard on any decision that affects them. Hearing, understanding, and acting upon the voice and experiences of the child is a key design principle of the Children First service improvements.
- 8.5 **Climate Change Strategy** – The 12 Family Hubs are in areas of higher population density to therefore minimise journey times for most users. The increase in provision direct to families at home or in a venue close to them, reduces their need to travel and limits both travel time and the impact on the environment and assists to offset any potential increase in travel time to Family Hubs.
- 8.6 **Crime and Disorder Implications** - There are positive implications for Sections 17, 37 and 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in the prevention and reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, and in reducing offending and re-offending by young people all of which are affected by the activity discussed in this report.
- 8.7 **Public Health** – The Early Help service 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
- 8.8 To continue to support these focus areas, Early Help staff are trained in Make Every Contact Count and complete health assessments with families to identify specific health goals. The service also includes the Young Parents pathway and the provision of Healthy Start vitamins and breast pump loan as well as promoting key health messages in Family Hubs. The Healthy Child Programme also continues to be delivered through the 12 Family Hubs (see paragraph 5.2)

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Appendices:

Appendix A - The Early Help Strategy April 2023

Appendix B – Supporting Families National Framework Criteria April 2022

Appendix C – Early Help Brochure November 2022

Background Papers: None