

Proposals to improve Somerset's early help approach

January 2019

Following the public consultation on proposed changes to Somerset County Council's (SCC) support and services for children and families and having due regard to the updated Equalities Impact Assessment, the following proposals have been drawn up for consideration by key partners on the Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board and Children's Trust Board. The Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee provided their comments to help inform these final proposals for Cabinet consideration on the 11 February 2019.

There are 5 key areas of activity that if addressed simultaneously with the three Safeguarding Partners and other stakeholders in Somerset (including District Councils, NHS agencies, schools and early years settings, the police, housing providers, and the charitable, voluntary and community sectors) will develop and improve the early help offer in Somerset and will prevent any loss of support for families with level 2 additional needs in the year-long implementation phase:

1. Improve the support and interventions for children with some additional needs – level 2.
2. Strengthening Early Help infrastructure with partners and redesigning the early help "Front Door" to be a multi-agency support and triage point.
3. Strengthening community capacity and capability.
4. Improve the support and interventions for children with complex needs – level 3
5. Strengthen the multi-agency strategic approach to early help in Somerset

In detail the 5 programmes cover:

1. Support / intervention for children with some additional needs – level 2

- Retain getset level 2 team in its current form, for the implementation period until March 2020 providing support to children with some additional needs at level 2 and their families by delivering group work and some key parenting programmes in areas identified as greatest need.
 - The team will move to providing family group work rather than case work and working alongside other key agencies that support 0-4 year olds; for example health visitors and Early Years settings enabling more families to be supported. This group work could include nurture groups run on particular themes eg school readiness, and drop in sessions in local community venues.
 - The team will deliver some key parenting programmes and groups
 - The council will develop a "train the trainer" model to provide training for evidence-based parenting programmes open to any early years or

community group to enable them to identify and support more vulnerable families.

- The team will continue to work with partners and be based within the 8 family hubs; they will act as community agents and help partners through training to identify and provide support for families so that partners can continue this once the getset level 2 service ends in March 2020.
- Continue to work with schools through Team Around the School (TAS) Co-ordinators to develop the TAS model, ensuring it is fully embedded and continues to develop, plus strengthen performance monitoring process to assess impact. There is the potential to extend the model to cover ages 0-4 and 16+ and widen the current school age remit.

2. Strengthening Early Help Infrastructure with partners and redesigning the early help “Front Door”

- In line with Children’s Services ambition to support families to be independent and resilient and in line with the SCC digital strategy, a greater emphasis and attention will be placed on self-help and self-reliance for parent/carers by:
 - Work with partners to assess where we hold information relating to advice and guidance and seek to bring this together into a single access point for our families. For example signposting families via Somerset Choices and the local offer (see below).
 - Re-design and resourcing of Somerset Direct (SD), the council’s contact centre, to be first point of contact for young people and families (based on adults’ model) providing advice and guidance in a more comprehensive way, only referring onto the Early Help (EH) Advice Hub if appropriate.
- Re-model EH Advice Hub as a multi-agency support and triage point providing support and training for professionals and for families requiring more intensive telephone advice.
- Assess requirements for implementing the Early Help Portal and / or roll out of the Early Help Module (EHM) to a wider group of professionals across partners to support them in early help work with families. (The cost of portal implementation is approx. £124k one-off with £50k annual recurring costs)
- Undertake further development of the current Early Help Assessment (EHA) into a digital form enabling quicker and simplified process for all practitioners and assessments that make sense to families.

3. Strengthening community capacity and capability / market development

- Establish an annual £200k commissioning / grant fund (which could be increased with other partners’ financial contributions eg Clinical Commissioning Group, district councils):
 - Initially focused on providing alternative help for families at level 2, for example investing in parenting programmes, and consideration to establish a children’s offer within community connect and community catalysts, developing and enhancing the current Adult’s model into a holistic family model that can better support children and families within their localities (based on successful implementation and learning from Adults commissioners).

- This fund will be facilitated by SCC with application/tender panels drawn from the multi-agency Early Help Commissioning and Area Advisory Boards to seed fund support at level 2 and 3 of need. Learning from other grant schemes will be used to develop this grant scheme eg short breaks with the aim to have this in place for April 2019.
- Develop stronger, collaborative relationships with district councils working in partnership to develop and deliver a community development offer.
- Collaborate with partners and larger voluntary and community sector provision eg Home-start West Somerset, Safe Families for Children, Yeovil4Families, YMCA etc to identify further opportunities and join up participation activities to ensure the voice of the child is heard.
- Strengthen the multi-agency Early Help Area Advisory Boards in each district council area to understand local needs, to hear the voices of young people, undertake local audit of provision and identifying gaps and prioritising early help action in their areas. This will allow integration with the emerging neighbourhood model.
- Utilise Somerset Choices and the SEND Local Offer as a key resource of information, advice and guidance to families by ensuring community groups, support and activities are widely publicised, thereby supporting individuals to help themselves and promote independence.

4. Support / intervention with children with complex needs – level 3

- Remodel and integrate SCC Children's Services level 3 services in line with PeopleToo recommendations.
- Retain a separate Children with Disabilities level 2 and 3 team and explore integration arrangements with SEND and the NHS to provide a coherent neighbourhood offer.
- Remodel the Education Welfare Service to support the schools-funded Level 2 service
- Through the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme, funded by Department for Work and Pensions, Somerset will be testing models of face to face support to families starting in April 2019 at no cost; £38k additional grant has been secured to provide additional support
- Provide parenting work with families of young offenders utilising a £70k Youth Justice Board (YJB) grant in 2019/20 (following £40k 2018/19)
- Test a business case to implement the national model of Pause in Somerset - a programme of support to vulnerable mothers who have, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children being taken into care.

5. Improve multi-agency strategic approach to early help

- Strengthen the multi-agency EH Strategic Commissioning Board including revised membership to focus on:
 - Providing clear messaging and communications to promote and engender support for early help in Somerset
 - Measuring impact and effectiveness of early help activity across the “system”
 - Holding all partners to account in delivering their responsibilities for early help
 - Strengthening the link with the 4 Early Help Area Advisory Boards
 - Ensuring the voice of families and young people is heard in developing and assessing the early help support offer in Somerset.
 - Greater presence from the community and voluntary sector

- Continue to embed the Troubled Families (TF) approach and strategic outcomes across partners
- Improve information sharing and continued development and use of the TF data warehouse to provide intelligence on need and allow targeting of resources
- Continue development and awareness raising of early help “tools” ie Early Help Assessment, portal/access to EH systems, professional choices and effective support (thresholds) guidance
- Continue to train and develop the early help workforce