

## **Somerset County Council Response to the public consultation on the proposed changes to the County Council's support and services for children and families**

Somerset County Council (SCC) would like to thank everyone who contributed to the consultation; over 900 people gave feedback with 731 responding via the consultation questionnaire. The results have provided vital information and opportunities to follow up which will help to develop early help support and services in Somerset and inform those making decisions.

Below we have summarised the most common comments made through the consultation and responded to them.

### **1. Summary**

The consultation responses generally show respondents do not want to see cuts to the getset service despite the message in the consultation documentation for the need to make immediate cuts and concentrate scarce resources on statutory services. Responses from some key partners have highlighted the need to have a mixed economy of services and a better co-ordinated offer from a range of partners to more effectively support children and families.

SCC is very pleased to be working more closely with the District Councils to explore greater opportunities to collaborate on community development. In addition, the multi-agency Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board has an increasingly strong membership which is actively taking forward the need for effective early help across Somerset.

SCC and partners have agreed that providing early help for families is everyone's business and it is clear that getset have gone above and beyond for families sometimes in the absence of partners meeting their early help responsibilities. This was highlighted by Ofsted in the inspection report published in January 2018:

- *Early help, although improved, requires further integration with partners to increase its capacity.*
- *Early help services in Somerset have improved, yet are not fully established across the partnership.*

## 2. Our Approach

Question 2 asked how respondents felt about our proposal to focus funding on children and families with most significant needs.

Your Response	Our response
<p>2.1 Many people felt early help was important and needed to be resourced</p>	<p>We agree and believe there is a wealth of support already in place across all partners but that it is not yet well co-ordinated, signposted or that all partners fully play their part.</p> <p>We already invest £17.8m in providing a range of services (see Appendix A below) but believe that supporting the community and voluntary sector will help to make a greater difference to local areas in a more sustained way alongside the proposals for the re-design of Somerset’s early help approach.</p>
<p>2.2 Partners’ responses particularly outlined that families may not have their needs met earlier and will “escalate” to statutory services.</p>	<p>Through the agreed Somerset Early Help Charter and Early Help Strategy all partners in Somerset have agreed that <b>“early help is everyone’s business”</b> and that every agency has a responsibility to support children when issues are first noticed.</p> <p>The council has invested, and will continue to fund, level 3 services which also provides support to families with more complex needs, before statutory social care intervention is required. The council acknowledge that more needs to be done to co-ordinate the range of activities available both within the council and with external partners, and actively plans to address this over 2019 with the proposals to improve early help in Somerset.</p> <p>Through our proposals we need to ensure that access to early help is clearly defined and communicated to all practitioners who work with children and families.</p> <p>The National Audit Office report on “Pressures on children’s social care” published in January 2019, lays out</p>

	<p>recent trends in pressures on children's social care. Amongst its key findings are that <i>“Local authorities which have closed children's centres have not had any consequential increases in child protection plans. We found that the closure of these centres has not resulted in increased statutory children's social care activity. Indeed, for those local authorities which had closed centres there was a slight fall in the number of child protection plans in future years”</i>.</p>
<p>2.3 The use of the Early Help Assessment (EHA) by partners is seen as a barrier to supporting families</p>	<p>The EHA is the agreed inter-agency assessment tool for all Somerset Safeguarding Children Board members. This is set out in Department for Education 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' statutory guidance setting out what organisations and agencies that have functions relating to <b>children</b> must and should do to <b>safeguard</b> and promote the welfare of all <b>children</b> and young people under the age of 18 in England.</p> <p>If the EHA is completed appropriately by front line practitioners (guidance is provided via the <a href="#">‘Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset’ guidance</a> and <a href="#">Professional Choices website</a>) this can help identify the child/family's needs and what support is required.</p> <p>We have continued to review the EHA with partners and have further plans to create a digital form to aid completion and look into how we can roll out the electronic Early Help Module to the wider early help workforce.</p>

Discussions have been held between SCC and representatives from the district councils who reported **“...there could be ways that the two tiers could work more effectively with wider partners to deliver good early help services for less cost. There is a lot of community activity going on at this time, such as One Teams, community hubs and community support groups, all of which could be utilised to build a greater community early help offer”**. The group felt that more time was needed to fully understand the impact of the proposals before they were implemented.

The consensus from the One Team / Together Team co-ordinators across Somerset was that “**a strong locality-based, family and child support network of both statutory and voluntary sector agencies would provide a far more effective approach to improving children’s lives**”. This is in line with Somerset’s Early Help Strategy and we support this view, outlining in the consultation proposals the aim to invest more resources in the community and voluntary sector in future. We recognise there is more to do to co-ordinate a coherent approach to identifying and supporting families that need additional help.

The first step to achieve the above ambitions is to bring all partners, including the voluntary sector and community leaders together to understand the needs in communities and agree how we all work together to support children and families.

### **3. Parenting support groups and support for individual families**

<b>Your response</b>	<b>Our response</b>
<p>3.1 Nearly 90% of respondents had some awareness or were well aware of other groups running in their area</p>	<p>This is reassuring and we are working to ensure this information, and more, is available on the <a href="#">Somerset Choices</a> website so all families can have this information. We will continue to maintain and update Somerset Choices.</p>
<p>3.2 Some comments highlighted concerns regarding the gap that would be left by removing getset level 2, and how accessible the other range of groups are for families, in terms of geography and cost.</p>	<p>A further analysis of this has been undertaken which has been used to inform the Equalities Impact Assessment.</p> <p>The getset level 2 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 such as school readiness, and drop in sessions in local community venues.</p> <p>Our proposals show how we are keen to invest in the voluntary and community sector to increase local provision, as they are often more agile and innovative in improving outcomes for families. They can then work in collaboration with other public services that are already provided; we recognise this will take time to develop and so we are proposing interim measures to ensure that there is continuity of support.</p>

Your response	Our response
<p>3.3 The majority of comments received from families highlighted how well regarded and valued the getset service is, having positive benefits for their children and themselves. Groups run by getset are seen as providing a safe non-judgmental environment for parents to meet and the family support workers are able to spot potential issues where perhaps others may not.</p>	<p>We are pleased the staff have been recognised for the great work they do with families. The next step is to ensure other groups receive training and support so that they too can provide this. This can be achieved by accessing training bids which offer a range of learning such as face to face as well as e-learning as we acknowledge volunteers are juggling work and family life as well as volunteering.</p>
<p>3.4 There appeared to be some concern that volunteers are untrained or unable to provide high quality support for children and families.</p>	<p>There are many examples nationally, and in Somerset, where volunteers provide exceptional care and support to children and families with additional and very complex needs, and SCC are keen to support this type of model in future.</p> <p>For example, <b>Home-Start West Somerset</b> currently have over 60 volunteers, 36 of which who are classified as 'home visiting' volunteers and mainly offer support to families in their home. All volunteers are checked through the disclosure and barring service (DBS) and follow a robust recruitment process. The majority of volunteers at Home-Start are retired professionals eg lawyers, teachers, nurses and undergo an 8 week induction course before they work with families. They use the national Home-Start UK's quality assurance programme (which is their equivalent to Ofsted) and in their last inspection in October 2017 they achieved 96% which demonstrates a 'good quality' standard.</p> <p><b>Safe Families for Children</b> who operate in the Mendip and Yeovil areas are a church-based organisation who are recognised nationally. They have 61 volunteers in total which again are mainly of retirement age and retired professionals.</p> <p>Across <b>6</b> areas nationally, feedback has been collated from service users. against a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being totally unsatisfactory, 10 being outstanding):</p>

Your response	Our response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>90%</b> of people responded <b>8</b> or higher when asked - <i>How did you like the help given by Safe Families for Children?</i></li> <li>• <b>94%</b> of people responded <b>8</b> or higher when asked - <i>How did you like your Safe Families for Children volunteers?</i></li> <li>• <b>98%</b> would recommend Safe Families for Children to a friend</li> </ul> <p>SCC have an 'Approach to volunteering' document in place which sets out definitions of volunteers and guiding principles around management, outcomes, standards and recruiting and matching of volunteers.</p>
<p>3.5 Some feedback from partners concerned the use of the early help assessment (EHA).</p>	<p>There is still some confusion in partner agencies as to when an EHA should be undertaken. An EHA is not required to attend universal or open access groups. An EHA is only undertaken with full consent of the family where additional help, often needing other partners involvement, is required. SCC continues to support the review of the EHA with partners (as mentioned in 2.3 above), provide training and advice through the Early Help Advice Hub, and there are plans to re-model the hub as a single multi-agency support and triage point to provide support and training for professionals and for families requiring more intensive telephone advice. These plans will enable partners to engage more fully in meeting their early help responsibilities.</p>
<p>3.6 In a small number of responses, there appeared to be a misunderstanding that there would be no individual case work for families in place</p>	<p>There remains a range of support via casework available at level 2 and 3, from both the council (see appendix A below) and other partners eg health visitors and PFSAs for school age children that will continue.</p>
<p>3.7 A petition with over 500 responses was received in relation to the <b>Key</b></p>	<p>Previous decisions made by the council identified the Key Centre as one of the 8 retained family centres, and that is still</p>

Your response	Our response
Centre in Frome and a concern this would close	the case; it will remain open. Health visitors, other council family services and potentially other public sector and community services will be utilising the centre for the benefit of local families.

#### 4. Getting involved

Your response	Our response
<p>4.1 In relation to the question (question 8) regarding <b>start-up funding</b> to help individuals, groups or voluntary organisations set up, there was 54.5% who either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' compared to 25% who either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' and a further 20% 'not sure'. Some respondents felt strongly that if there was funding available this should go to retaining the level 2 service.</p>	<p>The Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board, which is a multi-agency group, considered this response and suggested it may be that respondents felt there was little detail of the vision and what the future could look like which meant people were unsure and therefore couldn't agree; they could however see what was being proposed to be cut.</p> <p>Following the staff reductions already undertaken in getset the level 2 service consisting of 11 FTE family support workers covering the whole of Somerset costs £280k. The Council's view is that by investing an annual £200k in community based local support, this has the potential to become a much larger, more effective and sustainable resource with the ability to attract further funding from other sources. The proposals set out in Appendix 1 explain how we will achieve this.</p>
<p>4.2 There were 110 respondents who gave their details and would like to be involved in supporting early help in the future.</p>	<p>This is a really positive response; thank you to those that left contact details.</p> <p>SCC and the district councils are planning district events in the spring/summer 2019 inviting parish and town councils, local stakeholders and partners including charitable, voluntary and community groups plus the respondents to this consultation. The aim will be to explore local early help opportunities and actions to take forward.</p>

## **Appendix A: Other early help support provided by the Council**

This list provides details of early help support and services that the council provide. This complements the details of groups and activities included in the consultation paper. In addition, practitioners working in universal services eg schools, nurseries, GP practices have a role in identifying and supporting children that may need extra help.

SCC provides early help through its Children with Disabilities Team which offers support to families who have a child with a disability. This includes one to one emotional support, respite and opportunities for children to attend activities.

Team 8 (Community Adolescent Team) provide early help support to adolescents (Year 7 upwards) and their families whose children are experiencing complex (Level 3) issues, such as drug and alcohol misuse, child to parent violence and unhealthy family relationships.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Team provide advice and guidance for children and young people who need additional help with learning and who may require an Education Health and Care plan (EHCP). They will also signpost to other relevant organisations.

Parent and Family Support Advisers (PFSA) work in schools providing help for parents and families. They support parents with some of the everyday problems that they might be having with their children so that the children are happy to attend school and engage in their learning. PFSAs support parents with things like behaviour, attendance and health and can signpost families to more specialist support if it is needed.

The Team Around the School (TAS) model is a local network which consists of schools and other support services that meet on a regular basis to have a shared conversation about children and young people that they may be worried about and that early help and intervention may stop concerns escalating. The model provides the infrastructure for agencies to work together to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Local Authority also provides funding to support to the Early Years sector to ensure sufficient places and to support settings to meet the needs of young children through support and challenge using the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework.

Support Services for Education (SSE) is a traded unit within Somerset County Council that offers a wide variety of support services to all education and early years providers and other establishments. Their services are funded through the Local Authority to undertake statutory assessments through the Education Psychology Service. Funding is also provided through Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs to support education establishments, children and young people 0 – 25 year by providing assessment, support and guidance through the following services: Autism and Communication Service, Educational Psychology Service, Hearing Support Team, Vision Support Services, Learning Support Service, Early Years Areas SENCOs, Portage Home Visiting Service and the Physical Impairment and Medical Support Team (PIMST) (List not exhaustive). More information can be found here: <http://www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk>



SCC fund health visitors and school nurses and from April 2019 this service will be delivered directly by SCC providing a 0-19 years Public Health Nursing service that supports children, young people and families from conception to adulthood. This is the first step in developing a children and young people's public health service which is place based and closely linked to the communities, organisations and services who can positively influence the factors affecting the life chances of children, young people and families in Somerset.

The council is funding and directly providing a range of level 2 and 3 support services, but recognises that more needs to be done to co-ordinate the range of activities available both within the council and with external partners, and actively plans to address this over 2019.