

Update on CAF-14b Proposals for the alteration and / or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families - getset

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Cabinet Member: Councillor Frances Nicholson, Lead Member for Children's Services
Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1. On the 12 September 2018, Cabinet approved two proposals relating to changes within the getset service:
- CAF-14a relating to reductions in staffing levels across the service as a response to current demand levels and increasing caseload targets
 - CAF-14b relating to the launch of a public consultation exercise to review the provision of Somerset County Council early help services, to include the proposal that SCC no longer provide level 2 services.

CAF-14a was subject to a call-in by the Chair of Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families resulting in a recommendation to Cabinet to defer implementation of CAF-14a pending the completion of the public consultation agreed via CAF-14b. Cabinet at its meeting in October 2018, approved to continue with the immediate implementation of CAF-14a.

This report provides details of the public consultation and emerging proposals. Final recommendations will be presented to cabinet for consideration on the 11 February 2019.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- Consider and comment on the proposals (appendix 1) for improving early help activity within Somerset;
 - Consider how they can continue to review the development of Somerset's early help approach, through increased scrutiny and challenge, to ensure all partners meet their statutory early help responsibilities laid out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018'.

3. Background

- 3.1. **Somerset County Council's (SCC) getset services** were established in 2014 encompassing children's centre services at level 2 (universal and targeted support for 0-4 year olds) and level 3 family support work for families with children aged 0-19 years. The service is countywide and delivered in family homes, community buildings and in children's centre buildings.

getset is just one service providing early help for children and families in Somerset.

3.2. Both the Children's Act 2004 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (statutory guidance) set out early help arrangements:

Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

- *Identify children and families who would benefit from early help*
- *Undertake an assessment of the need for early help*
- *Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child*

Local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. This requires all practitioners, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment.

Children and families may need support from a wide range of local organisations and agencies. Where a child and family would benefit from co-ordinated support from more than one organisation or agency (e.g. education, health, housing, police) there should be an inter-agency assessment.

A lead practitioner should undertake the assessment, provide help to the child and family, act as an advocate on their behalf and co-ordinate the delivery of support services. A GP, family support worker, school nurse, teacher, health visitor and/or special educational needs co-ordinator could undertake the lead practitioner role. Decisions about who should be the lead practitioner should be taken on a case-by-case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.

3.3. Somerset's Early Help Strategy 2016-2019

The Somerset vision is that Early Help is everyone's responsibility; we want children, families, communities and agencies to work together so that families are assisted to help themselves and are supported as soon as a need arises, thereby improving the overall wellbeing and quality of life of all Somerset's children, young people and their families.

Effective early help will strengthen resilience in children and young people themselves, in their families and build capacity in communities that keep children, young people and their families healthy and safe.

Somerset's principles are:

- Sorting out problems early means that children and families do better

and the costs to society are less.

- Providing help early is an important part of protecting children from serious harm or neglect ('safeguarding') and improving health.
- When individuals and communities are able to help themselves, everyone benefits.
- We want to recognise the strong contribution of volunteers, communities, local charities and support groups and businesses in Somerset.
- When we provide services we want to make sure this is based on evidence of what works.
- We want to spend more of our budgets tackling problems before they get worse, but at the moment the demand for services to tackle serious problems is growing. We need to find the right balance.

3.4. The Ofsted inspection, published in January 2018 identified that partners still had to do more to meet their responsibilities.

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. However, the majority of families benefit from responsive early help services that are effective in reducing risk. Practitioners successfully support families who are living with domestic abuse, poor parental mental health and substance misuse, through the provision of targeted and universal interventions.

Early help assessments and plans are improving in quality. However, they are still too variable and not all are sufficiently focused on actions for improving children's outcomes. Assessments do not always analyse children's experiences sufficiently and not all risks are clearly articulated. Plans do not consistently address the needs identified in assessments, or what families need to achieve within specific timescales

3.5. In September 2018 Cabinet agreed to launch a public consultation exercise in relation to the council's provision of level 2 services, namely getset level 2, with the proposal to make significant changes to this service (CAF-14b). Details of the consultation are outlined in section 4 below and detailed in appendices 2 and 3. Through this consultation process a number of new opportunities have been followed up, most notably with the district councils to explore greater joint working across community development roles and resources.

3.6. Following the consultation exercise and considering the feedback and likely impacts, a set of proposals have been developed, detailed at appendix 1.

These proposals outline 5 key areas of activity that if addressed simultaneously with the three Safeguarding Partners (Local Authority, police and the Clinical Commissioning Group) and other stakeholders across SCC, District Councils, NHS agencies in Somerset, 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 avoid any cliff-edge for families 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 SCC “Front Door”
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

These proposals will be discussed with stakeholders via the Early Help Commissioning Board and Children’s Trust Executive prior to presentation to cabinet on the 11 February.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1. The purpose of the consultation was to understand the impact of the Council no longer providing getset level 2 services for children with additional needs (as detailed in the Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset guidance) and how best the Council, as the lead agency, ensures effective early help across the partnership in the future. The consultation was aimed at service users, partners and staff who work with children and their families across Somerset
- 4.2. The public consultation was launched on Monday 5 November 2018 and ran for 8 weeks, closing on the 31 December 2018.
- 4.3. The public consultation reflects the views of over seven hundred people through a questionnaire.

In addition, over 110 people attended public drop in sessions or were engaged via parenting support groups across the County.

A wide range of partners and professionals who work with children and families were also engaged through existing forums and meetings.

The full consultation report can be found at appendix 2. SCC’s response to the consultation can be found at appendix 3.

5. Implications

- 5.1. The Council has considered the feedback to the public consultation and used this to update the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (appendix 4) and form a separate response paper (see appendix 3).
- 5.2. The EIA shows that there will be some negative impact to some children and families by the proposed cessation of getset level 2 services at this time,

particularly those that access support via universal groups run by getset. The availability of some parenting programmes also appear to be a gap in provision. The early help arrangements in Somerset, whilst improving as indicated by Ofsted, have still some way to go to become more effective across the partnership.

- 5.3. The proposal is to retain the level 2 service for a further year to March 2020, in which time further development work can be undertaken with partners and the community and voluntary sector to develop Somerset's early help offer.
- 5.4. It is clear from the feedback from the consultation that there are some incorrect conclusions being made, which have been addressed in the separate council response paper (appendix 3). This includes a view that level 3 and 4 services (for those children and families with more complicated needs and those requiring social care involvement) are reducing or ceasing which is not the case and was clearly articulated in the consultation papers.

6. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Proposals to improve Somerset's early help approach

Appendix 2 – Consultation report - Proposed changes to the County Council's support and services for children and their families

Appendix 3 – SCC response to the consultation report

Appendix 4 – Equalities Impact Assessment

7. **Background papers**

- 7.1. Children and Young People's Plan 2016-2019
Early Help Strategy 2016-2019
CAF-14a and CAF-14b – part of the papers considered at Cabinet on 12 September 2018
"Call-in" of CAF-14a – Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee 8 October 2019
"Call-in" of CAF-14a – Cabinet 17 October 2018

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.