

Early Help Overview

What is Early Help?

Early help is a means providing support as soon as problems begin to emerge; at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to;

- Identify children and families early who would benefit from support to stop the problems from getting worse;
- Undertake an assessment of need to identify what support is required;
- Provide targeted early help intervention to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child and family.

What was the issue?

OFSTED (September 2014):

“Too many Family CAFS do not meet a good enough standard and fail to capture the views of children and their families, or to include clear action plans.”

“Data and information on cases which step down to universal services or step up to children’s social care are not collated.”

“The single assessment, introduced in April 2014, is not ensuring that children and young people’s needs are met in a timely way.”

“The authority has failed to act upon the recommendation from previous inspections to improve the consistency and quality of referrals, including notifications from the police.”

“The threshold for intervention by children’s social care is not understood by all partner agencies.”

“The quality of many referrals is poor and not all agencies complete the multi-agency referral form (MARF). This results in a significant number of inappropriate contacts to children’s social care.”

What Have We Done?

The structure:

- Between October and December 2015 we successfully appointed three Heads of Service, nine Team Managers and three Children Centre Leads to the Early Help Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the integrated Locality Manager Structure. These appointments provided the necessary leadership and capacity to drive forward the improvements required at pace. The Early Help Leadership Team meets weekly and the extended Early Help Team meets every two weeks.
- We have embedded a new structure of integrated, colocated teams moving from nine previously separate service areas to one integrated Early Help Service based in localities and aligned with Childrens Social Care.
- In January 2016 we introduced the Early Help Triage Team to address the confusion being expressed by partners and to consolidate in excess of thirty different referral routes into early help, into one single pathway.

HR and Finance:

- We quickly developed a tight grip and oversight of all HR and financial matters across Early Help and through a stringent moratorium on non-essential spend and tight vacancy control eradicated an inherited budget pressure of £250k. In 16/17 we achieved our savings target of £501k plus an additional £500k of in year savings through robust vacancy management. Further savings targets include; £421k in 17/18 and £500k in 18/19 *(with £100k to be brought forward into 17/18). In December 2016 the Early Help SLT completed a further HR / Finance validation exercise.

Performance:

- In September 2016 we launched the Early Help Monthly Performance Report.
- Achieved 100% PDR's (Appraisals)

Practice:

- In January 2016, after extensive consultation with partners, we launched the new Early Help pathway with a single Early Help Assessment Tool & Request for Early Help Support based on the Strengthening Families model and a one family, one worker, one plan principle.
- We commissioned Pepper Stacey Ltd to provide assurance on Inspection readiness for our Children Centres.
- Implemented the new Early Help Quality Assurance Framework.
- In February 2016 we launched our weekly Step-Down Panel co-chaired by Childrens Social Care and Early Help Heads of Service.
- Delivered Restorative Practice training across the Early Help workforce and are now set to widen this to partners and DLT in 2017.
- In September 2016 Early Help piloted the first CYPS Performance Clinic reviewing the various Early Help Service Plans.
- In November 2016, all Health Visitors and School Nurses received bespoke briefings to establish the importance of carrying out the Early Help Assessment and sharing responsibility for the throughput and volume of cases in the system. This was delivered jointly by an Early Help Head

of Service and the Senior Lead from Health. Further work is underway to ensure that the assessment is embedded within the health case management system to support this work.

- In November 2016 we produced; “What do good early help services look like?” A document which looked at the last two years of ‘Good and Outstanding’ local authority Children’s Services Inspection Reports.

Engagement:

- From January 2016, Heads of Service and locality Team Managers visited all Rotherham schools to establish a coproduced Early Help Offer aligned with need in localities and the Learning Community which was well received by head teachers.
- Locality managers attend regular meetings in schools and hold joint meetings with Children’s Social Care in localities.
- Throughout October and November 2016 we undertook a significant engagement piece with our staff, young people and partners on the Draft Early Help Strategy. The draft strategy was shared with; the Voluntary and Community Sector, the CYP Strategic Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Safeguarding Board, Early Help Steering Group, Early Help Review Board, All Council Staff, DCLG (Troubled Families Unit), Sheffield City Council, DfE, our Practice Improvement Partner (Lincolnshire County Council) and all Rotherham Ward and Parish Councillors.
- In October 2016 we launched the new Early Help branding after extensive partner, staff and young people focus groups.
- In January 2017 we are implementing our new approach to parenting to embed consistent, validated approaches in conjunction with Sheffield City Council.

Governance:

- We have established a Member led, Early Help Review Board that has met monthly since November 2015. Part of the work of the Review Board is to oversee savings proposals across early help. The purpose of the Review Board is; *‘to understand the impact of the Early Help savings proposals and to oversee the development of Rotherham’s Early Help Offer and Strategy in light of these proposals.’* The Board has recently approved the 17/18 Savings proposals of £421k and agreed to a whole service review to achieve additional savings of £500k in £18/19.
- We convened the new Youth Offending Team (YOT) Board on the 10th May 2016 and are working with the Youth Justice Board to facilitate a peer review of leadership and governance in January 2017.
- In June 2016 we launched the multi-agency Early Help Steering Group, which is the mechanism for ensuring partners contribute fully to Rotherham’s Early Help offer through completion of Early Help Assessments, undertaking the lead professional role and engaging in Team around the Family Meetings. The Steering Group reports to the Children and Families Strategic Partnership and meets bi-monthly.

What difference has this made?

Children and families:

In May 2016 we launched an exit questionnaire for families that can be completed anonymously either on-line through survey monkey, or by hand with options of where to return it.

By the end of Quarter Three (December 2016) we had received 171 Exit Surveys. Some examples of the results are below;

- 97% (61 people who responded) rated their overall experience of the help and support they received from the worker(s) within the Early Help Team as good or excellent service.
- 98% (69 people of who responded) said they got the support when they most needed it.
- 98% respondents (70 people) said we delivered the Service they were expecting.
- 97% (57 people who responded) said they did feel listened to and involved in the planning and support they received.
- 96% (66 of people responded) said our staff dealt with all the problems they asked them about.

"I didn't ask for support and didn't think I needed it. I spoke with someone at the hospital when I took XXX and they thought I needed some support with his behaviour. The referral was made by the neighbours who had reported me for XXX crying in the middle of the night. When the worker came she helped us with a lot of things we wouldn't have thought about."

"I was in crisis and was self-harming and I had lots of support from early help during this period"

"Felt my voice was heard and was not afraid to say how I felt and what my issues were. "

"The service provided was above and beyond what was expected."

Feedback (1)

My name is Cherie; I called for help regarding my son Harrison last year as I was having a tremendous amount trouble with him regarding XXX School. I was sent a lady called Diane who came to my house later that day. What I want to say about her I don't think I could put into words because she has been an absolute god send. Her support throughout this very emotional and stressful time has been incredible. She has supported Harrison so much and helped him begin to overcome his horrendous time at School, but not only has she has been a great support to Harrison but to myself and my family to the point that I don't think we would have got to this stage in our lives without her. Her advice has always been spot on and the way she always seems to understand Harrison is truly an art form. The way she cares about her job really does come through and I wanted to say that she has been like a guardian angel sent to us in our hour of need and boy did we need it. People seem to write letters of complaint which I have done a few myself this last few months so I wanted to write something positive and say you have a truly caring woman working for you who has had such a positive effect on my family. Thanks Cherie

Feedback (2)

I have recently done the 6 weeks parenting course, I found this to be a big eye opener. Sometime I would only see the bad and found it hard to see a positive, this course helped me to always try and find that positive. I do feel like I understand my young adult a little better. I am not saying that I have it all figured out but I hope my son would say I take more time to listen to him and don't shout as much. I have become firmer and make him do his bit around the house now and he knows that this has to be done by him or this will not get done at all.

I feel I have more control in my house even with my 3-year-old; things seem to run that bit smoother. I couldn't thank Victoria and Vicky more. They are lovely women and don't judge and always have time to listen to your problems. We need more women like this in the work and I would recommend these classes to everyone. You are not given instruction with a child but these classes help and guide you. They should give these to all parents.

Partners:

It was great to be in a forum where you felt that you were being listened to. It was also useful to talk to others from different professions and providers. This fostered a much better understanding of the whole area of Early Help.

Universal services, preventing escalation to Social Care. Very positive session. Love the proposed structure with Team Manager and Link Worker. Love the simple form which is then allocated out and very bespoke for the family. I will share all this with my LC Heads.

Performance and Quality:

Whilst the new Early Help arrangements have only been in place since 18th January 2016, the signs are encouraging. We now have the systems and processes and the right mix of skills, experience and leadership to continue with the pace of change.

Although I have only made referrals to the service recently, I have been struck by the professionalism and willingness to help of the admin staff within the EH Triage team. In addition, it is incredibly helpful as a practitioner to have a service which addresses referrals in such a timely fashion – my patients have been very pleasantly surprised to hear about the timeframe in which you process referrals, and being able to offer support at the point of need means that problems are far more likely to be addressed before becoming larger and more entrenched. Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust.

In October 2016 we migrated to the new case management system, Liquid Logic. *It is anticipated that this will have a negative impact on our performance in the short term until the new systems and processes have had time to embed and the migrated data validated.

As well as direct feedback and external evaluation (Safeguarding Board partnership survey in March / April 2016) and Ofsted April 2016, our progress and impact is measured through;

- Monthly Performance Meetings (RMBC)
- Monthly Progress Board (RMBC)
- Monthly Improvement Board (Partners)
- Early Help Review Board (Elected Members)
- Early Help Steering Group (Partners)
- Early Help (Monthly) Performance Scorecard
- CYPS Improvement Plan
- Corporate Improvement Plan
- Early Help Action Plan
- Early Help Service Plans

Performance summary:

- Since the launch of the Early Help offer (18th January 16 – 13th January 17) 1103 Early Help Assessments have been completed. This compares to 815 FCAF's that were completed in the preceding three and a half years.
- The Step- Down Panel was implemented on 9 February 16 and continues to meet weekly. It is jointly chaired by senior managers from both Social Care and Early Help. Since April 16 (this financial year) we have stepped down 260 families and 607 children (up to 31 December 2016) to our Early Help Locality Teams, along with making recommendations for 29 families and 54 children to be worked with by our partners.
NB: In total since the panel began we have stepped down 335 families and 802 children. 41 families and 76 children were recommended to partners.
- NEET performance in December 16 was 3.0% therefore meeting the local target. The figures below show statistical, regional and national comparisons and are from the month of November as this is the latest published data. The figures relate to the new tracking cohort of academic age 16/17, and also incorporate the removal of the NEET adjustment calculation.

November 2016				
Rotherham	Stat Neighbours	Regional	National	
3.0%	3.6%	3.0%	2.6%	NEET
3.0%	4.7%	3.7%	5.2%	Not Known
6.0%	8.3%	6.7%	7.8%	Combined NEET / Not Known
96.9%	94.3%	95.3%	94.2%	YR 12 Participation
87.6%	85.8%	88.5%	85.8%	YR 13 Participation

- At the end of Quarter Three, registration rates in Children's Centres currently stand at 93% against the local annual target of 95%. Even more encouraging, the 30% Lower Super Output Areas are already at 98% which is above target and is excellent progress in this area.
- In 2016/17 Rotherham has committed to identifying and engaging 882 families in the Troubled Families Programme (known locally as Families for Change); In December 75 new families were attached to the programme and therefore means that at the end of the quarter performance is at 68% of the annual target. Work is underway to address to increase the rate of identification and engagement by improving processes to connect the good practice in Early Help Triage and locality teams with required tracking systems.

What do we still need to do and by when?

Finance

Continue with our tight financial grip and; implement our savings proposals for 2017/18.

Partners

Whilst we continue to benefit from great support at a number of strategic Boards and partnerships, the latest performance figures, show that since April 2016, over 92% of all new Early Help Assessments are being completed by RMBC Early Help Staff.

Our priorities for the next few months include:

- Continue to increase partner engagement in the Early Help offer.
- Develop and embed Family Group Conferencing, Edge of Care services and expand the MST offer.
- Develop the Early Help Performance Scorecard further to include locality caseloads.
- A revised focus on Persistent Absence and School attendance
- Continue to roll out restorative practice.
- Improve, (Month on Month) upon our key performance targets. (***See Early Help Monthly Performance Scorecard**).
- Further embed our Quality assurance processes; Audit activity and Exit Surveys, including 'Beyond Auditing.'
- Launch the Early Help Strategy.
- Consult on our Early Help Attendance Strategy.

Ofsted Improvement Visit: Early Help 19th – 20th April 2016

On the 19th and 20th April Early Help was subject to an Ofsted Improvement visit. Two inspectors were on site and met with a range of staff, partners and service users. Very little of what Ofsted fed back was news to the Early Help Senior Leadership Team (SLT) which is positive and reinforces the previous Ofsted findings during monitoring visits that **'leadership and governance arrangements are now strong.'**

The overall judgement was that **"The Council know themselves well and that the pace of improvement in relation to development of the Early Help programme over the past six months has been positive and rapid."**

The following highlights are taken directly from the lead Inspectors written note to the Strategic Director of Children's Services and will be followed up with a formal letter.

- **Significant work has been undertaken to improve operational buy in from partners and this has improved significantly with schools and learning communities.**
- **The vision and priorities of the council are clearly set out in the new early help and Family Engagement service plan.** These are appropriately aligned with wider strategic planning to increase preventative and early help services through a variety of established, recent and planned services.
- **Refreshed governance arrangements are in evidence.** There is a clear commitment from senior managers and elected members to improve the quality of services and to improve outcomes for children and young people through a robust focus on early intervention and prevention. The Commissioner made early help a top service priority. A member led Early Help Review Board and early help sub group of the children and young people's strategic partnership is in place to oversee the development.
- **The council and its partners share an ambition** regarding the increased offer of early help to prevent the escalation of family difficulties through integrated and locality working.
- **There is strategic buy in from all major stakeholders.** This has the potential to provide valuable services and resources which are aligned to the views and needs of local communities.
- **Partnerships with the Police and YOS are particularly strong and well aligned with the troubled families' programme.**
- Work is underway to ensure police officers are fully briefed on the value of use of early help pathways. There is however still some way to go to secure full engagement and operational challenges remain to engage health visiting, school nurses and CAMHS. More work needs to be done to increase and improve education and health partners confidence not only in the early help offer but in their capacity to deliver early help assessments and support.
- **Threshold descriptors are clear and align with early help pathways to services** which outline a virtual pathway to and signpost professionals, practitioners and families

to early help services. We have seen evidence while on site of the application of these descriptors to inform decision making. (Early help triage, step up and schools).

- **Re-referral rates to Children's Social Care are very slowly decreasing.**
- **All professionals in and out of RMBC are positive about the Early Help Triage process and find it helpful.**
- **There is evidence of robust management oversight of the team and decisions, appropriate and educative advice and challenge back to referrers, including the MASH and locality teams.**
- **New and robust quality assurance and performance monitoring arrangements in place for early help** and will go live from 1st April 2016. Routine DFE performance reporting systems are in place, enhanced with bespoke success measures which intend to capture for example; contact timeliness.
- **All staff spoken to, while feeling the pain of change, are incredibly committed, enthusiastic and excited about the changes. All have seen the integration of teams and the Ofsted process as a learning experience and opportunity to improve the lives of children in Rotherham, which was heart-warming.**
- **The Step-Down Panel provides quality assurance re the appropriateness of the recommendations to step down.** Currently there is an analysis of themes and areas for improvement for example, category of need, hot spot localities and gaps in service provision.
- **The Families for change programme is well embedded in the early help programme** with the Families for Change coordinator sitting on the Early Help Senior Leadership Team (SLT).
- **There is evidence of real synergy between the programme, police and Youth Offending Team. Rotherham has exceeded its target by 2% in identifying its cohort of 371 for the next phase.**
- **There is evidence staff have been and continue to be consulted on the transformation programme and while anxious about their jobs and what it means for them, remain on the whole positive.**

The New Early Help Structure was put in place in October 2015. All 15 Management posts were appointed to by December 2015. We launched our new Early Help; Pathway, Offer, Request for Support and Early Help Assessment on January 18th 2016 and on February 9th we launched our weekly Step Down Panel. Within this context, the feedback received is very encouraging and is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the whole Early Help Workforce.