

Report to Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Development of Early Help

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Amanda Chadderton,
Cabinet member HR and Corporate Reform

Officer Contact: Gerard Jones, Managing Director Children and Young People

Report Author: Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Family Connect
Ext. 4196

1 September 2020

Purpose of the report

The report provides the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee with an update on the development of the early help offer for children and families in Oldham, and the connections to other areas of activity including place-based working. It also highlights linkages to a range of other work relating to prevention and early intervention in the Borough.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to note the update on the developing approach to the multi-agency early help offer, and to contribute views on how to further strengthen this.

Development of Early Help

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 This report provides the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee with an update on the development of the early help offer for children and families in Oldham, and the connections to other areas of activity including place-based working. It also highlights linkages to a range of other work relating to prevention and early intervention in the Borough.

2. Early Help

2.1 Working together to safeguard children (2018) is the statutory guidance for inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This recognises that providing early help is more effective than reacting later in promoting the welfare of children. It defines early help as *“providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years.”* This includes addressing parental issues such as poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse which impact upon the lives of children in the family.

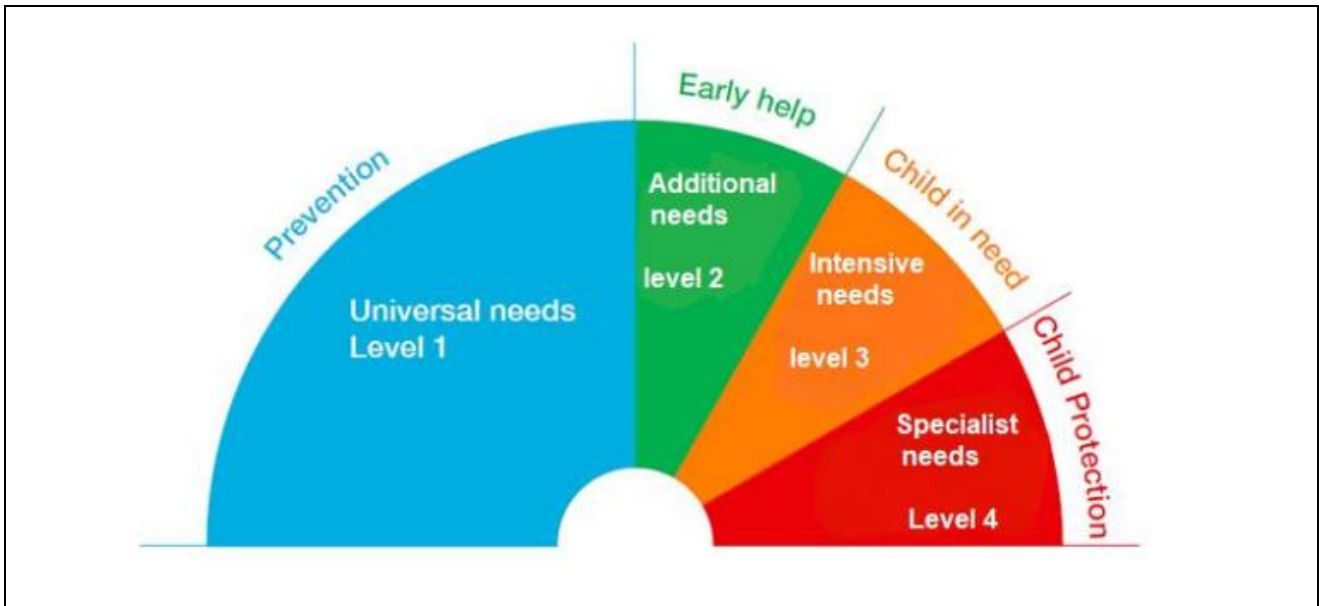
2.2 Working together highlights the need for local organisations and agencies to work together to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
- Undertake an assessment of their 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 promote outcomes for the child.

2.3 In every area the safeguarding partners need to publish a threshold document which sets out the local criteria for accessing help and services. The continuum of need from the Oldham document is shown below. The full document is on the Safeguarding Partnership website at: <https://www.olscb.org/cms-data/depot/hipwig/Effective-Support-and-Help-Framework-2019.pdf> There is an early help offer at all levels of need, but providing support earlier, and at lower levels of need, is crucial in reducing the impact of adversity on children’s lives and the likelihood of problems escalating. The levels are:

- Universal - Level 1: The needs of children are met by universal services such as schools, healthcare services, leisure and community services which are readily accessible to all, as well as the love, care and protection from parents and carers;
- Additional - Level 2: Children with additional needs that can be met by support, which may only be short-term, but if ignored could lead to an escalation of need;
- Intensive – Level 3: Children who have multiple and complex needs requiring a multi-agency response with a lead professional. This is the level that may require Children’s Social Care to undertake a S17 Child in Need assessment.

- Specialist – Level 4: Children with acute needs requiring statutory, high level intervention. This could be due to safeguarding issues including child protection concerns where there is actual or likely significant harm. This will require Social Care to undertake a S17 Children in Need assessment or S47 enquiries.



2.4 The diagram below, highlights how early help is everyone’s business, and the range of organisations contributing to this at different levels.



3. Oldham Family Connect

- 3.1 The earlier work on Oldham Family Connect resulted from an identified need to strengthen the support offer for targeted support for children and families at levels 3 and 4 of the continuum of need – preventing the need for social care intervention, working alongside social workers to improve the effectiveness of interventions and supporting step-down from social care intervention to reduce the likelihood of needs re-escalating. This gap was reflected in the numbers of contacts to children’s social care, and the rate of re-referral of children who had previously been subject to social care intervention.
- 3.2 Oldham Family Connect was therefore concerned with strengthening the offer at this level of need for children and families, aligned with a move to place based working.
- 3.3 Linked to this, there was also a need to simplify the support offer for targeted support at higher levels of need, and also to provide a clearer differentiation of the offer for children and families from that for adults without children.

Current targeted support offer

- 3.4 The Early Help service part of the offer was established in April 2015, and resulted from the recommissioning of a range of services to deliver a better integrated offer based on an approach of multi-skilled key workers supporting a whole family. This included Parent Support Advisers, the CAF Team and Community Outreach Team. A range of budgets were brought together to support this, but with the largest contribution from Public Health. At this time there was a single Health and Wellbeing Directorate which included both children’s and adult services, and the Early Help services were established as an all age offer. However, in practice the teams predominantly work with families with children, as well as a smaller number of adults without children (around 15% of cases in 2019).
- 3.5 In relation to adults, the Early Help service provides targeted prevention and early intervention support which contributes to Care Act 2014 responsibilities to prevent or delay the development of needs for care and support and to reducing needs that already exist, in order to promote the well-being of individuals.
- 3.6 The targeted early help support offer at different levels is summarised below:
- The Family Support Team in children’s services support families work alongside social workers to support social care interventions, or to support step-down from social care. The team has 11 FTE case workers plus a supervisor.
 - The Early Help Intensive casework team in the Council work with individuals or families where needs are becoming more complex, and issues identified as becoming longer term and entrenched. The family / individual may have already accessed a lower level of Early Help support. The team comprises 13.5 FTE caseworkers plus two supervisors.
- Support will typically be provided in relation to multiple issues to help families / individuals to address issues and put strategies in place to manage them. At this level of support families typically feel unable to resolve issues themselves, and need support to manage these. The support may include addressing issues such as risk taking behaviour by children and young people, involvement in crime and school exclusions, as well as concerns about the impact of domestic abuse, substance misuse and parental mental health on the family.

Support is usually provided for up to 6 months, with workers supporting around 8 families at any time who would each be worked with three times per week. The team work with families alongside, or stepping down from social care, as well as families just below the level of social care intervention.

- Positive Steps Early Help casework support is delivered at both Low and Medium level, though as demand has risen, this is increasingly only at Medium level. The service is delivered by a team of 35 case workers, organised in three teams each with a manager.

This is a commissioned service which provides caseworker support for 3,500 individuals and 4,000 through group and community activity across the range of issues. As well as Early Help casework, the service delivers a range of other interventions including health checks, smoking cessation and promotion of the two year old offer.

Medium level support is provided for families that are becoming more complex and when their needs cannot be met by universal services alone and the family would benefit from additional targeted support to improve their circumstances to stop an escalation in needs. The service provides practical support to help families/individuals to either address issues or to put strategies in place to manage them. Issues may be interconnected, for example the family may have issues in managing children's behaviour alongside problems with parental mental health, and these will impact on each other. Scores for key issues on the Early Help Assessment may typically be in the range 6-8, and the family might have lower scores on multiple issues, or score highly on one or two key issues.

- The Early Help Development team in the Council build the capacity of universal services and other partners to provide Early Help support. They provide advice and training to partners, for example around Early Help Assessments, leading or supporting Team Around the Family meetings and developing the skills and confidence of partners to support families themselves rather than escalate to other services. Every school has a named Development Worker. They also undertake casework – unpicking issues with families, working with other partners to support families and completing short interventions. The team includes a Mental Health Care Navigator for young people to assist children and young people not accepted for support by Healthy Young Minds to access alternative mental health support.
- Within the NHS, some GP practices in Oldham have Focused care practitioners who work with the patient's household around wider issues impacting on their health. They assess need and work with health and community contacts to provide practical support.

3.7 These are part of the much wider early help offer, and the Reform team led in reviewing the prevention and early intervention offer in order to inform the approach to recommissioning the all-age Early Help offer (the service currently delivered by Positive Steps described above).

4. Developing the multi-agency early help offer

4.1 During 2020 there has been a rethink of the approach to Oldham Family Connect. This has reflected a recognition of the need to consider the multi-agency early help offer to children and families at all levels of need, rather than simply focusing on changing the support offer at the intensive level. In order to address outcomes such as improving the number of under fives achieving a good level of development, and reducing the number of children referred or re-referred to social care, there is a need to address the early help offer across the whole system – not just particular parts of it. Strengthening the early help offer is integral to the Children’s Services Improvement Plan.

Early Help Strategy

4.2 A piece of work is therefore being undertaken to refresh the Partnership’s Early Help strategy for supporting children and families. This includes reviewing and developing the offer, and providing clarity about how this operates across the continuum of need. This includes supporting universal services in strengthening their early help offer, and improving the way in which agencies work together as a team around the family. This will assist in reducing the need to make referrals for targeted early help support.

4.3 A multi-agency Early Help strategic group has been established which is developing this work. Some of the key principles are:

- Early help is everyone’s business (not just the teams delivering targeted early help support);
- Providing the earliest possible help - delivering help when it is needed by those best placed to provide this (usually those who are already working closely with families and know them well);
- Minimising transfers of children and families between services;
- Focus on outcomes for children and on the voice of the child;
- Use of a restorative approach which provides both challenge and support, and is built upon good communication and development of strong relationships between children, parents and professionals. Naming the issues and being able to verbalise emotion supports the development of trust, and positive behaviour change;
- An asset based approach which builds upon strengths, and focuses upon building the capacity of families to be in control of their own lives.

4.4 The refreshed strategy will be agreed by the partnership in late 2020. As part of the process, further service mapping is being undertaken in order to identify ways in which the service offer can be developed, including consideration of opportunities for achieving outcomes in a more cost effective way – contributing to addressing the budget pressures faced by the Council and other partners.

4.5 The project is no longer being described as Oldham Family Connect, as this was only focused on one part of the Early Help offer rather than thinking about the multi-agency offer as a whole.

Targeted early help services

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- 4.6 As part of the wider development, it is intended to reorganise the targeted early help services within the Council. At an intensive support level there will be separate services for adults without children, and for families with children. This reflects the need to provide an offer for adults with complex dependencies e.g. those with multiple problems around issues such as mental health, substance misuse, insecure housing / homelessness, offending or anti-social behavior and self neglect.
- 4.7 In relation to intensive support for families with children, it is proposed to reorganise the Council early help and family supports into place based teams in line with the development of the district model. These teams will provide support for families at the edge of social care involvement, alongside social care and stepping down following social care involvement. They will also provide support to other services in districts in delivering the early help at lower levels of the continuum of need. As part of this, there will be arrangements in each district for partners to come together (with the consent of families) to discuss how to best meet the needs of families where needs are likely to escalate without support.
- 4.8 Schools will be a key partner in these multi-agency arrangements, and Stockport Council has been providing peer support under a Department for Education social care innovation programme relating to their Team Around the School model.
- 4.9 To support partnership working around children and families in the five districts, there is a need for governance arrangements which will enable partners to come together to agree priority outcomes for children and families - informed by evidence of need in the area - and to plan how they will work together to address these. This could potentially be achieved by adapting the role of the Children's Centre District Advisory Boards.

Commissioned Early Help offer

- 4.10 There are a wide range of commissioned services delivering early help support for children and families. One key commission is the all-age early help offer, currently delivered by Positive Steps as described at 3.6 above. This is currently being recommissioned, with the new service scheduled to go live on 1 January 2021. The health promotion and smoking cessation elements of this have now been split out into a separate commission to provide a greater focus in delivering the different elements of the offer. Within the specification, the new provider of the targeted early help support will need to align their services to the developing model of district working.

Inter-connected activity

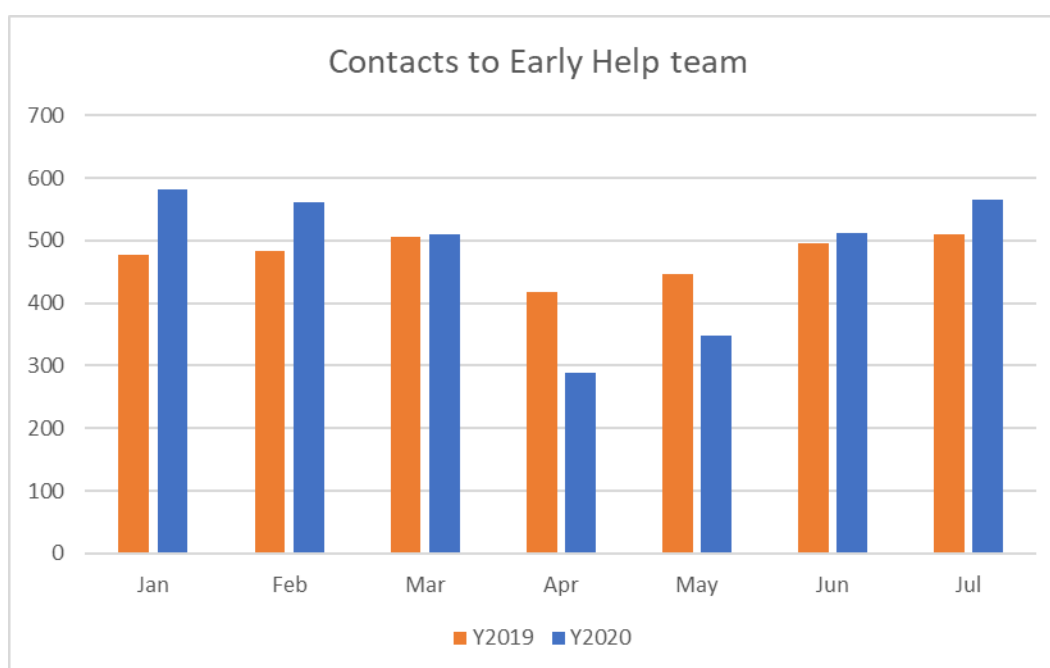
- 4.11 The development of the early help offer is closely connected to a number of other pieces of work. These include:
- review of the partnership continuum of need document. This will not alter thresholds (which are set out in the Working Together guidance), but will provide greater clarity and guidance;
 - recommissioning of the Right Start contract over the next 18 months which relates to the delivery of health visiting and school nursing services and the operation of children's centres;
 - implementation of the Early Years strategy;

- review of the parenting offer;

4.12 There is also ongoing systems development within the Council to help improve the responsiveness of the service. As part of this, an integrated children’s front door is being created within the MASH which is bringing together children’s social care and early help staff to work more closely together as a combined team in responding to safeguarding concerns and requests for support relating to children and families. Staff have already been brought together, and IT system changes are being implemented to support this, including moving Early Help casework into the Mosaic social care system in October. These changes will support improvements in the service provided to children and families.

5. Impact of Covid on demand for Early Help

5.1 The figure below compares numbers of contacts to the Early Help team in the MASH seeking support for children / families and adults without children. This includes those seeking mental health support for children and young people from Healthy Young Minds and referrals to Independent Domestic Violence Advisers which are also processed by the team.

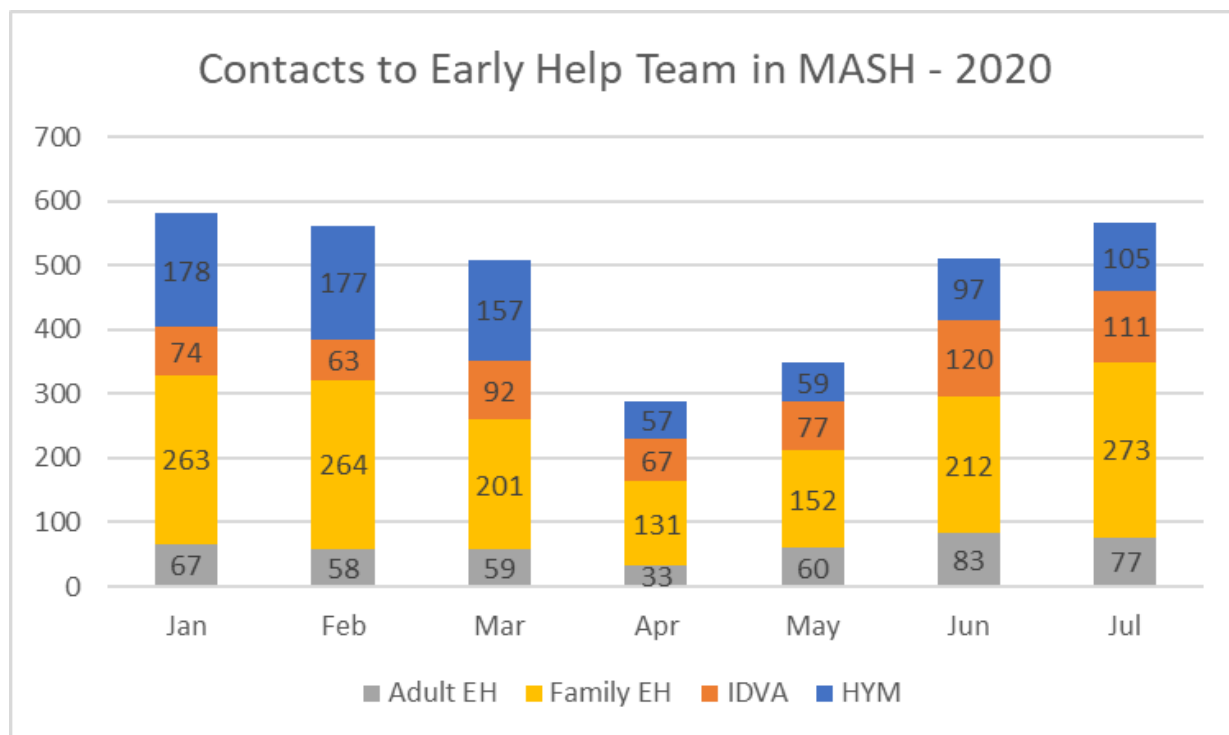


5.2 As the figure shows, prior to the onset of measures in response to Covid in mid March, numbers of service requests were higher in 2020 than in 2019. Demand for support was then lower relative to 2019 during April and May, but has since increased. The majority of contacts are initiated by professionals so that, for example, children not being in school reduces the likelihood of requests for support for children and families. In June and July numbers of contacts were higher than in 2019. A significant increase in demand for children’s services is anticipated in September when schools are fully reopened.

5.3 It is important to recognise that these figures do not include support delivered by the community hubs during Covid. These have particularly provided support around access to food, but have also addressed a range of other issues. Some staff from targeted early help

teams have been supporting this area of work. A lot of work has also been undertaken in partnership between social care, education and health to ensure that professionals have continued to have direct contact with the most vulnerable children.

- 5.4 The figure below provides a more detailed breakdown of the contacts through the MASH Early Help team during 2020 showing how contacts in relation to different types of support has changed. There has been reduced demand for all types of service during the Covid period.



6 Key Issues for Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee to discuss

- 6.1 The report has summarised work in relation to the development of the early help offer for children and families, explaining the shift in focus from Oldham Family Connect to the development of the multi-agency early help offer with a strong commitment across the Partnership to make early help everyone’s business.
- 6.2 There are a wide range of inter-connected areas of activity relating to this, including the development of the district model across a range of services.
- 6.3 The Partnership faces significant challenges in improving outcomes for children in the context of the current budget challenge facing the Council and other partners, and the impact of Covid on communities in which there are already high levels of disadvantage. A key issue is how more effective partnership around delivery of the early help offer can help to achieve this.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 The Committee is recommended to note the update on the developing approach to the multi-agency early help offer, and to contribute views on how to further strengthen this.