

Developing an Early Help Offer

The following is an emerging view of the likely characteristics of an early help offer and key issues to be tackled in its development.

Strategic and structural fit

- Need to define a common understanding of early help
- Strategic buy-in and direction from the Children's Trust and constituent partners is crucial to a clear vision and co-ordinated offer.
- Links with adult services across health, social care and probation need to be considered in terms of structural alignment of early help.
- Greater co-ordination likely to be required – services exist and interventions seeking to deliver early help happen, but often in an insufficiently co-ordinated way
- Design of early help offer should be part of a whole system approach and a clear understanding of local need. Improved Joint Strategic Needs Assessments may be an area for development.

Workforce, practice and organisation

- Early Help with appropriate social work input can provide a basis for practical family support linked to core social work principles.
- Awareness raising of early help is important, measuring knowledge and understanding of partners will be a qualitative measure of effectiveness
- Electronic case management and interface with ICS systems need to be addressed
- Clear and consistent job descriptions for Early Help workers should be a key tool in achieving a well-defined offer and core skills required for delivery, including ability to engage effectively with both children and adults
- Access to social work advice/ management on co-ordinated management oversight of cases at CAF/TAC level
- Information sharing protocols should be clear and underpin integrated working
- Agreeing and understanding how to measure impact, particularly where cases need to be escalated to social care despite previous interventions
- The role of Children's Centres needs to be defined dependent on local structures – all areas should challenge inconsistency, perceived over-reliance on education focussed offer and other common challenges.

The child's journey

- Information sharing and ICT should act as an enabler, not a barrier to integrated processes across the continuum of need
- Early Help offer should be well defined, but not separate from other statutory services with a shared focus on the child's journey and not 'step up/step down' or 'tiers' of provision.
- Clear articulation and expectations of the nature and level of social care involvement where thresholds are not met and after child protection plans are ceased.
- Importance of co-ordinated Early Help, CAF/TAC and Social Care resources at the 'front door' via integration, co-location or ownership of shared thresholds.
- Broaden and embed the use of basic social work tools including case summaries and chronologies across the system.
- Effective, independent review mechanisms for Child in Need cases within social care and into targeted services.

Learning and improving

- Consider Early Help as a strategic priority for the LSCB and help establish a joint understanding of accountability
- Need to measure impact in a qualitative, quantitative and outcomes-based way and acknowledge that it may take longer for quantitative and outcome benefits to be realised. This places greater emphasis on the need for robust and high quality qualitative measurement of impact.
- Regular service user feedback will be central to local authority, LSCB and Children's Trust efforts to quality assure and improve the early help offer.
- Embedding robust tracking, monitoring and review of CAF processes, plans and outcomes may be a focus for development for many areas.