People Select Committee

Review of Partnership Working in Early Help

Outline Scope

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Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

Early Help focusses on support and interventions for children and their families when needed most therefore this review will contribute to priority one – the best start in life to achieve big ambition. In particular it will contribute to the following key moves:

- Giving children and young people the best possible start, in an inclusive community where everyone can thrive
- A safe community for all children and young people

The review will also contribute to priority two – health and resilient communities, key move ensuring happy and healthy lives for all.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Early Help (EH) offers support to children and their families who require help with a range of presenting issues including behaviour, family relationships, problems at school, budgets or debt, children's routine or other difficulties they may be experiencing.

The Department for Education have recently published Families First Partnership Programme (FFP), which is the start of the National reforms and expectations on Local Authorities.

The vision of the programme
The FFP programme will support safeguarding partners to bring together targeted early help, child in need, and multi-agency child protection into a seamless system of help, support and protection. This includes services and workforces, such as family support workers, social workers and other specialist and alternatively qualified practitioners, coming together to support families.

By targeted early help, child in need and child protection, we mean:

- Targeted early help: children and families with multiple and/or complex needs that require a plan to be in place and a lead practitioner appointed;

- Children in Need (Section 17, Children Act 1989): a general duty for local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need or are disabled, and promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs;
- Child protection (Section 47): the duty on the local authorities to investigate where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

This review will aim to gain a greater understanding of the effectiveness of the partnership and early help offer across the partners.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- Are families getting the right support at the right time to prevent escalation of needs?
- Consideration of No Further Action (NFA) rate from Statutory Assessment
- What is the local authority's and partnership offer across EH?
- What is the demand on external partnerships to deliver EH interventions?
- How effective and strong is the partnership offer?
- How accessible are services?
- How clear is the offer for both professionals and families, and how easy is it to navigate?
- How effective are information sharing protocols across the partnership?

Who will the Committee be trying to influence as part of its work?

Cabinet, Council, partners

Expected duration of review and key milestones:

7 months (reporting to Cabinet in January)

Approve scope and project plan – May 2025
Receive evidence – June 2025 – October 2025
Draft recommendations – November 2025
Final report – December 2025
Report to Cabinet – January 2025

What information do we need?

Existing information (background information, existing reports, legislation, central government documents, etc.):

- Early Help System Guide https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-early-help-system-guide
- Families First Partnership Programme https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-first-partnership-programme
- Scrutiny review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment chrome-https://moderngov.stockton.gov.uk/documents/s8755/Select%20Committee%20Report.pdf

New information:

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)	What specific areas do we want them to cover when they give evidence?
SBC Officers: • Social Care • Education • School Support • Family Hubs • Early Help Teams	• Background information • Feedback from Early Help Strategy workstreams • The offer of support/what services are they offering? • How many families are working with partners? • How many families re-referrals are received? • NFA rate with Social Care Assessments
Partners including those on the Children & Young People Partnership • Integrated Care Board • Tees Esk and Wear Valley Foundation Trust • Education • Police • Catalyst • Family Action • HDFT 0-19 • Stockton Parent Carer Forum	• Data regarding number of families partners are working with & how many they refer to LA • Data regarding the number of families returning to partners for early help services • Partners experience of the partnership and how it works for them • Partners views on partnership
Other Local Authorities including pathfinder LA for the new reforms, Lincolnshire and Sunderland	• Best practice examples of how other LA's deliver Early Help with their partners
Service users	• Service users experience of accessing and navigating the most service • Service users experience of the online offer
How will this information be gathered? (e.g. financial baselining and analysis, benchmarking, site visits, face-to-face questioning, telephone survey, survey) Committee meetings, reports, case studies, desk based research, focus group of service user	
How will key partners and the public be involved in the review? Committee meetings, information submissions, focus group of service users	

How will the review help the Council meet the Public Sector Equality Duty?

The Equality Act 2010 protects everyone from discrimination on grounds of nine Protected Characteristics (including – but not limited to – age, gender, disability, ethnicity), and advance equality of opportunity for those with Protected Characteristics.

Public bodies must have due regard for advancing equality which includes:

- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people

The review will contribute towards meeting the Council's requirements under this Duty, particularly in relation to the outcomes for more vulnerable children.

How will the review contribute towards the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy?

Early Help ensures that children and their families have access to support and interventions when they are needed therefore the review will directly contribute to Stockton-on-Tees Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030: Focus Area 1: All children and families have the best start in life

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

This review will contribute to greater understanding of interventions and approaches which are effective at supporting children and families at the earliest opportunity. The review will also identify where partnership working can be improved.

Project Plan

Key Task	Details/Activities	Date	Responsibility
Scoping of Review	Information gathering	April 2025	Scrutiny Officer Link Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss aims and objectives of review	22.04.25	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Agree Project Plan	Scope and Project Plan agreed by Committee	12.05.25	Select Committee
Publicity of Review	Determine whether Communications Plan needed	TBD	Link Officer, Scrutiny Officer
Obtaining Evidence	Evidence SBC services/officers Service User Focus Groups Feedback from Focus Groups and best practice from LA's Evidence from Partners	02.06.25 07.07.25 August 2025 TBD 08.09.25 06.10.25	Select Committee
Members decide recommendations and findings	Review summary of findings and formulate draft recommendations	03.11.25	Select Committee
Circulate Draft Report to Stakeholders	Circulation of Report	November	Scrutiny Officer
Tri-Partite Meeting	Meeting to discuss findings of review and draft recommendations	TBD	Select Committee Chair and Vice Chair, Cabinet Member(s), Director(s), Scrutiny Officer, Link Officer
Final Agreement of Report	Approval of final report by Committee	08.12.25	Select Committee, Cabinet Member, Director
Consideration of Report by Executive Scrutiny Committee	Consideration of report	20.01.26	Executive Scrutiny Committee
Report to Cabinet/Approving Body	Presentation of final report with recommendations for approval to Cabinet	15.01.26	Cabinet / Approving Body