

REPORT TO CABINET
15 JANUARY 2025
REPORT OF PEOPLE SELECT
COMMITTEE

CABINET DECISION

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor
Clare Besford

Scrutiny Review of Partnership Working in Early Help

Summary

The attached report presents the outcomes of the People Select Committee's review of Partnership Working in Early Help.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

The topic was included on the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2025-2026. The review is now complete, and the recommendations have been endorsed by the People Select Committee for submission to Cabinet.

Recommendations:

The Committee recommend that:

1. A culture of shared responsibilities across the partnership is promoted to ensure that the principle of Early Help being “everyone’s business” is embedded within schools, health and the voluntary sector.
2. The re-design of the front door to Children’s Services embeds an Early Help focus, enabling timely outcomes and ensuring families are able to access the right support at the right time.
3. Advice and training are developed for schools and other partners referring to the Children’s Hub, to ensure families who could be better supported by Early Help services are forwarded to the most appropriate service for help and reduce demand on the front door.
4. A programme of training, tools and professional guidance is developed to support non-local authority practitioners in holding lead professional roles with children and families.
5. The design of a multi-agency data impact assessment, combined privacy notice, and data sharing systems to ensure effective and timely communication between the Council and its partners is supported.

6. A robust data collection system is established to measure partnership delivery of Early Help services.
7. The updated online offer is relaunched, promoting it to partners, schools, and residents. Self-navigation tools should also be introduced to empower families to access early, universal support without needing formal referral.
8. Partners are encouraged to utilise Family Hubs, basing and/or providing services in the venues where appropriate to ensure that these are accessible to children and families.
9. Further support is provided for partners to understand the needs of SEND families to enable them to offer appropriate Early Help service to these families.

Detail

1. Early Help ensures that families receive help and support at the earliest opportunity to improve the outcomes for children and young people. It seeks to prevent situations reaching crisis point that then requires statutory intervention. The aim of the review was to gain a greater understanding of what Early Help is in Stockton-on-Tees, as well as identify where partnership working can be improved, identifying key actions to improve and deliver Early Help.
2. The Department for Education (DfE) published the Families First Partnership (FPP) Programme in March 2025, which supports Local Authorities to bring together targeted Early Help, Child in Need, and multi-agency Child Protection into a seamless system of help, support and protection. The Council's current Early Help offer includes a wide range of universal and targeted support, demonstrating a strong commitment to prevention and early intervention. In addition, Early Help services are being provided by a wide range of organisations external to the Local Authority. While statutory interventions and response to safeguarding will remain with and be provided by the Council, we will seek to actively increase partnership activity across Early Help, promoting that Early Help is everyone's business, which in turn improve support provided to families.
3. The review's recommendations focus on strengthening governance structures, improving communication and accessibility to services, through investing in joint training and shared systems. By embedding the principle of shared responsibility across the partnership, we will seek to co-produce a clear strategy setting our joint approach to how we work with children and families. Promoting a more integrated and responsive Early Help system which ensures children and families receive the right support at the right time.
4. Contributions have been received from Early Help, Social Care, and Education services within the Council as well as several partners, namely Cleveland Police, Family Action, Harrogate & District Foundation Trust, and Stockton Parents and Carers Forum. A Family Hub focus group was utilised to hear users' views and experiences of those accessing Early Help. Additionally, Members attended two of the Children and Young People

Partnership Workshops, which were focused on co-producing an Early Help Strategy, taking a partnership approach to working with families across Stockton-on-Tees. The Committee also received feedback from officer visits to two Ofsted rated outstanding Local Authorities, Lincolnshire County Council and Sunderland City Council.

Community Impact and Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

5. A EPIA has been completed with the outcome that the recommendations will potentially have a positive impact on the protective characteristics of age and pregnancy & maternity.

Corporate Parenting Implications

6. There are no direct implications in the report.

Financial Implications

7. There are no direct financial implications in the report.

Legal Implications

8. There are no direct implications in the report.

Risk Assessment

9. The review is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

Wards Affected and Consultation with Ward/Councillors (refer to Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members)

10. This review is relevant to all Wards across the Borough.

Background Papers

11. None

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