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PROGRESS UPDATE: Review of Partnership Working in Early Help

SCRUTINY MONITORING – PROGRESS UPDATE	
Review:	Review of Partnership Working
Link Officer/s:	Kellie Wigley
Action Plan Agreed:	February 2026

Updates on the progress of actions in relation to agreed recommendations from previous scrutiny reviews are required approximately 12 months after the relevant Select Committee has agreed the Action Plan. Progress updates must be detailed, evidencing what has taken place regarding each recommendation – a grade assessing progress should then be given (see end of document for grading explanation). Any evidence on the impact of the actions undertaken should also be recorded for each recommendation.

Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Stacey McQuilling – Service Lead Integrated Front Door
Date:	December 2026
Agreed Action:	• Deliver a coordinated multi-agency communication campaign (schools, health, police, VCS, early years settings) to introduce the integrated Front Door and its benefits. • Provide clear partnership guidance outlining thresholds, pathways, and roles within Early Help. • Co-produce EH/Families First Strategy. • Host launch webinars and drop-in sessions for partners to build confidence and consistency in how Early Help concerns are managed. • Develop feedback loops so partners know the outcome of their contacts, reinforcing trust and shared ownership. • Develop Early Help Portal to log partnership activity.
Agreed Measure:	Success • Higher proportion of Early Help consultations or contacts made by schools, health, and VCS agencies rather than direct statutory referrals. • Reduction in inappropriate statutory referrals as partners gain clarity and confidence about thresholds. • Positive partner feedback on accessibility, clarity, and timeliness of the integrated Front Door.

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	Increased number of partners actively using the portal to record Early Help activity.
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	Since the launch of the new Family Help Front Door on 1 April 2026, there is strong evidence of progress in embedding a culture of shared responsibility across the partnership and reinforcing the principle that early help is everybody's business. Through the introduction of daily professional conversations, improved referral screening processes and a dedicated duty system, schools, health partners and voluntary sector organisations are receiving timely advice and support to make informed decisions about the most appropriate response for children and families. A host of external briefing sessions have taken place prior to the launch of the front door; these were very well attended. Refers receive outcome letters via the portal following referrals being received. To build on this progress, mapping work is underway to review the current Early Help pathway, understand the multiple access points into support, and identify opportunities to simplify and strengthen the family journey. Findings and proposals will be presented to the Families First Partnership Board to support continued system-wide improvement. This will allow us to further develop portals and registration of assessments and referrals. Families First Strategy is proposed to be completed for full launch of Family first Reforms come April 2027. Overall, the early indicators demonstrate positive cultural and operational change across the partnership, with increasing evidence that schools, health services, voluntary sector organisations and Children's Services are working together more effectively to deliver timely support and improve outcomes for children and families.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track: Overall, we believe strong progress has been made in a relatively short period of time. Since the launch of the new Family Help Front Door on 1 April 2026, the focus has been on establishing a new way of working, embedding processes, and building confidence across the partnership. Recognising that implementing a brand-new front door takes time, we continue to develop our understanding of demand, referral patterns and system throughput to ensure the model delivers the intended outcomes. Despite being in the early stages of implementation, the evidence demonstrates a positive direction of travel. We have seen increased utilisation of Early Help pathways, greater engagement from partner agencies, improved professional consultation arrangements, and a significant reduction in contacts progressing to statutory assessment. These changes

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	indicate that partners are increasingly working together to identify and respond to needs at the earliest opportunity. While there is more work to do to fully embed the new model and further strengthen partnership practice, the early data and feedback provide assurance that a strong foundation has been established and that good progress is being made against the recommendation and associated actions.
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	The emerging data demonstrates a significant shift towards earlier intervention and partnership-led support. Compared to the same period in the previous year, contacts remaining within Early Help have almost tripled, requests for Early Help have increased by 29%, and referrals to partner agencies have increased by 94%. These improvements indicate growing confidence in the Early Help system and greater ownership across the partnership in responding to need at the earliest opportunity. Most notably, contacts progressing to statutory assessment have reduced by 61%. This suggests that children and families are increasingly receiving the right support at the right time through Early Help and community-based services, preventing escalation to statutory intervention wherever appropriate. Robust and ongoing audit activity undertaken to ensure threshold application is consistent and appropriate. Uptake of the Online Family Help Triage Tool has seen a significant uptake and access with a total of 1841 families and professionals accessing information via this route. In relation to the portal a total number of 5479 referrals made on this system, with referring agencies increasingly using the platform to submit contacts and referrals. Although this is currently for social care referrals only. This is improving consistency, transparency and accessibility within the Front Door. Work is also underway with partner agencies that currently use their own referral processes to explore how these can be aligned with, or integrated into, the portal, maximising its use as the single route for recording and managing Early Help activity across the partnership.

Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Stacey McQuilling – Service Lead Integrated Front Door
Date:	December 2026
Agreed Action:	Launch of the newly Integrated Front Door in April 2026.

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	• Create user-friendly online triage and guidance tools so families and professionals can self-identify needs and access appropriate support pathways without needing to contact the Front Door unnecessarily.
Agreed Measure:	Success • Performance reports reflect timely response to families. • Reduction in statutory requests. • Increase partnership responsibility. • Increase in EH Activity in house and externally.
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	Significant progress has been made against Recommendation 2 through the successful launch of the new Integrated Front Door in April 2026. The redesigned front door has been developed to embed an early help approach at the earliest point of contact, ensuring that children, young people and families can access the right support at the right time and receive timely interventions that prevent needs from escalating. A key element of this redesign has been the creation and implementation of user-friendly online triage and guidance tools. These tools enable children, families and professionals to self-identify needs, understand the range of support available, and access the most appropriate services without unnecessary delay. Initial uptake has been positive, demonstrating that the new approach is helping people to navigate the system more effectively and increasing accessibility to support. Whilst the early feedback and usage data are encouraging, we recognise the importance of ensuring that these tools remain relevant, accessible and responsive to the needs of both professionals and the public. As such, further development is planned, alongside ongoing consultation and engagement activities, to inform future enhancements. This will ensure that the platform continues to be innovative, user-focused and appealing to those accessing support, whilst providing clear pathways to the help they need. The new Integrated Front Door has also strengthened the focus on early help through the embedding of dedicated Family Help Manager and six Family Help Navigators within the service. This workforce model is enabling a more proactive and coordinated response to families at the point of referral. As highlighted in the data presented above, there has been a notable increase in the number of families receiving early help support without the need for statutory intervention. This demonstrates that families are accessing support earlier and that needs are being addressed more effectively before escalating. In addition, and reflecting the progress outlined under Recommendation 1, we are seeing an increase in shared partnership responsibility for early help across the system. There has been growth in both internally delivered and externally

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	commissioned early help activity, with partners increasingly identifying and responding to needs at an earlier stage. Collectively, these developments are supporting a more preventative model of practice, strengthening outcomes for children and families, and ensuring that statutory services remain focused on those children who require the highest levels of intervention.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	As recommendation 1.

Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Stacey McQuilling – Service Lead Integrated Front Door
Date:	December 2026
Agreed Action:	• Create a structured, multi-agency training programme delivered on a rolling basis to build partner confidence, competence, and capacity in supporting families early. • Embed School Support within the Front Door.
Agreed Success Measure:	• Meet Reduction in statutory requests. • Increase partnership responsibility. • Increase in EH Activity in house and externally. • Interest from RP's
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	A comprehensive programme of external briefing sessions was delivered to partner agencies prior to the launch of the new model. These sessions provided detailed guidance on referral processes, including when referrals should and should not be made, how information received by the Children's Hub is assessed, and the processes used to review and progress cases. As previously highlighted, work is currently underway to map the Early Help pathway. At present, external agencies are not required to complete Early Help Assessments as part of the referral process. However, through the pathway mapping exercise, we are considering the potential benefits and implications of partner agencies undertaking these assessments

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	directly, alongside arrangements for recording and managing them within our systems. Our focus to date has been on embedding the new front door arrangements and ensuring these are operating effectively. The pathway mapping exercise will inform future recommendations regarding the support, training, and briefing sessions that may be required for partner agencies should a decision be made to introduce Early Help Assessments as part of their role. Any proposed changes will be developed in consultation with partners to ensure they receive sufficient guidance and training, building confidence and capability to support families effectively. A dedicated School Support representative is embedded within the team and works alongside colleagues on a daily basis, strengthening links with schools and supporting effective decision-making and intervention at the earliest opportunity.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	As recommendation 1.

Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Stacey McQuilling – Service Lead Integrated Front Door
Date:	December 2026
Agreed Action:	• Create a structured, multi-agency training programme delivered on a rolling basis to build partner confidence, competence, and capacity in supporting families early. • Create user-friendly online triage and guidance tools so families and professionals can self-identify needs and access appropriate support pathways without needing to contact the Front Door unnecessarily. • Co-produce EH/Families First Strategy.
Agreed Measure:	Success • Reduction in statutory requests. • Increase partnership responsibility. • Increase in EH Activity in house and externally

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Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	This action appears to be a combination of Action 2 &3 already covered in above points.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	

Recommendation 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.
Recommendation 6:	A robust data collection system is established to measure partnership delivery of Early Help services.
Responsibility:	Families First Partnership Board
Date:	January 2027
Agreed Action:	• Within the Families First Partnership Board bring together IG leads from the Council, Police, Health, Education, and VCS partners, to agree scope, responsibilities, timelines, and expected outputs. • Develop a Dashboard accessible to all partners. • Agree KPIs and dashboards to track data-sharing performance, timeliness, and accuracy.
Agreed Success Measure:	• Reduction in statutory requests. • Increase partnership responsibility. • Increase in EH Activity in house and externally. • Reducing duplication. • Increased partnership work and pooling resource.
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	As highlighted in Recommendation 1, we have completed an initial mapping exercise on Early Help through points and will be taking the findings and proposals arising from this work will be presented to the Families First Partnership Board later in September to facilitate discussion and agreement with partners regarding next steps. The decisions made will then inform work to support effective, lawful and timely information sharing between the Council and partner organisations, ensuring that data-sharing arrangements are clearly understood and underpinned by appropriate governance structures. It will also support the establishment of

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	robust and consistent data collection processes to enable the measurement and evaluation of partnership delivery across Early Help services. In parallel, we are working with internal colleagues on the development of performance dashboards and data collation processes, initially focused on Front Door activity. This will strengthen our ability to monitor service demand, outcomes and partnership effectiveness, while ensuring that data is used consistently to inform strategic decision-making. Further progress on the development of the multi-agency DPIA, combined privacy notice and supporting performance framework will be reported through the next update to scrutiny.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	As per findings in recommendation 1.

Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Stacey McQuilling – Service Lead Integrated Front Door
Date:	December 2026
Agreed Action:	Create user-friendly online triage and guidance tools so families and professionals can self-identify needs and access appropriate support pathways without needing to contact the Front Door unnecessarily
Agreed Measure:	Success • Increase in families requesting support and reducing reliance on services to make referrals. • Increase in universal access to services and self-referrals.
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	As highlighted within Recommendation 2, a key element of the Early Help transformation has been the development and implementation of a self-navigation online triage tool for partners and families. This tool was launched alongside the new Integrated Front Door and was supported through a comprehensive programme of communications and engagement sessions with partner agencies to raise awareness and promote consistent use.

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	The online offer has been designed to provide partners with accessible, timely guidance and support, enabling them to identify the most appropriate pathway for children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity. Initial usage data and feedback indicate good levels of accessibility and engagement with the platform, demonstrating that partners are increasingly utilising the tool to navigate support and referral processes. Whilst this represents positive progress, we recognise that the online offer is not static and there remains further opportunity to enhance its functionality and user experience. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we will continue to review performance, gather partner feedback, and analyse usage trends to inform future development. This will ensure the tool remains effective, responsive to partner needs, and aligned with the evolving Integrated Front Door model. The relaunch of the updated online offer therefore marks an important milestone in strengthening the accessibility of Early Help support, while also providing a foundation for ongoing development and refinement to maximise its impact across the wider partnership.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	

Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Hazel Clark
Date:	January 2027
Agreed Action:	•Further promotion of Family Hub offer. •Integration of Family Hubs within the Integrated Front Door, to educate partners of offer of support. •Increase in community engagement sessions.
Agreed Success Measure:	•Increased uptake of the universal offer of support. •Reduction in statutory and targeted EH support.
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	Throughout the scrutiny review, Members heard compelling evidence of the strength and maturity of Stockton's Family Hub offer. Family Hubs are now well-established, trusted community

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	assets that provide accessible support for children, young people and families and have become a central component of the Early Help system. The breadth of services available through Family Hubs, alongside their strong community presence, places them in a unique position to act as a gateway to support and a focal point for integrated working. In response to Recommendation 8, there is a clear opportunity to build on these strong foundations by encouraging a wider range of partners to utilise Family Hub venues as a base for service delivery where appropriate. Co-location and increased partner presence within Family Hubs can enhance accessibility for families, reduce barriers to engagement and strengthen multi-agency collaboration. By providing services in familiar, community-based settings, partners can reach families earlier, offer more joined-up support and improve the overall experience for children, young people and parents. Alongside this, the Council is increasingly focused on raising the profile, awareness and visibility of Family Hubs within the Integrated Front Door arrangements. As services continue to evolve, there is significant potential to strengthen the connection between the Integrated Front Door and Family Hubs, ensuring that families accessing support at the earliest opportunity are routinely signposted to local Family Hub provision. This will help families navigate the system more effectively, access support closer to home and receive the right help at the right time. Work is therefore underway to further embed Family Hubs within the wider partnership landscape, promoting their role not only as venues but as key components of the Early Help ecosystem. Through ongoing engagement with partners, the Council will continue to explore opportunities for co-location, outreach delivery and integrated service models that maximise the use of Family Hub spaces and resources. This approach supports the wider ambition of creating a more visible, accessible and connected system of support for families across Stockton-on-Tees. As awareness grows amongst both professionals and residents, Family Hubs will continue to play an increasingly important role in ensuring families receive timely support, reducing duplication across services and strengthening pathways into Early Help and targeted interventions where required.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	

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Recommendation 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.
Responsibility:	Stacey McQuilling – Service Lead Integrated Front Door and Hazel Clark – Service Lead – Early Help.
Date:	December 2026
Agreed Action:	• Create user-friendly online triage and guidance tools so families and professionals can self-identify needs and access appropriate support pathways without needing to contact the Front Door unnecessarily. • Create a structured, multi-agency training programme delivered on a rolling basis to build partner confidence, competence, and capacity in supporting families early. • Develop SEND offer within Family Hubs.
Agreed Measure: Success	• Increased awareness of support available. • Increased level of support available for families with children within additional needs.
Evidence of Progress (September 2026):	As highlighted in the previous recommendations, the online triage tool does encompass consideration of SEND needs and supports practitioners to identify these at the earliest possible stage. This enables more informed decision-making and helps ensure that families are directed to the most appropriate support and services from the outset. Alongside this, we continue to work with partners to improve awareness and understanding of the support available for children and young people with SEND and their families. The introduction of the SEND Navigators, combined with the ongoing development of the Family Hub offer, has strengthened our ability to respond earlier and more effectively to emerging needs. Feedback from families and practitioners has been positive, particularly in relation to the accessibility of advice and support and the ability to access information through a single point of contact. Within the Best Start in Life initiative and Family Hub developments, we will continue to review provision, gather feedback and identify opportunities to further enhance the support available to SEND children, young people and their families. Overall, significant progress has been made in strengthening the early help response for SEND families. Whilst there remains further work to do to fully understand and address any gaps in provision, the foundations are now in place to provide a more coordinated, accessible and family-centred approach, ensuring

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	that children and young people with SEND receive the right support at the right time.
Assessment of Progress (September 2026): (include explanation if required)	On Track
Evidence of Impact (September 2026):	

Assessment of Progress Gradings:	1 Fully Achieved	2 On-Track	3 Slipped	4 Not Achieved
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