

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 28th March 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Early Help Strategy

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To present Halton's Children's Trust first Early Help Strategy and Local Offer

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- 1) the Early Help Strategy, Local Offer and action plan is endorsed; and
- 2) the Strategy is implemented in conjunction with the 0-5 year old Development Action Plan, a priority of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Early Help has been a priority of the Children's Trust for over two years. There is a well-established structure in place where the Early Help and Support Strategic (EHaS) Sub-Group of the Children's Trust reports regularly to the Executive Board, highlighting progress of Halton's model- 'Team Around the Family' (TAF).

3.2 Over the last year early help has also been a priority of the Safeguarding Board. In December 2012 clear reporting mechanisms were agreed whereby specific early help issues would be reported to the Board. Ultimately the Board will hold the Trust to account regarding the safety and effectiveness of TAF across the Borough.

3.3 Alongside reporting mechanisms, there is a business plan and action plan in place that are progressed through the EHaS Sub-Group. Much progress has been made over the last two years and early help continues to have a high profile both nationally and locally. A regional early help strategy is being developed and regional workshops have been set up, the first of which Halton hosted and presented at as an example of good practice in the region.

3.4 In 2012, it was agreed that the next step was the development of an early help strategy and local offer. From the outset it was agreed that the emphasis had to be on intervening as early as possible in order to truly have a positive impact on families. Although Halton would remain committed to supporting families, irrespective of a child's age, the strategy would need to focus primarily on pre-birth to five year old children and their families.

3.5 Following a number of meetings and workshops, a draft strategy has been developed, in conjunction with Children's Trust colleagues. It comprises of the main strategy; four cross cutting themes that span across the Trust; a joint action plan; and an appendix that highlights Halton's local offer. The final draft version is attached.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Early help and support is not currently a statutory obligation. However the strategy supports the Council, Trust and Safeguarding Board regarding early help as one of their priorities.

4.2 Despite it not being written in statute there continues to be an expectation from Government that early help is developed via the Early Intervention Grant.

4.3 Given the structure of Halton's model, there are parts of the Directorate that are actually bound by law, in particular Children's Centre and Short Break Services for disabled children and their families. Children's Centres are also subject to Ofsted inspection processes.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Reports endorsed by Government (for example Graham Allen, Professor Eileen Munro, Dame Clare Tickell) all emphasised the financial benefits of early intervention. The earlier the identification of need, the greater chance of deploying services and families requiring more costly interventions.

5.2 Halton's early help model continues to develop with increased commitment from partner agencies. There are now indications that the model is beginning to work, for example referral rates into Children's Social Care appear to be decreasing. This is being monitored closely and further analysis will determine whether Halton's early help model is a main factor. If proven to be the case, this will mean that the model is financially beneficial to the Council as well as better for families (ie less intrusive interventions).

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

Intervening early will help families in Halton. It means less intrusive interventions, building on family strengths, and a greater chance that they will not require more specialist services.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Early help works on a whole family approach. There is close partnership working with adult-led services, including adult learning and employment services via Children's Centres.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Family health is a key priority within early help. This is addressed via Children's Centre, in conjunction with health colleagues.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Early help involves supporting parents and enabling them to increase their parenting skills. Case tracking shows how early help can help keep children safe and prevent escalation to social care.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Not applicable

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Although not a statutory service, the greatest risk to the Council of not having an early help model/ strategy is the impact on specialist social care services. Workloads within Social Work teams are likely to increase further and increase the risk of reactive services across the Council. This would be financially costly for the Council, as well as putting at risk the partnership working that has been developed over the last few years.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 A clear strategy and local offer would enhance equality and diversity across the Borough and Trust. The approach throughout Trust is a holistic one where the whole family is supported whilst ensuring the child is safe.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.