



Early Help and Prevention Protocol and Procedure

This document outlines the procedure of how Leicester City Children, Young People and Families Division will support the Early Help and Prevention Strategy and the Early Help Offer. It aims to provide both staff and partner agency colleagues with clear procedures on how early help will work within the City.

Principles underpinning Leicester's Early Help and Prevention Strategy

- Children and young people's needs are best met when addressed in the context of the whole family, including considering and addressing the needs of their parents or carers, which means services should work in an integrated and holistic way.
- Children and young people who need extra help often succeed best if that help is offered in a universal setting, and within a socially mixed group.
- Activities and services offered to children and young people should help to build and strengthen their resilience and reduce the need for more invasive and intensive services
- Parents have primary responsibility for, and are the main influence on, their children. The role of services is therefore to strengthen parenting capacity, whilst remaining clear about our duty to safeguard vulnerable children and young people
- Partners do not simply make referrals to target/specialist services but are remain integral to the future planning of services needed for a family, a joined up approach is crucial for positive change.

Leicester's early help approach is based on the belief that children, young people and their families develop resilience if a number of key protective factors are in place:

- Children have a positive relationship with a significant adult, usually a parent or carer
- Children develop good literacy and communication skills particularly learning to read
- Children's attendance at school is good
- Parent/carers are in employment, are actively preparing to access employment or are ready for and seeking work

Objectives

- Build the capacity of vulnerable families to support their children effectively in achieving positive outcomes.
- Reduce the number of children requiring intervention from statutory or specialist services
- Minimise the impact of child poverty and worklessness on vulnerable families where help is needed.
- Target resources effectively so they assist children, young people and their families who require extra help and support at the right time.

This document sets out how agencies will work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children throughout their life and only intervene when there is clear evidence of need.

Whatever support or intervention is needed will be given to the right child at the right time with clear co-ordination points where services will be reviewed and consideration given for the child and family to move along the continuum of need when necessary.

The Threshold for intervention will be clear and in line with the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland LSCB Threshold document. Practice and procedures will be clearly understood by all agencies and the rationale of their contribution to the support plan clear.

This guidance requires that practitioners who have concerns for a child/young person to contribute proactively at every stage in the child's journey, from early help through to specialist services and from specialist services through to early help via their direct work with families and contributing to Early Help Assessment meetings.

Early Help Services (Targeted/Specialist), Child In Need (CIN), Child Protection (CP), and Looked After Children (LAC) systems are all multi-agency and multi-disciplinary processes and all may involve the same practitioners. They differ only in terms of thresholds and objectives.

Consent

The issue of consent is central to the work in early help and prevention services.

The expectation is that all workers involved with children, young people and families will be open and honest with them regarding why they are involved with their family. They will explain clearly to the family the benefit of having co-ordinated services to support them in dealing with the identified issues. Where there is resistance from a family, and the worker feels that without further support the situation will deteriorate, resulting in a referral to Social Care, the worker must discuss the situation with their manager to consider what action to take. The family must be informed of the agencies' next steps unless there is clear evidence that this would be detrimental to a child in terms of their safety. Where a family meets the Think Family (Troubled Families) criteria, it is acknowledged that identification should wherever possible be based on informed consent. Outcomes are best achieved by working with families on a consensual basis avoiding escalation into statutory services.

Referral Process for an EHA

- Anyone can complete an EHA referral, sending it to the Early Help in Duty and Advice Team: Early-Help@leicester.gov.uk
- **All** referrals will be screened by the Early Help in Duty and Advice Team and if it meets the eligibility criteria and threshold, will allocate this to the appropriate cluster.
- Once the EHA referral has been allocated, professionals and the family will be invited to a 'Team around the Family' (TAF) meeting where the assessment will be updated, a lead practitioner identified and a plan of action agreed and reviewed every 3 months until needs are met.

Early Help Services

Early Help services in Leicester are for children young people and families whose needs are not being met by routine services but who do not need specialist services. They are for children of all ages and not just the very young. Early Help is not a new concept and although the Council will continue to lead the early help offer, there is now a greater emphasis on staff in any agency working with children providing direct support, signposting and a co-ordination of agencies working with the family.

Early Help services can be provided at any point of need and can be very effective in supporting a child, young person and/or their family to step down from statutory services as well as preventing the escalation of issues.

The Early Help Assessment (formerly CAF)

We have brought together our existing early help and prevention services into a consolidated 'Early Help Targeted and Specialist Services' offer. From February 2015, we will no longer be using the language of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and have developed the Early Help Assessment with the Early Help and Prevention Protocol.

Definitions

Unmet Need

An unmet need is a need that cannot be met by an agency in terms of not having the ability to respond to the particular need

Refer to pages 16/17 of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Thresholds document for examples of presenting needs.

Single Agency Response

Two or less unmet needs that can be met with a single agency response working alongside universal services.

Early Help Assessment

A co-ordinated multi agency response led by an identified practitioner working with the family using a team around the family (TAF) approach.

Eligibly Criteria for an Early Help Assessment

The eligibility criteria for an Early Help Assessment are defined as:

- A family has 3 or more needs that are likely to impact on outcomes for children and young people
- These needs are complex and are beyond the remit and capacity of a single agency response
- A co-ordinated multi agency response is required working alongside universal services.

The Early Help Assessment (EHA)

The EHA is a shared assessment and planning framework, endorsed by Leicester Children's Trust partnerships as the baseline assessment to use across the trust workforce. It aims to help the early identification of children and young people's additional needs and promote co-ordinated service provision to meet them.

Who is the EHA for?

The EHA is aimed at children, young people and families with 3 or more complex needs that are not being met by their current service provision.

Why have an EHA?

Many practitioners will be working with families where they are already in a Lead Practitioner role supporting them with a range of issues liaising with a range of services but without a formalised process.

Whilst this can work well, the most effective way of supporting a family where there are multiple issues with more than one service involved is to coordinate those agencies to meet on a regular basis with the family included to develop an action plan with outcomes.

This approach enables the family to still have that one Lead Practitioner with everyone being clear on what their responsibilities are and a process in place to ensure plans are monitored with progress being made and outcomes achieved in a timely way.

How does the EHA operate?

There are four main stages in completing an assessment: identifying needs early, assessing those needs, delivering integrated services and reviewing progress.

Which children, young people and families is EHA aimed at?

The EHA is aimed at children and young people with complex needs:

- Including unborn babies
- Generally up to the age of 18, but extended beyond 18 where it is appropriate to enable the young person to have a smooth transition to adult services (eg. For young people with learning difficulties or disabilities, assessments can be carried out up to the age of 25)
- Who have needs that are not being met by their current provision
- Who would benefit from an assessment to help a practitioner understand their needs, determine whether other services should be involved in providing support and engage further services
- Who are particularly vulnerable (eg. Persistent truants, excluded pupils, sexually exploited children, victims of crime and young runaways)

The EHA is not appropriate for:

- The majority of children and young people who are progressing satisfactorily towards successful outcomes within universal services
- Situations where an immediate statutory or specialist assessment is needed or is the most appropriate way to determine support required
- A child or young person about whom there is concern that they may be suffering, or may be at risk of suffering, harm. In such instances, Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland Safeguarding Children Board procedures should be followed without delay:
<http://llrscb.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>

Consent

The EHA is a voluntary assessment process and, as such, a child or young person and/or their parent/carer must give consent at the start of the process for the assessment to take place in the full knowledge of what will happen to this information (e.g. How it will be stored, who will have access to it).

Similarly, in instances where there is no Early Help Assessment in place, but a referral to a specialist service is being considered, consent should always be sought from the child or young person and/or their parent/carer unless to do so would place the child at increased risk of significant harm.

Practitioners should be tenacious in their attempts to persuade parents/carers to give consent. The benefits and advantages should be explained clearly, as should the purpose of an EHA (i.e. it is a process to determine the most appropriate type of support required for a child/young person).

Support for the Lead Practitioner

There is a dedicated email address and telephone number for Lead Practitioners to call to answer any queries, support with completing the EHA and navigation around the electronic case record Liquid Logic system.

Email: Early-Help-Queries@leicester.gov.uk Telephone: 0116 4541694

Early Help in Duty and Advice Team

This team are situated within (statutory) Duty and Advice and are staffed by Family Support Workers who were previously based within the Children Centres. The purpose of the team is to ensure the

seamless continuity of services/support to families and provide the bridge between statutory and support services.

Their role includes:

- Screening all EHA referrals and ensuring co-ordination and distribution of work to be passed out to locality/ cluster areas.
- Enabling appropriate advice to families in a crisis that are deemed to be below the threshold of social care and if required undertaking a short piece of work.
- Facilitating appropriate step down of cases.
- Ensuring that return interviews are completed for those young people reported missing from home.
- Ensuring information sharing with appropriate agencies.

In addition there are a range of additional mechanisms that offer early help support through the Early Help and Prevention Protocol as follows:

- Dedicated support for the completion and administration of Early Help Assessments
- Advice points based in cluster areas providing low level advice and signposting
- 0 – 19 Early Help locality meetings reviewing children and young people identified as vulnerable.
- Multi Agency Support Panel providing management oversight and decision making for cases that are stuck, high cost or need escalation.

For more information about the Early Help Assessment, making a referral or help completing an assessment, please contact 0116 4541694, email: Early-Help-Queries@leicester.gov.uk or visit: www.leicester.gov.uk/earlyhelp

Priority Children and Young People's Meeting

In each cluster, there is a locality meeting of partners which reviews the 'Priority Children's List'. This is intended to enable practitioners to share information and potentially co-ordinate a multi-agency response from a range of agencies in meeting a child's/young person's additional needs identified through an assessment. Its purpose is to enable early intervention so as to prevent problems increasing and requiring more specialist intervention later in the child's or young person's life. It is also intended to reduce the need for repeated, unnecessary assessments.

At the meetings, professionals will alert the appropriate Family Support Manager when they assess that an Early Help assessment (EHA) is required to support a family. This will then be allocated to the most relevant professional working with the family to undertake the EH assessment. In the case where the family is not well known to any agency, the Family Support service will complete this assessment.

Step Up from Early Help to Social Care

Where the Lead Practitioner or a multi-agency group consider that the needs of a child have become more complex and may need advice from Social Care, a referral should be made to the MASP (Multi Agency Support Panel) for discussion and action agreed. In the case where there are immediate safeguarding concerns, a referral to the Duty and Advice Service should be made. The needs will be assessed with a decision made that if thresholds have been met for specialist social care services, a direct referral will be taken.

Where the lead professional or a multi-agency group consider that the needs of a child have become more complex and may need advice from Social Care, a referral should be made to the Duty and Advice Service. The needs will be assessed with a decision made that if thresholds have been met for specialist social care services, a direct referral will be taken.

Prior to the referral to the Duty and Assessment Team, the Lead Practitioner should:

- Review the Early Help assessment paperwork and make sure it identifies all changes to the child's circumstances including newly identified needs.
- Communicate their concerns with the family.
- Be familiar with the threshold criteria for level of need.

Where there is an open EHA and a referral is made to specialist social care services the Early Help service will remain in place until the outcome of the Single Assessment undertaken by social care is known.

NB: Please note that early help services can undertake a specific piece of work as part of a child in need, child protection or LAC plan without the need to make a formal EHA.

Step Down from Social Care to Early Help

Social Care teams always aim to reduce their involvement as the child's needs are met. If a decision has been made that a child is no longer assessed as a child 'in need' (CIN) but ongoing support is required from Early Help services and the family have given consent to the support and to information being shared then Social Care services should adhere to the following process:

The CIN meeting/ CP review conference where step down is being considered must be attended by a representative from the Early Help in DAS Team. If an Early Help Assessment is required, this must be completed by the social worker and passed through to the Early Help in DAS.

Where a Single Assessment has been completed and additional needs have been identified, but this does not necessitate social work intervention based on the threshold criteria,

The Social Worker should:

- Discuss with the family the benefit of continued support for Early Help services and gain written consent.
- It should be agreed whether this is in the form of an Early Help Assessment or single agency Family Support Work.
- With the family's agreement, inform the Family Support Manager in Early Help (DAS) that an Early Help Assessment is required to continue to support the family. The social worker will not need to complete a separate EHA and can pass the complete single assessment on which will become the EHA. **The Family Support Manager should arrange the first TAF (Team around the Family) meeting within 3 weeks of the case being stepped down.**
- The social worker should attend the first TAF multi-agency meeting to support family and ensure a smooth handover.
- The first meeting will be chaired by the Family Support Manager in a locality, where a plan will be agreed and a Lead Practitioner appointed from the meeting.

Early Help Assessment Plans

The Early Help meeting must prepare an action plan which identifies the key agencies, resources and services which will be needed to achieve the planned outcomes within the agreed timescales. The plan must include:

- The desired outcome
- Highlight the strengths of the family
- Describe the identified developmental needs of the child and services required to meet need.
- Include realistic and specific actions to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Include a contingency plan if circumstances change
- Include achievable timescales.
- Identify the key agencies and their responsibilities, including frequency of contact with family members/visits to the child.
- Identify Review Date within the agreed timescale of 3 months.

Further meetings can be organised earlier if there are changes in the family circumstances or more frequent tracking has been agreed.

Multi Agency Support Panel (MASP)

Where a case is open to early help or social care and meets one of the following criteria, a referral can be made to MASP:

- High cost to the authority
- No improvement
- Escalation of problems

Purpose of the Panel

To provide management oversight and enable decision making to ensure that wherever possible children and young people are supported to live with their family or within their kinship network unless by doing so their wellbeing or safety would be compromised.

To provide a multi-agency perspective in providing preventative and targeted services to children and families.

Early information sharing between partner agencies and joint work at an early stage will reduce duplication of assessments and resource, coordinating services providing seamless provision to enable early identification of problems and prevent them before they escalate.

The Panel will seek to provide packages of support for children and young people across the continuum of need that promote family life and protect them within a family setting.

The Panel will provide support to children who are at risk of entering the care system and look to support and prevent cases escalating to child in need (CIN) and child protection (CP) using early intervention services to support both prevention and de-escalation.

For those children and young people who are not able to live safely within their families the Panel will make **recommendations** about placement options and admissions into the care system to the LARP (Leicester Access to Resource Panel).

More importantly it will ensure that children and families will get the right help at the right time and reduce the number that escalate and require social care intervention.

It will also provide an opportunity to identify trends in service provision and demand, to track outcomes and to enable a proactive approach to service design and commissioning and reducing costs.

Members of the panel may include:

- Parent/carer
- Child/ Young Person
- Social Care
- Education Welfare Officer
- Adult Services
- Early Help Services
- Schools
- Health
- Police
- Other agencies as required

The panel meets monthly, referrals are made in writing (using referral form in place) by sending an email to Neeta.Nayee@leicester.gov.uk and cases discussed with a series of possible outcomes:

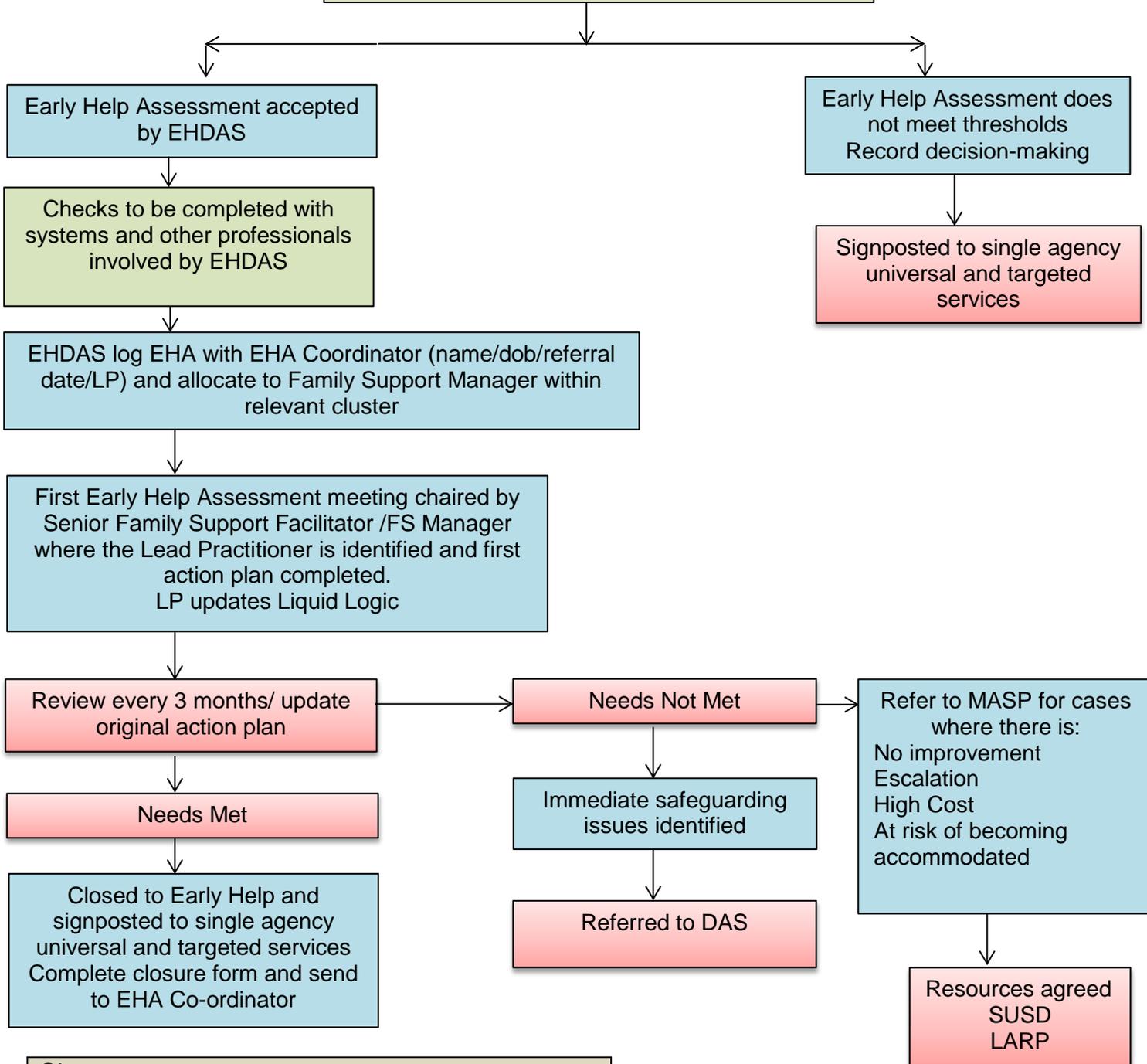
- Resources agreed
- Case stepped up to Child in Need
- Case stepped down to Early Help/Child In Need
- Progress to Child Protection
- Refer to LARP (Leicester Access to Resources Panel)

Quality Assurance Process

The continuum of support to children/young people and families in need of early help and specialist intervention will be regularly quality assured according to the Divisional Quality Assurance Framework. This will be measured via monthly audits undertaken by managers to establish whether the right children/young people are receiving the right support at the right time in their lives and support is proportionate with clearly identified and understood needs.

EARLY HELP PATHWAY

Consent gained and Early Help Assessment completed by referrer.
 Email to Early-Help@leicester.gov.uk
 or Tel: 0116 4545889



Glossary:
LARP – Leicester Access to Resource Panel
SUSD – Step Up Step Down
MASP – Multi Agency Support Panel
DAS – Duty and Advice
EH – Early Help
Contact details : EHA Co-ordinator email : Early-Help-Queries@leicester.gov.uk