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Leicestershire County Council Early Help Offer: Children and Family Wellbeing Service

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1. Introduction

There is a long standing and strong commitment to early intervention and prevention across strategic partners in Leicestershire. This document describes:

- our Early Help offer,
- the improved outcomes we want to see for children, young people and families
- the recent transformation in our Early Help services

2. Context

In April 2019, the council transformed its Early Help offer and created the new Children and Family Wellbeing Service (CFWS), which saw the integration of four services:

- Children's Centre Programme
- Information, Support and Assessment Service
- Supporting Leicestershire Families (Troubled Families programme)
- Youth Offending Service

The Children and Family Wellbeing Service (CFWS) is focused on providing early support to children and families to build strength and resilience in families. The service works with families who may encounter a broad spectrum of issues, and this includes delivering support to Child in Need Plans through 1-1 support, and support to Child Protection Plans through group work programmes including the 0-2 Pathway.

The Children and Family Wellbeing Service is focused on providing support or advice to all members of the family (the whole family approach), as appropriate to the circumstances. Within the whole family approach, the CFWS offer includes:

- Signposting or advising families to appropriate services
- Providing short term targeted support to families
- Providing longer term intensive support to families (up to 12 months)
- Targeted and tailored support programmes to families with very young children
- Specialist youth support to children and young people encountering difficulties, including diversion away from the Criminal Justice system
- Supporting those children who have entered Criminal Justice system and preventing further offending
- Supporting children and young people who have been missing from home and to further prevent other episodes
- Support to Young Carers

- Short breaks for disabled children who fall below the threshold for a social care intervention

During the summer of 2022 a new Teen Health Service 11-19 was set up within CFWS. This forms Leicestershire's provision of the Healthy Child programme for teenagers following a decision to bring the service 'in house'. This is a universal early intervention programme for young people attending Leicestershire secondary schools/young people who are electively home educated and live in Leicestershire. The main provision comprises group work within schools with a small amount of 1-1 case work being provided. The service began in September 2022 and the expectation is the full offer will be developed by April 2023.

In Leicestershire, the council's Early Help approach focuses on tackling the root causes of problems as soon as they arise. This is pivotal in improving children's life chances throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood – ultimately breaking down intergenerational cycles of deprivation and poor outcomes and reducing the demand on our specialist services. This is reflected in the Children & Family Services departmental plan:

Our vision: Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people and their families.

Our mission: children and young people in Leicestershire are safe, and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities

Our priorities in our Departmental Plan are:

- ✓ To help child to get the best possible start in life.
- ✓ Provide early intervention through working with families to build strength, resilience, confidence and capacity.
- ✓ Help children in Leicestershire to live in stable environments and have secure attachments
- ✓ Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their potential

3. Governance

Partnership and governance arrangements for CFWS are managed through several multi-agency boards. At a strategic level these include the:

- Local Safeguarding Children Board
- Health & Wellbeing Board
- Children & Family Partnership
- Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership

- Prevention and Early Intervention Board (Strategic Partnership Board)
- Youth Offending Management Board.
- Early Help Partnership Group

These are supported in the delivery of services by a range of multi-agency forums working across Leicestershire. These include

- Secondary Schools' Behaviour Partnerships.
- Borough/District based groups such as Joint Action Group, Think Family partnerships, etc.
- Family Hubs Steering Group
- Relationships Matter Core Development Group (Reducing Parental Conflict)

Additionally, CFWS participates in a number of regional initiatives and programmes of work overseen by the Directors of Children's Services in the East Midlands. They include Family Hubs, Supporting Families, Reducing Parental Conflict, Participation Leads.

Youth Justice is overseen by a multi-agency Management Board. The Management Board meets four times a year and is chaired by the Director of Children's Services. There is high level partnership representation on the Board from Leicestershire County Council, Rutland County Council, East Leicestershire and Rutland ICB, West Leicestershire ICB, Leicestershire Partnership Trust, the National Probation Service, Office of the Police and Police Crime Commissioner, Courts, Housing and the voluntary sector. There are good working relationships with all partners that ensure effective, integrated strategic planning, and delivery of youth justice services.

4. What do we mean by Early Help?

'Early Help' is an umbrella term that describes the work of many agencies engaged with children and families (Health, schools and learning providers, the voluntary sector, Police, district and borough councils and the County Council). In Leicestershire all agencies, working with children or adults, recognise that prevention and earlier intervention is more cost effective and successful than later or more formal interventions. We are all engaged to a greater or lesser extent in work that seeks to avert problem development and prevent the escalation of difficulties or the deterioration of circumstances which could adversely affect children, young people and families. Leicestershire's Early Help offer also delivers the national "Supporting Families" agenda.

Whilst the department has a key role in the provision of Early Help services – taking a lead in the commissioning and delivery of services - it also has a role as a partner working collaboratively and cooperatively within a system of services from the

statutory, voluntary and community sectors. It is also a facilitator – helping to strengthen the partnership and build capacity across the partnerships.

The following definition adapted from ‘Grasping the Nettle’ C4EO 2010 usefully encapsulates the Leicestershire approach to Early Help:

“Taking targeted action early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families, or with a population most at risk of developing problems. Early intervention may occur at any point in a child or young person’s life”.

By **Early Help** we mean **the targeted action or intervention that we take** to prevent the development or escalation of problems. This definition includes help **early in life** (with young children, including pre-birth interventions), and help **early in the development of a problem** (with children or young people of any age).

Eileen Munro (2011)¹ outlines three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary. The Care Act 2014 provides a similar categorisation using the language of prevent, reduce, and delay. Within the department we have adapted these to provide a clear framework to describe the council’s early work with families (the table below provides a summary). This description of different levels of prevention provides us with a clear rationale for early intervention – moving across levels of need in order to improve outcomes for families.

Prevention		
Preventing the occurrence of problems	Preventing problem escalation	Reducing the severity of problems
Early Intervention is taken at the level of the whole population to prevent the development of risk factors. At this universal level the Council works collaboratively with partners and with communities to build broad population resilience. We are working to equip the wider workforce to think ‘whole family’ and intervene early.	At this level we will intervene early with families who have existing risk factors, vulnerabilities or acknowledged additional needs in order to ensure that problems are halted and do not become more significant or entrenched.	At this level we work with families to tackle more complex problems to reduce the severity of problems that have already emerged and reduce or delay the need for specialist services involvement. This includes children, young people and families on the edge of family breakdown.

5. Relationship to Social Work Services

Leicestershire Children and Family Services have an integrated 'front door' ensuring that all requests for support are responded to appropriately according to the level of need and risk identified. First Response Children's Duty (FRCD) and CFWS Triage are co-located both at County Hall and in the Vulnerability Hub at Wigston Police Station. Threshold discussions take place contemporaneously and work is moved between teams as needed and with the consent of families. Our front door Domestic Abuse team is jointly staffed by social care and CFWS and largely based at the Police Station ensuring that opportunities for early intervention in domestic abuse and parental conflict situations are identified and support offered. CFWS utilise the same case recording system and workflow as social care ensuring that good oversight of all work, including the Teen Health Service.

Monthly peer discussion sessions take place within the localities and with Disabled Children's Service involving managers from social care and CFWS. These meetings follow a set agenda to consider individual cases as well as to develop locality working, shared practice, etc. At the meeting social care may present a case which would benefit from CFWS support following a child protection plan and CFWS staff can use these meetings to explore cases which appear to be making little progress or where concerns are mounting. All step-up requests are sent via FRCD to the appropriate team, and all step-down requests are fielded through CFWS triage to ensure all appropriate resources are considered.

6. The Early Help Offer

The Children and Family Wellbeing Service has two distinct but integrated parts:

1. Family Support
2. Youth and Justice

The Service is delivered on a locality basis with integrated, multi-disciplinary teams based in local communities, supported by a centrally based infrastructure. Centrally based teams include Triage, quality assurance, performance and voice team who undertake and coordinate quality assurance activities including audit, mystery shopping, voice work, etc; a workforce development officer and advanced practitioner developing our workforce development approach and plan. A centrally based Volunteer Coordinator supports a team of locality-based Volunteer Development Officers, recruiting and supporting volunteers who play an integral role in the service.

Leicestershire's Early Help offer blends the three levels of prevention activity described in section four, including universal and targeted services, and works to:

- reduce risk factors for children and young people

- support universal service providers where needed
- build protective factors with families and
- avoid escalation and formal intervention.

Preventing the occurrence of problems may be through work with an individual, with a family or it could comprise a whole population approach. These 'universal' or 'open access' services are available to all and provide advice, guidance and support to families when they need it. There is usually no referral route or detailed collection of outcomes. Families are supported in their local communities; their needs are identified early, and any difficulties are quickly resolved. Examples of preventative early help include:

- Childcare and education settings - helping children develop their intellectual and social skills.
- Parks, playgrounds, sport and leisure activities – so children have a chance to exercise, socialise and have fun.
- General Practitioners (GPs), school nurses and health visitors – to promote health and well-being for all.
- Police, Fire & Rescue services – educating families about keeping children safe.
- Housing – so children and families can live in homes that are supportive of family life and community connectivity
- Public Health – services and education, including the Healthy Child Programme, to enable parents, children and young people to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Youth Work – open access facilities within the voluntary and community sector.

The role of our in-house provision is to support agencies working at a universal level to increase the knowledge, skills and expertise across the partnership in relation to children and families.

Preventing problem escalation is delivered through work with individuals, groups or families. Examples of in-house provision at this level include evidence-based responses such as Triple P parenting programmes and behaviour management interventions. Our Volunteer led programme includes support groups for parents of children with SEND, Wellbeing Café's and opportunities for parents to form peer support groups.

Families or individuals are generally referred to services to **reduce the severity of problems** by professionals who have identified escalating need which cannot be addressed by other provision. Examples of our involvement at this level include work with families with complex and enduring issues, or to prevent family breakdown.

7. Active Involvement

Meaningful participation and active involvement of parents, carers, young people and children is central to our offer. Across the Department we have adopted the Lundy Model as a framework for our Voice work. This means we have a focus on:

SPACE – creating safe and inclusive spaces for children, young people and families to express their views

VOICE – providing information and support for children, young people and families to express their views

AUDIENCE – making sure children, young people and family's views are communicated to the right people.

INFLUENCE – ensuring children young people and family's views are taken seriously and acted upon

The involvement of families in the development and evaluation of services is key to the delivery of high-quality services.

We have a number of vehicles for the participation of young people, including CYCLe our County Youth Council. Our work on Family Hubs includes developing locality mechanisms for ensuring family voice is heard at partnership level.

8. Accessing Early Help

All agencies in Leicestershire know that the early identification of need is vital if we are to prevent problems developing or escalating over time.

All agencies are expected to first deploy their own resources to respond to emerging needs identified in children, young people or their families. However, when professionals do identify additional specific needs over and above what they can tackle, all requests for support are made using the multi-agency referral form, or for families, the request for service form.

Within CFWS triage team there is a team of information and support coordinators who provide telephone advice and support to families as well as undertaking coordination of services, onward referral and supporting information sharing. In addition, there is a team of 'Early Responders' who are able to quickly go out and see families – where needs are straightforward and can be dealt with quickly families receive immediate support in up to 4 sessions. The Early Responders are also able to meet families where the needs are not clear to ensure we make the most appropriate response and allocation of resources. Where it becomes clear that case work is required, the Early Responders can take some immediate support steps to contain the situation until a case worker can be allocated in the locality.