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Leicestershire 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 for 19/20,
- 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 families who may be on the cusp of requiring specialist statutory services.

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 tailored or intensive support to families
- ~ Providing longer term intensive support to families (normally up to a period of 12 months)
- ~ Targeted and tailored support programmes to families with young children
- ~ Specialist youth support to young people encountering difficulties, some of whom have entered the criminal justice system

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. This means that we will describe the outcomes we want to achieve for

children, young people and their families and identify measures that can tell us how well we are achieving them and show what impact our support is having.

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:

- Every child gets the best possible start in life.
- Provide early intervention through working with families to build strength, resilience and confidence.
- All children in Leicestershire are living in stable environments and have secure attachments
- Every child should have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their potential
- We focus on improving children's emotional health and wellbeing

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.

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

- Early Help Partnership Group
- Secondary Schools' Behaviour Partnerships.
- Borough/District based groups such as Joint Action Group, Think Family partnerships, etc.

These groups have similar roles and functions in the co-ordination of services to address the needs for specific groups of vulnerable young people such as those with health needs, those vulnerable learners facing exclusions.

Youth Justice is overseen by a multi-agency Management Board. The Management Board meets four times a year and is chaired by the Chief Executive of Leicestershire County Council. There is high level partnership representation on the Board from Leicestershire County Council, Rutland County Council, East

Leicestershire and Rutland CCG, West Leicestershire CCG, 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 "Troubled 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 in order 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

Requests for a social work service come into First Response – our centralised referral management service. A triage system categorises according to the level of need described, supported via the use of the 'Signs of Safety' approach. The Signs of Safety methodology is a strength-based model characterised by an inclusive partnership approach – work is undertaken collaboratively with families and their naturally occurring networks of support. It is, however, not a stand-alone approach. The application and integration of professional knowledge is essential in the delivery of high quality practice, and a culture of co-working is expected across Early Help and social work services, ensuring continuity of support and practice as risk escalates.

Monthly peer supervisions sessions take place within the localities 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.

Managers from both services also attend monthly meetings with Social Care managers to look at cases that have passed between teams and to have oversight of thresholds.

6. The Early Help Offer

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

1. Family Support
2. Youth 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, who work alongside First Response Children's Duty to ensure that families requiring support receive the most appropriate and timely response; 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
- 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 to improve their health and wellbeing.

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 parenting programmes and behaviour management interventions.

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.

Across Leicestershire there is a wide range of partners currently contributing to a county wide Early Help offer. These services offer a breadth of interventions that are available across a number of agencies – broadly these include:

- Information, tools and guidance
- Individual and family work – brief or longer term support
- Group work interventions – to address issues shared by a vulnerable group
- Outreach work – to vulnerable young people or parents

The needs of families where a single agency approach is unlikely to meet need are managed through one or more of the community-based locality partnerships referred to in Section 3 above.

7. Active Involvement

Meaningful participation and active involvement of parents, carers, young people and children is central to our offer. The involvement of families in the development and evaluation of services is key to the delivery of high quality services.

The voices of children, young people and their families are captured throughout their engagement with Early Help provision. Involvement takes place through a variety of methods such as pop-up consultation events with multi-agency partners.

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. In either case, the request is made via First Response Children's Duty to ensure social work oversight takes place. This is

managed between FRCD and the CFWS Triage team. These two teams work closely together, with threshold discussions taking place at a two-weekly meeting as well as the daily interactions between managers.

The CFWS triage team employs several 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. They are joined 3 days per week by NHS colleagues: Care Navigators to ensure families are receiving the best response to their needs from the most appropriate lead professional.

The 'request for service' form helps to identify the needs and issues which require early interventive support. The form is straightforward to complete and is presented as a secure e-form on the county council website.