

# Early Help Spotlight Review

**December 2020**

# 1. Recommendations

Recognising that Early Help intervention achieves lasting and sustainable change for children and families, and that it is estimated that late intervention costs the public sector in Devon £203 million a year, and £16.6 billion every year across England and Wales, the Spotlight Review asks the Council's Cabinet to endorse and action the following recommendations:

## **Recommendation 1**

That the Cabinet recommends a 2021/22 budget to Council which includes a significant increase in the core budget for Early Help, enabling services to plan and deliver sustainable Early Help services to families, and use any additional Government grant funding to support community initiatives, short term projects and growth within the Early Help system.

## **Recommendation 2**

That the Cabinet continue to lobby Government to provide adequate funding across public services which:

- (a) recognises increasing demand for all services across local authorities, schools and partners
- (b) accurately and fairly reflects the needs of the local area
- (c) recognises the value of Early Help services and the vital role that all partners play in delivering real and sustainable change for families

*The below recommendation was brought to the Children's Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November, prior to the publication of this report, and has already been accepted and actioned by the Cabinet Member.*

## **Recommendation 3**

That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools be asked to lobby the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Devon MPs to:

- (a) ensure that 2021/22 local government settlement includes ringfenced funding for the troubled families programme so that Early Help services in Devon can continue to be delivered throughout the next financial year;
- (b) make a long-term funding commitment to the Troubled Families programme (or equivalent), ensuring that local authorities and partners are able to make long term, sustainable plans to prevent children and families reaching 'crisis point', and support them to thrive into the future;
- (c) consider providing authorities (such as Devon) who have consistently shown their ability to deliver lasting and sustainable change for families through the Troubled Families programme, with ringfenced funding based on population and need, rather than 'results'.

The Spotlight Review requests that an update on the progress of **all three** recommendations should be brought back to the Children's Scrutiny Committee in six to nine months' time.

## **2. Background**

2.1 Early Help is an integral part of everyone's role, underpinned by the duty to safeguard children in Working Together 2018<sup>1</sup>. It is the initial response offered by all services in contact with children, young people and families when they need extra support to thrive.

2.2 It's not a specific service or team. It's an approach to working that brings together people from a range of different sectors and teams who will work with the whole family to help improve things for everyone. The aim is to identify and build on a family's strengths to help them resolve their own difficulties and support them to develop skills to prevent further problems and better manage any future challenges.

2.3 Across the country there are different interpretations and models of delivery of Early Help, in Devon our approach takes a whole systems partnership view to supporting children and families.

2.4 Scrutiny Members are supportive of these approaches and want to ensure that the Council continues to invest in sustainable early intervention and prevention, particularly in Children's Services, and that this is reflected in the 2021/22 budget and beyond.

## **3. Scope of the Review**

The Spotlight Review was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020 and aimed to:

- To understand the impact of the Early Help system and how the approach benefits children and families;
- To promote the value of Early Help approaches across the Council;
- To consider future sustainable investment into Devon's current approach to Early Help and to understand what is working and where it can be developed;
- To ensure that these approaches are reflected in the 2021/22 budget and beyond, making recommendations as necessary.

## **4. What does Early Help in Devon look like?**

4.1 Devon's approach to Early Help is aligned with the principles behind the Children and Young People's Plan<sup>2</sup> which are:

---

1

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/779401/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard-Children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dcfp.org.uk/childrensplan/>

- Children are best brought up in families
- We will support families to find their own solutions
- We will listen to each other and work together with services shaped by all
- Children and families will always know where they stand with us

4.2 These principles are reflected and enacted through Devon's Early Help model, which is a **whole system partnership approach**, bringing together **professionals from a range of different sectors and teams**. These multi agency teams **work with the whole family** to help improve things for everyone, **working to benefit children and society by benefiting the family**.

4.3 Devon County Council Early Help staff are divided across 4 localities (Exeter, East-Mid, North and South) and include:

- Family Intervention Service
- Youth Intervention Team
- Y-Smart youth drug and alcohol services

4.4 Wider partners include:

- Education
- Health, midwifery and health visiting
- Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and youth employment support services
- District housing organisations
- Youth focused voluntary organisations
- Voluntary sector
- Child, adolescent and adult mental health
- Adult substance misuse support services
- Domestic abuse support charities
- Devon & Cornwall Police
- District Councils

## 5. Funding and Sustainability

5.1 Devon's Early Help services are in part funded by the County Council's core budget, and partly by the Troubled Families (payment by results) Grant administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The Public Health Grant (and other funding streams) also part fund Y-Smart youth drug and alcohol services. In 2020/21 the total cost of the Early Help function was £4,702,000, with £2,443,000 (52%) of this met by the Troubled Families Grant. A full breakdown is provided in the Appendix.

5.2 Government have made no long-term commitment to continuing support through the Troubled Families Grant, and at time of writing, local authorities have no clear indication as to whether provision for this will be made in the

provisional local government settlement (expected December 2020). Because Devon is so reliant on the Troubled Families Grant to fund its Early Help function, long term planning for is very difficult, impacting on the Council's ability to recruit and retain staff (with many on very short term contracts) and build sustainable support and services for children and families into the future.

5.3 In addition, the 'payment by results' framework requires local authorities to hit certain outcomes and requirements, as set by MHCLG. Whilst recognising the value of initiatives which drive improved outcomes through funding frameworks, 'payment by results' arrangements can lead to resources being diverted into reporting and evidencing claims, and risk frontline staff working towards government targets, rather than putting the family's needs and priorities first.

5.4 An Early Help function which is fully and consistently funded (either as a ringfenced population and need based Government grant, or fully funded from the Council's core budget) would allow for the development of a sustainable service with secure staffing. Any additional grant funding could then be directed towards community initiatives, short term projects and growth within the Early Help system.

5.5 The funding framework detailed above does of course only relate to Early Help services provided by the County Council and does not include the time and resources contributed by wider partners. Schools in particular, but others such as housing providers, DWP, health services and more, play a significant and vital part in the Early Help process in Devon. As all public services continue to be subject to year on year funding reductions and demand for support increases, partners agencies are reaching saturation point, and this strain is beginning to be seen in the wider Early Help function.

5.6 This can only be addressed through the provision of adequate Government funding across public services which recognises increasing demand for services across local authorities, schools and partners, and which fairly reflects the needs of the local area.

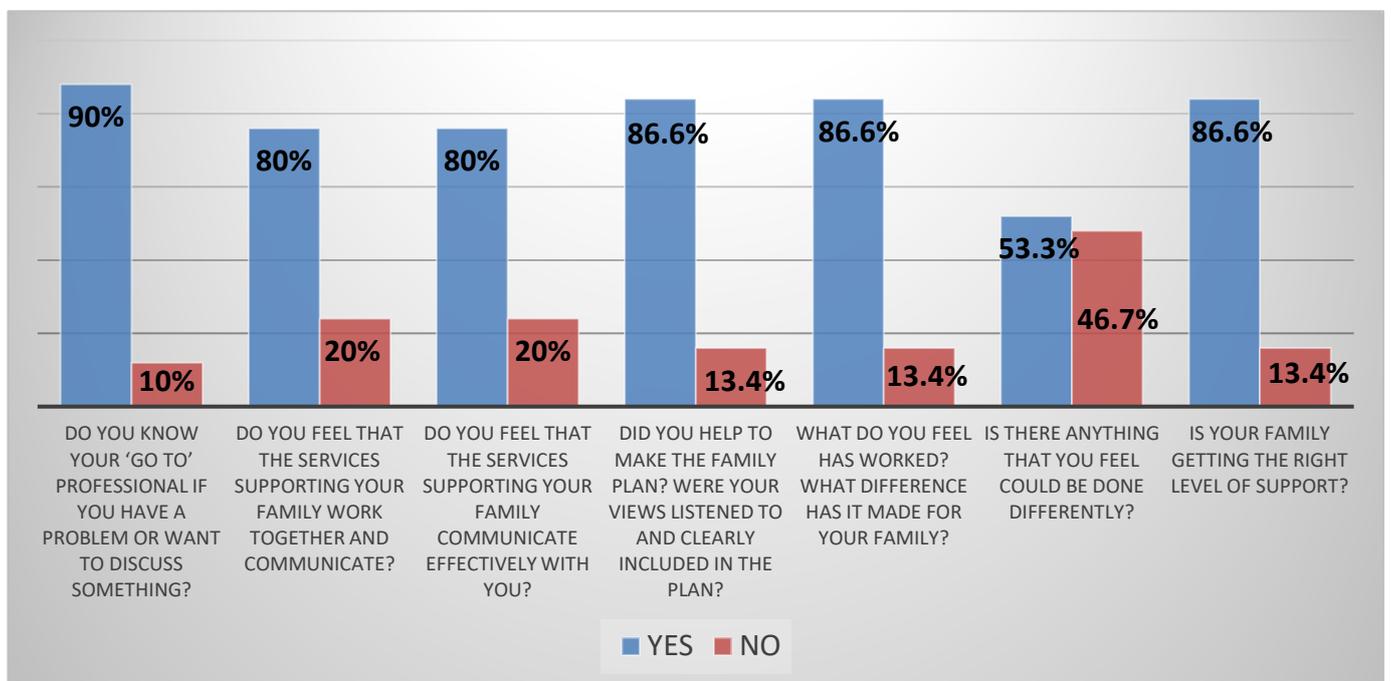
## **6. Outcomes for Children and Families**

6.1 All families experience difficulties and challenges over time, and often families are able to address and overcome these without the need for external support. However, sometimes families need some extra support to find ways to work through these challenges, particularly when they are facing difficulties in multiple areas of their life. These could include family breakdown, bereavement, difficulty finding work, financial difficulties, housing instability, school absence, difficulty supporting children with SEND, mental or physical ill-health, domestic violence and abuse, involvement in crime, anti-social behaviour or issues with drugs or alcohol.

6.2 If families facing these difficulties are unable to resolve their problems, these issues can escalate and become much more serious, having considerable consequences for children and families in the long term.

6.3 During the Spotlight Review meeting, Members considered a real-life case study of a family who had experienced a number of the difficulties mentioned above. Members spoke with a range of professionals who had supported the family to work through the challenges they were facing and heard how Early Help triage and following interventions had helped the family to significantly improve their situation. This family is one of 4130 families who have achieved significant and sustained change, and one of 77 who have sustained employment, following support from Early Help services.

6.4 Feedback from families themselves has also been positive, as shown in the below chart. The Early help teams are using this feedback to show the value of their interventions, but also to highlight and develop areas where there are still improvements to be made.



## 7. Invest to Save

7.1 Achieving significant and sustained change for families through Early Help not only results in better outcomes for children, but results in considerable financial savings for the public purse.

7.2 Some of the impacts of an effective Early Help function can be seen in the relative short term. For example, improved understanding of Early Help pathways across partners has helped reduce the number of enquiries received by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), and of those enquires that are still received by the MASH, a higher number are being directed to Early Help services, reducing the demand on statutory services.

7.3 However, longer term impacts can be more difficult to quantify. Early Help support provided to a family this year could help keep a primary aged child engaged in education, a parent in work, a family securely housed. In the medium term, the child's school, education authority, the DWP and housing authority may be able to equate some fiscal savings as a result of the intervention, however the full impacts of the intervention may not be realised until many years later; perhaps when that primary aged child is of working age and has a family of their own.

7.4 However, the Early Intervention Foundation estimates that late intervention costs the public sector £16.6 billion a year in England and Wales; the figure for Devon alone is £203 million a year<sup>3</sup>. The Government's own report on the Troubled Families programme indicates that every £1 spent delivers £2.28 of benefits<sup>4</sup>. Although these are estimates, the figures are significant and make a clear case for investing in Early Help services now, to ensure that public services are sustainable in the future.

## **8. Impact of Covid-19**

8.1 The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown this year has had a significant impact on Early Help services, as families have been faced with more complex challenges. The months of March to October 2020 saw an average of 79.18% increase in demand for Early Help triage, compared to the same period in 2019.

8.2 In Devon we expect to see increases in homelessness, financial hardship and child poverty in line with national trends in significant universal credit take up. Early Help can help to face these challenges with families by:

- Responding to need quickly through continued high frequency triage meetings
- Maximising family incomes and supporting family hardship by continuing the work of the Early Help work coaches and in partnership with the DWP
- Preventing homelessness and securing housing by collaborating with district councils and housing associations to secure housing
- Expanding domestic abuse support through new domestic abuse Early Help connectors

8.3 Looking to 2021 and beyond and the impact of Covid-19 on the job market in Devon (which is so heavily reliant on tourism, hospitality, retail and small business) it is likely that we will see a lack of education or employment opportunities for young people, potentially resulting in fewer opportunities for independence for young people, increased Anti-Social Behaviour and increased youth crime.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016>

<sup>4</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/889452/Improving\\_families\\_lives\\_-\\_Annual\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_Troubled\\_Families\\_Programme\\_2019-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889452/Improving_families_lives_-_Annual_report_of_the_Troubled_Families_Programme_2019-2020.pdf)

8.4 Early Help can support young people by:

- Creating hope of a brighter future by working together to secure training opportunities and helping them plan their route to achieve their goals
- Enabling young people to express themselves and find support in their families and mentors
- Partner collaboration to provide opportunities for positive experiences
- Future planning with partners to ensure sustainable offers continue as demand increases

## **9. Conclusion**

9.1 It is clear from the evidence presented that Early Help support can make a real difference for children, supporting families to find solutions to their problems and build resilience for the future.

9.2 Not only does Early Help result in better outcomes for children and families, but it is an 'invest to save' model, recognised by the County Council and partners, and promoted by Government.

9.3 We are living in extraordinary times, and as the County and Country continues to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and makes plans for recovery, it is clear that Early Help has to be a significant part of this.

9.4 However, for this to be achievable, the Early Help function in Devon needs to be sufficiently funded by both Government and through the Council's core budget. Schools and partner agencies who have such a vital role in Early Help support also need sufficient funding to continue to play their significant part.

9.5 The recommendations in this report call for changes to the way that Early Help services are funded by both Government and the Council, and asks for partner organisation to be sufficiently funded, so that together we can support children and families to thrive in Devon.

## **10. Membership**

Councillors Rob Hannaford (Chair), Ian Hall (Vice Chair), Su Aves, Christine Channon, Jonathan Hawkins, Linda Hellyer, Richard Hosking and Andrew Saywell.

## **11. Contact**

For all enquiries about this report or its contents please contact:  
Vicky Church (Scrutiny Officer) [victoria.church@devon.gov.uk](mailto:victoria.church@devon.gov.uk) 01392 383691

## 12. Witnesses

12.1 The Spotlight Review heard testimony from a number of stakeholders and witnesses and would like to express sincere thanks to the following people for their contribution and the information shared.

Kate Stephens	Head of Public Health Nursing, Devon County Council
Hilary Brooks	Locality Director (East & Mid), Devon County Council
James Tisshaw	Early Help Area Manager (Exeter), Devon County Council
Ian Flett	Early Help Area Manager (East & Mid), Devon County Council
Sarah Simpson	Early Help Area Manager (North), Devon County Council
Karen Hayes	Early Help Area Manager (South), Devon County Council
Jane McArdle	Locality Officer (South), Devon County Council
Cristina Geary-Nelson	Senior Accountant, Devon County Council
Keeley Wells	Accountant, Devon County Council
Neil Cripps	Head of Year, Teign School
Katrina Murphy	Early Help Work Coach, DWP
Lisa Eather	St Michaels Church of England Primary School
Karen West	St Michaels Church of England Primary School
Ria Armstrong	Teign Housing
Justine Williams	Education Welfare Officer, Babcock

12.2 Contributions were also shared from Julie Moore (Family Intervention Team) and Ella Thompson (Action for Children) and from a parent and young person who had received support from Early Help services. Thanks also goes to Patricia Maunder (Project Manager) for her background paper which supported the production of this report.

## 13. Bibliography

Devon Children and Families Partnership

<https://www.dcfp.org.uk/>

Early Intervention Foundation, Realising the potential of early intervention

<https://www.eif.org.uk/report/realising-the-potential-of-early-intervention>

Early Intervention Foundation, The cost of late intervention: EIF analysis 2016

<https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016>

HM Government, Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, July 2018

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/779401/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard-Children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf)

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Improving families' lives: Annual report of the Troubled Families Programme 2019-2020.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/889452/Improving\\_families\\_lives\\_-\\_Annual\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_Troubled\\_Families\\_Programme\\_2019-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/889452/Improving_families_lives_-_Annual_report_of_the_Troubled_Families_Programme_2019-2020.pdf)

## 2020/21 Early Help Budget – Early Help Teams

Service	Gross Expenditure	Troubled Families Grant Contribution	Other Contribution	Net Revenue Budget	Staff (FTEs)
Youth Intervention Team	416,000			416,000	10.64
Family Intervention Team	1,134,000	-867,000		267,000	29.01
Early Help Operational Management	962,000	-531,000		431,000	20.00
Family Group Conferencing	819,000	-341,000		478,000	18.81
Y-Smart	667,000		-460,000	207,000	12.30
<b>Early Help Teams - Subtotal</b>	<b>3,998,000</b>	<b>-1,739,000</b>	<b>-460,000</b>	<b>1,799,000</b>	<b>90.76</b>
Other Early Help Activities (see table below)	704,000	-704,000		£0	14.00

## 2020/21 Troubled Families Grant

Activity	20/21 Budget	FTEs supported
Contribution to Early Help Teams (see table above)	1,739,000	
Increased Early Help Capacity (Pro-rata 12 month only)	285,000	13.00
Troubled Families Database & Project Team	204,000	1.00
Finance and Support Costs	30,000	
Locality Budgets	80,000	
Parenting Courses	25,000	
Devon Inclusion Project (20/21 only)	80,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,443,000</b>	<b>14.00</b>