

Early Help Strategy Briefing Note

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Author: Nick Crippa, Head of Service (Early Help & Partnership)

Background

Early help in Devon is predominately accessed via early help triage panels following the completion of an early help assessment. The early help triage seeks to apply a multi-agency approach to provide children and their families the right help at the right time. Early Help Triage meetings are held in each of the four localities across Devon (North, South, East/Mid and Exeter). Partners meet to discuss families where a request for additional service (additional form) has been submitted and will provide families with an offer of support, intervention or financial assistance, through their identified referrer/lead practitioner.

Since January 2022, an expanded early help team sits within the MASH to consult and advise on outcomes to early help, to provide opportunities for support for families through the wider partnership if there is not a need for a social care intervention. The team work through children and families who have been accepted onto MASH Guardian with an initial level of need as identified as early help. Pathways coming out of MASH have been developed for Children Centres.

The current targeted early help offer includes:

- The Family Interview Team (FIT).
There is a team of Family Practitioners who work whole family, although work with children 8 years plus. The team are dedicated to working with each family to assess and support their individual needs, offering early help. This includes routine, structure, and inter-family relationships.
- The Youth Intervention Team (YIT).
The team supports young people who are or likely to be involved in criminal behaviour. The team are made up of a team of specialists, including social workers, probation officers, police officers, reparation workers, victim workers, mental health practitioners, education workers, speech and language therapists, youth offending team officers, volunteer community panel members.
- Action for Children's Devon Children's Centres.
Children Centres provide early help, to the whole family from pregnancy through to aged eight, when families most need support using the "team around the family" approach. Children's Centres across Devon provide a range of services to support any parent with a child aged eight years and under who feel they would benefit from Early Help & meet a certain criterion.

The proposed redesigned/configuration of early help will bring the current YIT & FIT teams together to create a dedicated early help targeted team, Family

Adolescent Support Team (FAST) which will be accessed via the front door and will record interventions on Eclipses. The service specification has been drafted.

Strategy

Prior to the current strategy being developed, Devon created an 'Early Help Plan for Change' in 2020 which was referred to by the partnership as the strategy for early help. The need for a concise and ambitious strategy for early help was evident. The 2022-2026 early help strategy has been created with the partnership. Workshops took place on the 16th and 17th May 2022, with colleagues from across the partnership attending to contributed to the development and priorities of the strategy.

The strategy is a 'call to action' and seeks to fundamentally address the challenges that children, families and professionals' experience when seeking support early. The strategy identifies the follow three priorities:

- **Priority One** Develop the culture of child friendly Devon
- **Priority Two:** Children and families in Devon receive the right support, in the right place at the right time.
- **Priority Three:** Partnership knowledge and demonstrating impact for children and families.

These identified priorities are the headlines objectives, and implementation plans will sit behind each priority led by a working group reporting into the Early Help Strategic Group. The group includes senior leaders from across agencies, the group has responsibility and oversight of ensuring that the strategy is implemented, delivers on the desired outcomes, and has a positive impact on children, families, and our residents in Devon.

The strategy supports the immediate and longer-term ambitions for early help in Devon, crucially ensuring children and their families can access and benefit from early help support as soon as problems start to arise. This includes:

- Ensuring that all early help teams are recording on a single database will support the smooth transitions for children across Children's Services and provide greater oversight for managers to support practitioners. All information will be evident to practitioners and managers to inform support being provided.
- Creating a single pathway for accessing targeted early help support, with case formulation starting at the front door to enable support to be delivered. Working hypothesis will be developed and received by allocated teams.
- Supporting families and their communities to develop resilience to support children in early help.
- Revised offer at Level 2, using 'Locality Budgets' to commission services based on local need and priorities.

The strategy was formally approved by the Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP) on 1st November 2022. The strategy is currently be

designed before formal publication. A working group is currently developing a child friendly version of the strategy.

Potential Questions

How many early help assessments are completed in Devon per year?

- 2019 – 2,140
- 2020 - 2,143
- 2021 – 2,428
- 2022 – 2,975

Through audit activity and conversations with partners it is clear that partners use the assessment as a request for support form, rather than an assessment.

What is the proposed operating model for early help in Devon?

The proposed operating model is for targeted early help contacts to be triaged in the front door, by specialist early help practitioners who will start the case formulation and allocate to the appropriate service. This will include a new configured internal targeted early help team, FAST. FAST will operate county wide and to a clear service specification. In addition, triage budgets will be reviewed to commission services at level 2 that respond to the needs of children and their families. Children Centre's will be reviewed, to ensure a core offer responds and delivers for children and their families.

What support is available for children who are born with complex conditions?

Partnership support would start from birth and would continue through childhood and into adulthood transition. Some of these services would be very specialist and could be provided out of area through children's hospitals or specialist teams elsewhere in the Southwest or potentially national hubs.

In term of signposting to support groups, this is an area we need to do more with as the help and supports groups are often limited in Devon and Covid has had an impact on these groups meeting with families face to face especially in terms of peer support. This isn't unique to this group of people and an area the ICB are looking into.