

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	17/07/2023
Subject:	Early Help Partnership Strategy
Lead Member:	Councillor Paul Kelly
Chief Officer:	Sue Butcher
Contact Officer:	Donna Briggs
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	NO
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Early Help Partnership Strategy2. Overview of consultation and feedback3. Early Help System Guide 2022-23

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose and expected impact of the newly developed Early Help Partnership Strategy and provides an overview of the implementation plan in order that the partnership delivers a cohesive approach to early intervention and prevention for children, young people and families across the Borough.
- 1.2 Co-produced by partner agencies, accepted by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and presented successfully to Slough Wellbeing Board, the strategy aligns with Slough Borough Council's vision for the future, for all children to thrive. Starting from the premise that all families need some help sometimes, the strategy highlights the importance of children and families getting the right help at the right time.
- 1.3 The strategy is presented to Cabinet to formally approve the strategy, to provide comment and to support its intention and implementation.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is recommended to:

Approve the adoption and implementation of the Early Help Partnership Strategy which will be overseen and implemented by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board (Appendix 1)

Reason:

It is necessary for Slough to improve its approach to early help support for children, young people and families through proactive, preventative partnership working to improve the life chances of our residents. An improved co-ordinated approach to early help will reduce the requirement for more costly specialist services over time and enable our communities to build resilience and self-efficacy.

Commissioner Review

This report has been received by Commissioners and any specific comments will be reported to Cabinet.

2. Report

2.1 The Early Help Partnership Strategy sets out our collective vision to share knowledge and resources to support children, young people and families who need help as soon as they need it, to prevent problems escalating.

2.2 The strategy feeds directly into all of Slough Borough Council's priorities (2022-2025) in the following ways:

(i) A council that lives within our means, balances the budget and delivers best value for taxpayers and service users

2.3 The delivery of a multi-agency early help offer through shared responsibility, will have a direct impact on the pressures placed on directly delivered local authority services as partners agencies will be better placed to support children, young people and families within universal, community services and Faith groups. As the needs of families are met earlier and they are empowered to make positive change, this will support families with the **right help, at the right time in the right place** and will prevent family situations worsening and needs becoming more significant where significant and costly services are needed (such as care arrangements). This approach supports our early help and prevention plan to reduce reliance on council services and identifies collaborative partnership approaches to supporting children and families in their communities.

(ii) An environment that helps residents live more independent, healthier and safer lives

2.4 Central to the Early Help partnership strategy is an approach which will ensure residents can find support more easily and increase their use of universal services to meet their needs before issues arise to build independence and self-efficacy.

2.5 A cohesive and shared early help offer will help us to build an improved picture of the early help needs of children, young people and families by bringing together services under a shared vision. Children and families will benefit from help being available at the earliest stages within their communities. Through this we will be able to proactively work towards improving key areas of need, which will include health and social support in line with identified shared outcomes.

(iii) A borough for children and young people to thrive

2.6 The vision for children and young people from our Early Help Strategy speaks directly to this third priority; and the future priority to support children and young people to thrive. This approach is collaborative and brings on board partners, including our Community and

Voluntary Sector. Across the partnership we will cover all aspects of children's lives – from early years health and development, to the complexities and challenges which can come from navigating teenage years and early adulthood. Incorporating all thresholds of need from universal, through to targeted support, the strategy supports the importance of being active and having fun as fundamental to developing positive relationships which are crucial to overall wellbeing.

'Children and young people feel happy, safe and loved within their families and wider community, where they are helped to thrive, not just survive'

2.7 Specific areas identified within the Corporate Strategy in relation to preventative help via family hubs and working collaboratively with schools are set out within the delivery plan for the Early Help Strategy. Breaking the cycle of poverty and striving for generational change are at the heart and purpose of working in a preventative way, to build on the resilience and resources of each generation of families.

Options considered

Option 1: Accept EH Partnership Strategy in full.

This is the recommended option particularly following the support received from partnership boards namely the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Slough Wellbeing Board.

Option 2: Reject EH Partnership Strategy

Given that this is a partnership strategy partner agencies are likely to continue to progress the strategy. However, the lack of support from the Council as a lead partner is likely to hinder progress and indicate a lack of commitment to supporting children and families at an earlier stage **This is not recommended**

Option 3: Agree specific aspects of the EH Partnership Strategy.

Cabinet may choose to identify and accept only certain aspects of the strategy. Work would then need to be undertaken to assess if the strategy remains viable in these circumstances. **This is not recommended.**

Background

2.8 As a partnership we collectively agree that we want the best for all children, young people and families. The development of a common vision and shared principles for our new Early Help Strategy is key to our approach if we are to work in partnership towards this common overarching goal.

2.9 Young people and parents have told us that they want Early Help services to be easily accessible, enabling self-referral and to offer flexibility in providing the right support before problems get bigger. The delivery of the Early Help offer needs to be built on positive relationships where there is mutual respect, and children, young people and families feel heard, unjudged and encouraged to make positive changes in their lives.

In developing this strategy we listened to our children, young people, families and partner agencies, to develop the vision and related principles for our Early Help Strategy:

2.10 In the past 4 years, early help has been considered by stakeholders as a service delivered directly by the Local Authority, rather than a multi-agency offer and approach. The updated Early Help strategy provides a clear, collective vision about Early Help being

all of our responsibility and gives a clear commitment to children and families in our community.

2.11 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care provides us with further opportunities to develop our partnership response to early help for children, young people and families, from prevention through to targeted support. This and the review by the National Panel into the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes have led to wide ranging recommendations being made to the Government and will feature significantly in the national development of early help services going forward.

2.12 Directed via the Children and Young People's Partnership Board, a Task and Finish Group was set up in November 2022 to focus on developing our new Early Help Strategy, with key statutory partners included at both and strategic and operational level. As part of the strategy development, we consulted with a number of stakeholders (professionals, parents/carers and young people) to develop our common language for early help and the principles that underpin the strategy (Appendix 2)

2.13 In September 2022, the Council's People Scrutiny Panel set up a task and finish group reviewing Slough Children First's (SCF) business plan with a particular focus on workforce strategy. The finalised report was presented to Cabinet in February 2023 and contained recommendations to the wider partnership, the Council and SCF. The recommendations included recognising the importance and value of the wider "children's workforce", with a need to develop a shared language and performance metrics to measure outcomes as well as embed a multi-agency partnership approach to supporting families impacted by the cost of living pressures and a multi-agency partnership focus on early help and prevention.

2.14 The Early Help Partnership Strategy was presented to Slough Wellbeing Board on 15th March 2023 as it aligns to Priority One: Starting Well. The Slough Wellbeing Board supported the principles and wider approach. In addition, Early Help has been identified as the first priority in Slough Children First's emerging Business Plan for 2023-26.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 *Financial implications*

3.1.1 The strategy seeks to improve the alignment of multi-agency service delivery in order to pool resources and budgets by identifying priority areas and reducing duplication and demand on more costly statutory services in the longer term.

3.1.2 Slough Children First will continue to deliver Targeted Early Help, with the current additional cost of delivering the service (in budget) at £419k leading to an anticipated 5% reduction in children and young people requiring targeted support, instead receiving support earlier on across the partnership. We anticipate that this continued investment will support our ambition to reduce the escalation of children's needs and thus reduce the flow through to statutory teams. This will support a future reduction in workloads in the safeguarding services and ensure our Targeted Early Help provision is in line with the expected changes under the National Review of Social Care in the next 2-3 years.

3.1.3 We do not anticipate the impact of the strategy to reduce costs until year 3, at which time we will seek to identify efficiencies across the system start to be realised before year 3 due to the need to support partners to hold Early Help plans and some initial challenges

in recruitment. Additional funding was sought in 22/23 for 2 additional Targeted Early Help Teams to achieve a reduction in unexpected high caseloads across statutory and targeted services, with future year funding factored into the Business Plan process from 23/24 and beyond.

3.2 *Legal implications*

3.2.1 Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, sets out the requirement for each local authority to make arrangements to promote co-operation between the authority, each of the authority's relevant partners (police, probation, youth offending team, health agencies and schools and colleges), and such other persons or bodies who exercise functions or are engaged in activities in relation to children in the local authority's area, as the authority considers appropriate. The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area so far as being related to (a) physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing, (b) protection from harm and neglect, (c) education, training and recreation, and (d) the contribution made by them to society and (e) social and economic wellbeing.

3.2.2 Section 11 of the 2004 Act requires the local authority, health bodies, police, probation, youth offending team and other prescribed bodies to make arrangements for ensuring their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and that any arrangements provided by another person pursuant to arrangements made by that body in the discharge of those functions are provided having regard to that need.

3.2.3 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 provides statutory guidance stating that local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. This confirms that providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to identify children and families who would benefit from early help, undertake an assessment of the need for early help and provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family focused on activities to improve the outcomes for the child. Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. This requires all practitioners, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment.

3.2.4 The Government has published a toolkit to assist local strategic partnerships responsible for early help systems. This guide has been produced jointly by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE). This defines early help as the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. The guide has an early help vision centred around the role of the workforce, communities, family voice and experience, leaders and data and was used as part of the initial self-assessment process which informed the development of the strategy (Appendix 3)

3.3 *Risk management implications*

3.3.1 There are a range of risks associated with this work which predominantly centre around:

- Lack of engagement from partners
- Lack of clarity on measurement on KPIs and/or benefits

3.3.2 Mitigation is continuing through external workshops, information sharing and coordination of approach to ensure shared ownership. Some of these mitigations are already in place, others will take time to implement and embed. All risks and mitigations will change and develop over time and the current position will need to be continuously assessed.

3.3.3 Reporting of significant risks will be managed through the CYP Partnership Board and will be a standing item on each agenda.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 None identified

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The Council has a duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act to have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

3.5.2 The protected characteristics are:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or belief;
- Sex; and
- Sexual orientation

3.5.3 The Early Help Partnership Strategy seeks to reduce inequalities by ensuring the availability of services to those in need within Slough, therefore all current and potential service users will be positively impacted, as they are likely to receive the right support the first time round.

3.5.4 Identification of need and specific outcomes linked to vulnerable groups and those with protected characteristics will be part of the next stage of work in the detailed implementation plan to support the strategy, which will inform the equality impact assessment

3.6 Procurement implications

3.6.1 None identified, though the partnership may later identify procurement or commissioning opportunities which would then be considered as appropriate.

3.7 Workforce implications

3.7.1 Implications for the workforce are deemed to be positive through building multi-agency networks of support that enables all partners delivering services to children, young people and families in Slough to do so in a joined-up way, sharing responsibility and risk in order to improve outcomes. The multi-agency workforce will work less in silo's and instead develop collaborative approaches to addressing need, enabling access to more specialist or experienced colleagues.

3.7.2 Additional support, training and tools will be available to support all partners in their roles within delivering effective early help and in the longer term, caseloads are expected to reduce within statutory services.

3.8 Property implications

3.8.1 None identified.

4. Background Papers

4.1 There are no relevant background papers