

Report of the Corporate Director of Children, Education and Communities

Local Area Teams - Update

Summary

1. In March 2019 the Children, Education & Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee received an update on Local Area Teams and wider early help arrangements.
2. The scrutiny committee asked to be updated on the outcome of a multi-agency audit into early help arrangements. This paper provides that update and covers:
 - a. Findings from the multi-agency audit into early help arrangements.
 - b. How this audit is informing the review of early help arrangements and the development of a new early help strategy.
 - c. The next steps in reviewing and revising the early help offer in York.

Background

3. We know that for many children, young people and families York is a great place to live and grow up. However we also know that this isn't the story for everyone. Still too often challenges and emerging difficulties in families lives mean children don't achieve their full potential. In some cases these challenges grow, meaning that families need more intrusive and higher level interventions. The purpose of early help is to identify need as it emerges and to address that need at the earliest opportunity. The role of early help is also to support families which have received a statutory intervention to continue their progress towards better outcomes and improved resilience.

4. Previous updates to this committee have focused on the role of Local Area Teams and their implementation. The current review of early help that is underway includes Local Area Teams but does so in the context of the wider landscape of York's early help offer.
5. Early help is a collaboration not a single service. Everyone is involved in the delivery of early help. This includes families, communities, voluntary groups, "universal" provision, schools, health etc. There is a complex and diverse landscape of services across York that work together in this arena.

Reviewing the early help offer

6. As outlined in the previous section early help is wider than just a single service. As such a number of work streams are underway to review York's early help offer.
 - a. **Early Help Task and Finish Group** - A time bound multi-agency task and finish group. This draws together all of the threads of work reviewing the early help offer. The early help task and finish group has drafted a revised early help strategy.
 - b. **Multi-agency Early Help Audit** - A multi-agency audit based on the requirements of Working Together 2018 has been undertaken. The results from this audit forms the basis of this paper.
 - c. **Reviewing the Local Area Team Offer** - Local Area Teams came into being in January 2017. Internal reviews into the effectiveness of the LAT role in early help are being undertaken.
 - d. **Early Help Partnership** - This is the key city-wide multi-agency forum driving the early help agenda in York. This groups reports into the YorOK Board and also the safeguarding partnership.
7. Early help arrangements were not directly reviewed within the recent Ofsted focused visit. However early help arrangements in the city have a key role to play in any improvement journey following the visit. As such the early help review must be seen in the context of its impact on demand management for statutory services.

Multi-agency Early Help Audit

8. The YorOK board and Early Help Partnership instigated a multi-agency audit of early help arrangements in spring 2019. Working Together 2018 sets the expectations for all partners in relation to early help it was agreed to use this as a framework for the multi-agency audit. A copy of the audit used with partners is attached as Annex 1.
9. An extract from Working Together 2018 is shown below.
 - a. “Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early help can also prevent further problems arising; for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care, or in families where there are emerging parental mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse. Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:
 - i. identify children and families who would benefit from early help
 - ii. undertake an assessment of the need for early help
 - iii. provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child.
10. The early help audit asked different agencies to self-report about their role in relation to early help and the overall early help offer in the city. This is instead of seeking feedback on a single agency or service within that wider offer. As such the audit is broadly qualitative in nature rather than quantitative.
11. There were 92 responses to the audit. Responses came from a good range of agencies and the breakdown is shown below.

Sector	Responses
Health	9
Local Authority	16
Police	5
Private	15
Schools / Education	35

Voluntary and Community Sector	9
(blank)	3
Grand Total	92

12. Health responses included responses from GPs, CAMHS, CCG, sexual health services and York Teaching Hospital.

Identification of need

13. Agencies reported back a range of different techniques by which families in need of support were identified. This reflected the different nature of organisations and their relationship with children, young people and families. For example:
- a. Going into family homes
 - b. Observation within childcare or education settings
 - c. Patient consultations
 - d. Through forming relationships
 - e. By referral
14. The use of tools and systems to identify need was present in a number of responses:
- a. “We have a strong safeguarding team to identify any safeguarding concerns, well-being or any families in need of help. We work closely to identify and target these children in school. We have a school SENCO and an Early Years SENCO to identify SEN needs. We work closely with the LAT to share information and support families.” – A school
 - b. “My role as pastoral care officer means I build up a relationship with parents and carers so they trust me to work with them. If staff have concerns about a child I will contact the parent to support. Our school uses CPOMS (software used by schools to monitor child protection, safeguarding, pastoral and welfare issues) to highlight concerns.” – A school
 - c. “The nursery works with children and families in the local area, providing care and education for children. As part of this work we often identify children and families in need – either through monitoring and assessing children’s development or through our partnership with parents/carers” – A childcare provider.

15. Agencies were asked to reflect how well practitioners understood their role within early help. At a simplistic level most agencies responded to say that staff knew their roles well. However limited assurance can be drawn from a series of statements (18) saying that practitioners understood their role “well” or “very well” without any further context.
16. Agencies responded with confidence on links with Local Area Teams and Local Area Support Practitioners.
 - a. “We understand our role very well through ongoing support and advice from Local Area Support Practitioner”.
 - b. “Through close working partnerships with the LAT and early help support a joint approach is established to support the young people and their families involved.”
17. Understanding would appear to be limited in some cases to early help or pastoral staff and not as well understood by staff not in roles badged as “early help” or “pastoral”.
18. Some agencies were unsure of the wider early help landscape.
 - a. “Practitioners have a basic awareness but could do with more input about what exactly early help can offer if it isn’t meeting safeguarding threshold.”
19. The level of detail provided in responses makes drawing firm conclusions challenging. However key themes to reflect on as potential areas for development are:
 - a. Partners reported strength in identifying need within individual children or families. Wider understanding of early help need in the city would appear to be more limited.
 - b. Agencies use a broad range of different tools to identify need. A further piece of work could be considered to make more use of common tools.
 - c. Agencies say they understand their roles within early help. However responses highlight the importance of training, wider workforce engagement and understanding of what early help provision is available.
 - d. Improved information sharing across multi-agency partners. For example reintroducing a version of the ‘right early help’ lists.

Assessment of need

20. The role of 'lead practitioner' is a key feature of multi-agency early help practice. A lead practitioner coordinate the input and work of different agencies working in a team around that child and family. Any practitioner can take on the role of lead practitioner. It should be informed by who is working with that family and the views of the children and family as to who is best placed to perform this role.
21. Agencies were asked the question "Do practitioners in your agency take on the 'lead practitioner' role of coordinating early help assessments?" 59% of agencies they said they did take on the role of lead practitioner and 41% said not. However, 56 agencies did not answer this question on the audit. It is difficult to speculate why these agencies did not complete this question. It could be they did not see that as a role relevant to their agency or were unsure if people undertook this role.
22. Where agencies did not take on the role of lead practitioner this was for a variety of reasons.
 - a. Time / capacity
 - b. Training and skills of staff
 - i. "We would want to give our practitioners further training before asking them to take the lead in this."
 - ii. "Have never done this before but have contributed to assessments led by others so lacking experience and confidence. Would benefit from additional training."
23. Agencies generally self-reported a strong understanding of thresholds when assessing need and confidence in seeking advice where needed.
 - a. "We are always aware of the thresholds but the ability to ask for advice from Front Door or LASPs (Local Area Support Practitioner) is always helpful."
 - b. "I feel we have a good understanding of the thresholds. If any concerns we can easily contact the safeguarding team."
 - c. "We are supported by the LAT (Local Area Team) to do this."
24. It should be noted though that out of 43 agencies responding to this question that 7 (16%) gave answers that do not give confidence to their understanding of thresholds. These comments are generally along the

lines of “not sure” or “not applicable”. All agencies responded strongly that if consent for support at an early help level was not given that they would consider if a safeguarding referral would be required.

25. Agencies gave a range of views on how the assessment of early help need could be improved. A number of comments highlighted the value of support from Local Area Teams in undertaking good quality assessments.
 - a. “I feel the LAT (Local Area Teams) are very approachable and can be contacted. Generally happy with the support received from them.”
 - b. “I make direct contact with our Local Area Team to discuss concerns, they are helpful at offering support and advice. It would help if the FEHA documents weren’t so lengthy.”
26. Summary findings in relation to assessing early help are:
 - a. More agencies need training to be able to take on the role of lead practitioner.
 - b. The Family Early Help Assessment should be reviewed to make it easy to use and improve focus on outcomes.
 - c. Although feedback on the use and understanding of thresholds is encouraging there is need to further develop understanding across the children’s workforce.
 - d. There is a need to maximise resources and collectively find ways to bridge gaps in practitioners having capacity to support in the family home.

Early Help Interventions - Providing targeted early help services to address assessed needs

27. When agencies were asked to consider what interventions they offer there were some key themes that emerged.
28. A number of agencies reported that the interventions they provided was to simply signpost to other agencies, which in many cases included Local Area Teams.
29. Agencies were asked to identify where they perceived there to be gaps in the city around early help interventions. These feedback here can be summarised under the themes of:

- a. **Resources** – Perceived reductions in support for families with universal and emerging need were highlighted. This would equate to levels 1 and 2 of need in the table shown in paragraph six.
 - b. **Mental health** – The value of early help initiatives in tackling emerging mental health / emotional issues was recognised. However practitioners reported concern that access to timely support remained difficult.
 - c. **Information / Information sharing** – Responses reflected concern that information sharing needed to be more robust. This reflected earlier comments about some agencies being unaware of what other services were working with families.
30. There is a very diverse range of “interventions” that exists across the city in different agencies. The review of early help should consider:
- a. Agreeing and supporting the deployment of common interventions across agencies.
 - b. Improved information sharing and the re-introduction of the former ‘right early help lists’ would be beneficial.
 - c. Improve information on the services / interventions available in the city.
 - d. Common tools for measuring progress and evidencing impact.

Next Steps

31. The multi-agency early help audit has provided helpful insight into the perceptions of different agencies operating locally. The feedback has already been shared with the early help task and finish group, the early help partnership, the YOT Board and the YorOK board.
32. As set out at the beginning of this paper there is a range of work being undertaken to inform the review of York’s early help offer. Any changes to the early help offer in York must support the wider improvement journey for safeguarding children. The next steps from here are that the early help task and finish group:
 - a. Complete an impact review into current early help arrangements.

- b. Complete a draft early help strategy, early help score card and action plan. These will be shared with the YorOK board for multi-agency sign-off.
- c. Ensure changes to the early help offer align and support the children's services improvement plan.

Implications

- 33. There are no **Financial, Human Resources (HR), Equalities, Legal, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology (IT), Property** – or **Other** implications, relating to this report.

Recommendations

- 34. The Children, Education & Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee are asked to:
 - (i) Note and comment on the outcome of a multi-agency audit into early help arrangements and the progress to date.
 - (ii) Consider if it would want to receive any further reports in relation to early help and the development of a revised strategy and early help offer.

Reason: To comply with scrutiny procedures.

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**Report
 Approved**



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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

Annex 1 – Multi-agency audit into early help arrangements

Abbreviations

FEHA – Family Early Help Assessment

LASPs - Local Area Support Practitioner

LAT- Local Area Team

Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education

SENCO – Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SEN - Special Educational Needs

YOT – Youth Offending Team