

Children's Demand Management Programme

Evidence based equality analysis

Main aims, purpose and outcomes and how does it fit in with the wider aims of the organisation:

Programme Overview

During 2022 the Council's Management Board identified an urgent need to focus on demand management across children's services given the rising numbers of children in care and the associated escalating costs. As a result, a 12-week feasibility study was carried out to identify potential areas of opportunity (factoring what was already happening or in progress), which could then be refined further and developed into recommendations as part of a new major transformation programme. It was concluded through a prioritisation exercise that an enhanced focus on early intervention and prevention in targeted areas could reduce contacts and referrals to children's social care, and ultimately avoid children becoming looked after, complementing existing initiatives.

In-Scope Services

The scope of the programme was agreed in November 2022 as reviewing the following functions: Early Help and Prevention service casework (family support), parenting and groupwork; early help, schools and partnerships functions; and the interface between Early Help and Prevention and Children in Need.

The programme's aim is to focus on early intervention and prevention to prevent escalation to the statutory children's care system – ultimately avoiding children coming into care. This should also result in reduced contacts to children's social care, referrals, assessments, and caseloads.

The programme considered:

- How to utilise family support and early help for more preventative work / prevent referrals and rereferrals once stepped down
- The role of social workers and non-social work qualified staff in preventative work

- How to ensure Team Around the Family assessments and plans are as effective as they can be including how the Council supports partners to manage them
- How to better support partners, particularly schools, to manage cases at the non-statutory level considering the advice, interventions and pastoral support schools may need – learning from Team Around the School style approaches
- The interface between early help and children in need – step-down process
- Effective evidence-based parenting and parental conflict offers
- How to ensure both step-down from Children’s Social Care and preventative family support offers are available concurrently to maximise the effectiveness of non-statutory services.

Baseline findings

During December 2022 to March 2023 baselining was carried out to ascertain current position – see further details in Evidence section below.

Key strengths identified were around the knowledge, skills and experience of early help workers, and the support available in some schools, and in some areas from the voluntary / community sector.

Key issues/areas of development identified related to families coming into the system too late making it harder to effect real change, the role and resources in the family casework teams to do preventative casework and step-down activity (from Children’s Social Care), schools needing access to interventions to support families earlier, a need for lower-level help for less complex families, more trauma informed support and interventions were needed, there was insufficient expertise to support families of children with disabilities / Autism Spectrum Disorder, and some administrative processes didn’t add value and took time away from working with families.

Further work then took place from April to December to develop a robust business case focusing on six key themes. In summary the recommendations aim to enable better early support at the right time to support families to resolve issues and behaviours before they become entrenched and worsen, or the family hits crisis – by introducing a new ‘early help’ service offer targeted in four pilot areas (identified due to levels of deprivation, numbers of children in care, greatest needs and volume demand) via Children’s Centres and schools, alongside greater access to parenting and groupwork programmes, and a new commission for low-level parenting and home conditions available across the borough. This will be supported

by sufficient resources to do casework (focussed more on areas of greatest need) and step-downs with enhanced training for Family Intervention Workers.

Recommendations Summary

Target operating model

In summary, the model introduces a new offer of support, true 'Early Help' which is accessible initially to schools and families in four targeted areas across the Borough (identified due to levels of deprivation, numbers of children in care, greatest needs and volume demand) – Chester: Blacon Children's Centre and Chester Victoria Children's Centre and schools in their footprints; Winsford: Over Children's Centre and schools in its footprint; Ellesmere Port: Portside Children's Centre and Stanlaw Children's Centre and schools in their footprints; and Northwich: Victoria Road Children's Centre and schools in its footprint.) This will enable families who recognise they have needs to access early help advice, guidance and support, as well as low-level parenting courses and assistance with home conditions.

This new function will be carried out by Early Help Navigators based in each of four pilot areas (two in each area, eight in total). The early help service will enable schools to access both lower-level and more formal parenting and groupwork programmes for those families on a school-led Team Around the Family plan, where previously this was only available upon escalation to a Family Intervention Worker-led Team Around the Family plan (Local Authority led).

The model clarifies the work of the current casework teams into a Family Help and Support team focussing on the key areas of greatest need – neglect, domestic abuse and compromised parenting. It bolsters the staffing available to ensure they can effectively manage both preventative casework and provide more specific focussed work on step-downs in parallel. This is supported by more trauma-informed parenting and groupwork programmes (to also be better promoted for use with families at Children in Need) and more targeted Team Around the Family plan support for partners.

Access to interventions

- An enhanced offer will be available through Children's Centres; improving the trauma offer / skills / training and programmes; improving access to interventions for partners; enhancing the offer for fathers who harm; improving access to an expanded parenting and groupwork offer; and improved access to information.

- In addition, a new service will be commissioned to ensure consistent and rapid access to low-level parenting skills covering such things as routines, boundaries, positive relationships and family communication; and reducing parental conflict. This will be provided in the family home and also via video interactive parental guidance. Whilst the support is taking place, further advice, guidance and signposting to further sources of support can be provided.
- Rapid work on home conditions (e.g., to ensure a house is suitable and safe for children to live there) will also be available – an early indicator of neglect which can lead to children becoming looked after in the future.

Parenting and groupwork

- A key recommendation, as briefly outlined above in the target operating model workstream, is to enable schools (and other partner led Team Around the Family plans) to refer into programmes directly. Both schools and Family Intervention Workers told us that often partner-led Team Around the Family plan family needs are left to escalate as schools cannot access the parenting programmes needed without the Council leading the Team Around the Family plan. Enabling partners to refer directly in means that support can be provided at an earlier opportunity for families before their needs escalate, behaviours become entrenched, and they hit crisis.
- To enable aftercare for people who have been on programmes but need reminders etc. capacity has been built into the additional practitioners required. The early help navigators will also be trained in some parenting programmes so they can also offer advice. Alongside this, the Family Intervention Workers will all undergo training in Nurture, so they are able to support the approach, use the right language, model behaviours etc. from their very first interactions with families.
- In order to support families of children with ADHD / Autism a longer Nurture programme and shortened Triple P programme were made available from September.

Early help for children with disabilities

- The programme identified strong knowledge across the council in relation to supporting families of children with disabilities. It was however identified that this not all easily accessible and joined up, so recommendations focussed on bringing this together and better equipping people to help themselves.

- These include a number of recommendations relating to process improvements, more specialist support, general enhancement of knowledge and skills (for FIW, schools and navigators), and clarity on movement between early help and the children with disabilities team.

Benefits of the recommendations

The programme anticipates the foregoing recommendations will result in:

- An overall reduction in the numbers of children coming into care and their associated costs
- Schools better enabled to access the interventions needed without the need to escalate for Family Intervention Worker involvement (and without family conditions having to worsen to do so)
- Families will be able to access the support at the earliest opportunity and before they reach crisis / behaviours are entrenched via access to the lower-level parenting and home conditions support, with the back-up of access to more formal parenting and groupwork programmes available as required
- More time to spend directly working with and supporting families – building trusting relationships, modelling behaviours, embedding positive parenting practices, and delivering interventions
- A dedicated and resourced step-down focus (alongside preventative casework) should help to minimise those families that currently ‘bounce around’ between Early Help and Prevention casework and Children in Need, and enable their plans to be successfully monitored and any further interventions delivered
- The council and schools more able to support families of children with disabilities and enable the Family intervention Workers to feel more confident in this role

This equality analysis has been completed to ensure that the changes being implemented as a result of the review do not have a negative impact on the target groups / areas detailed below.

The recommended changes align to the following priorities of the Council:

- ***Thriving Residents:*** *All of our families, children and young people are supported to get the best start in life.*
The programme recommendations should enable more families and children and young people to access the interventions they need to prevent needs escalating; crises arising and be better supported to reach their potential.
- ***Thriving Communities:*** *Vibrant and healthy communities with inclusive leisure, heritage and culture opportunities.*

The relationship building approach of the family hub model should support stronger links between communities, sources of community support and local authority services through linking children and families together with individuals, services and organisations geared toward them and their needs.

Lead officer: Zara Woodcock, Head of Service Early Help and Prevention

Stakeholders:

- Cheshire and Wirral Partnership
 - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – Team Around the Family support
 - Health Visitors
- Schools – family support provision (Headteachers, Primaries, Secondaries, Special)
- Youth service – services delivered.
- Starting Well – Team Around the Family elements
- Domestic Abuse Intervention and Prevention Service – group work element
- Casework, parenting and groupwork
- Early help, schools, and partnerships
- Children in need (interface with internal and external early help)
- Safeguarding Children’s Partnership
- West Cheshire Children’s Trust (and sub-groups)
- Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

For each of the areas below, an assessment needs to be made on whether the policy has a positive, negative or neutral impact, and brief details of why this decision was made and notes of any mitigation should be included. Where the impact is negative, this needs to be given a high, medium or low assessment. It is important to rate the impact of the policy based on the current situation (i.e., disregarding any actions planned to be carried out in future).

High impact – a significant potential impact, risk of exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place etc.

Medium impact –some potential impact exists, some mitigating measures are in place, poor evidence

Low impact – almost no relevancy to the process, e.g., an area that is very much legislation led and where the Council has very little discretion

	<i>Impact</i>		
Target group / area	Neutral	Positive	Negative
<p>Race and ethnicity (Including Gypsies and Travellers; migrant workers, asylum seekers etc.)</p>	<p>Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children were out of scope for this programme as they receive specific support as defined by the Government, however on a child-by-child basis if it would be to their benefit to attend a group this would be offered.</p> <p>The redesigned service should support people regardless of their race or ethnicity, as required by the Equality Act 2010.</p>	<p>Enhanced information and the low-level parenting / home conditions commission will be available across the borough. The Early Help Navigator role and links with schools are initially be piloted but may be rolled out to other areas if successful. The new service will improve the quality and availability of data on the characteristics of people accessing support, enabling the identification of opportunities to improve the experiences of people based on race and ethnicity.</p>	
<p>Disability (as defined by the Equality Act - a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities)</p>	<p>Consideration of physical access requirements will be made as for all council buildings when there is public access.</p>	<p>The recommendations will enable Family Intervention Workers to better advise and support families of children with disabilities due to enhanced knowledge sharing (with SEND, CwD and autism education service).</p> <p>The low-level parenting commission will have a</p>	

		<p>specific focus on ensuring the services can be provided to people with this protected characteristic. Some of the parenting and groupwork programmes give strategies for better supporting children with disabilities.</p> <p>Clearer pathways and closer working with the Children with Disabilities team will also take place.</p>	
Sex	<p>The recommendations have a neutral impact, the redesigned service will support people regardless of these protected characteristics, as required by the Equality Act 2010.</p>	<p>A gap identified for fathers will be addressed through additional 'Caring Dads' programme provision.</p>	
Gender identity (gender reassignment)	<p>The recommendations have a neutral impact and will assist people regardless of protected characteristics, as required by the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>Family Intervention Workers are provided with training relating to trans awareness.</p>	<p>Improved access to trauma informed parenting programmes and groupwork will be made available earlier on the continuum – this is of relevance to those people who may experience anxiety and trauma.</p>	

Religion and belief	The change has a neutral impact and will assist people regardless of protected characteristics, as required by the Equality Act 2010.		
Sexual orientation (including heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual)	The change has a neutral impact and will assist people regardless of protected characteristics, as required by the Equality Act 2010. Family Intervention Workers are provided with training relating to sexual orientation.	Improved access to trauma informed parenting programmes and groupwork will be made available earlier on the continuum – this is of relevance to those people who may experience anxiety and trauma	
Age (children and young people aged 0 – 24, adults 25 – 50, younger older people 51 – 75/80; older people 81+. Age bands are for illustration only as overriding consideration should be given to needs		Recommendations should enable improved outcomes for children and young people and their families (parents / grandparents/ etc.) – e.g., access to Early Help Navigators, low-level parenting support, improved parenting and groupwork offer and capacity, improved access to a range of interventions available earlier in the continuum of need from School-led Team Around the Family plans with more scope for direct work and aftercare.	
Carers		Recommendations will support people in their role	

		of carer to children and young people (as outlined above)	
Rural communities		Families in rural communities will continue to access current services, as well as enhanced information available online and the low-level parenting and home conditions support.	Medium impact – Pilot areas are to be targeted at areas of most need which by its nature tends to reflect dense populations. This means that rural communities are not eligible for the Early Help Navigator service or Parenting and Groupwork programmes if on a partner-led Team Around the Family plan. If the pilot is successful, roll out to other areas may be considered (if funding allows) but this will be on a need basis so not guaranteed for rural communities.
Areas of deprivation		Pilot areas have been selected against a number of factors – but key variable was areas of high deprivation levels (MDI). This will see enhanced services for people living within these areas – such as the Early Help Navigator role and access to parenting and groupwork	Medium impact – different pilot area communities may need different types of advice, guidance and support so some services will need to be tailored to specific areas.

		programmes. Services are being brought to the communities in which people live (via Children's Centres and local schools) enabling them to be more accessible.	
Human rights		<p>The recommendations are all directed at improving family and home conditions for children and their families, with the ultimate aim of preventing children from having to be looked after by the Local Authority, where they can be looked after by their families safely.</p> <p>This therefore aligns positively with the promotion of the right to family life as a human right set out under article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and with those under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</p>	
Health and wellbeing (consider both the wider determinants of health such as education, housing, employment, environment, crime and		Increased offers on parenting and trauma informed programmes through this programme should provide earlier intervention in relation to	

<p>transport, as well as the possible impacts on lifestyles and any effect on health and care services)</p>		<p>trauma affected individuals, of relevance to families where anxiety, routines and mental health are issues.</p> <p>Early Help Navigators being based in Children's Centres alongside Starting Well will provide better links into health services as well as a range of other services and offers relevant to the wider determinants of health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Development of a menu of interventions will outline the support already available in relation to health interventions such as substance misuse and mental health support.</p>	
<p>Procurement/partnership (if project due to be carried out by contractors/partners etc, identify steps taken to ensure equality compliance)</p>	<p>Services are already provided by a mixture of in-house and external providers.</p> <p>The new commission will require compliance with the Council's equality and diversity policies.</p>	<p>Tender for commission to be prepared relating to low level direct support for families.</p>	

Evidence (see guidance note for details of what to include here):

The initial baselining phase included the following activities:

- Refresh and confirm baselines / further data analysis where required – management information and finance (incl. early help contacts, Team Around the Family info, feedback from parents on programmes)
- Mapping current offers / ways of working / roles / gaps in provision – via interviews and workshops (including Early Help Operational Management Team, Casework managers / teams, Team Around the Family Advisors, Parenting and Groupwork, Children in Need managers and I-ART)
- Understanding how schools support young people / interface with Early Help / Team Around the Family / what do they need / interventions available / barriers / how to improve – via two workshops
- Understand the interface between early help and children in need – step-down process / support to universal services as part of step-down / step-up from partners
- Analysis of 130 children on stable full care orders – looking for common themes to determine if anything could have been done differently to prevent less complex / less high-risk children and young people coming into care
- Best practice review in relation to case work, family support and parenting
- Investigate role of third sector / partners.

Further work then took place to develop the recommendations, such as:

- Two workshops with voluntary organisations to gain their views on needs and how well these are met by current services, and considering potential solutions (utilising their knowledge of the families they work with)
- An anonymous survey to partners and currently commissioned early help service providers to consider strengths, barriers, and gaps (utilising their knowledge of the families they work with)
- Further meetings and workshops with officers such as voluntary organisations were carried out, along with an anonymous survey to partners and commissioned early help service providers, to further investigate the gaps and look at potential solutions providers, to further investigate the gaps and look at potential solutions.
- Desktop research and numerous meetings were held to unpick the issues – including a workshop with Family Intervention Worker representatives, meeting with the Children with Disabilities Senior Manager, ICB colleagues, I-ART manager, and the Autism education manager.

Action plan:

Actions required	Key activity	Priority	Outcomes required	Officer responsible	Review date
Areas of deprivation – ensure meets needs of individual communities	Work with schools to develop service spec for each pilot area / utilise local knowledge	High	Tailored services capable of having the most benefits	Zara Woodcock – Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	June 2024 prior to model go-live
Ensure that all new and existing staff are suitably trained in existing and new support and interventions	Training plans for staff Consider train the trainer opportunities	High	Staff are able, and feel confident, in their role supporting families and children and young people	Zara Woodcock – Head of Service Early Help and Prevention / Senior Managers within the service	June 2025
Development of robust performance monitoring tools and reports.	Creation of programme dashboard	High	Allow service to monitor performance, easily identifying and addressing areas of concern, including in areas related to equality and diversity	Louise Payne – Programme Manager – Transformation and Technology Team	April 2024
Develop a communications plan to support the roll out of the recommendations	Communications plan to include internal and external approaches to ensure that residents, staff and partners are aware of the new services and	High	Ensure residents / partners are able to access the new services Ensure staff across the Council know the pathways etc.	Louise Payne – Programme Manager – Transformation and Technology Team	April 2024

	how to access / refer into them				
Rural communities benefitting from services	Monitor pilot areas and if further funding available use data sets to consider other areas for roll-out (n.b. rural communities may still not be highest priority). If not rural – ensure existing service offer promoted	Medium	Ensure services are provided in areas where they will have the most impact	Zara Woodcock – Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	June 2025 (one year after pilot go-live)

Sign-off	
Lead officer:	Zara Woodcock, Head of Service Early Help and Prevention
Approved by Tier 4 Manager:	Zara Woodcock, Head of Service Early Help and Prevention
Moderated by the Operational Equality Moderation Group	
Date: 15 February 2024	
Date analysis to be reviewed based on rating (high impact – review in one year, medium impact - review in two years, low impact in three years)	June 2025