Birmingham’s Early Help Offer

There are many excellent examples of Early Help working across Birmingham, including a wide range of services offered by different agencies to address needs highlighted in ‘Right Help, Right Time’. Our new **Strategy for Early Help in Birmingham, 2019-2022** recognises this progress and seeks to build upon this firm foundation.

The Early Help and Safeguarding Partnership have been providing strategic and operational oversight of Early Help arrangements in the city since the launch of our first strategy. The Partnership has established early help pathways, agreed our ambitions for children and young people through our ‘Plan on a Page’, adopted the principles of the ‘Signs of Safety and Wellbeing Framework’, developed and embedded the ‘Early Help Assessment’ and ‘Our Family Plans’. The Partnership is engaged in reviewing the delivery of Early Help and as a result:

- The Right Help, Right Time (RHRT) threshold guidance has been revised and refreshed (launched in January 2018), with each agency undertaking a comprehensive training programme to embed the new guidance. In June 2018, the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board tested the impact of the guidance, completing a survey of front-line practitioners understanding and application of the guidance. 80% of practitioners reported feeling ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’ at being able to assess the layer of a child’s need with 20% feeling ‘fairly confident’. The vast majority (96%) knew who to contact within their organisation for advice and guidance on RHRT.

- Partners have reviewed and shared their early help offers, which has increased understanding of support and pathways. There has been an improved partnership offer within Children’s Advice and Support Service (CASS) and key agencies have increased their Early Help offer recognising the impact of supporting children and families early to prevent costly alternatives. Examples include neighbourhood police officers based in the Children’s Trust working alongside Think Family services, and Forward Thinking Birmingham recruiting 30 new Early Help staff aligned to Schools, Early Years and Family Support services.

- Children’s Advice and Support Service (CASS) and Early Help Support Team (EHST) offer telephone support and advice to partners regarding thresholds and when to consider completing an ‘Early Help Assessment’ (EHA) under universal plus RHRT or a request for support to CASS. This is to help application of threshold so that appropriate referrals are made to CASS and families receive the right level of intervention.

- Partner agencies, including schools are committed to demonstrating better evidence of the impact early intervention for children and families. Our EHA and ‘Our Family Plan’ (OFP) have been revised and will be incorporated into a web-based portal, which has the broad support of all partners.

- Early Help Panels have been superseded by the expansion of our CASS, incorporating Early Help Advisors from across the partner agencies to assist Lead Practitioners in their work with families. This process ensures that all assessments are uploaded on the Children’s Trust information system and partner agencies receive regular reports on the quality and quantity of the Early Help Assessments they complete.
• Partners and their respective legal and data protection officers have come together to develop an overarching data protection agreement inclusive of General Data Protection Regulation that will enhance information sharing.

Overall, there has been a reduction in the number of requests for support in CASS that have lacked appropriate consent from the family. This demonstrates that, in line with our agreed RHRT principles, agencies across the city are increasingly working with parents as partners.

Key Partner Updates

**Birmingham City Council Early Years, Childcare and Children’s Centres Service**

The Early Years, Childcare and Children’s Centres service has a remit to oversee that there is sufficient, good quality childcare for children aged 0-14 (16 with Special Education Needs) and access to early education places for all 3 and 4 year olds and targeted 2 year olds. There is a range of support that includes information, advice, challenge and CPD opportunities to the workforce, and a requirement to provide information to parents. These are Statutory Duties for the Council as outlined in the Childcare Act 2006 and 2016.

Evidence shows that attending high quality early education has a lasting impact on social and behavioural outcomes. The table below shows the difference in outcomes in good level of development between children who have or have not taken up an EEE place. In addition, childcare is more affordable for parents enabling them to work or increase their working hours if they wish to do so.

**Sufficiency - Early Education Entitlement (EEE) 2, 3 & 4 year olds**

In Birmingham, funded places are offered and delivered in a range of settings including maintained nursery schools, nursery classes on primary school sites and the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) childcare sector consisting of full day-care nurseries, pre-school play groups and childminders.

Whilst the 3 & 4 year old EEE is universal, the 2 year old EEE is targeted at the least advantaged children. The intention is for all children who meet the prescribed criteria to be able to take up a free place, benefiting their social, physical, cognitive development outcomes and helping to
prepare them for school. In Birmingham, the current rate of take up of 2 year old places requires improvement and is a priority area of work for the service and partners.

- **Quality and safeguarding**

  A team of Early Years Consultants are deployed to provide support advice and challenge to childcare providers who are judged by Ofsted as less than ‘good’ to drive up quality and improve inspection outcomes. The team provide intense support to individual settings and also delivers a range of workshops and training on a broad range of themes in line with the Ofsted framework. The workshops include delivery of the RHRT model and Early Help to Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL’s) and early year’s practitioners. This work is delivered via 10 district Early Years Networks.

- **Early Help/Safeguarding**

  There are two posts supporting this area of work – one of the posts provides support and advice in CASS where Early Help requests for support have been submitted. The post holder provides advice around the quality of the request for support and will if required assist the referrer throughout the process. In addition, the post holder provides advice and support to partners and other professionals about early years and childcare provision and what they provide when supporting families and will liaise directly with Birmingham Forward Steps to ensure families are directed to the most appropriate support.

  The other safeguarding post also offers support and guidance to providers around issues relating to persons in a position of trust and provides and interfacing role between the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and the Early Years’ Service.

  Both posts deliver a range of workshops and training to the sector to develop skills and knowledge in safeguarding policy and practice.

- **Inclusion**

  The service has a dedicated post with the remit to promote equality and inclusion, particularly for disadvantaged families, looked after children, children in need and children with special educational needs and disability, by removing barriers of access to free places and working with parents to give each child support to fulfil their potential. This work supports the local authority duties under the Equality Act 2010 and takes account of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice 0-25 when securing free places.

**Birmingham Forward Steps (BFS) 0-5yrs Service (Children’s Centre’s and Health Visiting)**

BFS is a partnership agency lead by five strategic partners (Birmingham Community Health Care Trust, Barnardos, Spurgeons, St Pauls and the Springfield’s project).

A 0-5 year’s district based community service commissioned by Birmingham City Council to provide universal and targeted early help support to children and families.

Families are offered an integrated approach to support which is delivered in the home environment and within a variety of community based settings.
The integrated team includes health visitors, assistant practitioners, family support workers and early year’s workers. Universal support is offered through the five mandated health visitor contacts and children centre play and stay groups. Families with above universal needs are supported through early help assessment and appropriate care plans. Practice is underpinned by RHRT and the service has adopted the principles of the Signs of safety and wellbeing framework and introduced the ‘Three Houses’ across the workforce.

**Education/Schools**

Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) has developed an Education and Emotional Wellbeing strategy group to support schools to promote inclusion positively. A triage process has been established to identify and support vulnerable children back into education.

Since 2016, Designated Schools Grant funded staff have provided intensive training to Safeguarding Leads and Pastoral Staff on working with children and families to significantly increase early hep offered to schools. The training has incorporated the signs of safety and well-being framework.

In 2018 the majority of schools reported within their section 175 (BCSB) that they are carrying out a range of early help interventions with children and young people, a mix of single agency and multi-agency interventions with over 10,000 early hep conversations. BEP is assisting schools with ensuring all early help conversations are successful in matching the agency with the young person.

BEP chairs the Education and Emotional Wellbeing strategy group and emerging focus of which has been to support schools to promote inclusion positively. A triage process has been established to identify and support vulnerable children back into education.

**School Nursing Service**

Qualified School Nurses as specialist practitioners in public health have the skills and competencies to identify children and young people in need of early help, in line with Birmingham’s RHRT Framework. Through the transition from Health Visitors to School Nursing and the use of robust health assessments they are able to provide support to improve the life chances of children and young people. The Link School Nurse will be well placed to share information with the multi-agency team within a locality. By sharing information an informed decision can be made as to the appropriate practitioner to undertake EHA and contribute to any Early Help Plan’s where there is any unmet health need.

**SEND**

Children and Young people with identified or evolving special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) require a coordinated multiagency approach where teaching support for their learning needs takes into account any associated health and social care needs.

All services are required by Part 3 Section 19 Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years (2015) to enable all children and young people with identified or evolving SEND to achieve their best possible educational and other outcomes.
Birmingham’s SEND Pathway requires all agencies supporting children and young people with identified or evolving SEND to work together to implement SEN Support through a graduated multiagency approach that is child-centered and addresses the child/young person’s education, health and social support needs.

If there are wider needs in the family such as housing or other domestic circumstances which cannot be addressed through the child/young person’s ongoing multiagency SEN Support or Education Health Care (EHC) Assessment, services are expected to make use of an Early Help approach in accordance with Sections 5.29 and 6.21 SEND Code of Practice for children and young people 0-25 year (2015). Any additional EHA will need to complement both implementation and review of the child/young person’s SEN Support or EHC Plan.

0 -25 Mental Health (Forward Thinking Birmingham)

The new Early Help offer from Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) provides specialised support and treatment for those children and young people who previously would not have met the guidelines for specialist intervention.

• Universal Early Help Offer

The FTB universal offer for Early Help is delivered through our drop-in centre “Pause” which is based in the city centre (Digbeth). Pause is provided by our partners at The Children’s Society to deliver brief interventions, groups and self-help material, seven days a week to children, young people, their parents and professionals who work with them.

• Universal Plus to additional needs Early Help Offer

STICK Team Schools

The team will assess and provide treatment in school, working with the staff to ensure wrap around support for the child/young person and up skilling the educational staff in the process. The team also provide mental health training to schools to ensure children and young people have access to the right help at the right time. Staff will work alongside educators to complete EHA’s and encourage the use of the three houses document.

STICK Team Consultation

Based in CASS, these highly experienced mental health practitioners can give advice, signpost and where necessary provide information to education staff, social workers and CASS staff. Consultation can be easily requested by emailing bwc.stickftb@nhs.net. The CASS workers can also provide liaison for children and young people being treated in secondary care services.
STICK Team Family Support

This service is accessed through an internal referral form available to all Family Support Teams. Our workers are based within the Birmingham Children’s Trust Family Support teams and alongside direct intervention, also offer consultation clinics. The team will assess and provide treatment, working with the Family Support staff to ensure wrap around support for the child/young person and up skilling the staff in the process. The team also provide mental health training to teams to ensure children and young people have access to the right help at the right time.

Think Family

Birmingham has a good family support early help offer, which is accessed by partners completing a Request for Support Form at CASS or following step down from Children in Need Plans. There are thirteen Family Support teams who work with families with additional needs (RHRT) with the offer available on the BSCB website as part of the broader Think Family Offer. There is a robust step up/step down process that enables the right cases to be stepped up to social work services and stepped down from Children in Need Plans. On average only 15% of closed cases are stepped up for a statutory intervention.

The Trust also commission Think Family specialist and intensive family support for priority areas – Multi Systemic Therapy from Women’s and Children’s Hospital Foundation Trust (Vulnerable Adolescents); Barnardos (Child Sexual Exploitation); Women’s Aid (Domestic Abuse) and Family Action (Families with complex needs). At any one time there are 1,500 families being supported across these services. All Family Support Teams adopt a whole family approach including a key worker allocated to each family promoting relationship-based and strengths-based practices, working with families as partners.

The majority of Family Support workers have completed the City & Guilds Level 4 working with families with complex needs. The teams offer a range of effective assessments, tools and interventions. The teams work intensively with families to build effective relationships and lead multi agency plans. They offer parenting interventions including Triple P - Positive Parenting programme and Incredible Years, provide additional support to engage the family members into education, training or employment or to access mental health or substance misuse services.

The Domestic Abuse Prevention strategy 2018 -2023 highlights the importance of early identification to strengthen responses in every organisation so that all workers are able to identify domestic abuse and intervene at the earliest opportunity.

Recent analysis of the needs of families has led to training being rolled out to family workers in Parents and Children Together – a programme that reduces violence from adolescents to their parents. Some workers have also been trained in the domestic abuse perpetrator programme and this is being rolled out across the City to increase our understanding and offer for perpetrators and victims.

Think Family Programme – Housing

Think Family is part of an overall shift in the way in which Housing Management responds to anti-social behaviour – the aim is to manage demand by having a real focus on early intervention and deterrence as opposed to enforcement. The Think Family workers have continued to play an integral part in ASB Service delivery and resolving ASB at a local level. Their early intervention and support mechanisms have supported families to develop strategies to
facilitate long term, sustainable change and to contribute to sustaining tenancies and enabling best use of BCC stock.

- Housing management continues in its journey to transform it approach to prevention and intervention with six dedicated family support workers based across the city, working with families with additional needs
- Help families to seek support to address financial exclusion/debt and housing issues.
- Develop actions with the family to reduce the risk of continuing housing issues.
- Provide guidance to support families to exit temporary accommodation. This will include seeking advice on finance and personal budgeting, implementing a payment plan to address rent arrears and looking at appropriate accommodation which may include private rented sector housing.
- The service will continue to identify family problems at an early stage, rather than reacting when these escalate, causing a greater impact on the community as a whole.
- The service will continue to work with those families in greatest need with multiple problems

**West Midlands Police**

The Early Help offer from West Midlands Police provides support to the thirteen family support Teams. Working with families predominantly with characteristics of involvement in crime or antisocial behaviour, those affected by domestic violence or abuse and Children who are in need of help our staff are co-located in the hubs.

Supporting the work of the FSW, Police Officers deliver inputs around criminal exploitation, knife crime, gangs and general stay safe.

WMP Early Help Officers will be supporting the work of the newly formed Exploitation hub and actively seeking to engage with young people and families where there are emerging concerns around exploitation and gang association to minimise the transferable risk to younger siblings.

The Early Help offer may adapt to suit the local needs and emerging trends within the community.

**Youth Offending Service**

The principal aim of the Youth Justice System is to prevent offending and re-offending by children and young people aged 10-17 years. Local youth justice services are delivered and managed through Youth Offending Services, which are multi-agency partnerships. In Birmingham this includes statutory representation from Local Authorities/Children’s Trust (specifically Social Care and Education), the Police, Probation and Health and also drawing on the input of a range of other disciplines including substance misuse, education link mentors and
a speech and language therapist, bringing together a range of agencies with expertise in welfare and enforcement practices to improve outcomes.

Front-line practitioners have been trained in ‘Working with families with complex needs’ (Level 4, City and Guilds) to promote a whole family response under the city’s ‘Think Family’ approach. Over the last 18 months there has been training to promote trauma informed practices for all front line practitioners and managers with on-going clinical supervision and formulation support from specialist staff within the Service.

On behalf of the Community Safety Partnership, the Youth Offending Service Management Board oversees performance of the Service and the broader partnership against nationally prescribed performance measures. There is a Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2019-2022 that has reviewed recent performance, provides information on interventions and highlights priorities for the City. Birmingham is sustaining lower reoffending than the national average and is performing better than the national average in supporting young people in the Youth Justice System to be in full time education or training. The First Time Entrants rate is reducing but remains above the national average as does the rate of custody.

Nationally and locally there have been rises in serious violence including knife crime and a greater understanding of the drivers behind this including young people being criminally exploited. A significant number of these young people are not known to the Youth Justice System and therefore work across the broader partnership to identify and address the causes of youth crime continues to be a significant priority. The West Midlands regional partnership including the Chief Executives of Local Authorities and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner are working together with the Home Office to establish a Violence Reduction Unit to significantly reduce the impact of violence to victims and local communities.