

Early Help Review Decision No - CE032	
CABINET MEETING DATE (2021/22) 24 January 2022	CLASSIFICATION: Open If exempt, the reason will be listed in the main body of this report.
WARD(S) AFFECTED All	
CABINET MEMBER Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care	
KEY DECISION No	
GROUP DIRECTOR Jacquie Burke, Group Director of Children and Education	

1. CABINET MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Ensuring that all children, young people and their families in Hackney have access to the opportunities and support needed to set them up for whole-life success is Hackney Council's vision for its Early Help offer.
- 1.2. The Early Help Review has presented the Council with the opportunity to ensure that the support that Hackney Council's Early Help services offer the right help for children, young people and their families and ensuring that these services can be accessed quickly and without stigma.
- 1.3. The review was initiated in 2019 prior to the Covid pandemic, which has exacerbated the inequalities that exist within society, has undermined the development of children and young people through disruption to their education and lives, and has exacerbated the needs of many families in the borough.
- 1.4. Now more than ever, it is critical that Hackney Council's Early Help services are best placed to support children, young people and their families, in order to ensure that all children can reach their full potential no matter what their starting point, and that these services provide the support needed to ensure that families can overcome challenges in their lives, helps them build resilience for the future and stops their needs escalating to a point where they may need the support of statutory services.
- 1.5. We are incredibly proud of our Early Help services, which play a crucial role in the lives of families across the borough and which were recognised by Ofsted as being "well-developed and effective" in 2019. The work of this review has highlighted the wide-range of support and opportunities that our Early Help services offer, and how these are highly valued by residents.
- 1.6. The review has also identified opportunities where we could be doing things differently, to ensure that our services are working in a joined-up way to get the right help for families as quickly as possible.
- 1.7. The focus of this review has been on Hackney Council's own Early Help services, however these services are just an aspect of a wider mosaic of Early Help offered across Hackney; including by schools and settings, the health sector and the community and voluntary sector. The changes associated with this review will seek to ensure that Hackney's Early Help services are best placed to work effectively as part of that wider system of help. The outcome of this review will also mark the start of a commitment to a wider piece of transformation work with partners in Hackney, to ensure that the whole Early Help system is working in a joined-up and effective way to help our children, young people and their families.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. 'Early Help' refers to the non-statutory support that is provided to a child, young person or their family when there are indicators that they are at risk of poor outcomes and need some help to achieve a good level of wellbeing and support.
- 2.2. The aim of Early Help is to support children, young people, and their families, to address their needs in such a way that they do not escalate, become entrenched or recur through their lives, at the same time as promoting self-determination and empowering individuals and families.
- 2.3. Early Help is provided on a consent basis to children, young people, and families who choose to engage with the Council's support.
- 2.4. Effective Early Help can enhance both the immediate wellbeing, on the one hand, and the longer-term life chances and resilience, on the other hand, of children and young people in the area, including those children and young people who are at risk of poor outcomes.
- 2.5. This report outlines the scope, drivers, and process of Hackney Council's review into its own Early Help services; as well as what the review has learnt and what the outcomes of the review are. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Cabinet on the outcomes of the review and for Cabinet to note the associated changes to Early Help service associated with the review, which will be embedded from January 2022 onwards.
- 2.6. These changes to process and practice will provide the foundations for a second phase of transformation work, beyond the completion of the Early Help Review. Hence, this paper is also recommending for Cabinet to note the commitment to wider Early Help engagement and transformation that will commence in 2022, in order to develop the wider system to most effectively help children, young people and their families early.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1. **It is recommended that Cabinet note:**
 - i) **The delivery of practice and process improvement changes to targeted Early Help services delivered by Hackney Council, as recommended as 'priorities' by the Early Help Review under Section 5 of this paper.**
 - ii) **The commencement of a wider piece of Early Help system transformation in 2022; through the establishment of a Strategic Partnership Early Help group and the development of a partnership Early Help Strategy.**

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

4.1. It is the responsibility of all local organisations and agencies to:

- identify children and families who would benefit from Early Help
- undertake an assessment of the need for Early Help
- 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

4.2. Hackney Council, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, has a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of all children.

4.3. Hackney Council should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up Early Help services based on a clear understanding of local needs.

4.4. Drivers

4.4.1. In 2019, it was agreed by senior officers and members of the Council that a review of London Borough of Hackney's (LBH) internal Early Help model should be undertaken. This decision was driven primarily by the following reasons.

4.4.2. A review will give officers and members confidence that Hackney's Early Help model is still fit for purpose and that it will continue to be fit for purpose during the coming few years. This review was not driven by a need to address perceived 'failings'. The quality of Early Help services was recognised by Ofsted in November 2019 as "well-developed and effective".

4.4.3. Developments in the social, political and economic context in Hackney since Early Help services were designed or last reviewed, including but not limited to:

- More families in temporary accommodation.
- More families under strain from cumulative impacts of austerity.
- Increased complexity in safeguarding adolescents.
- Changes in residents' expectations of how services and transactions are carried out: a 'digital shift'.

4.4.4. Ensuring a sustainable financial model: The review was not led by a need to make savings but rather a need to ensure that the financial model for delivery of Early Help services is sustainable for the future, in what was already an increasingly uncertain financial context due to reductions in the Council's core funding. This need was exacerbated by the financial impact of Covid. The outcomes of this review have hence been achieved within existing budget frameworks, and do not reflect a reduction in expenditure on Early Help services.

4.5. Scope

- 4.5.1. In scope for this review, and delivering the bulk of the Early Help offered by the Council, is the work delivered by the following service areas in Table 1. Each service delivers Early Help to a different key group, which benefits from their specialist knowledge and experience in dealing with the kind of challenges they are facing.

Table 1

Service area	Cohort supported
Early Years and Children's Centres	Pregnant women, teenage parents and families with children up to 6 years or children aged up to 8 where there is a preschool sibling including those identified as meeting 'Supporting Families' criteria. ¹ Children aged up to 12 years out of school provision.
Young Hackney	Children and young people aged 6 to 19 (or 25 where they have SEND).
Family Support Service	Families with children aged 6 to 19 (or 25 where they have SEND), including those identified as meeting the 'Supporting Families' criteria.

- 4.5.2. The focus of this review has been a close look at Hackney Council's internal Early Help services. These services are just an aspect of a wider mosaic of Early Help offered across Hackney including: by schools, the health sector and the community and voluntary sector.
- 4.5.3. The outcomes of this review will deliver changes that ensure that Hackney's Early Help services are best placed to work effectively as part of that wider system of help. This will also enable the start of a wider piece of transformation and engagement work with partners in Hackney, to ensure that the whole Early Help system is working in a joined-up and effective way to help Hackney's children, young people and their families.

¹ A Government funded programme which supports families with multiple and complex problems including crime, anti-social behaviour, educational attendance, unemployment, mental health problems and domestic abuse.

4.6. Objectives & Delivery

4.6.1. The objectives of the Early Help Review were to:

- Develop a better understanding of the current and likely future needs of children, young people, and families in Hackney.
- Identify a) particular strengths of the current Early Help offer and features it is important to protect, and b) any gaps in provision, instances of inefficiency and instances of duplicated effort within LBH or across the wider Early Help partnership.
- Clarify the vision, proposed outcomes and principles for Early Help in Hackney.
- Identify a financially sustainable operating model and Early Help offer that can more effectively meet local needs.
- Identify what work needs to be done in order to implement this new model.

4.6.2. The review has been led by an 'Early Help Working Group', inclusive of senior officers from across the Children & Education directorate since 2019. The review was paused for a period of 6 months in 2020, due to the impact of the pandemic and associated pressures on services.

4.6.3. An 'Early Help Members Oversight Group' (chaired by Cllr Anntionette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care, standing board membership can be found at Appendix 3), has provided oversight and input on the review process and outcomes between January 2021- November 2021. Ongoing Member oversight of Early Help service delivery will be provided through the CYP Scrutiny Commission and the Health and Wellbeing Board

4.7. Methodology

4.7.1. An extensive piece of engagement with stakeholders was completed in order to understand the current effectiveness of the Council's Early Help provision. This included:

- Deliberative workshops with over 100 frontline staff and partners, including representatives from schools and health.
- A series of commissioned interviews with children, young people and families who were accessing or had previously accessed targeted Early Help from Hackney Council. Interviewers spoke to 26 people from 17 different families: 7 young people, 19 parents or carers.
- An on-line engagement survey providing an opportunity for stakeholders to share their views of Hackney Council Early Help services ran for 8 weeks, receiving 91 responses.

- Engagement with primary and secondary schools at key meetings, and follow-up 1:1 conversations with 5 schools to share their views of Hackney Council Early Help services
- Review of recent engagement and consultation exercises completed by Hackney Council.

4.7.2. A secondary analysis was completed of the latest research on Early Help and work being done by other local authorities to identify evidence-based effective practice Hackney could adopt.

4.7.3. A number of service redesign workshops with senior leaders in Children & Education took place, to clarify the visions and principles of Hackney Council Early Help services, and identify key service changes for a new model.

4.7.4. An analysis of referral and assessment data in Early Help case management systems, to understand current demand, was completed.

4.7.5. A series of pilot projects to explore opportunities for changes to aspects of Hackney Council's future Early Help delivery model.

4.8. Learning of the review

4.8.1. The learning generated by the review highlighted that there are really strong aspects to Hackney Council's Early Help offer. The outcomes of the review seek to build on these strengths.

4.8.2. The key strengths of Hackney's Early Help offer identified through the review include:

- The strength and range of the services delivered, including:
 - Culturally appropriate opportunities, support and intervention;
 - The trusted role of Children Centre's and Young Hackney youth hubs in the community;
 - The importance of specialised services with specific expertise;
 - The value of taking a multi-agency approach to Early Help interventions and the importance of strong relationships with key partners.
- Early Help workers develop trusted relationships with families and young people; built-on the warm, judgement-free way Early Help workers relate to people they are supporting.
- Hackney Council Early Help staff encourage high aspirations and act as advocates on behalf of children and young people and their families in challenges they face.
- The importance of practitioners being able to take a creative and flexible approach and a personalised approach to providing support.

4.8.3. The learning of the review also indicated that there were opportunities to build on existing strengths, share expertise, and develop the Council's skill set, in

order to extend and improve the Council's Early Help offer.

4.8.4. Based on this learning, what was already understood to be effective and valued, and where there were opportunities to improve, this learning was focused into 6 key areas for what Hackney Council's future Early Help offer should look like:

- Visible, approachable services that are local to children, young people and their families, and that they trust
- Effectively communicated support, and clarity and consistency on how to access this support
- Support able to meet the needs of the whole family, especially parenting capacity
- Services built on trusting and consistent relationships with practitioners and services, so that engagement with children, young people and their families is the basis of all support
- Support which is able to meet the specific needs of children, young people and their families, through specialist and expert interventions, including at key points in a child's, young person's or family's life
- Interventions led by outcomes and impact, as well as young people and families being able to feedback and shape support

4.9. Priority changes to service delivery

4.9.1. The review has developed a vision and a detailed set of working principles for Early Help delivered by Hackney Council Children & Education services. This Vision and Principles can be found at Appendix 1.

4.9.2. In analysis of the learning of the review, and in-line with the vision and principles established, a set of priorities have been identified as outcomes of the review. These are outlined from paragraph 4.9.5 in this report.

4.9.3. These priorities are underpinned by the following practice principles for Early Help delivered by the Council:

- There should be no delay to getting support
- We should have a Single Point of Access to services
- We offer consistent and evidenced quality of support
- Our work is predicated on consent for support and consent to information-sharing
- We enable multi-disciplinary working led by families, with the family present
- We work with parents / carers as experts and know that work with young people should always involve parents
- Our interventions are evidence-based and ongoing service development is led by the needs of the children, young people and families we work with versus the evidence-based interventions we can offer

4.9.4. Delivery of these priorities equates to changes to practice and processes for LBH targeted Early Help services. Cabinet is recommended to note the delivery of these practice and process changes as the outcomes of the review.

4.9.5. Short-term priorities:

- All requests for Early Help will be made via one 'request for support' form and will be screened by the Early Help Hub in the Multi-agency Agency Safeguarding Hub. One assessment form and process will be embedded for all Early Help assessments delivered by Hackney Council.
- The Council will embed consistent protocol for children whose needs and/ or risk of harm escalate from needing an Early Help intervention to needing a Children's Social Care intervention, and whose needs and risk of harm decrease from Social Care to Early Help. This will ensure that children, young people and their families experience consistent timely and joined-up support as their needs change.
- A single set of practice standards will be adopted across Hackney Council targeted Early Help services, in order to ensure that interventions are consistently of the same standard for children, young people and their families. This will include timescales for how quickly children will be seen, how quickly an assessment will be completed and a plan developed with the family.
- Targeted Early Help services, including Young Hackney targeted units, Family Support delivered through Children's Centre multi-agency teams and Family Support delivered by FS Units will all allocate targeted cases on the same locality basis. This will ensure that families are able to receive holistic support from joined-up services, with a strong understanding of other local support and opportunities available. Work will also take place in 2022 to explore how synergies with the 'Neighbourhood' Primary Care Network localities could be built upon.
- Targeted Early Help interventions will always involve work with parents and carers, or other key family members.
- Hackney Early Help Services will embed a single performance framework for targeted Early Help services overseen by an officer oversight group. This will include a shared Quality Assurance framework, service Key Performance Indicators and the use of a common measure for the impact our services have for children, young people and their families.
- Hackney Council will develop a brand for Hackney Council targeted Early Help services, in order to have a clear delineation between the

targeted Early Help that the Council offers and the extensive Early Help delivered across the borough by other organisations. We will work with partners in 2022 to develop communication and branding around a borough-wide Early Help strategy.

4.9.6. The priorities above are the immediate focus for Early Help services. The review has also identified opportunities to deliver medium to long-term priorities. These will be delivered through 2022.

4.9.7. Medium-term priorities

- Ongoing development of 'children & family hubs' through key workstreams, linked to the Early Years strategy
- Evaluation capacity of parenting groups available across Hackney Council and ensure these are being targeted- audiences
- Multi-agency Early Help Strategy developed through engagement with partners (including schools, health, police and the Community and Voluntary Sector) , led and agreed by an Early Help Partnership Strategic Group- ensuring a shared responsibility for the delivery of Early Help.
- Multi-agency training programme developed and delivered to embed Early Help Assessment across the partnership
- Local Early Help performance framework developed and agreed, to provide oversight of local datasets related to children, young people and their families.
- Review approach to commissioning in Early Help, to ensure evidence-based and impactful.
- Ongoing review of presenting needs through Early Help hub versus evidence-based interventions available. Identify gaps and how these can be met through training and resources continually.
- Partnership locality Early Help teams will be brought together to periodically review specific locality needs, trends and resources available.
- Develop principles and associated actions for embedding effective and consistent co-production of Early Help service delivery with families and young people, so that families are able to shape the support that Hackney Council Early Help offers, and how we can best approach and work with them.

- Identify and embed actions for the delivery of anti-racist practice in Hackney Council Early Help services, linked to the Anti-Racist Action Plan being delivered across the Children & Education directorate

4.9.8. Longer-term priorities

- One case-management system for all Early Help services, with the ability for improved information-sharing with partners, in-line with GDPR and consent.
- Greater alignment of management structures to deliver seamless targeted Early Help.
- Regular review of performance and quality assurance of Early Help by the 'Early Help sub-group'.
- Yearly recommissioning of Early Help delivered in-line with a shared evidence-base and framework.
- Ongoing co-production of service improvements, working with families to understand how we can continue to shape how Early Help services work with families.
- Ongoing delivery of actions identified, to embed anti-racist practice in Early Help services.

4.9.9. An officer project board has been established that will oversee the implementation of the practice and process changes associated with delivery of the outcomes of the review.

4.9.10. Members' oversight of ongoing service delivery and improvement will be provided through the Children and young people scrutiny commission and the Hackney Health and Wellbeing Board. The Early Help Member Oversight Group has completed its oversight function in completing the review.

4.9.11. Delivery of these priorities and associated service changes will be delivered within current budget frameworks. There are no service reductions associated with these outcomes, nor does this reflect a reduction in the offer of Council Early Help services. These outcomes complement wider corporate savings commitment.

4.9.12. These recommendations will ensure that Hackney Council's Early Help services are delivering a consistently high standard of service for children, young people and their families; where families can access the right help for them, quickly and without stigma, will enable effective ongoing service improvement in-line with resident needs, and will provide a foundation for the next phase of Early Help partnership development to begin.

4.10. Wider system transformation

- 4.10.1. The review has also recommended the establishment of a partnership Early Help Sub-Group, reporting to the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. This group is planning to be established in February 2022 following approval of the Safeguarding Partnership Board and will include representation from Public Health, Schools, the wider Health system, the Police and community safety officers and the Voluntary and Community Sector, amongst others.
- 4.10.2. Through partnership engagement in 2022, this group will focus on developing, embedding and overseeing the effectiveness and impact of a wider London Borough of Hackney Early Help Strategy. This will be a strategy that outlines the shared vision and working principles of agencies delivering Early Help in Hackney, and a shared commitment to the shared actions of the partnership to deliver that vision. The sub-group will build on and improve partnership working across agencies, creating the infrastructure to provide a seamless service delivery which will evidence clear and positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 5.1. The alternative option is to not make changes to the processes, protocol and delivery of Hackney Council's Early Help services. This was rejected due to the importance of embedding consistent practice standards and processes, as were identified as opportunities to improve service delivery through the review. This will ensure that all families are able to effectively access consistent, evidence-based interventions, and that enhanced service performance oversight is in place.
- 5.2. It is also important that Hackney Council engages in establishing an Early Help sub-group and developing an Early Help strategy, in order to deliver on the partnership's collective responsibility to deliver Early Help in line with statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

6. BACKGROUND

6.1. Policy Context

- 6.1.1. These recommendations directly underpin the Council's Corporate Plan priority to: "Support children and families to thrive", through ensuring that all children, young people and families are able to access effective opportunities and support to overcome challenges they face, develop resilience, and thrive in the future.
- 6.1.2. These recommendations also seek to support the ongoing strategic response to increased demand in Children's Social Care, by ensuring that Early Help

interventions are best placed to prevent the escalation of a child or young person's needs and / or risk of harm, to a level requiring a statutory response.

6.2. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.2.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 2. Changes to service processes do not equate to reduction in the range or expertise of services available. Changes to pathways will not impact who can access targeted Early Help services or the interventions available to these groups; notably families with children aged 0-19, or up to 25 where a young person has a Special Educational Need or Disability.
- 6.2.2. There will not be an unequal impact on any groups, and recommendations should equate to an overall positive impact for children, young people and their families with protected characteristics, through consistent pathways to support, a reduction in any delays to getting help and an improved understanding of the specific needs of families in the borough.
- 6.2.3. The service changes outlined do not equate to any job losses or change in job roles. If, in the future, insight from improved monitoring of capacity, demand and need appropriate changes to staff roles, and / or a realignment of Early Help resources, this will be delivered in-line with the organisational change policy.

6.3. Sustainability

- 6.3.1. Not applicable.

6.4. Consultations

- 6.4.1. As outlined in Section 4.7, An engagement exercise was conducted through 2020 and 2021. This was not a statutory requirement but directly supported the identification of service changes. This engagement included:
- Deliberative workshops with over 100 frontline staff and partners, including representatives from schools and health
 - The Early Help Working Group commissioned a series of interviews with children, young people and families who were accessing, or had previously accessed, targeted Early Help from Hackney Council. Interviewers spoke to 26 people from 17 different families: 7 young people, 19 parents or carers.
 - An on-line engagement survey providing an opportunity for stakeholders to share their views of Hackney Council Early Help services ran for 8 weeks, receiving 91 responses.
 - Engagement with primary and secondary schools at key meetings, and follow-up 1:1 conversations with 5 schools to share their views of Hackney Council Early Help services
- 6.4.2. No further consultation is required to deliver these practice changes, however embedding the changes associated with the review will be underpinned by

ongoing engagement and communication with safeguarding partners, which will continue from January 2022.

- 6.4.3. Wider engagement with partners will be facilitated through the Early Help sub-group, in order to develop a partnership Early Help Strategy.

6.5. Risk Assessment

- 6.5.1. The service changes identified will be delivered within existing budgets, and there are no significant future financial risks identified at this time. There is a risk that improved branding and communication around the Council's Early Help offer may lead to an increased number of referrals to Hackney Council Early Help services. This will be mitigated by enhanced oversight of demand and service capacity of the 'front door' to Council Early Help services, reporting to the Children & Education Senior Leadership Team. This risk will also be mitigated by a consistent screening process that is able to direct families to Universal services where these services are best placed to provide the right help for them, as well as working with partners to manage expectations around the role of the Council's targeted Early Help offer.
- 6.5.2. There is an operational risk that case management and reporting systems will not be able to support process changes. This is being mitigated through close alignment with the Mosaic Recovery Programme (the case management system that will be utilised by Council targeted Early Help services in the future), to build-in any dependable reporting requirements within this programme of work.
- 6.5.3. If the identified service changes were not implemented, there is a risk that children, young people and their families may be undermined in their ability to access the right help, as quickly as possible. There is also a risk that families will experience disjointed help from different agencies if the Council does not support the development of a partnership Early Help Strategy.

7. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 7.1. The report seeks delivery of practice and process improvement changes to targeted Early Help services and the commencement of a wider piece of Early Help system transformation in 2022, through the establishment of a Strategic Partnership Early Help Group and the development of a partnership Early Help Strategy.
- 7.2. The programme will be fully funded from existing budgets across Early Help services, and the recommendations from this report will not result in a budget pressure for the Council. The outcomes from the programme align with and complement the corporate savings plans that have been agreed by Cabinet for delivery in 2022/23 and 2023/24.
- 7.3. The transformation programme must recognise the context of ongoing financial challenge and the continued uncertainty regarding future levels of funding for the local authority. The role of the Strategic Partnership Early Help

Group will be to ensure that financial sustainability is one of the key strategic objectives for the early help strategy.

8. VAT Implications on Land & Property Transactions

8.1. Not Applicable.

9. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR, LEGAL & GOVERNANCE SERVICES

9.1. In line with Article 5.2 of the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet will carry out all of the Council's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council. The Elected Mayor may choose to delegate functions to be carried out by the Cabinet collectively that set priorities that contribute to the life and development of the borough and those that promote and improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the Borough and its inhabitants. Cabinet is recommended to note at 3.1 of this report the practice and process improvement changes to be implemented to the Early Help Services which aim to improve the lives of families across the Borough

9.2. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Hackney Council Early Help: Vision & Principles

This document outlines the Vision & Principles for Hackney Council Early Help Services, as developed through the review. The service changes outlined seek to deliver this vision.

Appendix 2 - Equalities Impact Assessment

This document assesses the Equalities Impact of delivering the service changes outlined in this report.

Appendix 3- Membership of the Early Help Members Oversight Group

This document outlines the members of the Early Help Members Oversight Group.

EXEMPT

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

In accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) England Regulations 2012 publication of Background Papers used in the preparation of reports is required

Description of document (or None)

None.

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