

CSC Development Plan (Early Help)

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Service Area:	Early Help

1. TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW

Background

Barnsley's last full inspection was in 2018. Since then, the national context has changed. There is a significant workforce crisis, a slow recovery from a global pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis, all of which is having an impact on Barnsley's ability to deliver services to children safely and effectively. These changing circumstances are resulting in many more adults parenting in adverse circumstances.

With this context in mind, the newly formed leadership team and a new executive Director, with the full support of Organisational and Political leaders, commissioned a full review of children's services, including, external case sampling using Ofsted Methodology, obtaining feedback from front line staff and managers about how it feels to work for Barnsley, a review of data not currently included within the Children's Services performance framework, findings from the recent JTAI Inspection and findings from the recent Childrens Home inspection

The findings provided a full and thorough understanding of the impact of high demand and high caseloads on the quality and impact of practice and how well the service is performing. In the area of early help, it was found that our targeted early help service is significantly impact by demand levels outstripping our ability to respond in a safe and impactful way. The impact on workforce is significant and unsustainable. Caseloads are too high to deliver timely, effective and impactful targeted early help.

Effective Early Help services prevents families from entering the statutory social care system. This links intrinsically with the pressures also presenting within social care as when capacity is insufficient to address needs at the lowest level of the threshold of interventions this pushes families up into specialist and statutory services as needs and complexity of the requirements escalate over time if support is not provided on a responsive basis. Demand therefore needs to be addressed at all levels of the threshold of intervention in order to reduce pressure on statutory services and improve long term outcomes for children and families. In addition to the impact that this has on families, education and health providers and the wider community, early help falls within the ILACs framework and therefore presents an inspection risk to the Local Authority.

Summary of Proposal

The review found that Family Support Workers (FSW) have high caseloads so their work is consistently highly pressured. Too many children, young people and their families experience delay accessing the Early Help service they need. This means they do not always have the time they need to undertake planned direct work with families. Although there are examples of families receiving timely targeted support some of which is good, many families are not visited frequently enough and they experience drift and delay. The unmet needs of families escalate with examples of re-referrals to Children's Social Care which could have been avoided through effective early help and step down from CSC. Some families have their case worker re-allocated to other FSWs so they experience a start again service which hinders the progress made by many families.

There is insufficient frontline management capacity to demonstrate a firm grip on case work. This is compounded by poor data capture, retrieval and reporting arrangements so managers do not know what performance is in too many key areas of Early Help service output. Frontline and middle managers span of control is too wide so they also experience consistently highly pressured workload.

In order to address this, we need to create a safe level of caseload and reduce the span of control for managers.

Current family support caseloads (October 2022) equate to an average of 24 families and 53 children per worker. Some workers have up to 105 children on their caseload depending on the size of families allocated to them. Benchmarks across the region indicate that the average caseload is 10-12 families. From a total of 30 FTEs in Early Help Services no one held cases at 12 and the regional benchmark. 30% of workers held cases between 13 to 19 and the remaining 70% are carrying over 20 cases. Therefore, a worker holding between 20 to 25 cases could be working with between 75 to 100 children.

Family Support Managers provide direct line management and supervision for between 12 to 14 people. This exceeds the council's guideline of no more than 6 direct reports per manager.

The proposal is to agree a new operating model of no more than 12 families per worker to ensure a safe caseload. The proposed staffing model would ensure a management span of no more than 7 FTEs and increase workforce capacity by 27 FTE Family Support Workers , 6.5 FTE Family Support Managers, and 2 FTE Development Workers (G7)

Alternative Options

Do Nothing: The review findings set out that the current operating environment for early help is not adequate. High, complex caseloads with inadequate levels of management oversight is leading to drift, delay and escalation to the threshold for statutory social care. Whilst the workforce is committed the Local Authority is not providing adequate levels of staffing to ensure that practice is safe or effective.

Partial increase in capacity: see above. The level of capacity required would not be met.

Links to Corporate Priorities

As we approach 2030, our overall vision for Barnsley is for it to become a “Place of Possibilities” This means a place in which all people can live in good health, feel protected and to go on and achieve their potential through quality education institutions, transport and connectivity, access to skills and sustainable employment. The proposal is central to the following priorities:

- A Healthier Barnsley – in which (a) everyone is able to enjoy their lives in good physical and mental health (b) where fewer people experience poverty and (c) people can access the right support at the right time and place
- A Learning Barnsley – where all children and young people can aim high and achieve their full potential with more people being able to access higher education and higher-level skills than ever before
- Enabling Barnsley - Our council is modern, inclusive, efficient, productive, and high performing

Anticipated Objectives & Benefits

The proposal will achieve the following objectives and benefits:

- improved quality, compliance and effectiveness of early help practice
- reduced risk of harm - issues addressed or deescalated
- reduced length of intervention
- prevention of escalation to children’s social care – reduction in demand for statutory services
- sustainable step down to universal services
- improved outcomes for children and families across a range of indicators including education and health.
- strengthened resilience in families and improved levels self-efficacy
- consistent, effective and regular case/reflective supervision, performance and development reviews
- improved line of sight to practice
- long term sustainable children’s services and system
- culture of high support, high challenge, reflective and enabling

Implications

- Management/staff time to create the new structure, recruit and induct new members of staff
- HR/Recruitment support to expedite process effectively
- Finance support to expedite process effectively

2. PROJECT SCHEDULE

Key Milestone	Start Date	Completion Date
Cabinet Approval	October 2022	November 2022
Delegated Report	November 2022	November 2022
Commence Recruitment	November 2022	March 2023
Induct Members of Staff	January 2023	June 2023

3. RESOURCES

Resources	Why Required	When Required
Staffing Costs	£2.922M	Non-recurrently (Nov 2022 – Oct 2024)
HR	Recruitment	November 2022
Finance	New structure and ongoing monitoring, check and challenge	November 2022
IT/Office Space	Additional staffing	December/January 2023

4. EFFICIENCIES

Efficiency	Estimates (£)	
Timely interventions to families preventing escalation and re-referral	TBD through MTFS Transformation Review	
Reduced length of time of intervention therefore increasing the opportunity to work with more families at early help	TBD through MTFS Transformation Review	

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Impact of covid and post pandemic working cannot be underestimated. This operating model is only possible with the correct staffing ratios and working conditions.
- Local and national reviews of services for children affect workforce recruitment and retention
- Statutory requirements and regulatory frameworks continue to change and requirements broaden
- Local political pressures in relation to the areas of work/activities