

Early Help Strategy

It's Everybody's Business

London Borough of Lewisham
2016 –2020



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Papers to follow:

Guidance for practitioners
Multi-agency action plan
Revised Continuum of Need
Workforce development strategy

1 Introduction

'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.

Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to:

- identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child.

Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children.'

- (Working Together 2015)

This strategy has been developed with partner agencies who are engaged in the delivery of early help services. It sets out how they will work together to deliver coordinated and timely early help support to children, young people, and families that need it, how these agencies will work effectively to instil confidence, build resilience, and enhance the capacity of families.

What is early help?

The early help strategic board had agreed that:

Early help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family early in the life of a problem, ideally as soon as it emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child's life from pre-birth to adulthood, and applies to any problem or need that the family cannot deal with or meet on their own. Early help requires that agencies should work together to ensure the child and family gets the right response, and the right services, from the right people at the right time.

Early help is provided to prevent or reduce the need for specialist interventions unless they are absolutely the correct response to meet the need and resolve the problem.

Early help services also work with families alongside more specialist interventions to provide continuity to children and families across the levels of need.

In Lewisham, our commissioned family support service works at the targeted level of need:

'Those children and young people at risk of harm (but who have not yet reached the "significant harm" threshold and for whom a preventative service would reduce the likelihood of that risk or harm escalating) identified by local authorities and partners.'

However the majority of early help services provided to children, young people and their families will be services to meet needs which do not require very rapid or formal statutory intervention.

2 Our vision

Our vision for early help in Lewisham is to provide children, young people and families with **the right help, at the right time, in the right place.**

‘Together with families, we will improve the lives and life chances of the children and young people in Lewisham.’

- (Lewisham children and young people’s plan 2015–18)

3 Our objectives

This vision is underpinned by five key objectives:

- 1) To understand and respond in a timely way, apply the revised continuum of need document and assess needs of children, young people and families
- 2) To develop appropriately targeted early help services and support prevention, early intervention and crisis intervention
- 3) To create a clear ‘menu’ and pathway of support across all partner agencies so that families and professionals understand what support is available and how it can be accessed
- 4) To support families to be resilient and effectively address issues they are facing to stop their needs from escalating
- 5) To embed resilient practice in community settings, which will enable families to be appropriately supported in these settings as soon as issues arise

4 The national and local context

National

Services for children, young people and families are operating within a context of rapid change. The main national drivers which impact on the development of this early help strategy include:

- Financial pressures and reduced resourcing levels across all partner organisations
- The government’s Troubled Families programme
- The Children and Families Act 2014, which incorporates:
 - Transformation of the system for children and young people with special educational needs, including those with disabilities (SEND), giving children, young people and their parents greater control and choice in decisions about their future
 - Reform of child care to ensure a whole-systems approach delivering high-quality early years education and child care
 - Reform of the family justice system to tackle delays when children are taken into care
 - A requirement for local authorities to publish a local offer in partnership with children and young people and their families
- NHS reforms, such as the development of local commissioning groups and changes to public health nursing
- NHSE and DOH “Future in Mind” publication 2015, which focuses on promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing and has a focus on early intervention.

In addition, five key documents published during 2010 and 2011 following the formation of the coalition government reinforce the case for early help:

- Graham Allen reports on intervening early in a child's life (1)
- Field report on preventing generational poverty (2)
- Munro review of children's social care services (3)
- Tickell review of early years (4)
- Marmot review of health inequalities (5)
- DfE Keeping Children Safe in Education (6)

All make a compelling case for early help and prevention – both early in a child's life or at the early signs of a possible problem.

Local

Alignment of our early help strategy and children and young people's plan

Lewisham is home to approximately 292,000 people. Lewisham's population has grown rapidly in recent years. By 2018, it is expected that over 300,000 people will live in Lewisham, which will represent an increase of approximately 10% since 2011. In the coming decades, the population of Lewisham is projected to continue to rise, resulting in increased demand for public services.

Our early help strategy sets out how we will deliver an effective, cohesive and coherent early help offer for children, young people, and families living in the borough. This offer will focus on improving outcomes that will make significant improvements to the lives and life-chances of our children, young people and families.

Lewisham's children and young people plan (CYPP) 2015–18 highlights the strategic aims and priorities for all agencies working with children and young people across Lewisham. Lewisham's early help strategy is integral to the delivery of the plan and cuts across all the objectives agreed by the children and young people's partnership.

A key priority highlighted in our CYPP is preventing poor outcomes and escalation of need, including for children in families at risk of crisis through early help.

Other relevant priority areas that relate to our early help approach include:

- optimising the outcomes of pregnancy and the first 1001 days, including reducing toxic stress for children and securing attachment;
- promoting healthy relationships throughout childhood and adolescence;
- mitigating the negative impact of insecure or unsuitable housing for children, young people and families;
- improving and maintaining attendance and engagement in school at all key stages, including at transition points;
- identifying and protecting children and young people at risk of harm and ensure they feel safe

The early help strategy should be read in conjunction with Lewisham's special educational needs and disabilities strategy 2016–19 and the mental health and emotional wellbeing strategy for children and young people 2015–20.

5 The need for change

Although our current offer has strengths, we know that the way in which families access support services is too varied, the response time for families in crisis is too slow, and the monitoring of the effectiveness of on-going intervention too infrequent. In addition, Lewisham's recent Ofsted inspection resulted in recommendations that related to early help, namely;

- ensure that a revised early help strategy is implemented so that early help is effectively targeted, coordinated and evaluated
- enable families to receive appropriate support when need is first identified
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of step-up and step-down arrangements between early help and children's social care to ensure that appropriate actions are taken to improve services.

Through the implementation of this early help strategy, we will ensure that the right families are accessing the right services and that the support offer for families is effectively targeted and aligned. We will make effective use of evidence based practice and will measure the impact of our services robustly. We will strive to most effectively join up early help commissioning across the local authority and wider partnership.

Changing the way we work will have staff development implications and will require a workforce development plan to align with the early help strategy.

We will need to better use business intelligence and work with partners to improve the systematic and early identification of those children at highest risk of poor outcomes. We need to develop and implement an ambitious predictive framework to be more confident in identifying children who are at risk. This will help reduce a tendency to be reactive with brief interventions that have limited long term impact.

With the increase in collaborative working as well as establishing earlier identification mechanisms, there will be a greater need for partners to share information. We are also developing a new shared early help assessment and progress measured tools. It is vital that we address any barriers to appropriate information sharing in order to effectively co-ordinate our support for families.

Our commissioning approach will support our early help offer through making best use of partnership resources, re-shaping specifications and identifying opportunities to re-commission.

6 Features of effective early help

- Early help is a collaborative approach, not a service
- All children and young people receive universal services and we will promote self-help for them and their families, encouraging them to access and use services independently including improved digital platforms to promote these
- Families are best supported by those already working with them
- Where a family's circumstance has moved them along the continuum of need, a co-ordinated multi-agency response is usually best based on an early help assessment. (EHA)
- A lead practitioner ensures a team around the family (TAF) is in place to monitor progress focusing on improving outcomes for the family.
- The needs of the whole family are considered and how they impact on each other
- The voice of the child is always in evidence
- There are clear pathways into targeted and specialist services and where there are safeguarding concerns, there is easy access to children's social care for both consultation and to make a referral.

7 Outcomes

Our early help provision will focus on improving outcomes for **the whole family** including these six key areas aligned to Lewisham's Troubled Families framework

1. Parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
2. Children who have not been attending school regularly
3. Children who need help: children of all ages who need help, are identified as in need or are subject to a child protection plan
4. Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion or young people at risk of worklessness
5. Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
6. Parents and children with a range of health problems

Desired outcomes will be clearly identified through holistic early help assessments with children and families. They will be fully engaged in measuring their own progress using the team around the family (TAF) approach. Clear plans will be developed and reviewed to support them to achieve their outcomes.

8 Principles

The following principles will guide the way that we deliver our early help services across the partnership. We will:

Be outcome focused: the support we deliver to families is focused on meeting individually assessed needs. We will plan and review the progress to achieve positive and sustained change across all areas of need.

Take a “whole family” approach: ensure that our work builds on the success of the Troubled Families programme using family assessments and plans

Collaborate: ensure support is being delivered across the partnership in a joined up and seamless way. Using the early help assessment (EHA), team around the family (TAF) and lead professional approach will ensure that all services are working together effectively. Plans are developed by having conversations with each other and most importantly the child, young person and their family

Build resilience: early help is relationship focused, empowering children, families and communities to build their resilience and have a central role in achieving and sustaining their outcomes

Be evidence based: our early help approach is informed by and targeted at the needs that we have in the borough. Utilise evidence based practice and programmes as part of the early help service offer.

Identify need early: in order to intervene at the earliest possible stage.

Be digital: the single front door will provide information, advice and signposting to both professionals and families; completing the online single request form will enable families to receive the right support at the right time and professionals to have a digitally enabled single point of access.

Be efficient: utilise our early help resources efficiently and effectively, providing high quality outcomes at good value for money.

Be inclusive: our services are accessible to all that need them and that we reach out where necessary to proactively engage with harder to reach families who would benefit from early help support. Focus our early help support on closing the gaps where there are inequalities.

Listen: to the views of children, young people and families and use what they tell us to shape and improve services so that they best meet needs. Ensure that the tools we use to assist practitioners make sense to and are helpful to families.

Be innovative: continue to learn and adapt to deliver innovative solutions with families to address the complex issues

Provide governance: through the early help board that will bring together services under a common governance structure with clear decision making.

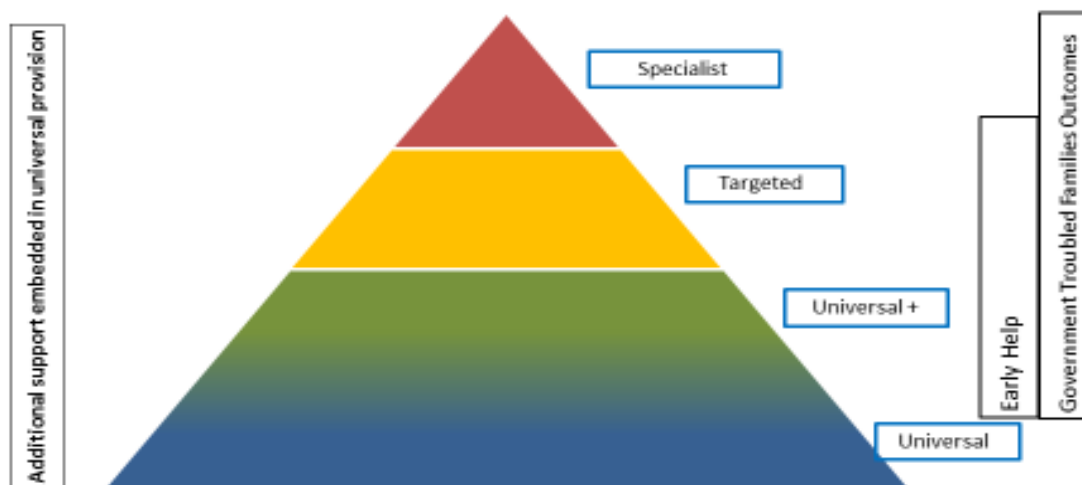
9 Continuum of need

In Lewisham, we recognise early help to be part of a continuum of help and support that families can access.

To effectively close the gaps in outcomes achieved by our children and young people, our early help approach needs to be effectively integrated with universal, targeted and specialist level services. The priority for all services is to prevent need from escalating and families to have any support needs identified and provided at the earliest possible opportunity.

We will take a proactive approach to early help where rather than waiting for services to refer in we will reach out where there are identifiable trends for particular cohorts of children and families to intervene before needs develop and escalate. For example, young carers, families living in inadequate housing, temporary accommodation or with no recourse to public funds
It is essential that all children and young people in the borough benefit from excellent universal services. Within those services we embed high quality targeted services for those whom have additional needs.

Lewisham's triangle of need



Universal – Children whose development needs are met by universal services across the partnership. Universal services in Lewisham have an essential role in prevention and provide a solid foundation for this strategy. A vital part of this offer is delivered by health and early years services including access to local health services, children's centres, schools and the voluntary sector.

Universal plus - Children and families with additional needs who would benefit from extra help to improve education, parenting and/or behaviours, to meet specific health or emotional needs, or to improve material situation. Children's centres, health providers and the voluntary and community sector also work with families at this level of need, some of whom may require multi-agency intervention through a lead professional and TAF.

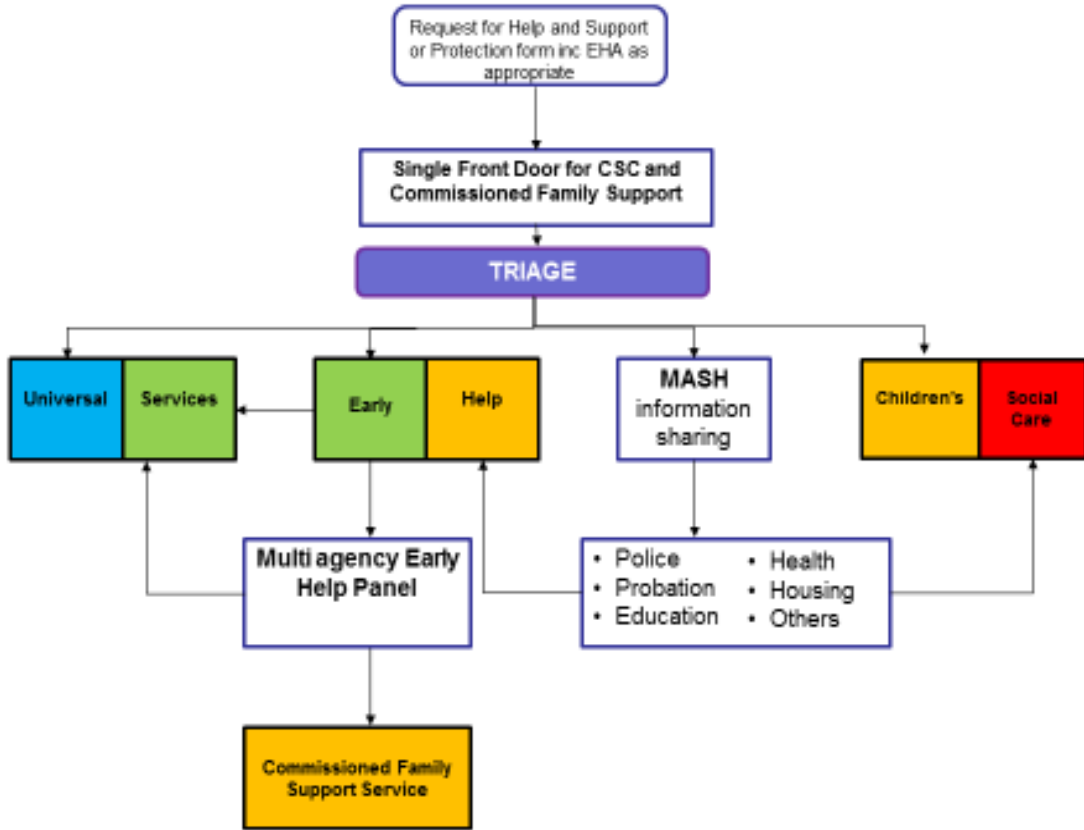
Targeted – Children and families with complex needs requiring integrated targeted support. Because of the complexity of needs, especially around behaviour and parenting, a multidisciplinary/agency coordinated plan developed with the family is needed, coordinated by a lead professional. The newly recommissioned integrated family support service will work with families at this level of need in addition to local health services, voluntary sector providers and children's centres.

Specialist/acute – Children with complex additional unmet needs and/or experiencing significant harm that require statutory child in need assessment or other interventions such as child protection or legal intervention. Where specialist services are needed we ensure that we act quickly and appropriately to provide this support.

10 Implementing more streamlined pathways for families

- A new continuum of need document will be implemented in January 2017. This will assist all professionals working with families to ensure that the right help is provided by the right service at the right time.
- A redesigned Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) including a dedicated and integrated team will be in place and launched in January 2017
- A new dedicated early help team to support professionals working with families below the specialist level of need
- An online single request for specialist or commissioned targeted family support services has been developed
- Pathways in and out of MASH will be more responsive and streamlined
- New tools to help agencies effectively assess needs and develop plans with children and families will be available online
- Better co-ordination and data analysis of need and outcomes achieved with families will be available
- A workforce development strategy will be required to ensure that all those working with children and families across the partnership have the skills and confidence to deliver effective and appropriate levels of support
- A multi-agency action plan will be developed to deliver the strategy
- Families will receive **the right help at the right time in the right place**

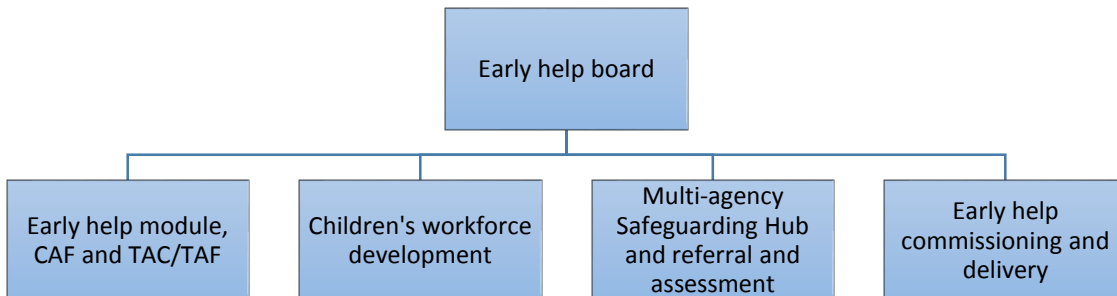
Pathways through the MASH



11 Governance

Implementation of the strategy will be managed via the Council's early help programme. This programme is overseen by the early help board, which comprises senior representatives from across the partnership. The early help board will report into the children and young people's strategic partnership board.

The Lewisham joint commissioning group and the Lewisham Safeguarding Children Board will also receive regular progress updates relating to the delivery of the early help programme.



The key activities for each of these areas are summarised below:

- **Early help module, early help assessment and team around the family** – ensuring that systems, tools and processes that support families are working most effectively
- **Children’s workforce development** – equipping staff in agencies across the partnership with the skills and tenacity to most effectively support vulnerable families in their own settings
- **Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and referral and assessment** – reviewing and redesigning the MASH function to enable it to operate most efficiently and effectively and introducing a single front door for safeguarding
- **Early help commissioning and delivery** – ensuring joined up commissioning and delivery is in place including recommissioning the existing targeted family support and family intervention project services to create an integrated family support service; re-commissioning our children’s centre offer, and public health services for 0–5-year-olds and school-aged children (health visiting and school nursing), and ensuring the delivery of these services is aligned to other commissioning intentions and delivered within the neighbourhood network model currently being developed.

12 How will we measure our success?

We believe that our success should be directly measured against the outcomes experienced by children, young people and families. We will expect to see that more families are empowered and supported to take control of their lives, and they are supported in their local communities avoiding the need for statutory intervention.

We will develop a set of measures with our partners which will be reported on a quarterly basis through a locally developed dashboard that will evaluate the impact of our early help services linked to outcomes. These will be overseen by the early help partnership board who will provide challenge and support.

References

- 1) Early Intervention: The Next Steps by Graham Allen (Jan 2011)
- 2) The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults by Frank Field (Dec 2010)
- 3) The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – a child-centred system by Professor Eileen Munro (May 2011)
- 4) The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning by Dame Clare Tickell (2011)
- 5) Fair Society, Healthy Lives by Professor Sir Michael Marmot (2010)
- 6) Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE (2016)
- 7) Working Together (2015)