

TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Early Help Strategy 2023-2026

REPORT OF: Helen Fergusson, Strategic Director, Children's Social Care and Lifelong Learning

Purpose of the Report

1. To request Cabinet to recommend to Council the partnership Early Help Strategy for Gateshead 2023-26 for approval.

Background

2. The Gateshead Early Help Strategy 2023-26 sets out the vision and key deliverables for the family support system in Gateshead.
3. The national Supporting Families Programme Outcomes Framework is adopted as the performance model to measure progress achieved with families.
4. The Strategy recognises Early Help as a system of partnership contributions and reflects on the improvement journey from 2019 – 2023.
5. The Foreword is provided by Heather Pearson – Chair and Independent Scrutineer, Gateshead Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Proposal

6. The Gateshead Early Help Strategy 2023-26 details the following four key priorities:
 - Implementing a network of Family Hubs and Start for Life Offer;
 - Reducing parental conflict and improving family stability;
 - Preventing youth crime; and
 - Supporting a skilled, confident and knowledgeable early help workforce.
7. Furthermore, the Strategy provides a synopsis of the key enablers to delivering the above priorities, including:
 - Review of the Early Help Assessment (EHA) process used with families;
 - More advice and support for those practitioners supporting families outside of the Early Help Service;
 - Broader access to professional development opportunities in relational, trauma-informed practice and contextual safeguarding;
 - Developing collection and analysis of data to inform improvements in practice;

- Improving strategic oversight and accountability across the local Early Help system, including a review of current governance arrangements.

Recommendations

8. Cabinet is asked to recommend the Council to approve and adopt the Gateshead Early Help Strategy 2023-2026.

For the following reasons:

The Gateshead Early Help Strategy 2023-26:

- (i) reflects the partnership commitment to delivering effective support to families through a combination of universal and targeted services;
- (ii) contributes to the aims and objectives of the 'Thrive' approach and the priorities of the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy;
- (ii) strategically positions the Local Authority to respond to emerging, national policy areas, including Family Hubs and the (2021) Care Review.

CONTACT: Gavin Bradshaw

Extension: 3543

APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. An Early Help Strategy is an *expectation* on Local Authorities and their partners and can be examined in Ofsted inspections of Children's Services, but is not a statutory requirement. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) expects a strategic Early Help document to inform the self-assessment process known as the Early Help System Guide (EHSG) which is undertaken annually as a condition for receipt of funding from the national Supporting Families Programme.
2. The Early Help Strategy should also reflect the response of the Local Authority to emerging policy initiatives around support for vulnerable families. This includes, but is not limited to, implementation of Family Hubs and a Start for Life offer (Best Start for Life – Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days, April 2021), the (Ministry of Justice) Turnaround Programme to prevent youth crime, the reduction of parental conflict (Department of Work and Pensions) and consideration of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (May 2022) recommendations.
3. Locally, the Early Help Strategy contributes to the priorities featured in the following policy documents Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy; Corporate Plan – Making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives; Gateshead Youth Justice Plan; Gateshead Children & Young People's Strategy.

Consultation

4. The Early Help Strategy has been developed following consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including colleagues (external partners) from North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, Gateshead Youth Justice Board and Growing Healthy Gateshead. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has also been consulted.

Alternative Options

5. Gateshead will continue to provide a partnership approach to the delivery of early help services to families. This includes advice, support and intervention from a spectrum of staff and services working in a variety of settings across education, housing, police, primary care, probation, early years and third sector organisations under a strategic vision which sets-out early help as "everyone's business". It is not recommended that Gateshead departs from this partnership approach, nor adopts a narrow, formal definition of early help provided only by Local Authority services for those requiring intensive levels of support. Early help is best provided in settings where there are good, existing relationships between support services and families. In many scenarios, informal advice and support is required, along with connection to assets in the community or to the extended family network, without the need for longer-term professional support. Population-level challenges around mental health, increasing deprivation, insecure housing (and more) requires a full-system response and is not the preserve of specific LA services. Partnership arrangements in Gateshead for the delivery of family support are strong and the foundation of this Strategy.

Implications of Recommended Option

6. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms the Strategy will positively position the Council to maintain national funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care and Department for Work and Pensions.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – Family Hubs will recruit to fixed-term roles to support initial implementation.
- c) **Property Implications** - Family Hubs will re-purpose the existing Sure Start estate. Increased co-location of services is likely.

7. Risk Management Implication - None.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications - None.

9. Crime and Disorder Implications – Effective Early Help services will impact positively (ie) reduce youth offending rates.

10. Health Implications – Effective Early Help services will impact positively on health/wellbeing outcomes.

11. Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications - None.

12. Human Rights Implications - None.

13. Ward Implications - Early Help services are delivered to families in every ward in the borough.