

Schools Forum

7th July

School Ready and Early Help in Walsall - developing a collaborative and more effective response

1. Purpose of report

The report seeks:

- 1.1 To inform Schools Forum of the Early Help demand analysis, the outcomes of consultation and the progress of the Integrated Strategy for children aged 0-5 years
- 1.2 To agree the recommendations
- 1.3 To approve the proposed investment priorities and plan for £1m Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) (13/14 underspend)

2. Recommendations

School Forum to:

- 2.1 Agree to extend the scope of the £1m DSG School Ready investment to the wider Early Help agenda and
- 2.2 Approve the proposed investment priorities and the implementation of the investment plan

3. Background

3.1 Context

- 3.1.1 Schools Forum agreed in February 2015 the allocation of £1m DSG under spend from 2013/14 "a one off amount of money 'to be used to commission early years improvement services across early help geographical areas with the intention of improving early years foundation stage profile outcomes and increasing the percentage of children achieving a good level of development (GLD). There will be no infrastructure costs but more available funding directly to front line services commissioned against improvement and need priorities identified in the School Ready Improvement Plan"
- 3.1.2 Consultation with schools and front line Early Year's practitioners took place during April - May 2015 to determine investment priorities for this allocated funding. Initial findings were shared at the Directors of Children's Service Head teachers meeting on 15th May 2014.
- 3.1.3 The Integrated Strategy for children aged 0-5 years- is currently being developed together with a range of partners including Education, Health, Children's Service, parents, 3rd Sector providers and will go out for consultation in September 2015.

Children's wellbeing becomes a key part of school's inspections from September 2015. This increased focus, builds on existing DfE policy frame

works including “Working Together to Safeguard Children” (March 2014) which states *“that early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later.”*

The Munro Review 2011 also recommends that local authorities and statutory partners have a duty to secure sufficient provision of local Early Help.

Ofsted Early Help Thematic Inspection *published in March 2015 sets out clear expectations for local authorities and partner agencies* in delivering Early Help to children and families to:

- Improve the quality and consistency of assessment and plans
- Provide professional supervision to all staff delivering early help and ensure that their work receives regular management oversight, particular in respect of decisions about whether families need formal help
- Ensure that all Early Help professionals have access to effective training
- Ensure that children’s needs for Early Help arising from parental substance misuse, mental ill health and domestic abuse are addressed in commissioning plans

Schools will be aware of the financial constraints that the Council is currently operating within, and that budgets across the partnership will continue to be under pressure and reduce, and as such we need to re-think the roles of partners and communities themselves in achieving what we all want for children and families. If we do nothing in future we will only have resources to support high risk statutory functions. The risk of cuts to local government funding affecting educational and other outcomes has therefore become an imminent reality.

3.2 School ready data analysis

3.2.1 The development of the Integrated Strategy for children aged 0-5 years is informed by the following data:

- Walsall’s current 0 to 5 population is 22,424 , greater than the national average
- Walsall is currently ranked 22nd out of 152 LA’s for % of children under 16 who live in poverty - particularly concentrated in Bloxwich East, Blakenhall, Birchills / Leamore and Pleck.
- Walsall has high levels of smoking during pregnancy, low birth weights, low breast feeding statistics, high infant mortality, high obesity and high dental decay.
- In 2014, 52% of children in Walsall achieved a good level of development at the end of reception class, compared to the national average of 60%.
- The biggest gaps in attainment are in the area of communication and language, literacy and numeracy, understanding the world and creative development.

These gaps in attainment are worse for boys and disadvantaged pupils.

- 3.2.2 The Strategy identifies how children, families and all agencies will work together to ensure children are physically healthy, safe and secure, can communicate effectively and have the characteristics of effective learning by the time they enter compulsory school age in Year 1. This will mean they are 'School Ready'.

3.3 Early Help data analysis :

- 3.3.1 Our analysis of the demand for multi- agency Early Help support in 2014/15 highlights:

- Walsall's Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST) received 18,266 contacts about individual children, 2,891 of which were requests for an Early Help Assessment.
- A third of these requests for Early Help came from schools
- The top three demands for Early Help related to domestic abuse, behaviour and neglect.
- 37% of the demand for Early Help related to children aged 0-4; 27% to young people aged 10-15 and 25% to children aged 5-9 year olds.
- Most children (72%) were supported by a lead professional in Children's Services (family support workers in children centres, Targeted Youth Support Worker in Youth Support Service and disability inclusion workers). 20% of children were supported by a lead professional in schools.
- 18% of children who have an Early Help Assessment and receive support are re-referred within a 12 month period of time.

- 3.3.2 In Walsall over 90% of children access school based provision at 3 and this rises to 98% at 4 years old. The implementation of 'free education for eligible 2 year olds' results in a further 2,200 children (1,400 children currently) having or eligible to access school aged 2.

3.4 Outcome of consultation with schools around Early Help

- 3.4.1 The LA's consultation with schools during April and May 2015 provided an opportunity to understand the challenges faced by schools in the delivery of Early Help and to listen to ideas schools had about strengthening the partnership and improving the delivery of Early Help to children and their families in Walsall.

42 schools out of 119 schools (this equates to 35%), took part in the consultation via questionnaires, focus groups and one to one discussions. This was 35 Primary Schools and 7 secondary schools.

3.4.2 Schools said the key issues children, young people and their families need help with are behaviour management, domestic abuse, parenting skills / advice and emotional / mental health support

3.4.3 Schools said the key challenges to the delivery of Early Help are:

- Early Help pathways and processes – lack of clarity and lack of involvement in decision making
- A lack of understanding about how decisions are made about which children and families receive support via Early Help or Children Social Care, or who should be the lead professional.
- A perceived raising of social care thresholds and a resultant default position that schools were increasingly being called upon to be the lead professional.
- Leaders and staff in schools are not always sure what to do or who to talk to if they disagree with a decision made regarding threshold or lead professional.
- Frequent changes to processes and policies make it hard to keep up; paperwork is excessive and acts as a barrier rather than a helpful tool in establishing needs and informing a package of support.
- Most schools have identified resources to deliver Early Help and where these exist, schools highlight this as a strength in enabling them to effectively deliver the Lead Professional role. However resources are significantly different in terms of capacity and capability across schools.
- Lack of dedicated Early Help resources (minority of schools) is a barrier to delivery on the lead professional role.
- Insufficient support for staff acting as lead professionals. Staff reported feeling isolated and difficulty securing cover during sickness and holiday leading to a risk that vulnerable children, young people and families are unsupported.
- Difficulty knowing what services are out there
- Gaps in services to support needs relating to mental health, domestic abuse and supporting issues within the home.
- Supervision arrangements for lead professionals varied from school to school. Schools feel insufficiently skilled and equipped to provide effective supervision and case management oversight of Early Help cases.

3.4.4 Schools said the solutions that would help to deliver more effective Early Help are:

- The delivery of evidence based training for school based staff including parenting, mediation and restorative practice, training in the delivery of emotional and personal development and family group conferencing
- Support with supervision and case management oversight of staff who are taking the lead professional role
- The development of locality meetings to share concerns about children, identify solutions, make decisions and share best practice
- Pooling resources across the school clusters to support children, young people and their families through an Early Help Assessment and plan.

4. Summary

4.1 The information gathered through the Early Help demand and Early Years data analysis, the consultation and the development of the Integrated Strategy for children aged 0-5 years is clearly making a case for maximising resources to develop a more effective Early Help Offer (0-19) with a focus on children aged 0-5 years and whole family working.

4.2 The analysis of data and consultation is informing the following investment priorities:

0-5 Integrated Strategy

Integrated 0-5 workforce child development training, school to school support, specialist training focussed on the areas where children do not achieve a good level of development, targeted support to schools and settings not yet good or with low levels of development, sharing good practice and developing integrated projects (e.g. integrated two year assessment, speech language and communication screening)

Wider Early Help (0-19) priorities:

Establish locality partnership conversations to enable a joined up approach to early identification of children, young people and families in need of Early Help, joint decision making and the timely and effective delivery of support.

Develop an Early Help supervision and case management framework and support schools to implement this.

Deliver an Early Help evidence based training programme to the Early Help workforce in schools to equip professionals with effective skills, knowledge and tools to address needs.

Align LA and school resources to secure the development of Local Support Teams to deliver a range of school attendance and support services for children and their families. These would be delivered through an integrated network of cluster based teams of education welfare professionals; family and education support workers and targeted youth workers.

Through this integrated team, all schools would have a named link worker and the Local Support Team would also support holistic multi-agency working including joint-working with statutory safeguarding teams; formal partnership with health, Youth Justice and Intensive Family Support.

This alignment of resources will need to be extended with other partners including Health and police.

5. Proposal

The following recommendations are being made to drive forward a more effective Early Help offer in partnership with schools:

- 5.1 To set up of a task and finish group per cluster led by schools to oversee the development and implementation of the recommendations in each of the localities. The task and finish group to be expected to bring back regular reports to the school forum giving reassurance regarding progression and impact of investment.
- 5.2 To agree the investment plan attached at Appendix A.

6. Financial implications/Value for Money

If the recommendations contained in the report are approved the £1m investment will be spent in line with the Walsall Council Best value approach. The impact of the resource will be monitored through the Integrated Strategy for children aged 0-5 years and the Early Help Strategy. Updates on progress and outcomes will be regularly reported to Schools Forum to enable effective oversight and scrutiny of outcomes to be delivered.

7. Legal Implications

The investment plan will contribute to Walsall's LA and partner statutory duties as outlined in Working Together 2015, Children Act 2014, Equality Act 2010 and the Education Act 2002.

8. School Improvement

The Integrated Strategy for children aged 0-5 years will lead to improved outcomes for children at the end of reception class, and therefore positively impact on their future education and long term life chances.

The increased focus on children's wellbeing, which will become a key part of school's inspections from September 2015, builds on the DfE's existing policy frameworks. These include "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (March 2014) which states:

Para 1 - "that help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later."

The proposals will support schools in the delivery of the above requirement.

Appendix A

Dedicated School Grant Investment proposal

Priority	Activity	Impact	Costs
Ensure children achieve a good level of development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Integrated 0-5 workforce child development training- school to school support- specialist training focussed on gap analysis- targeted support to schools and settings not yet good or with low levels of development- sharing good practice- integrated projects	<p>Good level of development for Walsall children in line with national average</p> <p>Consistent knowledge base across the 0-5 workforce on child development, how to work in partnership with parents and referral pathways.</p> <p>All Early Years schools and settings will be led well and cycles of improvement will lead to evidence based outcomes</p>	£250,000
Develop an EarlyHelp workforce plan for schools with a focus on evidence based training	<p>Delivery of evidence based training programme to 500 school based staff that includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- restorative approaches- emotional and personal development- parenting- family group conferencing	<p>A confident and competent workforce equipped with effective skills, knowledge and resources to respond to Early Help needs</p> <p>Improved outcomes for children and young people relating to attendance and achievement</p>	£100,000
Develop a sustainable model of robust supervision and case management oversight for Early Help in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- develop an Early Help supervision and case management best practice standards with schools- one to one and group supervision	<p>Effective oversight of Early Help cases</p> <p>Joint discussion regarding children and young people who need help and a</p>	£100,000

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for all Early Help staff in schools deliver reflective practice sessions in localities - develop and implement locality conversations 	<p>joined up approach to developing the right response</p> <p>Confident and supported lead professionals</p>	
Develop Integrated Early Help Local Support Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - align resource between LA and schools to develop integrated locality teams - identify the boundaries of locality working - develop a performance framework for the cluster teams with clear targets linked including a strong focus on attendance and attainment - effective commissioning for issues /gaps identified by the localities - More effective links being established to social care and youth justice 	<p>More effective Integrated support to our most vulnerable families that have not met the threshold for children social care.</p> <p>We will identify and feedback on return investment by LA and partners for every £1 invested by schools.</p>	£550,000

How will impact be monitored?

As outlined in 5.1 in the report a task and finish group will be established per cluster led by schools to oversee the development and implementation of the recommendations in each of the localities. The task and finish group to be expected to bring back regular reports to the school forum giving reassurance regarding progression and impact of investment.