

13 December 2011		ITEM 5
Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee		
EARLY OFFER OF HELP STRATEGY UPDATE		
Report of: Carmel Littleton, Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Yes	
Accountable Head of Service: Carmel Littleton, Head of Learning and Universal Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Jo Olsson, Director of People Services		
This report is: public		
Purpose of Report: To update members on the progress towards the development of an Early Offer of Help Strategy.		

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 National policy and economic drivers require Thurrock to refocus resources to target the most vulnerable families and clarify the thresholds for access to services whilst exploring innovative ways of integrated working.
- 1.2 The development of the Early Offer of Help Strategy will underpin these changes and ensure that the changes are delivered within the required timescales whilst engaging a range of stakeholders.
- 1.3 The initial needs analysis has identified the key issues and the strategy is on course to commence from January 2013 and for the procurement and redesign of services to be completed within the required frameworks and timescales.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That members note the progress made on the development of the strategy.

3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 National policy and economic drivers require Thurrock to refocus resources to target the most vulnerable families and clarify the thresholds for access whilst exploring innovative ways of integrated working to ensure that delivery of multi-agency services is non-stigmatising.
- 3.2 The proposed change follows and builds upon recent government sponsored reviews by Graham Allen MP, Frank Field MP, Dame Clare Tickell, Professor Eileen Munro and Professor Sir Michael Marmot and will link to the recent approval for changes in Children's Centres. These reports have highlighted the benefits of supporting children and families in breaking the cycle of wasted potential, low achievement, drink and drug abuse, unintended teenage pregnancy, low work aspirations, anti-social behaviour and a lifetime on benefits and the need to develop an early offer of help not just in terms of age but also in earlier intervention when families are facing difficulties.
- 3.3 The strategy to support the early offer of help will improve the way that children's centres, schools, statutory services – social work professionals, health, police, education - and partners in the voluntary and private sector work together for children, young people and families across the authority. It aims to provide a seamless range of integrated services and activities to help families address problems before they become too serious, reducing the need for intensive, high cost interventions at a later date.
- 3.4 The strategy will also promote effectiveness, efficiency and improve long-term outcomes and impact through an 'invest to save' approach, investing, particularly in preventative and early intervention approaches as well as review commissioned services, value for money, the CAF and the lead professional role.
- 3.5 In developing the strategy we aim to:
- develop a sustainable system change, structures and approaches which will provide a more efficient and effective model of delivery of support, services and activities for Thurrock's most disadvantaged children and families
 - To enable cross departmental and interagency partnership work with schools, health, police, businesses and third sector organisations to ensure that the families most at risk have access to an early offer of help
 - To break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage by addressing the causes rather than the symptoms of the problems reducing demand on specialist services

4. ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS

- 4.1 In order to develop the Early Offer of Help Strategy, a project board has been established to provide governance and oversight of the project along with the engagement of all key partners.

4.2 A clear project plan has been developed and the initial objectives for the strategy include:

- reviewing and redesigning the ways in which child and family services are delivered to meet the needs of the whole family
- prioritising preventions & early intervention, identifying issues at an early stage and taking action to prevent them escalating and needing more complicated & costly interventions
- ensuring that tackling child poverty & promoting family wellbeing is 'mainstreamed' across all services providing a range of interventions to meet need
- establishing locality working for multi-agency teams and partners based within/around children centre hubs
- establishing a single assessment process, based on current CAF process to refer children and families to children's social care

4.3 The draft strategy is due to be completed by early January 2012 with implementation due to commence in January 2013, commissioning of contracts for delivery will take place between March and September 2012 and an initial stakeholder workshop is being held in December 2012 to both engage key partners and ensure that wide consultation underpins the development of the strategy.

4.4 A key part of the strategy includes the redesign of the current Multi Agency Group (MAGs) panels, a needs assessment is underway using data, information from MAGs referrals, views of families and young people and information from other agencies and this will be completed following a workshop with key stakeholders planned for the 16th December 2011. In analysing the initial findings in the needs assessment we have identified three main approaches to supporting families that need to be addressed:

Prevention – an approach that takes account of the wider family needs in pre-empting/tackling problems through a broad range of early interventions

Remedy – an approach that aims to identify and support families which without any sort of intervention (light touch) may reach crisis, and

Protection – providing support for families at or near crisis point, typically through more intensive integrated support interventions

4.5 In addition, there is a need to identify systems and services that can help children, young people and families swaying perpetually back and fore from one crisis to another.

4.6 The project is progressing well but procurement timescales to ensure we meet legislative requirements dictate that the commencement date will be January 2013. The current contracts offered under the Thurrock Thinking Families project for the work such as support by Coram will be extended to cover this

period and ensure service delivery is maintained in the interim period.

- 4.7 To ensure that services to support children and families are maintained, the arrangements for interim delivery from Jan 2012 to Jan 2013 will be circulated at the end of December and these will include an outline of existing services and the referral mechanisms to ensure the needs of children, young people and families are met during the interim period.
- 4.8 Consultation on the draft strategy will be undertaken in January 2012 and stakeholders will shortly receive details of a workshop event to be held at the end of January and will also have the opportunity to provide their views via email.
- 4.9 Close working with Health will ensure that work across the partnership is aligned and that service specifications and referral routes are joined up.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Consultation is an ongoing part of the development of the strategy commencing with the needs analysis and this will be continued once the draft strategy is written.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 This consultation will inform recommendations that will assist in the delivery of the following Council priorities:
- to provide and commission high quality and accessible services that meet, wherever possible, individual needs

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by:
Telephone and email:

There are no financial implications at this stage as the strategy is under development, however, once the strategy is completed full financial implications will be identified and costed.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by:
Telephone and email:

There are no legal implications at this stage as the strategy is under development, however, once the strategy is completed full legal implications will be considered.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by:
Telephone and email:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been commenced and advice provided by the Diversity Team is guiding the development of this. The full impact assessment will be considered in the development of the strategy.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 National policy and economic drivers require Thurrock to refocus resources to target the most vulnerable families, clarifying the thresholds for access whilst exploring innovative ways of integrated working.
- 8.2 The development of the Early Offer of Help Strategy will underpin changes to refocus resources to target the most vulnerable families and ensure that these changes are delivered within the required timescales whilst engaging a range of stakeholders.
- 8.3 The initial needs analysis has identified the key issues and the strategy development involves a range of key partners. The draft strategy is due to be consulted on in January 2012 and is on course to commence from January 2013. Clear project management of these developments will ensure that the procurement and redesign of services is completed within the required frameworks and timescales.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

None.

10. APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

None.

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