

The Early Help Strategy 2015-2018

“Right support **Right action** **Right time**”



The Early Help Strategy

“Right support Right action Right time”

Throughout the strategy we refer to Bedford or Bedford Borough. When we say this we do not only mean Bedford Borough Council, but the group of organisations and services who are working with children, young people and families in Bedford.

This includes health services and commissioners, schools, early years providers and colleges, voluntary organisations, children centres, the police, probation services, youth offending services, children’s and adults’ social care services, education support services, community organisations and the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board. The strategy is jointly produced and owned by these services in partnership with the community as a whole. The Early Help Strategy sits under the Partnership Framework for Bedford Borough’s Children, Young People and Families 2014-2017.



Foreword

This Early Help Strategy is a cornerstone in the Borough Council’s approach to delivering better outcomes for children, young people and their families in Bedford Borough. Our approach to Early Help is very much a partnership one, with delivery on the aspirations outlined in the strategy being hinged on successful partnership working not only with statutory agencies such as the council, health agencies and the police, but also private providers and the voluntary and community sector.

The strategy has been developed within a partnership framework with a significant amount of consultation taking place not only with those working alongside children, young people and their families, but also with families themselves. The response throughout the consultation has been overwhelmingly positive with ideas and comments being used to shape the production of this final strategy and implementation plan. The consultation confirmed that the direction and ambition of the strategy is strongly endorsed. However it was also clear that key partners will continue to observe and evaluation progress being made in our journey towards the aspirations identified to ensure good progress.

The strategy sets out a vision and principles that we hope all services working with families in Bedford Borough will commit to. There have been some exciting and creative changes in order to structure Early Help Services in a way that best supports our families. Equally the strategy proposes some significant changes to the way in which our partners access and refer for support which will enable a timely and effective support network.

We look forward to watching the developments over the next few years bring about some significant positive changes for children, young people and families in Bedford Borough.



Councillor Sue Oliver
Portfolio Holder for Children’s Social Care



Councillor Henry Vann
Portfolio Holder for Education

1. What is Early Help?

1.1 Early Help is the term used to describe arrangements and services that identify the need for help for children, young people and families as soon as the problems start to emerge, or when there is a strong likelihood that problems will emerge in the future.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) identifies the critical features of effective Early Help as:

- A multi-disciplinary approach that brings a range of professional skills and expertise to bear through a "Team around the Child" approach.
- A relationship with a trusted lead professional who can engage with the child and their family, and coordinate the support needed from other agencies
- Practice that empowers families and helps them to develop the capacity to resolve their own problems
- A holistic approach that addresses the children's needs in the wider family context
- Simple, streamlined referral and assessment process

1.2 ‘Working Together’ also outlines the ‘continuum of need’

“ Where need is relatively low level individual services and universal services may be able to take swift action. For other emerging needs a range of early help services may be required, coordinated through an early help assessment, as set out above. Where there are more complex needs, help may be provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need). Where there are child protection concerns (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm) local authority social care services must make enquiries and decide if any action must be taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.”¹

1. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) HMSO

2. National context

2.1 Why Early Help is important

Five key documents were published during 2010 and 2011 which reinforced the need for Early Help.: the Graham Allen reports on intervening early in a child’s life, the Field report on preventing generational poverty, the Munro review of children’s care services, the Tickell review of Early years and the Marmot review of Health.

All make a strong and compelling case for Early Help and that no one agency can provide this support alone and greater co-ordination and joint working across and within agencies is required

2.2 Munro recommendations

Recommendation 10 of the final Munro Report on child protection, suggests that local authorities and other statutory partners should secure sufficient provision of local early help services for children, young people and families. Local authority areas should set out arrangements for early help and these should include: “specifying the range of professional help available to local children, young people and families, through statutory, voluntary and community services, against the local profile of need set out in the local Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA);

- specifying how they will identify children who are suffering or who are likely to suffer significant harm
- setting out the local resourcing of the early help services for children, young people and families; and, most importantly
- the identification of the early help that is needed by and the criteria for receiving children’s social care services [sic].

2.3 Working Together 2013

Working Together (2013) to safeguard children places a statutory responsibility on all partner agencies to comply with and work together to identify children who need safeguarding, offer early help and do this effectively to create positive change, keep children with families and reduce the need for statutory services. Doing this well will mean that we identify the children who need safeguarding at the earliest point and make a significant and timely intervention to secure the child’s safety and wellbeing within their family or where parents cannot make significant and sustainable change with an alternative family where the child has every chance to be safe, well and reach their full potential.

For Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Board (BBSCB) strategic priority 2 of their Business Plan aims to “Strengthen and implement multi-agency agreed thresholds for intervention and Early Help provision in order to promote more effective services to safeguard vulnerable children and young people”.

The Board are working with Bedford Borough Council and partners to agree the levels for the different types of assessment and services to be commissioned and delivered. Bedford Borough Council children services has the responsibility for clarifying the process for referrals.

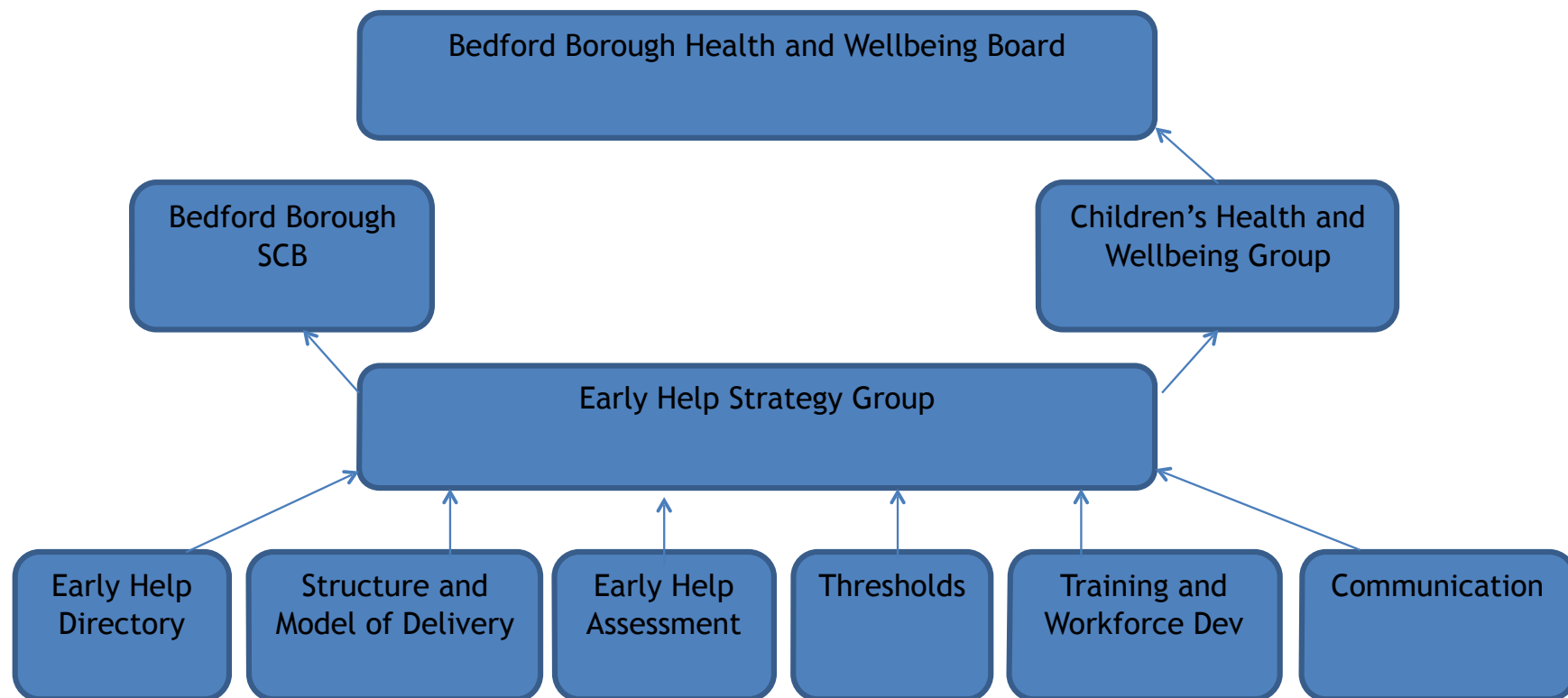
3. Governance

The Strategy is led by the Partnership Framework for Bedford Borough’s Children, Young People and Families 2014-2017 which includes Early Help as one of its 6 key themes. This partnership reports into the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Strategy is also monitored by Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children’s Board, the priorities of the Board are:

- To operate an effective LSCB that focuses its work on local safeguarding priorities including ensuring that children and young people at risk of significant harm are safeguarded
- Strengthen and implement multi-agency agreed thresholds for intervention and early help. In order to promote more effective services to safeguard vulnerable children and young people.
- The BBSCB to assure itself that there is effective communication and engagement with children and young people that demonstrates how their wishes and feelings are both asked for and taken into account.
- Ensure the BBSCB has an effective Learning and Improvement Framework in place which demonstrates evidence of outcomes and impact on practice.

The implementation of the 6 strands of work identified within Early Help strategy in Bedford Borough will be led by the Early Help Strategy Group who will report both into the Children’s Health and Wellbeing Group and the Bedford Borough Local Safeguarding Children’s Board.



4. Links to other Strategies

4.1 This Strategy should not be seen in isolation and is instead an integral part of a number of key documents all of which are aimed at improving the lives of the children and young people who live in Bedford Borough.

This Strategy will also help deliver the wider goals of the Bedford Borough’s Sustainable Community Strategy and in particular the ‘Aspiring’ theme which aims to ensure that all children and young people are able to lead safe, healthy and happy lives. Finally this Strategy will help deliver one of the themes of Bedford Borough Council’s Corporate Plan - Theme 3 ‘Brighter Future for Children’.

4.2 The Early Help Strategy links directly with the work required by the Children and Families Act (2014) relating to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms. Our goal is to use much of the learning around the Local Offer, keyworking scheme and co-production with parents to ensure all families benefit from these support structures not just those with high needs. There are also key links to the behaviour and attendance strategy.

4.3 The Early Help Strategy particularly has close synergies with the Early Years Strategy. They have some shared outcomes and Performance Indicators, although the Early Years Strategy has a clear and distinct focus on under-fives and the needs of parents/ carers. Early Help also has a key focus on providing help early in life. The Early Help Strategy will need to encompass and include the Early Years Strategy and action plans will need to have shared outcomes and joint working. However although Early Help links with Early Years it is not focused exclusively around this age range and is a strategy focused around early intervention/help to support any age of child or young person.

Ofsted is clear that all of the ‘offer’ and work undertaken by Children’s Centres is considered as Early Help under the Single Inspection Framework and evaluation schedule for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers (single inspection framework) and reviews of Local Safeguarding Children Boards

4.4 The Early Help Strategy also has clear links to Bedford Borough Council’s Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy both in terms of preventative/early help, but also in terms of restorative services to enable victims to take control of their lives again and move forward. There are also integral links with the Troubled Families agenda and the implementation of this strategy will work to incorporate all of the good practice currently being undertaken around Troubled Families.

4.5 Other documents which set the scene for our Early Help Strategy include:

- “Start well, live better: a manifesto for the public's health which sets out 12 important and practical actions for anyone serious about giving our children the best possible chance of a healthy and happy life.
- “The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment” which includes a summary of the key evidence that highlights the link between health and wellbeing and educational attainment.

5. Local Context

5.1 Four Early Help consultation events were held during the summer of 2014, and were well attended by all partners. This initial consultation focused on taking stock of where each partner felt Bedford was performing in it’s deliverance of Early Help services, noting what was working well and what needed further development. Partners were asked to provide idea’s and aspirations for both their service and for the partnership group as a whole. They were also asked to identify priorities that Bedford’s strategy ought to address.

5.2 Consultation feedback:

Where are we now?

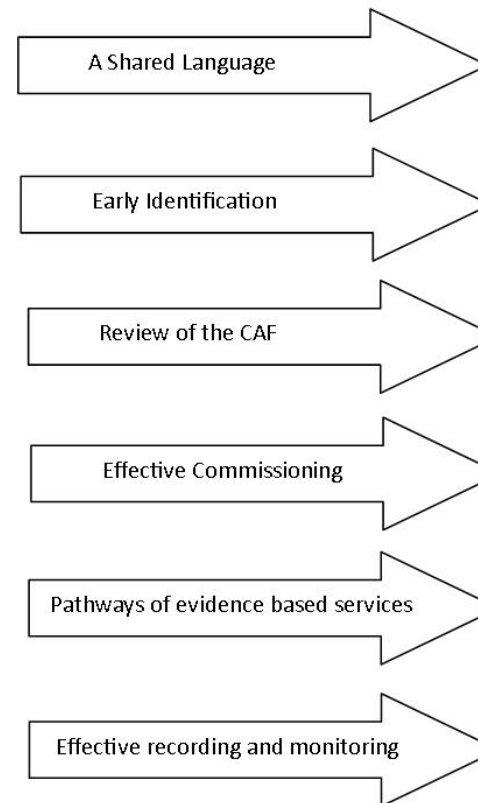
Schools are offering an eclectic, broad range of Early Help services. Quality is variable as is amount of support.

Some vital EH practices and teams in place but other services are unaware of them. General feeling that communication between services is poor.

Good range of Health Early Help services with some examples of integrated assessment and practice. General concern with the CAF process and the appropriate use of CAFs.

Good core of Voluntary Sector organisations offering Early help support but services users often don't know how to access them or what they offer.

PRIORITIES



Where do we want to be?

RIGHT SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible, high quality Early Help Directory • Robust early assessment tool which is widely used • High quality, well trained work force
RIGHT ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely and effective communication • Accreditation and quality standards for all services • Effective locality partnership working
RIGHT TIME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast initial contact • Understood referral routes and understood thresholds • Responsive services

6. Our vision

6.1 Our shared vision is to give all children and young people firm foundations in life, through strong network of family, friends and communities, with the earliest and best support that can be offered throughout their lifetime

6.2 What is our Early Help Strategy for Bedford Borough?

Our Early Help Strategy recognises that Early Help is a catalyst to change how local partners work together and with families to make sure that all resources are used at the earliest opportunity and in the best way possible.

Most families, most of the time, can get on with their lives quite happily with little or no outside help. If they need help, it is usually from Universal services such as Health, Schools and Police.

However, all families, whatever their circumstances, can have times when things seem to go wrong and they don't know which way to turn. Without the right support and the right action at the right time, the situation can easily go downhill very quickly.

Our Early Help Strategy outlines how we will tailor the right support to meet the needs of families, at the right time and right place. In order to do that we need to not only make commitments between partner agencies, but more importantly to children, young people and their families.

6.3 To successfully provide Early Help also means:

- Understanding the profile and needs of our families
- Being pro-active rather than re-active
- Stopping problems starting in the first place....or if not get to them early and 'nip them in the bud'
- Getting actively involved, hands on, to support children, young people and their families and communities to build resilience and problem solving skills so that any new problems can be successfully managed
- Changing the way that we work so that we work the ways that families need us to

6.4 We make the following commitment to families:

As a multi-agency Partnership we will:

1. Listen to you – when you contact any of the services you will be welcomed, listened to and not judged. We will work it out with you.
2. Not 'pass you around' – If calls need to be made to other agencies or further advice found, we will help you and not 'pass you on'; to someone else
3. When we have both agreed that you need help we will determine together one main person who is your point of contact
4. Early Help Assessments will be as simple and straightforward as possible – we will need to do assessments with you so that we know we are doing our best by you.
5. We will make Early Help services accessible to you – the right support, right action, right time
6. You will be kept informed of plans and outcomes

7. Partnership Principles

7.1 key underlying principles for partner organisations

In order to deliver the Early Help Strategy, all partner agencies will adopt an agreed set of underlying principles for early help work.

These include:

(i) It's in our hands – we are all responsible

- Everyone will be accountable for their actions.
- Best practice to be identified, shared and celebrated.
- Early Help is a way of thinking and working to achieve practical, cost effective and sustainable solutions.
- All children, young people and families have a right to receive high quality services and should be given equal access irrespective of ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality, gender or socio-economic status.

(ii) Integrated working - every contact counts

- Think Family – Think Early Help.
- Services need to work together and understand each other's current and future roles and responsibilities better within the shared vision for early help.
- Share information quickly so that we all have the fullest picture possible.

- Thresholds to help and protect children and young people must be clearly understood so that the right services are provided at the right time.
- Understand the thresholds between early help and statutory child protection work so that escalation to social care is used as soon as required.
- Early Help facilitating de-escalation from child protection services.
- The simplest solution is often the best one – in other words, take pragmatic action – early.

(iii) Strengthening communities – sustainable community based early help

- Children and young people do not live in isolation of their families and communities.
- Families and communities are more than able to support their children and young people if they are given support themselves so Early Help is framed within a community development approach. i.e. 'It takes a village to raise a child'.
- Prevention is better than cure.
- Wherever possible early help services will be co-designed and co-produced with families and communities.
- Innovation and new models, especially those which encourage sustainable social enterprises will be encouraged and supported.

(iv) Using the evidence – improved outcomes

- Only use evidence based practice where it is appropriate to the need.
- Outcomes will be measured and evaluated, including by recipients of early help.
- Outcomes used to inform future work.

By adopting these principles all agencies will sign up to the delivery of early help. It will also make commissioning services easier as new potential delivery agents only have to identify how their work lines up with and supports these principles, and the allied quality assurance standards.

8. Early Help Offer

8.1 The Early Help Offer is designed to help people access the support they need early and will need to be ‘accessible’ in the broadest sense.

8.2 Our offer will be underpinned by Professor Munro’s levels of prevention, which we want to form the basis upon which to develop our local Early Help model:

1. Primary prevention to ameliorate the effects of socio-economic disadvantage.
2. Secondary prevention to respond quickly to low level problems to prevent them getting worse.
3. Tertiary prevention providing support and therapeutic solutions to counter effects, of long term suffering.

Munro’s Level of Prevention	Level of Offer	Headlines	What’s happening for these families?	Type of response
Primary Prevention – improving the effecting of socio - economic disadvantage	Community Offer	Utilising and building on the resources in local community.	There are no support needs and the family is able to function and cope very well. When faced with adverse circumstances their network within their community are able to offer the appropriate support.	This will include voluntary and community sector, health promotion, self learning etc. Anything communities and families are providing for themselves.
Secondary Prevention – responding quickly to low level problems to prevent them worsening	Universal Offer	Universal Services support and enable all our children, young people and families to be healthy, be safe, achieve, enjoy and make a positive contribution to society.	<p>There are no additional needs. The family is broadly able to cope, but sometimes need additional help with universal services</p> <p>We want our children, young people and families to use and access these services as their first port of call when they need any help, support or advice.</p>	The kinds of universal services we want to see are available to all and will provide easily, accessible information, guidance and support which will intervene early and appropriately with families to improve their quality of life.
	Universal Plus Offer	<p>Additional support is needed by the family. Support is delivered in the Universal setting.</p> <p>These services are instigated to prevent families from becoming part of an on-going cycle of delivery, and to avoid escalation of need which may result in families needing specialist/statutory services and interventions</p>	<p>There may be a level of Special Educational Need and or Disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low level attendance issues. - Potential/risk of being NEET - Low level health needs - Risk of substance misuse or domestic violence 	<p>Single agency response</p> <p>Needs identified by the agency and plans put in place from within their own resources/support network.</p>
Tertiary Prevention – providing support and therapy to counter the effects of long term suffering.	Targeted Early Help Offer	<p>Where people are especially vulnerable, and have high-level and complex needs, we want to meet those needs In a supportive, innovative and cost effective way.</p> <p>This level of service is delivered to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the Borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School exclusion or persistent absence - Disability/SEN - Chronic health needs - Offending - Substance misuse - Mental health concerns 	<p>We will seek to work across boundaries with other agencies to identify where we can reduce the severity of need where possible, to commission packages which provide greater independence for families, and maximise the use of support available in today’s market through the commissioning of services.</p> <p>Where expert help is needed with, for example post natal depression, general development, social and emotional support, parenting support – over and above what is being provided universally, A rapid response is needed from all professionals involved</p>

8.3 Change of focus

We need to change the way that services are delivered to shift away from specialist and statutory intervention to much earlier help and support. We want to ensure that capacity and skills are aligned at all levels, and the thresholds between each levels and the ‘step up’ and ‘step down’ procedures are clearly understood.

Early Help services can work across all elements of the ‘circle’. The ‘statutory services’ area will need to incorporate intensive support for children, young people and families which would be at a more specialist/targeted level than at the early stages of problems emerging.



8.4 The Early Help Team

We will form a core Early Help Team to lead on the implementation of the strategy. The team will consist of 7 Early Help Professionals and 1 Teenage Parent Support Advisor. The team will operate alongside the CAF co-ordinators to ensure Early Help referrals and assessments are actioned in a timely and effective manner. Each EH Professional will be linked to a school cluster and they will act as a co-ordinator for all Early Help within that locality.

Children’s Services restructuring has created a wider Early Help Service area including key teams providing an early intervention and prevention service. The service will include the Family Intervention Support Service which incorporates the Troubled Families support, the Inclusion Support Team, the Education Welfare Service and the Early Years Service. Co-location of these teams strategically will ensure that the continuum of Early Help offered in Bedford Borough is robust. It is our aspiration to review the support offered across the service to ensure there is a coherent plan linking to this strategy underpinning the support offered within each of these teams.

The locality approach will be based on a detailed understanding of local need, future need and existing providers supported by strong stakeholder engagement throughout. Each community is different and while the principles of the approach of the team will be the same across Bedford Borough the solutions will be different in different areas.

The team will be equipped with a range of evidence based training and interventions to ensure they are best placed to upskill the wider Early Help workforce. They will act a Keyworkers and will support schools, health agencies and the police to work alongside families requiring targeted Early Help through the Team around the Family framework.

The team’s links with MASH and the wider social care workforce will be crucial to their work, as will good communication will all agencies working with families. The team will lead on the RELAY scheme around Domestic Abuse working closely with Bedfordshire Police to ensure schools are given vital information on instances of Domestic Abuse involving the families of the children and young people they work with.

8.5 Early Help Assessment

In response to the clear consultation feedback, we will re-design the CAF documentation and create a new Early Help Assessment (EHA) system. The EHA will be concise and easy to complete, requiring only the pertinent assessment data and information to inform the Team around the Child and any consideration of thresholds that may be required.

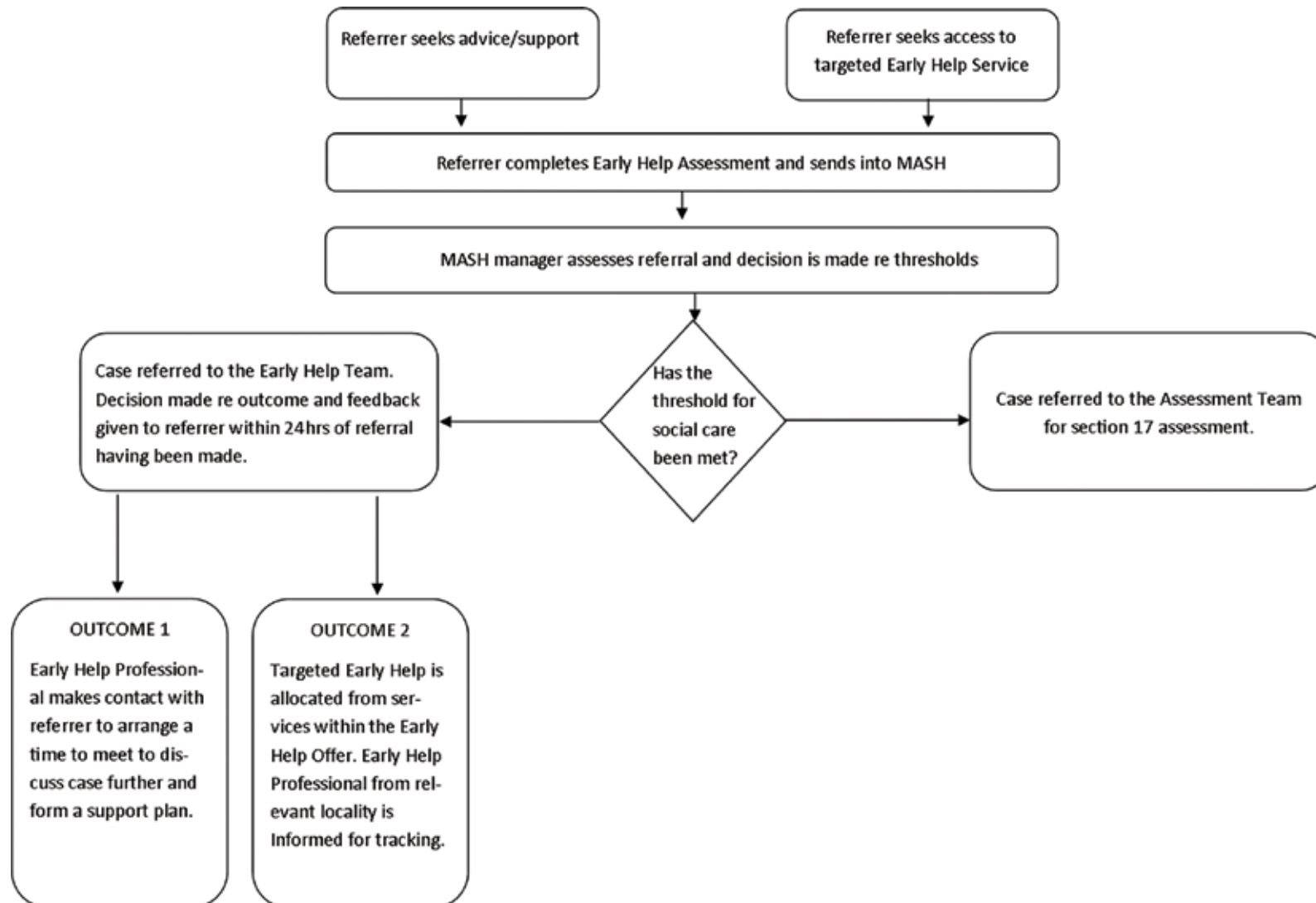
The EHA will request information pertaining to the Troubled Families criteria to ensure we are making the consideration as to whether a family might be supported under this framework.

The EHA will be a family document, recognising that in the majority of cases within Early Help, it is the family or sibling group who require targeted support and intervention rather than an individual child or young person. The document will very closely resemble our main neighbouring authorities Early Help Assessment to ensure health agencies and the police who work across the borders aren't required to complete two very different sets of documentation.

8.6 One Front Door

To reduce misunderstandings around thresholds and avoid drift, Bedford Borough proposes to operate a single point of entry for all children's services through its Multiagency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). All requests for Early Help advice, support and targeted intervention will go into the MASH; where decisions around thresholds will be made by members of the MASH team alongside members of the Early Help Team. The Early Help core team will operate alongside the MASH and will pick up any referral that does not meet the threshold for a referral into the social care assessment team. No referral into MASH will receive a 'no further action' outcome.

Early Help referrals will be made on an EHA and clear information and communication will be produced to inform referring agencies of the correct documentation supporting processes. Referrers into the MASH will be informed of the outcome of their referral for Early Help within 24 hrs of the referral having been made. A case being picked up by the Early Help team through the MASH will result in one of two outcomes. The first may be the allocation of a targeted Early Help services such as parenting or behaviour support. The second may be a consultation from a member of the Early Help Team to further investigate the nature of the referral, where appropriate form a Team around a Family and formulate a support plan.



8.7 An Accessible Offer

We want our Early Help Offer to be as accessible as possible to all parents and key partners. We will develop a directory of services which will include clear information about what the service offers, details of any referral criteria and the practicalities of the service such as contact details and location. The directory will also include some key pathway documents for how and when to access a service. We will also develop some key documents for professionals around “step up” and “step down” processes.

8.8 Information Sharing

The BBSCB has an Information Sharing Protocol which will support the Early Help delivery and the “step up/down” between levels of need. All agencies will also be provided with key guidance from the Information Commissioner’s Office around data sharing.

Communication as a wider issue will be a specific focus for the strategy group to ensure key messages and updates of the implementation journey are fed through to families and partners in a meaningful and effective manner.

8.9 Monitoring and Evaluation

Under ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (2013) the BBSCB has a key role to play in monitoring the impact and outcomes of Early Help and holding partners to account for the effective delivery of the early help strategy. However every agency that provides Early Help will need to have robust monitoring and evaluation procedures in place and will be subject to audit. As this is a growing area of work any procedures will need to be appropriate for the size and nature of any work being undertaken. We will include small voluntary and other organisations who may not have access to or experience of this aspect.

9. Continuing Professional Development and cultural change – Early Help Accreditation

One of the core aspects of successful service delivery will be that we work the ways that families need us to. This means that we need to evaluate what we do now and be open to change. Work is already happening and this strategy aims to build on that.

In partnership with Public Health the voluntary sector and the University of Bedfordshire, an accreditation scheme for Early Help will be developed to ensure the Early Help workforce across all agencies are skilled in standardised evidence based practice that will result in a consistent offer across the board.

Agencies and schools will have the opportunity to access the bank of training and sign up to support the strategy and adopt developed self-assessment tools to ensure practice reflective and always improving. The branding of the strategy will then be used as a Kite Mark and a sign of excellence in practice which in turn will serve as an indication to both parents and commissioners of a standard of service.

10 Measuring success

The Strategy needs to be underpinned by a clear set of Performance Indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) which are agreed with partners to enable the measurement of progress. The Early Help Strategy Group will report on progress against these indicators to both the BBSCB and the Children’s Health and Wellbeing Group.

10.1 Intended outcomes of our Early Help strategy

These outcomes will formulate a progress and evaluation framework that the Early Help Project leads will report on termly to the BBSCB and the Early Help Strategy Group.

- Families reporting positive experiences of Early Help.
- Reduction in the numbers of children and young people (including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) accommodated into the care of the LA.
- Reduction in the levels of fixed term and permanent exclusions from schools.
- Reduction in the number of Children in Need and number of children and young people subject to Child Protection Plans.
- Increase in the number of children who are school ready.

In order to achieve the above, we will commit to the following:

By the end of year 1 we will have in place:

1. An Early Help Strategy that is widely understood, owned and agreed by all partners.
2. A Bedford Borough Early Help accreditation scheme which is supported by the Early Intervention Foundation
3. A clear, and accessible Early Help Directory website
4. A clear structure and framework for our Early Help Model of delivery
5. A system in place that captures key data which informs the effectiveness of our Early Help Services.

By the end of year 2 we will have in place:

1. A workforce that is trained in a range of agreed, evidence based approaches.
2. An evaluation partnership with an external body
3. An evidenced increase in parenting capacity – particularly reducing the impact of poor mental health, domestic violence and substance misuse on children and young people.

Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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Za Informacije

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01234 718289



Fran Cox

Borough Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford
MK42 9AP



frances.cox@bedford.gov.uk



www.bedford.gov.uk