

Report to:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date:	28 June 2023
Executive Member:	Councillor Bill Fairfoull, Deputy Executive Leader (Children and Families)
Reporting Officer:	Ali Stathers-Tracey, Director of Children's Services
Subject:	EARLY HELP STRATEGY 2023-2026
Report Summary:	The report outlines the establishment of the new Early Help Strategy. The strategy builds on the previous Tameside Early Help Strategies of 2017 and 2020. Tameside's approach to Early Help has been refreshed to align with the recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022), The Department for Education's Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy and consultation (2023) and the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme (2022-2025).
Recommendations:	That the contents of the report be noted and the strategy is endorsed.
Corporate Plan:	The delivery of the updated Early Help Strategy is intended to support: the neighbourhood model, the tackling poverty strategy, the integration of health and social care and the development of new relationship between public services, citizens and communities.
Policy Implications:	The proposal aligns to the Council's key policies in supporting families within our community.
Financial Implications:	There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.
(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	However strengthening our Early Help offer and improving outcomes for young people in the borough will benefit the council financially in the long term. There is a saving in the 2023-24 budget for the Early Help redesign and a strategy refresh will help embed this change and improve the ability to achieve this saving.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	<p>This strategy brings together the relevant statutory responsibilities for the council's provision of services to families. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 (the Act) the Council has a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children. • Section 11 of the Act provides that statutory bodies including councils must make arrangements for ensuring that their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. • There is also a duty on schools outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021, issued under the Education Act 2002, which places a statutory responsibility on schools to safeguard children.
Risk Management:	The Early Help Strategy provides the framework by which partners, the community, and other stakeholders can identify their contribution to Early Help across the Borough. The presence of clearly defined priorities and approaches to supporting children and

families early provides a clear focus. Without such focus and a joint vision there is a risk that the needs of families escalate unnecessarily, meaning too many families have to access statutory services resulting in high case-loads in Children's Social Care.

Access to Information:

Information relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Paula Sumner, Assistant Director for Early Help and Partnerships.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Paula Sumner, Assistant Director for Early Help and Partnerships.



Telephone: 0161 342 2173



e-mail: Paula.Sumner@tameside.gov.uk

1 CONTEXT

1.1 The drivers of this strategy included:

- The Independent Review of Children's Social Care (2022) – Recommendations included a fundamental shift in children's social care towards early intervention, referred to as 'Family Help'.
- Department for Education, 'Stable Homes Built on Love' Children's Social Care Strategy - The recently released strategy aims to provide families with enhanced Family Help services delivered through a skilled multi-disciplinary workforce.
- The Family Hubs and Best Start for Life Offer - Tameside Council was successfully awarded £3,295,000 over three years by the Department for Education and to deliver the Family Hubs and Best Start for Life Offer locally, bringing existing family help services together to improve access and connections between families, professionals, services and providers.
- OFSTED Joint Targeted Area Inspection - OFSTED recently announced that their Joint Targeted Area Inspections will focus on the local multi-agency response to children and families who need help, evaluating how effectively different agencies work together to reduce risks to children and meet their needs early on.
- The SEND review – This highlighted prominent issues spanning from poorer outcomes for young people with SEN, negative experiences for families navigating the SEND system and pressure on resources for local SEND provision.

1.2 Building on these insights and best practice, Tameside has also developed a new Thresholds Document ([Tameside Framework for help and support](#)) which will support the delivery of the Early Help Strategy by supporting professionals to identify signs that families need help and the appropriate level of support required.

1.3 The Early Help Strategy 2023-2026 will reflect and align our approach with these recent changes, strengthening our approach to early intervention, providing families with the right help, from the right place at the right time.

1.4 The new strategy also acknowledges recent structural changes which have been made to Tameside Council's Early Help offer, including the establishment of targeted family help at Level 3 of the threshold framework where more complex early help cases will be held by Family Help Lead Practitioners who will work with a family as long as needed provided they are making progress. Where needs escalate, cases can be safely and quickly stepped up to statutory services using clearly defined, systematic approaches.

1.5 It is important to acknowledge that some children in Tameside face additional barriers, which, unless addressed early, can accumulate throughout life and negatively impact on their life chances, resulting in significant inequalities. Children living in Tameside are less likely to meet the expected level of development in their early years, with speech and language needs being a particular challenge. Throughout their school career, children living in Tameside are more likely to need additional support or be identified as having Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities. At secondary level, challenges around school attendance and attainment are key drivers in preventing progression into Further and Higher Education or training and in later life, impacting on earning potential.

1.6 This strategy has been developed in order to achieve better outcomes for families and to deliver on our corporate priorities to ensure children have the very best start in life, gain aspiration and hope through learning and to nurture resilient families and supportive networks to protect and grow our young people.

2 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- 2.1 Initially, to help design the framework and priorities behind the strategy, two in-person workshops were held on the 29th September 2022 and 13th January 2023. The meeting was attended by representatives from: Active Tameside, Greater Manchester Police, Children's Social Care, Population Health, Libraries, Adult Social Care, Action Together and Health Services.
- 2.2 The Early Help draft Strategy 2023-2026 was taken to the Neighbourhood Forums for feedback and awareness. The draft will also be taken to the Early Help Transformation Board, Tameside Community Safety Partnership, Neighbourhood Transformation Group, Executive Safeguarding Children Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 2.3 An online survey through Survey Monkey was launched for 9 weeks (03.03.23 – 05.05.23) and shared widely, gaining 133 responses. The survey included a copy of the draft Early Help Strategy 2023-2026 and asked a series of questions to identify whether the strategy helped people to understand what Early Help is and whether there were any areas for improvement required. The survey was circulated to:
- Tameside Youth Council
 - Families receiving support from Early Help,
 - Children's services staff,
 - Greater Manchester Police,
 - SEND Young Person's Council,
 - Children in Care Council
 - Schools
 - Early Years Providers
 - Health (GM integrated care, Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust, Change Grow Live)
 - Welfare Rights
 - Voluntary Sector Organisations (e.g. OKE, Homestart, Action Together, Citizens Advice).
 - Department for Work and Pensions
 - Bridges
 - Primary Care Networks
- 2.4 The survey was also advertised at the in-person launch event for the West Family Hub in Tameside on the 20 March. In-person consultation events took place with the Youth Council (3 April 2023), SEND Young Person's Council (20 April 2023) and Young Carers Forum (27 April 2023) and the voluntary sector (13 April and 3 May). The survey was also advertised via the Tameside Council's Early Help page, The Big Conversation and through Tameside Council's social media channels.

Summary

- 2.5 Most respondents said they felt the title of the strategy was good (54.14%), that early help and targeted family help were clearly explained (77.17%), that Tameside's approach and model were clear (80.80%), that the actions identified in section 6 'Making it Happen – Our priorities' accurately reflected the gaps they were aware of (61.79%). The most prevalent theme in the comments for question 5 "is there anything missing from the strategy?" was that there was nothing missing from the strategy (20%). In question 6, when asked whether there were any further changes that needed making to the strategy, the most prevalent theme of comments highlighted the need for better staff training / capacity / organisation (22%). Common themes within the comments included:
- Concern about mental health support pathways/SEND provision within early help and EHCP process
 - Greater use of family focused language and the creation of a shorter/ accessible guide for families on how early help works in practice

- Concern around current capacity / delivery of early help including staff training and issues around application of thresholds and how cases are moved up, down or closed

- 2.6 The draft strategy was also taken to the Youth Council on 17 April 2023 at 6.30pm. There were 14 youth councillors in attendance aged between 12 and 17, completing the survey and providing verbal feedback. Most of the feedback from youth council was around the document being too long and providing too much information which is practitioner focused rather than children and family focused, highlighting the need for a shorter practical guide. A couple of comments identified issues around the name of the strategy and connotations of young children which could prevent some families from accessing the service.
- 2.7 Key themes raised by partners at the Voluntary Sector Consultation events included: recognising the diverse offer the voluntary sector contributes towards Early Help, the need for early intervention as an approach across the local area, recognising and linking to work that is ongoing with the poverty strategy, barriers around translation and reaching diverse communities, need for a practical early help guide, barriers to carrying out Early Help Assessments and the need for more regular place based engagement between services.
- 2.8 Five parents and five young people attended the SEND Young Person's Council. Feedback from attendees was focused around how to access early help support and what was available once they have had an early help assessment.
- 2.9 Seven young carers participated in the focus group which took place at the Young Carers Forum on 27th April 2023. Out of those who took part, two young carers had difficulty reading the strategy due to accessibility issues. The main theme of comments was that the strategy was too long and difficult to read for young people. All of the young people taking part completed the questionnaire. When asked whether they felt they were getting enough support, most young people agreed that they were, one young person said they were not.

3 RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Points of concern predominantly related to understanding of practice which will be addressed through workforce development and engagement. Issues identified relating to SEND are being addressed through the SEND Improvement Group via the written statement of action. Additionally, recognising the need for a more practical guide for young people and families, a shorter guide will be developed.

4 IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The Early Help Partnership, a multi-agency working group, will develop and drive a delivery plan from this strategy. Additionally, a shorter, young person and family focused guide to early help will be developed. The newly appointed children's communications officer will pull together a communications distribution plan to ensure a wide distribution.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As set out at the front of the report.