



North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board Early Help Strategy

2014 - 2020

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1. Introduction

Welcome to North Somerset's Early Help strategy.

It sets out how we will improve our delivery of Early Help to ensure that families and communities get the support they need, when they need it.

It reflects the commitment that all agencies in North Somerset have made that:

“We believe that all children and young people in North Somerset should be enabled to reach their fullest potential as individuals, learners and citizens.”

Children & Families Partnership Plan 2011-2014; People & Communities Strategy 2013

Early Help plays a key part in achieving this vision and has been simply defined by research body C4EO as:

“Intervening early and as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families, or with a population most at risk of developing problems. Early help can be at any developmental or age milestone in a child or young person’s life.”

C4EO Deskstudy: Early Intervention & Prevention in the Context of Integrated Services, C4EO 2010

This definition therefore includes:

- interventions **early in life** (with young children, including pre-natal interventions)
- interventions **early in the development of a problem** (with children or young people of any age)
- universal interventions that are offered to an entire population to **prevent** problems developing
- targeted interventions that are offered to particular children, young people and families with existing risk factors, vulnerabilities or acknowledged additional needs in order to **protect** them from developing problems or to **reduce the severity** of problems that have started to emerge.

Acting in this way is complex and means:

- Understanding North Somerset's families and actively reaching out to those at risk
- Delivering practical help, as well as assessments
- Preventing problems from arising in the first place

- Getting involved to support families and help them build resilience so that emerging problems do not become more serious

It also requires all managers, front-line staff and commissioners, across all services and sectors, and whose work has an impact on the lives of children, to ask:

“How could we, within the limits of our existing resources, do things differently, so that we get help to children and families earlier?”

As our 2012 Ofsted inspection of safeguarding and looked after children’s services found, North Somerset has a “good range of early interventions available to support families, children and young people on the edge of care”.

However, it also highlighted the need for a strategy which “underpinned service delivery, coordinated resources and evaluated outcomes” in order to reduce the risk that “...early intervention services have been delivered in an ad hoc way often developing reactively rather than proactively”.

In order to achieve this we must address a number of challenges including:

- Reduced funding within and across agencies
- Fragmentation of service providers
- Developing shared approaches to evidence-based practice
- Embedding early help by redirecting resources from more expensive specialist provision
- Ensuring the continuous improvement of existing early help services

This strategy is therefore not designed to be:

- A document which should or can reflect every priority of every interested agency
- A “wish list” of everything that could or should be done
- A description of “business as usual” activities
- Practice guidance, a handbook of all available services or a digest of local needs

Instead, it aims to focus on the actions which, if taken together, will improve the quality and coherence to our early help delivery.

2. The Scope of Early Help

Reflecting the definition provided above, research and practice brought together in five key reports since 2010 has indicated the importance of various forms of early help in ensuring that potentially vulnerable children and young people are able to lead safe, secure and successful future lives¹.

As a result, three complementary approaches have developed:

- Providing appropriate support during pre-natal and early years, identified as the crucial period of child development, to ensure that babies and children have a healthy and stable start in life and are ready to benefit from the foundation stage of learning
- Providing interventions when the first signs of risk or vulnerability are noticed, with the aim of building on strengths and relationships already present in families to prevent the need to provide more costly and damaging statutory interventions
- Recognising and addressing the common risk factors which cause acute or chronic stress for families, contribute to poor outcomes and often form part of a complex range of challenges faced by families

In addition, the effective delivery of early help is also central to all agencies meeting their duty to keep children safe under the “Working Together 2013”² guidance.

All three approaches therefore sit alongside the need to recognise that in some serious situations, quick and decisive action will be required to secure the safety of children at high risk of poor outcomes.

They also reflect the potential value of early help, or early intervention, in reducing the need for more expensive, long-term and specialist has been identified through a number of studies.

More recently, the Government’s guidance “*Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*” has also set out:

- The legislative requirements and expectations of individual services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children; and
- A clear framework for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) to monitor the effectiveness of local services

¹ **Allen** (2011), ‘*Early Intervention, the Next Steps*’ and ‘*Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings*’; **Field** (2010), ‘The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults’; **Munro** (2011), ‘*Part One: A System Analysis*’, ‘*Part Two: The Child’s Journey*’ and *Part Three: A Child Centred System*’; **Tickell** (2010), ‘*The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning*’ and **Marmot** (2010), ‘*Fair Society, Healthy Lives*’

² “Working Together to Safeguard Children” 2013; DFE-00030-2013

It includes a chapter setting out specific expectations in relation of Early Help, which are reflected in the new Ofsted inspection framework. These emphasise the importance of:

- The early identification and assessment of problems
- Co-ordination between agencies and recording of timely and effective responses
- The local authority's central role in ensuring that co-ordination
- Focusing on effective, evidence based services
- The use of risk based assessments, authoritative practice, planning and review
- Securing change which improves a child's circumstances and, where appropriate, reduces or avoids the need for targeted services
- Ensuring effective information sharing between agencies in to provide effective early help

Safeguarding guidance³ issued to education providers in 2014 also highlights:

- the importance of educational settings identifying needs early and initiating an Early Help Assessment where a child would benefit from support from more than one agency
- the role of Governors have in ensuring that schools have a co-ordinated offer of early help is available and contributes contributing to inter-agency plans to provide additional support to children subject to child protection plans

Finally, early help complements the '**Think Family**' approach of thinking about the needs of the whole family and the challenges facing any person in the family unit, dealing with problems and issues as and when they arise and helping families to be resourceful and resilient.

This is reflected in North Somerset's "Think Family Guidance" designed to help practitioners consider the multi-dimensional of nature of the problems they are seeking to address.⁴

3. Our local need for Early Help

Assessment processes

The provision of early help services is part of a continuum of help and support in North Somerset, responding to the different level of needs of children, young people and families.

The North Somerset Threshold document gives clear criteria for taking action and providing help across the full continuum. Multi-agency training, provided

¹ Keeping children safe in education - Statutory guidance for schools and colleges, DfE April 2014

⁴ Think Family: Multi-Agency Guidance 2014; North Somerset Think Family Strategy Group

at its launch in 2013, ensured that these thresholds for action are understood by all professionals and applied consistently.

As part of the implementation of this strategy a new Early Help Assessment (EHA) is being developed for use by all agencies working with children, young people and families. The EHA will provide a clear action plan, with timescales and aims for the effective coordination of multi-agency support services.

This voluntary assessment will be undertaken with the agreement of the family and aligned to other assessments and will include a distance travelled impact evaluation tool to measure the impact of interventions and support.

Key target groups

The nature of early help means that there is no single, identifiable group of children, young people or families who are the focus for support.

However, those in the following groups are likely to receive services through one or more of the approaches given above:

Children aged up to four years:	c12,000
Children on School Action/School Action Plus:	c4,000
Children in Need:	c900
Families in the High Impact Families programme ¹ :	c350

In addition, national guidance published in “Working Together to Safeguard Children” highlights the need for professionals to identify children in particular risk groups, including those who:

- are disabled and have specific additional needs;
- have special educational needs;
- are young carers
- are showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour;
- are in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence; and/or
- are showing early signs of abuse and/or neglect.

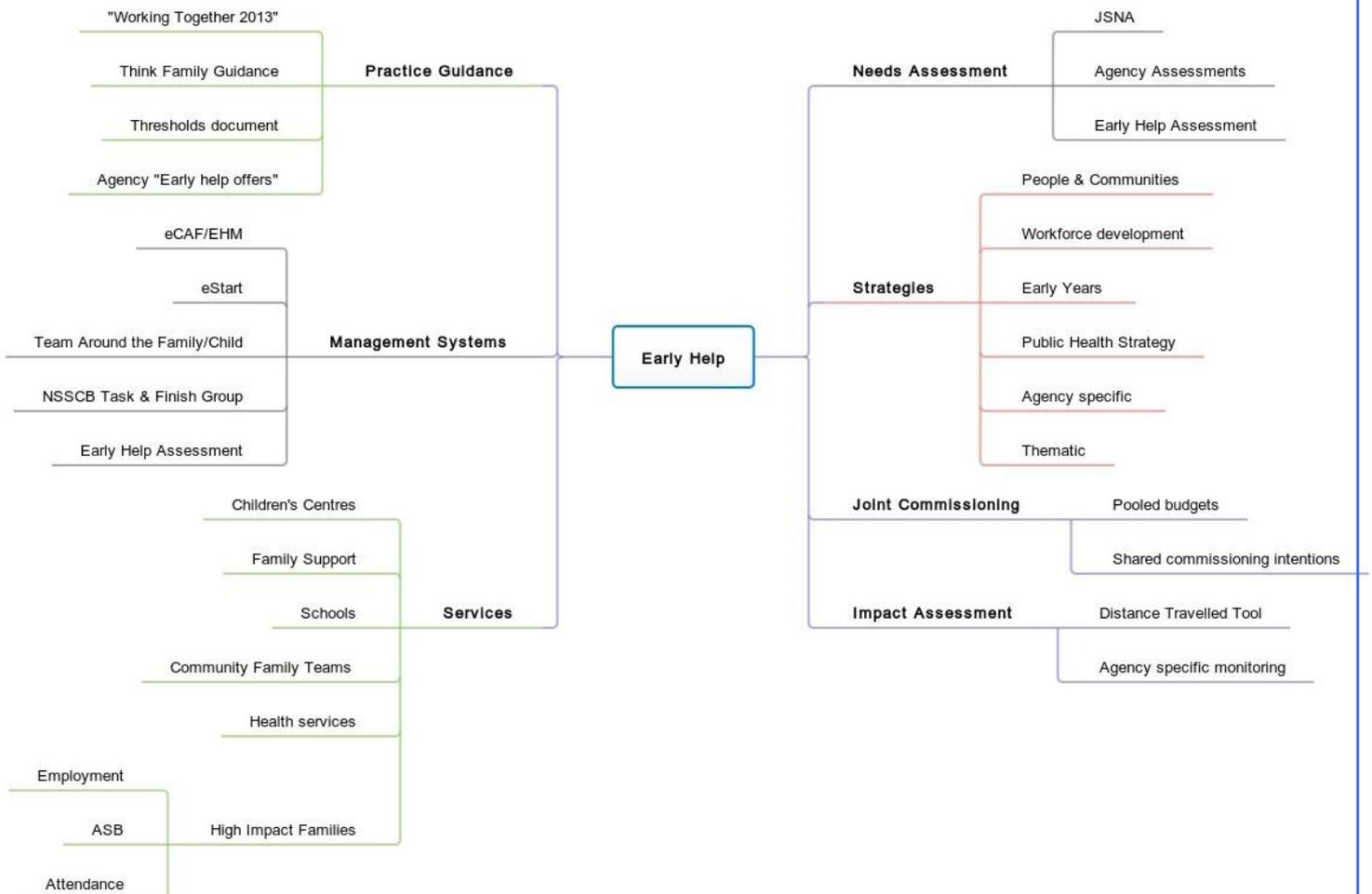
Further detailed data relating to these groups is summarised in Appendix 2.

Thematic assessments can also be found in the North Somerset

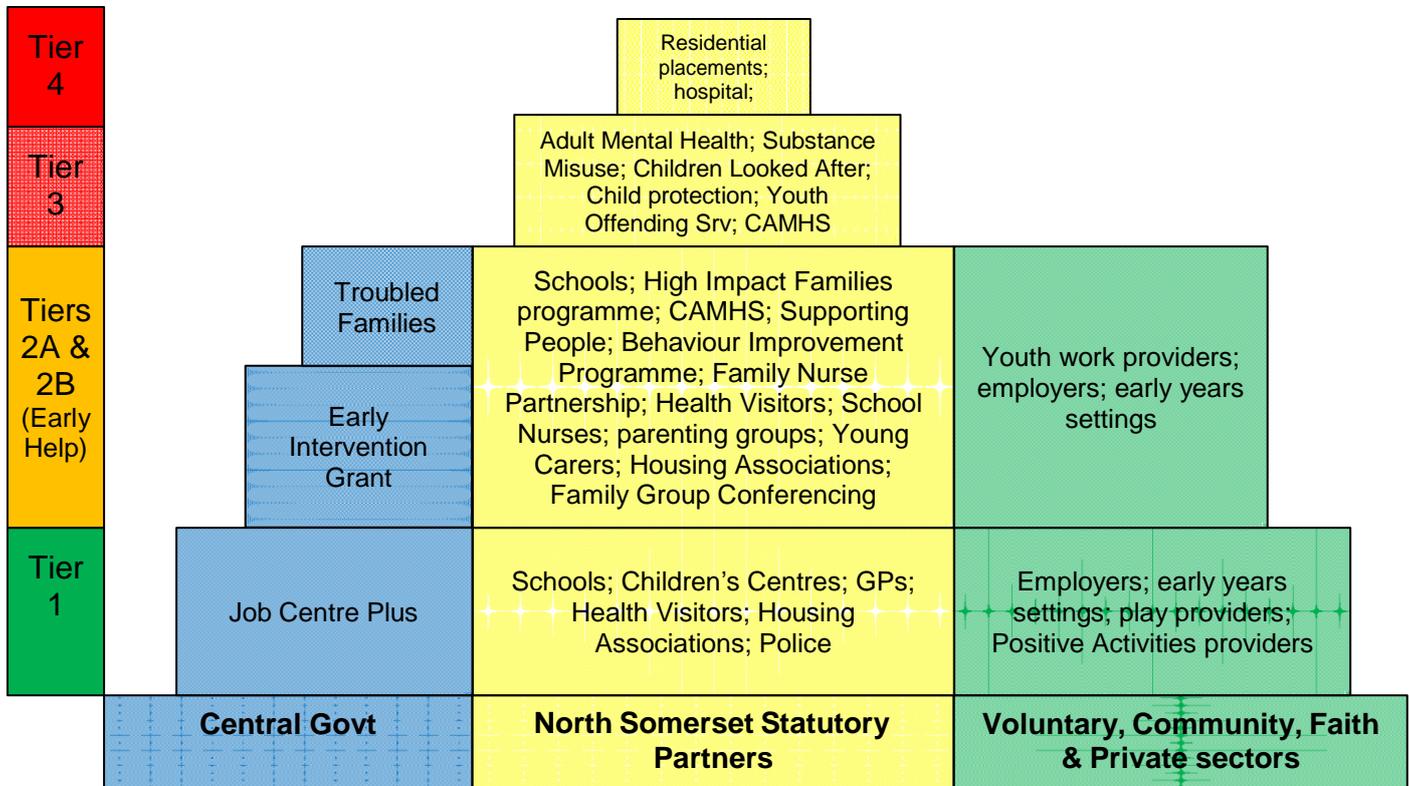
- Child Poverty Strategy
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

4. Our Early Help Challenge

The resources and interventions available to deliver early help in North Somerset are held by a number of agencies, each with their own priorities and drivers for service delivery and improvement. A selection of these resources is shown below



By relating Early Help services to Tiers 2A & 2B of the “continuum of need”, they can also be positioned in relation to other services:



Since North Somerset’s 2012 Ofsted inspection, the context for delivering early help has further developed in light of:

- the requirements placed on all agencies by the updated government guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children”
- changes to social work practice and the role of other agencies arising from the recommendations of Professor Eileen Munro
- the new Ofsted inspection arrangements
- the creation of a new directorate within North Somerset Council bringing together services for children, young people, adults and public health
- the continuing budget reduction challenges faced by all agencies working with children, young people and families
- the extension of the Government’s Troubled Families programme, which aims to embed its approach at the centre of early help delivery

In North Somerset the strategic challenge in improving local implementation of early help is therefore to ensure that:

- early help is focused on those at the greatest risk of poor outcomes
- multi-agency delivery of those interventions is efficiently planned and executed
- the limited resources available are focused on those interventions which can make the greatest difference

5. Our Early Help Outcomes

Delivering services to reflect this focus on early help and preventing escalation of cases to statutory interventions involves all partners working in genuinely integrated, collaborative ways.

Doing so we will ensure that families receive less duplication in their contact with agencies, but that fewer high quality contacts are focused on building their resilience and strengthening their ability to resolve issues and challenges.

For children, young people and families, the changes we expect to see from improved early help services are:

- Families strong enough to manage stress over money, poverty, health issues and unemployment
- Families maintaining stable and good quality family relationships
- Families giving and receiving support from friends, neighbours and the wider community
- Children and adults achieving improved long-term outcomes in education, employment and training
- Parents supporting their children's healthy physical, emotional, learning and social development
- Families requiring less support from specialist services

For partner agencies, the changes we expect to see are:

- Practitioners who have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to make the right judgements and deliver effective early help
- Assessment processes which use evidence to identify those in need and ensure that the right service is provided at the right time
- Clarity about each agency's unique contribution and its boundaries
- Effective information sharing to "ask once but use many times"
- Common evaluations which clearly measure impact not activity
- Commissioning arrangements which secure the best value investment

6. Our Early Help Principles

The North Somerset Local Safeguarding Children Board and the North Somerset People & Communities Partnership Board have endorsed eight core principles to underpin the local development of Early Help⁵:

1. Families will be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of early help services and supported to find their own solutions

⁵ North Somerset Partnership People & Communities Strategy, 2013

2. Early help will focus on improving “whole family” outcomes, while keeping the child at the centre of the work
3. Every agency working with children & young people will define and deliver a needs-led, evidence based, appropriate and co-ordinated “early help offer”
4. Delivery will be based on a ‘foundation’, multi-agency Early Help Assessment, which becomes the tool of choice for early help services.
5. It will reflect the principle that “safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility”, supporting agencies to identify concerns and respond without any unnecessary need for formal referral to children’s social care services.
6. This assessment will reflect clear thresholds and the child’s pathway for accessing support and be aligned with and inform Child in Need, Child Protection, Child Looked After & other assessments.
7. Early Help outcomes will be measured based on the principle of “distance travelled”
8. The quality improvement cycle will be followed, using information about the effectiveness of early help pathways and delivery to identify unmet need and inform service commissioning

All partner agencies will be invited to formally adopt these principles in the form of an “Early Help Pledge”.

7. Our Early Help Actions

Reflecting the context and challenges set out above, we have identified:

- seven strategic themes under which action needs to be taken
- the key actions required under each
- the multi-agency planning groups accountable for delivery of those actions

They are:

1. Strategic Leadership

- Drive **system and culture change** to embed co-ordinated early help delivery
- Position local delivery of the **Troubled Families programme** as the core of multi-agency, Early Help provision
- Adopt a formal **“Early Help Pledge”** to confirm our collective commitment to Early Help
- Align “Early Help” delivery to that of “Early Intervention & Prevention” for **adults**

Lead: People & Communities Partnership Board, North Somerset Safeguarding Children’s Board, agency leadership teams

2. Needs Assessment

- Improve the use of **intelligence, research and analysis** from across agencies to identify future Early Help needs
- Implement and embed a new **Early Help Assessment**, used by all agencies
- Assure the **quality** of the assessments through regular audits

Lead: Early Help Sub Group & Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Group

3. Joint Commissioning

- Map the **scope, funding, intended outcomes and value** of existing early help services
- Identify and mainstream the **finances** for early help across partners
- Publish formal **joint commissioning intentions** to address specific gaps in early help provision

Lead: People & Communities Partnership Board's "Joint Commissioning Group"

4. Define a "Local Offer" for Early Help

- All agencies should define their **Early Help Offer** and the criteria for accessing it
- All service strategies and implementation plans should contain clear proposals around the **development of Early Help**
- Agencies should actively **engage** in the early help delivery structures

Lead: NSSCB "Early Help Task & Finish Group", working through local agencies

5. Early Help Operational delivery

- Plan and deliver early help interventions using the "**Think Family**" principles
- Define a clear **pathway** for the delivery of early help which:
 - makes sense to families and agencies
 - ensures effective information sharing
 - provides a forum for reviewing individual cases which require early help from more than one agency
 - co-ordinates the deployment of services and resources
 - identifies emerging needs and gaps in services
- Develop the existing "**Think Family Operational Group**" concept to co-ordinate multi-agency planning of Early Help services around individual families
- Explore the development of local "**Early Help Delivery Hubs**", eg around Children's Centres, to co-locate service delivery

Lead: NSSCB "Early Help Task & Finish Group", working through local agencies

6. Impact Assessment

- Develop an **distance travelled** outcomes tracking tool and embed its use across agencies
- Focus on developing those interventions shown to be **most effective** in terms of outcomes and cost

Lead: North Somerset Local Safeguarding Children’s Board’s “Early Help Task & Finish Group”, working through local agencies

7. Workforce & practice development

- Ensure that all professionals delivering, managing and commissioning Early Help services
 - focus on improving **whole family outcomes**, while keeping the child at the centre of the work
 - are able to recognise and address the **common risk factors** which cause acute or chronic stress for families
 - are confident in **using local needs data** to plan services and evaluate their impact
 - understand the role and value of **non-statutory delivery partners**

Lead: North Somerset “Think Family Strategy Group” and its theme groups

The North Somerset Local Safeguarding Children’s Board’s “Early Help Task & Finish Group” be also be responsible for drawing these actions together into a detailed delivery plan and monitoring their progress.

Appendix 1

Thematic Needs Assessments

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
Children's Scrutiny Panel Performance Reports

Profile of Need

Basic demographics	Figure	Source
Total children & young people	42,225	Aged 0-17; ONS mid-2013 estimates
Estimated no of families @ ave of 1.7 children per family	24,838	ONS 2012
No of children aged 0 – 4	12,126	ONS mid-2013 estimates
No of children aged 5 – 11	16,057	
No of young people aged 12 – 16	11,632	
No of young people aged 17 - 19	6,685	
Education indicators		
Ave Primary School persistent absence	8.7%	Support & Safeguarding Branch Performance Report (Oct 2014)
Ave secondary school persistent absence	10.6%	
% Pupils eligible for Free School Meals achieving 5 GCSE's including English & Maths	32.5%	2013 - LAIT
% Pupils achieving 5 GCSE's including English & Maths	57.3%	DfE Provisional GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2013 to 2014 (Dec 2014)
% Primary Pupils with a Special Educational Need	14.9%	DfE Data Matrix (Dec 2014)
% Secondary Pupils with a Special Educational Need	16.2%	
Social Care indicators		
No Children in Need (Oct 2014)	920	Support & Safeguarding Branch Performance Report (Oct 2014)
No Child Protection Plans (Oct 2014)	90	
No Children Looked After (Oct 2014)	231	
Health indicators		
No of adults with Learning Disability	809	JSNA 2013
% adult population diagnosed with serious mental health problems	0.8%	JSNA 2013
Rate of adult opiate & crack cocaine usage (OCU)	10.1 per 1000	JSNA 2013
Crime indicators		
No of domestic abuse incidences (2010)	2,483	JSNA 2013
No of incidences of anti social behaviour		
Employment indicators		
% of adult population without work	1.2%	North Somerset Labour Market Review Nov 2014
% of adult population without work in Weston South & Central	4.1%	
% of 16-18 years olds who are NEET	2.8%	People & Communities Directorate Performance report (Nov 2014)
% of Care Leavers aged 19 in ETE	48.8%	

Appendix 2 - North Somerset Early Help Pledge

[NAME OF AGENCY] recognises the importance of effective and co-ordinated delivery of early help as part of the support provided to children, young people and families in North Somerset.

[NAME OF AGENCY] therefore commits itself to:

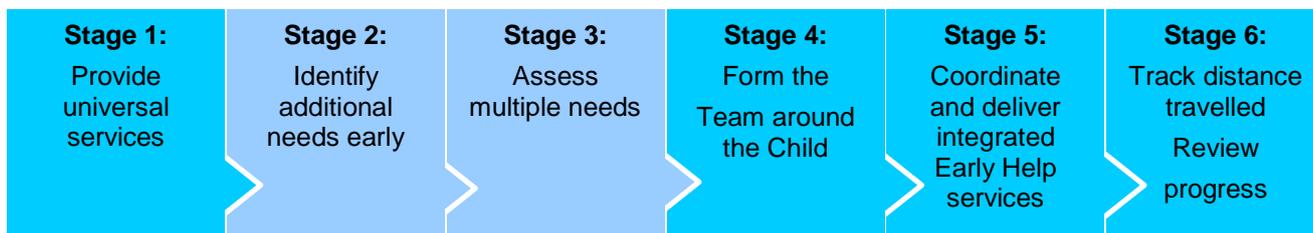
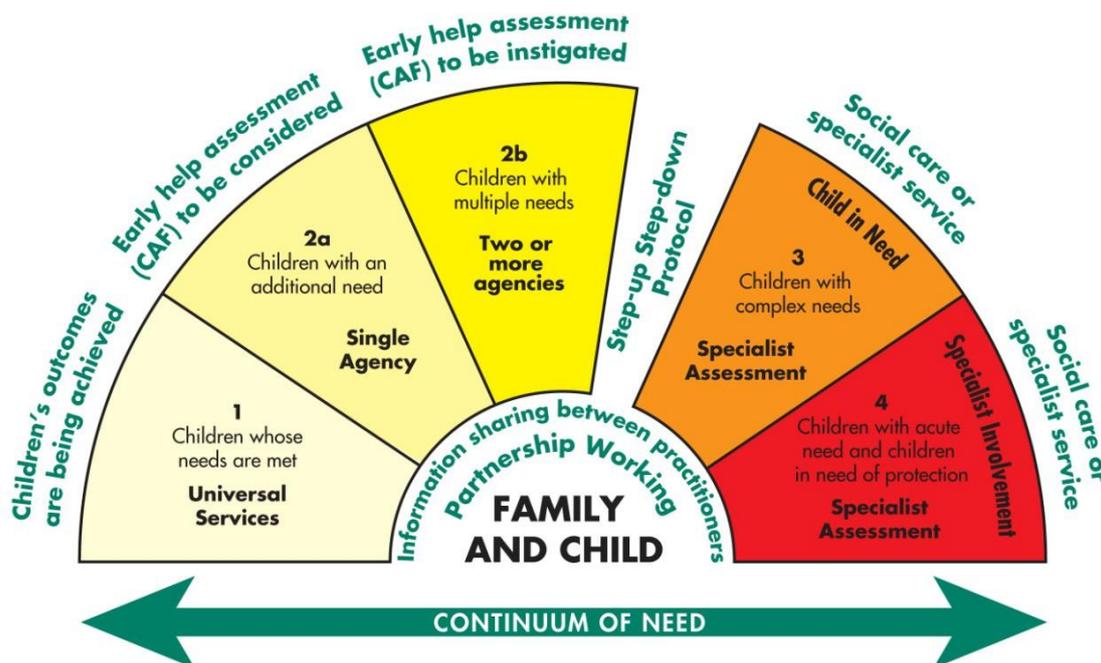
1. Involving families in the design, delivery and evaluation of early help services and supporting them to find their own solutions
2. Defining and delivering its contribution to a needs-led, evidence based, appropriate and co-ordinated “Early Help Offer”
3. Focusing its “Early Help Offer” on improving “whole family” outcomes, whilst keeping the child at the centre of the work
4. Delivering its part of that offer based on a ‘foundation’, multi-agency Early Help Assessment
5. Ensuring that service design and delivery reflects the principle that “safeguarding is everybody’s responsibility”, supporting its staff and volunteers to identify concerns and respond without any unnecessary formal referral to children’s social care services.
6. Using Early Help Assessment in line with the Local Safeguarding Board Thresholds guidance and the defined pathway for accessing support
7. Measuring the impact of its Early Help outcomes using the “distance travelled” principle
8. Following a quality improvement cycle, using information about the effectiveness of early help pathways and delivery to identify unmet need and inform service commissioning

Signed:

Position:

Date:

Appendix 3 – Early Help Pathway (As at March 2014)



Stage 1: Providing Early Help Services and Interventions

Level 1 Universal settings provide services for all children and young people in their day-to-day work. In the majority of cases, a child or young person's needs are addressed at this early stage. If the child's needs are not met practitioners should move to stage 2.

Stage 2: Identifying Additional Needs Early

Level 2a identifies children who do have an additional need. These needs can be met by a single agency. If the child's needs become more complex or are multiple then move to stage 3.

Stage 3: Assessing Multiple Needs

Level 2b is where a child has multiple needs, which require a co-ordinated response from two or more agencies.

Where a child has multiple needs the Early Help Assessment (CAF) should be offered to the family. This will enable professionals to:

- contribute information from their areas of expertise that will improve support to the child
- coordinate work with the family and where appropriate share information
- jointly consider a child or young person's strengths and needs

An Early Help Assessment (CAF) can only be undertaken with the informed and explicit written consent from the child/young person and/or their parents/carers.

Stage 4: Forming the Team around the Child (TAC)

Where a multi-agency response is required the Team around the Child (TAC) is formed. This will bring together practitioners from across different services to co-ordinate and deliver an integrated package of solution-focused support and meet the needs identified during the Early Help assessment (CAF) process.

Solution-focused approaches focus on what people want to achieve as opposed to their problems. It is important that the child or young person and parents/carers are also included as part of the TAC.

Stage 5: Co-ordinating and delivering Integrated Early Help Services

In these instances, the person who undertakes the Early Help assessment (and identifies the need for multi-agency support) is responsible for convening the first TAC meeting from which a Lead Professional is agreed. The Lead Professional acts as the main point of contact for the child or young person and their family, and co-ordinates delivery of integrated services.

Stage 6: Tracking Distance Travelled and Reviewing Progress

The Early Help Assessment and delivery plan are regularly reviewed by the TAC to monitor progress toward agreed outcomes. This will involve further multi-agency meetings and liaison between the members of the TAC.

To improve the tracking of outcomes a Distance Travelled Tool will be made available to be completed with families. This will show improved outcomes over time and identify any unmet or additional needs for the child or young person. Both the reviews and Distance Travelled will inform whether a child or young person needs to 'step up' into Level 3 or 4 Services for children with complex or acute needs or 'step down' to receive single agency or universal services.

Information Sharing

Effective integrated working is underpinned by good practice in information sharing and clear communication.

Information sharing is a key part of the Government's goal to deliver better, more efficient public services that are co-ordinated around the needs of children, young people and families. Information sharing is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare, and for wider public protection. Information sharing is a vital element in improving outcomes for all.

The Early Help Assessment (CAF) aims to enable and support good practice in information sharing about the needs of children and young people as part of preventative services. In so doing, all sharing (and storing) of information should be done lawfully and comply with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Child Protection Procedures and Early Help

Where there are signs that a child or an unborn baby:

- is experiencing or may already have experienced abuse or neglect or
- is likely to suffer significant harm in the future

A referral to Children's Social Care Referral & Assessment Team needs to be made following the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Procedures.

Appendix 4 – Early Help Evidence Base & Resources

1. Evidence Base

United Kingdom

[“Fair Society, Healthy Lives”](#) Report of the Marmot Review of health inequalities (2010)

[“The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning”](#) Dame Claire Tickell (2010)

[“The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults”](#) Rt Hon Frank Field MP (2010)

[“Early Intervention, the Next Steps”](#) and [“Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings”](#) Rt Hon Graham Allen MP (2011)

[“The Munro Review of Child Protection: final report – a child centred system”](#) Prof Eileen Munro (2011)

International

Various research by the [Washington State Department of Early Learning](#)

2. Resources

North Somerset

[“Pathways out of Poverty”](#) North Somerset Council 2011

[“North Somerset Public Health Strategy & Implementation Plan 2013-2015”](#) North Somerset Council (2013)

[“Think Family: Multi-Agency Guidance”](#); North Somerset Think Family Strategy Group (2014)

National

[“Keeping children safe in education - Statutory guidance for schools and colleges”](#), DfE (April 2014)

[“Working Together to Safeguard Children”](#) DfE (2013)