

## EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 NOVEMBER 2019

### CHILDREN & FAMILY CENTRES' WORK WITH SCHOOLS

#### Introduction

1. In March 2017 Oxfordshire County Council redesigned its delivery of children's early help and social work services; the Family Solution Service integrated statutory social care and targeted early help services, and these services are co-located and delivered from eight Children & Family Centres plus two satellites across Oxfordshire.
2. The Family Solutions Service was created to provide a 'Think Family' approach to support families with varying levels and complexity of need, in accordance with Oxfordshire's Threshold of Needs (Annex 2). The service provides targeted early help to support families with emerging needs and delivers statutory social work with families whose children are subject to Child in Need (CIN) or Child Protection (CP) plans. The Targeted Early Help teams deliver evidenced-based interventions and programmes including parenting education, protective behaviours for children, and early years 'play and learn' sessions. These interventions and programmes are also offered to families subject to statutory social work intervention, in accordance with their needs as set out in individual plans. Interventions are provided within the family home or within group settings or individually at Children and Family Centres.
3. Each Children and Family Centre works closely with a range of teams offering support to children and young people who are struggling with or not accessing education, and with relevant partner agencies, to promote children's educational attainment and life chances.
4. The Family Solutions Service supports children aged 0-19 years old and up to their 25th birthday if they have special educational needs set out in an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

#### **Family Solutions Services – partnership working to improve life chances**

5. Early Help and social care teams work closely with the Education, Employment and Training (EET) service, which supports young people aged 16 and over who need additional support to access education, employment or training. The Education, Employment and Training group, Choices, designed for young people to increase their opportunities for employment education and training, is provided in each centre once a week. The EET service also offers "pop-up" Choices at Abingdon Foyer, Oxford House, and Banbury Foyer around family functioning.

6. Each Children and Family Centre also works closely with Aquarius, Oxfordshire County Council's commissioned service for young people struggling with substance misuse; this may relate to young people's own substance misuse, or their parents, or both; Early Help Practitioners or social workers and Aquarius workers work jointly, delivering support on an individual case work basis. This intervention can, by decreasing substance misuse, or enabling young people to better make sense of their parents' difficulties, help young people struggling with education to increase their school/college attendance and attainment.
7. It is well established that children who are suffering neglect are less likely to realise their full academic potential. The Family Solutions Service works with children and families systemically, to seek to identify and tackle any parental difficulties impacting on parenting capability and as such resulting in child neglect; the Family Solutions Service is currently piloting the co-location of Turning Point, Oxfordshire's adults substance misuse service, with early help and social care practitioners at Children and Family Centres, to promote timely intervention for parents and carers struggling with alcohol or drug misuse, to minimise the impact on their children's emotional and educational development.
8. The Young Carers Team is part of the Family Solutions Service; the team provides targeted support and interventions through casework to children and young people identified as young carers and their families. Young carers often struggle with education because of their caring responsibilities. Casework always involves the child's educational setting within support planning, commonly aiming to build or develop trusting relationships within school – an understanding of the child's caring role increases school's ability to provide support through flexible arrangements. Where absenteeism is of concern, the young carers team will explore in more detail the factors contributing to a child's school absenteeism, leading to more supportive measures to promote inclusion; the team works in close partnership with education colleagues including attendance liaison officers.
9. Many children supported by the young carers team care for a sibling with special educational needs, or other barriers to education. Workers contributions to Education Health Care Plans often relate to the cared for child. Increased support to that child can lead to improved educational outcomes for the young carer.
10. The Family Solutions Service Young Carers Team is currently working alongside Aquarius to deliver an activity-based group for young teens impacted by parental alcohol or substance misuse. This group is being piloted in Witney, with a view to offer this across the county if successful. The group offers young people a safe space to talk about their home lives and any worries they may have, and together the group is creating a piece of art to showcase, and as such, build participants' self-esteem. This group is based on an established and evidence-based model developed by The Children's Society; children and young people who have a space to talk about their experiences are less likely to struggle in school; talking and being listened to supports their emotional well-being and as such increases their capacity to learn.

11. The Family Group Conference Service is also based within the Family Solutions Service; this service enables families to develop their own plans, mobilising family strengths and resources, to address unmet needs and reduce identified risks. Family Group Conferences are often convened in response to poor School attendance and an independent Co-ordinator will work to bring extended families together to find ways to improve this; it may be that if primary carers are unable to ensure consistent attendance due to their own difficulties, that another family member or friend is able to assist to improve attendance and punctuality.
12. Family Solutions Service early help practitioners and social workers always work as part of a multi-agency professional network when undertaking casework with children in need of help and protection; early help, child in need or child protection plans are multi-agency and consistently include actions for education professionals, social care staff and families, to promote best educational outcomes

### **Early Help: Assessment, Community and Specialist Services**

13. *“Keeping Children Safe in Education” (2018)* and *“Working Together to Safeguard Children” (2018)* provide the legislative framework for all agencies working with children and families to ensure that all children and young people are safe, and able to access education which is in line with their individual needs.
14. When a child and family is identified as potentially benefitting from early help, a multi-agency early help assessment (EHA) is undertaken; this is led by the practitioner who has identified the concern, subject to the family’s consent to the assessment. The purpose of the EHA is to identify any unmet needs, which may include educational needs, and ascertain what help the child, young person and/or family may need to promote best outcomes and prevent escalation of any existing difficulties that could result in the need for statutory social care intervention.
15. Children and young people who are not accessing education due to disability, illness, caring responsibilities or family difficulties, are at risk of not realising their full potential without additional services. This may require a single or multi-agency response and a “Team around the Family” (TAF) plan; depending on the nature and complexity of individual need, this plan may be drawn up and coordinated by the Locality Community Support Service (LCSS). If identified outcomes are achieved through execution of this plan, Family Solutions Services’ involvement may not be required.
16. Educational settings work to identify these cohorts of children at the earliest opportunity, to ensure that the right services are introduced in a timely way, to tackle emerging difficulties and hopefully resolve these to prevent escalation into statutory services. A comprehensive range of support services is offered to schools by the County Council, including specialist services and alternative provision; these are listed in annex 3. All schools can access this information via the Oxfordshire Schools intranet site.

17. Local demand in relation to Special Educational Needs support has more than doubled since 2014; this demand, coupled with a reduction in education budgets, has placed increasing pressure on Oxfordshire schools to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils over the last five years.
18. Children from educationally disadvantaged families are twice as likely to be persistent absentees – defined as children and young people whose attendance is less than 90% - than those who are not.
19. The exclusion of children from school is often linked to unmet additional emotional or behavioural needs; as such, the Locality and Community Support Services, Early Help and Targeted Early Help services are key in providing timely support to families whose difficulties are impacting on children’s emotional and behavioural development and well-being.

### **Role of Children & Family Centres: Family Solutions Service Targeted Early Help Service**

20. The nature of support and intervention offered to families within the Family Solutions Service is determined in response to the level and complexity of need identified through assessment; as detailed, early help and social work teams are co-located within the service. Services may “flex” between the two teams in response to changing family circumstances, and this is managed closely by managers from the statutory and targeted early help teams, who work together within each Centre to ensure continuity of care based on the individual needs of each family. It is the aim of the service to ensure that families continue to work with professionals with whom they have developed a positive rapport when the changing needs of the family warrant “step-up” to the statutory social care team, or “step-down” from statutory social care intervention to targeted family support services.
21. Children’s and young people’s education - including attendance, punctuality, presentation, engagement and attainment - is always explored and considered within both Early Help or Child and Family Assessments, and as part of planning and meetings to reviews plans, to ensure timely progression of identified outcomes.
22. Families referred to the Targeted Early Help service are at level 2b/3, as set out in Oxfordshire’s Threshold of Needs, and, whilst the primary presenting need may relate to education, families at level 2b/3 are, by definition, experiencing multiple or complex vulnerabilities. A Targeted Early Help Practitioner works as “Lead Professional” within the multi-agency network of professionals around the family who are, together with family members, responsible for progressing the plan. The plan will seek to address any difficulties relating to parenting capability and family & environmental factors, as well as any challenges relating specifically to education.
23. The multi-agency network supporting the plan generally includes representatives from the subject child’s nursery, school or college. The lead professional requires the support of colleagues from education and specialist services to jointly draw

up an effective care package for the family, to build on existing strengths and share and mitigate risk.

24. The Family Solutions Service’s operating model is a restorative approach; work with families within this framework seeks to:
- a) Identify strengths and needs for whole families - and build on strengths to develop a comprehensive plan.
  - b) Identify individual, multiple and cumulative risk factors.
  - c) Use tools, techniques and analysis, including the child’s voice, to understand unmet needs, and take timely action to respond to those to ensure best outcomes for children.

### **Targeted Early Help – referral process**

25. There are multiple points at which early help can be “triggered” in response to education difficulties:
- **Via the Locality Community Support Service (LCSS):**
    - Referral may be made by school if the child/ren, young people and family has already been provided with robust support but is not able to sustain attendance at school within agreed timescales. An Early Help Assessment will be completed or updated, and a referral submitted via the weekly Area Transfer Meeting, a multi-agency panel which considers and agrees next steps in response to referrals and includes education professionals.
    - Schools also refer when a child or young person has stopped attending school and school has not been able to make contact with the family for three consecutive days
    - Referral from the Learner Engagement Service.
  - **From Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).**
    - Triggered by the second episode of a child or young person going missing.
    - Triggered by the *Children Missing or Exploited Panel* if a child or young person goes missing on more than three occasions within a 90-day period.
  - **Child & Family Assessment Team (CAFAT)**
    - Triggered by child & family assessment undertaken in accordance with Oxfordshire’s Threshold of Needs.
  - **Family Solutions Statutory Service (FSS)**
    - “Step – down” plan following successful intervention via a Child in Need or Child Protection plan.

26. When referrals and/or completed assessments indicate that a child, sibling group, or group of young people are at risk of, or are, experiencing significant harm, a referral will be made to the Family Solutions statutory social work team immediately in order that safeguarding activity commences to reduce risk without delay.

### **FSS services for children & young people not accessing education**

27. FSS works with families to seek to identify the underlying reasons for poor attendance, school refusal, disruptive behaviour and exclusions, when these have been identified within assessment. These could include -

- Child or parents/carer's mental health support needs
- Child or parents/carer's physical health needs.
- Bullying, conflict with friends and unhealthy relationships.
- Child's caring responsibilities
- Child or parents/carers' substance misuse
- Parental domestic abuse
- Financial hardship and inadequate housing
- Family crisis such as bereavement
- Parental separation & conflict arising from this.
- School & family relationship breakdown

28. Interventions and support offered include –

- a) Where poor attendance and/or behavioural difficulties in education is reflective of wider family dysfunction or distress, Targeted Early Help works directly with the school, includes liaison with Learning Engagement Officers regarding attendance or exclusions, to ensure that schools are fully abreast of children's home circumstances and any environmental factors that may be impacting on their attendance or behaviour in school. This may include agreeing adjustments to "zero tolerance" policies and behavioural contracts relating to low level disruption and minor uniform infringements.
- b) Supporting socialisation through facilitating and supporting attendance at holiday activities and activity-based clubs and groups.
- c) Supporting schools and children & young people to access alternative provision as part of a comprehensive reintegration programme; these include TRAX, Riverside, Back on Track, Meadowbrook College, City Farm, ACE Training, & Activate Learning.
- d) Strengthening family functioning through the mobilisation of support from wider family and friends.
- e) Supporting with any housing or financial difficulties, social isolation or access to community resources that may be impacting on access to education.
- f) Strengthening parenting capacity, including basic care, safety, emotional warmth, behavioural boundaries and stability, and as such improving children's daily lived experience in order that they may thrive educationally.
- g) Supporting children and young people with the emotional impact of fixed term and permanent exclusions; this includes direct work with young people to increase their resilience, emotional wellbeing and self-esteem.
- h) Supporting children and young people through individual work on consequential thinking, anger management, and protective behaviours.
- i) Supporting children and young people and families with attending meetings with schools, including parent contract meetings and meetings to plan re-integration.
- j) Short term, intensive, direct and practical help for families to establish morning and bedtime routines, taking children to school on time, and supporting young people with travelling to school independently as

appropriate. In specific circumstances, workers will accompany children to school to ensure that children get to school when parents are unable to manage this.

- k) Supporting children, young people and families with managed school moves and accessing alternative provision when needed.
- l) Helping families to access child and adolescent mental health services if required.
- m) Working with schools around best use of pupil premium or other funding streams available to them to access additional resources and services.
- n) Supporting children and young people who have had longstanding absences from school, including children and young people who have become isolated and socially anxious
- o) Supporting children with transition from primary to secondary school.
- p) Working with Children Missing Education, the Learner Engagement Service and families to consider the benefits and risks of elective home education and its suitability for children who are finding it difficult to access education.
- q) Supporting schools to meet their safeguarding responsibilities and working with parents on safety planning if they are unable to supervise children and young people excluded from or not attending school.
- r) Co-ordinating support to children and young people involved in anti-social behaviour alongside the Youth Justice Service.

### **Children with Special Educational Needs**

- 29. As Lead Practitioner for Team Around the Family plans, Targeted Early Help Practitioners support schools to identify emerging educational needs and with the development of additional supports to ensure full educational access. TAF plans facilitate effective liaison with SEN Support Services, Oxfordshire Schools Inclusion Team, Educational Psychologists and Oxfordshire Hospital School as needed for children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- 30. When an Education and Health Care Plan is prepared, the social care section completed by the child's key worker from the social care or early help team.

### **Review and Completion of multi-agency plans**

- 31. Meetings to review multi-agency plans are held every 4 – 6 weeks to include an updated assessment of need and risk, strengths and protective factors and progress against the multi-agency plan.
- 32. The review is facilitated by the lead professional and will capture of the views of the child, young person and family, school and other agencies working with the family.
- 33. Each review meeting includes a review the child or young person's educational progress and engagement in learning.
- 34. The outcome of the review will determine whether the family continues to need early help or social care intervention or whether ongoing support can be provided

by school and community services, with or without additional support provided by LCSS.

35. Clear plans are put in place to ensure that improvements made in relation to education are sustainable and can be managed within the community with the support of universal services.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

36. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the report.**

**DELIA MANN – HOS FSS**

Background papers:

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