

Early Help in Bridgend

*A strategy laying out how children and young people in
Bridgend County Borough Council can access support as
soon as they need it.*

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INTRODUCTION

The desire to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families is what underpins Children's services in Bridgend and we know that by working in partnership we can make a big difference.

We are also united in our thinking around early intervention; we know that if our services identify the needs of children, young people and their families as soon as possible and take swift action to address those needs we could stop problems starting, getting worse or becoming entrenched. If problems worsen for children and young people they can start to influence every aspect of their lives. It is therefore important that every service and every professional has an interest in effective early intervention being in place.

Serious Case Review learning nationally and indeed locally has taught us that the more swiftly we recognise a child has problems, the quicker we take action. Furthermore, the better we work together and share information the more likely we are to avoid disastrous consequences for children. We know intervening early is the right approach to take.

We accept that orienting services towards early intervention is not easy, particularly during tough financial times, but there is evidence that it can be done. Some suggest that under the current economic circumstances early intervention is a luxury that cannot be afforded, but when early intervention is embedded it can relieve the pressure on services so a given level of resource is used to better effect. When the high costs of 'non-intervention' are compared to the significantly lower costs of intervening early, it becomes clear that early intervention is often the better approach. In the long term early intervention can yield significant savings. Moreover, all the evidence suggests that no children's services system can be efficient unless early intervention is a significant part of the mix. With this in mind we have laid out in this Early help Strategy the principles and processes that we, the Children's directorate have agreed to keep at the heart of our services and will be willing to be held to account to in doing so.

DEFINITIONS

Prevention: where services or interventions are intended to build skills and resilience and thus prevent problems arising. Prevention includes advice, support and anticipatory guidance at key life stages or transitions. This is a key role for universal services.

Early Intervention: means taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems that have already emerged for children, young people and their families.

Early Years: is a phrase used to describe the initial years of a child's life.

WHAT IS EARLY INTERVENTION?

It is important to recognise that early intervention is not a single, one-off event but a process whereby:

- Children, young people and families' difficulties are identified before they have reached a point at which a child's development and well-being is seriously compromised.
- Having been identified early on, the scale and nature of these problems are properly understood and a plan for offering help is developed through a process of high quality assessment, and
- Children, young people and families are then offered the help they need, in line with those assessments, accept it, and then either overcome their difficulties or they are offered and accept longer term support to help manage them.

Early intervention is a key part of a wider continuum of services and will work alongside universal services. For early intervention to be successful each stage of the process must be carried out well and followed through by every person who works with children, young people and families and has individual responsibility for early intervention.

Early help in Bridgend is about professionals working in an integrated and multi-agency way and delivering services in the right locations based on the needs of that local area.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Historically investment in prevention and early intervention initiatives in Bridgend has been un co-ordinated. Many services are still relatively new and they need time to embed and to develop links with other provision. There is a hope that, in time, these initiatives will impact positively on the lives of children and young people and their families but in order to achieve this we recognise that there is a need to co-ordinate services better and to make more rigorous links between our approach to children at different tiers of need. In recent years there has been some significant investment and commitment to prevention and early intervention within Bridgend, i.e. Connecting Families, the Intensive Family Support Service, Rapid Response Team, and Families First. In addition, some services have been re-organised with the aim of increasing skills and capacity within the team. The local authority has increased its focus on developing integrated approaches to supporting families and supporting social workers and other practitioners.

It is acknowledged that there needs to be a strategy in place to ensure that the range of prevention and early intervention initiatives in place are joined-up, coherent and have a common purpose.

Connections with other services, including universal services and statutory (e.g. child protection) services, could be improved. Stakeholders feel that this would help to deliver a more coherent spectrum of support for vulnerable families.

Existing prevention and early intervention initiatives risk being too short-term. Families face challenges that are longstanding and can't be resolved with (for instance) six months of support. Services need to be better at understanding need and providing support and intervention of a type and length that would meet the family's needs.

There is a degree of confusion across teams about which service or team a family should sit with. This is particularly the case for families that don't fully fit eligibility criteria. It is inevitable therefore that some families 'slip through the net'.

There is a concern that prevention and early intervention services are not fully equipped to support families at the cusp of entering statutory services. Stakeholders comment that there is a core of families who face significant challenges but who do not meet the threshold for statutory child protection services. This results in some services supporting families with whom they are not sufficiently skilled or experienced to work. On other occasions, it is also resulting in families not getting any support, resulting in their needs having to escalate further before getting support.

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

Early identification in Bridgend is underpinned by the following key principles. All services in the partnership have agreed to embed these principles into their organisational culture.

- **Children, young people and their families are at the centre of everything we do and interventions and services are shaped and delivered around them. To ensure this we will:**
 - help all children and young people to:
 - thrive and make the best use of their talents;
 - live healthy and safe lives;
 - be confident and caring individuals and know and receive their rights.

The Children's Directorate will ensure that we will provide greater opportunities us to work closer with partners across the public, voluntary and private sectors to work together in a fully integrated way. However, the impact of the wider public sector financial cuts will clearly impact on services for children, young people and their families. We are therefore making some difficult decisions about what we can maintain, reduce or stop delivering in line with the budget reductions. Where we can, we are committed to protecting front line children's services, especially those that support early intervention and the safeguarding of children, protecting them from harm. What is important is the quality of outcomes for our families. Value for money is our key measure, not who provides the service. Therefore, the renewed focus of our business plan is on the transformation of children's services, with a strong focus on early intervention and prevention and the development of a whole system approach to ensure that the needs of all our children and young people will be met at the earliest opportunity.

- **Any service or individual presented with a child's unmet need should take action or invoke the help of others; everyone has a responsibility to act and to ensure this we will:**

- Use the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) to provide a one-model, one-process way of working which should be at the heart of all other assessments.
 - Safely share information between services to avoid duplication where appropriate and purposeful to do so.
 - Use interventions which are based around what we know works and have a proven evidence base ensuring the right person is available at the right time.
 - Provide good, clear information about services to help families access advice and guidance about emerging difficulties at the appropriate level.
 - Work in a co-ordinated and integrated way.
- **Early intervention is core to the work of every mainstream service and as such investment and resource should be reoriented into early intervention. To ensure this happens we will:**
 - Shift services to early identification and intervention to improve safeguarding.
 - endeavour to make the children's workforce skilled in identifying, assessing and swiftly responding to unmet need.
- **Success is measured based on outcomes achieved for young people. To ensure this happens we will:**
 - Transform the way we deliver children's services to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families and to meet the demands of the medium term financial strategy
 - We will adopt a whole system approach to improving outcomes for children
 - We will ensure that the whole systems approach has a joint assessment framework at its heart.
 - Ensure there is a common understanding of need by all agencies and a consistent response to levels of need
 - Work in a holistic way to meet the needs of the whole family
 - Target the families who need our help and tackle the 'referral' culture
 - Ensure we meet the needs of children and their families as earlier as possible to ensure we prevent need from becoming more complex.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE?

In Bridgend we talk about a ‘Continuum of Need Assessment and Action’ as illustrated in Appendix 1. The ‘Continuum’ represents a seamless approach to service delivery which meets the changing needs of children, young people and their families. There are four segments of the continuum:

Level	Need	Descriptor of need (for a full guide of indicators see appendix 1)	Example of typical service response	Example of assessment
1	Universal need	Children who are enjoying general well-being, accessing education and health services and maintaining good overall progress in all areas of development.	Universal services including: Schools Children's Centre's Youth Clubs / Youth Projects	Screening tools SATs Health screening
2	Additional need	Children who have an identified, singular need whose health, development and / or learning are starting to be adversely affected as a result.	Family Support Targeted Youth Support Behaviour Support Autism Outreach Portage Workers Education Welfare Parent Support Workers Flying start Integrated working teams	JAFF
3	Multiple need	Children who have numerous needs, who as a result are not maintaining satisfactory health, development and/or learning and who are increasingly vulnerable. <i>(including Children in Need as defined by S17 of the Children Act 1989)</i>		JAFF TAF
4	Acute need	Children in crisis, with complex, acute and often long term need, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where parents refuse or are consistently not able to co-operate • Children who have complex disabilities • Parental resistance and lack of support mechanisms which results in children suffering or likely to be suffering significant harm • Children who are offending and subject to a court order • Children who have serious unmet enduring health, development and /or learning needs <i>(including Children in Need as defined by S17 of the Children Act 1989)</i>	Youth Offending Service Disability Services Safeguarding Teams Attendance Prosecution IFSS Connecting families Edge of care project	Initial Assessments Core Assessments SEN Assessments

Level 2 and 3 represent early intervention in response to an individual need. To enable children, young people and families to receive a seamless service all partners have agreed to operate the following processes to make early intervention happen in practice.

The JAFF is a key part of delivering frontline services that are integrated and are focused around the needs of children and young people. The JAFF is a standardised approach to conducting an assessment of a child's additional needs and deciding how these should be met. The JAFF promotes more effective, earlier identification of additional needs particularly in universal services. It aims to provide a simple process for a holistic assessment of child's needs and strengths, taking account of the roles of parents, carers and environmental factors on their development. Practitioners are then better placed to agree with children and families about appropriate modes of support. The JAFF also aims to improve integrated working by promoting coordinated service provisions.

Where a multi-agency response is required, the formation of a Team around the Family (TAF) is needed. A TAF brings together practitioners from across different services that work together to co-ordinate and deliver an integrated package of solution focused support to meet the needs identified during the common assessment process. It is important that the child or young person and parents/carers are also included as part of the TAF. Our vision of the TAF is that it is a multi-agency panel convened regularly to discuss the needs of children in a given locality.

The Lead Professional is the person responsible for co-ordinating the actions identified in the assessment process. They act as a single point of contact for children and young people with additional needs who are supported by more than one practitioner within a TAF.

The JAFF Plan is regularly reviewed by the TAF to monitor progress towards agreed outcomes. The review identifies any unmet or additional needs for the child or young person's smooth transition between universal, targeted and specialist services. In the case of multi-agency responses, this will involve further multi-agency meetings and liaison between the members of the TAF.

The objective of the Information Sharing Protocol is to facilitate sharing of all personal, sensitive and non-personal data between the public, private and voluntary sectors so that members of the public receive the services they need.

The Critical Pathway is a process that ensures children, young people and families have the appropriate support at the appropriate time against the Continuum of Need Framework, including the escalation and de-escalation protocols.

OUTCOMES

By adopting these principles and processes across all of our services in the Children's Directorate we expect children, young people and families to receive the right support at the right time. There will be:

- Fewer children, young people and families needing expensive high tier services (measured by the number of referrals to specialist services)
- Fewer severe problems (measured by the number of referrals with a primary need; the number of families in acute distress or family dysfunction)
- A narrowing of the gap between populations of children, young people and families (measured by Bridgend's Child Poverty Indicators, the proportion of children in poverty)
- Improved uptake and engagement with universal and targeted services (tier 1, 2, 3 and 4, measured by the number of JAFFs)
- A reduction of Children in Need of Child Protection measured by the number voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1984
- Improved satisfaction about services (measured by the number of related customer compliments and complaints and service evaluations)
- Empowered and self-reliant communities (measured by re-referral rates)

As part of this protocol each of the services that form the Children's Directorate will embed these principles and processes into the culture of their service and be willing to be held to account by other services in doing so.

ACTION PLAN

Work stream	Actions	Lead	By when	Savings attributed
1.				
	Re-structure all family support services including youth services	Mark Lewis	Dec 14	150K
	Create support hubs in communities aligned with safeguarding teams	Mark Lewis	Dec14	
	Re launch JAFF to provide single form of entry for the support hubs	Mark Lewis	Jan 14	
	Re-locate safeguarding teams to hubs	Colin Turner	Dec14	
	Explore the options to develop a full MASH model of service delivery	Colin Turner/Nicola Echanis	Dec 14	
2.				
	Develop a multi-agency programme of parenting	Mark Lewis	March 15	

	education and skills			
	Develop a mechanism for identifying and assessing young carers within the borough	Mark Lewis	Dec14	
	Develop a programme of interventions to meet the needs of young carers	Mark Lewis	March 15	
3.				
4.				

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Integrated Working Procedures

