



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Title:	Response to the Early Help Call-in Request
Committee date:	Friday 2 February 2018
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Background

The Early Help Review has previously been considered by:

- Cabinet 10th July 2017 [Early Help papers](#) ¹
- Select Committee 17 October 2017: [Early Help consultation](#) ²
- Cabinet 8 January 2018: [Early Help papers](#) ³

Summary

This paper sets out a response to address the 9 issues raised in the call-in request submission.

¹ Cabinet 10.7.17: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6788>

² Select Committee 17.10.17: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=788&MId=9303&Ver=4>

³ Cabinet 8.1.17: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6946>



Key issues

The call-in has raised 9 issues:

- 1. The Cabinet Member report contained a number of contradictions, including: Promoting prevention, but using the existing Troubled Families outcome measure (page 196, paragraph 25);***

Detailed research and needs analysis have shown that the following factors are significant in driving demand within Children's Services:

- Domestic violence and abuse
- Behavioural problems in children
- Mental health
- Relationship breakdown / parental conflict
- Poverty and worklessness

The Troubled Families Outcome Measures correlate with these key factors. The Project Team sought advice from the Early Intervention Foundation on outcomes measurements and they confirmed our view and recommended the Troubled Families Outcomes Measures as appropriate measures.

The Early Help Strategy (pages 9-10) also refers to other existing measures that will continue to be monitored.

- 2. The Cabinet Member report contained a number of contradictions, including: The Equality Impact statement says that pregnant women will receive more support (page 15), when actually they will receive less support (page 4).***

The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) seeks to proactively consider the impact of the proposal on the 'specific protected characteristic' of pregnancy and maternity status. Pages 4, 5 and 15 of the EIA identifies that services currently additionally benefit, by design, children and families.

The intention is to continue to additionally benefit those who are pregnant and the EIA makes clear that this will particularly be the case where for example the person is a single parent in receipt of work-related benefits. However it is possible in the new model, where no other risk factors exist (for example unemployment), that the level of BCC service may be reduced.

However on page 5 of the EIA, it further indicates how these impacts may be reduced, because we intend to *'improve our communication pathways (via internet websites and work with key partners in education and health services). Our aim is that these groups will be supported to engage with the wide variety of provision already available from partner agencies across Buckinghamshire.'*

Page 15 of the EIA indicates that those with a pregnancy or maternity status are more likely to access the new service and the new model of service delivery is intended to increase the amount of parenting groups and by taking the service out into communities and people's homes, will improve access for those for whom transport with young children is difficult.

3. *There was an inadequate consultation process as many members of the public who provided feedback on the consultation said that they were confused about the consultation.*

The original consultation period was 10 weeks from the 14 July – 22 September 2017. This was further extended on the 4 September for 6 weeks to 16 October 2017 (Phase 2) with additional information. This represented a total consultation duration of 3 months (13 weeks).

As is usual of a large scale consultation, the proportions of agree / disagree etc. and the comments provided by residents / organisations to the open questions in the consultation were kept under constant review; the feedback showed that more information would be useful.

Similar proportions of residents agreed with the proposals in both phases of the consultation (52% in the first phase, 45% in the second phase). Large numbers of residents responded to both phases of the consultation, First Phase (1279), Second Phase (712).

When further information on the proposals was added at Phase 2 of the consultation, respondents were encouraged to complete the questionnaire for a second time if they had further information to add. Further detail regarding the proposal was added on 4 September 2017. This information was available both online, as well as a supplementary document to sit alongside the printed consultation document that was sent to libraries. Note that the same process and channels were used to promote both the first and second phases of the consultation (see below channels) both on a general basis and a targeted basis as per page 240 of the Cabinet report:

General promotion included:

- Comprehensive webpage and homepage advert on the BCC website
- MyBucks – council newsletter to 18,000 residents in August, October and December
- Weekly promotion through the BCC corporate social media channels (Facebook and Twitter)
- Local media coverage (15 online and print articles and various radio interviews and items)
- Posters in libraries and GP surgeries
- Articles and distribution through councillors, Local Area Forums and Parish Newsletters
- Promotion through internal staff newsletters, screens and other channels

Targeted communications included:

- Information sent to current early help service providers to share with their colleagues, clients and partners
- Targeted social media adverts using 'ACORN' data for those living in areas classified as 'Financially Stretched' and 'Urban Adversity' groups in Buckinghamshire (matched with being a parent/ a family)
- Promotion through Bucks Family Information Service, social media channels and website
- Articles and poster sent to local community and faith groups
- Direct letter/email sent to schools to distribute to parents as appropriate

Public consultation results:

Residents were asked if they had any other comments on the proposal for a new early help service, where 27% mentioned factors that relate to the clarity of the proposal. However, people largely mentioned this in the first phase of the consultation (40% of residents responding in this phase), compared to the second phase of the consultation, when further information was provided to help clarify the proposal for respondents, where only 5% of respondents mentioned this.

When asked about improving the way we deliver services for children and their families, 3% of residents mentioned factors relating to the clarity of the proposal, again this was slightly higher in the first phase of the consultation (4%) than in the second phase (2%).

The approach adopted was to conduct an unbiased, clear consultation. This follows the consultation principles used by the Cabinet Office and is in accordance with the Market Research Society code of conduct ⁴. The following examples show how the consultation has followed these principles:

- The survey asked balanced questions that were not leading in their nature. For example, ensuring that the questionnaire asked whether residents 'agree or disagree with the proposal', rather than only asking if they agree with it.
- The consultation lasted for 13 weeks, including a period outside of the summer holidays to allow families time to respond.
- The consultation was open to all key stakeholders including residents, organisations and young people (targeting all key groups).
- The results were analysed to understand the views of different groups of residents and stakeholders and were used to shape proposals ahead of any formal decision making.
- The council published the results of the consultation, available online, for consideration before any decisions have been made about the Early Help service.
- Guidelines were followed with respect to how to engage young people aged under 16.
- A range of engagement work was undertaken in developing the approach and proposals, for example, through focus groups, discussions with staff/providers and an assessment of need to understand the issues that relate to early help services and information about support services.
- Information to explain the proposal and the proposed changes to services for a new early help service was provided alongside the consultation.

⁴ Cabinet Office Consultation Principle's: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>

Market Research Society Code of Conduct:
[https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/code%20of%20conduct%20\(2012%20rebrand\).pdf](https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/code%20of%20conduct%20(2012%20rebrand).pdf)

4. There was insufficient engagement with all County Councillors, particularly involving discussions around the potential future use of buildings in their local areas.

The Early Help Project has been under development for some considerable time.

The Early Help Review has previously been considered by:

- Cabinet 10th July 2017 [Early Help papers](#) ⁵
- Select Committee 17 October 2017: [Early Help consultation](#) ⁶
- Cabinet 8 January 2018: [Early Help papers](#) ⁷

There have been a number of member briefings in the lead up to the Cabinet paper and subsequent decision on 10 July 2017 authorising public consultation. These include:

- February 2017: Member briefing on Early Help Review
- March 2017: Change for Children Programme Select Committee briefing
- June 2017: Conservative Group briefing & Opposition Group briefing
- July 2017: Change for Children Programme stand at the Member Induction Programme marketplace
- October 2017: Select Committee meeting on Early Help Consultation
- October 2017: Change for Children Programme Member briefing

Regular direct updates have been sent to Councillors. Local Areas Forums and Parish Councils, these include:

- June 2017: Early Help Review Member update
- July 2017: Early Help Review Member briefing pack
- July 2017: Early Help Review Consultation launch announcement to Members with Parish Council article to use for local newsletters/websites to encourage large response to the consultation
- July 2017: Update to Local Area Forums on Early Help Consultation
- July & September 2017: Updates in Parish newsletter
- September 2017: Early Help Member briefing pack with additional information on extended consultation period
- November 2017: Update on extended timeline and Cabinet date of 8.1.18, to Councillors, Local Area Forums, Town and Parish Councils
- December 2017: Early Help Review Member update / reminder re: Early Help discussion at Cabinet 8.1.18.

⁵ Cabinet 10.7.17: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6788>

⁶ Select Committee 17.10.17: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=788&MId=9303&Ver=4>

⁷ Cabinet 8.1.17: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6946>

A number of Members have been proactive in approaching the project team to discuss issues in their area and the Local Area Forums have continued to be updated on the consultation process. In addition, as Julia Wassell states, Select Committee have also received an update on 17 October 2017, providing a further opportunity for members to engage.

The Cabinet paper requested in recommendation two, that discussions will take place over the next 6 months to determine how to best utilise the buildings to maximise benefits for families and children, and members' involvement in those discussions is vital.

5. *Safeguarding issues have not been adequately addressed and should be further reviewed to ensure full confidence in the new proposal.*

Paragraph 60 in the Cabinet report addresses the appropriateness of this proposal with regards to ensuring safeguarding and confidentiality.

To confirm, the proposed new Early Help service will always ensure that a meeting place will be where a family feels most at ease and where it is appropriate for the discussion to take place. This will be on a consent basis, discussing with the family/individual where they feel most comfortable to meet, this could be in an office/meeting room, or a more informal venue e.g. a library, a coffee shop, this could take place within the home, or where it is convenient and appropriate for the family/individual.

We will of course ensure the competence of our family workers through the selection process, induction and ongoing training and development.

The new Early Help model will necessarily include and link in with staff from a range of disciplines; these are professional people who will use their judgement in line with professional standards.

6. *Service users of Bucks County Council should not have to repeat their histories as a matter of good practice therefore this should not be used to justify the Cabinet decision.*

We note the comment. However the Cabinet decision was based on a broad evidence base as detailed in the Cabinet papers. The discussion at the Cabinet meeting on 8/1/18 did include commentary on this issue as it is clear from engagement with existing

service users that it is a really important issue to them and one that is improved by establishing the lead family worker role.

The premise of the Early Help model is essentially that children and families will not have to repeat their story more than once, based on a one family worker model.

7. Local knowledge has not been considered as part of the decision-making process - there was no mention in the Cabinet report about the impact that this decision will have on the local schools who currently jointly use facilities. Have those affected been consulted on the plans and if so, have their concerns been considered (and these should be reflected in the Cabinet report to ensure clear and transparent decision-making).

Discussions have been held with a number of sites since the consultation closed mid-October 2017, including schools, about the potential implications for them of the county council moving to a new model of service delivery. We are using this feedback (which includes positive ideas to support the new Early Help Service, as well as concerns) to develop our ideas into viable plans. Discussions in relation to schools include providing the space to increase Early Years capacity, other more general school use including ideas for supporting children and families, and wider use by local communities.

We accept that local knowledge will be critical to ensuring the success of how buildings can be repurposed, as well as ongoing dialogue with the 21 schools / nursery school that have a Children's Centre on site.

Cabinet report recommendation 2 requested: That Cabinet authorises formal discussions over the next six months with schools, early years providers, partners and the voluntary and community sector about how the remaining 28 Children's Centre buildings can best be utilised in the future to maximise their benefit for children, families and communities, within agreed resources.

8. Again local knowledge was lacking in the Cabinet report as the omission of Micklefield (IDACI Decile 2 most deprived, appendix 7 Cabinet Paper) and East Wycombe (Team area 8, Appendix 4, Cabinet Paper) for a hub cannot be justified.

We are acutely aware of the areas of the county where residents suffer particular disadvantage, including Micklefield and Appendix 7 of the Cabinet report highlights them.

We have to reiterate that the proposed Early Help Team Bases are not hubs, i.e. are not primarily intended as service delivery points and the reality at the Wycombe East Children's Centre is that its existing service provision is at most 16 hours a week.

The family workers will go out from the team bases into the community, working closely with families to reach them where they feel most at ease and where most appropriate regarding confidentiality and safeguarding. Group sessions will be available in community locations where need arises, much the same as current practice with parenting groups. Services currently provided by other agencies in Children's Centres (such as health visiting, speech and language therapy, antenatal classes, employment workshops or music sessions) will continue to be provided in those locations where it proves possible with community support to keep the buildings open. Where this isn't possible, they will be relocated to other partner buildings (health centres, libraries, job centres etc.), or provided in other community locations.

It is imperative to ensure that residents are able to access the new service, irrespective of where they live and the project team are keen to work with Julia Wassell and other local members to explore the opportunities for re-purposing the existing buildings in and near the local area.

9. *The consultation did not state that there would be a six month period to look at alternative uses of premises. It is unclear whether new management through charities etc will be funded or whether schools will be given additional funding. This work needs to be Member led and should have been done in advance of the decision.*

At the time of the consultation it was not intended within the Early Help Project, to re-purpose those buildings that were not being identified as suitable for being Early Help Team Bases.

Other projects under the Buckinghamshire Public Estate Partnership were and are looking with other public sector partners, at how community hubs can be developed from our collective property assets.

However, because of the consultation feedback, we reconsidered the scope of the Early Help project and asked the project team to explore informally how all 35 buildings might be re-purposed if the decision was taken to move to the new service delivery model.

The Cabinet report acknowledges at paragraph 57 that during the consultation, we had clear feedback about:

'the importance that people place on these buildings as focal points in their local communities. Discussions will continue over the next six months with schools, early years providers, partners and the voluntary and community sector about how the remaining 28 Children's Centre buildings can best be utilised in the future to maximise their benefit for children, families and communities.'

The Cabinet decision authorises discussions over the next 6 months to explore how buildings could be repurposed and it is absolutely right that there should be strong involvement from local members. This could not be authorised until the decision was taken on the new service.

At this stage it is not possible to say how the running costs of any repurposed buildings will be funded. From informal discussions so far, it is apparent that there is broad range of ways that running costs could be met.