

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**SCHOOLS FORUM****9 January 2017****Report of the Service Director, Schools and Learning****Rethink of the Early Help Offer (REHO)****1. Purpose of the report**

To update Schools Forum on the redesign of the early help offer.

2. Background

In July 2014 the challenges and issues relating to budget reductions in early help were highlighted to all schools in a letter from the Strategic Director. Within this there was an invitation to work in partnership on an innovative redesign of early help to include joint investment between the local authority (LA), schools and potentially wider partners through joint commissioning.

This proposal was further discussed with:

- Headteachers and governors at headteacher forums and strategic governor briefings during autumn term 2014;
- In the autumn term 2014 Schools Forum agreed to retain £3m funding centrally to enable the early help offer to continue whilst the redesign was undertaken.

The LA funded independent consultants to broker the early help redesign between LA and schools. This included the establishment of five prototypes: Whittington Green; Hope Valley; Kirk Hallam; Heanor Gate and South Derbyshire.

Governance and accountability arrangements were established for the oversight of the redesign and the prototypes. The Schools Forum provided governance of the overarching strategic direction with a project reference group made up of Schools Forum and LA representatives overseeing the prototypes.

During spring and summer terms 2015 the prototypes were established at varying levels and at varying pace. The aim being to run the prototypes until April 2017 and to use the learning to inform a county wide approach to joint commissioning of early help.

In the autumn term 2015 Schools Forum again agreed the retention of DSG to continue the early help redesign. The level of funding agreed increased to £5m. In December 2015, despite the LA appealing, the Secretary of State for Education refused to allow the funding to be held centrally and determined that the funding should be allocated through the formula and for schools to re-pool the funding,

This decision led to a significant change in the redesign programme as the LA needed to engage in a different process with schools regarding re-pooling the funding. This also resulted in the need to implement the redesign of early help county wide ahead of the original project timeline (April 2017). This roll out was based on the learning that there was to date from the prototypes and was to be in place by September 2016.

The LA and schools were in agreement to continue with the innovative redesign programme based on a commitment to retain a connected whole system approach to children's services. This was based on the belief that this would enable more efficient working and improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

Therefore, as the implementation of a redesigned system was significantly brought forward in timescale, the role of the external consultants ceased, as did the governance arrangements through the Schools Forum. The governance responsibility transferred to individual schools and locality partnerships which were already in existence.

Several governance meetings took place whereby the Schools Forum representatives on the governance group agreed to establish locality events in order to provide the opportunity for all schools to contribute to the ongoing development and co-production of the locality partnership arrangements and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in relation to the ongoing re-pooling of funding.

Between January 2016 and April 2016 the LA requested schools to re-pool the funding that was provided to individual schools in addition to their budget allocation.

This included a range of locality events, individual school and cluster group meetings with MAT colleagues, headteacher and governor briefings. By April 2016 all but three schools in Derbyshire agreed to re-pool.

In order to ensure effective delivery of early help provision, for those schools who decided not to re-pool, clear accountability arrangements were put in place through the Derbyshire Children's Safeguarding Board (DCSB) and Children's Trust Board (CTB).

The outcome of the locality events which took place in March, May and July 2016 was the production of terms of reference and governance arrangement for locality children partnerships and a MOU to provide a transparent agreement between the LA and individual schools in relation to the re-pooled funding.

It was decided by schools and the LA that the MOU would provide a three year agreement for re-pooling with an option to withdraw at any stage. This was to prevent the need to request the re-pooling of funding on an annual basis at the same time allowing a school to withdraw with three months' notice. This also enables locality children's partnerships (LCPs) to plan on a three year cycle, thus providing greater stability for strategic locality leadership to redesign early help.

LCPs were established in September 2016 and are in varying stages of development.

3. Current Position

403 of the 408 schools continue to re-pool funding to enable the joint investment and joint commissioning through LCPs to continue to develop. This allows for effective mechanisms for identifying local needs and commissioning arrangements to meet the needs and measure impact to be established. Over time it is anticipated that the shape of the early help offer will evolve and change according to each locality's priorities and needs. The LCPs will be accountable for outcomes for children and having a positive impact on children's well-being and life chances to the newly configured CTB and the DCSB.

4. Independent Evaluation

In August 2016 the LA were successful in being awarded a grant from the Local Government Association to undertake an independent evaluation of the early help redesign including the LCPs. Following procurement processes this was awarded to S4W.

The independent evaluation methodology included:

- Observations of LCPs;
- Meetings with headteachers and partners including health providers, clinical commissioning groups, voluntary sector and district councils.
- Telephone discussions – headteacher - special schools and partners.

Key findings

- Schools are well engaged and a new, positive relationship is developing through improved communication and understanding between early help and schools.
- A commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children and all parties agreed that maintaining a connected, whole system of children's services is the best way of achieving this.
- Re-pooling deadlines created challenging timescales for this ambitious programme of change management – this added pressure on staff and as a consequence there has been less preparation and consultation than the LA would have liked.
- With more resources/capacity there is a strong potential to maintain and improve an integrated system of early help through the LCPs.

Achievements and Successes

- The LCPs are refocusing around local priority setting and the alignment of resources which has increased engagement and dialogue with schools.
- Improved knowledge of provision across all children's services, for example, increased capacity and opportunity to improve outcomes through voluntary sector involvement.
- Realigned multi-agency services in some areas, for example, rural areas in Derbyshire.
- Providing a mechanism for commissioners (health, Public Health and the LA) to engage with schools and provision.

5. Next Steps

- To embed the principle of joint investment through the MOU.
- To establish a programme of development for LSPs to enable more effective collaborative commissioning.
- To share learning and good practice through joint events.

6. Recommendation

For Schools Forum to note the update on the redesign of the early help offer across Derbyshire.

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