

# Mid-Year Review

## Early Help

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## 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report reviews the progress the Early Help Programme in the context of grant funding ceasing at the end of 2021/22 and work on a Business Case to secure longer-term funding for the programme.

The purpose of the mid-year review is:

- To provide information on progress of the Early Help Programme
- To provide options to assist in decision making regarding the future of the Early Help Programme from April 2022 onwards
- Identify any risks and mitigations
- To outline procurement options, together with timelines, if a decision is made to continue with the Early Help Programme.

It is proposed that a report is made to Cabinet in January 2022, requesting an extension of 1 year of grant aid for the Early Help Programme

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary **Purpose** of this report is to provide options to support decision-making regarding the future of the Early Help Programme from April 2022 onwards. It is proposed that a report is made to Cabinet in January 2022, requesting an extension of 12 month of grant aid for the Early Help Programme

The **Introduction** describes the inception of the EHP to be delivered through BVSC, ten Locality Teams and several specialist services. A further year's funding for a city-wide approach across the full ten localities was agreed in February 2021.

This report outlines the features of the **Early Help Programme** including: the key features; individual service information, including the providers and funding; and some of the outputs (activities) from those services.

The issue of **Outcomes and Impact** is explored:

- An external evaluation of the programme was considered but not pursued
- The difference between outputs and outcomes is considered and that ***all the data available is activity or output data and none is outcome data***
- The BCT review of Locality Teams is described briefly and the feedback from interviews of the Locality teams by Rita Chamber
- The Business Case (Refresh) Assumptions underpinning the financial model are explored ***but there is no data to support any of these assumptions or any of the assumptions around other aspects of the Early Help programme.***
- Two outcome data tools are being introduced but there is currently insufficient data from these to inform decision making
- Proposals for outcome measurement and reporting are made.

**The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Model** are described from the perspectives of the Business Case and from the interviews with partners. The Business Case describes work in Camden and Durham and the cost benefits outlines in the National Development Team's work. Also, the comments of the Locality Teams from the interview programme are listed.

**The Commissioning Overview and Implications** outlines a range of issues which need consideration under the headings:

- BVSC and Voluntary Sector Lead Organisations
- Birmingham Children's Trust
- Performance Monitoring
- Procurement
- Governance
- Financial Management

**Options and Timelines for the EHP** are presented for the period beyond March 2021 and the implications for decision making outlined together with a provisional timetable for either terminating funding or its continuation via a new procurement. It is proposed that a report is made to Cabinet in January 2022 for a decision on the route forward.

A range of **Risks and Mitigation** of the routes forward (termination, continuation via grant aid or contractual process) are also outlined briefly.

The key **Conclusions**:

- Without secure funding for the period 2022/23, it is difficult to envisage the delivery organisations being able to make the best use of any funds they receive, not least because of staff instability.
- There is no procurement process in place to secure whichever option is chosen for the future of the EHP

The key **Recommendation**:

- Consider an extension of Grant Aid for 2022/23 for a period of 12 months.

### 3 INTRODUCTION

#### 3.1 Background

Three years ago, the Council and its partners set up Birmingham Children's Partnership (BCP) to help tackle many years of failing children's services. One of the main aims of the BCP was to establish a system wide approach to early help in the City. The first year of funding was formally agreed by the Modern Council Delivery Board on 6 April 2020.

The Early Help Programme was set up to be delivered through BVSC and ten localities, each locality led by a voluntary sector organisation, via letters of agreement between the partners and several specialist services.

A further year's funding for a city-wide approach across the full ten localities was agreed in February 2021.

The context of this report is that funding ends on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. A Business Case has been developed by BCT to continue the Early Help Programme for a further five years from April 2022.

### **3.2 Process of Drafting Mid-Year Review Report**

The following sources form part of the evidence for this report:

1. Interviews with each of the locality leads and, in some instances e.g. Northfield, Ladywood more than one
2. Attendance at city-wide Locality meetings
3. Attendance at each locality 6 monthly review (total 10)
4. Interviews with BVSC
5. The following documents have been used:
  - Draft Business Case
  - Final BCT 6-month Early Help Review Report
  - Early Help Programme Position Statement
  - Letters of Agreement
  - Monthly Statistics

## **4 THE EARLY HELP PROGRAMME**

### **4.1 Key Features of the Model**

The aim of the programme is to invest in early help to support families and mitigate an increase in needs, , reducing the number of children growing up in poverty, investing in jobs, education and outdoor spaces, and reduce need in mental ill-health, substance misuse and domestic abuse

Each locality has a voluntary sector organisation, which is commissioned via BVSC to be the locality area lead.

Locality	Funding 20/21	Funding 21/22	Lead Organisation
Edgbaston	105,000	169,478	Gateway Family Services
Erdington	107,000	171,916	Compass
Hall Green	108,000	173,137	Accord
Hodge Hill	125,250	212,152	Family Action
Ladywood	124,750	211,542	Birmingham Settlement
Northfield	107,000	171,916	Northfield Community Partnership
Perry Barr	106,000	170,697	Spurgeons
Selly Oak	105,000	169,478	Malachi Community Trust
Sutton Coldfield	106,500	97,543	Spurgeons
Yardley	75,500	171,306	Barnardos, Birmingham Forward Steps

There are six principles for the changes:

1. Focus on relationships and bring even more compassion to our processes and service delivery.
2. Services and systems are connected around families: multi-agency teams are based in localities and professionals are part of the community.
3. Frontline practice embraces whole family working and co-production with families.
4. Share data and intelligence to help target those most in need.
5. Collectively rebalancing investment from acute services to early help for children and families.
6. Leaders at all levels trust each other, solving problems as a system and sharing risks.

Each of the key areas of transformation and the associated case for change is set out below:

- **Locality teams:** a new model of voluntary sector led Early Help in ten localities, connecting multi-agency professionals around the family and building Early Help capacity and social capital to reduce demand to acute services.
- **Schools, further education, and nurseries:** Placing schools at the centre of Early Help, developing a team around the education setting and enabling with shared data, shared case management and a clear offer.
- **Community Connectors:** Developing our understanding of community resources in each locality, and training professionals across the system to connect vulnerable families to the community assets that will help them to be more resilient.
- **Mental health and wellbeing:** A whole-school approach and much greater capacity to support children and young people following the trauma of COVID-19, including through education settings and online.
- **Evaluation & Culture:** Bringing our vision and values to life through communications, change leadership, training and development – and crucially enabling the transformation to have reach across the children and families' system. Independent evaluation to understand the Early Help

return on investment for each partner, and ethnographic insight into what it's like growing up in Birmingham.

## 4.2 Individual Service Information

Organisation & Brief Description	Background	2020/21 £m	2021/22 £m
<b>BVSC: Locality Leads; Community Connector Service &amp; COVID19</b>	<p>Nine voluntary sector organisations providing a locality lead and back-office support for the function for ten localities. This service role is to engage with the community sector provide support and coordinate the support families receive including providing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Leadership of early help based in ten localities and in partnership with the community</li> <li>2. Community Connect service to train professionals across early help / early intervention system (including teachers, nurses, social workers) in community support</li> <li>3. Family Group Conferencing in the community, so public issues are solved in the community</li> <li>4. Community grant and support to small community groups to grow Birmingham's social capital for families</li> </ol> <p>20 FTE staff employed to deliver the community connect service in localities, with a service manager in BVSC to coordinate delivery. The community connect service trains all professionals across Early Help to connect families to local community resources.</p>	0.889	1.719
<b>Children's Trust Early Help: Locality Teams</b>	<p>Each locality areas employs an Early Help Manager and a team of Early Help workers/professionals employed by the Children's Trust.</p> <p>The aim of the BCT staff is that they will work in the locality with the voluntary sector lead organisation to provide case work for families needing more targeted interventions.</p>	0.750	3.74
<b>Evaluation / Culture: 2 x Apprentice Commissioners / BCT</b>	Transformation Apprentices – two apprentices with experience of the health and care system recruited in January 2021 for a two-year term to work on service design and engagement, ensuring children and young people are involved in service design, and amplifying their voices.	0	0.055



<b>Forward Thinking Birmingham: Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing School Facing EWB / STICK</b>	<p>The Screening, Training, Intervention, Consultation and Knowledge service (STICK) providing both consultancy development of locality early help staff and direct support to children and young people.</p> <p>STICK staff are part of the operational support to families who are seeking support, and staff offer training and consultation to each locality, and well as assessing pupil needs at an earlier stage in schools and community settings.</p>		0.543
<b>Mental Health &amp; well Being: Online Counselling KOOTH</b>	<p>An online advice and guidance, moderated peer support and counselling service. Kooth offers young people a broad range of anonymous support including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderated articles and stories from other young people</li> <li>• Chat rooms that are moderated where young people can interact</li> <li>• Information about mental health concerns and conditions</li> <li>• Direct support from an on-line counsellor.</li> </ul>	0.400	0.400
<b>Interpretation Services: 9 x Voluntary Sector Organisations</b>	This funding is to ensure each locality is able to use interpreters, for families who need this support. The funding is held by BCT and localities request funding as needed.		0.047
<b>Online Parenting Courses / Solihull Approach</b>	<p>Online parenting support – important part of the offer for parents, grandparents and carers during Covid-19 lockdown to know how to deal with challenging behaviour and improve relationships within the family</p> <p>This is a prepaid access to a variety of parenting courses</p>	0.016	0.016
<b>Schools FE Nurseries; ECINS Licence</b>	<p>Payment for ECINS license (Electronic Charting and Integrated Navigation System).</p> <p>A new case management system is offered to schools so they can share case information about children and families, provide support to schools on their work with specific children, build confidence and quality assure practice.</p>	0.025	0.020

### 4.3 Early Help Programme Outputs

The Draft Early Help Business Case (November 2021) identifies the following:

- Over the past 12 months the Programme has supported over 17,000 families that otherwise would not have received help, reducing demand to acute services.

- In the past 3 months alone, the Programme has delivered support and intervention to over 4000 individuals requesting an Early Help Intervention
- 7,200 families have received financial assistance
- 5,000 young people have accessed Kooth mental health support
- 9,000 plus families have received help from a programme of community grants
- 1,000 plus families have accessed on-line parenting support training
- The community connectors have delivered over 400 early help promotion sessions
- BCT and the community connectors have reached approximately 1500 professionals a month in training sessions on the Early Help System
- Community Connectors have mapped over 4000 community groups across the city and a user-friendly data base is now being developed to partners and families can access this

#### **4.4 ECINS: usage, issues, and proposed package of enhancements**

ECINS is supported in principle, but staff and managers need more support and training to use it effectively. There is anecdotal evidence that localities are not consistently inputting data into ECINS.

There is a question around whether ECINS is suitably fit-for-purpose and an additional range of measures has been proposed.

The cost of such a package has been estimated at £40k, for a school consultant working 2 days a week employed by BEP; a senior admin person to support schools in using ECINs early help software, with a dedicated phone line, ECINS superuser.

However, should a decision be taken to procure a further long-term programme of Early Help, a new, bespoke data collection and management system may need to be considered. to the use of ECINS is supported in principle, but staff and managers will need more support and training to use it effectively. And consideration needs to be given as to whether 'Impulse' is a more effective option (if it can be made available across the programme).

Another factor is the Council's use and upgrade of the 'Impulse' system and whether this should be the used instead of ECINS as maintaining both will mean duplication for schools.

## **5 OUTCOMES & IMPACT**

### **5.1 External Evaluation**

The early intention for the Early Help programme was to commission an external evaluation for whole system change to Early Help and acute services.

The fundamental research question is: what is the return on Early Help investment for each BCP partner, with the aim of providing a clear evidence base for continued investment in Early Help over future decades?

The evaluation was expected to take four years in total, with interim annual reports, including identifying how the programme is working operationally and what could be changed to increase the efficacy of the programme. The final (summative) evaluation was to provide a public-facing set of messages framed around what has been achieved in terms of outcome measures such as return on investment, improved outcomes, improved quality of care, reduced demand for services, and culture change within the partnership; and comparing the programme with similar transformation programmes that have occurred in other areas.

A specification for the evaluation was drawn up, but the evaluation was not commissioned as there was uncertainty around continuing funding.

## **5.2 From Activity to Output to Outcome to Impact**

Data provided through the monthly ECINS reports give no indication of the effectiveness of the Early Help Programme, its cost-effectiveness overall or by locality or by service delivered. This is not to say it is not achieving outcomes or adding value.

- Activity data is collected within the localities. This data includes numbers of referrals, people helped, staffing and so forth.
- Output data is also collected, which includes services delivered e.g. food bank data
- Outcome data has not been collected by the localities, although recently some development on outcomes have begun (see below). The outcome star is used by BCT for individual children and young people. BCT is exploring the possibility of extracting outcome data from ECINS
- Locality Teams do not use the outcome star on the Early Help Programme.
- Impact measurement for the local population (by locality and / or Birmingham as a whole) is not available.

## **5.3 BCT Review of Localities**

BCT has completed reviews of each of the ten localities. The key messages:

The Early Help Locality Model is working well. The combination of a multi-layered offer has built both capacity and new connections in each locality. The layers are:

- Locality Steering groups are developing – sharing data, agreeing priorities and action plans – creating a local governance structure
- Universal support through a network of voluntary, community and faith organisations – signposting, social prescribing
- Early Help for urgent issues, finance, housing, school uniform, food, energy poverty,
- Multi-agency (beyond BCT and VCS) allocation meetings each week, at best involving mental health, police, housing, children centres.
- Universal + support for families through either VCS or BCT family support
- Joined up 'lower end additional needs' work with families

There are a number of concerns:

- ECINS is supported in principle, but staff and managers need more support and training to use effectively
- Social care reorganisation - with family support teams changing their role – could impact significantly on Early Help capacity
- Insufficient process and engagement with locality teams as developments take place, better communication and engagement required – (the new city-wide meeting structure should help)
- Data to support locality priorities and Data from ECINS needs improving
- Clear KPI's for early help – to set and manage expectations
- Growing concerns regarding the future of the early help programme and 'going to the wire' again before funding is agreed.

#### **5.4 Fee Feedback from BVSC & 10 Localities**

Meetings were held with BVSC and the ten localities, the main points are highlighted below

##### **5.4.1 BVSC**

The legal entities (delivering services) are the localities, all voluntary organisations and constituted as charities.

Q1 What would happen if continuing funding is not agreed beyond March 2022?

- BVSC would have to end all contracts
- Staff would be made redundant
- The activities could not be sustained
- SU/Child/YP/Families would cease to get support
- Timeline to wind things down is dependent on the redundancy period required. This means that:
  - Everyone is working at risk of losing a job
  - Children will be on a waiting list for a service that may never happen
  - We may have to indicate to families they cannot finish their course (Halfway through the programme)

Q2 What is required?

- A Formal Procurement Process around Early Help
- A holding or extension budget should be made on a rolling 6 to 12 months basis to complete this exercise to September 2022 or March 2023
- The model we have at present is a version of team around a child (similar to safeguarding model but pulled forward to the Early Help space. There needs to be more thought around prevention activity, which is not necessarily around having a workforce around a child
  - The Early Help Programme is not a 'crisis intervention' model, it operates at an early stage, but it could be framed to be more preventative.
  - How can we link Early Help with specific key BCC priorities, so less children/families are referred to statutory services and thus reduce the numbers of children taken into care / teenage pregnancy / Domestic Violence reduction etc. Currently, priorities are not targeted.

- How do the priorities for the Children's Partnership relate to overall Early Help priorities and which are the ones Early Help needs to concentrate on? Without this, it is really difficult to evidence the difference Early Help makes and the cost savings produced.

### Q3 What are the Lesson Learned / Changes BVSC want to see?

- More resources/funding is required, in April 2021 the activity /intervention budget was removed. This meant after an intervention for example signposting someone to a foodbank, there is no funding available to pay for the transport the person to the foodbank. However, this was available in Year1

#### 5.4.2 Northfield:

- Northfield are piloting a Birmingham Social Emotional Mental Health Pathfinder, the staff are employed by BCT;
  - Work and build strong relationships with schools who work who have employees who undertake early help work, Pathfinder supports with training and supervision to stop the 'revolving door'.
  - Cases are not closed and utilise the 12 years statutory school relationship
- An Early Help Strategy is required – current there is nothing in place
- The Early Help model is still not early enough, and should concentrate more on preventative work rather than crisis prevention / action
- There are no programme priorities, the priorities are dependent on work with school, therefore the school determine the priorities.
- Northfield has its own foodbank, every two weekly it subsidises the foodbank with £1000, this is putting a budgetary stain on the locality

#### 5.4.3 Ladywood

Funding has been an ongoing issue since the beginning due of the lack of secure funds: initially for 6 months there was £25k to do an emergency response to covid19; followed by a further tranche for 6 months; and in April an extension for 2 months then an additional 10months (to the end of March 2022). This has meant:

- Difficulty with forward planning
- Unable to recruit effective and quality staff as people are not prepared to leave a current role to a job and commit to a job with very little security of employment and the locality is unable to build a team without security of employment
- As the whole point about Early Help is building relationships and responding to family crisis for people who already lack trust in mainstream service provision, a measure of consistent staff is required.
- The Early help programme also has an impact on other parts of the service e.g. the youth worker is now part-time instead of full-time. This results with insecurity for the staff member, plus the bureaucracy, makes the Early Help programme too much of a risk.

We would rather be a smaller organisation delivering effective services than a larger organisation delivering an ineffective service. We have seriously considered pulling out of the Early Help programme but will see it through until March 2022, to see how it will be taken forward.

#### The Relationship with BVSC and BCT:

- In the beginning it was “we are all in this together” with honest and open discussion
- At present it feels very controlled and very prescriptive with a focus on numbers rather than outcomes. We are told what to do and how to do it
- We are trained and given a script on what to say
- Money advice: we should be reporting on outcome and doing case studies which tell the stories and impact on the families. Instead we are asked for number of calls and response times
- The support we get is from within our own organisation

#### 5.4.4 Remainder Localities

- There is a city-wide locality leads meeting fortnightly
- Communality Connectors meet fortnightly
- There is a BCT Early Help Team connected to each locality, which works very well
- There are different priorities between localities
- The Outcome Star model is not used on Early Help cases
- The focus has been to build connections with the community, charities statutory and non-statutory organisations, with increased engagement from statutory partners i.e. police, housing
- Recruitment of staff has been difficult due to recruiting on short term basis (4 to 5 months)
- Family resistance is changing, and we are seeing more self-referrals
- The focus needs to change from collecting numbers towards outcome-based model, for example;
  - **Financial Resilience** i.e. it not just about sorting rent arrears, but making sure they don't fall back into rent arrears care,
  - **Health and Wellbeing**, building self-worth and confidence, ability to question, able to challenge, ensure they are able to ask and get the support when they need it (self-care).
  - **Developing People** to become economically active, volunteering, being employed, becoming engaged and involved in the local community and supporting other people.

## 5.5 The Business Case (Refresh) Assumptions

The potential benefits of the programme (and financial model) are based on a set of assumptions around reduced demand and cost savings.

In relation to Locality Teams, these include:

- Reduction in demand for EHCPs
- Reduction in MH referrals to Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) and Tier 3 and 4 (CAHMS) health services
- Reduced social care demand and increased payment by results from the MHCLG Troubled Families programme

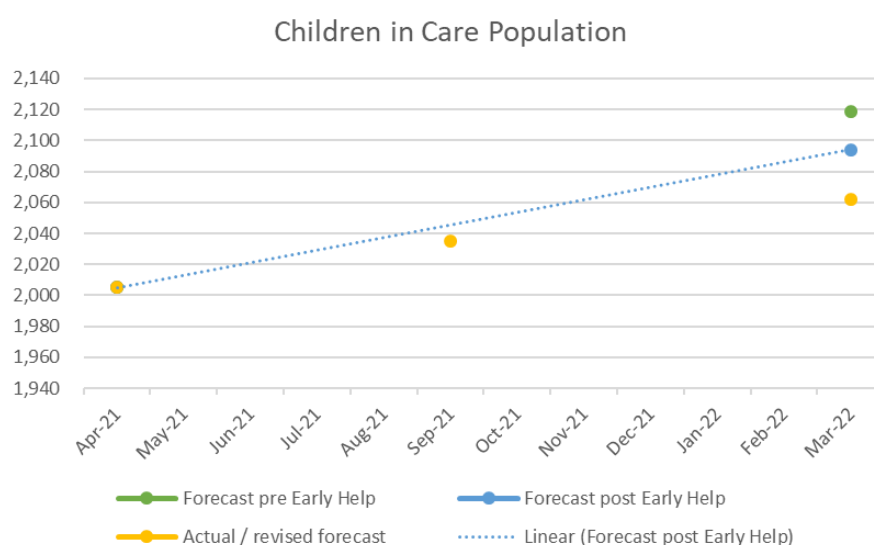
However, there is no data to support any of these assumptions or any of the assumptions around other aspects of the Early Help programme.

The BCT Business Case (November draft) states that:

*“The previous business case identified financial benefit in the form of cost avoidance to the value of around £5m per annum across a ten-year period.*

*“The Trust’s MTFP was based on the assumption that without Early Help investment that the children in care population would increase to 2,119 by March 2022 based on the same trend for the last six years of 5.7% net growth per annum. The assumption was that with Early Help this forecast would reduce to 2,094 children (4.4% net growth).*

*“The current trend is below that at 2.8% and suggests if that continues that the children in care population by March 22 would only reach 2,062. The graph below highlights the trend to date, and whilst it is too soon to assess the full impact of Early Help, this trend does provide some evidence that the increasing number of Early Help referrals are impacting on the whole system.*



*“The benefit of this equates to 57 less children in the care system which at the average cost of care at £907 amounts to £2.7m (60%) and the education benefit (40%) would amount to £1.8m. The total benefit totals £4.5m which is still in line with the original business case assumptions.*

*F “Based on the current cohort of children in care, around 8% of these are in residential care. If this assumption was to be applied to the 57 children then this would equate to around 4-5 children not entering a residential care or residential school setting and would increase the cost avoidance benefit by a further £0.75m to a minimum of £5.25m per annum.”*

As recognised in the BCT Review report, data reliability is questionable since the beginning of Covid, so the trends identified above may be highly suspect.

The veracity of the assumptions could be evidenced in future by comparing pre-programme bombardment data / cost reduction data for the relevant services with data from the inception of the programme, to see if there is any impact but the same caveat (‘life in the times of Covid’) would still apply for some while hence.

## 5.6 Development of Outcome Data

The draft BCT Review report includes two recently developed outcome tools that will enable practitioners to record the ‘distance travelled’ for families, children and young people as a measure of the change in scores three months apart.

- The development of the tool and staff practice is recent and to date up to October there were 24 completed double assessments showing progress below for different areas of need.
- The numbers of families who have two-wheel assessments will increase significantly over the next six months.

Wheel Assessment Results				
Category	Opening Total	Closing Total	Difference	% Improvement
Education Attendance and Attainment	143	175	32	22%
Health and Emotional Well Being	116	162	46	40%
Financial, Housing, Employment and Training	123	161	38	31%
Children and Young People who need help	127	165	38	30%
Domestic and Emotional Abuse	153	161	8	5%
Crime and ASB	141	158	17	12%
Other 1	137	137	0	0%
Other 2	140	140	0	0%
Other 3	140	140	0	0%
Other 4	140	130	-10	-7%



## 5.7 Outcome Measurement Requirements and Reporting

There are two potentially useful measures which may be used, which could be reported on annually, together with case studies.

- Distance travelled data
- Data re impact on contacts, referrals and re-referrals
- Case studies

### *Distance Travelled Data*

The distance travelled evidence from the outcome star would work, though each locality would have to use the same indicators on the outcome star, and all would have to take part fully. An aggregate report quarterly would work.

### *Impact on Contacts, Referrals and Re-referrals*

In addition, it would be helpful to know the impact on contact, referrals and re-referrals. This work could be taken forward between BCC (Commissioning, Education and Skills) and BCT.

### *Case Studies*

A case study per locality each quarter would also be helpful.

## 5.8 Efficiency Measurement

Individual differences between localities could be explored. A useful exercise might be to check data between localities so as to give some indication of efficiencies (not effectiveness) for example, comparing activity levels for some / all services against spend.

## 6 STRENGTH & WEAKNESSES OF THE MODEL

### 6.1 The Business Case: Strengths and Weaknesses

Although the Business Case does not identify strengths of the model, some elements of the Business Case are relevant. No weaknesses have been identified in the Business Case document.

The model builds on work in Camden and Durham to develop community capacity, and the ability of local leaders and families to solve their own problems without direct state intervention. Camden's recent analysis found that 79% of families who have had an Early Help Family Group Conference remained free from further Early Help or social work intervention within 12 months of closure. The percentage was similar (83%) for those families receiving formal Early Help casework (<https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/family-group-conferencing-camden>)

In Durham there is a similar Community Connector service training professional in what is available in the community to support families. 90% of family support plans in Durham have something from the community, which is helping that family, and will

continue to be there when services step-down, improving resilience and reducing demand to acute services.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest investment in community-based support structures represents good value for money; for example, in their evaluation of local approaches to transforming adult social care, the National Development Team for Inclusion (2017) found that for every £1 spent on community programmes in the first year of delivery, there is a return of £2.22 in non-cashable savings. The report is based on community led support evaluation in Denbighshire, Derby, Doncaster, East Renfrewshire, Leeds, Scottish Borders, Shropshire, Somerset and South Ayrshire.

## **6.2 Strength & Weaknesses Identified through Interviews with Localities / BVSC**

Interviews were conducted with the localities (primarily the leads) and BVSC as well as attending several meetings involving locality staff. The strengths and weaknesses which were raised are as follows:

### *Strengths:*

- Commitment of the localities' staff to the model and the early intervention approach.
- Families trusting the service as it is non-statutory, meaning more self-referrals

### *Weaknesses:*

- Staff believe levels of Intervention are insufficient
- Each locality devises its own priorities, and these are not aligned to BCC's priorities
- The grant-aid model of funding is problematic due to the short-term nature of the funding. This significantly impacts on staff recruitment as people do not want to sign up for what could be very short-term jobs and, if they do, there is a discontinuity in staffing which undermines the 'connectedness' of delivery
- The Pathfinder model (Northfield) works well where schools are committed but where schools are less committed, they believe that they are getting less input or being left behind. In addition, the Pathfinder approach are not fully aligned to the Early Help approach – e.g. they don't close cases. And whilst working in a preventative way, they reach fewer people.

## **6.3 Evaluation of Impact /Outcomes**

As currently established, there is no in-built system for collecting outcome data which means there is no ready means to identify the model's effectiveness.

## **7 COMMISSIONING OVERVIEW & IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 BVSC and Voluntary Sector Lead Organisations**

- There are currently letters of agreement in place between the Council and BVSC.
- BVSC have letters of agreement in place with each of the locality voluntary organisations.
- The Children's Trust Early Help Consultant supports and monitors the organisations.
- Each locality submits data on ECINS database on a monthly basis to the Children's Trust.
- Until recently this process did not involve BCC staff in a commissioning capacity.
- There are no formal contract and review processes in place between the Council and BVSC and each of the locality organisations.
- The current commissioning and procurement arrangements for BVSC and voluntary organisations needs to be agreed; particularly as financial thresholds increase.

### **7.2 Birmingham Children's Trust**

- Formal agreement was given by Cabinet to award funding to the Children's Trust for the Early Help Teams.
- There was discussion regarding the contract for the early help funding to be done via a contract variation.
- This would mean that the contract would be monitored as part of the overall contract by AD for Commissioning, Education and Skills at monthly meetings with Chief Executive and Directors at the Trust.
- Since this agreement there has been suggestion of this done via a new separate contract between the Council and the Trust.
- There is currently no specification and contract between the Council and the Trust for the early help funding and resources.
- Future funding commitments for next year onwards are still to be confirmed. As we approach the second quarter of the financial year and budget setting for 2022/23, this needs to be confirmed.

### **7.3 Contracts and Specifications**

- There needs to be a specification and contract devised for the Council funding to BCT. There have been requests made between Commissioning and BCT to begin this process.
- The current letters of agreement for BVSC and the locality organisations need to be revised for future years funding.

### **7.4 Performance Monitoring**

- A performance monitoring process needs to be developed by the Council as commissioner of services.
- This needs to include all areas, proportionate to spend.
- The priority areas therefore would be BVSC and the locality organisations and the Children's Trust.

## 7.5 Procurement

- A decision needs to be made on the future procurement options for the contracts between Council and BSVS and the voluntary organisations to ensure effective commissioning and procurement processes are adhered to.

## 7.6 Governance

- The arrangements for monitoring the effectiveness of the programme via the new independently chaired Early Help Board need to be confirmed.

## 7.7 Financial Management

- The Council receives information on spend from organisations in different ways. Standardised financial reporting on a monthly process needs to be introduced.

The use of potential underspend needs to be discussed and governed using appropriate council financial processes

# 8 OPTIONS AND TIMELINE FOR EARLY HELP PROGRAMME DECISION

## 8.1 Options for the Early Help Programme

The Early Help Programme is funded until the end of March 2022. A decision is required whether to continue to fund the Early Help Programme and, if it is to continue, the form of procurement for April 2022 onwards: continued grant aid or a tender process with contracts

If a tender process is to be engaged in, there is insufficient time available to deliver that process before April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Any such process will require 9-12 months, thus interim grant aid funding will need to be made from April 2022, probably until January 2023, when new, contracted services could begin.

If a decision is taken to terminate funding, sufficient notice should be considered to be given to the organisations involved so as to enable them to make appropriate arrangements for redundancy, though there is no legal obligation on BCC's part to do so. Practically speaking, a decision would need to be made before Christmas 2021.

## 8.2 Timeline

A provisional, outline timeline is presented below.

Date	Activity
November 2021	Mid-year Report
November 2021	BCT Business Case
30.11.2021	Pre-Cabinet (Senior Manager) Risk / Impact / Options Report
January 2022	Cabinet report meeting to decide continuation or termination of Early Help Programme and new BCT Early Help model
January 2021	<b>If EHP not proceeding</b> BVSC / Locality Organisations issue redundancy notices

31.03.2022	Grant ends
01.04.2022	<b>If EHP continues</b> 12 months to complete commissioning and procurement exercise
01.04.2022	Procurement of new service by contract / grant extension begins
01.03.2023	New Early Help service commences

## 9 RISKS & MITIGATION

When considering whether to procure via a grant or a contract, the risks and possible mitigations should be considered.

### 9.1 Grants

1. Grant aid does not provide contractual liabilities for early termination, meaning that the Early Help Programme can be terminated at any point by BCC. The arrangements are set out in Letters of Agreement between BCC and BVSC and between BVSC and each of the localities and services e.g. Kooth but these arrangements are not legally enforceable.
2. Grant aid does not give significant control over the form of the activity, performance management etc. since the only real sanction is to terminate grant aid.
3. As the grant aid reaches the end of the grant period, it becomes increasingly difficult for the localities to recruit to vacancies as there is no ongoing secure funding for the locality and consequently no job security for potential employees.

### 9.2 Contracts

1. Contracts are enforceable by BCC in terms of processes, outputs, outcomes, KPIs etc.
2. Contracts are enforceable by those organisations BCC contracts with such that early termination of a contract may bring BCC financial penalties.
3. The status of the locality organisations as community trusts may require investigation to ensure they would be sufficiently robust to maintain a contract over the long term (up to five years) though any robust procurement process would ensure that this issue was addressed.
4. There will be a need to develop a detailed Specification, including KPIs, which will need to reflect a robust model of service delivery

## 10 CONCLUSIONS

1. After 18 months of the Early Help programme, the delivery organisations (BCT, BVSC, the Locality Teams etc.) are wholly committed to the programme and argue strongly for its continuation, based on their delivery of an extensive range of activities, services and outputs.
2. The delivery organisations propose more secure and longer-term funding, not least because of the difficulty in delivering continuous service when it is difficult

to recruit staff who want secure employment. BCT has developed a business case for its continuation for a further five years.

3. Although BCC may be committed to the EHP, the lack of outcomes data means that the financial model, including benefits and costs, cannot currently be justified.
4. Outcome data is beginning to be collected but needs to be embedded into the delivery model and its collection continued for at least 12 months (September 2022) to be able to make an interim evaluation of impact and value for money.
5. There has been no attempt to evaluate the efficiency of the services between localities nor of the specialist services. Also, there is no infrastructure in place to be able to evaluate this either in terms of having specifications for services / KPIs nor the means to record activity comprehensively.
6. Northfield pilots the Pathfinder service delivery model; each Locality Team has different resource availability; and BCT has proposed a Hub model for delivery. To date, there is not a full commitment to any particular delivery / resourcing model.
7. Although ECINS is welcomed, there are numerous criticisms of it, including the failure to be able to train staff adequately, particularly new entries.
8. Without secure funding for the period 2022/23, it is difficult to envisage the delivery organisations being able to make the best use of any funds they receive, not least because of staff instability.
9. There is no procurement process in place to secure whichever option is chosen for the future of the EHP

## 11 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Extend Grant Aid for 2022/23 for a period of 12 months for:
  - Completion of some preliminary evaluation work to assist in decision making, including an efficiency exercise
  - Conduct parallel procurement work to prepare for either a longer-term contract (following Grant Aid) or cessation of the programme, which would include a specification for the work
  - Undertake consultation on the details of the model e.g. whether to follow the Northfield /Pathfinder approach or the approach more generally in use
  - Should a decision be made to terminate or considerably scale down the programme, to give sufficient notice to delivery organisations, their staff and clients to make other arrangements
2. Consider the ECINS development package, which will be required to ensure the collection of reliable data to underpin managerial decision making.
3. Outcome data is beginning to be collected but needs to be embedded into the delivery model for at least 12 months so that a further evaluation of the Programme can identify the impact and value for money.

4. Currently each of the Locality Teams is resourced differently and the outputs delivered differ. A further evaluation around the efficiency of the services between localities and how they are resourced will ensure greater equity.
5. There is no infrastructure in place to ensure delivery of the required programme: service specifications for services and KPIs need to be developed for any continued Grant Aid programme for 2022/23 and / or any form of EHP beyond 2022/23.
6. The various models of Early Help Locality Team delivery (standard model, Pathfinder, Hub) should be explored, and firm proposals put forward for delivery in the future, based on a full specification.
7. A procurement process should be developed urgently to secure the preferred option for the future of the EHP.
8. The Commissioning Implications should be reviewed to consider what other actions should be instigated in the short and medium term