

## **Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 4<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

### **Family Help Model**

#### **Recommendation**

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. To scrutinise the implementation of pilot, trialling the Family Help Model in two districts (Stafford and Lichfield).

#### **Local Member Interest:**

N/A

### **Report of Councillor Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People**

#### **Summary**

##### **What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?**

1. It's recommended that the committee scrutinises the implementation of the Family Help Pilot, trialling the Family Help Model in two districts (Stafford and Lichfield).

#### **Report**

##### **Background**

2. This report is to provide the committee with an overview of the pilot, including the rationale for its implementation, the engagement undertaken with staff to date and the pilot's next steps.
3. The pilot was approved by the Children and Families Senior Leadership Team in October 2023. It forms part of the change and transformation activity that is happening within Children and Families.
4. Family Help is an approach suggested by the government in their consultation proposal "Stable Homes, Built on Love", a response to "The Independent Review of Children's Social Care".
5. The pilot has been formed in line with the government's vision for "a non-stigmatising, welcoming family help service based in local

communities". The intention is to use a skilled, multi-disciplinary workforce so that the needs of children and families can be met in one place".

6. The government has introduced a 'Twelve Families First for Children Pathfinder' initiative. Local authorities have been identified to test the operationalisation of the family help vision. They will be supported by £45 million of investment. The first wave of pathfinding authorities were identified in July 23: Lincolnshire, Wolverhampton, and Dorset.
7. Although Staffordshire are unable to bid to be a pathfinder in wave 2 due to being part of Family Network Pilot, we are aspirational for our children, supporting the current government proposals which are based upon the same principles that we adhere to, they are:
  - a. prioritising relationships at the heart of the care system,
  - b. reducing the need for crisis response and providing more early support to families including local early help and intervention with issues such as addiction, domestic abuse, and mental health to keep families together,
  - c. using family networks at an early stage to support parents and minimise risks to children by using family group decision-making, such as family group conferences. Staffordshire has pathfinder status (Wave 2) for the Family Network Pilot which compliments this model.

### **Staffordshire's Family Help Offer**

8. To achieve the vision identified above and respond to the operational and structural issues that we are facing; we are piloting a reconfiguration of our Children's Social Care and Family Practitioner Teams to deliver a Family Help offer.
9. Following SMT approval, the new operating model will be implemented in the Stafford & Lichfield Districts from February 2024. The aim of the pilot is to test the implementation of an integrated, localised operating model. The pilot will consist of Child in Need (CiN) work being undertaken within Family Help Teams, whilst Assessment and Staying together Teams (AST) and Children in Care (CiC) Teams will continue to deliver the functions as described in the District Operating Model. The exclusion of Child in Need work means more reasonable and manageable workloads within AST (only Child Protection and Court work) and CiC with a focus upon an improved and more timely response to our most high-risk children being supported at this level.

10. The core principle of Family Help will be supportive, non-stigmatising relationships, alongside skilled and well attuned support that responds to family's needs.
11. The Family Help model will aim to not only reduce handovers between practitioners, but it can also help to reduce the stigma of having a social worker and help families in need of support by maintaining the family practitioner as the lead professional and coopting in the specialist support and supervision of an experienced social worker.
12. To enable the Early Help Teams to respond to the additional CiN work, additional capacity will be created in the pilot districts, by:
  - a. Stafford: several vacant social work posts that we have not been able to recruit to will be changed to family practitioner posts for the duration of the pilot.
  - b. Lichfield: the Early Help Teams have carried a significant number of vacancies for almost a year. All posts have now been recruited to creating an opportunity to allocate CiN work. They will also change vacant social work posts to family practitioner posts for the duration of the pilot.
  - c. Both Districts will also create additional capacity by not allocating work for co-working between Assessment and Staying Together teams and Early Help.
  - d. There will also be some additional SW resource due to The Frontline Units being in both districts and Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) starting their first year in practice within Family Help.
  - e. The cabinet investment which has enabled social work progression plans has supported the planning of the Family Help Pilot. An opportunity has been created to implement Social Work Practice Leads who are experienced social workers with expert knowledge to support the early help teams to manage the child in need work through additional supervision and expertise.
  - f. We will also be strengthening the Early Help offer by co-locating one IPS worker and one Family Group Conference (FGC) Convenor within each pilot district. It is anticipated that by offering targeted support and family solutions much earlier in the system, families will not escalate to a point where more statutory services are required. The recent Ofsted visit confirms the need for us to provide FGC at the earliest opportunity.

- g. It is considered that this model will complement the family hubs and we are engaged in discussions with them to ensure a seamless early help offer across Tier 1, 2 and into our Family Help service.

### **Developing the Model**

13. The project has identified an initial five workstreams. This has been done in conjunction with our staff engagement group. Each staff group has developed a workstream scoping document which outlines the objectives of the workstreams, stakeholders, risks, assumptions, and deliverables.
- a. Workstream 1 - Operating Model
  - b. Workstream 2 - Form and Process Updates
  - c. Workstream 3 - Partnership Working
  - d. Workstream 4 - Roles & Responsibilities
  - e. Workstream 5 - Internal Communications

### **Governance**

14. The governance for the project is being established. A Strategic Project Board will have oversight of the pilot and will include representatives from Children and Families, Peoples Services, Legal and the Change Team.
15. An Operational Project Group has been set up and includes managers from both districts. This group will be responsible for the day to day running of the pilot.
16. The two District Leads will also attend the Children in Care Programme Board to provide updates, alongside a monthly status report. The right help at the right time is key to us ensuring in the long term we are providing children the opportunity to remain living in their family units. By strengthening our Early Help and child in need offer we are providing this opportunity to families, and this is part of the wider vision to reduce children in care numbers within Staffordshire as we will be providing preventative support to reduce the need for crisis intervention.

### **Link to Strategic Plan**

17. As part of the council's Strategic plan, we will:
- a. deliver effective early help that is focused on helping families to get back on track,
  - b. work with partners, parents, and carers to keep the most vulnerable

children and young people safe, and support them to achieve their potential

18. The pilot will help us test the family help concept and should reduce the need for crisis response by providing more early support to families.

### **Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity**

19. The Family Help Pilot is linked to the investment from cabinet provided to CSC earlier in 2023. This pilot also has co-dependencies over our Children in Care Programme.

### **Community Impact**

20. It is not anticipated that the pilot will have any negative community impact. Providing services to families at the earliest possible opportunity is likely to ensure that children are having their needs met quicker.

### **List of Background Documents/Appendices:**

#### **Contact Details**

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