

## Appendix **A**

### **Extracts from Central Bedfordshire Early Help Offer**

*'For children who need additional help, every day matters. Academic research is consistent in underlining the damage to children from delaying intervention. The actions taken by professionals to meet the needs of these children as early as possible can be critical to their future'*

Early help supports the broader council priorities of promoting health and well being and protecting the vulnerable and additionally offering value for money by working preventatively to reduce future spend within specialist services.

Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to teenage years.

The new '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' guidance places an emphasis on the importance of early help in promoting the welfare of children, together with clear arrangements for collaboration, and we want to ensure that our early help offer reflects the ambitions of this guidance.

Our offer takes into account key messages from Munro's review:

- preventative services will do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services
- co-ordination of services is important to maximise efficiency
- within preventative services, there needs to be good mechanisms for helping people identify those children and young people who are suffering or likely to suffer harm from abuse and neglect and who need referral to children's social care

Central to our early help offer is the early identification of children and families who would benefit from early help and a co-ordinated early assessment and response to prevent abuse and neglect of children and young people, and improve outcomes for children and families as a whole.

*Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation through to teenage years.*

Our early help offer therefore puts the responsibility on all professionals to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children and families, irrespective of the whether they are providing services to children or adults. The professionals working mainly in universal services are best placed to identify children or their families, who are at risk of poor outcomes. These will be in health services, such as health visitors, GPs and school nurses, or in Children's Centres, or in education provision at any age from early years onwards.

'Working together' recommends that professionals should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence and / or
- is showing early signs of abuse and / or neglect and / or sexual exploitation

Early help services are also integral to cases stepping down out of Children's Social Care services, and Troubled Families Support, to enable a lower level of help to be offered to reduce future need for high level support and statutory intervention.

*The provision of early help services should form part of a continuum of help and support to respond to the different levels of need of individual children and families.*

Early help services work with families where there are signs that without support a child may not achieve good outcomes and fulfil their potential. However early help services are also critical in preventing escalation into specialist services, and will also assist with continuing lower level support once a higher level intervention has been completed (for example a Child in Need plan or a Troubled Families intervention).

*Local agencies should work together to put processes in place for the effective assessment of the needs of individual children who may benefit from early help services.*

To ensure that the best possible support is provided to children and families there needs to be an early assessment of need considering child's developmental needs, family and environmental factors and parenting capacity. To ensure that the best possible support is provided to children and families there needs to be an early assessment of need considering child's developmental needs, family and environmental factors and parenting capacity.

Working Together states that in order for an early assessment to be effective:

- the assessment should be undertaken with the agreement of the child and their parents / carers. It should involve the child and family as well as all the professionals who are working with them
- if parents and/or the child do not consent to an early help assessment, then the lead professional should make a judgement as to whether, without help, the needs of the child will escalate. If so, a referral into local authority children's social care may be necessary