

# Reading's Early Help Strategy 2013-16



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you



## Foreword

I am pleased to introduce Reading's Early Help Strategy (2013-2016). Its aim is to demonstrate our continuing commitment to offer a range of effective, accessible services that support local families in a timely way. As the Chair of Reading Children's Trust it is important that this strategy reflects the vision and priorities in our Children and Young People's Plan and builds upon the significant progress that has already been made with our partner statutory agencies and the voluntary sector.

Although Reading, along with many other Local Authorities and our partner agencies, faces unprecedented financial pressures, there are some key commitments that are critical for this strategy to be effective. Our *one council service* approach to our residents will be part of the service delivery culture of the Early Help offer. This approach is expected to provide families with a straightforward route to the services they need from their first contact with us.

In addition, our Children's Centres will continue to be accessible for all families within Reading communities. I am excited that the Council intends to further enhance this offer through the emerging development of Family Support Hubs which will mean that families with children of all ages can access support and advice through these centres.

Finally, we recognise the need to strike the right balance between specialist support, targeted work to prevent issues getting worse and the universal accessible services that are open to all in our communities. Without this balance of provision many families will either slip through the net unnoticed or have to wait for issues to become unmanageable before help is offered.

Production of this strategy has involved discussion and consultation with partners and stakeholders, including parents. The wide range of views and feedback has enabled us to be confident that the strategy is taking us in the right direction and is consistent with our partners' ambitions and the expressed needs of parents and carers.

This strategy is an important document that will shape and guide the development of services by both the Council and its partners over the coming years, as we all seek to ensure that Reading's families get the best start in life and maximise opportunities and chances for their children to achieve in their schools and local communities. I welcome any comments about this strategy or our services.

**Councillor Jan Gavin**  
**Lead Councillor for Children's Services & Families**

## Introduction

Whilst the majority of our children and young people in Reading grow up in a supportive environment that enables them to have the best start in life, far too many do not. Children do not come into this world with a pre-determined life path but many face additional challenges and barriers at any point in their life that, unless addressed early, can cumulatively and negatively impact on their future well-being. These issues can be linked to parental needs (poor health, violence, substance misuse, a poor home environment), or to additional needs of the child or young person.

This strategy attempts to mitigate the effects of specific risk factors for children through a focus on the whole family, so that the well-being of children and young people can be properly addressed. The challenge in achieving this is to ensure that the voice and needs of the child are heard and clearly inform our work alongside assisting parents. We also know that situations change for families; their lives are not static, and challenging issues can arise at any time. We need our services to be timely and responsive throughout a child's life, providing the right support early so that problems don't escalate.

Significant progress has already been made in many areas to deliver timely early help and prevention services that work well together, building on the strong commitment across partners set out in the vision of Reading Children's Trust:

**To create a positive and ambitious environment for Reading children and young people so that they:**

- are happy, healthy, safe and coping with change and challenge
- are enthusiastic and skilled learners
- value themselves and others

This strategy sets out how we aim to strengthen joint working and consistency across partners providing Early Help services to ensure that we work together to identify needs and provide support to children, young people and their families at the earliest possible stage, improving outcomes and reducing costs. Our ambition is to learn from the best and deliver high quality preventative services backed by evidence of success. Opportunities remain to ensure more seamless, clearer and efficient pathways into and through services; to prevent the revolving door syndrome and improve tracking of cases; and to develop more integrated approaches to screening, assessment, planning and service delivery. If we intervene early with high quality coordinated services we should be able to reduce the number of families requiring higher cost interventions.

## What is Early Help?

‘Early Help’ means intervening as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging either for individual children, young people and their families or for a specific community or section of the population most at risk of developing problems. Effective intervention may occur at any point in a child’s or young person’s life.

This definition includes both interventions early in life (including pre-birth) and interventions early in the development of a problem (with children or young people at any age). It includes universal interventions that are offered to an entire population to prevent problems developing, and targeted interventions that are offered to particular children, young people and families with existing risk factors, vulnerabilities or additional needs in order to protect them from developing problems or to reduce the severity of impacts where there are existing needs. It also includes working with parents where their needs may impact on their ability to parent, such as those with mental health problems or substance misuse issues.

## Why do we need a strategy?

### National Context

There have been a host of influential independent reviews and policy developments over recent years that point to the importance of effective Early Help:

#### **Michael Marmot: ‘Fair Society - Healthy Lives’**

The Marmot Review provides evidence that there is a disproportionate impact on health for those living in deprivation. The report also highlights the importance of intervening early in a child’s life, noting that: *“the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development - physical, intellectual and emotional - are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being.....later interventions, although important, are considerably less effective where good early foundations are lacking.”*

#### **Frank Field: ‘The Foundation Years, Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults’**

Frank Field’s report found overwhelming evidence that children’s life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life, and recommended a shift in focus *“towards providing high quality integrated services aimed at supporting parents and improving the abilities of our poorest children during the period when it is most effective to do so.”*

### **Graham Allen: Early Intervention**

Graham Allen has completed a review of early intervention for the government, and published two reports that highlight the potential for effective early intervention to improve outcomes and make long term savings in public expenditure. His recommendations include ensuring that early intervention is promoted as a policy approach that can create *“enormous benefits to individuals, families and society”*.

### **Eileen Munro: ‘The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, a child-centred system’**

Professor Munro devotes a chapter of her review to ‘Sharing Responsibility for Early Help’ and says: *“Preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services. Many services and professions help children and families so co-ordinating their work is important to reduce inefficiencies and omissions.”* The Government has accepted Munro’s recommendations including the need to identify Early Help that is needed by a particular child and their family, and the provision of an ‘Early Help offer’ where their needs don’t meet the criteria for receiving children’s social care services.

### **Working Together to Safeguard Children**

In 2013, the Department of Education published the ‘Working Together’ guidance to set out the legislative requirements and expectations on individual services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The guidance includes a section on Early Help, and sets out the need for agencies to work together to:

- identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child.

There is an expectation that all professionals, including those working with adults with children and ‘universal’ services that are open to everyone, should understand their role in identifying emerging problems and in sharing information to support early identification and assessment of needs.

‘Working Together’ expects that local areas will have a range of effective, evidence-based early help services in place informed by the local assessment of need: *“In addition to high quality universal services, specific local early help will typically include family and parenting programmes, assistance with health issues and help for problems relating to drugs, alcohol and domestic violence. Services may also focus on improving family functioning and building the family’s own capability to solve problems.”*

## Challenges in Reading: The Local Context

It is essential that an understanding of the key needs and issues of the local population are used to inform and shape service provision. In Reading, we know from the data gathered in a number of documents, including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup>, that there are specific challenges that remain particularly significant in our area, including:

### Population

Reading has a large child population, particularly of those aged less than five, and the school age population is the population group expected to see the largest increase over time. 2011 Census data shows a 34% increase in the number of 0-4 year olds in Reading in the last ten years, the second highest rise in the South East.

### Diversity

Reading is already a diverse place, with a 25% black and minority ethnic (BME) population, and data shows it is rapidly becoming increasingly diverse; the latest School Census records a 51% BME population and live births data shows 43% of babies born in Reading are to mothers born outside the UK. The number of children with English as a second language is over 60% in some schools, and 15% of the total Reading population has a main language that is not English. Analysis of data shows variations in educational attainment with children from some BME groups and from families where English is in Additional Language achieving lower results than average. Exclusions are also higher, and school attendance lower, across some BME groups.

### Poverty

The percentage of Reading children living in poverty is 24%, compared to a national average of 20%. Of those children living in poverty in Reading, 74% are living in lone parent households.

As the town has high levels of employment, in-work poverty is clearly the issue for the area, with low wages and part-time work increasing the risk of poverty. 57% of Reading's population cannot afford housing at market rates and demand for council housing outstrips supply by 6:1, with particular pressure on larger family homes of 4 bedrooms or more. The proportion of private sector housing in Reading which is classified as non-decent is significantly higher than the national average, and this largely relates to thermal comfort.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information is available in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Reading Borough Council 2012/13:  
[http://www.berkshirewest.nhs.uk/\\_store/documents/jsna-reading-2012-13.pdf](http://www.berkshirewest.nhs.uk/_store/documents/jsna-reading-2012-13.pdf)

## **Education**

Children attending Reading schools are achieving as well educationally as their peers nationally, across the region, and in comparison to their statistical neighbours. However, there is a greater achievement gap between children receiving free school meals and their peers within Reading compared to the national average.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile mirrors the gap between children in low income families and their peers, with 48% of children eligible for free school meals achieving the EYFS benchmark, compared to 72% of those not eligible for free school meals who achieve the benchmark.

## **Children in Need and Children subject to a Child Protection Plan**

Reading's rate of Children in Need is 369 per 10,000 population (for 2012), compared to an average rate of 311/10,000 among our statistical neighbours. Although this number offers a comparison with other local authorities, it only captures those supported by Children's Social Care; it does not record those Children in Need supported through early help services at lower tiers.

The number of children on Child Protection plans has reduced in the last year, but Reading's rate is still notably high at 49.4/10,000, compared to an average across statistical neighbours of 35.4/10,000.

## **Child obesity**

In 2012 obesity for reception age children in Reading was 12.2%, significantly worse than the England average of 9.4%, and also worse than the South East average and Reading's statistical neighbours. Levels of childhood obesity are also a concern among year 6 children, with 21% classified as obese.

## **Maternity**

Breastfeeding rates remain low among those living within Reading's more deprived wards, and for teenage mothers and BME communities. Rates of maternal obesity are also increasing.



## Current service delivery

Early Help services are provided by a wide range of organisations which includes the Council, health services, schools and a diverse voluntary sector. The diagram on Page 9 sets out Reading's framework of support for children, young people and families, structured by the four levels of need set out by the Reading Safeguarding Children's Board in their thresholds document.

### Council Services

Routes into Reading Borough Council's children's services are managed predominantly through two access points (shown in the diagram on Page 8). The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the contact for any child protection concerns. Outside the MASH, access to prevention and family support services is through the Children's Action Teams. Requests for early help/prevention services within Reading Borough Council requires the completion of an assessment using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which identifies the strengths and needs of individuals and helps create a support plan for each family.

The majority of the Council's family support, early intervention and prevention services for children 0 to 19 year old and their families are managed through Reading's Children's Action Teams (CATs). The CATs are multi-professional teams that link into existing local resources to provide holistic family centred support, including services to support the parent(s) as needed. Health visitors are a virtual part of the CAT teams. Reading's children's centres are also managed within the CATs as a universal service for all families with children under 5.

Alongside the CATs, the Specialist Youth Services provides more targeted support to the most vulnerable young people, such as those at risk of teenage pregnancy or sexual exploitation, young people with drug and alcohol misuse issues, young parents, young carers and LGBT young people. For more vulnerable families where children are close to social care involvement, services and interventions such as the Edge of Care team and Multi Systemic Therapy will work with families and provide more intensive, high-level support alongside other agencies.

### Health Services

Community health services including health visitors, midwives and school nursing are delivered by Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust. A key driver for these services is the delivery of the 'Healthy Child Programme', a national framework of standards for the delivery of services for children and families. A range of health services are specifically designed to provide targeted support for vulnerable families; the Poppy team (specialist midwifery service) and Coral team (specialist health visiting service), for example, to provide a more intensive and holistic service to vulnerable women. A vulnerable women's sexual health outreach nurse specifically aims to reduce the number of babies taken into

care at birth by improving access and uptake of contraception to vulnerable women.

The recent reorganisation of health services provides an opportunity for closer work with GPs through the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). Reading is covered by 2 CCGs (South Reading CCG and North and West Reading CCG) who, along with Berkshire West colleagues, have highlighted a number of priorities relating to children and young people on which to focus on in 2013/14. These include the implementation of a paediatrician-led service to provide timely high-quality initial health assessments, and improving the quality of the Community Paediatric Nursing service through revised service specifications.

### **Voluntary, Community & Faith Sector**

Reading has an active and thriving voluntary and community sector that also provides a wide range of early intervention and prevention services and support. Some of this is directly commissioned or funded by statutory organisations, but a much broader range of support is provided in the community and accessed by a significant number of families. The voluntary, community and faith (VCF) sector has considerable expertise in providing support to certain groups, such as families with children with learning difficulties, and has strengths in engaging families, for example from different ethnicities, who might not choose to access statutory services in the same way.

Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) and more specifically Reading's Children and Voluntary Youth Services (RCVYS) both provide a network for the VCF sector, and act as a link with statutory services to ensure information sharing and awareness of ways to signpost and refer parents identified as needing further support.

### **Other Agencies**

Other statutory agencies, such as Thames Valley Police, Thames Valley Probation Service and Job Centre Plus, may not specifically focus on children and young people, but are nevertheless vital to ensure we can support Reading's families in a more effective and coordinated way.

All of these agencies, plus the voluntary sector and the Youth Cabinet, form Reading's Children's Trust. This partnership recognises the benefits of working together to ensure the whole family receives the support required and that focussing solely on the children or young people may not resolve issues in the longer term. By working in partnership, we are better able to provide the support and services required to enable all Reading's children to achieve our vision.

# How to Access Children and Family Services in Reading

Provided by, or in partnership with, Reading Borough Council



## PREVENTION and FAMILY SUPPORT

Children's Action Teams

If a child or young person needs **additional** or **early intervention** support please contact our **Children's Action Teams (CATs)**

**0118 937 6545**

CATs are local teams that provide help, guidance and support; working together with families and communities to create and achieve positive change for Reading's children, young people and their families. We work closely with schools and other services to provide holistic family centred support for families with multiple and complex needs. For more information on CAT services please visit: [www.reading.gov.uk/ChildrensActionTeams](http://www.reading.gov.uk/ChildrensActionTeams)

The CATs use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and team around the family approach. The CAF is a standardised assessment tool that helps practitioners identify a child or young person's need at an early stage, assess those needs holistically, deliver co-ordinated services and review progress. Consent is mandatory. For more information see [www.reading.gov.uk/caf](http://www.reading.gov.uk/caf). If you don't have access to CAF, please phone the CAT on 0118 937 6545 or email CAF@reading.gov.uk

Cases will be escalated or de-escalated if appropriate

## CHILD PROTECTION

Children's Social Care

If you are concerned that a child is being **mistreated** or at risk of **significant harm**, please contact our **Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

**0118 937 3641**  
(9am-5pm)  
Emergency Duty Team  
(Out of Hours) 01344 786543

Reading's **MASH** is a partnership between Reading Borough Council Children's Social Care, Health Services and Schools in Reading with links to Thames Valley Police, working together to safeguard children and young people.

Partners involved with the MASH share information securely to decide if a child or young person is 'at risk' and would benefit from support from services that help children and families.

If a child or young person is thought to have been at risk of significant harm the MASH refers them to Reading Borough Council's Children's Social Care team.

## Reading's framework of support for children, young people and families

Level 1 Universal	Level 2 Early Intervention/ Additional Needs	Level 3 Vulnerable Children & Prevention	Level 4 Specialist need	
Voluntary & Community Sector				
Midwives			Poppy Team	
GPs				
Children's Centres				
Early Years Intervention Service				
		Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service		
Health Visitors			Coral Team	
School Nurses				
Schools	Behaviour Support Service			
	Educational Psychology Service			
	Education Welfare Service			
Teams/Services	Primary Mental Health Workers		Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	
	Parenting			Targeted Parenting
	Family Workers		Multi-systemic Therapy (MST)	
			Edge of Care Service	
			Children's Social Care	
			LDD & Short Breaks Services	
			LAC Health Team	
			Integrated Health Team	
	Youth Work Teams			
	Young Carers			
	Source			
	Family Nurse Partnership			
Teenage Pregnancy Services				
Prevention and Support Service (PASS)		Youth Offending Service		
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	

**Note 1:** Both Children's Centres and Schools provide level 1 and 2 services, however they will work with children in levels 3 and 4 but will not be the lead professional for these cases.

**Note 2:** The majority of this information has been referenced from the 2012 RBC Thresholds document

## Strategic drivers and priorities

Our vision for Reading is of ‘no child left behind and no parent unsupported’. Children can achieve their potential, and families realise their ambitions for themselves and their children, regardless of their background. We have made good progress in Reading in recent years, but we need to build on existing areas of good practice to further embed and enhance our Early Help support and to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

With resources reducing across the public sector, there needs to be an even greater focus on how we work with partners to combine our resources to have greatest impact in the support we provide to families, particularly with improved targeting to support those at greater risk.

There are a number of key principles that underpin the development of Early Help services for children and families in Reading going forward:

- Improving ease of access to advice, information and support to help parents navigate through the system and ensure coordinated service provision along an integrated care pathway;
- Intervening early before issues, needs and costs escalate;
- Targeting resources effectively - including through assertive outreach and follow-up support;
- Meeting the needs of families with complex and multiple needs and ensuring a focus on the needs of parents in their own right which act as enablers or barriers to nurturing;
- To ‘think family’, ensuring we are being creative in meeting needs rather than solely delivering services;
- Ensuring an integrated approach at all levels across all Children and Adult partner agencies, including making the best use of the VCF sector;
- Building the capacity of communities and individuals to develop services and to support each other;
- Engaging with children, young people and their families to understand their experience of what works to inform service provision

Reading’s Early Help Strategy is aligned with the priorities and aims of several parallel strategies and plans within the Council and across partners.

These include the two main overarching strategies agreed across partners that impact children and families: the Children and Young People’s Plan 2011-14 from Reading Children’s Trust, and the strategy recently published by Reading’s Health and Well-being Board:

# Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-16

## Goal One – Promote and protect the health of all communities particularly those disadvantaged

Objective 1 – Protect health and reduce the burden of communicable diseases by targeting services more effectively

Objective 2 - Ensure effective support is available to vulnerable and BME groups to protect their own health.

Objective 3 – Increase awareness and uptake of Immunisation and Screening programmes

## Goal Three – Reduce the impact of long term conditions with approaches focused on specific groups

Objective 1 - Assist and support ability to self-care in all adults and young people with existing long term conditions

Objective 2 - Ensure high quality long term condition services are available to all including those with a learning disability

Objective 3 - Build on and strengthen the quality and amount of support available to adult and young carers in Reading

## Goal Two – Increase the focus on early years and the whole family to help reduce health inequalities

Objective 1 – Ensure high quality maternity services, family support, childcare and early years education is accessible to all

Objective 2 – Reduce inequalities in early development of physical and emotional health, education, language and social skills

Objective 3 - Improve identification and reduce the effects of domestic violence on emotional wellbeing for the whole family

## Goal Four – Promote health-enabling behaviours & lifestyle tailored to the differing needs of communities

Objective 1 – Improve tobacco control and reduce harm due to alcohol and drug misuse in Reading

Objective 2 – Enhance support and target causes of lifestyle choices impacting health for adults and children

Objective 3 – Reduce the prevalence, social and health impacts of obesity in Reading including targeting key causes

## Reading Children's Trust - Children and Young Peoples' Plan 2011-14

### Keeping children safe

- Protect and look after children and young people that need our care
- Reduce domestic abuse and substance misuse and support families with these issues

### Intervening early

- Work with families in greatest need as early as possible to build emotional well-being and improved health
- Help young people to have high aspirations and be healthy, active citizens, making positive life choices

### Learning and ambition

- Make sure every child and young people has a fair chance of achieving, whatever their ethnicity, disability or family income
- Help young people improve their employment prospects
- Help families from poverty realise their ambitions for their children and themselves

## Structure of the strategy

Reading's Early Help Strategy 2013-16 builds on the priorities and drivers identified above, and sets out the way that Reading aims to meet these across a range of Early Help services and in partnership with other agencies.

As well as highlighting the significant progress that Reading has made in recent years, this strategy set outs actions to address any gaps in service provision to improve Early Help services further. Information is given on current service delivery, areas for development, key actions and outcomes measures in the following five chapters, each for a different over-arching priority:

1. Early Identification and Assessment of Need
2. Effective Early Help for Children & Families
3. Supporting the More Vulnerable and Sustaining the Change
4. Listening to and Involving Children & Families
5. Quality of Practice

Following the priorities, a final section will set out the plans for implementing the strategy and monitoring progress towards achieving the key actions.

## Priority 1 - Early Identification and Assessment of Need

### Where are we starting from?

A key focus of our Early Help services is to identify and assess needs as early as possible and to provide support before issues, needs and costs escalate. Partnership working and integrated service delivery means there is already a lot of good work to identify needs early across all ages, including pre-birth.

### What will we achieve?

A number of areas have been recognised where there could be improved coordination and consistency in the way that needs are identified and referred for further support. A key focus is on strengthening relationships across partners and further embedding assertive outreach to support vulnerable families to engage with support.

### Antenatal identification of need

A Maternity Pathway for identifying potentially vulnerable families pre-birth has been established in partnership with the Royal Berkshire Hospital Maternity Department. A simple questionnaire is completed by the midwife at the mother's 12 week appointment to identify risks and vulnerabilities and, with consent, a referral for any additional support needed is made to the family's local children's centre. The children's centres aim to engage with the mother and provide support pre-birth, then maintain this early relationship once the child is born. A review of the work in early 2013 identified some good outcomes achieved for the families supported and a working group will use this good practice to further embed the Maternity Pathway, focusing on ensuring consistent, high quality referrals from midwives and establishing a consistent level of assertive outreach and programme of support provided by centres.

The Maternity Pathway review found that the most success occurred in centres that already had a working relationship with midwives, where antenatal and postnatal services are run out of children's centres. Currently this takes place in four children's centres which have appropriate facilities for midwifery appointments. Further development of joint working with midwifery will include ensuring services are provided in areas of highest need, exploring further co-location and the provision of appropriate facilities to enable this.

### Key Actions:

- Embed the Maternity Pathway with a consistent core offer for mothers, and monitoring of outcomes
- Work with midwifery services to further develop joint working



## Children's Centres and Health Visitors

Reading's children's centres act as the 'front-door' for families with children under 5 to access universal and targeted services, with a focus on engaging and achieving sustained attendance from those identified as more in need of support. Children's centres will increasingly need to work with partners to ensure effective support to families. This includes Early Years providers such as pre-schools, nurseries and childminders, and particularly the significant number of Parent and Toddler groups run in community settings around Reading, often by voluntary, community and faith sector organisations. The ongoing development programme for children's centres will increase the emphasis on providing outreach to identify and support more vulnerable families. The role of children's centres as a non-stigmatising, community front door will also expand, with some centres developing into Family Support Hubs. The Hubs would be a contact point for families with children of all ages seeking information and advice, and allow access to more specialist support.

Children's Centres and Health Visitors work closely to deliver the Healthy Child Programme during pregnancy and a child's early years. This includes home visits with all families, which from September 2013 will expand to include a universal 36 week ante-natal visit. These contacts are a key point for an assessment of a family's need where health visitors can signpost or refer to services as appropriate. Health visitors regularly register families with their local children's centre, establishing an early link between parents and early year's services. Health assessments such as the two year old check often takes place at children's centres. Health staff such as nursery nurses, health visitors and speech and language therapists can discuss any shared concerns about a child and where necessary make referrals for further support, such as free early education through the 2 year old offer. A key area of development is to design a consistent approach to multi-agency development checks for two year olds, which will ensure early identification of language delay and other needs.

Children's Centres and Health Visitors have a key role in early identification and support for children with a Learning Difficulty or Special Educational Need. Alongside any identification of potential learning difficulties by health visitors and children's centre staff, each centre has a named Lead who works with families and childcare settings for any children identified as needing support. If required, a referral is made to the Early Years Intervention Panel for further support, such as from the Portage service who provide home visiting training and support to parents of children with additional needs, or the Pre-School Support Teachers who support the child's early development.

### Key Actions:

- Create Family Hubs at some children's centres to improve access to services for families and children
- Improve partnership working with Early Years providers and Parent

and Toddler groups to ensure families are accessing appropriate support

- Improve the identification of vulnerable families by children's centres, and use more assertive outreach methods to engage these families
- Deliver a consistent approach to multi-agency development checks for two year olds

## **The Early Education Entitlement - the 2 year old offer**

As the entitlement to early education for two year olds expands nationally, the Early Years service is working to implement the offer locally. All children eligible for Free School Meals (identified by parents receiving certain benefits) are entitled to the two year old offer. Locally, teams will proactively identify families that meet the criteria and will undertake outreach to encourage and enable take-up of places from these families. As the Early Years service implements the expanded provision of the 2 year old funding, it will be important to ensure that all childcare settings offering 2 year old places are providing effective support for these families, including linking with the children's centres to access more support for the family, such as Family Learning for parents.

## **School and Youth services**

Schools have a key role in identifying emerging concerns early on, and close working with the school community is critical. Often a child missing school will be the first indication that the family are experiencing problems and Education Welfare Officers will follow up individual children with unexplained poor attendance and will make home visits where attendance does not improve. The Children's Action Teams work closely with local schools and hold regular School Consultation Meetings in the majority of schools, providing an opportunity to discuss any emerging concerns about pupils. CAT staff working with individual children and with staff are a regular presence in schools in their locality area.

Funding is increasingly devolved to schools to meet the needs of their pupils around careers advice, sex and relationship education, and other areas. Reading Borough Council will continue to work with schools to ensure that appropriate access to services is maintained, considering the needs of both individual school communities and the wider needs of children and young people across Reading.

Just under a quarter of 13-19 year olds in Reading access universal youth work across Reading, some of which is provided by voluntary and community groups. As well as an opportunity to take part in positive activities and develop personal and social skills, young people can access information and advice, and be signposted to further support as required.

## Common Assessment Framework and Access to Services

Where children and families need coordinated, multi-agency support, an inter-agency assessment is completed through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) system. Reading is committed to the use of the CAF as an assessment tool for Early Help, and it remains important to ensure the children's workforce feels confident and equipped to use it. A wide variety of staff across agencies act as CAF lead professionals, and the Council is working to extend the range of staff taking on this role, especially within health services.

A significant number of families who access CAT services through a CAF come from Children's Social Care when the level of support they need has reduced. The remainder come from a range of other professionals and agencies, with a high proportion of CAFs being initiated by schools. The CATs have worked closely with schools to enable them to make appropriate decisions in accessing the right level of support for families, and to access prevention services via the CATs rather than making a referral to Children's Social Care. Housing services and CATs are also now holding regular joint case consultation meetings.

Access to Early Help services from some agencies is still low, and feedback from partner agencies suggests that there is further work to be done to ensure clarity about thresholds for accessing services, and to make sure that referrals are appropriate. The Council have resources put in place to provide training and support to professionals across agencies to complete CAFs, and the Reading Safeguarding Children Board is currently sponsoring a multi-agency project to reduce inappropriate referrals into children's social care (which are historically too high) and increase the use of CAFs. The Council will be establishing a single point of contact for all partners, including GPs and Schools, as the pathway to access its range of Children and Family services, including Early Help. This development will include the introduction of a simplified referral form, that can be supported by recent holistic assessments completed by agencies.

The introduction of the two Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) within Reading presents the opportunity to increase earlier access to support from the critical contact that GPs have with families. The CCGs have already shown commitment to improving the identification of families in need of support through the funding of Berkshire Women's Aid to deliver IRIS (Identification and Referral to Improve Safety). IRIS is a training, support and referral programme that aims to improve the identification and referral of women experiencing domestic violence or abuse through GPs.

### Key Actions:

- Increase the number of CAFs completed by partner agencies, and the number of partner agencies who act as a lead professional for CAFs
- Work with partner agencies to increase the understanding of

thresholds and increase awareness of Early Help services available

- Reduce inappropriate referrals to Children's Social Care, and increase the number and quality of referrals to Early Help services
- Introduce a single point of contact for all agencies to refer families for further support

### **Access to services by BME families**

As Reading becomes increasingly diverse and the number of families with English as an Additional Language increases, there is a need to review access to services and the quality and suitability of provision to meet the needs of these families. A working group will be set up to examine the evidence, both data and from research with families, to understand any barriers to accessing services, and to work with communities to explore options to address any barriers. This will heavily involve voluntary, community and faith groups who often have great strengths in reaching and engaging families from a diverse range of communities.

#### **Key Action:**

- Establish a working group to understand barriers for BME families to accessing services, and address any issues.

### **Increasing Awareness of Early Help support**

One area for improvement across services and agencies is increasing knowledge of the infrastructure of existing support available to children, young people and families in Reading. Networks such as the Children's Trust and RCVYS support this across sectors and a number of directories (for example, RVA's directory of voluntary sector groups) exist that aim to help promote the wide range of organisations that can provide both universal and more targeted support.

As resources reduce for agencies it becomes increasingly vital that those working with families are thinking about the network of existing organisations that may be able to provide effective support. This will be supported by the development of a comprehensive Children and Families Resource Directory that builds on the existing Family Information Service and other directories to establish a user-friendly way for residents and professionals to find out about support for children, young people and families. While this meets statutory requirements to deliver and publish the Youth Offer, the Early Years offer, and the Local Offer (for children and young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities), it also provides a resources for improved working across partners to help families access early support. The Resource Directory would be supported by a plan of regular information events for staff across early help services to build their networks or refresh their knowledge of the voluntary sector organisations available to support their families.

**Key Actions:**

- Develop a comprehensive Children and Families Resource Directory
- Run regular events for professionals working with families to build their knowledge of support available from voluntary sector organisations

**What does success look like?**

- Increased registration and sustained engagement (attendance on 6 or more occasions) from target groups at children's centres
- Increased number of 2 year olds from low-income families who access childcare and benefit from coordinated assessment of needs
- Increased engagement pre-birth and post-birth at children's centres for mothers identified through the Maternity Pathway
- Increased number of good quality CAFs completed by partner agencies
- Increased number of partner agencies taking on the lead professional role for CAFs
- Reduced referrals into Children's Social Care
- Increased referrals from GPs to Early Help services

## Priority 2 - Effective Early Help for Children & Families

### Where are we starting from?

Our Early Help services aim to provide holistic and coordinated support to families to prevent an increase in need and to reduce the number of children needing Level 4 services. Much has been achieved through the development of the four locality based multi-agency Children's Action Teams (CATs) since their introduction in 2008.

### What will we achieve?

Although a lot of good work is already taking place, a number of areas for development have been identified, including further coordination of service provision; developing systems to assess service impact; joint working between services and improving the targeting of resources.

### Children's Action Teams (CATs)

Children's Action Teams contain a range of professionals, including Educational Psychologists, Primary Mental Health Workers, Education Welfare Officers, Family Workers, Youth Workers, the Early Years Intervention Service to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities, and the Prevention and Support Service (PASS) working with children at risk of offending. The multi-professional locality structure of the CATs means that they can link well with existing local resources and work closely with other agencies to provide holistic family centred support.

Referrals to CAT services go through a weekly team triage meeting and cases are allocated to a Key Worker who will support the family to access a range of services, depending on the family's needs. The support provided by the CATs contributes to a number of key outcomes for families, including raising attendance and attainment in school, improving parenting skills and confidence, raising emotional health and improving inclusion at home, in school and in the community. Aggregation of data shows that consistently 70% or more of the goals in each CAF or case are achieved. This data is bolstered by the perceptions that families have of the support they receive; in questionnaires completed before and after receiving support, 94% of families record a positive difference at the close of a case. The mean change is 4.2 points on a 1-10 scale rating of where the family thinks they are in terms of their concerns or issues. The questionnaire also captures the families' own perception of change, with the most common responses including adults being calmer or more confident as a parent, and families appearing happier.

There are opportunities to build on and further strengthen multi-disciplinary working both within the CATs and through more integrated working with

other services such as Housing, Anti-Social Behaviour, and Health to ensure that families are receiving a consistent and coordinated Early Help offer.

**Key Action:**

- Further strengthen integrated working within the CATs, and with other linked services such as Housing

## **Parenting**

A number of voluntary groups provide parenting support to families, which runs alongside the nationally recognised and evidence-based Triple P and Webster Stratton parenting programmes delivered as targeted 1:1 and group interventions by the CATs and others. Parenting often runs alongside other support for a family, such as partnership work taking place with New Directions at one primary school to provide a parenting programme integrated with intergenerational learning to support both children and their parents, which initial feedback is showing to have positive impacts on children's learning and attendance.

In response to feedback from parents, peer support parenting has been tested in a number of contexts. Barnardo's were commissioned in 2011 to run Community Mums and Dads, a volunteer peer support service that provides home visiting one-to-one early support to families. The service has been successful in reaching families and recruiting volunteers in Reading's BME communities. Parenting peer support has also been introduced in Reading's children's centres, initially in South Reading which introduced Parents Supporting Parents in summer 2011. The programme has had benefits for the parent volunteers, who have built their confidence and progressed to work or further education. It has also resulted in increased registrations and attendance at the children's centre, including from groups such as teen parents.

One of the recommendations from a recent Parenting Review is to further expand the use of peer networks to provide parenting support in the community. The Parenting Review identifies gaps in provision to be addressed, such as the need for interventions to support parents from ethnic minorities or those whose first language is not English. It also makes recommendations to strengthen the consistency of the delivery of evidence-based Parenting programmes, including improving the measurement of outcomes for parents and quality assurance processes.

**Key Action:**

- Introduce improved processes for monitoring performance for Parenting programmes, and evaluate this to improve consistency of delivery.

## Children's Centres

Children's centres are managed within the CATs and provide community-based universal services, alongside an increasing focus on targeted early intervention for families with greater needs. These include a wide range of activities and services that deliver Early Years, parenting, and family learning outcomes both through the children's centres and on an outreach basis in other community venues, such as at the Indian Community Centre. Designated Health Visitors are attached to each centre to help ensure appropriate access to services and support and deliver joint programmes.

Reading's children's centres have developed incrementally over three phases and in summer 2012 a review of provision began with the children's centre managers' involvement to agree a framework for future development that builds on existing strengths to provide better more cost-effective services. The new operating model for Reading's 13 children's centres has created five locality clusters, each with a single coordinator managing a pooled team that allows for more flexibility in delivering a programme of activity and outreach work across an area. A more consistent offer of service across centres will be developed, including further strengthening joint working with health professionals and exploring co-location of health staff. The development of a more consistent programme will still allow for flexibility and creativity within centres to deliver services that meet local variations in need and gaps in provision.

### Key Action:

- Implement a new cluster-based operating model for children's centres that includes greater integration with Health services and a more consistent offer of support.

## Early Years Service and Early Years Foundation Stage

Early Years childcare settings are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a statutory framework of learning, development and care for children from birth to five years old. The Early Years service provides quality assurance and advice across childcare provision, and also monitors the level of attainment by children across Reading when they are assessed at the age of 5 on the EYFS framework. There has been a steady increase in performance between 2007 and 2012, with the number of children achieving the EYFS benchmark score (a good level of development) increasing from 41.2% to 70.6%. The gap in attainment between the overall average score and the lowest achieving 20% has also narrowed from 38.3% to 29.6%.

Although the overall gap in attainment has reduced, there is further work to do to improve the attainment of target groups, including children eligible for free school meals and some BME groups. This will be addressed in part through the implementation of the expanded Early Education Entitlement



(the 2 Year offer) and ensuring that effective holistic support is provided for these families, including through the children's centres.

**Key Actions:**

- Provide targeted support to childcare settings identified with lower EYFS result to further close the gap in attainment, with a focus on children eligible for free school meals
- Ensure effective holistic support is provided for families offered 2 year old places

## **Communication and Language Development**

A new contract for Speech and Language services was commissioned in 2011, based on a model of universal and preventative work with parents through children's centres and childcare settings. In the first year the service has seen a 43% reduction in the number of children identified as being at risk of language delay, against a target reduction of 20%. The service recently won a "Shine a Light" award from the Communication Trust for this achievement. The success is mirrored in the EYFS Profile performance; scores for Communication and Literacy in Reading have increased, and Reading is now achieving the 16<sup>th</sup> highest scored in this scale nationally.

A refresh of the existing Language Strategy will review the progress made and identify areas for further development, alongside an action plan to implement recommended changes. Other work to improve language provision is focusing on workforce development in schools, childcare settings and children's centres, aiming for all new childcare workers to attend training on communication development and attachment. Two children's centres have been accredited by I CAN (a children's communication charity) for their language focus there is an ambition for further children's centres to achieve the award.

**Key Actions:**

- Refresh the Language Strategy to identify areas of focus for further improvements

## **Supporting Young People**

The Council's Youth Services have been refocused to provide targeted youth work to the most vulnerable young people, using street, project and one-to-one work to support vulnerable and disengaged young people. The voluntary, community and faith sector continue to play a key role in providing a universal offer of youth services to young people.

The Young Carers programme has grown from supporting 28 young carers in 2009 to over 70 regular attendees at weekly carers sessions (out of 420 identified young carers). Support and opportunities for personal and social

development are provided through Young Carers clubs, alongside some respite breaks. There is more work to do to identify all young carers in the local population, which partly involves working more closely with Adult Services where parents are being supported to ensure the needs of children are also addressed.

**Key Action:**

- Continue to improve awareness, identification of, and access to support for vulnerable young people and their families

## **Health Services**

Outcomes for children, young people and their families are supported by a range of public health and community health services that include breastfeeding support (both through the evidence-based Unicef Baby Friendly Initiative across maternity services and community health, as well as more informally through the commissioning of a local voluntary group to deliver a breast feeding peer support project), smoking cessation services, dental health promotion, immunisation and implementation of the Healthy Start programme (providing free vitamins for new mothers).

Health advice for under 19s is provided through educational and non-educational settings by the Juice service, offering free, confidential health advice and support from qualified nurses and youth workers. The service is open access and provides holistic support about a full range of health needs, although 90% of those accessing the service are for sexual health or contraception needs.

Schools have a significant role to play in ensuring that all learners access good quality Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE), including Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). The government's 2013 Children and Families Bill will give schools a statutory responsibility to provide PSHE, with local authorities taking a role in supporting schools to deliver consistent, high quality education. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy group will ensure that all secondary schools have an awareness of the importance of SRE for pupils, and will provide schools with a menu of support from key partners to strengthen the delivery of quality SRE in schools. Reading Youth Cabinet have also recommended, on the basis of their extensive surveys with young people, that SRE should place greater emphasis on mental and emotional health awareness and the social aspects of relationships for young people.

Diet and healthy eating is a key area of focus, particularly with Reading's high adult and child obesity levels. Support is provided currently through 'Eat 4 Health', a 10 week healthy lifestyle course for adults run in a range of settings in Reading. In addition the 'Let's Get Going' initiative within schools aims to engage primary school children with healthy lifestyle activities, and healthy cooking courses are run for families through New Directions, Reading's Adult Learning service. Other successful work with schools includes the "Beat the Street" transport scheme which encourages

and incentivises activity such as walking. There is an identified need for a local obesity and healthy weight strategy that covers children and the whole family to ensure that support provided is coordinated and evidence-based where possible. Other identified gaps to be addressed include holistic ante-natal education on child development issues and coordinated work around accident prevention. Further work is also needed to ensure that targeted work takes place to increase breastfeeding and take-up of immunisations in more deprived areas and among vulnerable families.

Another identified gap is early support around postnatal depression, below the level of clinical treatment. A newly appointed Perinatal Mental Health Manager for Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust has delivered training for health visitors to ensure that mothers suffering from postnatal depression are identified early, and this will be supported by the introduction from September 2013 of the universal 6-8 week postnatal visit, with a focus on the mother's emotional well-being. The postnatal depression training will be broadened to include staff within children's centres and other services to raise awareness more widely. A group focused on the mother's care both for themselves and their babies will be introduced as an accessible and non-stigmatising way for mothers to get some low-level support.

#### **Key Actions:**

- Achieve Level 3 accreditation of the Unicef Baby Friendly Initiative across Community Health providers
- Develop a stronger approach to partnership working in South Reading to improve the support available to breastfeeding mothers
- Ensure all secondary schools have an awareness of the importance of Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) for pupils, and provide a menu of support from key partners
- Develop a local healthy weight and obesity strategy and action plan, including identifying the key gaps in current services and support
- Increase support for mothers with postnatal depression, through training for a broader range of professionals and introducing low-level wellbeing support groups

### **What does success look like?**

- Improved and sustained outcomes for families supported including reduced Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour; education attendance and exclusions; engagement in preparation for work and progress into employment, education or training
- Improved 'softer' outcomes linked to family's health, emotional needs, good parenting and home and finance management evidenced through Outcomes Star tool

- Increased number of children achieving the EYFS benchmark
- Narrowed gap at the EYFS profile between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest of the year group.
- Increased number of parents recording a positive change between pre and post assessment, following completion of a parenting intervention
- Increased identification of young carers within Reading, and improved access to support resulting in improved outcomes
- Increased breastfeeding prevalence at 6-8 weeks (from 53% to 54% across South Reading CCG)
- Improved health of mothers pre and post birth, including increased numbers stopping smoking
- Improved immunisation coverage for all immunisations given
- Reduced number of children identified as obese in Year 6

## Priority 3 - Supporting the More Vulnerable & Sustaining the Change

### Where are we starting from?

It is vital that we provide services for those children and young people who are vulnerable and need more targeted support, and for those that need additional help to enable them to sustain positive changes they are making in their lives. These services not only prevent escalation of issues to Children's Social Care, but provide specific help to those that need it most.

### What will we achieve?

To enable the continued improvement of these services, effective partnership working is vital to ensure a holistic view of the family is taken. Isolated intervention will not enable sustained change within the family; linked services, effective information sharing and clear pathways for targeted support are key areas for improvement.

### Reading's Turnaround Families programme

The Turnaround Families programme in Reading has committed to identifying and working with 345 families over 3 years as part of the national Troubled Families programme. The aim is to achieve sustained outcomes for families with multiple needs. Although criteria for identification and outcomes are specifically defined in the Government's Financial Framework for the programme, there is some flexibility to prioritise locally in recognition that additional problems such as domestic violence, mental and physical health, relationship breakdown problems and isolation can make it very difficult for families to unravel problems and result in high cost to the local public purse.

The approach taken in Reading means that systems and approaches developed through the Turnaround Families programme will be applied across Early Help services to meet the needs of families with multiple needs - regardless of whether they meet the Government criteria. The Council is working with partners across a range of services and agencies (including Reading's diverse voluntary and community organisations) to develop and embed the key aspects of the Turnaround Families approach, which include:

- Key working - coordination of the plan developed with the family
- Whole Family Single Assessment - including reducing the diversity of models used for assessment and planning across agencies and services
- Team around the Family model - developing better coordination of services to meet the family's needs
- Family Enablement Panel - multi-agency solution focused approach to coordination of services

- Community Engagement - work with the voluntary and community sector to develop models that maximise volunteering and community support for more complex families
- Support to help families gain employment, including through the Progress Programme

Another key area of work includes a proactive cross-service programme of targeted outreach work to ensure that families understand the impact of welfare reform and are offered support in how to prepare for the benefit cap. The Turnaround Families Programme is closely aligned with the development of the Edge of Care Service, and a joint approach is being taken to the development of connected areas of the strategies to prevent duplication.

**Key Action:**

- Work across agencies and services to develop and embed the Turnaround Families approach, including better coordination of services and assessments

### **Edge of Care Service**

Reading's Family Intervention Project has developed into an Edge of Care Service (EOCS), designed to deliver intensive high level support to a targeted range of vulnerable families where children are at risk of coming into care. These families have a range of complex needs and will already have had a level of assessment, often resulting in receiving services from a variety of agencies. The EOCS works in a time limited way with existing universal and targeted services to intensively support work already in progress. They add a new dimension and focus through approaches which include assertive outreach, parenting development work, linking to the Multisystemic Therapy team, or simply practical help. This includes working in partnership with health and other agencies to think about the family's needs more holistically. With this integrated multi agency response it is hoped that families will be able to address their persistent problems.

### **Multisystemic Therapy**

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) is a nationally-supported, evidence based programme, aimed at the family of young people aged 11-17 years who are at risk of out-of-home placements due to anti-social behaviour at home, school and the community. MST is a goal based programme that works to decrease problematic behaviours in a number of ways that may include improving parents' management of unacceptable behaviour, improving family relationships and improving links with school and the community. Therapists work intensively with the family in the community and home over 3-5 months, having visits on average 3 times a week. The team work flexible hours so they can meet families at convenient times and they also provide a

24/7 on call service that is available to families when they are dealing with problematic behaviours.

## **Sustaining the change for families**

CATs co-work some cases with Children’s Social Care, providing support for families on Child Protection plans, and to families who have recently reduced their need for a Child Protection Plan or a Level 4 service. Children’s Centres are also aware of any looked after children or children who are subject to a Child Protection plan living within their reach area and liaise with Children’s Social Care to ensure support is maximised.

Work is currently underway to provide a more consistent approach for identifying the opportunities for social workers to handover responsibility for cases to the CATs as the needs of the family reduce. This process involves early identification of cases to allow for a smooth handover, and needs to be tailored to the individual case to ensure change is sustained long-term.

Although CATs work well at intervening early with the majority of families, some families need longer term support to sustain change. The CATs are adapting to meet this need through the introduction of a system of follow-up, which will involve after-care visits or “maintenance” contacts at agreed levels of frequency. This support will be tailored to suit the individual needs of the family and may include peer support.

### **Key Actions:**

- Further improve alignment between the CATs and Children’s Social Care, including reviewing processes for transferring long-term Children In Need cases to CATs
- Establish a follow-up system within the CATs to ensure families are supported to sustain change longer-term

## **Complex and Specialist Parenting**

There are a number of specialist parenting interventions available such as Teen Parenting programmes and the Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) pilot. VIG is a specialist intervention that aims to enhance communication within relationships. The pilot will establish whether this model will make a difference to our higher tier families with more complex needs, and then a full evaluation will be used to decide on its cost effectiveness in comparison to other interventions we already offer. More broadly, the provision of specialist parenting support will be considered as part of the ongoing Parenting Review.

Alongside the Portage service’s support for parents of children with additional needs, parenting provision for parents of children with Special Educational Needs are commissioned from a specialist facilitator. The recent Parenting Review found that capacity for higher tier parenting

needed to be examined, including exploring how to align the special needs parenting to the SEN Team. An identified gap is the need for specialist parenting for mothers who have repeat removals of children into care, and a task and finish group will be set up to progress this work.

**Key Action:**

- Address gaps in specialist parenting support through the Parenting Review, including provision for parents with children with SEN.

## **Youth Offending Service (YOS)**

The YOS screens all young people who receive a Youth Restorative Disposal or a first Youth Caution, and prioritises young people who receive a ‘red flag’ through this process for early intervention support. Neighbourhood Police Officers can also refer children of concern and request prevention activity. Through a range of individually tailored interventions, the YOS has enabled a reduction in the number of first-time entrants (FTE) into the criminal justice system by 57%, from 241 in 2009/10 to 103 in 2011/12. To achieve further success through early intervention, YOS is building links with the voluntary and community sector, such as initiating a Reading Football Club Kickz project.

## **Support for Prison Families**

Since 2006 a number of activities have been taking place in Reading through close partnership working between Thames Valley Partnership (a voluntary organisation), Reading Borough Council, Reading Young Offender Institute (YOI) and Thames Valley Probation to address the issues that affect children with a parent in prison. These include ‘Family Fun Days’ delivered by Reading’s children’s centres at Reading YOI, workshops for statutory, voluntary and faith sector organisations to increase awareness of prisoner families and their needs, and safeguarding and CAF training for named prison officers.

As Reading Young Offender Institute closes in September, the multi-agency Family Matters Working Group will be looking at how to continue to support families with a parent in prison. Two gaps still to be addressed are improved processes for identifying children with a parent or carer in prison, and a clear pathway of support for children and families of prisoners. The Family Matters Group has produced a draft Strategy that sets out the priorities and actions across a number of partners to ensure this support is in place.

**Key Action:**

- Family Matters Group to establish a process for identifying children and young people in Reading with a parent or carer in prison and ensure that appropriate pathways for support are in place



## **Domestic Abuse Support**

Rates of repeat victimisation for domestic abuse have reduced by 19% between December 2011 - November 2012, a shift attributed to strong partnership work and early intervention. Within the overall Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading, several priorities relate to services accessed by families or focus directly on support for children, young people and families. These include raising awareness of domestic abuse, both for adults and young people; Thames Valley Police are funding Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) to deliver an information and awareness programme around healthy relationships within secondary schools, for example. The Crossing Bridges service, also delivered by BWA, is a drop-in centre providing support for victims before or after leaving a partner, and outreach support to victims in their own homes.

Referrals for families experiencing domestic abuse are triaged by BWA to assess the level of support required. If proactive early intervention work with the family is appropriate, BWA deliver the Family Choices programme for perpetrators, victims and children which aims to help victims and perpetrators understand what leads to domestic abuse and to make, and keep, positive changes in their home life. There is already some clear impact evidence a year into the contract, including low (13%) re-incidence amongst Family Choices attendees and a 55% reduction in the amount of contact that attendees' have with Social Care. Attendees also report a positive impact on their behaviour. Changes to the service are being explored to ensure greater impact of this contract, including the increased use of one to one work (for clients who are not ready, able or happy to engage in group work), increasing the amount of awareness raising carried out with the general public and extending the current contract period.

### **Key Action:**

- Increase the use of one to one work within the 'Family Choices' programme for domestic abuse support for clients

## **Teenage Pregnancy Services and Support to Teenage Parents**

Teenage Pregnancy prevention services aim to reduce the overall conception rate. This includes the universal support through the JUICE service and personal, social and health education (PSHE), as well as targeted work with young women identified as being at risk of teenage pregnancy and outreach health services offering contraceptive and sexual health services. Since 2005 there has been a steady reduction in the overall under 18 conception rate from 60.1 (149 conceptions) to 34.1 in 2011 (80 conceptions). This significant improvement means Reading is close to the target of 31.6, the 50% reduction Reading was tasked with achieving within the National Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. One area of concern is the termination rate, which has jumped in the past year from 41.1% to 60%. Although this is a small increase in numerical terms (39 terminations in 2010 to 48 in 2011), the multi-agency Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Group will

analyse termination data to understand what might have changed and identify any areas for further action to mitigate this rise.

Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and Reading Borough Council ensure that support to teenage parents is coordinated and that both they and their children are supported in achieving positive outcomes. This includes support through the Youth Outreach Nurse; the Reintegration officer (focused on education); the Family Nurse Partnership and the specialist midwifery (Poppy team) and health visiting (Coral team) services. The Family Nurse Partnership is a recent introduction to Reading that includes registered nurses, midwives, health visitors and school nurses and provides a structured, intensive, evidence based home visiting programme for first time teenage mothers that runs from early pregnancy until the baby's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday. The FNP is an evidence-based programme that aims to improve pregnancy outcomes, child's health, development and school readiness, and the parents' economic self sufficiency.

**Key Actions:**

- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Group to identify any areas for action to address the rise in the termination rate
- Family Nurse Partnership to be embedded as support for first time teenage mothers

## **Learning Difficulties and Disabilities**

Learning Difficulties and Disability services cater for children with a wide range of needs, with services to promote support and provide information to families, as well as targeted support and a short breaks services. To improve on this provision, Reading Borough Council is creating a life-long disability service which aims to provide holistic support for families in close partnership with health and education services. This service needs to be able to deliver the new national introduction of the 'Local Offer', a comprehensive set of services covering health, education and social care for all children with special educational needs aged 0 to 25 years that must be established by September 2014. A Local Offer Steering Group is working with families and local providers to collate all our local data, identify gaps in provision, determine how to fill these and agree how best to publicise the final offer. More detail on the strategic priorities for these services is contained in the draft Special Educational Needs Strategy that is currently out to consultation with stakeholders.

Parent Partnership is a statutory service that operates at arm's length from the local authority to provide confidential and impartial advice and information to parents and carers of children with special educational needs. The service is working with Reading Borough Council to help develop policy around the Local Offer and related SEN changes. Parent Partnership have introduced training to reach out to more vulnerable parents in the

hope of empowering them in a group settings, and aim to run this more regularly in schools targeting areas with high levels of deprivation.

**Key Actions:**

- Ensure the Local Offer is in place by September 2014
- Implement a life-long disability service to provide holistic, multi-agency support for families.

## **Substance Misuse Support**

Support for young people who have drug and alcohol misuse issues is provided through SOURCE who deliver a full range of treatment interventions including harm reduction, psychosocial interventions, health assessments and access to substitute prescribing. Training, advice and guidance is also provided to colleagues across services to raise awareness of the issues for young people.

## **Emotional Well-being and Mental Health**

A wide range of services are available to support the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people, including Primary Mental Health Workers, youth counselling, and a wide range of voluntary and community groups. CAMHs (Children and Adolescent's Mental Health Service) provides specialist support to children and young people with severe and/or enduring difficulties.

A needs assessment is required to identify the prevalence of mental and emotional well-being problems among young people, to investigate any service gaps and issues, and, where appropriate, recommend services to improve provision. There is also work needed to clarify the care pathway within CAMHs as commissioning responsibility is split between the local CCGs and National Specialised Commissioning, and to implement improved care pathways for anxiety and depression within Talking Therapies for children and young people. Reading's Youth Cabinet have made a number of recommendations to improve mental health awareness and support for young people which will be implemented with the support of the Children's Trust Board. This includes asking schools to sign a treaty to provide increased mental health education.

**Key Actions:**

- Identify the needs of young people experiencing poor mental and emotional well-being
- Assess gaps in current support for mental health and, where appropriate, recommend services to address gaps
- Ask schools and other stakeholders to sign up to Reading Youth Cabinet's Mental Health Treaty

- To work with commissioners and partners to ensure that there is ongoing access to youth counselling for young people
- Run a mental health challenging stigma campaign targeting young people
- Implement improved care pathways for anxiety and depression for children and young people

## What does success look like?

- Improved and sustained outcomes for families supported including reduced Youth Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour; education attendance and exclusions; engagement in preparation for work and progress into employment, education or training
- Improved 'softer' outcomes linked to family's health, emotional needs, good parenting and home and finance management evidenced through Outcomes Star tool
- Reduced under 18 conception rate and termination rate
- Reduced number of First Time Entrants to Youth Offending Service
- Reduced re-offending rates by young people
- Increased number of children and young people in Reading identified with a parent or carer in prison who are provided appropriate support
- Reduced number of re-incidents of domestic abuse involving children and young people
- Increased number of young people with understanding of the mental health support services available and feeling comfortable to access these
- All secondary schools in Reading signed up and committed to Reading Youth Cabinet's Mental Health Treaty

## Priority 4 - Listening to and Involving Children and Families

### Where are we starting from?

Listening to and engaging those using services is a central part of our work with children and families. The voluntary and community sector also play a key role in ensuring the views of a children and families from a wide range of backgrounds are heard. We have some strong methods and tools to involve children and families in service provision, particularly young people.

### What will we achieve?

There needs to be a more consistent culture of involving service users in Early Help services and greater consistency for recording the voice of the child and/or the family within case work.

### Voice, Influence and Participation

An overarching vision for young people and families, working in partnership with services, to be empowered to plan, deliver and evaluate services for them and their communities is supported by the Voice, Influence and Participation (VIP) Guidance. The VIP guidance was co-produced with young people, and outlines standards and a process for assessing the extent to which teams and services meet those standards. The Guidance will be reviewed in 2013/14 in the context of the new structure of the Council as this provides an opportunity to embed the principles of engagement across a wider range of services.

#### Key Action:

- Review the Voice, Influence and Participation Guidance and embed the principles of engagement more widely

### Young People's Voice

There are some key structures in Reading that enable young people's voice, influence and participation in service design and delivery. These include the Young Inspectors programme where young people inspect the quality of provision across services and the Young Commissioners, who are involved in the commissioning and monitoring of the Children and Families' Commissioning Team's contracts. Reading's Youth Cabinet is elected by young people (over 3000 voted in the 2012 elections) and takes a leading role in advising and scrutinising services from a young person's perspective. In 2012 this included a focus on awareness of mental health services, which led to endorsement of the Youth Cabinet's recommendations by the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group. While continuing with the

good work of engaging young people, the challenge going forward is to broaden out the work to a wider range of services.

**Key Actions:**

- Recruit and train a new cohort of Young Inspectors and broaden the programme to inspect a wider range of services
- Youth Cabinet will support the implementation of the recommendations around mental health services for young people

## **Young People's Engagement in Consultations and Feedback**

Young people's views are regularly captured to inform service delivery; the results from a recent consultation on how Youth Services should be delivered were built into the specification for future youth work delivery, for example. Young people have also contributed to the development of the Youth Work Outcomes Framework and service provision at SOURCE, the Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service, is informed by pre & post questionnaires completed by young people accessing the service.

A Young Carers Personalisation Pilot has tested a new way of giving a voice to young carers through involving young carers and their family in deciding how a personalised budget will be used for support - for example through funding short breaks or additional support. 18 families are participating in the pilot, and this will be evaluated and used to bid for further funding for similar work.

**Key Action:**

- Evaluate the impact of the Young Carers Personalisation Project

## **Voice of the Family and Child in Case Work**

The voice of the child is a core element of any work carried out with families, and a variety of methods are used to enable children and families to engage and develop ownership of their plan, such as pictorial representations. Work is designed to engage families in assessment and planning, using a strengths-based approach, and professionals will often meet with young people and children separately to enable their voice to be heard. Children and young people are also involved in Team Around the Child meetings (TAC) and are encouraged to share their feelings through the 'My TAC, My Views' process. The Signs of Safety approach being embedded across services includes tools to capture the voice of the child. Although good work is frequently taking place to involve families in case work, this is not always robustly recorded on files; this will be reviewed as part of quality assurance work on recording practice to ensure a systematic approach to capturing this work.

**Key Action:**

- Introduce a more systematic approach to recording the voice of the child and/or family in case work

**Parental Involvement in Children's Centres**

Parents are engaged in shaping children's centre provision through Advisory Groups and, more widely, through feedback tools such as parent questionnaires and comment books. Several centres also run their own volunteer programmes, often shaped by the local parents themselves - as was the case with Parents Supporting Parents, the peer support programme co-produced by parents and staff around the two children's centres in South Reading.

The approach piloted in South Reading has introduced a methodology for involving parents in shaping, designing and delivering services. Staff are using these skills and experiences to support the roll-out of the approach to other children's centres in Reading, starting initially with a further four centres. The methodology is also being used in a project in partnership between three children's centres and Jobcentre Plus, aiming to understand the lived experience of lone parents with young children. To capture parent feedback more consistently an annual children's centre survey will be introduced to gather the views of parents across Reading. This data will be collated and published in an annual report to demonstrate performance.

**Key Actions:**

- Continue to use a range of innovative tools and methodologies to engage more parents in services at children's centres
- Introduce a children's centre annual survey and publish an annual performance report

**Parenting**

Parents who attend a parenting programme complete pre and post questionnaires which are collated and reviewed on an annual basis to inform service development. There are a number of submissions from parents demonstrating the impact from participation in the programme. In the future a more systematic way of aggregating and analysing this feedback needs to be established, and an overhaul of this evaluation process is one of the recommendations to be implemented from the recent Parenting Review.

**Key Action:**

- Introduce a systemic way for evaluating the impact of parenting

## Parents Forum

There are a broad range of methods used to capture feedback from families and to involved families in shaping service provision across Early Help services - pre & post service questionnaires, for example. There are a number of established groups (such as Reading Families Forum for parents with children with learning difficulties) that allow parent representatives to engage with services in a more formal and structured way. Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust have identified that they need to make it easier for parents to share their views about the support they receive from health visitors, for example. As well as introducing consultation events and processes that suit the needs of parents, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and Reading Borough Council are working together to establish a Parents Forum, that aims to engage a group of parents in a more formal way to influence service development and to support wider consultation work.

### Key Action:

- Establish a Parents Forum across Reading Borough Council and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust as another route for parents to help shape and influence service development

## Service User Feedback

The Council is always looking for ways to improve our services and raise standards, and welcomes feedback about services, whether a complaint, comment, compliment or suggestion. If things do go wrong, complaints are seen as valuable feedback to help improve our services. If a complaint is about a number of services or agencies, the Council will ensure that agencies work jointly to investigate and provide one shared response.

### What does success look like?

- Increased number of young people voting in Youth Cabinet elections
- 50% of children's services contracts commissioned with involvement of Young Commissioners
- Increased evidence of the voice of the child and/or family being recorded in case work, through quality audits of files
- Increased percentage of families participating in TAC meetings
- Establish a benchmark for the percentage of parents satisfied with service provision across Early Help services



## Priority 5 - Quality of Practice

### Where are we starting from?

Reading's 2013 Ofsted local authority inspection found examples of good practice were found across services and commented on Reading's "four well led CATs". Systems are in place to ensure quality of practice in our support for children and families.

### What will we achieve?

Ofsted made recommendations to improve the consistency of practice quality across services, including ensuring reflective case supervision that supports high quality case analysis. The Turnaround Families programme and Signs of Safety approach are both leading elements of the ongoing workforce development for staff across Early Help services.

### Key Working approach

The Turnaround Families programme is being used as the platform to develop further some of the key approaches that will underpin the development of the continuum of Children's Services in Reading. This includes further embedding the Key Worker approach, building on the existing good practice in Children's Action Teams and national learning from the FIP (Family Intervention Project). A workforce development programme is helping practitioners to further develop skills and share and review good practice. This includes skills in assertive outreach; embedding the Signs of Safety approach; and information gathering to inform assessment and planning. Further training needs will be identified as the programme develops. Not all staff in Early Help services currently hold Key Worker responsibilities, but workers from Youth Offending, Health Visitors, the LDD service and Youth Workers are now taking on a wider Key Worker role.

### Ensuring practice quality in Early Help services

An external file audit of the CATs was commissioned and completed over 4 days in winter 2012, involving an Independent Social Care Consultant and the senior management team. The audit focused not only on the quality of recording, case work and analysis but also set out to assess the extent to which professionals are 'thinking family' and on consistency of practice across all locality teams and disciplines. The audit found no issues across localities, but did identify some issues of consistency of practice and recording identified across professional disciplines and an opportunity to further strengthen coordination of delivery. An action plan from the results of the audit is being implemented and used to inform workforce development plans, with the 2013/14 training needs analysis for the CATs including training on how to write SMART plans with measurable outcomes; how to record in a reflective and analytical way; and how to record safeguarding issues across professions. The CATs Recording Policy will also

be updated. To support continued development there are plans for a regular annual external audit and further development of the multi-disciplinary auditing approach within other teams and services, including a quality assurance process within the CATs to establish peer auditing.

**Key Action:**

- Implement the recommendations of the CAT File Audit, including establishing the process for an annual external file audit and for regular peer auditing across services

## **Signs of Safety**

In line with the new 'Working Together' statutory guidance, Reading is embedding the Signs of Safety approach, which underpins the assessment framework for all of Children's Services. This includes the development of a more consistent approach to undertaking assessment to ensure that all family members needs have been addressed, including a stronger focus on the needs of children. One of the recommendations of the CAT file audit was that the Signs of Safety approach be incorporated into recording practice, to ensure common language across services and consistent working with families in a strengths-based and action focused way. Staff are completing Signs of Safety training over several phases and a task group of key managers are reviewing paperwork to ensure consistency with Signs of Safety and to communicate changes to staff. As Signs of Safety is rolled-out across children's services further training needs may be identified to ensure the practice is being embedded as a new way of working.

**Key Action:**

- Embed the Signs of Safety approach across Early Help services

## **Outcomes Based Performance Framework**

Despite the range of good work taking place with families, there are significant issues in capturing data and performance monitoring within the CATs, with no single IT system for early intervention services. Work is underway to establish a robust performance management framework to be embedded across CATs, Specialist Youth Services and the Turnaround Families Programme. An outcomes based performance framework has been created which will monitor the progress of individual families, as well as allowing for aggregated performance data. This will demonstrate the impact of Early Help services in improving a broader range of outcomes, including preventing families and children from escalating into statutory services and thereby improving outcomes and avoiding cost.

An interim data recording system will be implemented to allow consistent data capture and analysis across Early Help services. This would mean that no service areas will be left without a system to record their data within children's services. The use of the Outcomes Star tool will be introduced as

an improved way to capture the outcomes achieved for families. Although initially this would be introduced within Reading Borough Council's Early Help services, the training could be widened to partner agencies and commissioned services, so that the Outcomes Star tool becomes a common method for working with families and tracking impact.

**Key Actions:**

- Develop a more robust framework to measure the impacts and outcomes of early intervention and prevention services, using a single ICT system
- Develop systems to systematically collate data on evidence-based interventions and use to inform future delivery and commissioning
- Introduce the Outcomes Star tool to capture outcomes achieved for families

### **Supervision and Practice Development**

Consistent and robust management supervision is crucial to ensuring good quality casework with children and families. A Leadership and Practice Development Programme to span Early Help services will support managers with observing practice and ensuring consistently effective and reflective case supervision.

A number of recommendations made by Ofsted in the Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children in March 2013 are common to Children's Social Care and Early Help services. One specific recommendation was to implement systems to capture the lived experience of children and young people in assessments, planning and case work. A common approach to systems and workforce development will be implemented to ensure that the voice of the child is heard and evidenced in case records. Opportunities for practitioners from across the workforce to meet, network, share best practice and discuss issues that affect their work will also be embedded. A key element of this is ensuring that professionals have a greater awareness of the support and expertise already available within Reading's voluntary and community sector. Alongside the development of a comprehensive Resource Directory that covers these organisations, regular opportunities for professionals to hear from organisations in the voluntary, community and faith sector to build their knowledge and local relationships are key to helping families accessing a wider network of support.

**Key Actions:**

- Introduce a Leadership and Practice Development Programme for Early Help services
- Share work and development opportunities to improve quality of practice across Children's Social Care and Early Help services
- Establish regular opportunities for promoting voluntary and

community sector organisations to professionals working with families to raise awareness and increase links with existing support

### What does success look like?

- Increased number of staff across agencies trained as key workers, enabling the improved outcomes for families identified in Priority 2 & 3.
- Increased consistency of good quality case recording across Early Help services
- Increased number of CAFs with actions plans focused on outcomes with clear and measurable success criteria
- Improved consistency of good quality reflective practice and supervision
- A highly skilled workforce that is confident and well-equipped to deliver effective support to families resulting in long-lasting improved outcomes for vulnerable families with a reduced dependency on services

## Implementation of the Strategy

This Strategy sets an ambitious vision and direction of travel for Early Help provision across partners in Reading. Delivering this strategy at a time of reducing resources across the public sector means we need to work together and combine resources, with an even greater focus on services that make a critical difference to children, young people and families - and especially to those at greater risk.

The high-level strategy will be underpinned by a delivery plan that sets out how the key actions will be implemented. This will include leads for each action and timescales for delivery, with a resource plan that sets out a realistic level of activity that matches the reducing resource levels.

We will develop a performance management framework to measure our progress against the key outcome measures identified, and to help us better understand where we may need to divert additional resources as we tackle the various challenges we face in the future.

As this Strategy spans Reading Borough Council services and a wide range of partners, progress in implementing the strategy will be monitored by the multi-agency Children's Trust Board. The delivery plan will also align with the parallel work overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board to implement their strategy.



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