

## Scrutiny Review Terms of Reference Document

<b>Scrutiny Review</b>	Use of prevention in Children's Services
<b>Responsible Committee</b>	People Scrutiny Committee
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<b>Date</b>	11 July 2022

### 1 Background

1.1 At its meeting on 24 March 2022, the People Scrutiny Committee agreed - having heard from officers earlier in the meeting about the important role early and community interventions could play in preventing escalation of cases of child criminal exploitation - that the Committee was interested in undertaking a scrutiny review of the wider role of prevention in Children's Services.

1.2 The Committee agreed to appoint an Initial Scoping Board to consider whether the Committee should undertake a scrutiny review of this area.

1.3 The Scoping Board met on 11 July 2022 and considered a presentation from the Department on the national policy context and evidence base surrounding preventative work in children's services, the current local approach, and the benefits of prevention and early intervention for both service outcomes and effective use of resources. A 'Realising the Potential of Early Intervention' briefing by the Early Intervention Foundation was also circulated to the Board for review as part of the scoping exercise.

1.4 The main issues considered and discussed by the Scoping Board were:

- **National Context** – The Board heard from the Department about research and reports published over the last decade, which had built a strong evidence base that demonstrated the potential of early intervention and preventative approaches to improve the lives of children and families involved with Children's Services and other public authorities, reduce escalating demand on public services, and, thereby, make better use of public resources. This included the work of the Early Intervention Foundation and the recent national Independent Review of Children's Social Care.
- **Local position** – The Board heard about the range of work undertaken locally by the Children's Services Department (CSD), other Departments in ESCC, and partners to provide services that prevented situations and need escalating into the highest end of need in Children's Services. CSD's work included targeted support provided through the Early Help service which offered parents support to better meet the needs of children with multiple and complex needs. However, the Board noted that 'prevention' took place at every stage of the Department's work, including in the work statutory social workers undertook to keep families together and prevent children being admitted into care. The Department also outlined the limitations to existing work.

- **Work in train** – The Board heard about work underway to strengthen preventative approaches and earlier intervention in service delivery. This included:
  - Strengthening the Department’s challenge and support to schools on understanding pupil behaviour, being inclusive and reducing use of exclusions, which presented challenges for safeguarding children and young people.
  - Family Hubs – the Department had been allocated one-off Government funding to establish Family Hubs providing a package of family support. Proposals for use of the funding and the approach were being developed. The Hubs were expected to be open access but with tiered responses on the basis of need. The Hubs were also expected to undertake some outreach work with communities and families.
  - Connected Families – ‘edges of care’ investment to prevent teenagers coming into care and to facilitate reunification with their families.
  - Exploring implementing a Family Safeguarding model where the needs of adults, as well as children, were addressed to ensure children could remain safely within their families.
  - Lifelong Links – a programme to connect children in care with people who are, or can be, important in their lives to improve their life outcomes long-term.
- **Parenting support** – The Board discussed with officers the role that support with parenting played in early intervention, particularly with young parents and parents of vulnerable teenagers (in light of the increase in older children entering the care system). The Board heard that although support with parenting was sometimes provided as part of the Department’s targeted Early Help offer; earlier, universal support for parents on matters such as communication skills and parenting a difficult toddler or teenager was more limited. The Family Hubs provision that was under development was expected to, in part, focus on parenting and providing support before challenges emerged but the Board noted that thought needed to be given to how this could be delivered to ensure that support was openly accessible while also targeted to those who needed it most. The Board discussed how to engage with and get buy-in from parents who may be unlikely to come forward or be sceptical of support but would benefit from it most.
- **Rural provision** – The Board discussed with officers how preventative work, particularly the work of the planned Family Hubs, would work in rural parts of the county and heard that particular consideration need to be given to how to do this most effectively.
- **Impact of debt** – The Board noted officers’ insights that debt was often a key stress factor for families and that support with financial management, and access to benefits and employment may play an important part in preventing escalation of families’ situations. The Board agreed that this was likely to be increasingly important in future given the recent increases in the cost of living.

## 2 Scope of the Review

2.1 The Board concluded, on the basis of the discussion with officers, that there were areas within the work the Department had in train to strengthen

preventative/early intervention approaches that could benefit from closer examination and challenge by scrutiny. The Board therefore resolved to recommend to the Committee that it undertake a scrutiny review of plans to strengthen use of prevention in children's services.

2.2 To refine the scope of this review, Members recommend that this is explored through the following **key lines of enquiry**:

- With particular consideration of the work in train to strengthen preventative approaches:
  - are Children's Services, working with other relevant parts of the Council, taking the right steps to strengthen prevention and early intervention?
  - what is needed to ensure work is effective in rural communities?
  - what is needed to ensure that potential broadening of current approaches, such as earlier parenting support, is targeted effectively and accessed by those who would benefit from it most?
  - how can we ensure that families are accessing support from wider services, such as debt and financial advice?

2.3 Detailed consideration of work in train to strengthen challenge and support to schools on behaviour and inclusion will fall outside the scope of this Review as it overlaps with the focus of another paused People Scrutiny review of school exclusions.

### **3 Review methods**

3.1 It is anticipated that the Review Board will review documentary evidence, question witnesses and undertake research in order to gather evidence to inform its recommendations. It is anticipated these will include:

- Detailed consideration of the Council's existing Early Help offer
- Detailed consideration of programmes of enhanced early intervention/preventative work in train
- Research and resources available from the Early Intervention Foundation
- Learning from the work of other councils on prevention and early intervention

### **4. Review Organisation and Responsibilities**

#### **4.1 Initial Scoping Board**

The initial scoping for this review was undertaken by Councillors Adeniji and Howell.

#### **4.2 Review Board**

The Review Board is: *to be confirmed by the People Scrutiny Committee*

The Chair of the Review Board is: *to be confirmed by the People Scrutiny Committee*

4.3 The Review Board is responsible for:

- making decisions regarding the scope and direction of the review;

- monitoring and control of the overall progress of the review;
- agreeing how Board members will undertake evidence gathering activities as required by the review;
- considering and providing challenge to all evidence presented to it; and
- developing and agreeing the final report, including the findings and recommendations of the review.

## 5 Scrutiny Review Support

5.1 Support for the review will be provided by the Policy Team to:

- manage the review process;
- undertake research as agreed by the Board;
- draft the final report.

5.2 The Lead Officer who will support the review from the Policy Team is Beth McGhee, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser. Their role is to manage the review, ensuring its aims and objectives are met and that the final report is delivered to the People Scrutiny Committee within the agreed timescales.

## 6 Scrutiny Review Completion

6.1 When the review has been completed the Lead Officer will co-ordinate the production of a final report outlining the findings and recommendations for agreement by the Review Board. Once agreed, the Review Board will present this to the People Scrutiny Committee for it to agree the recommendations.

6.2 The report will then be presented to Cabinet for comment and County Council for approval. Progress updates on how the recommendations are being implemented by the Department will be presented to the People Scrutiny Committee in due course (usually six and twelve months after the review has been approved by County Council).

## 7 Review Timetable

7.1 Based on the initial scoping of the Review, the Review Board aims to submit the final report to the People Scrutiny Committee at the meeting to be held on 16 March 2023.

7.2 An initial timetable of the meetings and activities required to complete the review is outlined below. [*The number of review board meetings is not fixed and there can be more or less depending on the nature of the review. The Review Board will agree the number and content of the meetings and review activity*].

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timescale/Date</b>
<u>Review Board Meeting</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider initial evidence</li> <li>• Review lines of enquiry/terms of reference</li> <li>• Agree further evidence gathering/requirements</li> </ul>	August/ September
<u>Review Board Activity/Meeting</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence gathering</li> </ul>	October - December 2022

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Draft Scrutiny Review report and finalise findings and recommendations of the review.	January 2023
<b><u>Final Review Board Meeting to agree Report</u></b> Review Board meeting to agree draft report, findings and recommendations with input from key officers.	February 2023
Deadline for Report Dispatch	8 March 2023
<b><u>Report to People Scrutiny Committee for agreement</u></b>	16 March 2023
<b>Report to Cabinet</b>	18 April 2023
<b>Report to Council</b>	9 May 2023