

## **Scrutiny Committee Children's Services – 23 June 2011**

### **Family Support Services**

#### **Background**

Under the 1989 Children Act Local Authorities have a general duty to promote the upbringing of children by their families - Section 17 (1). In support of this duty Local Authorities are given a number of related duties in respect of Family Support Services. They are required to make provision for advice, guidance, counselling, assistance and home help services. They are empowered to provide social, cultural, leisure activities and in addition to provide such Family Centres as they consider appropriate in relation to children in their area.

Every Authority is required to take reasonable steps through the provision of services to prevent children in their area suffering ill treatment or neglect.

In fulfilling the duties laid out under the 1989 Children Act Local Authorities will have regard to the range of universal provision which exists for children through education services, early years provision and health services within the locality. It is essential that these services are as inclusive as possible and that vulnerable children are able to access those services to prevent the need for them requiring services of a more intensive nature and preventing the Local Authority needing to intervene to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded.

The Directorate provides a range of services either on a direct provision or commissioned basis to support families in caring for their children, some of which are included in this document as follows:

1. **Homestart** – this is a commissioned service through the voluntary sector to provide a family support service to families who are experiencing stress as a result of their parenting responsibilities. It is essentially a befriending service for all families where there is a child under the age of 5
2. **Children's Centres** – there are 20 Children's Centres in the borough. The majority are based on school sites but there are a number which have evolved from the original Surestart Centres and which are commissioned from Action for Children. Centres provide a range of both direct childcare provision, parenting support groups and a range of other services designed to support families at the earliest opportunity or when they may require some additional supports. These services operate collaboratively with other partners
3. **Family and Adolescent Support Service** – this service is directly provided by the Local Authority and works on a solution based therapy basis. It provides swift and early intervention to families who are experiencing difficulties in relation to their parenting. It is a very targeted service and the majority of families currently accessing the service are on referral from Social Care. The service provides interventions where children are subject to a child protection plan and also does work to rehabilitate children to their families where they have been previously been looked after.

4. **Parenting Programmes** – The Local Authority utilising grant funding has invested in training a range of professionals in various parenting interventions from universal programmes to more intensive and targeted work. We now have over 100 practitioners trained in various programmes which are all evidence based.

The Children's Centres deliver a universal programme called Family Links which is available to all parents who wish to have some additional support in their parenting role.

We have specialised practitioners trained in Triple P, which is a highly targeted programme of work.

5. **Family Intervention Project** – utilising grant funding the Family Intervention Project provides a holistic approach to support to families giving assistance to both individual children and also to the adult family members who may be experiencing difficulties relating to specific issues in their lives which is impacting on their parenting ability. These are highly intensive programmes and are to a small number of families.
6. **Family Assessment Centre** – the Family Assessment Centre is a residential provision for families and their children usually on referral through Social Care/courts. It provides assessment on a 24 hour basis for families and their children which can either lead to a permanency option outside of the family or to a community based assessment where additional family support is provided to families to enable them to care for their children.

In addition to the services mentioned there are a range of services provided by Adult Services, other partners, both within the Council and in other agencies which provide direct support to adults experiencing difficulties which impact on their parenting role.