Hounslow’s Early Help Protocol

1. Purpose of the protocol

This protocol aims to establish a consistent approach amongst agencies within Hounslow providing early help to children and families. It also links to the wider pan London cross-authority protocol for the Common Assessment, (CAF), which aims to make CAF work across agencies and local authority boundaries as easy as possible. It draws upon the tools developed as part of that protocol, which were agreed across London in 2009.

The Early Help protocol commits agencies across Hounslow to:

• a common definition of early help;
• an agreed set of principles underpinning all work;
• eight joint standards; and
• the development of joint monitoring through the LSCB and Children’s Trust Board.

The protocol can be used by professionals to:

• identify varying levels of need and corresponding service provision across four levels;
• ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of services;
• identify when to begin the CAF process; and
• identify when and how to refer to specialist services.

2. Our Vision

‘Our vision is for a comprehensive and coherent early help offer that builds the resilience of children, young people and their families, empowers them to resolve their problems and provides timely help to individual families who require additional support.’

3. Hounslow’s Early Help Offer:

Shared Definition

‘Early help’ is an ambiguous term, referring both to help in the early years of a child or young person’s life and also early in the emergence of a problem at any stage in their lives. Services offering early help are aimed at improving the life chances of children and young people in general.

The provision of early help services requires all agencies to work together to ensure a co-ordinated continuum of help and support to
respond to the different levels of need of individual children and families. (See continuum of need, below). Where need is relatively low level, individual services and universal services may be able to take swift action. For other emerging needs, a range of early help services may be required, coordinated through an early help assessment, (the CAF). Where there are more complex needs, help may be provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (children in need). Where there are child protection concerns, (reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm,) local authority social care services must make enquiries and decide if any action should be taken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

**Continuum of Need**

The continuum of need adopted by Hounslow is summarised below. It aims to facilitate swift and easy access to appropriate services and establishes a consistent approach for:

- four levels of need and corresponding service intervention; and
- beginning the CAF process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2 - Low risk to vulnerable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No identified additional needs. Response services are universal services.</td>
<td>Child’s needs are not clear, not known or not being met. This is the threshold for beginning a common assessment. Response services are universal support services and/or targeted services.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 3 – Complex</th>
<th>Level 4 – Acute</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex needs likely to require longer term intervention from statutory and/or specialist services. High level additional unmet needs - this will usually require a targeted integrated response, which will usually include a specialist or statutory service. This is also the threshold for a child in need which will require Children’s Social Care intervention.</td>
<td>Acute needs, requiring statutory intensive support. This in particular includes the threshold for child protection which will require Children’s Social Care intervention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directory of Services**

Standard 1, below, commits all partners to publicising their services through an up to directory contained in The Family Service directory.
(fsd.hounslow.gov.uk). Annex A provides a summary of services, at the time of agreeing this protocol.

4. Principles underpinning our work

• **Working Together:** All partners will agree to work tighter, acknowledging and sharing respective skills and expertise

• **Access:** All Hounslow Children and families should have equality of opportunity to access support and relevant services

• **Preventing escalation:** Promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children is paramount. Everyone has a responsibility to intervene early and prevent the escalation of need.

• **Timeliness:** Timely responses are required at the point of needing, receiving help and support to prevent drift and delay.

• **Informed Consent and decision making:** Consent will be obtained at the start of any work and positive relationships will be nurtured so that families are enabled to make informed decisions.

• **Planning:** All services provided directly to families will be based upon a family assessment leading to a plan that is flexible, varying in intensity and responsive to individual need and circumstances. Multiple services may be required to achieve agreed outcomes and services will work collaboratively with colleagues and partner agencies to achieve a coordinated approach.

• **Measuring Impact:** Each plan will establish the need for change and how this will be achieved. Regular monitoring and reviews will ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved and where this is not possible alternative approaches must be considered.

• **Consultation and Participation:** The voice of children and families will inform and shape the development of services.

• **Evidence Based Approaches:** We will provide services and interventions that are underpinned by research, evidence and best practice. This will include advice, guidance and support to partners to promote collaborative working practices.

5. Standards

The following eight standards have been identified as minimum requirements for enabling effective multi-agency.
• **Standard 1** – All partners will publicise their services in a directory contained in *The Family Service directory (fsd.hounslow.gov.uk)*.

• **Standard 2** – Hounslow Continuum of Need Descriptors (See Annex C) should act as a minimum standard for identifying additional needs for children or young people.

• **Standard 3** - Where a child/young person has additional unmet needs, a common assessment will be undertaken, except in cases of child protection, where practitioners should follow the Local Safeguarding Children Procedures.

• **Standard 4** - all agencies working with children, young people and families will share information in accordance with the HM Government Information Sharing Guidance for Practitioners and Managers (Oct 2008). Annex F outlines why Information Sharing Protocols are not required for sharing of CAF information and Annex G contains Hounslow’s Information sharing protocol.

• **Standard 5** – all agencies will work with families to agree desired outcomes through agreed plans.

• **Standard 6** – all agencies will keep clear records of intervention and work with families.

• **Standard 7** – all agencies will monitor and review the impact of their work with families, using a robust and auditable tool. Hounslow Council recommends the use of the Outcomes Star, (See Annex H).

• **Standard 8** – all agencies will involve children, young people and families in the delivery and design of their work.

6. **Summary of Annex Information**

• **Annex A**: Summary of Services.

• **Annex B**: The Common Assessment Framework.

• **Annex C**: Hounslow Thresholds for Early Help and Social Care.

• **Annex D**: Referral pathways.

• **Annex E**: Hounslow Continuum of Need Descriptors - Sets out risk and resilience charts, which have been developed to support the London Continuum of Need outlined in this protocol.

• **Annex F**: CAF Information Sharing Protocol - Sets out the use of information sharing protocols within the CAF.

• **Annex G**: Hounslow Information Sharing Protocol.

• **Annex H**: The Outcomes Star.

**Monitoring the Protocol**

All Children’s Trust partners and the Hounslow Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) have agreed this protocol.
**CAF Monitoring**

Hounslow council’s Early Intervention Service will produce quarterly CAF activity reports and undertake three-monthly audits of CAFs. Findings from these will be reported to the Children’s Trust Board and LSCB.

**Monitoring Early Help**

In accordance with *Working Together (2013)* Hounslow’s LSCB will publish the threshold document, which includes early help and put in place systems to:

- assess the effectiveness of the early help offer; and
- monitor the impact of early help services on children and families in Hounslow.

**Revising the Protocol**

This protocol will be updated as required, in accordance with any recommendations made by the Children’s Trust Board or LSCB, following monitoring and evaluation of early help in Hounslow.

**Hounslow Children’s Trust Partners**

**September 2013**