



Supporting, Challenging and Changing Parenting

Thurrock's early offer of help to secure the best possible outcomes for children

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

In life, the parents you are born to, is probably the most important factor in the outcomes you are likely to achieve. Parenting is innate and the majority of parents successfully bring up their children without the need for additional help.

Bringing up children in adverse circumstances, for example in poverty or trauma, demands increased levels of resilience and resourcefulness and, for some parents, this can mean that the ability to support their children is damaged or inhibited and this can have very profound consequences for children.

That innate capacity in all humans can, however, be damaged or inhibited, enhanced or refreshed with very profound consequences for children. There is no doubt that bringing up children in adverse circumstances, for example in poverty, or war, or trauma; demands levels of extraordinary resilience and resourcefulness.

Most children grow up in loving homes, with resourceful and resilient parents who secure the support they inevitably need from time to time to meet the

challenges of life. Thurrock's early offer of help is not for them; they will find the help they need themselves from within their own resources or by tapping into resources in the community. Not everything we do in Thurrock is part of the early offer of help; for example our work to ensure young people are in work or education/or training is not focussed on parenting and therefore is not included, but it will continue.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Thurrock's early offer of help is for

- Parents who are struggling, whose children are suffering harm as a result, who know they need to do some things differently and who will accept the support and challenge they need to change
- Parents who don't appreciate the harmful impact their lifestyle and/or parenting is having on their children and need challenge as well as support if they are to make the changes they need to make and thereby prevent chronic damage and/or significant harm to their children. Parenting is about skills that can be learned and applied but more importantly it is about relationship which must be reflected upon if sustainable change is to be secured.

The early offer of help is designed to secure 'good enough' parenting for all children in Thurrock, through support challenge and change.

Some children will experience significant harm through abuse (physical/sexual/emotional) or neglect. Research has shown that the worst outcomes for children are associated with parenting that features serious abuse and neglect, specialist services under a legal mandate are required in these kinds of cases. The specialist services will be locality based and fully aligned with the early offer of help.

Figures one and two below show the segments of the population for which the early offer of help has been designed. Our detailed needs analysis shows that approximately 15% of the child population in Thurrock may need the early

offer of help, with a further 5% needing specialist services. This will equate to approximately 3000 families and whilst these will live across the Borough our analysis shows that the greatest concentration of need is in the following areas:

- Belhus
- Ockendon
- Chadwell St Mary
- Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park
- Tilbury St Chads
- West Thurrock and South Stifford
- Parts of Grays

In developing our locality based offer of services we will focus on these areas with the capacity to provide outreach in other areas of the Borough where this is required.

Families are dynamic, growing/shrinking, learning/resisting, struggling/thriving, succeeding/failing; in any event changing all the time. Common sense as well as national and local analysis shows that they move in and out of categories of need and services must be sufficiently aligned and/or integrated to respond to the changing needs over time.

The adult behaviours that are having harmful impacts on children (either numbers of children affected or degree of harm) are:

- Domestic abuse
- Sexual Violence
- Alcohol and Substance misuse
- Unresolved or chronic parental conflict
- Poor attachment
- Parenting characterised by low warmth and high criticism

In addition some families have features that increase the risk that children will be adversely impacted, these are:

- Enduring and/or serious parental mental ill health

Parental learning difficulties
Enduring and/or serious parental physical ill health
Loss and separation
Children who are parents

There are also environmental factors that require parents to have higher than average levels of resourcefulness and resilience if children are not to be adversely affected such as:

Poor housing
Worklessness
Poverty
Racism and other forms of discrimination

The behaviours, features and environmental factors identified above are not exhaustive, they rarely occur singly and combinations can act to intensify or ameliorate the risk of harm to the child.

In Thurrock we have identified a small group of very troubled families for whom the offer of help will be intensive and highly personalised. These are families who, without intervention, would prove extremely costly to the public purse. Within the People Directorate in the council we have an unprecedented opportunity to fully integrate services, systems and processes across children's adults and public protection. In health, the scale or the change is equally unprecedented and gives an opportunity to re-configure equally radically locally. Alongside is the opportunity that Integrated Offender Management provides to uniquely align at a local level the policy direction of education, health and the home office. Thurrock is small and nimble, it is much easier here to work across organisational and service boundaries than in most other areas in the country.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

No single agency or service can respond to the complexity of families we have sketched out here. **In Thurrock the early offer of help is multi-agency and integrated** at planning, middle management and operational delivery levels.

There are very significant opportunities to re-profile public sector spend in Thurrock. The early offer of help and accompanying system redesign will reduce the risk of harm to children by

- reducing overlaps and gaps between professional services and agencies
- preventing multiple interventions in families and multiple professional exchanges and
- reducing complicated and extended information exchange chains

However this depends upon very effective management of access to resources, this is critical to ensure the right families get the right services at the right time under the right mandate. **The early offer of help in Thurrock will have a single point of entry to service, a multi-agency triage response.** This will be a Thurrock Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub that brings together a variety of agencies into an integrated multi-agency team, where they share information appropriately and securely on children, families and adults around the child or young person, in order to take timely and appropriate actions. Based on the information gathered MASH staff decide on what appropriate action needs to take place.

To ensure excellent alignment of services between levels of seriousness from universal to specialist, **services currently locality based will be enhanced by co-location and/or closer integration with other council services** for example libraries, adult services, housing. In addition **specialist services for children in need of protection will be de-centralised** to strengthen alignment with the early offer of help and to **deliver specialist consultation and support in risk management to lead professionals** who are not qualified social workers.

WHAT SERVICES WILL BE ON OFFER

The early offer of help in Thurrock will be underpinned by a shared theoretical framework. No single theory of human behaviour is sufficient. Thurrock's framework will be shaped by

- Attachment theory
- Systems theory
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Solution focused models of intervention
- Multi-systemic therapy
- Family group conferencing

The accompanying **workforce development strategy** will ensure all staff involved in the early offer retain their professional integrity and insights but share a common language, an understanding of evidence based practices and a shared approach that is shaped by this shared theoretical underpinning

The core offer in each locality will include

- Parental and Infant Mental Health Services
- Family Nurse Partnerships
- Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home visiting (MECSH)
- Family Intervention Programme
- Domestic abuse and sexual violence services
- Alcohol and substance misuse services
- Family Group Conferencing
- Parenting SCC programmes

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF THE EARLY OFFER OF HELP IS WORKING

Parents will tell us!

We will develop a **performance management framework** that includes quantitative as well as qualitative measures of success. Examples might include:

- shorter care proceedings, as courts will be satisfied that families have had appropriate opportunities to access high quality and effective help

to effect the necessary changes in their parenting. This presents a potentially significant saving in public spend

- help plans that specify in SMART terms exactly what aspects of parenting need to be supported challenged or changed
- lead professionals with increased capacity to confidently and effectively manage appropriate levels of risk

We may hope to see fewer children in care, fewer young people in trouble with the law and fewer children subject of protection plans as a consequence of the early offer. However we need to be cautious, we are already seeing changes in the demography of the borough, with a steady increase in vulnerable families moving in to the borough. The proposed welfare reforms are likely to have a significant impact on the volume and nature of the demand for early offer services.

In summary, the key priorities for the early offer of help are as follows:

- Strengthening entry into services through the development of a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
- Developing an integrated multi agency response that targets resources to supporting parents and reducing the number of cases escalating to statutory intervention.
- Enhancing locality delivery by decentralising and aligning specialist services to targeted locality delivery.
- Developing a core offer of services delivered locally to support, challenge and change parenting where needed
- Implementing a clear workforce development programme to support the delivery of the early offer of help.
- Implementing a performance management framework that monitors and evaluates the success of the support offered.

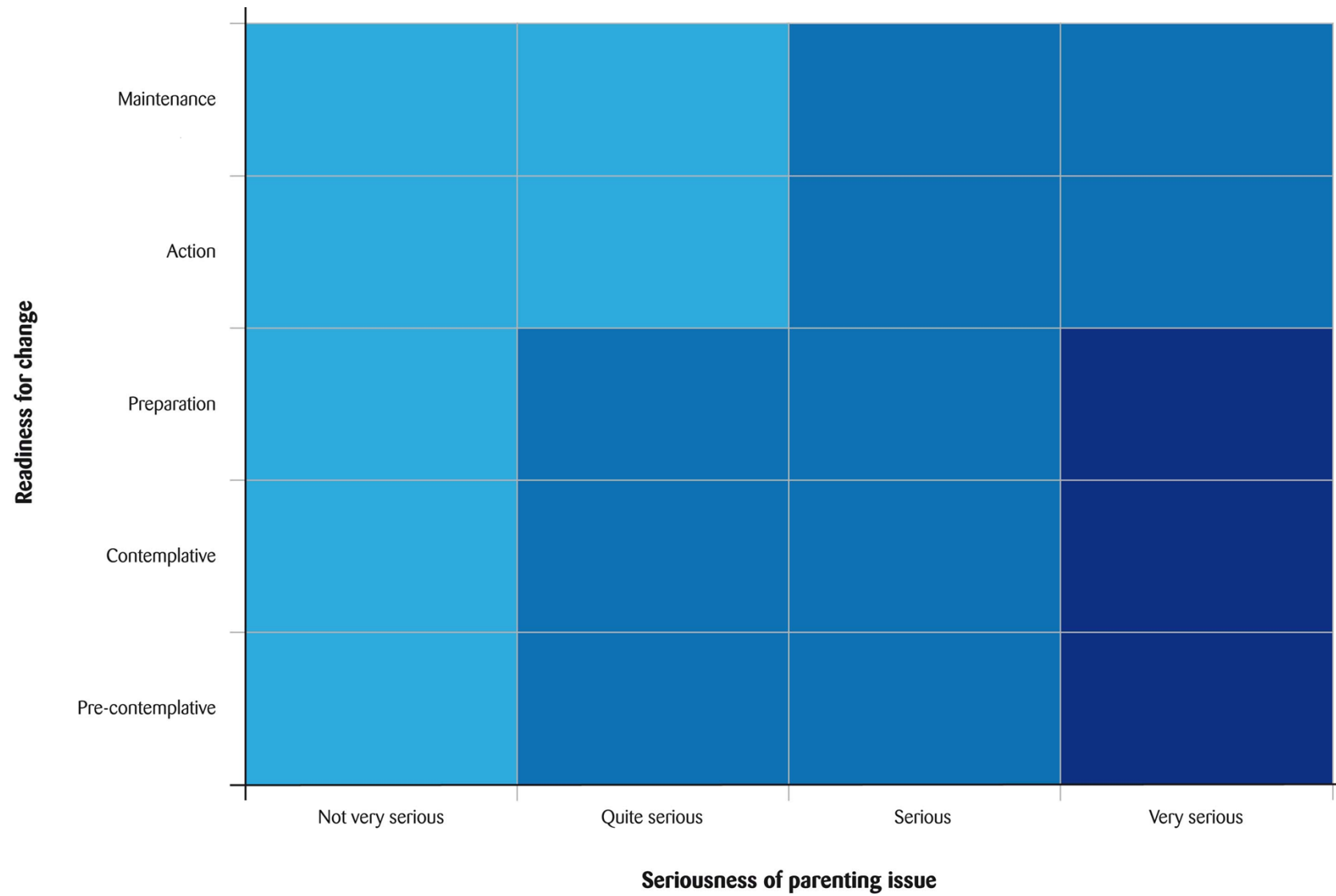


Figure Two

