

## Early Help

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Early Help - means 'providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life'.

The Early Help budget in Shropshire funds support across a wide range of areas - in partnership with schools and local agencies - to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

In the financial year 2015-16 spending on Early Help was as follows:

Gross Early Help Budget	<b><u>£6.087m</u></b>
Funded by:	
Local authority	£5.066m
Central Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)	£0.593m
CCG & Public Health	<u>£0.428m</u>
	<b><u>£6.087m</u></b>

*The funding through DSG is via the 'Contribution to Combined Budgets' line within the Central Provision within School Budgets part of centrally retained DSG. It should also be noted that the CCG- provide additional funding towards other areas of Children's Services particularly contributions towards external residential placements for Looked After Children. The figures above relate to direct support to a number of specific Early Help services.*

The attached appendix provides further details on the particular areas of Early Help that currently receive financial support via centrally retained DSG and for which additional financial support through this funding stream is being sought in 2016-17 and future years. This illustrates the direct and indirect benefits to schools of the retained funds to support Early Help services.

At a meeting of the Schools Forum Task & Finish Group in January 2016 a proposal was tabled to secure further funding from centrally retained DSG to support Early Help services.

Childrens Services have prioritised the Early Help offer to Children and Families since the implementation of their Early Help strategy in 2014. This strategy seeks to ensure all children and families access good quality Early Help at the first sign of concern and that support is responsive to long term as well as short term needs. It has also invested in the role of social workers and other professional staff including youth worker and primary mental health workers in supporting partners, including schools, to deliver good quality early help assessments and targeted early help plans. Through the single point of contact "Compass" staff offer telephone consultations and community visits to support professionals in their "lead professional" role identifying and managing risk together.

As councils have received reduced government funding the need to prioritise funding to specialist safeguarding activities associated with children in care and children subject to child protection plans has increased. We want to continue our investment in Early Help to families and as such are looking at other funding streams to help us fund this provision which to date has largely been funded through LA budgets as a non-statutory requirement.

## **Appendix 3**

A separate paper analyses the financial position of the High Needs Budget within the centrally retained DSG. This demonstrates that there is scope to release £600,000 in 2016-17, in part through savings and reconfiguration of the base budget, but also through one-off savings from the forecast underspend carried forward from 2015-16.

It is acknowledged that this is a short-term fix but is an even-handed approach to what is a shared issue, ie the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people against a background of reducing financial resources.

Given the need for further close working between the local authority and schools, at both the strategic and local level, it is proposed that a separate Task & Finish Group be established to undertake a review of the current application of resources to support Early Help, to determine how the £600,000 DSG released in 2016-17 is applied and to look at improvements in provision going forward through joint commissioning and exploring opportunities for pooling resources. This group will report through to Schools Forum.