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Guidance

Supporting Families: Earned Autonomy prospectus

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Applies to England

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1. Background

1.1 The Supporting Families programme has, since its inception in 2012 as Troubled Families, funded and advocated for transformation in the Early Help system.

1.2 There are currently 14 areas who operate under Earned Autonomy where all funding is provided upfront, rather than a proportion of the funding as a payment by results for family outcomes. These 14 areas were granted Earned Autonomy status following a bidding exercise in which they evidenced that having the funding upfront would accelerate transformation.

1.3 In our policy narrative 'Supporting Families 2021-22 and beyond' we outlined commitments that would help mature and modernise the programme and do more to encourage transformation.

[Autonomy 2022/23 \(for prospective EA areas only\)](#)

[Annex B – Evaluation criteria for application form](#)

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Supporting Families 2021-22 and beyond

“Over the next year we will work with areas to develop a renewed upfront funding offer, in return for consistent family outcomes, a strong local voice for families and progress on partnerships and data. We expect these local areas to lead the way in demonstrating what a partnership-based, data driven, coordinated whole system approach to supporting vulnerable families looks like, and how this is reflected in the outcomes they are achieving at both service and system levels”

1.4 We want to learn from the achievements of the most ambitious areas, partnering with them to continue to drive innovation and to shape local services for families into the future.

1.5 Following a consultation process during 2021, this prospectus outlines a new process for areas to apply for Earned Autonomy. This sees Earned Autonomy as a progression from Payment by Results (PbR) for areas who have reached a defined standard of maturity with their Early Help System.

1.6 We see these areas as leading the way locally and nationally, helping us to develop future policy and strategy by demonstrating what is possible. We expect these areas to work closely with the national programme team to influence future direction of travel and to share their good practice and innovation with other areas.

2. The role of Payment by Results and progression to Earned Autonomy

2.1 Payment by Results for family outcomes is a mechanism that helps encourage and maintain a focus on the following:

- The outcomes families are achieving – knowing more about how families’ lives have been changed
- Data maturity – embedding outcomes in case management systems, sourcing, matching and analysing multiple partner data sets to gain insight into outcomes
- Engaging partners in delivering whole family working – broadening the range of partner organisations who are part of working with families in a whole family way

2.2 These elements are at the core of an effective Early Help System.

2.3 Where an area can evidence these elements are well developed and embedded and there is strong local momentum to continue to improve, we believe there is no longer a need for PbR to incentivise this. From 2022 onwards we will be making a stronger connection between elements of the system being in place in an area and having Earned Autonomy status. The markers of maturity are discussed in detail below.

3. Maturity markers

3.1 A consultation exercise was carried out to gather views on the level of maturity which should be in place in Earned Autonomy areas. The following markers underpin the criteria to become an Earned Autonomy area:

- Comfortably **exceeding minimum numbers** for successful family outcomes

(exceeded 100% in 2021/22 and achieved 30% or more by Quarter 1 2022/23)

- Met the **20/21 data milestones** set out in the 2021/22 programme sign up conditions
- Committed to **work on 'all Early Help Data'** and will have recording and reporting in place to do this during 2022/23
- Strong evidence that **whole family working is an essential element of practice**
- Strong evidence of **family voice informing service delivery**

3.2 To demonstrate the ongoing drive for improving the Early Help System, areas wishing to become Earned Autonomy will also need to demonstrate their vision for the local system including: how the work on data for the programme is integrated with wider data transformation programmes; their strategy to work towards rebalancing the system towards greater prevention and how family hubs are being developed as part of this system. They would also need to provide assurance of their internal audit process for quality assuring successful family outcomes.

4. Benefits for Earned Autonomy areas

4.1 We believe this approach brings clarity for all areas around a common standard of maturity for the programme. With this incentive, it encourages all areas to level up and aim for this standard of maturity. All Earned Autonomy areas would:

- Receive all allocated funding upfront providing certainty of funding amount and simplifying the funding stream
- Have the national profile as having reached this standard of maturity

4.2 There may also be opportunities to contribute more to the development of the national programme, evaluation and peer support of other areas.

5. Ongoing requirements and assurance mechanisms for Earned Autonomy areas

5.1 In the first iteration of Earned Autonomy there were some additional assurance tasks required of areas. These included submitting an investment plan, agreeing and submitting population outcomes to the national team, providing an annual assurance report and hosting an assurance visit, alongside continuing to report successful family outcomes and the other business as usual requirements of the programme.

5.2 Programme assurance requirements will be reduced compared to the first iteration of Earned Autonomy to reduce the administrative workload for more mature areas.

5.3 However, we are also conscious that things can change quickly in a local area and that some assurance will need to remain in place to ensure the level of maturity remains high and there is continuous improvement. As a progression from PbR, there may be some areas who regress and need an improvement plan to remain Earned Autonomy or may need to return to PbR if there is insufficient strategic ambition to improve.

5.4 Continued and increasing maturity of Earned Autonomy areas will be monitored through:

- All Earned Autonomy areas will continue to use the Early Help System Guide self-assessment to guide plans and priorities locally and complete the data survey

- All Earned Autonomy areas will continue to report successful family outcome data until such time as the 'all Early Help Data pilot' has progressed and data returns for this can replace successful family outcome data.
- Ongoing assurance visits will also be used to gain greater insights into progress at the local level. An outline agenda for this is provided in Annex A.

6. Criteria and assessment

Process in brief

Stage 1: The Early Help System Guide self-assessment and successful family outcome performance will be used to assess the maturity of all areas against the maturity markers.

For prospective EA areas, only those who have scored at or above the levels outlined below will be invited to progress to stage 2.

Stage 2: For prospective EA areas, an application form (Annex A) and panel process. For existing EA areas an assurance visit (Annex D) will be conducted.

6.1 To progress to Stage 2, prospective EA areas will need to meet the following criteria:

1. Successful family outcomes:

- Exceeded 100% in 2021/22
- Achieved 30% or more by 30 June 2022 (Quarter 1 2022/23)

2. Early Help System Guide self-assessment (relevant descriptors included at Annex C):

- Family voice 1 (minimum score 4 or above)
- Workforce 1 (minimum score 4 or above)
- Workforce 3 (minimum score 3 or above)
- Leaders 1 (minimum score 4 or above)
- Leaders 3 (minimum score 3 or above)
- Data 1 (minimum score 4 or above)
- Data 3 (minimum score 4 or above)
- Data 4 (minimum score 4 or above)
- Data 7 (minimum score 3 or above)

6.2 **Important:** Areas should be realistic with their responses to the self-assessment. It is important that the self-assessment scoring is accurate and the narrative robust as the information and scoring provided will be tested through Stage 2 of the process.

7. Process and indicative timelines

7.1 Prospective Earned Autonomy areas

1 April – 30 June 2022	Local authorities and partners complete self-assessment against the Early Help System Guide
1 July 2022	Submission of Early Help System Guide self-assessment Submission of Quarter 1 successful family outcomes
July 2022	Areas who have achieved the successful family outcomes criteria and minimum scores of the relevant descriptors in the Early Help System Guide are invited to apply for Earned Autonomy
July – September 2022	Areas who have been invited to apply, complete application form Representatives from the Supporting Families team will be available to support areas. Deadline: 30 September 2022
October – November 2022	Applications reviewed by a cross-government panel including Teams calls with areas individually to clarify any points as necessary
December 2022	Ministerial decision about areas to be moved to EA
January 2023	Areas informed of outcome and Memorandum of Understanding issued
April 2023	First payment

7.2 Existing Earned Autonomy areas

1 April - 30 June 2022	Local authorities and partners complete self-assessment against the Early Help System Guide
1 July 2022	Submission of Early Help System Guide self-assessment Submission of Quarter 1 successful family outcomes
July 2022	Assurance visits to EA areas conducted to review current position against maturity markers using the EHSG self- assessment - those who are scoring below the criteria level for the EHSG self-assessment and successful family outcomes will be visited first
July - August 2022	Areas where improvement is needed to meet the criteria level or where any other concerns are raised produce an improvement plan
1 - 9 December 2022	Progress against any improvement plans reviewed
December 2022	Ministerial decision about areas to remain on EA or those who are recommended to return to PbR as insufficient progress has been made
January 2023	Areas informed of outcome and Memorandum of Understanding issued

Annex A: Supporting Families: Application for Earned Autonomy 2022/23 (for prospective EA areas only)

Please note: submissions will be made via delta

Local Authority area

Name of Supporting
Families Co-Ordinator

Email

Senior Responsible Officer

Title

Email

Partnership body overseeing
Supporting Families

Vision and strategic alignment

Vision for the local Early Help system (600 words) Include:

- Your strategy to work towards rebalancing the system towards greater prevention
- How family hubs are being developed and are being integrated into the local EH system to support rebalancing the system towards prevention
- How the work on data for the programme is integrated with wider data transformation programmes

Successful family outcomes

Describe how your internal audit team quality assures successful family outcomes (300 words)

Describe how you believe the number of successful family outcomes will continue to increase in your area and your projection for outcomes to be achieved up to March 2025 (300 words)

Data maturity

Give a position statement on your readiness and willingness to participate in the all Early Help Data pilot (300 words)

Annex B – Evaluation criteria for application form

The Early Help System Guide criteria will be assessed with reference to the scoring system in the Early Help System guide.

Vision and strategic alignment

Vision for the local Early Help system (600 words) Include:

- Your strategy to work towards rebalancing the system towards greater prevention
- How family hubs are being developed and are being integrated into the local EH system to support rebalancing the system towards prevention
- How the work on data for the programme is integrated with wider data transformation programmes

Scoring criteria

1. Limited or disorganised description of the vision for the local Early Help System with no attempt to demonstrate how different workstreams are strategically connected
2. Reasonable description of the vision for the local Early Help System with some attempt to demonstrate how different workstreams are strategically connected but lacking coherence
3. Good, wide ranging and full description of the vision for the local Early Help System with good articulation of how different workstreams are strategically connected
4. Strong vision for the local Early Help System, aligned to the EHSG, which is stretching yet realistic. Evidence that the range of workstreams in place are working to the same agenda

Successful family outcomes

Describe how your internal audit team quality assures successful family outcomes (300 words)

Scoring criteria

1. Information provided does not demonstrate how the internal audit teams ensures outcomes have been identified for all needs in the family in line with the outcomes plan, and that whole family working principles were adhered to
2. Information provided gives partial assurance that internal audit teams ensure outcomes have been identified for all needs in the family in line with the outcomes plan, and that whole family working principles were adhered to

3. There is sufficient evidence that the internal audit process accurately ensures that outcomes have been identified for all needs in the family in line with the outcomes plan, and that whole family working principles were adhered to

4. There is detailed evidence that the internal audit process accurately ensures that outcomes have been identified for all needs in the family in line with the outcomes plan, and that whole family working principles were adhered to and that any issues identified lead to improvement.

Describe how you believe the number of successful family outcomes will continue to increase in your area and your projection for outcomes to be achieved up to March 2025 (300 words)

1. Response gives no assurance of continued improvement in successful family outcomes.

2. Response articulates desire and belief that successful family outcomes will continue to increase but lacks a clear explanation of how that will be possible.

3. Clear description of a small number of improvements or developments and good case for how these will increase the number of successful family outcomes.

4. Clear description of a wide range of improvements or developments and strong case for how these will increase the number of successful family outcomes. The case accounts for the full range of possible impacts on this, using a structured analysis framework.

Data maturity

Give a position statement on your readiness and willingness to participate in the 'all Early Help Data pilot' (300 words)

Scoring criteria

1. Response shows limited understanding of the purpose of the 'all Early Help Data pilot' and/or insufficient building blocks in place to be able to participate.

2. Response evidences good understanding of the purpose of the 'all Early Help Data pilot' and that building blocks are in place to enable the area to participate fully.

3. Response evidences visionary thinking about the purpose and potential of the 'all Early Help Data pilot' alongside showing that building blocks are in place to begin reporting at pace.

Annex C – Early Help System Guide descriptors used for Stage 1 (for both prospective and existing EA areas)

0	1	2	3	4	5
< Early stages					Mature
There are no or few elements of this descriptor in place with no plan for development.	Planning has started and is at an early stage of development. It is too early for evidence of impact.	There is a plan to achieve this and some evidence that this is being implemented. It's too early to demonstrate impact/outcomes from this work.	There is some good evidence of progress - to some extent/ across many elements. There may be some emerging evidence of the outcomes/ impact. The next steps are clear.	This is largely in place although not yet fully established or embedded. There is some good evidence of outcomes/ impact. There is a plan for continuous development.	This plan is established. The evidence are limited. There are needs. The commissioning to cover development

Family Voice 1

Family engagement: We have well established mechanisms to gather and act on feedback from families and engage people with lived experience in service design, governance and quality assurance.

Minimum score: 4

A mature area has a range of methods to collect feedback from families (all children, young people, parents, carers and significant others) including but not limited to:

- From families during and following support given as part of a Family Plan reflecting whole family working principles. This feedback relates to the work of all parts of the Early Help System.
- From families who have not accessed support e.g. families who have been offered help and refused, those who needed help and weren't able to get it, and those who have needs but haven't come to the attention of services
- From families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

This feedback is used as learning to support changes in how the whole system works together

Workforce 1

The workforce in our area operates effectively to deliver whole family working and is aligned with the levels set out in the workforce table (see EHSG)

Minimum score: 4

The workforce table shows our vision for how all professionals who contribute to the Early Help system operate in practice although we recognise this is not a complete or exhaustive list. The family voice section gives definitions of the Lead Practitioner role and whole family working

Workforce 3

We have a shared practice framework and locally agreed processes for professionals in partner agencies working across the wider early help

system which is known, understood and consistently used.

Minimum
score: 3

In a mature area, partners will have agreed an overarching framework that articulates the shared values, principles, key theories, and models that underpin local ways of working with children, young people and families, with whole family working at its core. As well as describing what is common, this framework will also recognise the value of the specialisms and perspectives from different agencies. There are many different services which provide Early Help. In a mature area, there will be a clear service map outlining how all services contribute to the whole system of support and the pathways and processes in place to enable families and practitioners to navigate this system.

Leaders 1
Minimum
score: 4

There is a senior strategic group accountable for the Early Help System and the partnership infrastructure evidences a focus on early help, whole family and whole system working.

A mature area has strong partnership arrangements that enable partners to take collective responsibility, share risks and jointly invest in early help, whole family and whole system working. Strong partnerships also evidence that leaders at different levels across the Early Help Partnership focus on building productive relationships with partners and trust one another. All themed initiatives such as serious violence, child poverty and homelessness are co-ordinated and seen as interdependent and are supported by strong data governance arrangements.

Leaders speak with one voice on the importance of early help, whole family and whole system working and ensure this culture is embedded through senior and middle management and the front line and staff at all levels are effectively involved in shaping and developing improvements.

Leaders 3
Minimum
score: 3

Partners have agreed a shared set of measures at family, cohort, demand and population level, including quality of whole family practice and family voice, which collectively represent the effectiveness of the Early Help System. The performance against these measures shows that outcomes for families are improving.

A mature area has a shared set of measures owned by all partners who take collective responsibility for contributing to positive change. Population measures cover the whole population of the area e.g. Primary school attendance rates.

Cohort measures cover a specific subset of the population e.g. primary attendance rates of children in families who received a specific service. Demand measures are those which measure activity in the system e.g. child in need per 10,000 population. Family measures track progress in outcomes for individual families e.g. child attending school at least 90% in last three consecutive terms. All outcome measures are used to generate an enquiring and learning culture, with high support and high challenge. This enables shared responsibility for improving outcomes, recognising that no one organisation delivers a specific outcome on their own.

Data 1
Minimum
score: 4

We have regular data feeds from all parts of the partnership to support whole family working. These are open feeds and underpinned by strong data sharing agreements.

A mature partnership shares data feeds, including police data, housing, social care, education and homelessness, council tax and where possible

health. They make good use of open data feeds (the whole population rather than confined to the cohort) to allow for the quick identification of issues for referred families, along with needs and predictive analysis, to understand the whole community and predict individual risks. They explore the use of the Digital Economy Act to underpin data sharing agreements.

Data 3 Our case management system allows us to record all issues affecting the family and outcomes in a quantifiable way and run reports on these.

Minimum score: 4

A mature area quantifies issues that could previously only be captured and monitored in a qualitative way (such as parenting needs or parental conflict). This enables the partnership and analysts to understand which issues are affecting families and how these interact with other issues and outcomes. Embedding quantitative reporting should commence from notification through to closure and should be checked by supervisors at closure.

Data 4 We have an effective data governance board that is accountable for our progress on data transformation. It supports us and our partners to unlock and resolve issues with data sharing and direct how we use data both for performance and analytics and how we consult on system changes that would impact cross partnership. Data are used by the partnership to support resourcing, planning, whole family working and early intervention. An identified member of the Children’s Services Senior Leadership team has responsibility for driving forward actions from this board.

Data Governance Boards should be either a stand-alone board, or part of a wider partnership board. The board should help drive the data transformation journey and road map. It should provide direction on how data should be used to ensure effective services and help unblock any data sharing issues. Representation should be at a senior level from across the partnership.

Data 7 We have developed innovative analytical products. This could be needs analysis, place-based analysis, individual or family level risk analytics, apps or systems to improve information available to practitioners and partners, quantifying qualitative case notes or other documentation or any other product or system that has changed/improved our ways of working.

Minimum score: 3

A mature area continues to learn and develop how they use data to keep up with demands, changing services and improve the offer to families. Data are used to evaluate services, improve their effectiveness and continue to create/increase efficiencies.

Annex D: Assurance visit agenda (for existing EA areas only)

One hour	Vision and strategic alignment including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the system is being rebalanced towards greater prevention therefore reducing demand on children’s social care • How family hubs are being developed as part of this system 	DCS, Key strategic partners, SRO, SFC
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One	System maturity markers	DCS, key strategic
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hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up questions from central team on any detail provided in EHSg self- assessment with particular reference to EA criteria 	partners, SRO, SFC
One hour	<p>Data maturity including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress on data maturity in last 2 years How the work on data for the programme is integrated with wider data transformation programmes Demonstration of case management system showing process for assessing successful family outcomes Overview of internal audit team process for quality assuring successful family outcomes Projections for successful family outcomes up to March 2025. Follow up questions from central team on any detail provided in EHSg self- assessment with particular reference to EA criteria 	Corporate BI lead, SFC, SRO, Data Analysts

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