



Lancashire Multi-Agency Early Help Strategy

For children, young people, and their families
2024-2028





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Foreword

As Cabinet Member for Children and Families, I am delighted to introduce our Multi-Agency Early Help Strategy for 2024 - 2028. All children deserve the best possible start in life, which is why we are delighted to share our ambition as a partnership to collectively work together to deliver Early Help support for our children, young people, and their families across Lancashire. This strategy represents a pivotal step forward in our commitment to meeting the needs of our families and improving the well-being and development of every child and young person in our community. Early help is not merely a set of actions but a philosophy that underpins our approach to support and intervention and will play a significant part in our focus on Lancashire as a 'family friendly County', with policies that strengthen family units and promote a sense of community cohesion.

I recognise that the foundation of a strong community lies in the health and happiness of its members, especially, the young and vulnerable. This belies our commitment to 'Community Safety', and our focus on aiming to make life better for the residents of Lancashire, by prioritising policies that enhance safety and security. This includes addressing concerns about local crime, supporting law enforcement, and ensuring that community safety measures are effectively implemented. Our strategy is designed to strengthen the role that Early Help can play in creating a safety net, crafted with the threads of care, support and early intervention.

Early Help is the shared responsibility of all agencies that work with families with children and young people of any age, and at any time. Here, we set out an ambition to provide the necessary tools and resources to empower our professionals to act swiftly and effectively when support is needed.

We have received a great deal of evaluative review from all our partners and of course, from children, young people, and their parents. This has reflected on our journey to date, and what we have achieved together in Lancashire. Since launching our first early help partnership strategy alongside the introduction of a new, integrated Early Help Service in 2017, we have built new and effective relationships with a range of partners.



Our self-assessment has been wide-reaching across the partnership and has shaped the priorities set out in this refreshed strategy. Our evaluation highlighted many strengths of our Early Help offer in Lancashire, from the point of view of families, engaged with early help, and the quality of multi-agency partnership working. Whilst we are proud of what has been achieved in such a relatively short space of time, we operate on the basis of continuous improvement to ensure a consistent, high quality, early help response that makes a positive and sustainable difference for families across Lancashire. Our ambitions should drive and determine how we take things forward together, through our local partnership networks. I believe that this strategy provides direction and focus to enable those in need to easily access appropriate support from partners who work increasingly closely together.

Our vision for children is clear, we want them to be safe, healthy and achieve their full potential. This Early Help Strategy is more than a document; it is a declaration of our dedication to getting the support children need at the earliest stage. This is never more important than for the benefit of our most vulnerable children and young people. Our commitment to Inclusion and improving access to services and support for children and families with special educational needs and disabilities is in line with this strategy. It sets out our collective resolve to positively change children's lives every day. We will identify and address challenges for our families at the earliest stage, ensuring that no one is left to face difficulties alone. The steps that we take today will echo positively, through generations of children to come in Lancashire.

County Councillor Simon Evans,
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children
and Families
June 2025.



Introduction

Lancashire is a great place for families to live and for children to grow up. We want our children to be healthy, safe and achieve their full potential, and of course, we want them to have the best start in life, so they can make the most of opportunities throughout their childhood, into their adolescence and beyond into adulthood.

Whilst most children, young people and their families in Lancashire can have a good quality of life with minimal additional support required from public services, there are some who find life more challenging and at different times may need additional support and help from universal, targeted and specialist services. Waiting for a child or family's problems to get worse before we try to address them is not viable in any scenario. In Lancashire, we have evidence not only of things being stopped from getting worse, but of improved outcomes for children, young people, and families through the work of early help across all local agencies. That is why, Lancashire Children, Young People and Families Strategic Partnership will continue to maintain Early Help as a priority and why this Multi-Agency Strategy is so important.

It is well established that helping families as early as possible and providing support at the right time can reduce the likelihood of problems escalating, with the need for more serious interventions. The importance of prevention and early help in supporting children, young people and their families is well evidenced and embedded within national guidance and reports. These include the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011), The Allen Report (2011) and the Early Intervention Foundation's Report: Realising the Potential of Early Intervention (2018).

The economic argument for Early Help is that more effective assessments and swifter, coordinated responses will ultimately lead to a reduction in the numbers of families whose needs are met by specialist and high-cost services.¹

It is estimated that for every £1 invested in early help, there is a financial benefit to society of between £7.60 and £9.20.

Through a whole systemic approach, we can achieve change for families by exploring relationship patterns and understanding how they impact on children. Research tells us that the first 1,001 days of a child's life are a critical period. "What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) can have lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being – from obesity, heart disease and mental health, to educational achievement and economic status".² "The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), which are traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) such as experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home; and having a family member attempt or die by suicide' can lead to poor outcomes, in health and development throughout childhood, adolescence and in some cases, into adulthood".³ This is why a trauma informed approach to our work is a high priority.

¹ "Backing the Future", a report by the New Economics Foundation and Action For Children.

² 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives' (The Marmot Review)

³ Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2019)

Our aspiration is that children...



Strategies which aim to tackle child poverty, such as Inspiring Change, Every Child: Every Chance,⁴ are closely linked to early help. By focusing on increasing family incomes and reducing living costs, wherever possible, this strategy aims to address the root causes of child poverty before they escalate into more significant issues. This proactive approach aligns with the principles of early help, which emphasizes timely intervention and support to prevent problems from becoming more severe.

Our aspirations for Early help within this strategy involve.

- **Maximising means of financial support** to families to alleviate immediate economic pressures.
- **Enhancing access to services** that support children's development and well-being.
- **Coordinating efforts** across multi agency partners, local authorities, and health boards to ensure a comprehensive and integrated support system for families.

By addressing these areas early on, we aim to improve the life chances of children and reduce the risk of future generations growing up in poverty, creating a more stable and supportive environment for families.

In Lancashire, we acknowledge that Early help is not a service, but rather more, an effective Early Help model is one of collaboration. Bringing together families, communities, professionals, and systems to work together in a joined up and co-ordinated approach, with a shared understanding of the family's needs. This reflects the expectations for whole system working, set out within the national Early Help System Guide.

This is Lancashire's third 'Early Help Partnership Strategy', and it reflects the progress we have made in recent years, in supporting families and communities. It also reflects the changing context of how we operate our approach to early help in Lancashire to meet the ever-changing needs and challenges faced by children, young people, and their families. We have a strong track record of partnership working to provide support at the earliest opportunity. This includes our 'Team around the School and Settings' work within schools and early education settings, and our Family hubs way of working. Local Early Help Partnership Networks are well embedded within each district, and regularly come together to ensure joined up offer of practical support, advice and resources to professionals supporting families.

We believe this strategy sets out clearly, our ambitions for the continued development of our 'partnership early help approach' in Lancashire for the next three years. The Strategy outlines the next phase in our delivery of Early Help and provides our high-level shared vision, outcomes, and priorities for Lancashire. It builds on the outcomes achieved through our previous strategy and the strong foundations laid, whilst considering the context shaped by the pandemic and national strategy for Family Help.

⁴ "Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022 (March 2018). Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017'.

Early help is a cornerstone of the new government strategy, the 'Families First Programme,' aimed at reforming social care. By providing timely support and early intervention, the programme seeks to address issues before they escalate, ensuring that families receive the assistance they need at the earliest possible stage. This proactive approach not only helps to prevent crises but also promotes the well-being and stability of families, fostering a nurturing environment for children to thrive. Early help is essential in building resilient communities and reducing the long-term demand on social care services, ultimately leading to better outcomes for all involved. Families First reforms in Lancashire will ensure.

1. **Early Help and Intervention:** Providing timely support to families to address issues before they escalate, ensuring children and parents receive the help they need at the earliest stage
2. **Strengthening Family Units:** Promoting policies and initiatives that support and strengthen family structures, helping families to thrive and remain resilient
3. **Community-Based Support:** Encouraging local community involvement and support networks to create a more cohesive and supportive environment for families
4. **Inclusive Services:** Ensuring that services are accessible and inclusive, catering to the diverse needs of all families, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
5. **Safety and Well-Being:** Prioritising the safety and well-being of children and families through effective safeguarding measures and multi-agency collaboration

These goals are designed to create a holistic and supportive framework that addresses the various challenges families face, promoting overall well-being and stability.

An extensive period of engagement has taken place to ensure that our Early Help Strategy (2024 - 2027) is co-produced.

The engagement process allowed for a significant period of reflection during early 2024, when over 250 professionals were consulted, alongside 185 children, young people, and parents. We wanted to fully understand where our previous Early Help Strategy (2020-2023) had taken us, what it had achieved and, most importantly, what life is like for those receiving support in Lancashire in 2024. We also wanted to understand the full extent of our collective resources and strengths.

Through collaboration and a shared commitment to providing the right support at the right time, we are, and can continue, to make a real difference to our communities, enabling families to stay safe, achieve their potential and be more resilient and self-reliant, within supportive communities.





Local Context

Lancashire is the fourth largest Local Authority in England and is home to approximately 1.2million people, who live in a mixture of cities, large rural areas, and coastal towns, covered by 12 district council areas. There is a strong sense of regional identity and pride, based on our industrial history, with great importance placed on family and local community.

Our local data gives us a rich strategic overview of trends in Lancashire, and a clear understanding of the factors that influence local need to match up with what our children and young people and families are telling us. This includes our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and data which underpins our Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

With a population of approximately 366,990 children and young people, Lancashire is a large area which faces some unique challenges posed by its diverse geography and population make up. If Lancashire was a village of 100 children, we can see below, what some of the features of their lives would be and how that impacts on their needs.

If Lancashire had 100 Children

there would be...



51 boys
49 girls

82 White
13 Asian
4 Mixed/Multiple
Ethnic Groups
1 Black
1 Other

20 Living in most
deprived areas
7 in at least deprived
areas
(IMD 2019)

Health

94 vaccinated for
DTAP, IPV, HIB by age 2
88 immunised for MMR by
age 5
10 obese aged 4-5
23 obese aged 10-11
45 physically active school
aged children
27 5 year olds would have
experienced dental decay

Education

62 who have a good level of
development at reception
2 who have a statement or
EHCP of SEN at primary
21 children who
persistently be absent
5 16-17 years old who are
NEET

Social

3 who have a Social Care
referral
16 children (aged under 16)
who live in an absolute
low income family

Figures for Health, Education and Social are a proportion of each relevant age group if each age group had 100 children.
Sources: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/child-health-profiles>. Local authority interactive tool (LAIT).gov.uk

Within Lancashire we have ‘earned autonomy’ status for our national ‘Supporting Families Programme’, which underpins Lancashire’s Early Help Strategy, and we use its mechanisms to share data and identify families with multiple issues and needs. This enables us to deliver an integrated, multi-agency, ‘whole family’ approach that recognises and deals with overlapping and interconnected problems and histories. Through Supporting Families, we have been able to invest in responding to key issues, for example, by providing specialist Domestic Abuse Practitioners.

The intended longer-term gain from good quality early help is reducing demand placed on statutory services.

It is important to recognise the impact of disadvantage and deprivation, on children’s life chances. Josh McAlister’s independent review indicated that “children’s social care is involved with families chiefly because parents are raising their children in very difficult circumstances, rather than because the parents have caused, or are likely to cause significant harm to their children”, and goes on to note that “communities can also play a key role in supporting families, in some cases removing the need for statutory intervention.”

This goal is firmly within the auspices of the good quality, ‘place based’, early help that we deliver, together, in Lancashire.

Early Help Snapshots ~ the last 12 months

6,116

Number of Early Help assessments completed

7,122

Number of referrals to targeted Early Help
(Children and Family Wellbeing Service Family Intensive)

7,919

Number of children worked with

33,254

Number of children/parents receiving group-based support

7,255

Number of young people receiving Targeted Youth Support



Parents are responsible for meeting their children's needs and keeping them safe and they are in the strongest position to do this when their own needs are met. But some children grow up with parents or carers who at some point experience challenges, such as mental ill health, substance misuse or domestic abuse in the home. These can have a significant impact on the wellbeing and life chances of children in the family, particularly where there are other contributory factors such as trauma-based childhood experiences for the parent, poverty, family debt and poor housing. This is why parenting support and education are a critical part of our early help offer in Lancashire.

Strong educational outcomes are fundamental, and we understand the protective factors that regular school attendance bring. National evidence demonstrates that the quality of early childhood experiences can affect how young children develop, so whilst early help can be provided at any age, it is particularly important in the first 1001 days, to give children the best start in life.

Most children in Lancashire aged under five have a good level of development and are supported by good quality early years provision. Overall outcomes for pupils across Lancashire are good and attainment across all the key stages are at or above the national average.

However, the performance of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average, and while the gaps are narrowing in some subjects and in some schools, change is not happening quickly enough.

The vast majority of Lancashire pupils are being taught in good or outstanding schools, but we remain concerned with the needs of our children and young people who are not receiving their full education, and some of those children who are registered for elective home education.

A key priority for the local authority is narrowing the achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils by improving their performance across all key stages.

Another fundamental priority for us in Lancashire, is ensuring that we have strong support and well embedded pathways for families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to access the early help they need. 8.74% of our children and young people (0-25yrs) in Lancashire have been identified as having SEND needs. It is a priority for us that these children, young people, and their families have good local access and opportunities to participate, which are inclusive, as well as access to tailored support when needed and access to early help, should they be waiting for specialist assessment, treatment, or other services.



Part 1 – Review of our Multi-Agency Early Help Strategy

What we have achieved since our last Early Help Strategy was published.

Lancashire organisations, working together, have made good progress over the lifetime of the last Early Help Strategy, in ensuring that arrangements for children and families through early help are coordinated and timely, and we continue to build on this approach through our successful 'Family Hubs' network, and way of working together.

There has been significant development and achievements, since the 2020-2023 Early Help Strategy, delivered through our partnership working.



Early Help Improvement Journey

**Ofsted, Case File
Audits & Partnership
Feedback Shapes
Continuous
Improvement**

Multi Agency Early Help Strategy 2020-2023

Establish an Early Help system approach across all key stakeholders, including regular communications and Early Help partner events.

Revised Early Help Assessment

650 partners consulted in producing a streamlined strengths-based tool. Training rolled out across partnership.

Performance Data KPIs established

New framework is an effective tool to support managers, measure impact and examine trends. Improve performance on delivery targeted Early Help.

Established Single Front Door Referrals

Improved response time-lines and quality of threshold decisions to get right service in place quickly for families.

Improved Quality of Assessments, Plans and Direct Work

Extensive programme of quality of assurance and practice movement workshops systematically focus on key improvement areas. Assessments to clearly articulate risks - step up arrangements are robust - safe transfer occurs at step down - purposeful direct work - accurate and timely recording. Quality of supervision and management oversight - reduced disengagement.

Family Discussions

Introduced to create a robust weekly opportunity to discuss and agree thresholds to assist with Step Across.

Refreshed Neglect Strategy

Work with partners to ensure that children experiencing neglect receive effective targeted support. Train all staff in use of graded profile 2 tool to assist early intervention.

Established Team Around School

Work with partners to ensure an effective range of Early Help is available for families across the continuum of need, including integrated pathways with 0-5 partners, health and mental health, community safety, schools and social care.

Workforce Development

Introduced Multi-Agency Early Help Training Programme for all Lancashire Lead Professionals which has delivered over 300 courses to date.

Family Hubs

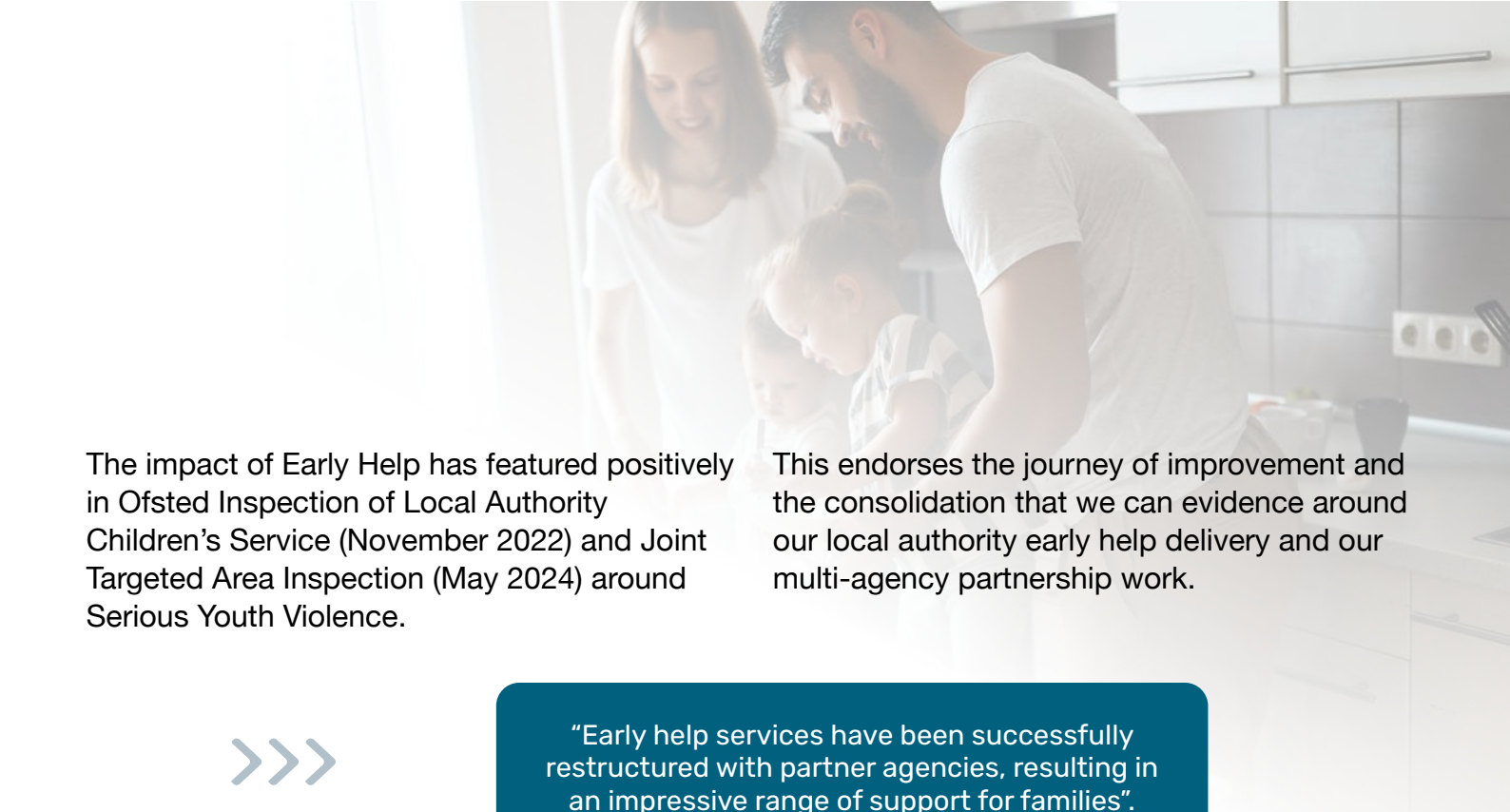
Networks established and delivery services launched in all districts.

Child First-Child Voice

Participation Strategy. Practice Improvement activity to focus on embedding the voice of the child at all stages of Early Help response.

Investment in Response to Domestic Abuse

Establish specialist practitioners to ensure that children living with domestic abuse receive effective preventative and targeted support.



The impact of Early Help has featured positively in Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (November 2022) and Joint Targeted Area Inspection (May 2024) around Serious Youth Violence.

This endorses the journey of improvement and the consolidation that we can evidence around our local authority early help delivery and our multi-agency partnership work.



"Early help services have been successfully restructured with partner agencies, resulting in an impressive range of support for families".
Ofsted, November 2022.

"Children and families benefit from a wide range of purposeful early help services.

They have the right support early on and the need for statutory support is avoided where appropriate. Early help assessments are detailed, highlighting strengths and what needs to change. Interventions are timely and proportionate, and delivered alongside well-established partnership arrangements. Early help services, which include the Child and Family Wellbeing Service, linked education officers, and the 'front door', are well connected, so that if families need a different response this is achieved swiftly and in children's best interests...

Children's lives have improved as a result of this effective support."
Ofsted, November 2022.



"Children and families benefit from a wide range of trauma-informed universal and early help services which are delivered by partner agencies, community services, schools, youth services, multi-agency family hubs, and through intensive family work by children's services.

These are making a positive difference in addressing the underlying causes of serious youth violence and are helping to reduce vulnerabilities and to improve many children's lives".

JTAI, May 2022.

Consultation and Co-Production

In March 2024, we held a partnership wide Early Help Conference which celebrated our journey in Early Help and highlighted the launch of our 29 Family Hubs, which had emerged from our local Early Help Partnership Networks. This event created the opportunity for us to begin consultation and engagement to inform the co-production of this revised Early Help Strategy and is something that has been taken forward throughout the summer of 2024 within local network partnerships involving over 160 agencies county wide.

Extensive user engagement has captured the voice of children, young people, and their parents/carers, and directly influenced how we have shaped delivery and the services provided through our Family Hubs. Children's and Parental involvement are important features of a 'family hubs way of working' in Lancashire, and we are embedding a variety of different methods through which we can effectively achieve meaningful engagement e.g., parent/carer forums, peer support, family engagement events.

- Focus groups with 48 young people in 6 districts (Pendle, Hyndburn, WL, Preston, Burnley & Lancaster).
- Focus groups with over 50 parents and carers in 6 districts (Pendle, Hyndburn, West Lancashire, Preston, Burnley & Lancaster).
- 198 parents and carers across Lancashire took part in our internal survey across Lancashire.
- 380 Children and young people participated in our shout survey across Lancashire.





What children, young people, and parents tell us about the impact of Early Help...

Now, 6 months on, we are a family again.

It has been amazing, having a place we can talk and be open, and not feel judged, it has been hard hearing the situations our kids are in, but we can see a way out now we hadn't before.

You may remember me, I spoke with you a few weeks ago regarding my son, Will. You were so helpful and gave me so much advice, I wanted to provide an update. Will started Inside Out three weeks ago and is thoroughly enjoying it, he is going to be quite upset when the course finishes. Thank you for ensuring he got a place;

I know they are in demand! Following your suggestion, I also reached out to SENDIASS, who have been amazing. They even supported the first TAF meeting at school a few weeks ago.

It's important to me that I message to let you know that you've really helped William. We still have a long road ahead, but you've made an immediate difference and for that I am so grateful.

'I found the relationship sessions more useful than I ever imagined and I am feeling really good about having some tools to work with in the future to help continue to strengthen our relationship and face the new challenges.'

Hi, it's my birthday tomorrow and I wanted to say thanks for helping me get through life. I'm feeling better, much better. Doing my hardest trying to get a better mindset.

I've picked my GCSEs. I want to go to college.

I have no blades on me anymore and when I get the urge I scratch instead. I was put on this earth to live it through not kill myself because my head tells me to. You have seen me through a lot of stuff and that's why I'm trusting you.

I know this will sound weird, but I love you (in a friendly way) for helping me.

Best advice I've had for the last 18mths – hands down!

Even though I feel down and can't go to school, I want to still go to the group its helping!!

I've taken on board all the safety advice. I do feel that now because dad is in prison, we are safe, but when he is released, I would now know what to do to keep myself and my children safe.

Really useful tips are given to help with speech. it has really helped bring my little one's speech on and helps him socially. It's my son's best day of the week.

"This time last year I didn't know how to get to the end of the day and dread waking up, now I'm able to look far into the future and be excited for it. I will never ever forget you and the work you have put into fixing my family. Thank you so soooooo much'.

As a mum with children on the spectrum it can get emotional and difficult at times but I'm very happy with the service they provide for us and want to thank everyone part of this wonderful service.

You've gone above and beyond for me and been my voice when I didn't have one and have given me my voice back and made me shine again.

Navigating the challenges of postnatal depression has been a daunting journey, however the warm and welcoming atmosphere at your centre, along with the genuine care from all staff, has truly been a beacon of light during a difficult time.

Being a friend of a family supported by a family hub has been reassuringly helpful. In the dedication and responsiveness to difficult situations for all involved.

To the things that make life bearable such as fairy cakes and a brew. A welcoming safe and comfortable environment.

The distractions and professionalism when working with vulnerable people is also appreciated.

Sometimes change for the better is a slow process, the family hub being available really makes a difference.

and Partners...

We have 2 early help staff here at school, running some groups to target 2 pupils who are selective mute. One has now started to talk in class and to me. This is a huge break through, and we are delighted! So are parents. Just wanted you to know the impact of your support.

The One Stop Shop is a great place for professionals to network and seek advice and support from other services to increase our knowledge about support available locally and to ask advice about referrals. Families can enjoy a drink and snack, free of charge and feel that their voice is heard, and they are not alone.







Part 2 – Early Help Strategy and Priorities 2024 – 2028

Aim of the Strategy

This strategy sets out a multi-agency partnership approach to coordinating Early Help for children and families. The aim is to engender a commitment to Early Help, embedding an understanding of thresholds and appropriate levels of action across agencies, to work together to ensure that children and families receive the support they need at the right time.

The strategy sets out our ambition for Early Help across Lancashire, describing how partners will work together to strategically plan and deliver services, through a family hubs way of working. It outlines the support to be provided to ensure that services are working together effectively and how we will keep children & families at the centre of our services.

The strategy works to underpin a principle that we will work together to deliver Early Help and support at the earliest opportunity with a focus on working with particular groups of children and young people that are known to be at greater risk of poor outcomes.

Working Together 2018 sets out a list of vulnerabilities that we strategically encourage early help practitioners should be particularly alert to. Including children with SEND, young carers, those being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, those frequently missing from care or from home, those at risk of being radicalised or exploited etc.



Duty and Definition of Early Help

In Lancashire, we know that the needs of parents and the family, and environment in which children grow up, have a significant impact on the life chances of the child.

Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places a duty on states to protect children from all forms of maltreatment or exploitation and to provide support to children and their carers to prevent and/or reduce the incidence of maltreatment. Local authorities in England, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, also have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children.

Early Help is about services working together for those children, young people, and their families, who would benefit from additional support to keep them safe from harm, help them to overcome difficulties, thrive and be happy. The overall goal is promoting resilience, participation and building on their strengths.

Early Help is delivered across levels 2-3 of the 4-level continuum of need model. Agencies coordinate support, using agreed tools and processes, for whom, without early intervention, might find that their needs escalate, necessitating higher levels of involvement, including statutory intervention. Early help is voluntary and consent from children, young people, and their families to work with them, should always be sought.

Providing good quality early help, is well proven to be more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later, and if delivered in the right way can also prevent further problems arising. These principles underpin our approach to whole family working and our subscription to the following definition of early help.

Early Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from early help.
- Undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
- Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcome for the child.

(Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018)

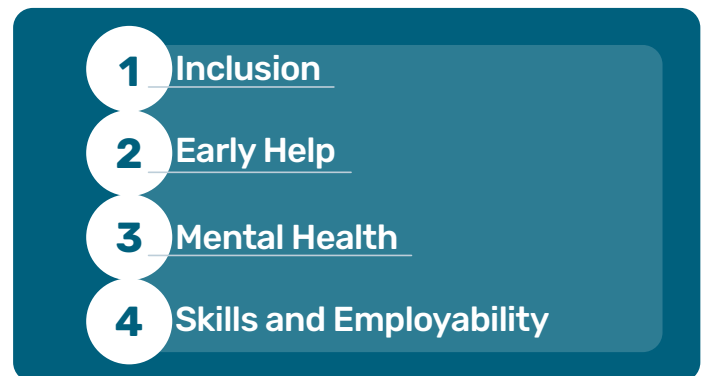


Values, Principles and Standards for Early Help.

Our early help approach shares the responsibility with all professionals from across the partnership to identify emerging concerns and potential unmet needs for individual children and families, irrespective of the whether they are providing services to children or adults. Professionals working in universal services are most usually the best placed to identify children or their families, who are at risk of poor outcomes. These will be in health services, such as midwives, health visitors, GPs, and school nurses, or in early years and education provision at any age from early years onwards.

Alongside this we will use local intelligence such as Supporting Families criteria which can support us to identify both groups of children and families that are more likely to need early support. In line with this partnership wide approach, we ask that all agencies are committed to adopting the following core values, principles and standards in their contact and work with children, young people, and families.

The 'Early Help Family Hubs' approach is a priority principle, for all those working with children, young people and their families in Lancashire and this Early Help Strategy sets out our approach to achieve our aims through a systemic, multi-agency, consistent approach to early intervention. It considers how Early Help contributes to delivering linked priorities and shared expectations in other key strategies such as the Children, Young People and Families Plan, which has four key priorities.





Our commitment to children, young people, and their families

This means our practice values include:



Believing your children and young people are valuable and putting your family at the heart of what you do.



RELATIONAL PRACTICE



Ensuring the first professional you approach will do their very best to work with you to get the help and support you and your family need.



EVERY CONTACT COUNTS



Offering a service that is right for you, wherever you are, whenever you need it.



RIGHT SUPPORT / TIME



Doing our best to work with your whole family so you only have to tell us your story once throughout your journey.



WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH



Recognising your family's strengths, valuing your thoughts and ideas as to how we can help you make positive changes.



STRENGTHS BASED



Working together with other professionals to support your family; Early Help is shared responsibility.



TEAM AROUND FAMILY



Creating a positive learning experience that increases resilience and empowers your family to make changes.



GROWTH MINDSET

Across the partnership we remain committed to these guiding values and principles that inform the way we work with children, young people, and families in Lancashire.

These principles lead us to **shared standards for practice**, when delivering early help across our Early Help System.

Safeguarding children and young people

Our primary responsibility is to safeguard children and young people. We strive to do this in the least interventionist way possible, responding to needs as quickly and as early as possible.

Being professional and accountable

We are accountable for providing the highest quality service we can. We are reliable and honest to earn the trust and confidence of children and young people and their families. We show commitment to our service vision and values. We respect managerial direction. We make time to learn and use our current practice models.

Participation

We co-produce assessments, plans and other work together with children, young people and families. The participation of children, young people, parents and families is at the core of what we do, ensuring they are prepared for meetings and know why we are involved in their lives.

Listening and communicating clearly

We are responsive, available and take time to listen carefully. We are aware of barriers to communication and help everyone to participate and communicate as much as they can. We work to understand the lived experience and opinions of children, young people and families. We provide accurate information and are polite, respectful and helpful. We ensure children, young people and families are aware of their rights.

How we write about children, young people and families

We are aware that records belong to the child or young person. We strive to accurately capture their lived experience, voice and journey. We set out clearly how decisions have (or have not) been made. We meet statutory requirements around consent and recording.

Achieving permanence

The best outcomes for children and young people are normally met in their own family. However, for children who can't stay in their own families, we work as quickly as we can to help them have a lasting home where they can feel settled and belong. For children and young people in every part of our service, we do life story work with them to help them understand and make sense of their own journey. We promote independence whilst protecting our children and young people from danger of harm.



Everyone is equal

We respect difference, celebrate diversity and value all people. We challenge oppression and discrimination in all forms. We support everyone to achieve their full potential in line with their abilities, regardless of who they are and their past experiences.

Working together

We are responsible for our role in professional networks to coordinate current work. We look for opportunities to improve how we deliver services through collaboration with colleagues in our service, partners outside our service and the children, young people and families we work with. We show professional curiosity and respectfully challenge each other.

The right relationships

We model kind relationships. We spend time working with (rather than 'doing to') children, young people and families to build meaningful relationships that are based on honesty and a clear understanding of people in their own context.

Developing our staff

We prioritise the health, safety and wellbeing of staff. We endeavour to ensure manageable workloads and time for development. We are committed to improving our own practice and encourage and support the professional development of others. We try to be creative, flexible and innovative and take an active role in our learning culture. We protect, prepare for and make use of supervision, reflection and continuing professional development/ training which is tailored to our specific services.





Governance

Lancashire's Multi- Agency Early Help Strategy recognises that the delivery of Early Help is not the responsibility of a single agency but is owned by all partners that work with children, young people, and families.

Early Help is provided by a broad range of agencies including the voluntary and charitable sector in Lancashire, as well as the council and other public sector organisations.

The strength of our collective offer is the quality of our partnerships. A multi-agency response is often required to support an individual child, young person, and family, and so it is essential that this is reflected in the strategic and local partnerships and networks.

The relationship between this Early Help Strategy and other multi-agency strategic plans and partnerships is demonstrated below.





Governance and overarching responsibility for the Strategy is provided by the 'Lancashire Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board'. This is supported by the Lancashire Children's Safeguarding Assurance Board, which has an assurance role in monitoring the effectiveness of Early Help across agencies. Early Help is included as one of the four priorities for the Children, Young People and Families Partnership and includes the following ambitions:

- That there is an up-to-date multi-agency Early Help Strategy for Lancashire which is understood and implemented across partners.
- That partners are fully engaged in the delivery of the Early Help Strategy and are able to evidence the impact of their own early intervention work on improving outcomes for children, including the most vulnerable.
- Partner agencies are committed to, understand, and implement the principles outlined in Lancashire's working well with families (continuum of need).
- Partner agencies promote development of the Early Help workforce and embed the values and principles of Early Help into practice.
- All partners ensure appropriate and timely information sharing takes place for the benefit of work with families.

Progress made against the agreed priorities and objectives of the Strategy, will be reported to the Partnership Board at least twice yearly.

Delivery of this strategy is supported within and across partner organisations, with challenge and support, provided by a place-based governance model which supports effective co-ordination of multi-agency service delivery to better meet the local needs of children and families. Local 'Early Help Partnership Networks' have been developed in each district area and their terms of reference for the groups are set out in Appendix 2.

Their purpose is to:

- Determine the locality profile based on current data and intelligence.
- Identify unmet needs and gaps in early help provision from the local perspective.
- Agree and own an action plan based upon the above, detailing development activities with a partnership approach. Hold each other to account for delivery of the plan.

Membership of each of the local network groups is broad and involves statutory, voluntary and community sector partners. Individual agencies will be responsible for meeting their own performance management arrangements which the partnership expects will incorporate targets for delivering the wider strategy and meeting shared key performance indicators and outcomes.

Lancashire Model of Early Help

Early Help services are a flexible continuum of support ranging from universal services through to statutory or specialist provision, focussed on improving the lives of children young people and families. We deliver this as a strengths-based family safeguarding approach across the whole system, and as a fundamental way of working with children, young people, and their families.

We know that they may experience a range of different needs at different times and as such will move backwards and forwards through any continuum, as needs are met and will be supported by different agencies.

Families who may require Early Help are identified by a wide range of practitioners, in many ways and everyone who meets children and families across Lancashire has some role they can play.



A customer services call handler has a conversation with a member of the public who is struggling to manage their household budget.



A General Practitioner recognises that a child is struggling to cope with his/her parent's separation.



A council workman overhears a parent shouting at their child and they are clearly struggling to cope with their child's behaviour.



A hairdresser listens to a customer talk about finding it difficult adapting to a new baby at home.



An employer adviser is concerned that a parent may be subject to a benefit sanction.



A drug or alcohol worker feels that children in the family may be vulnerable through the risk-taking behaviour of adults.

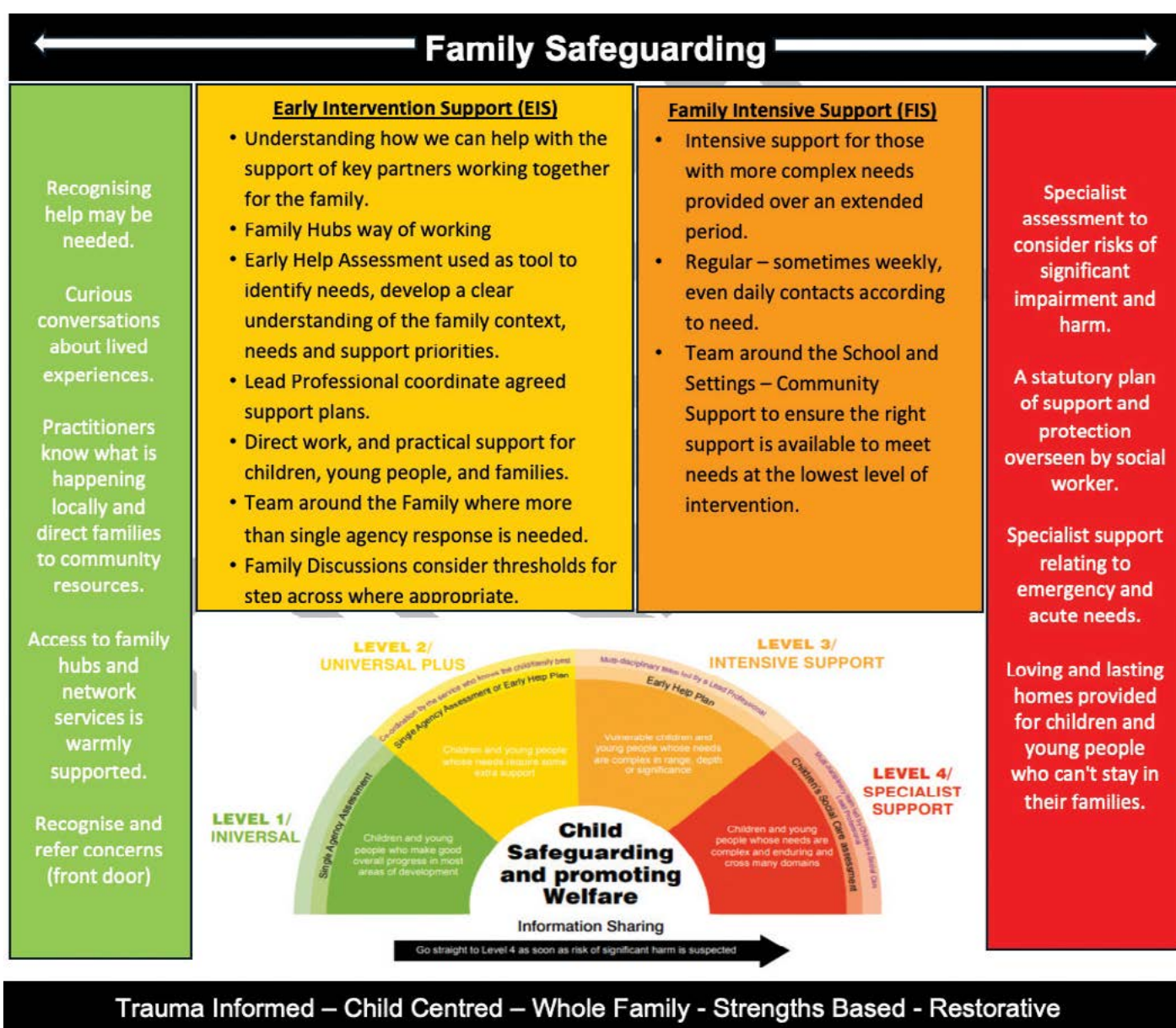


An education officer identifies a young person's persistent absence from school, or has concerns about a family's support needs where their child is electively home educated.

From simply asking if people have heard about Early Help when meeting a member of the public, to knowing where to signpost them to in the local area, right through to completing an early help assessment of need and plan. We are committed, through our family hubs way of working, that all practitioners in contact with children, young people, and their families in Lancashire, and importantly, those delivering universal services, understand their role in

identifying emerging needs, raising awareness, and sharing information. This will support early identification and assessment in a multi-agency context and ensure that safeguarding children is paramount.

There is strong commitment to 'place based' working within a system wide framework and our whole system model for early help therefore is as follows:





Demand for Early Help

There has been an increase in early help demand and activity generally during the period of the last Multi Agency Early Help Strategy. Following the implementation of streamlined arrangements at the front door, including investment in an Early Help Children's Services Hub we have matured our triage response in Lancashire, and improved the quality of threshold decisions, enabling us to ensure children and their families are receiving the right support, at the right time, from the right service.

Following an initial spike in demand (to be responded to by the local authority's Family Intensive Support Service), referrals for support at the intensive level have been relatively stable and there has been some plateauing of the submission of Early Help Assessments by lead professional outside the local authority.

We can generally see that whereby the percentage of children receiving Family Intensive Support has reduced by around 15% on average, across the County, over the period, this demand has moved to being responded to at the Universal Plus level by partners across the wider early help sector, which demonstrates a reciprocal 15% increase in children being supported with early intervention. At the same time, the number of children referred in for statutory social work has fallen over the period and the number of children being brought into care has reduced significantly.

The roll out of 29 Family Hubs and the consolidation of a network approach to delivering Early Help for children, young people, and families, has led to significantly increased referrals and uptake of direct services of between 80 to 220% increase in demand across all areas of the County. This has meant that families have more opportunity to be supported at an appropriate level and shows a shift towards earlier intervention and a reducing demand against longer-term and potentially statutory or clinical intervention.



Performance Management

The delivery of our Multi-Agency Early Help Strategy is based on a joint commitment to shared outcomes. It will evidence the impact we make for families by intervening early and providing the right support at the right time in the right place, enabling sustainable outcomes and building family resilience.

Early Help responds effectively to a myriad of issues impacting on children, young people,

and families lives and we are focused on responding to the issues outlined in the national Supporting Families Outcomes Framework.⁶

It is important that measures of success for early help are established and agreed, and the following outcome indicators will demonstrate the effectiveness of the Early Help Strategy over time.

⁶ *Guidance: Chapter 3: The National Supporting Families Outcome Framework. Published 2 April 2022*

Key Success Indicators - Early Help and Family Hubs

Direct Performance Indicators

- Increase in the number of families supported through a multi-agency early help plans.
- Number of families where needs are met after an intervention or support plan of Early Help.
- Low re-referral rates within 12 months of receiving early help support.
- Partnership Early Help increasing frequency of needs being responded to at Universal+ level.
- Number of families accessing targeted early help support.
- Improved reach of early help through Family Hubs
- Number of families who are satisfied with the support they receive.
- Increase in the numbers of early help plans in place at the time of a request for an Education Health Care needs assessment.
- Increased percentage of those accessing Family Hubs from within the 20% most disadvantaged children (Lancashire IMD-LSOAs)
- Reduced incidence of engagement ceased by family before early help could be provided/concluded.
- Increased prevalence of good/ outstanding/ strength identified in observation/ evaluation of early help practice.
- Reduced number of children with a closed Early Help plan that within 12 months of closure have had a subsequent referral for further Early Help support.

Indicators of positive attribution of early help

Reduction of contacts to the front door, meaning that families are supported by those who already know them.

Increase in the number of statutory social work assessments which result in step across to early help.

Reduction in the number of families subject to child in need plans.

Reduction in the number of Education Health Care Plan needs assessment requests by parents.

Reduction in exclusions as a result of early help support.

Number of multi-agency practitioners trained in a range of early help processes, skills, and practice.

Evidence on the performance of Early Help in line with these indicators, will be routinely monitored to track the progress and impact of our strategy. They will be published quarterly and reported to the Children, Young People and Families' Partnership Board.

In Lancashire, we are committed to continually developing the maturity of our data and systems approach to Early Help and using our data intelligently to inform our priorities and planning.

We have implemented a family hubs information sharing system, to aggregate and amplify what we know about our children and family's needs, within our Supporting Families programme, and plan to develop this further as a safeguarding portal tool for multi-agency practitioners.

Our continued annual self-assessment and use of the Early Help Systems Guide,⁷ will ensure that we continue to maximise our ability to share information safely to improve outcomes for children.

⁷ Supporting Families: Early Help System guide, April 22, Supporting Families: Early Help System guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)





Information Sharing

Appropriate and timely sharing of information is critical to ensuring that families receive the right help at the right time and to reducing risk and preventing issues from escalating. Serious Case Reviews have consistently highlighted that a failure to share information was commonly a contributory factor to the children not being protected. All agencies have a responsibility to adhere to safe Information Governance practices and to ensure their staff are appropriately trained and supported.

Early Help is voluntary and consent from children, young people, and their families to work with them should always be sought. Sharing information for the purposes of Early Help is based on discussion with all members of the family and the consent of those who are adults. A consent and information sharing form should be used that reflects the arrangements of the organisation delivering the early help and is explicit about how information may be shared.

Good information sharing and clear communication underpins effective early help working across agencies. It is recognised that the sharing of information can present challenges, however, fears about sharing information cannot stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people at risk.

Developing the Early Help Workforce

It is important that practitioners across Lancashire who encounter children, young people, and their families, understand and have the confidence to play their part in delivering Early Help. A mainstream commitment to the Early Help model is needed from the very top of organisations through to the front line and a culture of ownership is required, that 'Early Help is everyone's business', and of working together in partnership.

To do this effectively, practitioners need to feel that they have been given permission to work in this way from their managers and be confident about managing risk at an appropriate level. They need to understand and be competent in using our shared and agreed tools to support early help work with families.

A multi-agency early help training programme is currently offered, that enables partners to train and learn together. The councils early help service will continue to take leadership responsibility for delivering Early Help partnership training, including a wide range of core knowledge, skills, and abilities to deliver early intervention support well. Individual agencies, however, also have a responsibility to ensure the principles of Early Help are embedded into relevant training for staff and into working policies and practices.



Details of the current offer of early help training for professionals in Lancashire can be found at:
Early help training for practitioners - Lancashire County Council

Strategic Priorities

Early Help has a unique role to play in making sure we affect the changes we wish to see across the whole children and young people's system. For the whole system to work the best it can, it is important that we continue to embed common ways of working and understanding of need, and work together in a flexible and joined up way across traditional service boundaries, especially at points of transition for our children and young people.

We have agreed nine priorities which we will focus on achieving over the life of this strategy, 2024-2027. Progress against these will be regularly reviewed by the Children and Young People and Families Partnership Board.

These priorities aim to create a robust early help system that supports children, young people, and their families effectively.

Lancashire Multi-Agency Early Help

Strategic Development Priorities

- Quality of Assessments, Plans and Reviews
- Multi-Agency Communications Plan
- Whole System Partnership Approach
- Building Resilient Communities
- Supporting Vulnerable Groups
- Voice and Influence
- System Maturity
- Digital Transformation
- Developing Early Help Culture and Practice



Early Help Strategic Priorities - Action Plan

1. Whole System Partnership Approach

Goal	Actions	Impact
<p>Promote a culture of responsibility where prevention and early help is everyone's responsibility, underpinned by shared principles. Think Link!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen multi-agency governance and ownership of early help. Consider role of Lancashire CSAP.• Ensure the Partnership has the right infrastructure to support the development of early help services through the Children's Partnership and through strong place based Early Help Partnership Network Groups.• Recognise and engage new partners within local early help partnership networks to add breadth and capacity to our partnership.• Prioritise co-located and integrated service delivery wherever practicable. Regularly review service needs and locations and co-design joined up responses.• Identify additional opportunities to co-locate community-based family services and Family Hubs ensuring spaces are fit for purpose for all age groups and the wide range of providers.• Share intelligence and data to inform joint working and future developments.	<p>Capacity continues to develop in the Early Help System</p> <p>Leaders can demonstrate and evidence improvements in service delivery.</p> <p>Priorities are agreed locally, and action plans are developed and monitored.</p> <p>The workforce knows how to respond to emerging vulnerability and provide the right support, at the right time, for families.</p>

Early Help Strategic Priorities - Action Plan

2. Building resilience in families and communities

Goal	Actions	Impact
By enabling self-help, families build resilience and inequalities are reduced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote family networking and develop approaches that help families connect with networks of support within their community. • Widen access to community resources which can be independently and repeatedly accessed when needed. • Support parents, carers to provide support and early help to their friends, neighbours, and their community. • Offer early help resources and services which promote self-help and self-service and that provide access to the support they need, on demand. 	<p>Children, young people, and families are able to access a solid foundation of support on an independent basis and broaden their capabilities for independent action.</p> <p>Such that when they encounter future difficulties, they are more able to overcome these with the resources available in their communities.</p>

3. Supporting Vulnerable Groups

Goal	Actions	Impact
Build on good practices to co-produce solutions which effectively respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people and reduce the need for statutory interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure clear understanding of risk thresholds and facilitate smooth transitions between early help and specialist interventions. • Prioritise four key groups of children and young people at risk of poor outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND): ensure inclusive and systematic support for families with SEND children. ~ Education: support electively home educated children, and those excluded or not receiving their education. ~ Domestic Abuse: focus on reducing and responding to the impact of domestic violence and emotional abuse. ~ Exploitation: protect children and young people vulnerable to exploitation. 	More children receive an early help response leading to improvements in their lives and those of their families.

Early Help Strategic Priorities – Action Plan

4. Voice and Influence

Goal	Actions	Impact
<p>Ensure meaningful involvement of children, young people and their parents/carers in service evaluation, design and delivery and use accessible mechanisms to improve services based on user experience.</p> <p>Learn from their input and recognise the value of their voice and influence as 'experts by experience'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use surveys and other easy access mechanisms to regularly collect views and gather feedback from service users to inform service developments. • Support children and young people to be involved through established advisory groups e.g., youth councils, SEND forum, children in care council. • Develop opportunities which empower parents, carers and volunteers to feedback and provide local support to sustain families within their communities. 	<p>The views, experiences and opinions of children, young people and their families feed directly in to service reviews and practice improvement across early help agencies.</p> <p>Children, young people, and parents report that they can influence service design and can feel the improvements made when they contribute.</p>

5. Developing Early Help Culture and Practice

Goal	Actions	Impact
<p>The early help system is underpinned by an integrated, skilled workforce that responds to the needs of the whole family, no matter what their professional background.</p> <p>Impact is strengthened through multi-agency learning and evidence-based practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further embed and develop Lancashire's multi-agency training programme to enable partners to work together effectively Embed an authentic vision for early help that connects professionals to their core purpose and inspires improvement. • Emphasise the added value of what can be achieved through partnership working. • Make every contact count, where everyone is professionally curious and motivated understand families and what can be done to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. • Use lead professionals/whole family working/Team around the Family models of practice consistently and effectively to coordinate efforts for families with complex needs. • Develop shadowing and inter-agency working opportunities to enhance understanding and collaboration. • Knowing our cultural communities better. We have a multi-culture of professionals supporting a multi-culture of communities and we need to ensure local cultures are heard and understood to support better delivery of early help. 	<p>Practitioners report that they feel confident, supported, and empowered to engage with children and families earlier.</p> <p>Families are only having to tell their story once and are working with skilled, trusted professionals.</p>

Early Help Strategic Priorities – Action Plan

6. Quality of Early Help Assessments, Plans and Reviews

Goal	Actions	Impact
Enhance the effectiveness and impact of early help services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality Assurance Framework: Develop a multi-agency framework to support continuous improvement in early help practice. • Regularly monitor the quality of early help by conducting regular audits of Early Help Assessments and plans through a multi-agency early help assessment quality assurance group. • Monitor actions from audit work to ensure lessons are learned. • Support early help practitioners to improve the strengths base of their assessments through effective engagement with families and relational practice. • Create an Early Help resource pack for professionals to support consistent practice alongside evidence-based approaches and interventions. 	<p>At review points, audits reflect an improving understanding of when and how children, young people, and families require early help services.</p> <p>Children, young people and families and families report that they feel more empowered to take control of their lives.</p>

7. System Maturity – Information Sharing and Data Maturity

Goal	Actions	Impact
Enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and impact of early help for families across the whole children's system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure pathways to early help are clear and easy to navigate. • Improve information sharing between professionals to better identify families needing early help. • Regularly review self-assessment ratings using the Early Help Maturity Matrix and identify actions to improve them. • Develop integrated systems to bring together information from various partners and services e.g., Family Hubs Information Sharing System. • Use the Supporting Families Framework to measure impact and inform service improvement. • Refine the Family Hubs dashboard and reporting. • Improve the maturity of our systems that share data and information, to help us identify inequalities and families and communities that require prevention or early help support. 	<p>Improved communication and information sharing is evident and is making a difference.</p> <p>Performance data accurately reflects the impact of early help service delivery across the whole system in Lancashire.</p>

Early Help Strategic Priorities – Action Plan

8. Multi-Agency communications plan

Goal	Actions	Impact
All partners understand and promote the early help offer to increase its visibility and ensure all families are aware of available services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a promotional plan which promotes a coordinated approach to publicising our wider early help offer. • Develop opportunities for collaboration, and information sharing through regular networking activities. • Collaborate to achieve a comprehensive directory of services. • Provide information about early help through digital platforms such as the Family Hubs website and signpost to the events/ activities search tool. 	Families report that they have been offered a range of local support services that meet their needs

9. Digital Transformation

Goal	Actions	Impact
Use digital transformation processes to predict demands and needs and inform service delivery responses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish digital access systems to pro-actively communicate with families and encourage the take-up of services and support opportunities. • One landing place for Early Help that connects to all partners and apps. Hub of Hope. • Use behavioural intelligence that helps us know what digital advice and guidance needs to be promoted and made available for families to access. • Develop a digital hub of tools and resources to support families in accessing advice, guidance, services, and activities. • Establish digital and artificial intelligence systems to pro-actively communicate with families and encourage the take-up of support opportunities. 	Families pro-actively engage with services and are empowered by easy access to the digital tools and resources they need. This leads to improved satisfaction and greater reach towards those in need.







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