

Dudley's Early Help Strategy

2015-2017



Acknowledgements

The development of Dudley's Early Help Strategy was led by the Children and Young People's Alliance Early Help Group. We are grateful for the contributions of children and young people and staff from the wide range of agencies that contribute to Early Help in Dudley.

FOREWORD

I am very pleased to have the pleasure of presenting Dudley's Early Help Strategy. Dudley is a great place for family's to live and work and we want to be able to provide the right support at the right time when it is most needed. Early Help is paramount in ensuring problems for families are identified early and responded to effectively.

The overall aim of this strategy is to ensure problems do not escalate to the detriment of children and families. We will do this by modernising and investing in strong and effective community services at a grass roots level, making sure that our children and young people have the best possible chance to succeed and thrive.

Early Help requires a collaborative approach from all agencies including Schools and the voluntary sector, with the active involvement of children, young people, families and carers being vital to its success.

This strategy document sets out the pathway for Early Help in Dudley and will ensure that the appropriate level of support is put in place. Investing in our children and young people now will ensure we build strong, resilient and thriving communities in the future.

I firmly believe that by providing early help services we will be contributing to a lasting improvement to the quality of the lives of Dudley children, young people and their families.

Tony Oakman

Chair of Children and Young People's Alliance Board

Contents

A. Introduction	4
B. Our Approach	4
C. Governance and Accountability arrangements	6
D. The Life Chances of Dudley’s Children, Young People and Families	7
E. The Dudley Deal for Children and Young People	7
F. Operating consistent thresholds for accessing Early Help	8
G. Identifying children and families who would benefit from Early Help	8
H. Providing effective arrangements for assessing the needs of children who may benefit from Early Help	9
I. The Early Help Cluster Operating Model	10
J. Giving Voice to Children and Young People	14
K. Developing the Early Help Workforce	14
L. Outcomes and performance monitoring	14
Appendix 1 – Summary Analysis of the Needs of children and young people in Dudley.	15

A. Introduction

In Dudley, we are passionate about the wellbeing of our children young people and families. Our Vision is that Dudley is a place where children and young people thrive.

This Early Help Strategy is about delivering that vision, and driving change to improve outcomes. It sets out how we are developing our Early Help offer in partnership not only with the wide range of agencies in the borough working with children, young people and families, but also with families themselves.

The Case for Early Help and Intervention

Dudley's definition of Early Help :

Early Help is taking action early and as soon as possible to provide support where problems are emerging for children, young people and their families, or with a population most at risk of developing problems. Early help may occur at any point in a child or young person's life.

The case for Early Help is well evidenced, and we know that effective early help can ensure that every baby, child and young person acquires the social and emotional foundations upon which success depends. Early identification and intervention are critical in order to improve children's outcomes, and Eileen Munro stated in her review that "preventative services will do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services".

Evidence also suggests that early help develops social and emotional capability, builds resilience through to adulthood, and can reduce truancy, anti-social behaviour, crime, health problems, obesity, welfare dependency, need for statutory social care, under-attainment, and exclusion from school. It can reduce the burden of mental and physical ill health over the whole life course, reduce the cost of future interventions, improve economic growth and reduce health inequalities.

B. Our Approach

The Dudley Early Help offer

Our Early Help offer sets out a collaborative approach rather than simply a provision. We believe that an effective early help offer has the following elements:

- Operating consistent thresholds for accessing Early Help
- Identifying children and families who would benefit from Early Help
- Providing effective arrangements for assessing the needs of children who may benefit from Early Help
- Developing the Early Help Cluster Operating Model
- Giving Voice to Children and Young People
- Workforce Development
- Outcomes and performance monitoring arrangements shared with Social Care.

This strategy sets out our arrangements and plans for ensuring all these are in place.

An outcomes focus

In developing our Early Help strategy, we have adopted a commissioning approach. This means that we have started with creating a vision and defining the outcomes we want to see for the children, young people and families of Dudley. Dudley's Early Help offer is designed to contribute to the following outcomes:

1. Children and young people are safe from harm in the home, outside of the home and online.
2. Children and young people have the best start in life and are ready for school.
3. Children live healthy lives.
4. Children and young people learn well.
5. Young people make positive transitions into adulthood.
6. Families provide safe and supportive homes for their children.

Our plans to develop the local early help offer are led by our commitment to improve outcomes for the local population and address the additional needs of some children, young people and families. They are based on local needs and we have identified what we know about the local community currently and where the inequalities are, and this is referenced in Section D, with a brief analysis in Appendix 1.

To measure progress against these key desired outcomes, we will put in place an Outcomes and Performance Framework (see Section L) to monitor the extent to which we are contributing to these population outcomes. This will be shared across Social Care to ensure we are effectively monitoring the whole safeguarding system across all levels of need, and the extent to which thresholds between those levels of need are effectively applied.

In addition, we will know the Early Help Offer has been effective when there is an appropriate and safe reduction in demand for specialist services, e.g.

- Reduction in the number of children in need, requiring child protection plans or coming into care
- Reduction in demand for specialist child mental health services
- Fewer young people accessing hospital provision following an episode of self-harm.

Two key ways of working

Our primary aim is to improve outcomes by offering families the right help at the right time. Central to this is to change the way we work with families. There are two key ways in which we are developing practice that will support us in achieving this:

a) Working together with families to develop their capacity for change: We know that families are have greater capacity for change when we work with them as partners. We need to support families to become stronger and more resilient so they can solve their own problems and make positive changes themselves. We are developing strength based approaches with parents and families which we believe will lead to stronger families and communities, who are better able to help themselves. This is part of an evidence based approach known as Restorative Practices.

b) Taking a whole family approach: We will adopt a 'Think Family' approach in all our Early Help work. We recognise how problems that adults and children experience can impact on the whole family and that many parents have additional needs which can impair their parenting capacity. We will work to improve ways in which children and young people's services and adults' services work effectively together. We will work across the whole system to ensure that there is a coordinated approach for families and that they can 'tell their story once'.

9 Key Principles underpinning Early Help in Dudley

We have agreed a set of core principles that will underpin Early Help in Dudley, based both on local priorities, and on evidence of approaches that work to support children and families effectively. These are:

- 1. The welfare of children and young people is our key priority** - safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and all services will operate within the thresholds framework to safeguard and promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- 2. Early help is everyone's responsibility** - all services working with children, young people, and families have a role to play in the wellbeing of children, young people and their families
- 3. The views and influence of children and young people are crucial** in delivering and monitoring the Early Help strategy
- 4. We will offer help as early as possible** and before problems escalate.
- 5. Working with the whole family produces the best outcomes**, with all services involved with family members working together, and families only telling their 'story' once.
- 6. Families are our partners** - we will work together with families to become stronger, more resilient and better able to help themselves.
- 7. Wherever possible early help will be accessed through universal services.**
- 8. Our approach and services will be evidence based** and focused on what works for children and families
- 9. All practitioners will have a shared vision and common skills** to put the family at the heart of deciding and implementing solutions.

C. Governance and Accountability arrangements

The delivery of an effective Early Help offer is part of the approach to safeguarding, and is everyone's business. It requires an approach owned by all agencies working with children, young people and families. In Dudley, the Children and Young People's Alliance (CYPA) is an alliance between all those agencies who play a part in improving outcomes for children and young people in the borough.

Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB) also has a key role in early help, including some particular obligations set out in Working Together.

Governance of the Early Help strategy will be provided by the CYPA Board, via the CYPA Early Help Group, which is the main delivery vehicle for the implementation of the strategy. The DSCB will provide scrutiny and challenge to the CYPA Board on the effective delivery of the strategy through regular outcomes and performance monitoring progress reports.

D. The Life Chances of Dudley's Children, Young People and Families

A thorough understanding of both the population and the needs of children, young people and their families is essential to the development of appropriate and responsive early help services. We have taken a commissioning approach in developing this Early Help Strategy, seeking to respond to specific identified need in the Borough at the population level. A summary needs analysis has been compiled from Dudley's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2014), and we will be undertaking a more detailed analysis of need in each of the five Clusters.

We know that life chances for some children, young people and families in Dudley are less good than for others as a result of economic, social and health inequalities. There are relatively high levels of deprivation in Dudley, largely concentrated in particular areas of the borough, with child poverty slightly higher than the national rate.

Health inequalities are largely associated with deprivation levels, particularly around low breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates and childhood obesity rates. The rate of Children in Need in Dudley is higher than the national average, as is the rate of children and young people in care, suggesting that targeted services at the early help level are not yet as effective as they could be. In addition, demand for specialist services is generally much higher in localities with high deprivation.

E. The Dudley Deal for Children and Young People

The Dudley Deal for Children and Young People is being developed through the CYP Alliance. The Dudley Deal for Children and Young People sets out a proposition around the respective responsibilities of both the agencies forming the CYP Alliance, and children and young people in **Dudley in achieving the vision that Dudley is a place where children and young people thrive.**

Making the "Dudley Deal" a reality will be a key focus for the CYP Alliance and will involve a major participation exercise to both increase the voice and influence of young people in Dudley, and to ensure commitment from all partners to work to common priorities and truly engage with children, young people and families.

F. Operating consistent thresholds for accessing Early Help

The provision of early help services should form part of a continuum of help and support to respond to the different levels of need of individual children and families (Working Together, 2015).

Children and family needs will change and at different times in their lives they may require different levels of involvement from a range of universal, targeted and specialist services. In Dudley, the provision of targeted early help services forms part of a continuum of help and support designed to respond to different levels of need that children and families experience.

It is critical that all professionals are aware of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and protecting children, and that they understand and consistently apply agreed thresholds and approaches to effective identification, assessment and planning. It is also important that professionals work together effectively to ensure that families have a smooth transition where they need to “step up” or “step down” between services and that all services supporting the family remain focused on the needs of the child.

What we are doing

- Dudley’s Thresholds Document has been endorsed by Dudley Safeguarding Children’s Board (DSCB). As required by the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015, it will include the process for early help assessment, along with Dudley’s four Levels of Need and thresholds for each service response, and clear pathways and step up and step down arrangements between Universal services, targeted Early Help (Universal Plus and Co-ordinated Help), and statutory intervention.
- A number of versions of the document will be required up until April 2016 to ensure continued clarity as arrangements move towards the full implementation of Dudley’s new Early Help operating model, Single Point of Access and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub by that date.
- The Threshold Document will have the full endorsement of both DSCB and the CYPA, followed by a programme of training to embed a common understanding of service thresholds and ensure the risk to children is identified early and acted upon. We will ensure that staff confidence in its application develops along with greater consistency in practice. [Threshold Link:](#)

G. Identifying children and families who would benefit from early help.

Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation through to teenage years (Working Together, 2015).

The early identification of children and families who would benefit from early help and a co-ordinated early response to prevent abuse and neglect of children and young people is central to our early help offer.

What we are doing

- We are developing a Single Point of Access (SPA) for all enquiries about a child, with a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) undertaking information gathering and analysis where more information is required to accurately understand risk. These arrangements will provide the opportunity to share information between agencies about individual children and families about whom there is a concern, and identify children who are suffering or likely to suffer harm.
- Access to child protection social work expertise for those professionals providing Early Help and at the boundary of statutory social care will also be available from the SPA.
- The SPA and MASH will enable the effective sharing of information, risk assessment and decision making about the level of help required to support children and families - leading to a prompt offer of early help or assessment of needs where the threshold for specialist services has not been met.

H. Providing effective arrangements for assessing the needs of children who may benefit from Early Help

Local agencies should work together to put processes in place for the effective assessment of the needs of individual children who may benefit from early help services (Working Together, 2015).

A major service transformation is currently underway to re-design services and the way they are accessed, to ensure that targeted Early Help services are accessed appropriately and as part of a safeguarding continuum. The new model is set out in Section I. The Early Help Cluster Operating Model.

What we are doing

- **Developing a single Early Help Assessment with partners.**

We are developing a new single Early Help Assessment in full collaboration with partner agencies, together with a new Family Support Plan. This will replace the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The new assessment will include collection of information about all relevant family members as part of our whole family approach, whilst retaining a focus on the child. Alongside this will be appropriate IT and a portal for inputting assessments across the Partnership, enabling improved collection of data and evidence of improved outcomes. Training and support will be required to ensure the effective use of the Assessment by all agencies. The Early Help Assessment will be adopted by all partners across each of the Clusters.

- **Establishing arrangements:**

- to offer support and advice where required to professionals around completing an Early Help Assessment, arranging a Team Around the Family (TAF), and developing outcome focused family support plans and their review.
- to ensure that an appropriate Lead Practitioner is identified to coordinate the support and act as the key point of contact for the family and professionals where a child does not require a social work intervention but there are additional needs to be met through more than one agency.

I. The Early Help Cluster Operating Model

The overarching aim of Dudley's Early Help operating model is to enable effective, well co-ordinated early help for those who need it, and a seamless journey of support for children, young people and their families across all levels of need. We are developing Early Help Clusters, offering:

1. Early Help Co-ordinated in local Clusters: There will be five Clusters across the borough, each one organised around universal services including schools, with a Family Centre at its heart. Through Clusters, children's services and key partners aim to provide a local well integrated model of support for children and families. Clusters will have a range of co-ordinated community services meeting different levels of need and delivered by providers from across the public, voluntary and private sectors. A Family Centre in each Cluster will have professionals from a range of agencies co-located and working closely together around a child's or family's needs.

We want to build the capacity and resilience of communities so as many families as possible can thrive using universal services. We will work in co-production with partners from the voluntary and community sector and local communities to design and deliver services that meet needs in each Cluster. We know that people using services, their families and their neighbours have much to contribute, and see them as valuable partners in the co-delivery of services, with volunteers from the community having a key role in ensuring the Clusters flourish.

2. Early Help based around universal provision: Universal services are often best placed to provide Early Help as part of their day to day working with families, maintaining their existing relationship with them. Where families need to be referred to targeted early help services, the continued involvement of universal services can really help, so that children and families maintain the relationship with the services they will be continuing to use. This enables families to receive seamless support and remain engaged when 'stepping down' from targeted and specialist services.

3. Early Help designed around the whole family: A Think Family approach is a feature of the operating model - working with the whole family, and ensuring all services working with families work effectively together to co-ordinate the support they provide. We know this is particularly valuable where parents have needs relating to housing, mental health problems, substance misuse and domestic violence.

4. Early Help linked to robust arrangements for reporting safeguarding concerns: There are robust arrangements to identify children who are suffering or likely to suffer harm, and access to child protection social work expertise for professionals providing Early Help.

Access to Early Help in the five Clusters will be fully integrated with the Single Point of Access (SPA) and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to ensure children and young people are safeguarded at all times. Each Cluster Hub also has an Early Help Social Worker and an Early Help Advisor who are responsible for the facilitation and co-ordination of Early Help in each Cluster.

Targeted Early Help services delivered from the Clusters

These will include:

- Family Solutions Early Help services
 - Family Information Service
 - Family Centre offer
 - Childcare
 - Family Support Workers
 - Youth Work
 - Family Keyworker Service
- Volunteer delivered services
- Health Visiting Service
- Midwifery Service
- Primary Emotional Health & Wellbeing Service (including School Health Advisors)
- Birth Registration Service
- Open access community services delivered by voluntary organisations.

The Troubled Families Programme

The Cluster model will incorporate the Troubled Families programme, delivered through the Family Keyworker Service. Phase 2 of Dudley's Troubled Families programme includes a focus on families with a child on the edge of care, and this focus will now be taken forward in an integrated way with needs addressed regardless of whether families are identified through referral or through meeting Troubled Family criteria. This "mainstreaming" of the multi-agency Troubled Families approach is in line with our whole family approach and will offer the opportunity for all families to access support to address additional needs such as those relating to housing, mental health problems, substance misuse and domestic violence.

The co-location of all these services will support close and effective working and in particular, the integration of 0-5 year old public health services with early years services will support the provision of a seamless service for families with young children.

Key features of Dudley's Early Help operating model

- Local and co-ordinated support in Clusters - accessible for local communities
- Early Help based around universal provision wherever possible, with targeted support and access to specialist services when needed.
- Designed around the whole family and adopting a Think Family perspective.
- Linked to robust arrangements for reporting safeguarding concerns.
- A child and family centred pathway clearly identifies the routes in and out of services and ensures a seamless experience for families.
- Integrated working between the range of local agencies with a role to play in safeguarding and early help, with good communication, contact and information sharing in co-located settings – enabling a 'no wrong door' approach.
- All services and agencies use shared processes to identify children and young people who have additional needs and who need support.
- Criteria for accessing services are clear and well understood by all professionals.
- Early Help Assessments are good quality, include the whole family, result in outcome-focused plans and are adopted by all partners. There are clear processes in place and access to skilled advice to support the effective assessment of the needs of children and families who may benefit from early help services.
- Universal services, including those delivered by the VCS, are supported to deliver Early Help by Early Help Champions.
- Each family, child or young person offered co-ordinated early help is allocated a lead professional who will ensure co-ordination at the point of delivery with all agencies working together through a Team Around the Family (TAF), particularly where there are multiple problems such as domestic violence, mental health issues, housing problems and substance misuse.
- Staff undertaking the lead practitioner role have good access to support and advice.
- Evidence based service models and restorative practice approaches are adopted.
- Strengths based approaches help families and communities to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to manage challenges and develop their capacity for change.
- The impact of services and interventions on families' lives is measured.
- Each Cluster is designed around a needs analysis detailing the local population, needs, issues and pressures, enabling resources and services to be based on an individual profile of local need.
- A single outcomes framework is used across all agencies working in both the Clusters and the borough wide services, so all partners contribute to a common set of priorities and together improve outcomes for families and the performance of services.

What we are doing

Some particular areas of focus alongside developing the Early Help Cluster operating model will be to:

a) Work with schools to provide early help approaches to support students to be ready to learn.

All local schools are community assets and have an important contribution to make to the well being of the children and young people in Dudley. We will work with schools to maximise the delivery of early help services through schools, such as direct parenting work in the home, and behaviour management to support learning and behaviour in school.

b) Address the emotional health and wellbeing needs of children and young people

Emotional health and wellbeing is a critical element of early help and will be embedded into the work of all services. The new School Health Advisor contract will ensure that all schools are supported by their school health advisor (SHA) to develop and embed an ethos and curriculum that is conducive to the development of resilient, confident children and young people. For pupils with more complex emotional health needs there will be a central team of 3 specialist SHAs who will work jointly with schools, their own SHA and other relevant professionals to plan an individual programme of support and development.

c) Improve access to Specialist Mental Health Services

Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group is currently undertaking an all age service redesign of acute mental health services as part of a CAMHS transformation plan. This sets out how the Early Help approach in Dudley is integral to the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing in all people. It is therefore crucial that, locally, there is an integrated, partnership approach to defining and meeting needs, with a wide range of professionals involved across universal, targeted and specialist services, to:

- promote mental wellbeing and resilience, by supporting children and young people and their families to adopt and maintain behaviours that support good mental health;
- prevent mental health problems from arising, by taking early action with children, young people and parents who may be at greater risk;
- identify need early, so that children and young people are supported as soon as problems arise to prevent more serious problems developing wherever possible.

The purpose of this re-design is to better serve GP registered populations, rectify gaps in current service provision, and increase the range of therapeutic options available to patients of all ages. The new design will provide an all age service that will holistically assess the needs of individuals and their families. The criteria for referral will be inclusive (i.e. both mental health problems/illness and emotional health problems), with no exclusions. This way of working allows for new roles and ways of working to be developed. The emphasis will be on enabling people to remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible, either by preventing deterioration or illness, or by ensuring recovery from illness and proactive management of long term conditions.

d) Troubled Families

Service re-design includes a specific focus on the delivery and "mainstreaming" of Dudley's Troubled Families programme, which will be delivered from the Clusters through a new Family Keyworker Service. This service is being developed to provide an intensive whole family service to families with a child on the edge of care, whether identified through referral or through meeting Troubled Family criteria.

e) Increase take up and quality of targeted education entitlement for two year olds (Time for Twos).

An ambitious target of 85% placement take-up by December 2015 has been set (from 54% as of 31st March 2015). To meet this, we will work with partners in the voluntary, community and private sectors to develop placement sufficiency, particularly in targeted areas of Dudley North, Dudley Central and Halesowen. We will also work to deliver the increased 30 hour entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds.

In addition, we will increase the quality of provision, and our aim is that all children access childcare provision with a Good or Outstanding Ofsted rating. We will work to enrich learning environments at home and in early years settings and to narrow the attainment gap and enable all children to be ready to learn when they enter reception.

J. Giving Voice to Children and Young People

We are working to develop ways to support the engagement and participation of children, young people and families in services. This needs to operate effectively at both a strategic and an individual level:

- The CYP Alliance is working to develop a model of accountability between the Alliance and Dudley children and young people, that will support real voice and influence in priority setting, service review and design and the way services are delivered.
- A strong emphasis on listening and responding to the Child's Voice will be firmly embedded in practice across Early Help. In addition, we will identify an approach, such as an evidence based outcomes tracker, for use with individual young people and families to monitor change resulting from services used against a baseline of desired outcomes identified by service users.

K. Developing the Early Help Workforce

An effective and committed workforce is critical to achieving our vision. We need to ensure there is effective training in place for professionals providing Early Help to build an assertive strengths based and solution focused workforce which supports the effective delivery of a multi-agency early help offer. We will also address workforce development around:

- Developing restorative practices to support families to become stronger, more resilient and better able to problem solve and make positive changes themselves.
- Working effectively together across the whole system to ensure that there is a coordinated approach for families, and that all services 'Think Family'.
- Ensuring a clear and consistent multi-agency understanding of the operating model and how to use it, including a consistent understanding and confident application of thresholds, and appropriate responses to different levels of need, and pathways between the different service tiers and step up and step down arrangements, and the development of skills and confidence to effectively use Early Help Assessment.
- Child Sexual Exploitation awareness raising.

L. Monitoring Outcomes and Performance

In order to measure the effectiveness of the Early Help strategy, a multi-agency Outcomes and Performance Framework is being developed to measure both changes in outcomes for children, young people and their families, and in the performance of the Early Help operating model and services. The Framework will be shared across Social Care to ensure that there is effective monitoring of the application of thresholds for services and that Early Help is integral to overall safeguarding arrangements.

The Framework will be agreed with partners, and monitored closely by the Children and Young Peoples Alliance and Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board to understand the impact of our Early Help Offer.

Appendix 1: Summary Analysis of the Needs of children and young people in Dudley.

Population and ethnicity

- A total of 75,203 children and young people aged 0 to 19 live in Dudley (National Census 2011). This is 24.5% of the total population in the area. Following a continued rise in the birth rate, there is an increasing number of children in the early years age bands, and primary school numbers have recently begun to rise and will flow through to secondary school from 2019/20.
- The proportion of children and young people from black minority ethnic groups is rising and they now represent 18.3% of the school population and 20% of 0-5 year olds. The diversity of ethnic groups has increased particularly in terms of migration from Eastern Europe. There has been a rise in the number of children for whom English is an additional language (from 10.7% in 2012 to 11.5% in 2015).

Deprivation, child poverty and family income

- 24.5% of the population (using IMD 2010) now live within the 20% most deprived areas of England compared with 22.9% in 2007. These areas are principally in a zone covering Dudley, Pensnett, Netherton and Brierley Hill, but also include parts of Coseley, Lye, Halesowen and Stourbridge.
- Child poverty has remained static in recent years, with 22.1% of dependent children in Dudley under 20 living in a household in poverty (based on low family income) - nearly one in four of all children. This is slightly higher than the equivalent national rate (20.1%) but below the West Midlands region average (22.7%). The highest levels of child poverty are clustered in a relatively small concentration of deprived localities.
- A significant proportion of children and young people live in households where no-one works. In November 2014, 5,880 people in Dudley Borough were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), equivalent to 3.0% of the working age (16-64) population. Although the claimant rate in Dudley has been on a downward trend since February 2013, it is still above the regional (2.5%) and England (1.9%) figures.
- The annual average wage for Dudley residents working full-time was £24,455 in 2013, below the national figure of £27,375.

Education, Employment and Training amongst Young People

- As at March 2015, 93.9% of academic 16 year olds were participating in education, employment or training, close to the statistical neighbour average, and 85.5% of academic 17 year olds (compared with a statistical neighbour average of 86.5%). This is a slight fall on the previous year for both ages.
- As at March 2015, 606 young people were NEET (5.5%), a reduction from 5.9% last year. This compares with 5.3% (West Midlands average) and 5.2% (statistical neighbour average). 8.9% (1,007 young people) were "not known", an increase from 6.9% the previous year, and higher than England, West Midlands and statistical neighbour averages.
- Unemployment amongst young people has fallen slightly, reaching 2,295 (6.9%) in January 2014. However, this is still higher than both the West Midlands region (5%) and England (3.9%) and as of January 2014, 545 or around a quarter of all claimants aged under 25 in the Borough had been claiming JSA for longer than a year, higher than both regional and national averages.

Health inequalities

- The infant mortality rate in Dudley is 4.5 per 1,000 live births for 2010-12, slightly higher than the national picture. Babies born in the most deprived areas of Dudley are up to six times more likely to die than those from the more affluent areas.
- Smoking in pregnancy was 14.3%, higher than the West Midlands and England averages, though with a downward trend.
- Breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates are some of the lowest in the country, although there are some signs of improvement. Rates are particularly poor in the more deprived areas of the borough, and with younger mothers.
- Primary immunisation coverage in the first year of life within Dudley was above the England average and the WHO target of 95%, and this position has been maintained over time.
- Emergency hospital admissions have risen slightly in the last year for all age groups, especially in the most deprived areas of Dudley. There is also an over representation of children from the most deprived areas attending A&E with accidental injuries.
- Childhood obesity rates are higher in Dudley than in England, at both Reception and Year 6. Again, the proportion of obese children is higher in the most deprived areas of Dudley.
- Teenage pregnancy rates in Dudley have continued their downward trend reaching 34.6 per 1,000 aged 15-17 years in 2012. However, this is still above the England and Wales average of 27.9 per 1,000.
- The proportion of 9 and 11 year olds bullied at or near their school has remained above 25% over the last 8 years.

Usage of specialist services

Looking at the usage of specialist services such as social care in the borough is not in itself a strict measure of the extent of need, as it is influenced by how thresholds for services are applied. However, we would expect an effective early help offer to reduce the usage of specialist services.

Levels and complexity of need among children, young people and their families are very high in some places within Dudley, particularly those with significant rates of child poverty. The demand for more costly intervention by specialist services such as CAMHS and social care is generally much higher in these localities.

At the same time, we know that a significant proportion of referrals made to specialist services such as social care and CAMHS turn out to be inappropriate referrals – both costly for Dudley and disempowering for families and young people.

- The rate of Children in Need in Dudley was 447.8 per 10,000 children (at 31st March 2015) which was higher than the national average of 346.4 per 10,000 children and the statistical neighbour average of 375.4 (as at 31st March 2014, latest data, Source: DfE, CIN Census, 2014).
- 392 children were made the subject of a Child Protection Plan, and 382 children were removed from their Child Protection Plan when it was judged that they were safeguarded.
- Overall, the rate of looked after children and young people in Dudley has increased in recent years, although there has been a small decrease since 31.3.14. In March 2015, there were 745 children being looked after by the Local Authority, a rate of 110.1 per 10,000 children in the population, significantly higher than the national average rate of 60 per 10,000 children. 42% of children coming into care were under 4 years of age, and 28% were between 10 and 15 years, broadly in line with the national profile.
- 4,036 domestic abuse incidents where children were members of the household were screened by the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART). This equates to a rise of 52% compared to last year, continuing the rising trend.
- The number of young people entering the criminal justice system in Dudley is well below the national average.
- There are 2,430 families across the borough eligible under Phase Two of the Troubled Families programme for targeted intervention. These families are experiencing inter-related and complex problems; on average nine serious problems exist in any one family at one time. These problems include truancy and school exclusion, worklessness, crime and anti-social behavior, mental and physical health problems. Without intervention these problems become increasingly harmful to the family and local community and represent a high financial cost to public services.