



Dudley's Early Help Strategy 2018 - 2021

Working together to help children and young people thrive



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Further information can be found at;

<https://www.dudleycpp.org.uk/copy-of-children-s-services>

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Foreword

DUDLEY'S EARLY HELP STRATEGY 2018 – 2021



Andy Gray
Chair of the Children &
Young People's Alliance
Board

Putting Children, Young People and Families first is the foundation of our Early Help Strategy. Effective Early Help support minimises the risk of problems becoming more severe and entrenched, and ensures that children and young people are supported to achieve their full potential and lead fulfilling and rewarding lives.

The Children and Young People's Alliance Board is responsible for overseeing the strategy and ensuring that its aims and key priorities are met across the partnership. This commitment for all partners will ensure that the strategy will maintain a strong, multi-agency focus and community based approach to Early Help.

At the heart of this strategy is the ambition to hear the voice of the child and place them at the centre of the support we are providing. Our aim is to develop a workforce that is committed to meeting the needs of the child through creativity, responsiveness to needs and regular reviews of progress. If we can effect change at an early stage through the use of preventative strategies we stand every chance of improving the outcomes for families living in Dudley.

We are pleased to be able to present this strategy to you and we are confident that it represents the hard work, dedication and commitment of all partners that make Early Help in Dudley such a success.

“We were not sure what Early Help was all about until we got help from a Family Support Worker. They were able to offer us support, help and advice that meant that I could focus on doing what was right for my family and not on worrying about the problems that kept cropping up.” – Parent





Part One

Setting the Scene

Part One

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Improving the lives of the children, young people and families in Dudley is at the heart of our Early Help strategy. Our first Early Help strategy has been in place for two years and over that time we have achieved a great deal. During January - April 2018 we came together as a partnership to review our progress and feedback to each other about what has gone well, and to identify what we have learned and where we need to do more. In particular, as a central part of our review, we asked the children, young people and families of Dudley what they think. We have had rich and valuable feedback which has contributed significantly to re-shaping the future direction for the next three years. This new strategy gives us the opportunity to re-set our ambition, refine our vision and set out the steps we will collectively take to make children's lives better through Early Help.

1.2 WHAT IS EARLY HELP?

Early Help has been defined in Dudley as follows:

'Early Help is taking action early and as soon as possible in order 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.'

As set out in **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015**, effective Early Help relies upon local 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 outcomes for the child.

This, in essence is what Early Help is. It is the offer from all agencies, including universal services such as schools, health partners, police, and housing, voluntary organisations and the council, working together to identify children who need help, assessing that need and offering services and approaches which will meet that need. This document sets out Dudley's continuing commitment to make the borough a better place for children, young people and their families and communities, by ensuring families get the help that they need, when they need it.

'The value has been to slow down and sometimes stop family problems that were having a negative impact on learning.'

– Deputy Head Teacher, Primary School

1.3 NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

We know that it is so much better to provide Early Help to support and promote the welfare of children and young people than to react later when problems have already developed and sometimes reached crisis. It is commonly accepted now that in order to achieve this, organisations need to work together in partnership with each other and with local communities to provide consistent, joined up support. We also know that Early Help is neither an extra or an option – as mentioned above, **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 sets out the statutory guidance which all agencies working with children and young people must follow.** Working together identified that Early Help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later and specifies this means providing help as soon as a problem emerges.

The statutory guidance is clear. Local areas are required to have a range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address needs early.

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The Early Help offer should relate to our local assessment of need. In addition to high quality support in universal settings, specific local Early Help services will include family and parenting programmes, assistance with health issues and problems relating to drugs, alcohol, domestic abuse and mental health issues.

Several policy changes have also embedded the importance of agencies working together to support children and families:

- In 2012, The Health and Social Care Act required Local Authorities to establish a Health and Wellbeing Board, to bring together local leaders in health and social care, and join up the commissioning and delivery of local services.
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability reforms, through the Children and Families Act 2014, have introduced new statutory responsibilities for joint health and local authority commissioning arrangements for these services.
- Responsibility for health commissioning for 0-5 year olds is now the responsibility of the Local Authority.

Locally, **Dudley's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-22**, overseen by the Health and Wellbeing board, has prevention and joining services up to achieve better outcomes for our communities at its core. The Health and Wellbeing board has identified three goals for 2017 - 22:

- Promoting healthy weight
- Reducing the effects of poverty
- Reducing loneliness and isolation

The Children and Young People's Alliance board members have agreed their commitment to collectively contributing to the achievement of these goals.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy reflects the **Children and Young People's Alliance Board Strategy 2017 – 2019**. The Dudley Children and Young People's Alliance Board provides overall leadership and accountability for the delivery of improved outcomes for the

children and young people of Dudley, and their effective transition to adulthood. It is the overall alliance between all those agencies who play a part in improving the outcomes for children in the borough. The Alliance is made up of the following organisations:

- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council People Directorate
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Place Directorate
- Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board
- Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group
- Schools
- Further Education
- Police
- Black Country Housing Group
- West Midlands Fire Service
- Healthwatch
- Sandwell & Dudley National Probation Service
- Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Dudley & Walsall Mental Health Trust
- Dudley Council for Voluntary Services
- Barnardos
- Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Dudley MBC

The Children and Young People's Alliance Board Strategy 2017 - 19 sets out the commitment to help every child to thrive, and Early Help is enshrined within it.

The Alliance has committed to:

- Raise children and young peoples aspirations and create opportunities for them to achieve
- Enable children and young people to have a voice
- Work with children and young people to keep them safe and healthy

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- Work with children and young people when they need extra help to ensure they get the help they need

The themes carry through to the **Dudley Safeguarding Children Board's plan**, which is focused on three priorities:

- Keeping children safe in the home, outside the home and online
- Children and young people have access to the right service at the right place at the right time
- Effective partnership working and accountability to improve safeguarding outcomes for children, young people and families.

The plan has Early Help as a clear priority, focusing on ensuring thresholds are understood, and the accessibility and impact of Early Help.

The Children and Young People's Alliance Board and the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board have jointly developed Dudley's **Neglect Strategy** which recognises that a concerted shift to prevention is required, where everyone – children, parents, communities, universal services and partner agencies – work together to help children thrive, preventing neglect before it happens and nipping early problems in the bud. The strategy is closely aligned to the Early Help priorities. The ambition is to prevent and reduce neglect. Where neglect does occur, there is early recognition and a timely and appropriate response.

These strategies are all closely aligned and are reflected in this document, which provides the strategic direction for the delivery of Early Help services, making sure that children, young people and families are identified when they need help, that the right support is provided at the right time, to prevent problems escalating further. The delivery of this strategy will be overseen by the Early Help Steering Group, which reports to the Alliance Board, and will also be monitored by the Dudley Safeguarding Children's Board.

1.4 TROUBLED FAMILIES

Nationally, the Government has recognised the value of Early Help, through the development of the Troubled Families Programme in 2011. In 2015 the expanded programme began, which retained the original focus on families with multiple high cost problems, but also would also reach out to families with a broader range of problems including those affected by domestic abuse, and younger children who need help.

Through the transformation of the Early Help offer in Dudley, the Early Help Steering Group has main-streamed the national Troubled Families programme into a system that focuses on:

- an integrated whole family approach to support families with a range of multiple needs
- helping to reduce demand for reactive services

In Dudley, we call this approach **Strengthening Families**. Dudley's transformation of the Early Help offer is now demonstrating that family's lives are being turned around with clear evidence of measurable outcomes.

Key workers across the range of services that support children and families ensure that assessment and support plans focus on areas of need that prevent families from achieving their full potential.

Dudley's Strengthening Families Outcome Plan enables key workers to benchmark family progress against a range of indicators including school attendance, domestic abuse, mental health, substance misuse, involvement in crime and child protection/child in need status.

The current priorities from the Dudley Strengthening Families Strategic Plan are to:

- further develop an enhanced understanding of the family experience of transformed services through clear informal and formal child and family contributions;

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- enable a wider range of partner agencies, including health and the community and voluntary sector, to contribute to the programme, led through the governance of the Early Help Steering Group;
- use the reviewed Early Help Strategy to drive Dudley's condensed Early Help Assessment increasing the incidence of the assessment and planning process to a wider range of partners;
- ensure the culture of whole family working, through an outcome focussed assessment and planning process is embedded across the workforce that supports children and families;
- embed the newly developed workforce development opportunities across the workforce that supports children and families;
- ensure the delivery structures and process enable the maximum number of children and families benefit from being part of the main-streamed programme through the attachment and payment by results process.

Dudley has made significant progress through the original Early Help Strategy (2015 - 2017) in integrating and transforming public services. Early Help support services will continue to transform through to 2020 when the Department for Communities and Local Government bring the national programme to a conclusion. Dudley is firmly focussed on ensuring the legacy of the programme's outcome focussed service transformation continues to improve the lives of children and families beyond 2020.

1.5 OUR VISION

Dudley's Children and Young People's Alliance, working with the Youth Council, has identified the vision:

'A place where children and young people thrive'

By asking parents, carers and young people through our review what it means to them to thrive, and by reflecting the principles set out in the Alliance Board Strategy, we have been able to expand on what this vision really means for us in Dudley.

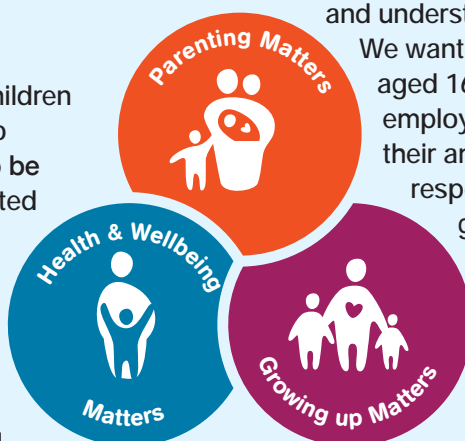
OUR VISION MEANS

1. Parenting Matters

We want babies and young children to have secure attachments to **capable, confident parents**, to be warm, well fed and be supported in their development, ready to start school.

2. Growing up Matters

We want primary school children to develop friendships and enjoy learning and play, to reach their full potential, and be ready for secondary school. In secondary school we want engaged, emotionally resilient adolescents, achieving their ambitions and setting goals for the future,



and understanding how to get there.

We want engaged young people aged 16+ who are in education, employment or training that matches their ambition and ability, who have respectful relationships and good friends, have skills for independence, and able to see the future positively.

3. Health and Wellbeing Matters

We want all our children and young people to be healthy and safe from all forms of harm including exploitation and bullying, to have secure warm attachments to people who care for them and look out for them, and are enabled to make good choices in their lives.

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This vision places children and young people at the heart of our work across the partnership in Dudley. In addition to the over-arching strategies outlined above, this strategy sits alongside a range of approaches across the partnership aimed at early intervention and prevention.

The statutory guidance, 'Working together to safeguard children 2015' requires us to have these early identification and intervention arrangements in place. All agencies who have contact with children, including universal services and adult services, are required to understand their role in identifying emerging problems, and to share information to support early identification and assessment, in order for children to thrive. This strategy sets out how we are supporting agencies across the partnership to do this – not just because the statutory guidance sets out the imperative, but also because it is the right thing to do for our children and young people – to enable them to thrive.

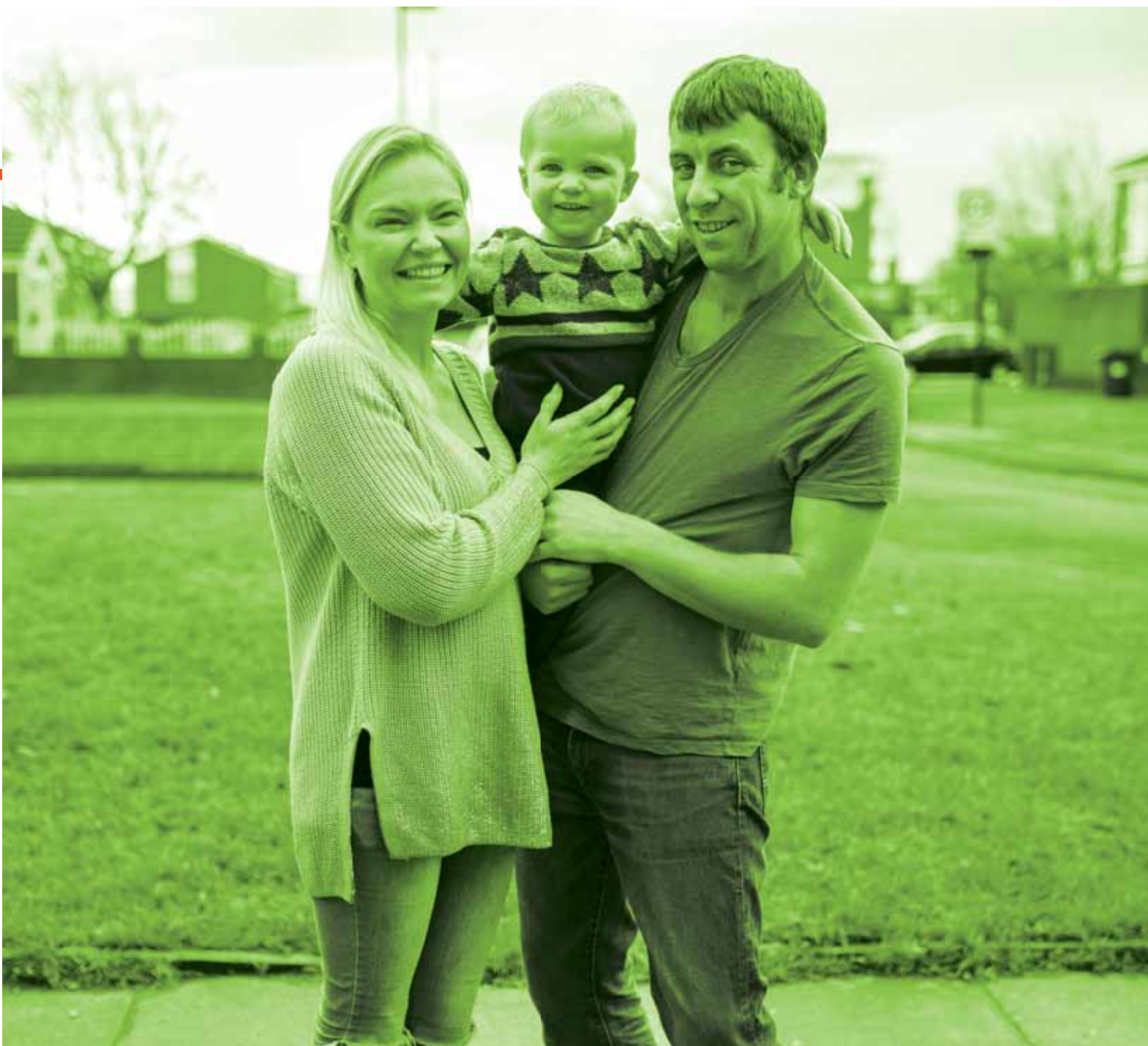
1.6 RESOURCING AND FINANCE

As the lead agency for Early Help, the Local Authority has identified funding to support the delivery of the Children and Young People's Early Help Strategy. This is provided from a number of budget areas. For 2018/19 funding the budget position is as follows:

- As part of the People Services Directorate (Children's Services) the Council fund the Family Solutions division at £9.4m. The service has undergone a restructure to achieve the £1.4m Medium Term Financial Strategy savings, as approved by Cabinet in October 2015.
- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is a Department for Education ring-fenced grant to provide services to pupils in schools. The DSG funds £1.4m to support the Family Solutions division with Early Years Foundation Stage, Counselling, Education Investigation Service and targeted Special Educational Needs supported by the Connexions Service.



- The Public Health Grant is a Department for Health ring fenced grant. The grant contributes £0.355m to support initiatives within Family Solutions and Early Help.
- Troubled Families Grant is a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) grant and for 2017/18 the funding received was £0.911m inclusive of Payment by Results. The allocation for 2018/19 is yet to be confirmed, the DCLG will provide the allocation upon satisfactory completion of targets and the likelihood is that Dudley will receive a similar allocation for 2018/19. The grant will no longer be available from 2020, therefore, associated activity for Family Solutions and Early Help will require main-streaming prior to this.
- The Youth Justice Board (YJB) provides grant funding to Dudley in respect of the Youth Offending Service, which for 2017/18 was £0.360m, the 2018/19 grant has not been confirmed by the YJB, as they are currently undertaking a review of funding for Local Authorities.



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Reviewing the progress and impact of Early Help in Dudley

Part Two

In 2015 an ambitious plan set out what should be achieved in Dudley over the following two years. This review set out to measure what has been achieved and set the strategic priorities for the next phase.

In 2017 alone, over 1500 children, young people and their families had an Early Help assessment. Over 700 families now receive support at any one time. This is a significant achievement for Dudley.

2.1 ESTABLISHING THE BUILDING BLOCKS

In practical terms our phase 1 strategy set out how we would establish the foundations for the Early Help offer and we have achieved the following:

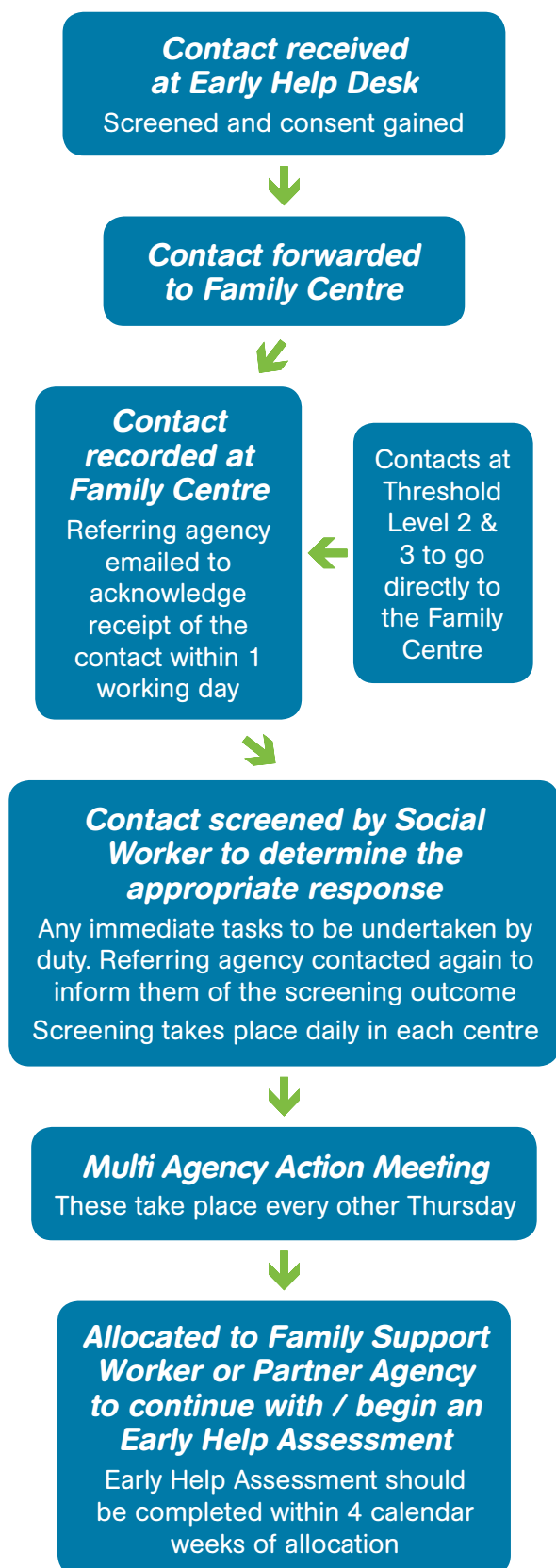
- Cluster boundary areas have been established and regular partnership meetings take place in family centres to discuss and agree plans for children, young people and families in local cluster areas. These meetings are working well. A list of the Family Centres and their contact details can be obtained from; <https://www.dudleycpp.org.uk/copy-of-children-s-services>
- The Early Help Assessment has been reviewed and simplified and is being re-launched together with this phase 2 strategy. <http://safeguarding.dudley.gov.uk/child/work-with-children-young-people/dudley-early-help-strategy/>
- The Dudley thresholds document has been implemented and thresholds for Early Help are already better understood. The document has been reviewed and will be relaunched together with this phase 2 strategy. <http://safeguarding.dudley.gov.uk/child/work-with-children-young-people/safeguarding-children-procedures/>
- The process to access Early Help has been established.

- A single point of access has been established within the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).
- Work is in progress to merge the Dudley Family Information Directory with Dudley Community Directory.
- Step up and step down arrangements between different levels of service are better understood.
- Early Help enablers have been established in every cluster and play a key part in supporting the delivery of the Early Help offer.
- A systematic review of commissioned services has commenced to ensure that provision is aligned with the needs of children and families in Dudley and supports. This includes piloting new delivery models and utilising commissioning arrangements to encourage greater innovation and collaboration between adult and children's provision as part of our 'think family' approach.
- The NSPCCs Graded Care Profile been adopted as the tool to support families and practitioners understand and identify neglect in a timely manner. The tool helps identify anything that's putting a child at risk of harm, and identifies this risk as early as possible so we can get them the right help. Almost 300 multi-agency staff have been trained in the tool and it is embedded within the Early Help Assessment.



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Dudley Early Help Contact Process



How is the Early Help offer working in practice?

We have established the five clusters which bring together a range of universal and targeted Early Help services in each local area, including schools and services provided by the voluntary and community sector. The five Family Centres sit within the heart of each of the clusters. Multi Agency Action meetings are regularly taking place every 10 working days in all of our Family Centres.

There is a good level of partnership buy in but there is still a need to develop stronger relationships with partners in some of our areas. Attendance and feedback from the meetings is being monitored via the Early Help Steering Group. The Early Help Assessment has become more and more widely used across the partnership both internally within Family Solutions and within key partner agencies such as Education and Police. We are building up a strong evidence base of assessment audits which are being carried out on a regular basis by our Early Help Enablers. Initial findings are highlighting areas of both positive practice and that which needs developing but working in conjunction with the Centre for Professional Practice means that we are able to identify areas of concern and rectify issues through a robust training offer.

The Early Help Enablers role has been refined and they are now a fundamental part of the Early Help process and a key link to partner agencies.

Getting these building blocks in place means there is increasing awareness and understanding of Early Help, and more families are accessing support at a more useful time in their lives.

How do we know it is working?

As part of our quality assurance process, Early Help practice is subject to scrutiny through a rigorous audit cycle. We recognise that we are making good progress in increasing the number of Early Help assessments, but our audit process is telling us that the quality of our Early Help assessments, plans and service delivery is variable, and therefore the impact we are having on children, young people and their families is

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also variable. Whilst an improving picture, thresholds are not consistently understood. Early Help enablers audit all Early Help assessments that are completed across the whole partnership. Feedback is collated and fed back to practitioners to support learning and development. We have also implemented a monthly case file audit process whereby managers undertake a full case file audit on a sample of cases that sit within Early Help. Where practice improvement is needed, support is provided for this, and good practice is shared across the workforce. This process is working well alongside the Centre for Professional Practice and is informing a robust training and development plan which is being rolled out to staff.

We have made it our business to ensure we know what children, young people and families are telling us about the difference Early Help makes, and what we need to do differently. We will continue to seek imaginative ways to gather feedback and to adapt our responses in light of it.

2.2 TARGETING EARLY HELP - WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT DUDLEY CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES?

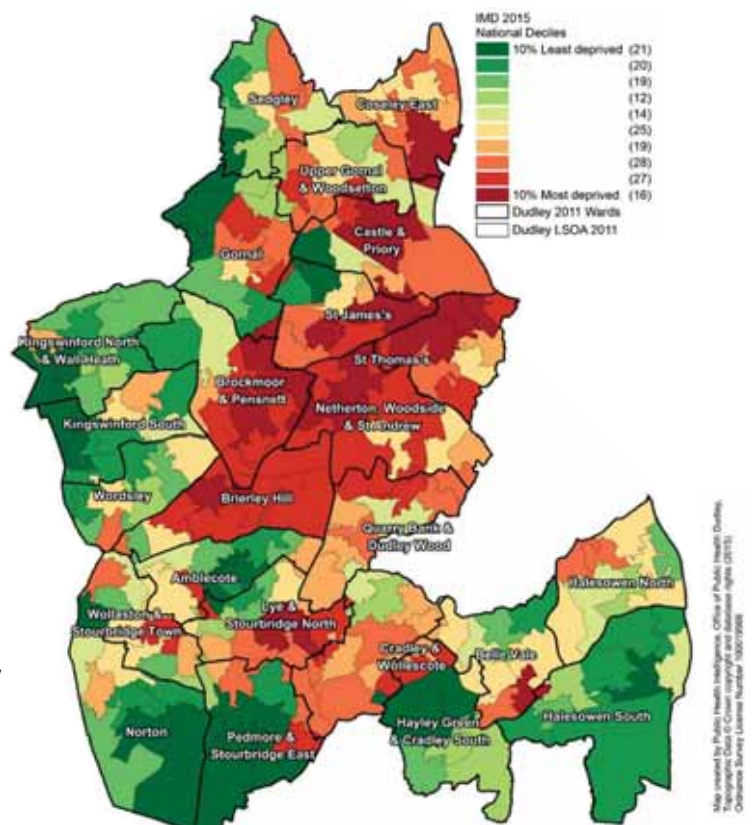
A greater proportion of the population in Dudley Central have started an Early Help Assessment, when compared to other areas within the borough. This appears to be reflective of the higher levels of need within the area, which is more deprived and has a younger population, with more lone parents and dependent children, than other areas in the Borough. Additionally, Halesowen and Stourbridge have the lowest proportion of cases, which backs up the message that resources are being targeted into areas of highest need.

➔ In the first year of reporting up to February 2018, 1,817 children (approximately 0.5% of the population) had an Early Help assessment started.

- ➔ Numbers of open allocated cases are rising. For example, between September 2017 when data collection started and March 2018 the numbers rose from 685 to 790.
- ➔ Referral information from October 2017 – February 2018 indicates that after the Local Authority, schools make the most referrals, which would be expected. Levels of referrals across all agencies may also highlight the need to ensure all agencies know about Early Help and how the offer works.

Data and performance reporting for Early Help is currently in its infancy, with initial focus on referral information, numbers of EHAs started and caseload information largely focused on Family Centres. Headline information is encouraging, but there is more to do to ensure all agencies are aware of the Early Help offer, what they should do when emerging needs are evident, and how to target resources effectively.

Figure 1: Index of multiple deprivation 2015



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Target Groups for Early Help in Dudley

Through our Joint Strategic Needs analysis in Dudley we have identified some key issues we need to address with our children, young people and families. We know, for example, that between the ages of 5 and 11, obesity increases in Dudley. Almost a quarter (23%) of young people in Dudley live in poverty. One in ten children aged 9 – 11, and four in ten young people at college never or rarely feel good about themselves. Proportionately, children from lower income groups are doing less well at school – 23% of pupils eligible for free school meals get five or more A* - C at GCSE compared to 54% not eligible for free school meals.

The following list contains examples of the types of difficulties being faced by the children and young people and families of Dudley, and we believe that early identification, assessment and action can lead to those difficulties being reduced, and we can prevent escalation to more serious difficulties:

- Children who are obese or at risk of obesity
- Children living in poverty or in low income families
- Children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation
- Children at risk of neglect
- Children who have mental health issues including low self-esteem, or parents with mental health issues
- Children at risk through issues related to the internet

This list is not exhaustive but links to our local needs assessment and priorities.

It is important that to ensure the right support is identified at the right time for any child or young person experiencing difficulties that a good assessment of need is undertaken as early as possible to prevent needs escalating.

2.3 WHAT HAVE PARENTS, CARERS, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US?

The good news is that children, young people and their families were overwhelmingly positive about Early Help.

(Early Help has)... ‘been the bridge between me and the school so now relationships are much better.’ – Parent

Positive themes for Children, young people and parents have been:

- The way Early Help is offered and delivered is as important as what is offered and delivered
- The importance of people really listening and having someone respectful and non-judgemental to talk things through with
- Parents, young people and children value feeling empowered to help themselves and to gain confidence to overcome their difficulties
- The importance of help offered by people in places where children, young people and families already go



My Early Help support worker... ‘helps me with my behaviour. She listens to me – and doesn’t shout at me.’ – Child aged 11

Early Help has... ‘Allowed me to talk about personal things. A fast response to my problems.’ – Young person with disabilities

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- The coordination of professionals through Early Help so as not to need to repeat the story
- Consistent support workers who do what they say they are going to do, are dependable and don't give up
- The value of being offered strategies and ways to respond to difficult situations
- Support when you need it most to stop things getting worse
- Practical help
- Children and young people value being helped to understand their emotions and being supported practically to manage them
- Parenting groups and activities bringing families together are great for making parents know they are not alone

'Last time I used the website it was not up to date and there were not any activities listed. I ended up having to make three phone calls, one to a central service who referred me to a local family centre who then referred me on to another centre. I was only trying to find a local stay and play session as my health visitor had advised me that being around other children would help my child's speech. A less confident parent may have found having to make three phone calls daunting and it may have put them off accessing services.'

– Lone Parent

Need.... 'response time quicker at crisis point... Family made calls early but went around in circles' – Parent

'When initially offered Early Help...? At first I was worried about it and thought it was social services. I've been all through that before, so at first it took some time to help me to understand the difference – this part is important.' – Lone Parent

Even better if....

- Families did not have to wait so long for help
- The offer of Early Help is made really clear so that families don't worry that their children will be removed and that this is not social care
- Family support workers could stay involved longer
- Families could be brought together for wider reasons than parenting classes
- All children who need it could be offered it
- Up to date information about services could be readily available to families online
- Earlier support and earlier diagnosis for children who have special needs
- All professionals fully understand the thresholds so that families don't end up being passed around agencies slipping between all the levels of need and not getting help

'I am not a person. I am number 3.5 on a threshold – too complex for Early Help, and not complex enough for a social worker. I thought every child was supposed to matter.'

– Parent of a child with disabilities



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2.4 WHAT HAVE OUR PARTNERS TOLD US?

The good news is that partners who fed back to us were overwhelmingly positive about the impact and benefits of Early Help, and the support they receive to deliver the offer.



'Early Help is A key component of early intervention to support CYPF to possibly prevent further deterioration and escalation to children' – Dudley School Nurse

Positive themes for partners have been:

- The role of the Early Help Enabler is invaluable
- Early Help Assessments and delivery plans work well to support families – the approach works
- Partnership meetings offer wider access to partners and services, and access to services is quicker
- It is an empowering process for families
- Shared decision-making leads to better decisions and outcomes
- Families don't have to keep repeating their stories
- Families find it a helpful and non-judgemental process
- Families really appreciate a 'go to' who helps them with coordinating support
- Early Help does stop problems and issues escalating and stops referrals to higher threshold services

Even better if....

- The vision and commitments to children, young people and families is articulated and communicated even more clearly and delivered on the ground
- All agencies become involved and contributing to Early Help – clear information is needed across the partnership about Early Help
- More multi agency communication and training were available to ensure everyone understands Early Help and can contribute to the delivery of the offer
- More practical help in place in the form of a comprehensive service directory and for issues such as consent to be clarified
- All those offering Early Help have the skills needed to gain the buy in from families from the outset.
- The response to Early Help needs were more swift at times
- Better communication about what works and the impact of Early Help

'Undoubtedly I have found the Early Help Enablers support the most important element of the Early Help Offer. It has enabled me to feel confident and supported me to be able to best support the children and families I work with. She has ensured all the relevant information around the family is available and enabled partnership working, advising me on areas that I have not had experience with before' – Teacher, Specialist Early Years' Service



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'A Year 5 Primary School boy... The assessment enabled the school to get a clear picture of the whole family and their individual needs... we have been able to access a wider range of resources, agencies and professionals, which the school on its own does not always have access to. By all professionals working together we have been able to address all of the family's needs not just the child's. Regular reviews are helpful so progress can be seen and measured. As a result.... The child is happy in school and learning is good, child is confident in class and with adults. The child feels that school is safe environment and he is listened to.'

– SENCO, Primary School



'One extended family had been slowly falling apart. It peaked when a domestic violence incident one morning resulted in police involvement. An Early Help Assessment then follow up from a family support worker helped to steer the family in the right direction. The openness the family showed me when writing the Early Help Assessment built strong relationships between us.'

– Deputy Head, Dudley Primary School



"Early Help can really support Families when there is a need. The admin is difficult to fit into my already busy work load but I do see the benefits and I am getting better at completing the Assessments."

– Dudley Health Visitor



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'By addressing the needs of the whole family, I strongly feel that the child is then empowered and enabled to access learning. Ensuring that a child's holistic needs are being met; emotional, social and physical, by supporting the family, gives children the best life chances and ability to develop and progress.' – Teacher, Specialist Early Years' Service

'Early Help has worked well with all the families as it provides an answer. Families often want and need help but do not know where to turn to. We have seen Early Help as that lifeline some families need, be this as an ongoing process or one arrow of direction that stopped a potential future problem.' – Deputy Head, Primary School

'The Early Help process works well when parents have asked for help and support, and are open to engage with professionals' – Dudley School Nurse

'Parents feel the school are supporting them and not working against them. Parents feel they can ask for help without being judged which I feel enables parents to be honest with us.' – Primary School

Professionals also fed back their own understanding from listening to children young people and families about what they need from Early Help:

- a. Young people want to be 'worked with' not 'done to'. There was a great emphasis on the importance of shared values and attitudes of everyone who works with children and young people and their families.
- b. Allocation of staff within Early Help to families, young people and children needs to be matched with skills and experience – including lead professionals having knowledge and experience of the age of child being supported, and knowledge of SEN and disability for those with special needs.
- c. There is a need to broaden the knowledge of the whole workforce around SEND.
- d. Young people and families need us to have collective understanding of 'the basics' including thresholds and how they are applied and how they can expect to be communicated with.
- e. Children, young people and families would welcome standard Early Help Information for children, young people, families and partnership.
- f. Children, young people and families can still fear that Early Help means a pathway to statutory social care – and this is a barrier.
- g. Consent issues need to be resolved.
- h. Children young people and families would like professionals working with them to know what provision is available.

Part Two

Overall, our review has shown us that we have work to do in four main areas:

1. Leadership, Vision and Drive

- The vision for Early Help and what we hope to achieve for our children and young people isn't as embedded as it needs to be
- Leadership is vital across all agencies to ensure everyone 'buys in' and collaborates with this agenda, to ensure that every child who needs help early, is offered it.
- Need to make sure all our communications are right and engaging around Early Help
- Too much reliance on one or two key leaders – and a perception that Early Help is 'the council'
- We need a better communication platform to get the messages about Early Help to everyone.
- We need to continue to continue to develop integrated commissioning arrangements across Early Help with a focus on shifting service delivery models from reactive to proactive and preventative

4. Quality and Impact

- We will need to give more focus to the quality and consistency of Early Help assessments, planning and services for children and families
- We will need to ensure Early Help is timely and that support offered matches assessed needs
- We will need to work to ensure children with special educational needs have relevant support from professionals who understand their needs
- There is further work to do to continue to develop data collection mechanisms, to further support smarter targeting of resources going forward

2. Workforce

- There is still a lack of understanding/awareness of Early Help amongst staff/partners, and with families, so the offer and delivery of help to children & families is not consistent
- Our training offer is not well enough developed – especially for lead professionals, and the new assessment, how the offer works/the process and overcoming resistant families, helping families trust the process
- There are professional boundary issues to overcome – we don't know what each other does, and not everyone working with children and young people thinks that Early Help is really their job
- More work needed to be sure we can always identify the right lead professional, particularly children with disabilities, ensuring this is needs led

3. Support and Practicalities

- We will need keep working on a shared common language and use the revised threshold guidance to understand when Early Help should be offered
- We will need to ensure the process for early help is clear and understood and used by all relevant agencies
- Issues regarding consent will need to be resolved
- Families and professionals want to know more about what is available across all the services and would welcome a comprehensive service directory
- Professionals completing the assessment can feel isolated and more support would help
- Should link more with pre natal work to ensure Early Help needs are identified really early
- We will need to consider how Early Help is resourced and supported, and to ensure there is sufficient resource across Dudley to match needs
- Simple information leaflets need to be available to children, young people and families to ensure they know what Early Help is (and is not)



Part Three

Our Pledge

Part Three

Following our review and taking note in particular of what children, young people and families have told us, we have responded by developing the following pledge:

Our Pledge

WE WILL MAKE EVERY CONTACT COUNT

The first conversation is often really important and we understand the importance of handling this well. Whoever is chosen to be the person the child, young person or carer talks to, is the one who has the responsibility to make sure the response is a helpful one.

WE WILL LISTEN TO YOU AND NOT JUDGE YOU

We will show you we are listening and not judging you. We will care about the issues you share and will do our best to help

WE WILL 'WORK WITH' YOU – AND NOT 'DO TO YOU'

We will not tell you what to do. We understand you know yourself and your family best. We will enable you to help yourself and won't make you feel 'done to'.

WE WILL GIVE YOU ONE POINT OF CONTACT

We will work with you to identify a lead professional. That may be the person who first understands you need help, or it may be someone better placed to help you, but there will be one point of contact. This person will be your first point of contact who will help make sure the right support is in place.

OUR ASSESSMENTS WILL BE UNCOMPLICATED AND ROBUST

We will make sure we understand your situation and will write it down. We will share it with you to make sure you agree. We will talk to family members and sometimes other professionals with your agreement to make sure we have understood your situation.

WE WILL TAKE CARE OF YOUR INFORMATION

We will look after your personal information and make sure you give us consent before we share it. We will only share it without your agreement if we feel a child or young person is at risk and the law says we must share it for safeguarding reasons

WE WON'T 'PASS THE BUCK'

We will help you at the point of enquiry and won't pass you to someone else until we know they will help you. We will do our best to draw in the support needed rather than just refer you on, not knowing whether help will follow.

Children and Young People's Alliance Board



Part Four

Delivering our vision and our pledge.

Priorities and next steps

Part Four



By assessing our progress, and listening to families, our next steps as a partnership have become much clearer. (See Appendix A)

We have five key priorities:

PRIORITY 1 **DELIVERING OUR VISION**

We have further developed our vision with the participation of children, young people and families to make it really clear in Dudley that we know what it means to thrive. Together, across our partnership, we will now work to ensure this vision is clear to all, so we can all work together with a sense of shared purpose and endeavour, the direction we are taking and have collective goals which we will work towards to better support our children and young people. Some of these things are very fundamental to our success, and so we need to address these together and with some urgency. Leaders, managers and practitioners will take responsibility to share the vision, and what it really means for our children and young people and deliver it on the ground.

PRIORITY 2 **COMMITMENT - MAKING THE PLEDGE**

We know everyone has competing priorities and we have some way to go to ensure we have everyone's commitment to give time and resources to this agenda. We need all agencies who work directly with children and young people, both in universal and targeted services, and those working with the adults who support and care for the children to share the commitment to intervening early and helping children and families to thrive. Through our review we have concluded the best way to make this commitment is through a pledge. This priority will be for our alliance to ensure all agencies will sign up to this and will work actively to deliver upon it.

Part Four



PRIORITY 3 **RESOURCING AND SUPPORT**

We will ensure that we have the 'real' conversations about capacity to deliver the offer and find ways together to ensure we use what we have to support everyone's engagement. We recognise through this review that prioritising Early Help can be a challenge for some partners who have high demands and often shrinking resources. This makes effective Early Help all the more vital, but we will grapple with the real issues around resourcing and support. Our Early Help Enablers add vital capacity within the system, but they too are a limited resource. We will work together to share the responsibilities across the partnership so that the work and the rewards are shared. The value of good family support has been emphasised by families so we will look further at our family support network to see how we might widen it. We will also review our service directory to ensure it covers the widest number of services and is maintained and current. We will keep our new assessment tool under review to ensure it is working well and meeting our

needs. We will produce information leaflets for families to explain what the offer is in simple everyday language.

PRIORITY 4 **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

We will develop a clear multi-agency training offer which will include the Early Help process, communicating the offer of Early Help, the new assessment framework, planning and delivering Early Help, the Lead professional role, consent, and overcoming resistance with reluctant families. We will make sure everyone understands the issues around consent and applies our policy. We will encourage agencies to train in multi professional groups to expand knowledge of what everyone does, and build a sense of shared endeavour across our partnership. We will ensure professionals understand what children, young people and families value in what they appreciate most in terms of approach and values. We will keep our new assessment tool under review to ensure it is working well and meeting our needs.

Part Four



PRIORITY 5 **PERFORMANCE, QUALITY & IMPACT**

We will focus on improving the quality and consistency of Early Help offered and will ensure we understand the progress of our work, and the impact we are having, through the development of a quality and outcomes framework. This will be monitored through the alliance and the safeguarding board. This will help us all to know the difference we are making to children, young people and their families through high quality work, a clear understanding of needs and plans which are fit for purpose and deliver the help that is needed. We will develop our data collection mechanisms, to support smarter targeting of resources going forward and to ensure that the outcomes framework can be monitored effectively. We will continue our auditing work but will include a multi-agency audit programme so that we understand in more detail the experiences of our children and families and assess the quality of individual pieces of work across the partnership. We will develop a feedback framework for children, young people and families so that we can understand better what is working well and less well for the families we support. Through

our new framework, our audit and our data we will have an overview of our progress and where we need to continue to focus.

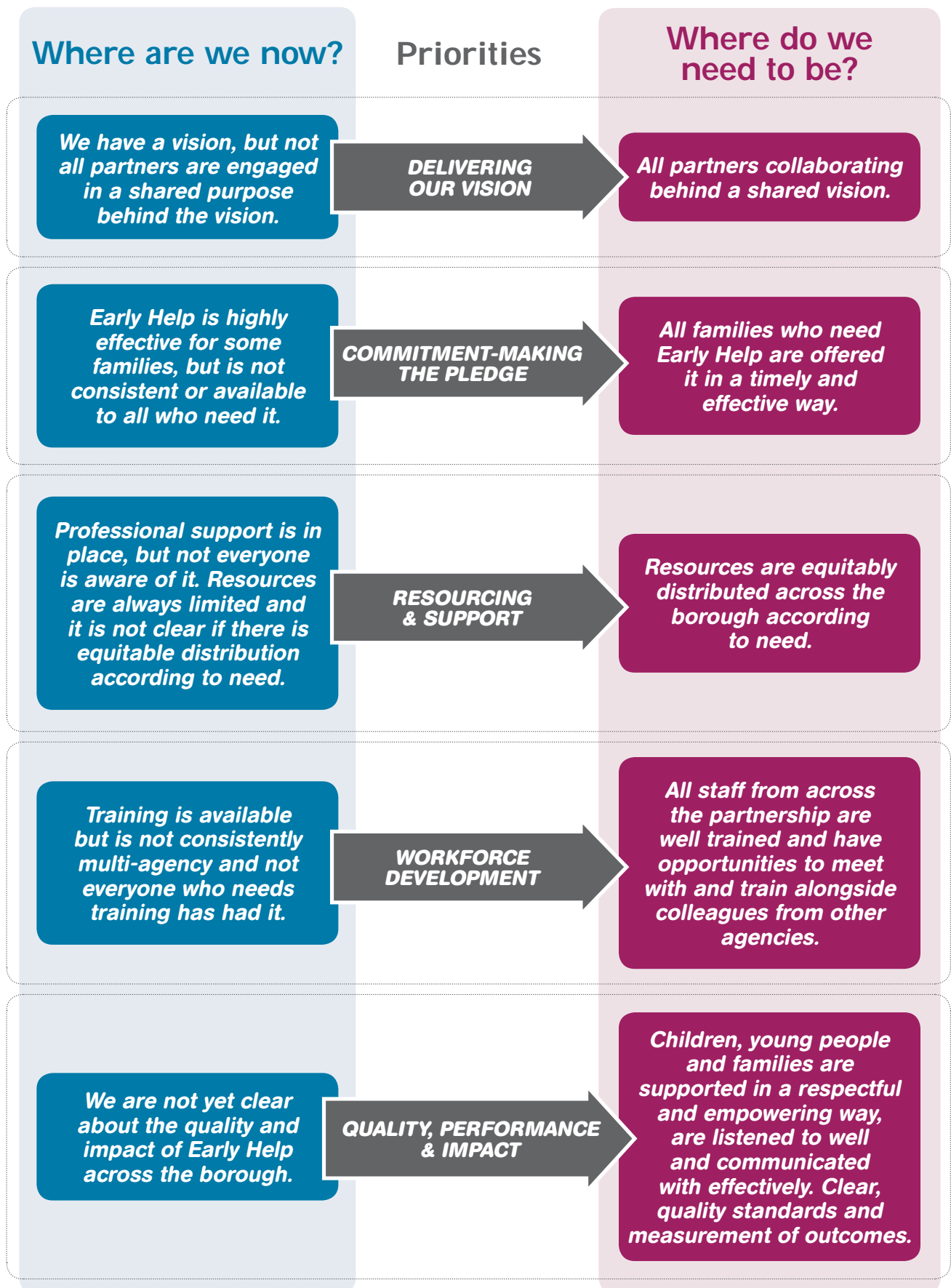
SUMMARY

This document shows we have already made huge strides forward. We are already supporting hundreds of families and this review suggests that families really appreciate the help they are getting. We have some way to go to broaden the offer and make sure that all children who need Early Help in Dudley have access to it, and that the help is of consistently good quality.

We will develop a plan from our priorities and in particular ensure that we develop a bold communications platform that will spread the word far and wide to ensure all professionals are given the information they need to offer Early Help. We will make our pledge to the children, young people and families of Dudley and we will work hard to keep our promises.

Through the Dudley Alliance, we will keep the plan and progress of this strategy under review. By doing so we will be confident we are doing all that we can to deliver our ambition, making the impact we want in order to see our children and young people thrive.

Appendix A





'Having someone who is not involved to listen to you, talk to you and who works in a way that builds you up makes it work – the skills and approach makes it or breaks it.' – Parent

'The family centre gave me courage to get out of an abusive relationship and I can honestly say that the family centre 'saved my life.' – Parent

'Early Help worker has provided me with anger management strategies that have helped me to do better both at home and at school.' – Young person working with the Youth Service



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