Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)
Children, Young People and Families

Early Help Strategy 2015 to 2018
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As Chair of the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) it is my privilege to write the foreword to this Staffordshire Early Help Strategy. This Strategy makes clear what is meant by the term Early Help, why it is important and the mutual benefits that follow when there is effective early intervention. The key message throughout is that we all want children and young people in Staffordshire to grow up in a great place enjoying good health and wellbeing. We want children and young people to have the tools they need to enable them to make good life choices as they grow and reach their potential. It’s recognised there’s already lots of great work happening across Staffordshire to meet needs early and we are not starting from scratch.

By continuously improving how we provide Early Help we have the potential to make significant savings to the high cost of intervening late. This important document has been produced at my request by a specially convened group of knowledgeable and qualified practitioners from a range of fields including the voluntary sector, health, education, social care, police and the local authority who work closely with children, young people and families.

Through a comprehensive process of engagement partners have provided significant contributions and facilitated broad involvement and challenge.

This has helped to ensure that the Strategy is fit for purpose and appropriate for use by anyone who comes into contact with children and young people and their families.

The Saffordshire Safeguarding Children Board is committed to making this strategy a reality and will be holding partners to account for its implementation. We want to ensure that it is widely understood and used by practitioners, leaders and commissioners and that children and families are helped as a result. Through the planned audit arrangements and the links to related partnerships the Board will be particularly looking for examples of good practice so that these can be extended as appropriate.

I take this opportunity to publicly thank all those involved in the work to develop the Strategy but as importantly all those who will be translating this Strategy into action and delivering the necessary positive outcomes for our children and families.

John Wood, Independent Chair,
Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board
Our Vision

Our vision is that Staffordshire will be a great place to grow up and live, where excellent health and wellbeing outcomes are experienced by all and where all children develop well and achieve their potential. For some children this can only be achieved with additional support.

Helping children and their families isn’t about doing it for them; it’s about helping them to find the right solutions to improve their situation. This means that those coming into contact with children (such as teachers, the police, health visitors, childcare practitioners and volunteers) have a responsibility towards taking a committed and coordinated approach in identifying emerging needs at the earliest opportunity so that children are kept safe and achieve good outcomes.
Introduction

Staffordshire is a great place to live. Most families are happy, safe and have loving homes, but there are some families who face challenges that mean they cannot thrive in the way they want to. When asked, children said they want to be supported by their families to resolve the day-to-day problems they face. Providing children are safe, we also want them to thrive within their families and communities. Early Help can be critical to this so we can promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people together in a swift manner.

Statutory guidance states that effective Early Help relies upon local agencies working together to:

• Identify children and families who would benefit from Early Help;
• Consider initiating 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.

Early Help requires all those who come into contact with children and families, including those in universal services to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and potential unmet need.

Acting early to prevent problems getting worse, including in the early years of a child’s life, could have a positive impact on the child and their family. Evidence shows Early Help can also reduce the high cost of late intervention so that we can make the best use of our limited, shared resources. The issues for families can either be straightforward or they may be complex - including elements such as relationship breakdown, exploitation and substance misuse. Sharing information with others to support early identification and effective assessment is key. Early Help is everyone’s responsibility.

We are not starting from scratch; following a successful Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) application to the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), Staffordshire was selected as a national pilot site in September 2013. During this time the EIF provided support to evaluate the overall effectiveness of Staffordshire’s Early Help offer. The Foundation provided challenge, advocacy and signalled national best practice.

A number of stakeholder sessions and tools were used during the pilot in order to help make an assessment of Staffordshire’s offer. The findings and recommendations from this work have been fed into the production of this strategy.

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2 Page 6 of the SSCB Threshold document indicates which agencies come under universal service www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Procedures/Section-One/Section-One-Docs/Section-1E-SSCB_Thresholds-for-Intervention-Guidance.pdf
The Purpose of the Early Help Strategy

The purpose of this Staffordshire Early Help Strategy is to establish a common understanding of Early Help, and ensure everyone can see how their contribution can make a difference to the lives of the children, young people and families. This will help us to achieve the Health and Wellbeing Board’s and Family Strategic Partnership’s priorities and outcomes for children and young people to start, grow and live well.

Our Principles

The following principles will be referenced within an accompanying Implementation Plan in order to achieve our vision:
- Children, young people and their families are at the centre of everything we do;
- Need is proactively identified and appropriate action taken;
- Early Help is core to everyone who interacts with children, young people and families;
- Shape and co-develop the Early Help offer with children, young people, families, communities and other partners;
- Measure success by the individual outcomes for children, young people, families and wider communities.
Staffordshire Context and Need

Staffordshire is a large county and the lives and needs of children and families in towns and cities will often contrast with those who live in rural communities. District variation is also evident, the latest information on local needs and demographics can be found at the Staffordshire Observatory website. Whilst some of the issues may vary, the importance of a timely offer of Early Help is the same wherever families live. Help should be focussed, tailored and effective, involving parents / carers and extended family at every stage. Building on family and community resources will help to reduce the likelihood that extra help is required in the future.

Staffordshire County Council’s Insight Team has explored the reasons why children, young people and families may need additional support. They have identified a number of risk factors which could lead to parental/carer issues or have a negative impact on the child and/or their family. Having an understanding of these potential risk factors can assist with spotting signs of unmet need. See Appendix B for more information.

Looking closer at a snapshot of the latest data available regarding children and young people that live in Staffordshire we can see that approximately:

- 1:7 IN POVERTY
- 1:9 CLAIM FREE SCHOOL MEALS
- 1:10 HAVE A SPECIAL EDUCATION NEED
- 1:24 ARE CLASSED AS PERSISTANT ABSENTEE
- 1:55 ARE A CHILD IN NEED
- 1:40 ARE STATEMENTED
- 1:355 ARE IN TREATMENT FOR SUBSTANCE MISUSE
- 1:295 ARE SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN
- 1:200 ARE LOOKED AFTER
- 1:31 HAVE A T2/3 MENTAL HEALTH NEED
- 1:33 HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED AT LEAST ONCE
- 1:237 HAVE A DISABILITY
- 1:147 ARE A YOUNG CARER
- 1:201 ARE A TEENAGE PARENT
- 1:31  HAVE A T2/3 MENTAL HEALTH NEED
- 1:33 HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED AT LEAST ONCE
- 1:237 HAVE A DISABILITY
- 1:147 ARE A YOUNG CARER
- 1:201 ARE A TEENAGE PARENT
- 1:355 ARE IN TREATMENT FOR SUBSTANCE MISUSE
- 1:295 ARE SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

* Each ratio based on appropriate age group

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3 Approximately 171,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Staffordshire. This is approximately 20% of the total population in the area.
4 www.staffordshireobservatory.org.uk/homepage.aspx
The views of children and families are essential in shaping our ‘Early Help’ offer, and a review in 2015 found that:

**Children and Young People would like:**

- To be independent from a formal system
- More crisis support
- Expert support for a sensitive or specialist reason
- Help from friends, family and schools

**Parents and Carers would like:**

- Networks of support in their community
- Agencies to be proactive
- More activities for their children

**Key messages include:**

- Children, young people and families are likely to turn to people in their community they trust when they need support and they want to see more peer-to-peer support in their local areas.
- Children and families have told us they are less likely to seek the help of a ‘service’, as there is a stigma attached to these services, though they would seek professional help if a problem is specific or complex.
- When families do access help from a professional they would like it to be in their community at places they go (such as the school, GP or nursery) and they would like consistency so they don’t have to tell their story lots of times or be ‘passed around’.
- Current information, advice and guidance is not accessible on their terms; leaflets and being given phone numbers was not helpful.

A commitment to engage children, young people, families and communities on an ongoing basis in service design, delivery and evaluation is integral to the success of this Early Help Strategy. Genuine co-production will be a distinguishing feature of the provision of Early Help in Staffordshire in the future.
Why do I need to provide Early Help to children, young people and families?

• For children, young people and families that need additional help every day matters and delaying intervention can have a negative impact on their lives.

• Acting early to prevent issues from escalating and re-occuring is your responsibility, regardless of your role and whether you are in the public, private, voluntary or community sector.

• By acting swiftly to meet needs and address underlying root causes of issues we have the opportunity to substantially reduce the high costs of late intervention.

• We all want children and young people to start well, grow well and live well. By identifying emerging problems and acting on them we can make this happen.

• 'One size does not fit all', we need to provide flexible, adaptable and effective Early Help that is tailored to meet individual needs, not be timebound and have a whole family approach.
What is the difference between Early help, Intervention and Prevention?

The terms ‘Early Help’ and early intervention’ are often used interchangeably and this can result in confusion. They both refer to the support which is needed for children and families at the first sign of additional unmet need. Providing the right help at the earliest opportunity, helps to solve problems before they become more pressing and complex, and avert the need for statutory intervention when concerns for the safety and well-being of children has become acute. In reality, they mean the same thing.

The Department for Education and Ofsted both use the term ‘Early Help’. This has also been adopted in Staffordshire.

The language of ‘helping’ a family is complementary to our commitment to working alongside families, using an approach that recognises and builds upon their strengths and that engages them as active participants in plans and activities to address identified needs. Families are our partners in this work: they are the ones who will sustain the positive changes made to the lives of their children. When services are no longer involved, it is families and their support in their local communities that will continue to focus on ensuring that outcomes for their children are the best that they can be. Service providers – schools, health, police, housing, voluntary sector agencies – they are there to help as and when help is needed.

The term prevention is also often used interchangeably with Early Help however this means actions taken so that problems do not arise in the first place. Early Help takes place at the first sign of a problem or to avoid problems getting worse.Specialist intervention or treatment takes place when needs or problems become more serious.

Early Help involves bringing together people with the relevant skills and experience from the voluntary sector, community and/or other services to work in partnership with the child and/or their family to help themselves, build on their strengths to resolve the issue(s) and to become more resilient to prevent the issue from reoccurring. The purpose is to work alongside families to enable them to make the changes that they need to make for themselves.

It is recognised there is a continuum of Early Help from preventing issues from occurring, to proactively identifying and responding to low level signs of unmet need through to more complex needs that require a more coordinated response. See Appendix A for more information.
What does Early Help mean for me?

I am a child or young person...

• My wishes and feelings are important, no matter how small I feel they are.
• I feel confident to speak to those adults or peers around me that I trust and I understand they won’t know how I feel unless I tell them.
• I am a partner in the work to improve my life. I am confident in sharing my views and feelings with those working with me.

I am a parent or carer...

• If I have concerns or issues about my family or friends I will be there to support them and encourage them to seek additional help if necessary;
• I am a partner in the work to improve outcomes for my child or my family. My perspective needs to be heard, and I will have a crucial part to play in achieving a positive change.
• I am confident in approaching local groups and organisations that could give me information, help and support.
• I recognise that my family and I will always have strengths and positive things on which to build on and I will highlight these to others.
• I understand that my needs are important but those of my child are the most important in this process.
What does Early Help mean for me?

I come into contact with children, young people and/or families or manage services that do (e.g. I am a teacher, PCSO, childcare practitioner, volunteer, health visitor or school nurse)

• You have a role to play to prevent unmet needs arising.
• Be proactive to identify unmet needs; this can start with a conversation with the child/young person and their family in order to resolve issues early.
• Remember that Early Help is a partnership with families. Seek out and listen to the views, aspirations and needs of children, young people and families and make sure that you work together.
• Keep focused on the strengths of children and families, helping them to find ways of addressing issues themselves as early as possible, and in a way which will prevent them from happening again.
• Adopt an outcome focused, evidenced based approach.
• Where appropriate, seek additional help and support from other agencies, particularly if you have a concern that issues are more complex than you originally thought.
• Have joined up processes with other agencies and work in a coordinated and integrated way;
• Use the Early Help Assessment (EHA) as the common tool for exploring issues with children and families, and as the basis for an analysis of what action to take together.
• Safely share information where appropriate and purposeful to do so;
• Provide clear information, advice and guidance to families and support them in accessing other services and local resources
• Always act swiftly and decisively if you have immediate safeguarding concerns, following SSCB procedures available at: http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Concerned-about-a-Child/Concerned-about-achild.aspx
What does Early Help mean for me?

I am a community leader and/or I work with local community groups and community leaders...

- Consider how well your local community supports its families and cares about all of its children. Are there ways that the community could come together to do more for those who need extra help?

- Promote awareness of the benefits of acting early for children, young people and families and the use of the Early Help Assessment as a common tool for partnership working.

- Build on the strengths within the community to create opportunities to develop projects that will bring people together, increasing their confidence and skills as well as helping to build supportive networks.
What does Early Help mean for me?

I commission and/or fund services that work with children, young people and families...

• Be clear about Early Help needs and use current information about outcomes for children and families to inform the commissioning of responsive provision.
• Have strong and coherent ‘return on investment’ arguments for Early Help versus costly and late intervention and be clear on current evidenced based practice and innovation.
• Build prevention and Early Help into commissioning as a means to reduce demand on more specialist services. Reference use of the Early Help Assessment as a reliable proxy indicator.
• Strengthen and recognise the importance of prevention and Early Help in all relevant service specifications particularly universal provision.
• Ensure commissioning is done in a complimentary fashion and where possible, collaborate with those that commission or provide Early Help from other sectors.
• Work alongside children, young people, families and communities to shape and develop Early Help provision on an ongoing basis.
• Through contracts ensure that appropriately skilled and competent workforces are delivering Early Help and use the Early Help Assessment to support their engagement with families.
• Ensure that measures are in place to drive continuous improvement in outcomes.
Governance and Accountability

Overall accountability of the Early Help strategy resides with the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB). This strategy is endorsed and ratified by the Board. The Staffordshire Family Strategic Partnership (FSP) is responsible for developing an annual plan to secure sufficient provision of quality and effective Early Help, in line with local needs. These accountabilities, in line with Ofsted’s ‘Whose Responsibility’ thematic inspection’s recommendations, are detailed below:

The **SSCB** is accountable for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of Early Help services and publishing their findings by:

- Critically evaluating the effectiveness of Early Help on an annual basis and sharing the results in the Annual Report
- Monitoring the quality of Early Help assessments, plans and management oversight through effective audit arrangements
- Developing and monitoring local quality standards to ensure that Early Help professionals have access to effective supervision and management oversight
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the SSCB threshold document to ensure it is understood, used appropriately and children and families are helped as a result
- Monitoring and evaluating whether children’s emerging needs are appropriately met elsewhere when referrals to Social Care do not meet the locally agreed threshold for statutory intervention
- Ensuring all professionals working with families have access to effective Early Help training

The **Staffordshire FSP** is accountable for ensuring partner agencies delivering Early Help (including Staffordshire County Council) implement the strategy through:

- Securing sufficient provision of local Early Help for children, young people and families
- Publishing an annual plan, which is aligned with the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)
Governance and Accountability

- Continuously improving the quality and consistency of assessments and plans by:
  - Promoting the use of evidence based and research informed assessment practice
  - Improving the quality of analysis in assessments
  - Ensuring that assessments reflect the views and experience of the child and family
  - Giving plans clear purpose and intended outcomes
  - Ensuring plans are regularly reviewed, including evaluating the child and family’s progress
- Ensuring all staff delivering Early Help have:
  - Professional supervision
  - Regular management oversight of their work (particularly regarding decisions about whether families need more formal help)
  - Access to effective training

- Ensuring that children’s needs for Early Help arising from parental substance misuse, mental ill health and domestic abuse are addressed in commissioning plans.

Staffordshire County Council is responsible for:
- Giving good quality feedback to referrers on the outcome of referrals to Children’s Social Care
- Establishing effective processes for evaluating the overall impact of Early Help

In addition, this strategy has been developed within the context of the Health and Wellbeing Board’s directive on Early Help and prevention. At a district level, any associated Early Help delivery plans should be developed as part of local partnership arrangements for children, young people and families. Any relevant boards or partnerships should be sighted on progress and impact accordingly.
The Evidence Base for Early Help

There is a wide range of evidence which demonstrates effective Early Help identification, assessment and provision can have a positive impact on the outcomes of children, young people and families. This strategy takes into account relevant reports and research on Early Help including by Allen, Marmot, Field, Tickell, Ofsted, the EIF, LARC and iMPOWER. By increasing the focus on Early Help, with all local partners taking responsibility for the wellbeing of children and young people, there can be a shift towards tackling the root causes of problems effectively rather than the symptoms. Early Help can therefore prevent issues from escalating and/or reoccurring, therefore reducing the pressure on statutory services. The importance of Early Help in pregnancy and early years is reflected in the Wave Trust report, where Early Help can promote infant mental health and reduce the risk of children’s development being hampered by abuse, neglect or other early parent-child relationship difficulties.

There is a high cost to public services for late intervention, nationally estimated at £17 billion per year. Allen highlights evidence which suggests that £40 million investment in positive parenting could potentially save £400 million over a 15 year period. A shift in focus and investment towards Early Help could lead to longer term financial savings across partners. Allen identified that acting quickly to resolve issues that could prevent longer term issues could save costs for example of:

- £59,000 annual cost for a young offender in a young offender’s institution;
- £45,000 for each young person not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET);
- The long term impact on society of unresolved conduct disorder can exceed £1 million for one individual over their lifetime.

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6 The Wave Trust, 2013, Conception to Age 2 – the age of opportunity. www.wavetrust.org/ourwork/publications/reports/conception-age-2-age-opportunity
The Evidence Base for Early Help

The EIF identified that an early intervention transformation programme had predicted savings of £2.34 for every £1 invested\(^7\). In Staffordshire, we need to work collaboratively together to commission, influence, grow and provide Early Help in a more coordinated way, with a greater focus on preventing demand through late intervention.

Key messages and recommendations from these papers include:

- **Early Help is crucial in Early Years**, as it is a time when children achieve their most rapid development and can embed essential social and emotional skills.
- **A culture change** is needed to move towards providing the right Early Help as soon as possible and away from focusing on late intervention.
- **Consistent leadership** on Early Help, a good understanding of local needs and services, compelling vision, clear responsibility and accountability and an open, honest and credible approach.
- **Effective monitoring and oversight** of Early Help by the Local Safeguarding Children Board is critical, including evaluation of the Early Help offer and quality of EHAs.
- **Long term, holistic and flexible** approach to enable effective investment, collaborative working and innovation.
- **Listening, empowering and engaging** with children, young people, families and communities to understand what is most important to them and their concerns.
- **Collaborative working** across commissioners and providers. At an individual level this can include effective partnership working to assess and support families, at a service level could include greater integration and joined up working, with clear expectations on how partners should work together and at a strategic level for example to pool budgets, joint monitoring of shared outcomes and Early Help embedded in relevant commissioning plans.
- **Appropriate and proportional information sharing** is crucial to effective partnership working, both on individual cases and the needs of the local population, in line with relevant Data Protection legislation (including the Data Protection Act 1998).
- **Effective identification** of families that require support at the earliest stage and effective **assessment, planning and high quality support**, based on evidence based practice and the use of common tools.
- **Promotion of innovative** working across partners to stimulate new ideas and ways of working with children, young people, families and communities.
- **Workforce development** across partners to ensure there is a skilled, knowledgeable and supported workforce for those working with children, young people and families.
- **Performance management** focused on coherent partnership working.
- **Identify and build on the community’s assets**, promote community networks and relationships, co-design and co-produce Early Help provision, value what works well in communities and drives community action.

How do we first respond to the need for Early Help in Staffordshire?

In Staffordshire we have thought carefully about how best to harness all available resources to work alongside families when they need support. The aim is to help them to become more resilient and confident in meeting the needs of their children and young people. We have agreed that we all need to:

- Be committed to ensuring that we identify need as early as possible, so that we can work with families before circumstances become more urgent and/or acute. This means that we all need a shared understanding of the issues that children and families face in Staffordshire, with which they are likely to need Early Help.
- Help families explore all aspects of their lives to recognise the strengths, as well as the challenges and the root causes of the difficulties that they are facing.
- Be imaginative in finding community-based opportunities for families to find ongoing support so that their need for services in the future is less likely.
- Ensure that we are well-co-ordinated and work in a seamless way: we should not expect children and families to understand our processes and politics.
- Always have the child in our sight – keep the child in the centre of our work, and listen to their voice throughout: they know best how our efforts are making a difference to their lives.

Partners have worked together to develop an assessment tool that everyone can use – the Staffordshire Early Help Assessment:

**What is and Early Help Assessment**

The Staffordshire Early Help Assessment (EHA) is designed to help anyone who already knows a child and their family to talk to them about their lives and any concerns that they may have. The EHA has been adopted by the SSCB for use by all partners who engage with children, young people and families as a common tool to explore their additional needs and agree how they will work together and with other services and community partners to reach a point where extra help is no longer needed.

As our ‘common’ tool, this means that everyone who works with children and families knows where to find it and how to use it, and so – once started – any other practitioners or agencies who become involved simply add to the original: there is no need for the family to tell their story again. It is good practice that an EHA is used when assessing a family with level two needs; however the decision in relation to using an EHA at level two will be the decision of the individual organisation or service.
How do we first respond to the need for Early Help in Staffordshire?

An EHA is required when working with children or young people who have numerous needs requiring a multi-agency response (at level 3 on the SSCB threshold model). (Please see Appendix A for further details on the SSCB threshold model and Appendix C for further details on the EHA).

There are ongoing conversations across partners in each district to explore the vision for the whole families system and to identify how we can work together to have:
- Resilient, skilled and self-supported families and communities
- Community and services working together
- Statutory service response

Early Help is integral to these conversations. The conversations aim to enable effective collaboration involving families, communities and services working together to meet need before it becomes acute – to provide Early Help, early enough and for those that need it, when they need it.
How is Early Help provided for children and families in Staffordshire?

Our Early Help offer puts the responsibility on all practitioners to identify emerging problems and potential unmet need for individual children, young people and families, irrespective of whether they are providing services for children or for adults. Those who work mainly in universal services are best placed to identify children and/or their families that are at risk of poor outcomes. Alongside this is the use of local and county-wide intelligence to identify those who are more likely to be in need of Early Help, guiding both focus and resource for those who are less visible or who are isolated from services and/or supportive communities.

We are clear that helping children and families as early as possible when issues first arise is a priority. Staffordshire County Council’s children’s service, Families First, has an established a network of district-based Local Support Teams which are made up of practitioners with expertise in working with children, young people and families when the challenges that they face become complex and difficult to resolve. Local Support Teams work with individual family cases, they support the whole family by delivering evidence-based interventions and promoting effective co-ordination between agencies and a clear and common focus on improving outcomes. They also deliver targeted family interventions identified by the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme and manage the multi-agency teams which work intensively with those families whose challenges are most entrenched.

Importantly Local Support Teams work closely with the local authority Safeguarding Teams in their area and are frequently co-located: ongoing dialogue between them ensures that those children on the edge of ‘care’ are clearly sighted by all services that may be needed to support the family. Local Support Teams work particularly closely with schools and are commissioned to enable Staffordshire to fulfil its statutory duty to promote school attendance. Regular attendance at school can be an important protective factor for children and young people, and the integration for school attendance in the ‘Early Help’ offer of Local Support Teams ensures that a ‘whole family’ view is then taken of their additional needs, of which poor attendance at school may be just one factor.
How is Early Help provided for children and families in Staffordshire?

This strong focus on access to education and on multi-agency working with children and families complements the approach of the Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) programme, which takes the co-ordinated multi-agency partnership model of working one step further. Multi-agency teams of practitioners (known as Family Intervention Programme teams) which include the police, housing providers, youth sector, the voluntary sector and Local Support Teams work with those families whose problems are complex and frequently intergenerational – but still, for many, a form of ‘Early Help’. Those families identified for support as part of the BRFC programme with less complex issues are supported by Families First Local Support Teams, the Carers and Participation Service, the Youth Offending Team or by agencies in the voluntary and community sector.

The emphasis on targeting Early Help resources for those children, young people and families that most need support is a key element of the Building Resilient Families and Communities programme. As the pressure for scarce resources continues to build, it is crucial that we ensure that Early Help is pro-actively offered to those for whom it can make the most difference. This approach is informing the way that Early Help is developing to meet the needs of Staffordshire for 2015 and beyond.

Harnessing the engagement of the wider economy of services that touch the lives of families in one way or another is crucial if we are to identify and address issues as soon as possible. Effective partnership working in local areas is fundamental in addressing some of the key issues that impact on the well-being of some of our more vulnerable children, young people and families. Staffordshire County Council works closely with its partners in response to local issues, aligning a broader focus on targeted prevention with populations of children and young people, with Early Help for individuals. The role of the authority is to co-ordinate and steer that response, but the driving force is very much a local one.

By monitoring use of the Early Help Assessment we know that a wide range of services – schools, health services, childcare providers and voluntary and community sector agencies in particular – are asking their front-line practitioners to have that first conversation with families and start a planned process to ensure that these are addressed.

It is important that all services – universal and targeted – have a role to play in offering Early Help to children and families.
How is Early Help provided for children and families in Staffordshire?

The majority of our children and young people spend much of their time in school, and **schools and colleges** are an important part of the ‘front line’ in identifying concerns at an early stage. Schools have more regular contact with children and families than any other service, and schools in Staffordshire are using their resources, and drawing on their local partnerships and contacts to engage promptly and sympathetically with families - addressing issues as soon as they become apparent. There are good examples of how the development of services on school sites can provide ease of access for students and local families, and offer different agencies a venue in which to work together.

**Universal Health and Wellbeing services** are critically important in ensuring that we explore needs at the earliest opportunity – from conception until early learning and school. The role of Midwife, Health Visitor and School Nurse combines checks, assessments, advice-giving and support for families at a time of significant change and challenge. They provide Early Help by prioritising their time with those families where they have identified specific risk factors or where it is clear that additional support is needed, and their approach.

The use of programmes and models and that have an evidence-base to demonstrate effectiveness is a key feature of health and wellbeing interventions. An example of this is the Family Nurse Partnership, which uses a model of regular, sustained and outcome-focused targeted support in working with young parents.

Effective partnership working supports a holistic view of the family and their needs and an efficient approach to providing Early Help, in the early years. Staffordshire Children Centres continue to promote access to Early Help services for families with young children, and to support local groups in establishing peer programmes that can support local families.

**Community groups and projects** - have their roots in local neighbourhoods and villages, and are therefore well-placed to both provide support to families with relative informality, and to apply a practical approach to meeting needs. Feeling isolated, excluded and unsupported can make it all the more difficult to meet the challenges of everyday life and it is sometimes easier to approach local and less formal groups and services for advice and support. Local groups and projects not only provide an accessible opportunity to seek help with specific issues; they can also provide volunteering opportunities for those who feel that they can build on their own life experience to help others. Volunteering is, in itself, a valuable way for local people to develop their skills and build their self-esteem.
How is Early Help provided for children and families in Staffordshire?

There is a clear need for effective partnership working between local community based initiatives, universal services like schools and health providers, and the more targeted and specialist services for children and families.

The range of local initiatives already in development must be nurtured and supported if Staffordshire is to realise the ambition of ensuring that all can access Early Help, as and when they need it. The further development of accessible and targeted approaches in local areas is fundamental if we are to successfully address some of the key issues that impact on the well-being of those children, young people and families who – by virtue of a number of circumstances - are less well-equipped to meet those challenges that can otherwise make them vulnerable.

Staffordshire County Council will continue to work closely with all of its partners in response to local issues, aligning a broader focus on targeted prevention with populations of children and young people, with that of Early Help for individuals and families. The role of the authority is to co-ordinate and steer that response, but the driving force is very much a local one.
How is Early Help provided for children and families in Staffordshire?

Example: Multi-Agency Centres (MACs) in partnership with Schools
The MAC concept is about bringing together a range of partners in one location within a high school to support young people with some of the difficult and complex issues they may face, for example, bullying, sexual health, bereavement, domestic abuse, relationship difficulties, online safety and emotional wellbeing to name but a few. This model of intervention is well developed in Tamworth and in Staffordshire Moorlands, where the project is called Room 21. Young people are able to easily access advice and support at a time and place that suits them, with ease of access in their school site.

In Stafford this initiative is being further developed by Staffordshire Police and the Safer Communities Partnership through the Safer Schools Initiative. It is designed to complement and enhance the PSHE curriculum and provide opportunities for children to reflect on their own behaviour, challenge and clarify their own values. It provides pupils with appropriate information that with help to build their confidence, resilience and self-esteem, and also delivers sessions aimed at promoting awareness and understanding of Crime and Consequences, Risk Taking Behaviour, Substance Misuse, Internet Safety, Gang Crimes, Healthy Relationships and Child Sexual Exploitation. For more examples of Early Help see Appendix D.

Community-based voluntary organisations - whether ‘home grown’ or a part of a national charitable organisation, also play a key role in providing Early Help for families. Often having their origins in the collective action of a group of local people, voluntary sector agencies can have a greater flexibility of approach and a local and less formal identity. Their approaches are complimentary to those of the statutory public sector – schools, the local authority, health services – and they are an essential part of the mixed economy of provision for families necessary for a large and diverse authority like Staffordshire.

Example: Proactive Home Visiting in East Staffordshire
Since July 2015, community organisation East Staffordshire Family Support incorporating Harvey Girls and Dads4Dads, has been participating in a new initiative introduced by Staffordshire County Council to proactively contact families in the locality who have a child between the ages of 5–8 months or 13–22 months. In so doing they ensure that families are able to access all universal services in conjunction with the Best Start Pathway, and simultaneously promote the opportunity for Early Help, if needed. Families are identified using ‘live birth’ data provided by Staffordshire County Council on a monthly basis.
How is Early Help provided for children and families in Staffordshire?

Appointment letters are sent a week in advance and discussion during the visit includes the accessibility of local universal services with information and support provided when needed. East Staffordshire Family Support work closely with the local health visiting team.

Each family is provided with a ‘Proactive Visit Pack’ which includes a selection of partner agency information, together with a children’s centre information and a leisure pass application. Where appropriate in the 13-22 month visits, parents are provided with a Think 2 application form so that they can apply to access up to 15 hours free quality childcare every week. The completion of a children’s centre registration form during the visit helps to encourage families to access new activities, and a holistic information pack covering health, childcare and family safety issues is also provided.

Where issues of concern for the family are identified, the families are referred for outreach support by the organisation. The family’s individual needs are identified using the Family Star Plus as a guide and this tool is then completed again at the end of that support so that the effectiveness of our intervention can be evaluated. When multi-agency partnership working is required, the consistent use of Early Help Assessments offers the family an individual support package, tailored to their individual needs that can be shared between partner agencies. This process helps with the mapping of any previous support and ultimately, a longitudinal picture of the family’s needs.

Following a recent proactive visit, a young Polish mum with 2 young children disclosed that her relationship had broken down and she was experiencing significant financial issues and very low self-esteem. She especially needed help with budgeting, benefits, finding a dentist, securing additional work to help support her young family and in accessing universal services through local children’s centre.

The East Staffordshire family support outreach worker went with her to the council office to sort out her council tax arrears and her housing benefit. Given an element of a language barrier, the outreach worker was able to check mum’s understanding which enabled her to communicate and take ownership of her situation.

As her financial position improved, mum began to feel more confident and, with assistance, was able to promote her photography business with local nurseries which resulted in some new business. She also found part-time work and has a children’s centre free pass card which is further helping her to access services. Ian North, CEO of East Staffordshire family support (Harvey Girls & Dads4Dads) is clear that “the opportunity of early intervention through proactive visits is one of the best pieces of commissioning to date, offering support to families across the county by using Early Help, whilst at the same time, saving the public purse considerable money”. For more examples of Early Help see Appendix D.
Measures of Success: how will we know we’re making a difference?

Early Help can contribute towards a number of high-level outcomes including the following:

- Be able to access good jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth
- Be healthier and more independent
- Feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community

Early Help will also contribute to a raft of wider outcomes such as school readiness, reduction of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and reduction in offending levels. We will listen to children, young people and families to understand how well we are doing to achieve the vision and principles set out in this strategy, as well as use all relevant available data. Several measures have been identified, as referenced in Appendix E and these may continue to develop as Early Help delivery is embedded. As delivery this strategy is progressed a focus will be given to how we monitor and measure our impact to ensure children, young people and families are receiving effective and timely Early Help in order to achieve better outcomes.
Next Steps

There has been lots of positive work already and we need to build on what is working well already in communities, districts and across the county to improve Early Help. We need to maintain the momentum built through the joint development of this strategy so collectively we realise the benefits of Early Help for children, young people and families. Making the strategy a reality will require planning and action, supported by robust delivery plans that are owned and delivered at both a local and county level. We will measure our success by the impact that this has on the lives of children, young people and families.

**Those plans must demonstrate the Staffordshire commitment to:**

i. Change our current culture to ensure that Early Help is recognised as everyone’s business, sharing a proactive approach and a common language.

ii. Ensure that those whose work involves contact with children, young people and families, have access to the training and development support they need to be skilled and confident in identifying need early and responding swiftly.

iii. Measure the impact on the lives of children, young people and their families, and consistently make the case for effective early action to meet need.

iv. Use common tools and processes, including the use of the Early Help Assessment as the single tool to support that early work with families.

v. Recognise the wealth of assets in local communities – of people, skills, buildings, and commitment: treasure these and work to maximise their use to promote resilience and self-supportive communities.

vi. Understand that Early Help in the earliest years can be particularly important for children’s healthy emotional and cognitive development in future years: we need to be clear about what good Early Help looks like for different ages and stages.

vii. Integrate and strengthen the commissioning and delivery of Early Help across the system where this will improve outcomes.

viii. Share information appropriately so that services, families and communities can work together as effectively as possible;

ix. Explore creative opportunities to promote this strategy such as the co-production of a pocket guide and online app.

Where possible this Early Help Strategy has been aligned to neighbouring local authorities, however it is recognised there is not full alignment and local differences should be taken into account.
Appendix A: Early Help at the Levels of Need

Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) describes children’s lives in terms of ‘Levels of Need’, as illustrated in Diagram 1 below:

It is recognised there is a continuum of Early Help from where need is low level and can be met by the universal services or with some limited additional advice / guidance through to more complex needs that require a more coordinated response. This should be read in conjunction with the full SSCB Threshold document available at: www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Thresholds-and-CAF/Thresholds-and-CAF.aspx
Appendix B: Understanding Needs - Dimensions of Vulnerability

The Staffordshire Insight Team used extensive national literature of existing research and local service level analysis to understand and identify key risks factors that can lead to parental problems and negative family effects.

The influential risk factors, as illustrated below, can have a negative impact on children and families, including when combined with other issues (such as mental health issues and domestic abuse). Examples of negative impact can include issues such as school absence, poor parenting and child abuse/neglect.

By identifying need for Early Help as soon as possible, issues can be addressed early, therefore preventing problems escalating and reducing demand on services by avoiding late intervention.
Appendix C: Early Help Assessment

The Early Help assessment will support the identification of unmet needs at the earliest opportunity and the timely provision of additional services. A co-ordinated approach to service delivery will lead to improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Staffordshire Early Help Assessment has been designed to be easy to use as a guide for initiating and recording discussions with families where their children may have additional needs. The format is user-friendly and the form can be re-visited and added to over time by the practitioner(s) working with the family, and by the family themselves. It is – first and foremost – a tool to enable practitioners and families to jointly assess needs and to inform a plan in which all will play a part. The objective of that plan will be to ensure that everyone understands their role in actions that will ensure that the additional needs of the child or young person are addressed, and that outcomes for that child – and for their family – improve and are sustained.

The Staffordshire Early Help Assessment is the tool for the county and practitioners are encouraged to use it when they feel that they need to discuss concerns with a child and their family.

The form guides that discussion and should prompt recognition of the strengths and resources in families and the communities in which they live. It will inform a plan of action that draws on those resources to achieve improvement for the child or young person. If more than one agency needs to be involved - either from the outset or later on – then the format is one which is familiar and not specific to any one agency and is an ideal tool to support partnership working. It can be added to and updated but there should rarely be the need to start the assessment again.

Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board will monitor use of the Staffordshire Early Help Assessment to ensure that all relevant agencies are using it as a matter of course to support good practice in working with children and families. The SSCB will be looking for examples of where a range of agencies and practitioners have found it useful as a tool to achieve a collective understanding of the needs of children and families. When undertaking an assessment, professionals should pay due consideration to the safety needs of each individual child / young person and to the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board policies and procedures.

For training information visit: http://www.staffschildboard.org.uk/Training/E-Learning/Specific-Subject-Training/Specific-Subject-Training.aspx
Appendix D: Further Examples of Early Help in Staffordshire

DADS – Dads and Disability Support

DADS group grew from a group called ‘You Too’ - a parental support group run by mums from Cannock children centre for children with additional needs. The group was developed in partnership with the Children’s Development Centre (CDC) and parents and children attending a CDC assessment were given an invite to attend the “You Too” group on the final day of the assessment process by children centre workers. DADS group was formed when a father with two children that had complex needs extended the group to increase father participation in October 2012.

Their aim is “To Build Awareness to Make a Difference” by improving integration for children with disabilities with mainstream activities for families in the local community. The group is run independently from the children’s centre by parents and carers who have children with special needs and disabilities. The group offers;

* Peer support with dealing with routine family life as well as crisis support at times of real difficulty
* free training courses
* access to advice and guidance
* a centre for families and community members to meet
* day trips for families & members
* ad hoc events
* opportunity to buy previously used household furniture and other items at low prices.

DADs is not just for fathers - it is for everyone to join, share information, ask questions, to offer and get support.
House of Bread, Stafford

House of Bread (HOB) is a volunteer-based organisation that offers information advice guidance and a home-cooked meal for vulnerable and homeless people in Stafford and the surrounding area. They operate a food bank, Bread Church and community garden/allotment, access to furniture and soft furnishings and clothes re-cycling project, and work with families who need support and are directed to them by the local Signpost Centre. They have a youtube channel and video that can be accessed via; www.hobstafford.co.uk/hob-media-the-documentary

House of Bread work in partnership with local schools, colleges, health professionals and universities. It has a close working relationship with Staffordshire Sports and Performance Academy through whom it advertises the support that it can provide to families, and with St Georges Hospital, providing supported opportunities for service users to be involved in the various project activities. The HoB foodbank is a core element of their service for families living in poverty and was supported by the DHL and Argos Stafford based depot as their charity of the year 2014/2015.

A food collection point was set up at the Stafford depot for the 900 onsite staff to donate, and the proceeds were distributed to families in the Stafford area. HoB also work with the youth offending service in Staffordshire, offering volunteering activities for young people at risk of early entry to the criminal justice system. The charity has a diverse range of community-based volunteering opportunities for local people, with a clear focus on practical support for families of limited means.
Lichfield ‘International Women’s Group’

Lichfield ‘International Women’s group’ was started 5 years ago by a local woman who had lived in other countries with her husband’s work, with her young children and as a result had felt isolated and lonely during her time abroad. On her return to the UK the group was set up to provide support, friendship and signposting to services for women who found themselves in a similar position and for several months was an informal weekly gathering which was run from her family home.

In 2011 Alice approached a local commissioner as she was finding the numbers attending were increasing and she could no longer hold the group in her home. The group was finally relocated to the local children’s centre where they developed a strong voluntary committee and now have planned activities and themes for sharing ideas/information/traditional recipes from their own cultures which is shaped and driven entirely by the women. It has been supported by commissioners and quality assured on its (informal) early learning provision by Entrust. The group is run by parents for parents and attended in the main by Polish, Eastern European, Japanese, Chinese families. All parents have registered with the children’s centre, and as a result have engaged in the English and Maths courses at the local community centre and children’s centre and one parent now volunteers for the local credit union.

Local professionals are familiar with the group, which has become an established network of support for EAL families and is signposted to by health visitors, commissioned providers, council and Local Support Team when they are aware of isolated minority community families.

Alice handed over the responsibility of running the group to a local lady called Anna last year as her own children grew older.

Attendance numbers can fluctuate on a weekly basis from anything between 5 and 9 adults and up to 11 children with some school age children who still attend during school holidays.

An example of how the group can provide support is when a Polish parent came into the centre and was distressed as she spoke very little English and was trying to navigate her way around the services. The group translated information for her, and finally acted as an interpreter when she was applying for a Think 2 nursery place.

Lichfield International Women’s Group can be found at:
https://www.facebook.com/LichfieldInternationalWomensGroup
Appendix D: Further Examples of Early Help in Staffordshire

Chesterton Moving Forward (CMF)

Chesterton Moving Forward (CMF) is a task and finish group developed to bring together key local partners to develop a community response to tackling the vulnerability to child sexual exploitation (CSE) that had been identified in the local area. The Newcastle Partnership is working closely to deliver the district prevention strategy for the young people. This work has focused on local young people to raise awareness, education and CSE prevention.

CMF has complemented the work that has already been undertaken to address the wider context of vulnerability by the Newcastle Partnership. Over the summer holiday period Families First Local Support Teams deployed their youth work practitioners to work with young people as and when they met in the evenings in the Audley area. Building on this work, Local Support Teams then worked alongside key partners; schools, the police, and the borough council – to deliver the ‘Girls Empowerment Group’. The young women involved have renamed the group ‘girl power’. They took part in activities such as rock climbing, and clearly responded well to each other and bonded with their workers. They are now pro-active in encouraging each other – and their peers – to engage in positive and inspiring activities. The success of this targeted prevention project has been evident, and further groups have been set up using the same principles. Where those who participate need individual support, this is then provided by the Local Support Team with an ‘Early Help’ action plan for the young women and their families. Their involvement in the group has been a key factor in securing their engagement with an ‘Early Help’ service.
Appendix E: Success Measures

A number of measures have been identified below which could be used as a mechanism to measure the impact of Early Help across the county. Further work on identifying specific measures will need to be progressed locally and included as a key strand of any associated strategy delivery plans. The indicators could also be linked to relevant performance frameworks to promote a joined up approach.

- Confidence that there are peer networks in the community which provide opportunities for support;
- Reduction in the number of looked after children (LAC);
- Reduction in the number of Child in Need Plans open to children’s social services (excluding LAC and Child Protection plans);
- Reduction in the number of children and young people excluded from school;
- Increase in school attendance and attainment;
- Reduction in the number of children and young people involved in anti-social behaviour and crime;
- Reduction of the number of children and young people in custody;
- Increase in the number of young people and parents/carers in employment training & education;
- Reduction in the number of teenage conceptions;
- Reduction in the number of referrals to specialist mental health services through an improvement in emotional wellbeing and mental health
- Reduction in attendance at A&E departments
- Increase in the number of EHAs initiated by partner/agency;
- Improved confidence amongst partners to identify and respond to Early Help;
- Positive feedback from children, young people and parents/carers on the Early Help offer, their experiences and positive outcomes achieved.
- Individual outcomes of children, young people and families (e.g. measured through achievement of EHA plans)
- Reduction in the cost of late interventions and
- Financial savings achieved on investment in Early Help
Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)
Children, Young People and Families
Early Help Strategy 2015 to 2018