**Delivering Early Help in Staffordshire**

**The Families First Early Help Offer for Children, Young People and Families**

**Introduction to Families First**

Families First are the key provider of children’s services across Staffordshire and deliver the full range of duties required of local authorities to support those children and young people who are most vulnerable, or who have the most unmet need. Families First works closely with partners to deliver Children’s Social Care, Early Help, Education Psychology, Youth Offending, Statutory Education Services and provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND).

Families First support the County Council’s mission statement *‘to ensure everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy’*.

In support of this, the Families First Vision is: ‘*to work with partners and families to enable vulnerable children and young people to be safe and secure; to promote physical and emotional well-being and to help them achieve their full potential within their communities’.*

Our overarching Core Goals are to ensure:

* Governance and leadership arrangements are implemented and well understood across Families First.
* Children and families in need are offered evidence-based services, which supports resilience and improved outcomes.
* Service users, partners and staff feel they are empowered and have the authority, responsibility and accountability to influence and shape our services.
* Families First use technology to maximise its performance.

**Our cross-cutting Strategic Priorities are to ensure we:**

* Invest in our **workforce**

* Provide value for money and ensure **resources** are used in the most effective and efficient way to achieve sustained improvements to the lives of children, young people and families.
* Develop and embed effective **performance** management
* Engage **service users and staff** in developing and delivering services and share responsibility with **partners** to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people.

Families First provide local support and evidence-based intervention for children and families to prevent needs escalating to a level requiring statutory services. Where such specialist services *are* needed, we ensure that timely and effective decisions are made to secure the best outcomes for a child’s future.

Engaging and listening to children, young people and their families is key to the service’s continuing improvement and this is embedded into and evidenced within the individual, group and family work that we do.

Families First operate in a localised way with key people required to meet the needs of those communities. Families First Specialist Safeguarding Delivery Teams and Local Support Teams cover the whole of Staffordshire but are delivered through eighteen locally based Specialist Safeguarding Teams and nineteen locally based Local Support Teams.

Families First bring together all services delivered by the local authority who work with vulnerable children, young people and families in a more coordinated way.

**Local Support Teams** are teams of Family and Education Engagement Workers (FEEWs), Child and Family Engagement Workers (CFEWs), Education Welfare Workers (EWWs) and Youth Workers with a variety of multi-disciplinary skills and backgrounds plus multi-agency practitioners who support the Building Resilient Families and Communities Programme (BRFC). They provide a range of services for children, young people and families living within a particular geographical area by utilising the Early Help Assessment and Plan as a means of assessment and intervention. Provision is focused on meeting **additional, targeted needs** at level 3 as defined by the SSCB. The focus of the LST is to support families who, without some intervention and support, would be requiring of statutory social work services. Group work is offered to families at any level of need post Universal provision who meet a defined referral criteria and support in a co-work capacity is provided to some families in statutory social work services. ’Intense’ cases identified as part of BRFC will be offered a multi-agency approach and a more intense level of intervention supported by the multi-agency practitioners working within the FIPs. FIP workers may also work alongside social workers leading statutory social work interventions where families additionally meet the criteria for inclusion on the BRFC programme. EWWs undertake statutory education functions on behalf of the Local Authority.

Local Support Teams will work closely with partners in the developing Place Based Locality arena to understand and respond to locality needs and to ensure effective step-down to ‘Earliest Help’ services at the close of a period of engagement when this is appropriate.

Local Support Teams will allocate work to Commissioned Providers at Tier 2 of the Threshold of Needs where BRFC criteria are also met.

There are 19 LSTs.

**Responsive Services** provide one front door for all requests for support for targeted early help delivered by the LST’s or statutory social work assessment and intervention, an Education Support and Advice Service, a Local Authority Designated Officer Service and provision of a CSC Risk Management Coordinator for local MAPPA arrangements under our duty to cooperate. Responsive Services also provide an Emergency Duty Service out of hours for children and adult social care. Responsive Services will further identify families eligible for inclusion on the BRFC Programme. **Responsive Services will not provide referral routes for support offered at Tier 2 of Staffordshire’s Thresholds Framework unless BRFC criteria are met.**

**Specialist Safeguarding Units** provide social work services to safeguard and protect children in need and children at risk of significant harm. They also undertake assessments of children and young people entering care. There are 18 SSUs.

**Looked After Children Services** provide help and support, including a range of statutory services for children and young people in care, moving towards permanency and those leaving care. Practitioners are based in Court & Care Planning and Throughcare Teams and keep in regular contact with looked after children and ensure their statutory Care Plans are up to date.

**Children’s Disability Teams** provide a holistic service to children and young people with a disability including assessment and care planning and interventions including short-breaks and provision for looked after children.

**Families First Local Support Teams Early Help Offer for Children, Young People and Families**

**Why Provide Early Help?**

The desire to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families by providing the right help at the right time underpins all aspects of Families First service planning and delivery. We know that if our services, and those of our partners, identify the needs of children, young people and their families as soon as possible and take swift action to address those needs, we can stop problems starting, getting worse or becoming entrenched.

If problems worsen for children and young people they can start to influence every aspect of their lives, hence the clear message from the Munro Review which has been endorsed in the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015, that early help is better for children. It is therefore important that every practitioner is committed to ensuring that effective early help

is in place.

Serious Case Review learning has taught us that the more swiftly we recognise a child has problems, the quicker we take action. Staffordshire’s early help strategy recognises the need to promote and support earliest help delivered in communities as well as providing more formally delivered early help via an assessment and key-worker model which is common to all partner agencies. Furthermore, the better we work together and share information the more likely we are to avoid negative outcomes for children. We know that a comprehensive early help offer which delivers the right help at the right time is the right approach to take. We accept that orienting services towards early help is not easy, particularly during tough financial times. However, when early help is embedded there is clear evidence that it can play a crucial role in relieving the pressure on statutory services so a given level of resource is used to better effect.

Similarly, when the high costs of ‘non-intervention’ is compared to the significantly lower costs of intervening early, it becomes clear that early help is often the better approach and in the long-term can yield significant savings. Moreover, all of the evidence suggests that no children’s services system can be efficient unless early help is a significant part of the mix.

As Staffordshire’s largest provider of service for children, young people and families, Families First has a central role in the coordination and delivery of a comprehensive and effective targeted early help offer, building on our current strengths and continuing to develop and deliver services in a way that meets the needs of Staffordshire families.

Supporting and managing the interfaces between the formal Local Support Team offer of early help and place based earliest help and statutory social work provision is a core strategic priority of Families First current transformation strategy.

**What is Early Help?**

It is important to recognise that early help is not a single, one-off event but a process whereby:

* Children, young people and families’ difficulties are **identified** before they have reached a point at which a child’s development and well-being is seriously compromised;
* Having been identified early on, the scale and nature of these problems are properly understood and a plan for offering help is developed through a process of high quality **assessment**, the foundation of which is a ‘common early help assessment’ for use by all professionals involved with children and young people with this level of need;
* **Planning** for action in partnership with children and families, having a clear understanding of the outcomes that we want to achieve; and
* Children, young people and families are then offered the help they need in the **delivery** of evidence-based programmes and interventions the result of which should be that they either overcome their difficulties or are offered and accept longer term support to help manage them.

**Levels of Need**

Staffordshire’s Threshold Framework **‘Accessing the Right Help at the Right Time’** is an overarching document for the whole of the children and young people’s workforce in Staffordshire. It acts as a guidance tool that all agencies, professionals and volunteers can use to consider how best to meet the needs of individual children and young people through a seamless approach to service delivery which adapts in response to changing levels of need. The threshold model has four descriptors for these levels: **Universal Need, Additional Need, Multiple Need and Acute Need.**

**Level 1: Universal Need –** Children and young people at this level are achieving expected outcomes and experiencing the usual challenges of growing up. There are no unmet needs or need is low level and can be met by the universal services or with some limited additional advice or guidance. Children /young people, parents and carers can access information, advice and services directly.

**Level 2: Additional Need –** Children and young people at this level are in need of co-ordinated early help and support from services. The need cannot be met by a universal service/setting alone but can be met by a targeted intervention from single service to prevent needs from escalating.

**Level 3: Multiple Need –** Children and Young People at this level have diverse and complex needs and targeted multi-agency support is required. Children and families participate in interventions which are delivered in a co-ordinated way which tackle identified difficulties and help them to build resilience to better deal with issues in the future. Local Support Teams offer early help assessment, plans and interventions at this level of identified need, with consent from families.

**Level 4: Acute Need –** There are a smaller group of children and young people at this level who require intensive help and are in need of specialist support. Children and young people will access specialist services following a statutory assessment. Specialist services include Children’s Social Care, the Youth Offending Service, SEN Services and CAMHS. This could be due to safeguarding issues where there is no risk of actual or likely significant harm, but needs are acute and multi-agency plans are not effective; or because there are child protection issues where there is actual or likely significant harm.

The full Thresholds Framework document ‘Accessing the Right Help at the Right Time’ which includes further guidance on the levels of needs and possible service response is available on the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) website at Section 1E of the SSCB procedures:

<https://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Procedures/Section-One/Section-1-Policy-Framework-and-Principals.aspx>

**SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE LOCAL SUPPORT TEAMS**

**Referral/Request for Support (follow hyperlink for referral guidance)**

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/health/childrenandfamilycare/childprotection/ChildProtection.aspx>

Requests for support from the Local Support Team should be made via First Response or as part of step-down arrangements between Specialist Safeguarding Units and LSTs. Consent from the family should be obtained prior to a request for support been made.

Requests to refer a family to a group work programme offered by the LST should also be made via First Response or directly from a social worker to the LST Coordinator currently engaged with a family. All families meeting the group work referral criteria will be considered. Partner agencies seeking a group work provision only for a family should consider if they should also be supporting the family by an early help assessment led by their own agency.

Families meeting the criteria for Building Resilient Families and Communities (BRFC) intervention will be identified at the point of request for support. Partner agency information will also be utilised to identify further families who may benefit from LST intervention who meet the BRFC criteria.

Where requests for support do not meet the referral criteria for LST, First Response will offer advice on how families may access support offered at Tier 2 via 0-19 Service Providers commissioned by the Local Authority and other community and voluntary agencies.

**Early Help Assessment, Planning and Intervention**

[**EARLY HELP PRACTICE GUIDANCE**](https://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Thresholds-and-CAF/Thresholds-and-Early-Help.aspx)

Local Support Teams will accept referrals from families or professionals where families have consented to the referral being made and where the child has unmet needs at Tier 3 of the Thresholds Framework. They will work from a strength based perspective utilising Staffordshire’s Early Help Assessment and Plan. Assessments will be undertaken in partnership with children, young people and their families and with those professionals who already know and offer support to the family.

A key worker model will be operated and the key-worker will be responsible for co-ordinating the Early Help Assessment and Team around the Family (TAF) meetings. These meetings will produce Family Plans for intervention which identify and coordinate a package of multi-agency interventions to meet the assessed needs of the family. The key worker will coordinate TAF Reviews to ensure outcomes are reviewed at regular intervals. Whilst Family Plans will consider all family members including the adults, the focus of our interventions is on improving outcomes for children.

Bespoke 1-1 interventions will be provided as part of the Family Plan. Examples of interventions which might be delivered are;

* Anger Management
* Behaviour Management
* Bullying Awareness
* Self-esteem work / confidence building
* Internet Safety
* Positive Activities
* ASB Awareness
* Getting to school
* Smoking/substance misuse education
* Healthy Relationships education
* CSE Awareness
* Self/harm prevention
* Managing emotional well-being
* Developing a positive self-image
* Accessing community based services to support independence and resilience

Supporting parents to address issues which are impacting upon their parenting will also form part of Family Plans and may include;

* Accessing advice on debt and welfare benefits
* Accessing advice on housing
* Addressing emotional well-being in adults
* Access to work
* Access to learning
* Addressing domestic violence in adult relationships
* Addressing alcohol or substance dependency
* Parenting strategies
* Understanding child development needs
* Family support – additional parenting related support to help families implement parenting strategies
* Accessing community based services to support independence and resilience
* Delivery of evidence based parenting interventions, e.g. Triple P, Strengthening Families.

LSTs will work with families identified as part of the BRFC Programme, also by utilising the Early Help Assessment and Plan and will provide Assertive Outreach to those families identified as BRFC ‘intense’ via a multi-agency approach and a frequent visiting programme. Families with more complex needs will be supported by a more intense programme of support to assist them to find realistic solutions which address route causes.

**Statutory Education Services**

Consists of:

* Reviewing the evidence presented for prosecution for irregular attendance under section 444 (1) and (1A), and then progressing cases through the judicial services, including PACE interviews.
* Issuing of 20 day notices and Penalty Notices for irregular attendance and punctuality.
* Issuing penalty notices for leave in term time and parents in breach of exclusion condition.
* Initiating and processing School Attendance Orders.
* Undertaking Parenting and Education Supervision Orders.
* Casework for children identified as Children Missing Education (CME).
* Monitoring Children Missing out on Education (CMOOE).
* Annual Register inspections.
* Child Employment and Entertainment Licensing and Monitoring

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**Group Work**

Families First recognises that group work may be of considerable benefit to families whose needs can be met without a coordinated Early Help Assessment or who are receiving statutory social work services, and LSTs will consider requests for group work support for families whose needs present at tiers 2, 3 or 4 of the Thresholds Framework. Group work is not however accessible as a Universal Service.

LST will provide Group Work via the following commissioned contracts;

* Adult Community Learning
* Teen Spirit

**The Core Group Work** **Offer** in each cluster will be shared with local agencies and is likely to comprise some or all of the following.

* Mellow Bumps – antenatal programme.
* Simply Play for Babies (PEEP) – works with families in most need in the first year of having a baby.
* Simply Play (PEEP) – works with families who need support to engage/interact and be aware of their child’s early development, where children are aged 0-4 years.
* Healthy Lifestyles – Time for You Course. For parents who struggle to interact and engage to address low confidence and low self-esteem. Looks at giving information, improving practical tasks like cooking and healthy eating.
* Parenting Course – From Pram to Primary School. Parenting Programme to develop learner’s knowledge and understanding on factors which influence children’s behaviours and positive strategies which can be used to support any unwanted behaviours.

According to identified need, which may vary across localities, LST’s will also develop **local group work offers**. Examples of the types of group we might run are;

* Internet safety
* CSE Workshops
* Girl’s Empowerment Group
* Baby Massage
* Anti-Bullying Projects
* ASB desistence

A menu of core group work opportunities will be published annually and more localised arrangements will be developed according to identified need and LST capacity.

**Step-Up and Down**

Local Support Teams will develop a detailed knowledge of services available within their localities and part of all Family Plans will be to support families to access local and Universal provision to support their resilience and independence and reduce their requirement for formal support.

Where safeguarding concerns are identified as part of an LST intervention or where a statutory child in need assessment is required, families will be discussed at Step-Up meetings. Any child protection concerns will be subject to immediate step-up. Cases with immediate child protection concerns must be discussed by the LST Coordinator and SSU Team Manager/Team Coordinator on the day the concerns are identified. Any disagreements about next steps will result in escalation to the SSU County Manager via the LST District Lead. Where it is unclear if a family require the intervention of statutory Children’s Social Care services but where their needs appear to be escalating, In-Reach will be provided by the SSU.

Where cases open to Children’s Social Care are assessed as no longer requiring a formal child in need or child protection plan, but where the family would benefit from a further period of support which they have consented to, Early Help Workers will be invited to contribute to the final period of CIN or Child Protection planning and form part of the CIN or CP Plan. At the point of transition to the LST they will thus have an established relationship with the family and will become their key-worker at that point. The final CP or CIN planning meeting which supports step-down should develop the first Early Help Assessment and Plan with the family.

**CORE PRINCIPALS OF THE LOCAL SUPPORT TEAMS**

* The voice of the child and their lived experience will be central to all assessments and interventions delivered. Their needs, safety and welfare will be the focus of all we do.
* An approach of whole family working will be adopted.
* A solution focussed approach will be adopted.
* We will recognise and celebrate families’ strengths.
* Child protection and safeguarding concerns will be subject to immediate escalation to the Team Coordinator.
* Our approach will encourage cognitive learning rather than crisis management.
* The Early Help Assessment and Family Plan will be the assessment and planning tools used.
* A Key-Worker will be assigned to all families.
* The Key Worker will coordinate the delivery and review of the Family Plan ensuring effective multi-agency working and information sharing (with consent) is in place via regular TAF meetings.
* Family Plans will be SMART and will recognise strengths, worries and what needs to change.
* Our processes will be timely.
* The Family Outcome Star will be used to measure progress made against the Family Plan.
* Regular management oversight and supervision of all case work will be provided.
* For all Family Plans reaching a third review, the review will be chaired by the Team Coordinator.
* Interventions will be evidence based.
* Our relationships with each other, our partners and families will be respectful.
* We will use performance data, learning from audit and feedback to analyse our effectiveness and make changes where we need to improve and do more of what leads to successful outcome for families.
* We will attend training and development opportunities to support our service approach and personal development.

**Outcomes**

By adopting these principles and processes across Families First and encouraging our partners to do the same, we expect children, young people and families to receive the right support at the right time. Our desired outcomes are;

* Fewer children, young people and families needing expensive high tier services (measured by the number of referrals to specialist services)
* Fewer severe problems (measured by the number of referrals with a primary need; the number of families in acute distress or family dysfunction)
* A narrowing of the poverty gap between populations of children, young people and families (measured by Staffordshire Child Poverty Indicators, the proportion of children in poverty)
* Improved uptake and engagement with universal and targeted services
* A reduction in demand on specialist services
* Improved satisfaction about services (measured by the number of related customer compliments and complaints and service evaluations)
* Empowered and self-reliant communities (measured by re-referral rates)