

Report to Children and Education Scrutiny Board

9 January 2023

Not for Publication

[Exempt Information – insert exemption clause applicable by speaking to Democratic Services Unit, delete if not applicable]

Subject:	Early Help in Sandwell
Director:	Director of Children and Education Michael Jarrett
Contact Officer:	Assistant Director Children’s Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement, Sally Giles Sally_giles@sandwell.gov.uk Strategic Lead Early Help, SCT, Kate Griffiths Kate_griffiths@sandwellchildrenstrust.org Mark Davis, Chief Executive, SCVO Mark@scvo.info Chief Executive, Krunch, Jon Grant JonGrant@krunch.org.uk

1 Recommendations







- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the update on Early Help work in Sandwell.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Board is invited to review progress to date and comment on planned next steps.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>The Early Help Strategy is key to achieving the corporate objective of Best Start in Life for Children and Young People. Without an effective Early Help offer and effective multi-agency support, families will not receive the right interventions, in the right place at the right time, which could lead to problems escalating and more expensive, intrusive statutory interventions being required.</p>
	<p>People live well and age well</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>Early Help and prevention helps to build strong and resilient communities.</p>
	<p>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods</p>
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p>
	<p>A connected and accessible Sandwell</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

What is Early Help?

4.1 Early Help is not a service. Early Help means that if children and families have unmet needs and need additional help, all agencies are responsible for intervening and seeking to meet these needs. Therefore, identifying unmet needs and intervening with the **right support, in the right place, at the right time**, at the earliest possible opportunity when problems emerge, is not optional and is non-negotiable.



Early Help Governance

- 4.2 On 26th June 2021, Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership recognised Early Help as one of its three key priorities. A new Sandwell Early Help Strategy 2022- 2024 was launched on 17 March 2022. It was shaped by a wide range of local partners and over 180 practitioners and managers from across the partnership attended the launch which signalled a re-invigorated, multi-agency approach to the way help and support is offered across Sandwell.
- 4.2 Early Help and the implementation of the strategy is overseen by the Early Help Partnership, which is chaired by the voluntary sector, with representatives from SMBC, SCT, Police and Health in attendance. The Early Help Partnership reports to the Children and Families Strategic Partnership, with Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership receiving regular updates and assurance of progress against the Early Help strategy and action plan.

Early Help – How it Fits into the Windscreen of Help and Support

- 4.3 In March 2022, Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) refreshed its windscreen of help and support to ensure there is a shared language and consistent approach across the agencies to how help and support is provided to children and families. This is set out at Appendix A. The windscreen, also known as the continuum of need, is set out in the SCSP’s thresholds document.
- 4.4 Most children’s needs are met by their family and support networks or **universal services** available to everyone. Where a child or family has **an additional need**, their needs should be assessed, and an offer of additional support may be provided by a single organisation through a single agency plan, this tier of support is known as **Early Help**.
- 4.5 **Multi-agency Early Help** is available for children and families whose needs and circumstances make them more vulnerable and **who have two or more unmet needs** which requires input from more than one organisation or agency. A coordinated multi-disciplinary approach should be adopted.



- 4.6 This involves an Early Help Assessment, which is a tool for any practitioner to complete with a family to identify their needs and devise a plan for support. The assessment and plan are co-ordinated by an identified Lead Professional who works closely with the child and family and other professionals through Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings. A Lead Professional can be someone from any agency - paid or voluntary - who knows the family well and is best-placed to bring other partners together to co-ordinate the response. All multi-agency Early Help interventions should be recorded on the Early Help Module (EHM), a multi-agency database that allows practitioners to share information and make decisions about families based on an overview of all the work that is being undertaken with them. Families have to give consent to receive Early Help. Two case studies of effective multi-agency Early Help are provided at Appendix C.
- 4.7 The final tier of help and support that exceeds Early Help support (in situations where Early Help has not been sufficient to address the needs), is **Statutory Social work**. This is the point at which Sandwell Children's Trust - Children's Social Care will become involved with children and families as children are deemed at risk of significant harm. Families can be 'stepped up' to social care if their needs cannot be met or they escalate, or 'stepped down' from social care if their needs reduce and support can be appropriately provided through Early Help.

Who Delivers Early Help?

- 4.8 Early Help is 'everybody's business' and is delivered by all organisations and sectors - health, education, social care, police, housing, adult services and the voluntary sector – collaborating under the statutory guidance Working Together 2018. It is important that this 'system' of assessment and interventions works together effectively so children and families can access the appropriate help to meet their needs. Families should be able to access different types of support quickly and easily, preventing more intrusive interventions from statutory services. **Early Help is an approach and not a service**, offered by the Sandwell Partnership to ensure the right support, at the right time, in the right place. All agencies in Sandwell providing support and help to children and families are part of the Early Help community.



Progress and Achievement

- 4.9 The Early Help Partnership launched the new Sandwell Early Help Strategy and action plan in April 2022. A new Early Help Assessment (EHA) has been co-designed with partners and went live in October 2022. This will more robustly identify the support that families need and will help to engage them more effectively. It is important to note that an EHA is not a referral into Sandwell Children's Trust. Referrals are made through the Multi-agency Referral Form (MARF).
- 4.10 In order to develop a common understanding and ownership of Early Help, the three modules that make up the current early help training offer have been reviewed and updated. Early Help training historically sat with Sandwell Children's Trust but to ensure its widest reach across the partnership the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership have now incorporated Early Help training into their training offer. An Early Help e-learning module is currently being developed to reach all front-line children and family practitioners in Sandwell. Messages about Early Help and links to training and new developments are also now held and updated on the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership website, so there is a central point for up to date Early Help information.
- 4.11 The Early Help Partnership also host two websites – www.sandwellfamilylife.info and www.sandwellearlyhelp.info: the first offers support directly to families and allows them to search for activities in their locality by simply searching the service they require e.g. football club. The second website, which has recently been developed, is for practitioners and allows them to search for services by locality that can support families and offer intervention on specific needs.
- 4.12 Four partnership events were run in November and December 2022 to promote and remind partners of the shared commitment to improve the Sandwell early help offer and focussing specifically on the role of Lead Professional. 167 practitioners and managers from across the partnership



attended. Case studies were used to show how partners can more effectively work together, and children and parents' voices were used to show the impact that Multi-agency Early Help can have on families.

Impact and Progress

- 4.13 A multi-agency Early Help dashboard has been developed to provide evidence on impact. A copy is set out at Appendix B. Quarterly updates on 10 key performance indicators provide data and information to SMBC and the wider partnership so that progress can be measured. Sandwell is also contributing to a regional early help workstream chaired by the Sandwell DCS.
- 4.14 There has been a greater ownership of early help across the partnership. This summer, Sandwell Policing Unit have created and employed three Early Help Police Officers, with another three expected to join in the coming months. The Police are supporting and assisting in diverting children and young people away from offending and crime. Colleagues from across the Health Trust have been working to get key messages across the front-line practitioners in School Nursing, Health Visiting and GP Practices.
- 4.15 The demand for multi-agency Early Help support has increased by 25% in the last 12 months, with more children and young people receiving Early Help, including those who have been stepped down from statutory social work to Early Help services. If children's outcomes improve as a result of multi-agency Early Help interventions, this should lead to fewer children and families requiring intrusive and costly social care interventions.
- 4.16 The number of Early Help Assessments completed across the partnership has remained consistent at approximately 1,000 per quarter. EHAs are completed per family, so whilst assessments have remained stable, the number of children receiving Early Help has increased, as indicated above. The number of allocated Lead Professionals from different organisations has increased by 3% in the last 12 months. In addition, there have been 400 fewer children open to social care across the partnership compared to this time last year.



4.17 During the last three months the demand for partnership Early Help training has increased to such an extent that 4 additional training sessions have been added to meet demand which is positive in terms of evidencing growing partnership interest and commitment.

Areas for Development

4.18 Although there are 'green shoots' of improvement, the task involved in improving how partners work together through multi-agency Early Help and thus reduce the need for statutory intervention should not be underestimated. There is an ongoing need to promote the strategy and the messaging around Early Help to ensure commitment and engagement from all partners. The Data Dashboard will be used by the Early Help Partnership to proactively challenge partners and hold them to account to ensure that the Sandwell approach of 'right support, at the right time, in the right place' is being delivered. For a number of years, services in Sandwell have believed that any concerns for a child should result in a contact to Sandwell Children's Trust, which has resulted in a large number of contacts and referrals which do not meet statutory social work thresholds, and with no evidence of previous Early Help intervention being undertaken. Cultural change across the partnership is required to alter this narrative, to break down the barriers between agencies and organisations and to build up practitioners' skills and confidence. It will take time to see the impact of the Early Help strategy in practice. Further partnership working, learning and training is required to bring about long-lasting cultural and systemic change.

Next steps

- Consultation and engagement with children, young people and families to seek their views on the Sandwell early help offer and how this can be further improved to make it more accessible for them.
- Ensure all Early Help literature and websites explaining Early Help support available are up to date, family friendly and are promoted actively to families across Sandwell.



- Continue to promote the need for diversity in the take up of Lead Professionals from across the partnership to ensure families are supported by the most appropriate professional.
- Improved analysis of the Early Help data dashboard to ensure areas of development are actioned swiftly and appropriate challenge is made in a timely way.
- Bespoke discussions with Adult Services and CAMHS planned for early January 2023 to ensure understanding of the Early Help strategy and the contribution they can make in particular, though not limited to, transitions.
- Complete and launch the new Early Help e-learning module.
- In March 23, hold a 'year on' partnership event to look at progress made within the last 12 months following the launch of the Early Help Strategy.

5 Implications

Resources:	<p>Financial, staffing, land/building implications</p> <p>The Early Help Strategy requires all partners to contribute effectively to the deliver of multi-agency Early Help in the Borough, enabling and ensuring that their staff undertake Early Help training, contribute or undertaken Early Help Assessment, act as Lead Professionals where appropriate and record interventions on the Early Help module.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions</p> <p>The requirement and tools to be used for Early Help are set out in the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018)</p>
Risk:	<p>Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications</p>



	If Early Help is not delivered effectively, families will not receive support in a timely fashion and there is a risk that their outcomes will not improve and demand for more intensive social care services will increase.
Equality:	<p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <p>Early Help supports families where there are unmet needs. Work is currently being undertaken to understand how effectively it is meeting the needs of certain groups such as families from BAME groups.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <p>Early Help has a critical impact on the health and wellbeing of communities: it supports families who are dealing with mental health issues, domestic abuse, neglect, child exploitation etc.</p>
Social Value:	<p>Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)</p> <p>None</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Implications for climate change outcomes and any potential impact on the environment (e.g. impact on emissions, resource use, or the natural environment)</p> <p>None</p>

6 Appendices

Appendix A – Windscreen of Help and Support

Appendix B - Early Help Data Dashboard

Appendix C – Early Help Case Studies

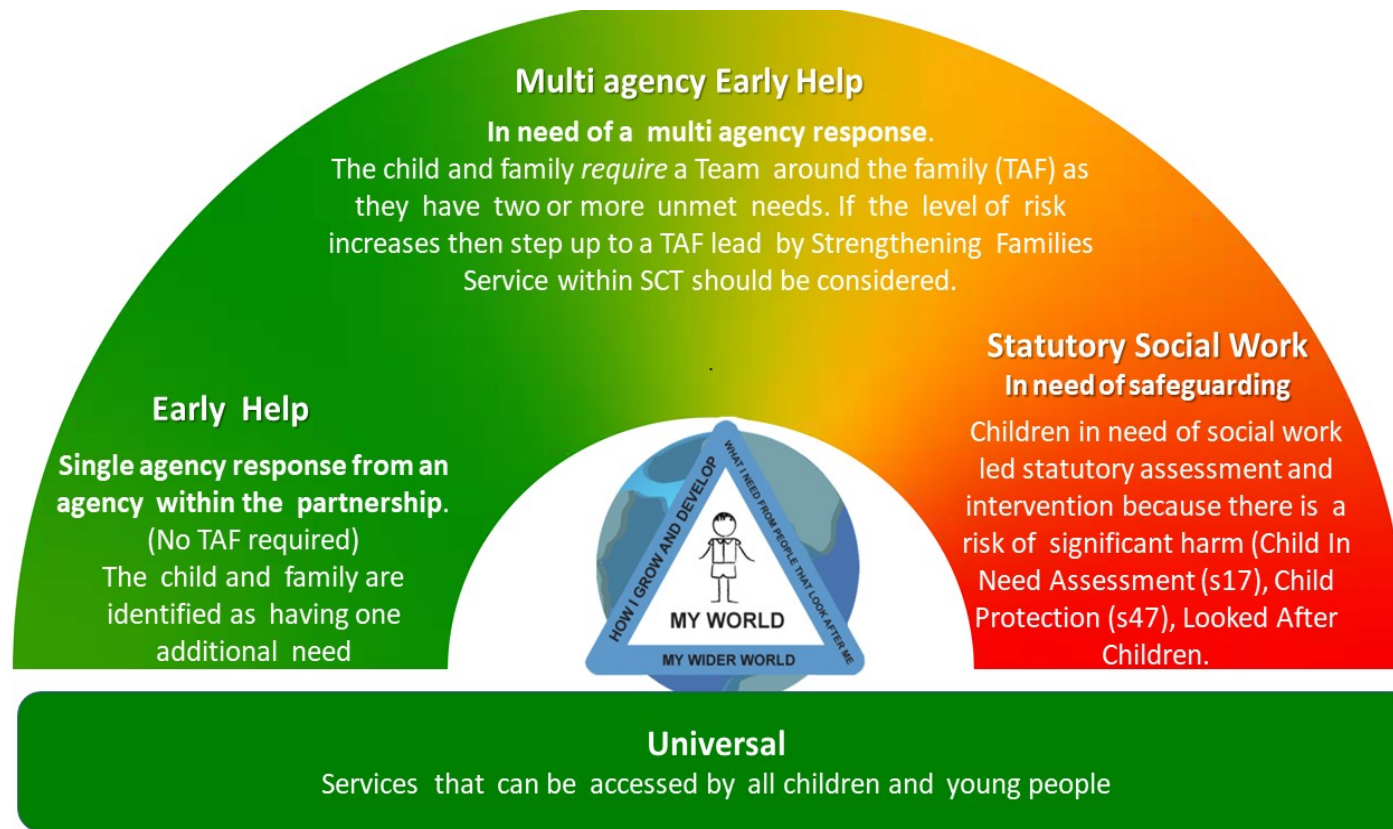
7. Background Papers

None





Appendix A – Windscreen of Help and Support



Appendix B - Early Help Data Dashboard

1. Early Help training take-up
2. Number of partners undertaking Early Help Assessments
3. Number of Lead Professionals per organisation/sector
4. Number of families receiving multi-agency Early Help who do not return within 12 months
5. Number of step downs to multi-agency Early Help that do not return to Social Care within 12 months
6. Referrals to Social Care with no evidence of Strengthening Families Service intervention or multi-agency Early Help in the prior 12 months
7. Number of contacts into Sandwell Children's Trust received, source, and conversion to referral or that meet threshold for Early Help
8. Number of children and young People receiving intervention/support



Appendix C – Case Studies

Case Study 1

Single mum SB has 3 children and the family came into the service in July 2021 due to a traumatic bereavement in 2020. The oldest child had discovered her father deceased as a result of suicide. Since that time, mum had struggled with her mental health and was using alcohol as a way of coping. The children were all sleeping in the same bed and the house was quite cluttered with their father's belongings. The oldest child was spending increasing amounts of time with her grandmother as she was upset at the home address. The initial requested was support for SB to de-clutter upstairs as soon as possible and to get the children's bedrooms back to how they were.

The initial plan was to provide a support to Mom and the children, but Mom didn't want this. Mom agreed to have some help to support the children's emotional wellbeing and to clear the garden for the children. The main thing Mom wanted was a house move so that the family could live together and begin to recover from their loss. Due to Housing Benefit debt which was accrued, the family were not going to be offered the house move.

Contact with SB was maintained although she had said she didn't want more support than a garden clearance. Strengthening Families Service worked with a charity Safe families and a volunteer was identified to try to help her to sort out the garden. Whilst initial wishes and feelings work was undertaken with the children, Mom shared she was in debt and agreed to additional support.

"I just want to thank you for all your help. I wouldn't have got where I am without you and I really appreciate it... I feel so proud of myself." – **Mum, June**

Once SB was receiving consistent and proactive support from her family support worker, as well increased support from Safe Families, she began to make significant steps forward.

In September 2022, SB and the children moved into a new property. The change in her is remarkable. She presents as very happy. She has addressed her drinking and said, "I haven't even thought about a drink since I moved here".



She has asked her GP for a hospital referral regarding her diabetes in order to improve her care and control and is awaiting an appointment. SB's new home is tidy and clean, and she feels very proud of it. The family are all living back together, and the children are happy to go to bed rather than being upset.

There were significant challenges in the support of this family however, this is a real example of excellent partnership working, resulting in significant and sustainable change for this family.

Case Study 2

Mum of four Amy lives in with her husband Steve and her children Abigail, Charlotte, Jack and Ava in Wednesbury. In 2007, an accident at work left Amy's husband Steve severely injured and unable to walk. During this time, Amy worked night shifts whilst also taking on childcare duties during the day: "I would often work, take the children to school, and fall asleep in the car when it came to pick them up. Then at night I would be back at work. The kids were sometimes late for school, sometimes unkempt, but that was just life."

In the following years, the financial strain took its toll on the family as their reduced income had to meet the growing needs of a family of six. Amy says "Even though we both worked, there were years where we slept just on mattresses on the floor. The kids all slept in one bedroom with blankets on the windows because we couldn't afford the heating. The money was just never enough to make ends meet."

As their financial situation began to steadily improve, Amy suffered a huge knockback when she lost her supermarket manager's job after 13 years. This had a devastating impact on her mental health, bringing back the negative emotions, fears and anxieties of the previous years. The family were under huge financial strain and Amy's mental and physical health deteriorated, and she had a flare up of her Fibromyalgia. It was at this point that Amy was referred to Children's Centre family support practitioner, who has improved family relationships by helping the family communicate with one another more effectively, stabilised their tenancy by clearing the garden, provided help with gas and electricity bills and enabled them to access to food banks.

"She's been a massive support for my kids, and they're really confident with her. She's helped me with CBT and talking therapy, and now I'm starting DBT. I didn't



tell Steve about what I was experiencing at work, so he didn't understand why I was angry all the time. She's broken down that barrier, and I've become stronger.” “It sounds silly, but it's the little things like that which makes life so much easier. Just having that skip [to clear the garden] has made a huge difference. There are families that don't know where to start, and things like that have a massive impact.”

Now, with Jack, Charlotte and Ava all seeing improvements in their schoolwork, the future is looking brighter. “Now, we no longer need to have the meetings with the school - the children are doing fine, they're above achieving, and Jack is set to get As and Bs for his GCSEs. “ Of the continued support they have received, Amy says “Without our family support worker we'd be in a much worse situation than we are now. I wouldn't have had the communication with my husband and children the way I do now, and I'd still be living on a knife's edge. Our support worker has broken that out of me, and she's helping me to become a better person.”

