Durham County Council

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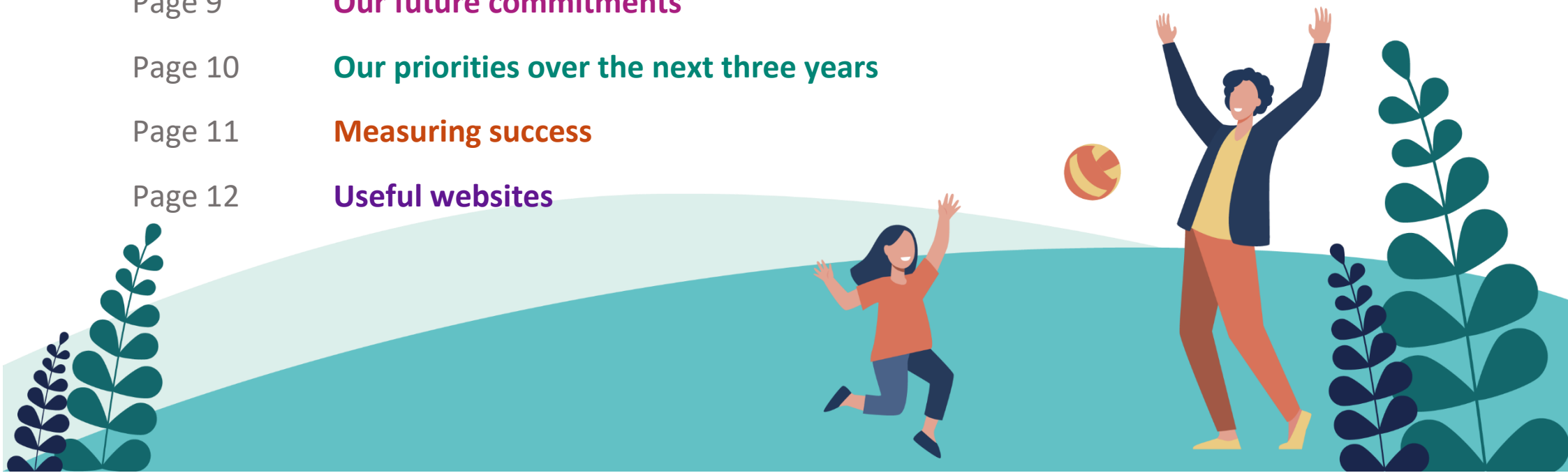


Foreword

In County Durham we have a vision to support all children and families to achieve their goals in life, in an environment that is safe, happy and healthy. We recognise that all families need support from time to time to help their children thrive, whether that's from friends, family, volunteers, or services. Our ambition is for every family to receive ***the right support at the right time and in the right place.*** We want all families to have access to the information and tools they need to care for and interact positively with their children, and to look after their own wellbeing.

Durham's Early Help Strategy focuses on building positive and trusted relationships, between services, our communities and most importantly families. Our early help offer is focussed on identifying needs for the whole family at the earliest opportunity and using our collective support to respond swiftly and effectively.

We are committed to working together with children and their families, and in partnership with health, education, criminal justice and voluntary, community and faith sector organisations to ensure our support offer is accessible and meets the needs of all families in County Durham.

The County Durham Early Help Strategy sets out what we will do over the next 3 years to make sure that children and families get the early help they need.

What do we mean by Early Help?

Early help is not a service but a way of working and relies on local services working together with children and their families to identify who needs help and how best to meet a family's needs. Identifying families who need support and working with them at the earliest opportunity regardless of the age of the child can help improve their lives. This also includes identifying children and families with a range of multiple and complex needs in order to provide effective early help to mitigate these needs and reduce the need for statutory children social care interventions. Where social care interventions have been required, a range of early help support can also be provided during and after social care intervention ensuring children and families receive the range of help that builds safety and resilience.

Early help is offered everyday by voluntary and community organisations including volunteers and charities, Family Hubs, schools, universal health services, Doctors etc. It is the term used in Durham that describes our approach to supporting children and their families to prevent problems emerging (prevention), or as soon as problems emerge (early help). This could be on a whole range of social, health, educational or financial issues.

Some of the young people we work with have helped us make an **Early Help in County Durham animation** to explain who we are and what we do.

National context for Early Help

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

Successful outcomes for children depend on strong partnership working between parents/carers and the practitioners working with them. The guidance highlights the need to ensure we take a child centred approach to meeting the needs of the whole family. It recognises that all families can face challenges that make parenting difficult. Often families are able to overcome challenges themselves or with the help of relative, friends and services such as schools, health visiting and mental health services. However, sometimes families have more significant needs that require more intensive help and support. The guide also recognises that early help is NOT a service, but a system of support delivered by Local Authorities and their partners working together to take collective responsibility to provide the right support.

Supporting Families Programme

The national Supporting Families Programme, known in Durham as Stronger Families is about building resilience by providing effective, whole family support at the earliest possible opportunity, where joined up local services are able to identify families in need and provide them with the right support at the right time.

Family Hub and Start for Life Programme

Family Hubs provide a 'one stop shop' for families from pregnancy, through the early years and up to 19 years or 25 years for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Family Hubs provide a place-based way for local services to come together to improve access, improve connections between families, professionals, services and providers, and put relationships at the heart of family support. The Start for Life offer focusses support for families from pregnancy up to a child being 2 years old.

Reducing Parental Conflict

There is strong evidence that frequent, intense and poorly resolved parental conflict can have a negative impact on children's mental health and long-term life-chances such as their education, health and happiness. Parental Conflict is conflict which occurs within an equal relationship (no imbalance of power). In response to this, the government developed the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme to reduce parental conflict and improve these outcomes. In Durham, we call this 'Relationships Matter' and have trained our workforce to support parents and carers to improve the quality of their co-parenting relationship whether they are together or separated.

Independent Review of Children's Social Care

In 2023 the government published a new vision to transform Children's Social Care: 'Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy' ('Built on Love') in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The government sets out a number of key ambitions including the need to provide Family Help to ensure all children and families can get the right help at the right time, no matter what they need or where they come from as well as making this help easier for children and families to get.

There are 115,000 children and young people (aged 0 – 19) in County Durham with almost 4,800 live births annually.

The information to the right makes plain the scale of the challenge for the county and why we need to provide high quality early help to those who need it.

Why do we need Early Help?

- 1 in 4 children live in a household which cannot afford all the basics they need such as their food and fuel bills (1)
- 1 in 5 five year olds have tooth decay (1)
- We have 561 children requiring a Child Protection Plan (3)
- We have 1183 children in care and 305 care leavers
- We have 2273 classified as a Child in Need (3)
- Domestic Abuse continues to be the most frequent concern for a referral into Children's Social Care 24% (3)
- 27.1% of children aged 0 to 4 are described as living in poverty in County Durham (1)
- Child neglect is the second most common reason for a referral into Children's Social Care 18% (3)
- In 2022/23, 1,689 Early Help Assessments were undertaken (3)
- 1 in 6 children, aged 5 – 16 years, identified as having a probable mental health disorder (an increase from 1 in 9 in 2017) (4)
- A 20% increase in demand for Children Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is projected over the next 5 years (2)
- 31.2% of children in County Durham are eligible for Free School Meals relating to approximately 22,800 children (1)
- 1 in 7 women smoke at the time of baby's delivery (1)
- 10,400 school age children have special educational needs and 14.65% (11,200) of pupils have SEN support (1)
- 1 in 4 reception pupils (26%) and around 1 in 3 year 6 pupils (40%) are overweight, with higher prevalence in more deprived areas (1)
- School attendance rate in County Durham is 93.3% (1)
- 1 in 3 babies are breast fed at six to eight weeks after birth (1)

1 - Durham Insights

2 - TEWV Research looking at the impact of COVID People Survey in England

3 - Durham County Council Case Management Data

4 - Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey in England

Our vision for County Durham

We will support children and families at the earliest opportunity to help them thrive.

Who ‘we’ are?

When we talk about ‘we’, that includes everyone in the Early Help system who works with children and their families, networks and local communities to help build family resilience.

The Early Help System and Governance

The governance and oversight for Durham's Early Help System is provided by the multi-agency Prevention and Early Help Partnership, reporting to the County Durham Starting Well Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board for County Durham.

County Durham's early help Approach 2024 - 2026

We do this by...

Being here for all children, young people and families.

Working with the whole family.

Working with families at the earliest opportunity.

Making it as easy as possible for families to find out about our support.

Offering a range of support such as online, digital and face to face, so families can choose what is right for them.

Listening to families and the voice of children.

Tailoring our support to individual families as all families are unique.

Designing and delivering services with the people who need them.

Working together with other services, sharing information, organising and co-ordinating support to families.

Not judging families and by being honest, respectful, understanding and reliable.

Providing support we know works, in a way families understand, and delivering this in places they feel comfortable and safe.

Listening to families when we don't get things quite right so we can make it better as soon as possible.

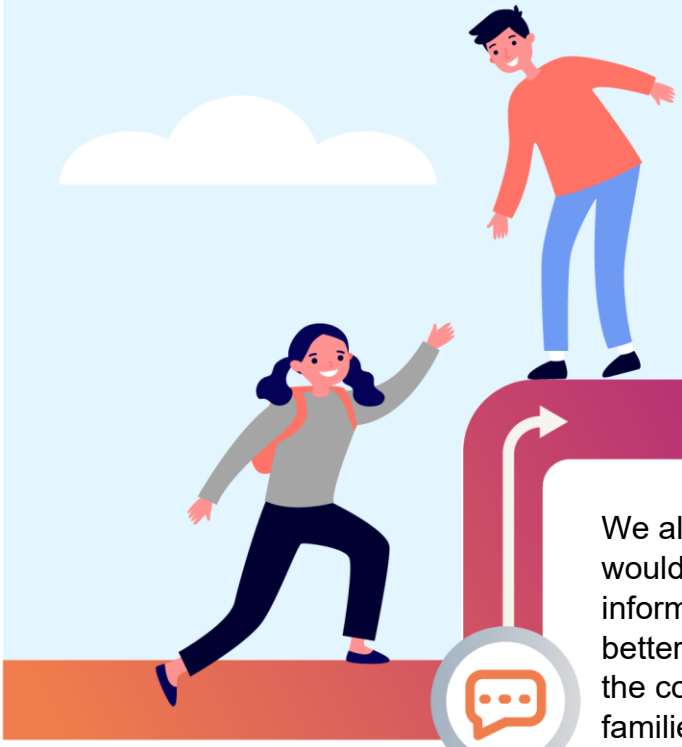
Building on the strengths of families, believing in them and helping them be more confident in managing difficult times.

County Durham's Early Help Approach

…is founded on a relationship-based culture, building valued and trusted relationships with families. Our guiding principles shape the way we deliver support across our Early Help System to families in County Durham.

We do this by…

What we have achieved so far



In our last Strategy (2019-2023) we said we wanted services to work better together and be more joined up around communities (place-based).
We have achieved this by creating 7 Locality Early Help Conversations across the county where services come together and agree how they will best support families to meet their needs.

We also said that services would more effectively share information and data to help us better understand and address the collective issues children, families and communities are facing and provide a more collective and effective response.
We continue to improve this through our established Prevention and Early Help Partnership and 3 Prevention and Early Help Forums. These bring services together to share information on worries they may have that are emerging in communities and consider how together they can best support and improve these.

We said we wanted to improve how we collected and used a range of data to help services better understand individual, family and community needs. We have made good progress with this and now have an online portal where services can, where appropriate, share information about families they are supporting. This helps to better connect and join up services and not duplicate and repeat support to families that has not helped before.
We now have a 'Group Work' module capturing the work carried out in Family Hubs which helps us to know what families like to attend the most. We have also began using an IT system called 'Single View', which supports Childrens Service's practitioners in better understanding the needs of families and be able to provide more effective support.

We said we would build resilience and encourage independence within families and communities. We continue to use a model of practice called Signs of Safety/Wellbeing which builds on the strengths of families and helps them identify those people most important to them, who are their natural support network.

We continue to work closely with our Voluntary and Community Sector and help connect families to the support in their community as this is part of their wider network.

We have continued to develop our offer of evidence-based programmes to families through our **Family Hubs** and have established a parent peer support programme called **Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities** (EPEC). EPEC trains parents in a range of parenting programmes and those parents then deliver to other parents across County Durham.

Our future commitments

The national Early Help System Guide provides a 5-point framework to support early help partnerships to develop an effective Early Help System based on local need.

Using this framework, we commit to:

Leadership

We will promote our early help offer and ensure early help is seen as everyone's responsibility. We will foster a shared relationship-based culture and an early help approach which promotes collaboration and integration and deliver what we know works for children and families in County Durham.

Workforce

We will work together to build a confident and competent early help workforce. We will continue to implement the Signs of Safety/Wellbeing approach and use common tools such as the Family Outcome Framework, Early Help Assessment and Child and Family Practice Toolkit to help be consistent in our approach. We will also develop a Team Around the School (TAS) approach and ensure every school has a named Early Help Advisor who will offer ongoing support.

Communities

We will work alongside our local communities to ensure offers of support meet local need using all our collective assets, community resource and knowledge. We will continue to build our connectivity with local Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector organisations to help build support around families near to where they live. We will also continue to harness the skills of local parents and carers to provide peer support to other parents and carers.

Families

We will provide support to those who need it in the right place, at the right time and in the right way including digital, face to face and outreach support. We will ensure we take a child centred approach to meeting the needs of the whole family. We will also provide support that we know works. We will co-produce and develop Durham's Start for Life and Family Hub offer with Mam's, Dad's and carers so that we know what they need. We will use the family's voice as an important measure of what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

Data & Information

We will gather data and intelligence from a variety of sources to achieve better outcomes for children. In line with Working Together 2023, we will promote proactive information sharing as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. We will effectively and safely share information, so families do not need to repeat their stories. We will use our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) to inform our Early Help Offer.

Based on our current data and intelligence of children and family need, we will focus on the following priorities over the next three years

We will support children's mental health and emotional wellbeing

We will develop and implement a robust, graduated response to children's emotional wellbeing which ensures children and their families are offered the right support at the right time. Support will focus on building resilience and promoting the 5 ways to wellbeing (connecting with others, being active, taking notice of surrounding, keep learning and giving to others).

We will promote good school attendance

We will support children to get the most out of their educational opportunities, especially those most disadvantaged, by supporting them to attend school regularly and promoting their aspirations as they transition into adulthood.

We will co-produce and embed our Family Hub and Start for Life offer

We will ensure that all babies and children have the best start in life by providing a robust support offer for families with children aged 0-19 years and 25 years with SEND. The Start for Life offer will focus on a robust universal and targeted offer from pregnancy until a child reaches 2 years of age aimed at promoting nurturing parenting, a positive home learning environment and the health and wellbeing of the child and family.

We will promote healthy family relationships and protect children from the harm of domestic abuse

We will offer a range of support aimed at promoting healthy family relationships from pregnancy through the early years and into adulthood. We recognise children are victims of Domestic Abuse in their own right, in their seeing, hearing, or experiencing the effects of Domestic Abuse. We will provide support to families impacted by Domestic Abuse using a range of evidence-based interventions such as Domestic Abuse Recovery Together (DART), Inspire and Respect Young People's Programme where Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA) is a presenting issue.

We will promote positive and nurturing parenting

We will promote positive and nurturing parenting and identify and address neglect at the earliest opportunity.

We will promote financial stability

We will promote financial stability by ensuring all families have access to information and support to improve their financial wellbeing, help parents meet their child's basic needs and support young people's aspirations as they transition into adulthood.

Measuring Success

It is important that we use measures of success to monitor if we are getting things right for children and families.

The following measures will let us know how well we are doing:

Family Hubs

Durham County Council

NHS

Increase in the number of children identified and effectively supported to improve their emotional wellbeing without need for specialist intervention

Increase in the number of Early Help Assessments across the Early Help Partnership

Increase in the number of families achieving positive outcomes as described in the County Durham Family Outcome Framework

Increase in the number of children and parent victims of Domestic Abuse reporting feeling safer

Increase in the numbers of Mams, Dads, carers and babies accessing Durham's Start for Life offer

Increase in the number of Dads/Male Carers engaged in family support work

Increase in the % of children who are school ready, improved school attendance and reduced exclusions

Increase in the number of families receiving support to improve the quality of their co-parenting relationship (Reducing Parental Conflict Programme)

Increase in the number of multi-agency practitioners, community members, parents and carers (Empowering Parents Empowering Communities Programme) trained in Early Help related programmes

Increase in the number of families supported effectively where neglect is a concern without the need for Childrens Social Care

Increase in the number of families who are satisfied with the support they receive

Useful Websites

Durham Safeguarding Childrens Partnership

Family Hubs and Start for Life – Help for Families

Durham Insights

Relationship Matters

Local Offer SEND

County Durham Family Outcome Framework