

# Early Help Strategy

2022 – 2025



# Early Help Strategy, West Sussex.

## Contents page

Foreword.....	Page 3
Introduction.....	Page 4
Strategy Mission Statement .....	Page 5
Programme and Service Development Timeline.....	Page 6
Strategy Vision and Ambition.....	Page 6
Demographics and Needs Analysis.....	Page 9
Future Analytical Developments .....	Page 14
Areas of focus from the EHSO 2022.....	Page 15
Strategic Priorities 2023-2025.....	Page 16
Measuring the impact of this Strategy.....	Page 17
References and Links.....	Page 18

## Foreword

This strategy represents a commitment to creating an effective Early Help System which puts Children first, as part of the overall Children first Vision. It shows an ambition to bring organisations together to affect change and drive forward better support for children, young people and their families through collaboration and partnership working.

It directly links to the main priorities from our West Sussex Council Plan, namely:

- Keeping people safe from vulnerable situations
- A sustainable and prosperous economy
- Helping people and communities to fulfil their potential
- Making the best use of resources

The impact and long-term effect of the coronavirus pandemic means the pressures on family life are extremely challenging and the need for support has never been more prevalent. Now with the cost-of-living crisis bringing additional hardship there is an even greater need for services and communities to come together and build strong local partnership and networks.

Creating a whole family support model and local opportunities for resilience, with a proactive service provision that children, young people, and families can be a part of, must be the way forward for improving life chances in these extremely challenging times. Earliest help and prevention must be at the forefront of our conversations and practice as we design and develop these partnerships and networks with children, and for children.

'Stable Homes, Built on Love: strategy and consultation' presents the government's plan for how we make children's social care work better. Whilst this is focusing on redefining children's social care it mirrors the same ethos and approaches for early help whole family working and the wider early help system. In the executive summary it states: "This vision is underpinned by the fundamental principle of the Children Act 1989 that children's welfare is paramount. The best way of promoting children's welfare is very often by supporting children's families and the loving relationships around them. To achieve this vision, we need to rebalance children's social care away from costly crisis intervention to more meaningful and effective help for families, so that it achieves the outcomes children deserve. Achieving this will require a major reset that puts love and stable relationships at the heart of what children's social care does."

This will form a critical link with all our work and support for children through an effective Early Help System.

This Early Help Strategy is ambitious because it needs to be.



*J Russell*

Jacquie Russell  
Cabinet Member for Children and Young  
People



*Lucy Butler*

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Director of Children, Young People and  
Learning

## Introduction

Early Help in West Sussex: the sooner a family receives the right support, the sooner they can improve their situation and prevent the need for prolonged support or escalated intervention. Support starts with universal services, such as the school, the health service, and the police.

A 'whole family' approach ensures that children's needs and welfare are being met and maintained as well as those of the family. This is achieved by working with the family, local communities and others already supporting them.



Whilst thresholds are used to determine the right level of support a family may need, we consider Early Help to be part of the wider system and not confined to one service or one plan. Many families' needs are met through the support from universal services or someone they already know in the community. All those working and supporting children must work together through an effective Early Help System and network of supportive and interactive approaches to make the most impact where and when it is needed. This aligns to the proposed redefining of children's social care outlined in the consultation document *Stable Homes, Built on Love*.

*All families and children need help sometimes. Families, neighbours, and friends can usually help each other. Sometimes help might come from a teacher, doctor, nurse, or people like youth workers. But sometimes families need more help than that. In future, these families will be supported by a new service called Family Help, so they can get the right help at the right time. At the moment, when families need help from children's social care, they often go through lots of meetings with different people. We want to make it easier to get that help. Children and families might also feel like the help they get is not what they need, or they might feel that they have too many changes of adults working with them. We want that to change.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) consultation

Partnership working is key when a family's needs do not meet the threshold for targeted support. Through Family Hubs and collaborative approaches with wider partnership networks the early help system aims to support families no matter what level of support they need.

In summary there are four elements to early help which involve partnership working, no matter the level of need:

1. The [Integrated Front Door \(IFD\)](#) aims to provide a single and consistent point of access to advice, guidance and decision-making about the right level of help needed to keep each child safe or achieve change. Anyone can contact the IFD including parents and young people for support.
2. [Early Help Hubs](#) that ensure families referred on from the IFD are joined to the right kind of support quickly through a co-ordinated response with partners.
3. A partnership of specialists and professionals to support children with multiple or complex needs who require coordinated multi-agency support. This aims to prevent the need for statutory social care intervention and build resilience within the family.
4. Strong local partnerships to support families in their communities through universal services and delivering the earliest help response in an informal and supportive way.

In January 2022, a refreshed approach to Early Help was rolled out in West Sussex and further work carried out to align with the phase 3 Supporting Families programme launch in October 2022. In February 2022, the new Family Safeguarding Model was also implemented in children's social care (CSC) to tackle the main causes of parental and family breakdown. This model provides a planned strategic approach that will help manage the high level of demand whilst delivering better outcomes for children and their families. These new approaches further align Early Help and CSC under the programme of intervention and support.

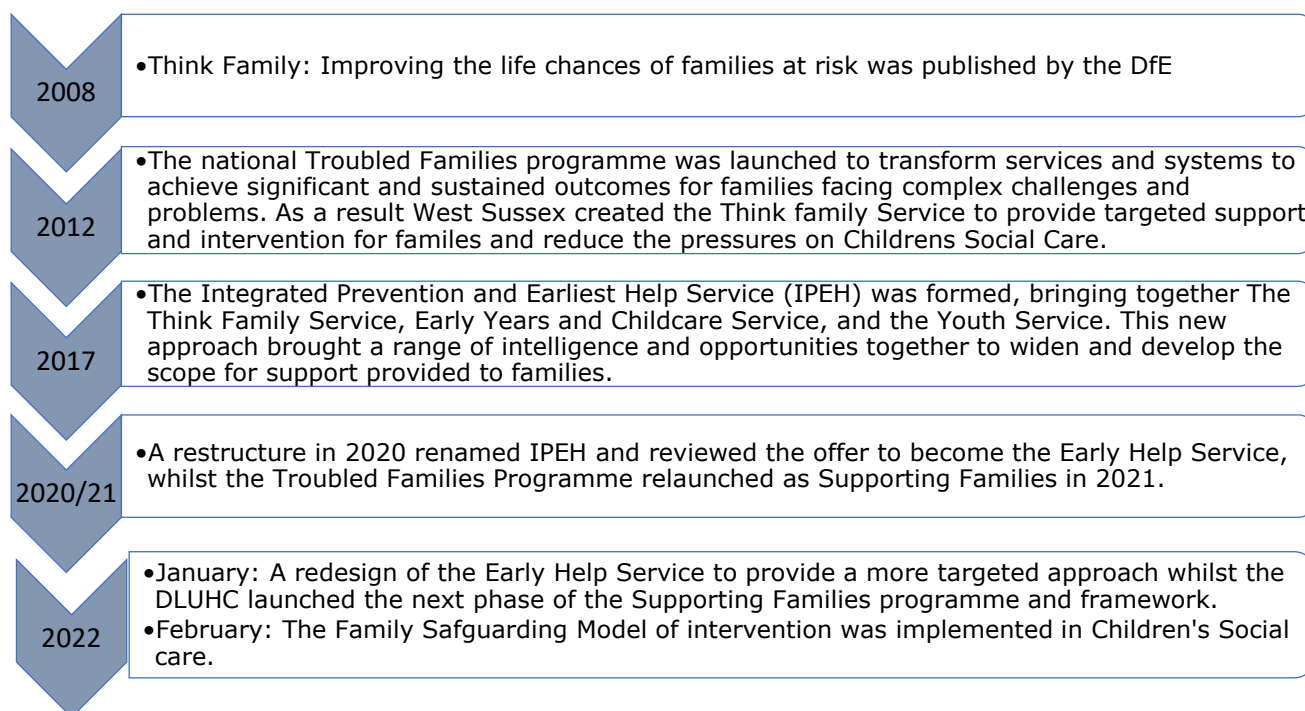
Through partnership events information was gathered to inform this Early Help Strategy. By using the Early Help System Guide 2022 from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as the basis for discussion, and by sharing the new framework and visions from Government, we were able to gain direction and ambition for Early Help in West Sussex.

This strategy outlines the intention of how West Sussex will further develop the early help system and operations to meet these new challenges. Strategies, operations, and partnerships need to be refreshed and re-energised to drive positive change to meet the new vision and programme direction.

### **Strategy Mission Statement**

To continue to support and improve the experiences for children, young people and families across West Sussex who face challenges that impact on their lives and opportunities to thrive.

## Programme and Service development timeline



Think Family: Improving the life chances of families at risk<sup>2</sup>

### Strategy Vision statement

To develop a collaborative approach to an Early Help System for whole family support through effective partnerships and information sharing.

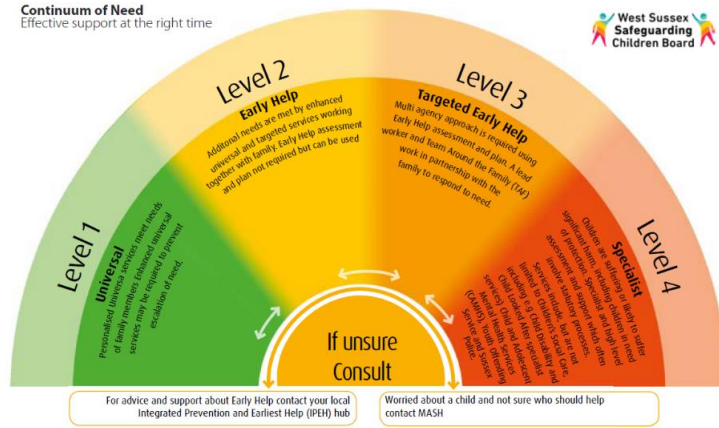
### Ambition

We have created an ambitious strategy to transform family support in West Sussex and improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children whilst reducing the need for acute or specialist services. Key to achieving this is a multi-agency commitment to providing effective, high quality early help systems that support children and families to have their needs met in their local communities.

A whole system integrated approach is needed for prevention and intervention across a range of stakeholders with collaborative practices to create an effective early help system which covers universal service levels to more intensive statutory work for 0–19-year-olds (up to 25yrs for SEND). This brings the thresholds for level 1, 2, 3 and 4 interventions together to support children rather than work in isolation and pass families from one to another.

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<sup>2</sup> [Think Family: Improving the life changes of families at risk](#)



*Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act 2004, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children.<sup>3</sup>*

Through this shared Early Help Strategy document, we recognise the importance of partnership working across sectors, services, and resources. The Early Help system is about all partners working together to effect change and better outcomes for all children and their families who need support or seek advice.

By using the regulatory frameworks, national programmes, and local initiatives we aim to bring together plans across children’s services in West Sussex to meet our duties and the needs of children.

Regulatory Framework	National Programme	Local Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children Act 1989</li> <li>- Children Act 2004</li> <li>- Working Together to Safeguard Children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supporting Families Programme and Framework 2022</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children and Young People Plan 2022-25</li> <li>- Children Young People and Learning Service Plan 2023/24</li> <li>- Family Hubs</li> </ul>

The recently published West Sussex Children and Young People Plan (CYPP) 2022-2025<sup>4</sup> identified key priorities which will need to link to Early Help and the developments to achieve a mature early help system. These are:

- Keeping children and young people safe from harm
- Providing the earliest possible support to families on low incomes to minimise the impact this has on their lives
- Closing the disadvantage gap for children and young people across all key stages
- Improving children and young people’s emotional health and well-being
- Strengthening our multi-agency approach to identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

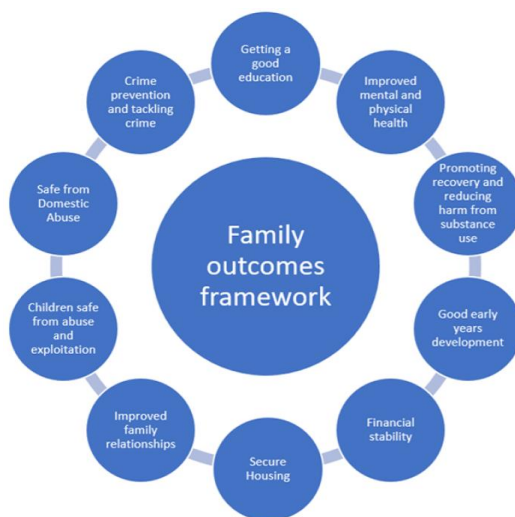
<sup>3</sup> [Section 10 of the Children Act 2004](#) requires each local authority to make arrangements to promote co-operation between the authority, each of the authority’s relevant partners, and such other persons or bodies as the authority considers appropriate.

<sup>4</sup> [Children and Young People’s Plan 2022 - 25](#)

By aligning all those working and supporting children to strengthen opportunities for collaboration and joined up approaches we aim to widen the offer and scope for providing earliest help.

*Local organisations and agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. Local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. This requires all practitioners, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment.*<sup>5</sup>

To achieve our ambitions, we will build on our existing data and develop robust information and data sharing processes that will provide outcomes-based insights for use across the system. With this reporting and the use of analytical and demographic intelligence we aim to support decision making at county and local level to be more responsive. Engagement, planning, and a more collaborative approach to designing and implementing services using these data insights is needed. The focus for these data sharing agreements and analysis will align with the Supporting Families framework themes as shown below.



*Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment, and service provision to keep children safe. Serious case reviews (SCRs) have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of and share information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children.*<sup>6</sup>

Whilst we have extensive knowledge and existing relationships with our local communities, we recognise the need to provide clear and shared pathways for communication to engage parties effectively. Review and redesign of partnership groups

<sup>5</sup> [Working Together to Safeguard Children interagency guidance 2018](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Working Together to safeguard children interagency guidance 2018](#)

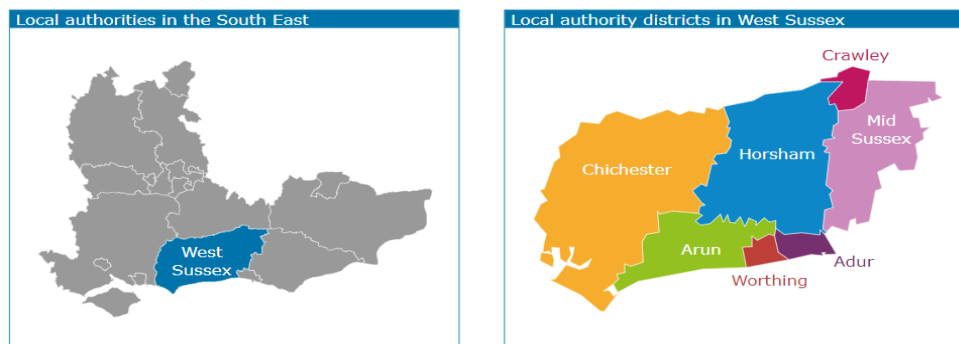


with all stakeholders is required to discuss the needs of children, young people, and families across West Sussex. These groups will come together to agree protocols for development at County level and for area-based plans at a local level. With this multi-agency approach to driving forward an effective early help system we aim to identify gaps in service, strengthen and grow partnerships, and encourage a shared approach to keeping children safe.

Family Hubs across the county will provide a single virtual front door for universal services within communities. We will seek an enhanced digital offer through the Family Information Service and Libraries to enable access to information directly through service directories and webpages. This will provide details on how to access services or the ability to view supportive information on a range of self-serve guides.

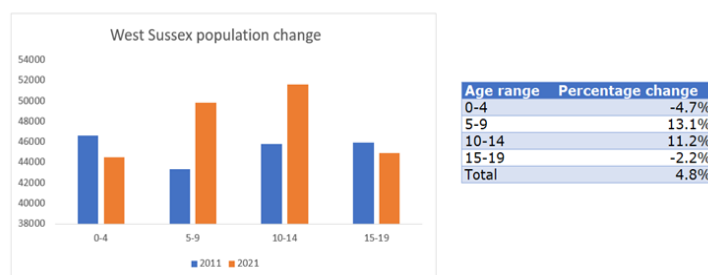
## Demographics and Needs analysis

West Sussex is a county in the South of England with an area of 769 square miles. It has borders with East Sussex, Brighton & Hove, Hampshire, Surrey, and the English Channel. It operates under a two-tier system of local government made up of six Boroughs or Districts: Adur & Worthing, Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, and Mid Sussex.



The 2021 national census provides the most recent breakdown by ethnicity for West Sussex. This shows that 84% identify as White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British, whilst 16% identified as BME. The 2011 census showed this as 94%, a difference of 10% in 10 years. Crawley shows the greatest diversity in population with 62% identify as White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British, and 38% BME.

By comparing the census data from 2011 and 2021 we are able to say the population aged 0-19 years old in the county has increased by nearly 5%, however the vast majority are in ages 5-14 with an increase of over 12%, conversely ages 0-4 and 15-19 we see a decrease by 5% and nearly 2% respectively.



If we focus on numbers for children under 18 years old only (0-17) by using the DfE mid-year estimates, we find there are nearly 175,000 children in West Sussex.

*Local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address assessed needs early. The early help offer should draw upon any local assessment of need, including the JSNA and the latest evidence of the effectiveness of early help programmes.<sup>7</sup>*

By analysing the needs identified through Early Help Plans from phase 2 of the Supporting Families programme, we can see the key areas of need. These themes correlate with intelligence gained through the conversations and workshops with partners on the challenges and experiences they have found working with families.

- **Mental Health:** We have seen significant increases in referrals for children's mental health services in West Sussex and this is a national trend recognised in reports such as the NHS Digital: Mental Health in Children and Young People in England.

*Rates of probable mental disorders have increased since 2017; in 6- to 16-year-olds from one in nine (11.6%) to one in six (17.4%), and in 17- to 19-year-olds from one in ten (10.1%) to one in six (17.4%). Rates in both age groups remained similar between 2020 and 2021.<sup>8</sup>*

Between July 2021 and June 2022 there were 2,300 Youth Emotional Support (YES) referrals. Of which: 45% were self-referrals, followed by 36% from GPs, 15% from CAMHS and 2% from school nurses. 61% of these referrals were females with the highest numbers for 14 to 15 years old (36%). There were 745 emergency hospital admissions for 10–24-year-olds for intentional self-harm in West Sussex in 2020/21, of which 17% were children aged 10-14.

Following a Sussex-wide review of emotional wellbeing and mental health services for children and young people, a new West Sussex Single Point of Access (SPOA) for emotional wellbeing and mental health support launched Wednesday 1 June 2022. The new service provides a simplified single route so that children, young people, families, carers, and professionals can be directed to the right service, eliminating the need to refer to multiple services. Led by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the new arrangement is delivered in partnership with West Sussex County Council's Youth Emotional Support Service (YES) and YMCA Dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Foundations for our Future is an independent review carried out in Sussex on how we can improve mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people. This has given us a greater understanding of what needs to change and has enabled us to begin our work together to take bold and ambitious action to make change happen.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [Working Together to safeguard Children interagency Guidance 2018](#)

<sup>8</sup> [NHS Digital: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England](#)

<sup>9</sup> [West Sussex Single Point of Access website](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Foundations for our Future](#)

- **Domestic Violence:** There has been an increasing trend in the number of new Domestic Abuse referrals over the last 2 years. In Sept 2022 501 children were affected by domestic violence (42.5% aged 5 to 11). There has also been an increasing trend in the number of open cases since October 2022 and as of December 2022 are at the highest in the last year.

For the Sussex Police Force Area, 30,909 Domestic Abuse related incidents and crimes were recorded in the year ending March 2022, which equates to 18 per 1,000 of the population. This compares to a rate of 21 per 1,000 for the South-East and 25 per 1,000 for England and Wales. DA related crimes made up 16% of all crimes recorded by Sussex Police Force for the year ending March 2022, which compares to 17% for both the Southeast and England and Wales.

- **Youth crime:** Violence against the person offences is the most common with 62% being committed by children under 16 years of age at the time of the offence.

The Sussex Violence Reduction Plan aims to protect young people and make our communities safer. It does this by bringing together the police, local authorities, criminal justice, NHS, Public Health, and community organisations to tackle the root causes of serious violence in Sussex.

There has been a 20% reduction in recorded Serious Violent Crime (SVC) in Sussex in the 12 months to Sept 2021, compared to the previous year. By volume, the highest percentage of SVC occurs in West Sussex (43.5%), however, Brighton and Hove have the highest rate of offences per 10,000 population. 43% of perpetrators of SVC were aged under 25 and classified as 'Youth-Related', with 18-to24-year-olds accounting for 23% and 11-to17-year-olds 19%. The most frequent age for an offender and a victim of SVC in Sussex was 18. Half of all hospital attendance and admissions for assaults involving a knife or sharp instrument were for those aged 15 to 29 years. 16% of hospital admissions were 19 years or younger.

Many of the risk factors for committing serious youth violence fall within the scope of support offered by the Early Help System. These include early Malnutrition, low family income, poor and inconsistent parenting, abuse, neglect, household alcohol or substance misuse and mental illness, family violence, family breakdown and family offending behaviour. Identifying the risk factors and enhancing protective factors early may help prevent later violence.

- **Substance Misuse:** Increasing levels of both adult and child substance misuse are being seen in our coastal urban areas. The misuse of drugs and alcohol has been linked to a range of negative impacts for individuals, families, and communities. Public Health England estimate that there are 2,700 children in West Sussex living with an adult with alcohol dependency, though only 375 children are known to live with an adult who entered alcohol treatment in 2019/20. Roughly half of alcohol service admissions are parents or those who live with children, and 14% of these service users are also known to children's services. Over half of new drug service admissions are parents or those who live with children, and 23% are also known to children's services (taken from West Sussex Substance Misuse Needs Assessment 2021: WS JSNA Website).

- **Cost of Living:** This will be an area of concern throughout the life of this strategy and support will need to be developed to manage the increasing pressures and challenges this crisis will bring to families. Whilst West Sussex is often perceived as an affluent County, we have 52 0-30% Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), 5 being in the 0-10%, and 18 in the 0-20% LSOAs of the Country. Lower Super Output Areas from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are the smallest geographical areas for which levels of poverty are calculated nationally. An area referred to as 0-10% is an area within the bottom 10% of the national scale of poverty. From the 2020 mid-year population estimates we know approximately 1% of the 0-17year olds in West Sussex live in a 0-10% LSOA, with 4% living in a 0-20% area and 11% living in a 0-30% area.

The correlation with these areas and the levels of need we have identified through analysis is clear. Nearly 20% of children on an Early Help Plan live in a 0-30% LSOA in West Sussex. With nearly 19% of children on Child in Need plans and more than 20% on Child Protection Plans living in 0-30% LSOAs too we can see that overall children living in an area of deprivation are twice as likely to need a targeted multi-agency intervention.

We have also seen significant increases across the county in the need for crisis support for utility payments and/or food. This peaked in March 2022 but has since started to decline. Support with food made up 72.6% of all crisis payments for the year ending Sept 2022 and the vast majority were provided in Adur & Worthing and Crawley.

The West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) summary 2021/22 tells us that approximately 16,700 (11%) of 0–15-year-olds in West Sussex are in income deprived families. There is a correlation with low income, or those living in areas of deprivation, having poorer health outcomes.

*We continue to observe a strong social gradient across many indicators and outcomes. Children living in poverty and from deprived areas are more likely to be overweight or obese; less likely to attain the expected level of attainment across educational key stages; more likely to be admitted to hospital for self-harm; more likely to become pregnant as a teenager; and more likely to grow up in a household where someone smokes. In West Sussex, almost 17,000 children live in poverty. Children in poverty are more likely to come from single parent/carer families, be disabled or live in a household with an adult who is disabled. Poverty can transmit across generations and there are specific concerns about low social mobility in some parts of the county. It is also important to recognise that, on average, children who are in care or are care leavers have significantly poorer health and educational outcomes than their peers. Emotional and mental health are intrinsically linked to physical wellbeing and longer-term outcomes. Children who are happier and more emotionally resilient tend to have better physical health. Local survey data has highlighted the importance of cognitive reappraisal (reframing problems in a positive way) and expressive suppression (burying negative feelings/avoidance) in predicting life satisfaction and overall happiness. <sup>11</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> [West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\) 2021/22](#)

- **Education:** From autumn term 2022 we saw 41 permanent exclusions from schools and 2,034 suspensions. Local data suggests vulnerable groups are more likely to have lower attendance rates and suspensions. Statutory School Age Children within vulnerable cohorts (Early Help Plans, Child in Need Plans, Child Protection Plans, Children We Care For, Youth Justice Service, ISO, Education Health, and Care Plans, those in APCs and children with a missing episode) all had lower attendance rates at school (Spring 2022 census, which includes Autumn 2021 figures). The higher the number of vulnerable cohorts that a child is known to, the lower their school attendance rate. We intend to carry out further analysis on this area.

Whilst we know 2% of 16 and 17 year olds in West Sussex are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) we have 4% whose education status is unknown. This means our published NEET figures (which includes Unknowns) stands at 6%. This is one of the highest levels of NEETs nationally and we must therefore take action to improve. It is an area of focus for us to better understand the dynamics of our post 16 education group and how to improve our engagement with this cohort.

- **Health:** Whilst general health for both adults and children in West Sussex is better than the average for England there are still areas of concern to be focused and improved upon. For children in Year 6 (10–11-year-olds), 15.4% (1,214) of children are classified as obese. The rate of alcohol specific hospital stays among those under 18 years of age at the rate per 100,000 is 32, this represents 55 stays per year. Levels of teenage pregnancy, GCSE attainment and smoking at time of delivery are better than the England average.<sup>12</sup>
- **Level 4 Childrens Social Care:** Approximately 0.50% of children aged 0-17 years of age in West Sussex are in care (in West Sussex known as Children We Care For). That is a rate per 10,000 of 49.2, compared to our statistical neighbours at 52 and England rate of 70 (2021/22). For Child Protection Plans our rate per 10,000 is 40.6, with statistical neighbours on 35 and England 42 (2021/22). Whereas children on Child in Need plans are at a rate of 92.5 per 10,000 in West Sussex (there is no comparison available for neighbours or national at the present time).
- **Re-referral rates:** Following work carried out with a Family Support Worker or Key Worker the number of families returning to Early Help for a level 3 service within 12 months of a successful outcome remains low at 5.5% (Dec 2022). Those who return after a successful outcome at level 3 who require a level 4 intervention within 12 months is 3.44% (Dec 2022). Whilst these are low, we see the same children returning for a service several times. Further analysis on the possible reasons or similarities in characteristics will take place to explore where changes in approach may be useful in supporting a reduction in these returns. Children returning to Children's Social Care for further level 4 intervention is currently at 26% (rolling year figure Feb-2022 to Jan-23).

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<sup>12</sup> [Local Authority Health Profiles 2018 - Fingertips](#)

## Future analytical developments

By using existing internal data sources, we can carry out research on the needs for children already known to us (past and present) who have received a service. We already have access to data relating to areas such as Education Services and Schools, Domestic Abuse, Youth Homelessness, Youth Justice Services, Early Years, and Post 16 Education.

This analysis will give us an insight into trends of need and the ability to consider building predictive analytics on where services may be needed going forward. This in turn will allow us to report at a county and a local area level to support decisions for reviewing services, partnerships, future development, and resource deployment.

With the phase 3 Supporting Families Programme and Framework on evidence-based need and outcomes we will further develop our analytical approaches to include more detailed and targeted statistics. Using agreed vulnerability factors, including those listed under protected characteristics identified through deep dive analysis activities, we aim to consider how to focus earliest help and prevention work through an early help system.

The development of external data sharing practices through clear governance and Information Sharing Agreement (ISA) processes will widen still the evidence-based intelligence we can apply to practice and provision. By sharing this intelligence with partnership groups, we aim to develop and work towards a mature early help system informed and supported by robust data with a focus on outcomes.

Key external partners to engage for formal information sharing processes are:

- Public Health, specifically Maternity and Health Visiting
- Mental Health Services, such as CAMHs and Adult Services
- Police and the Youth Justice Service
- Housing
- District and Boroughs

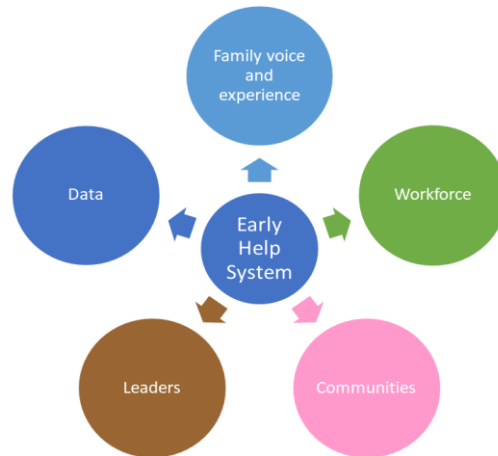
*The Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children.<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Working Together to Safeguard Children interagency guidance 2018, Chapter 1, point 27 / Guide to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#)

## Areas of focus from the Early Help System Guide

We used the vision for a mature early help system from the Early Help System Guide (EHS) in activities carried out in our partnership workshop events. By reviewing the five areas from the vision, and each of the statements within them, we asked partners to identify which should be a focus for the first year to give direction and planning.



Following the seven workshops we were able to clearly see the statements partners indicated should be priorities. There were six key statements which ranked the highest which partners felt should form part of this strategy and plan.

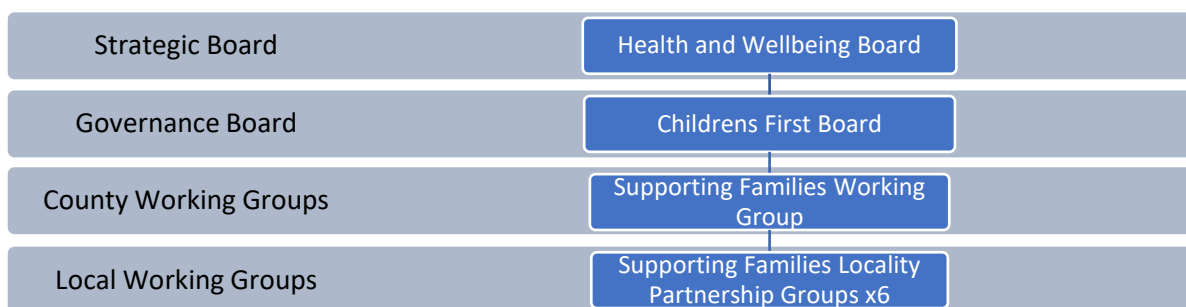
- **Workforce:** Public services work together in place based or hub-based working where partners are integrated virtually or physically, based in the community with a common footprint
- **Communities:** We are improving the connectivity between voluntary and community sector activity, family networks and formal early help activity
- **Family voice and experience:** Families say they know how to navigate local services and how to get help
- **Family voice and experience:** Families who have several needs say they know who their lead practitioner is, that all their needs were considered individually, and they only needed to tell their story once. They also say all the professionals work together to one plan in a team around the family
- **Leaders:** Our system is balanced, so that more appropriate support is provided for children and families earlier to avoid unnecessary or costly statutory intervention in the children's social care system
- **Data:** All data feeds are shared safely and robustly across the partnership, brought into one place, and used to identify family needs

The EHS self-assessment process is set to be repeated annually with stakeholders to review the progress and gaps on the early help system in West Sussex. The results of this must be submitted to the Supporting Families Team at DLUHC in July 2023 and 2024 and so we will have a continuous cycle of review, enabling us to identify the next steps and priorities for each year of the programme and this strategy.

## Strategy Priorities for 2023 – 2025

Using all the research, workshops and stakeholder conversations carried out in 2022 over several months we can identify clear areas for focus and action for this strategy. These are outlined below and form the basis of an action plan to provide clear direction and timeframes on what will be achieved, with whom and by when. This will enable clear progress reporting and support identifying any barriers and how they can be removed. The Supporting Families Working Group will manage and monitor this action plan under their governance arrangements.

- Communication across the system, including threshold and referral processes.** Feedback from the partnership events (October 2022) indicated a need to remove confusion around the referral process, threshold decisions and to provide clarity to referrers on the outcome of their referrals. Clear pathways and processes need to be shared and reviewed as part of developments and partnership working.
- Family and child voice informs system development.** We need to develop a process where children and their families are involved in the evaluation of the service they have received after it has ended. A plan and process for this will be needed to enable analytical reporting to ensure this feedback informs planning and areas for development or change.
- Information sharing to enable insights for intelligence-based practice decisions.** By using a wide range of sector and service data we can develop services and partnerships to meet family needs at appropriate levels through a single system. Providing needs and outcomes-based analysis will support decision and resource deployment including partnerships and services at a local level. Through demographic reporting, and continuous review, we will develop predictive analytics to understand the family needs more fully across West Sussex using characteristics and potential vulnerable indicators to provide support at the earliest opportunity.
- A single point of access for information in a digital format.** A directory of services through aligning the current Library Service and Family Information Service webpages would provide a joined up and connected approach. Self-help information for parents and young people through this system would provide a one-stop-shop on basic information and where to seek support.
- Reset the partnership groups to provide governance, direction, and development of an early help system.** This should accommodate all levels of need and enable evidence-based decisions at county and local area levels. This will include developing a network with a partnership framework to reduce duplication and maximise the shared wider workforce across the system in local areas.





## Measuring the impact of this strategy

- We will continue to assess the maturity of our early help system through the Early Help System Guide in 2023 and 2024. This tool will support us to review developments with stakeholders, whilst identifying the improvements still to be made. Through this strategy, engaging with more partners, and widening the early help offer it will support the maturity and impact we can evidence.
- We will work on wider and clearer information, advice, and guidance opportunities through the development of a digital offer by working with the Library Service and Family Information Service to link current family Directories. The access to this service will be monitored to show the most visited sites and pages and by ensuring information is aligned and updated regularly.
- Putting in place the groups best placed for Governance and providing effective communication across strategic levels and pathways will be key to the success of this strategy and activity it proposes. Engaging a wide range of partners with early help system roles will be monitored to ensure membership of these groups is maintained. Developing a shared recognition of the importance of this when planning and providing the services needed to meet the Supporting Families Programme, having a mature early help system, and reaching the vulnerable groups locally, will be key and measured through the outcomes from self-assessment tool for the Early Help System Guide.
- Having formal data sharing agreements in place to support identifying who would benefit from supportive interventions as early as possible will form part of the governance process. Regular analysis and reporting will be carried out to show the impact that this information sharing has and where more may be needed. This reporting will inform planning and practice decisions that this strategy is proposing.
- We will have strong local partnerships working together to support families on the programme and on prevention work outside the programme. This will mean children are supported within their local communities and by local community services, at the earliest possible time reducing the need for more targeted interventions. This will be tested and scrutinised within the self-assessment process for the annual Early Help System Guide.
- The independence and resilience in families will be measured through their feedback on the early help system after support has been provided. This will be used to further enhance the offer and activities with partners where needed.

## **Links to other plans and initiatives related to this Strategy**

[West Sussex Council Plan](#)

[Cost of living - West Sussex County Council](#)

[Children and Young People's Plan 2022-25 West Sussex](#)

[Safer West Sussex Partnership \(SWSP\)](#)

[Education and Learning Strategy](#)

[Stable Homes, Built on Love](#)

## **References (links within the main body of the strategy)**

- West Sussex Partnership Families Strategic Plan 2020
- Children and Young People's Plan 2022-25
- Early Help System Guide 2022
- What is early help? Concepts, policy directions and multi-agency perspectives, Feb 2022.
- Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
- Section 10 of the Children Act 2004
- West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2021/22
- Local Authority Health Profiles 2018 – Fingertips
- Working Together to safeguard Children interagency Guidance 2018
- NHS Digital: Mental Health of Children and Young People in England
- West Sussex Single Point of Access website
- Foundations for our Future