




Oldham Early Help Strategy 2023/2026



Oldham
Council

Contents

Introduction	3
Oldham context	4
What does it feel like growing up in Oldham?	5
What is Early Help?	6
The Early Help system	7
Vision for children and young people	7
Early Help principles and values	8
Oldham’s Early Help model	10
Developing early help – the bigger picture	12
Our improvement priorities	14
Learning from family experience	15
Joined-up multi-agency leadership	15
Enabling self-help and early intervention	16
Strong place-based partnerships	16
Multi-agency workforce development	17
Using information to drive improvement	17
What will success look like?	18
Governance and accountability	19



Introduction

Cllr Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

We are delighted to introduce Oldham's Early Help Strategy 2023-2026. Every child in Oldham deserves to be given the very best start in life and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. That is reflected in the Council's recent investment of an additional £14.7m in Children's Services.

This is part of an ambitious transformation programme which will enable us to deliver better outcomes for all our children and reduce the number of children escalating into social care. Developing the Partnership's Early Help offer - with a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention - goes alongside the development of our district working model, implementation of family hubs and further service integration across education, health and social care.

The Early Help Strategic Board has oversight of this and will ensure that these wide-reaching changes are effectively co-ordinated to deliver the improvements needed for Oldham's children and young people.

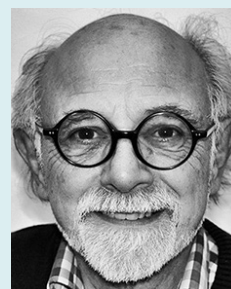


**Cllr Shaid Mushtaq,
Cabinet Member
for Children and
Young People**

Dr Henri Giller, Chair Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership

Effective early help is proven to minimise the risks faced by children, young people and their families before problems become more significant and entrenched. Oldham's Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to embedding a Partnership Early Help model in which practitioners across a range of sectors take responsibility for identifying concerns early, understanding how and when to assess these concerns, and how to provide a timely and effective response. We know that intervention works best when a whole-family approach is taken, and when interventions are chosen on the strength of their evidence base.

Through the strategy, we want to ensure that early help is a shared responsibility which is responsive, accessible and based upon shared language and processes wherever possible. It needs to be widely understood and used by practitioners, leaders and commissioners, so we get the best outcomes for our children, young people and families. Building the capacity of families and communities to better meet their own needs is central to the Strategy. Early help in Oldham really is everyone's business.



**Dr Henri Giller, Chair
Oldham Safeguarding
Children Partnership**

Oldham context

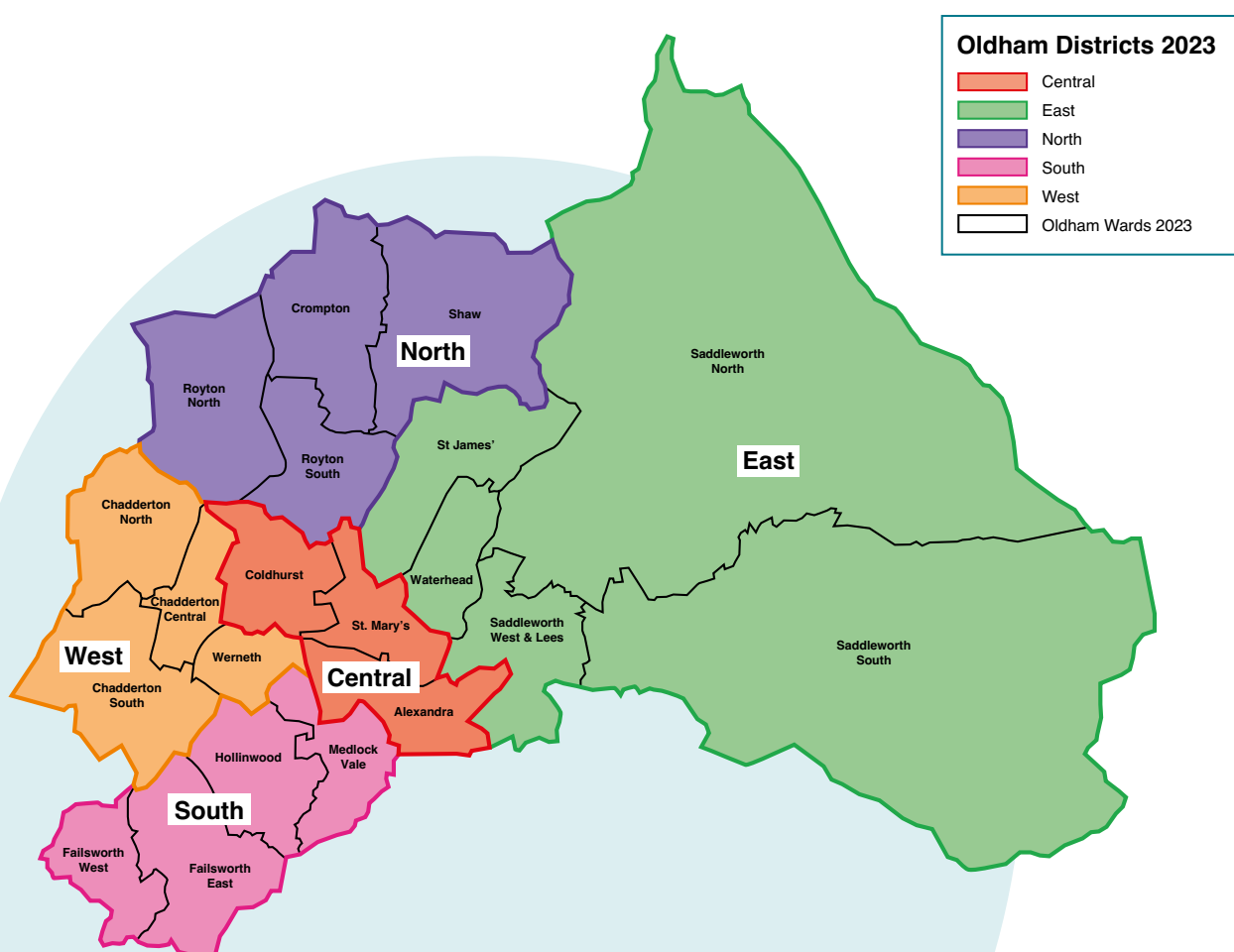
Oldham is a diverse borough; with communities whose needs differ. This is reflected in our organisation around five districts to enable services to adapt to local needs.

The population of Oldham in 2023 is 243,800 and is projected to grow by 5% over the next 10 years. There are 61,000 children and young people aged 0-17, who comprise one-quarter (25%) of the population. Numbers of children and young people are projected to fall by 5% over the next decade, in contrast to overall growth in the population.

Almost one-third (32%) of Oldham's population are from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic groups (BAME), but 50% of children under 18. The largest minority communities are people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, but there are also substantial numbers of children of Black African heritage, children with dual heritage and children whose families are migrants from Eastern Europe. BAME families are particularly concentrated in neighbourhoods around Central Oldham, mainly in Central and West districts. A total of 127 languages are spoken by children in Oldham schools

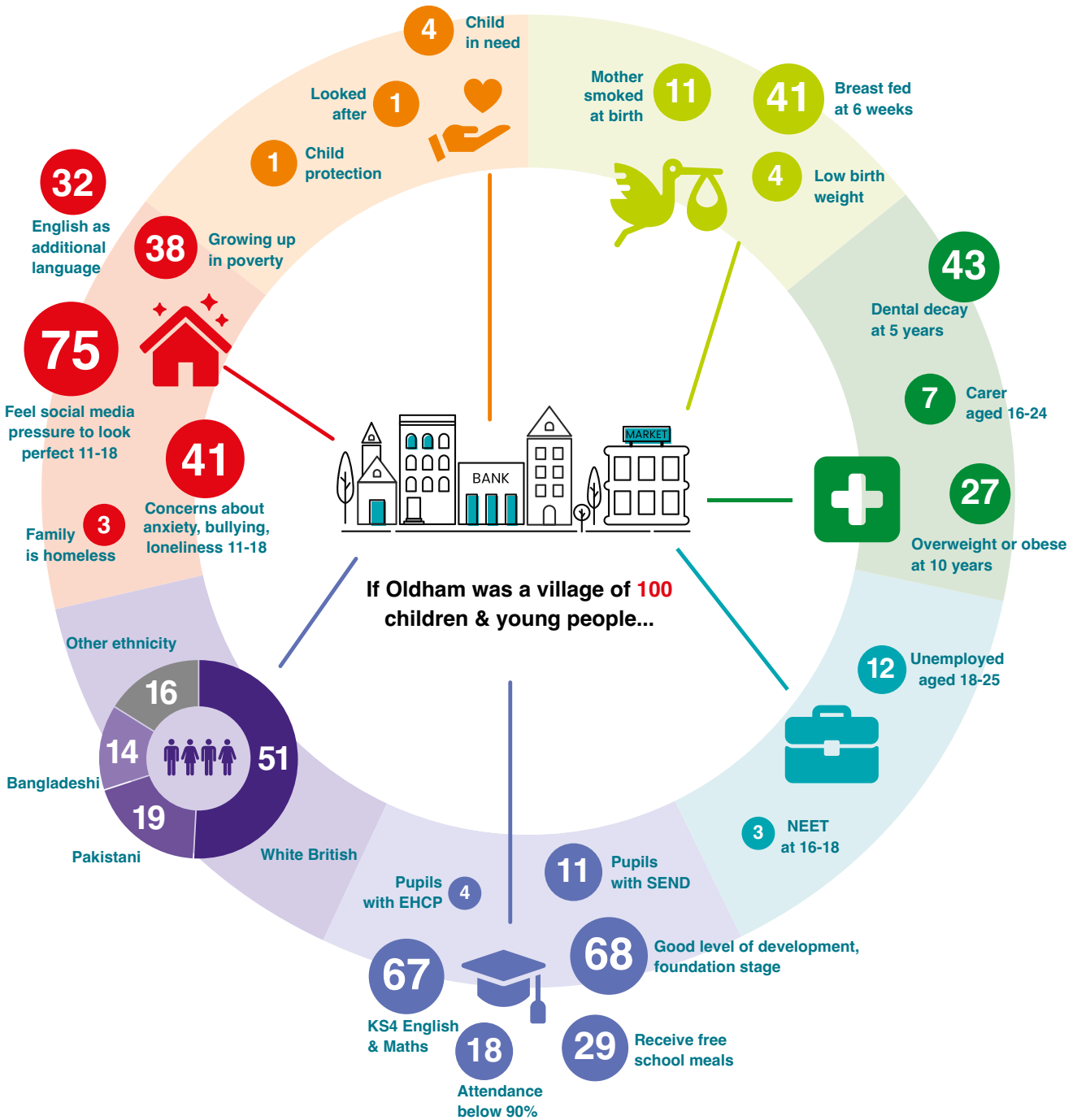
Oldham is a borough with high levels of deprivation, ranked 19th most deprived out of 317 local authorities on the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation. Almost two-fifths (38%) of children under 16 in Oldham live in poverty. Rates of deprivation are highest in parts of Central, East and South districts, and particularly concentrated in neighbourhoods with large BAME communities and on estates with social rented housing.

A total of 122 schools provide education for the compulsory years, comprised of 90 primary schools, 20 secondary schools, two 16 to 18 establishments, 9 special schools, and a Pupil Referral Unit. There are currently 16 Children Centres, some of which are planned to expand their role and become Family Hubs.



What does it feel like growing up in Oldham?

82,393 children & young people aged 0-25 live in Oldham



What is Early Help?

Statutory guidance emphasises the crucial role of effective early help and the collective responsibility of all agencies to identify, assess and provide effective Early Help services. While Councils have a key co-ordinating role, the local Early Help offer needs to include the work of the full range of agencies, including health services, schools, housing, early years providers, police and the voluntary and community sector. Early help is everyone's business.

“Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Early help can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care, or in families where there are emerging parental mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018

Key elements of the definition are:

- Achieving better outcomes for children and young people.
- Providing support early in the lives of children and young people (including pre-birth).
- Responding quickly to prevent problems from escalating (with children and young people of any age).

The Early Help System



Vision for children and young people

Our children and young people are the future of Oldham. Our vision is to ensure that children and families are at the centre of everything we do and to develop their strengths and resilience ensuring all children have a stable life and reach their full potential.

To achieve this, we need them to:

- Be safe and supported.
- Be as healthy and happy as they can.
- Have opportunities and achieve their potential.
- Have a voice and be part of a community.
- Feel proud and be ready for life.

Our vision has three objectives:

1. Right help, right time, right place

- Services close to home and reflecting the community.
- Providing support to families along a continuum of needs.
- High-quality support and services when it is needed.
- Help from professionals that families already have a good relationship with.

2. Celebrate our children and young people

- Realise the fantastic potential of every child to build their own family and contribute to Oldham

3. Better together Oldham

- A network of services and support wrapped around every child, young person and their family.



Early Help principles and values

Our vision is that families, particularly those with multiple and complex needs, will have access to effective and co-ordinated early help as soon as difficulties have been identified. This offer will be personalised, multi-agency where required, evidence-based and will adopt a whole-family approach.

Early Help will support families in enabling children and young people to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives, and help to break intergenerational cycles of risk and vulnerability. It will help address the impact of the high levels of poverty in Oldham, and the disproportionate impact of this on children and young people in some communities in Oldham.

Some children and young people face particular challenges and need to be prioritised for support, including those who:

- have specific additional needs.
- live in challenging family circumstances, such as where there is drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues or domestic abuse.
- are young carers.
- show signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour.
- frequently go missing from care, or from home or education.
- misuse drugs or alcohol.
- are at risk of modern slavery, trafficking, criminal exploitation or radicalisation.

Early help needs to be everyone's business, with the full range of partners across all sectors playing their part in meeting the needs of children and families.

Local authorities across Greater Manchester have worked together to develop a shared set of principles for the delivery of Early Help, built around the central pillar of Early Help being everyone's business. The model is based on six principles and three underpinning system conditions, as shown below. **Working with**, rather than **doing to** families is central to the approach:



Early Help is Everyone's Business

Principles

Local & Sustained
Everything builds from sustainable community support & relationships with peers.

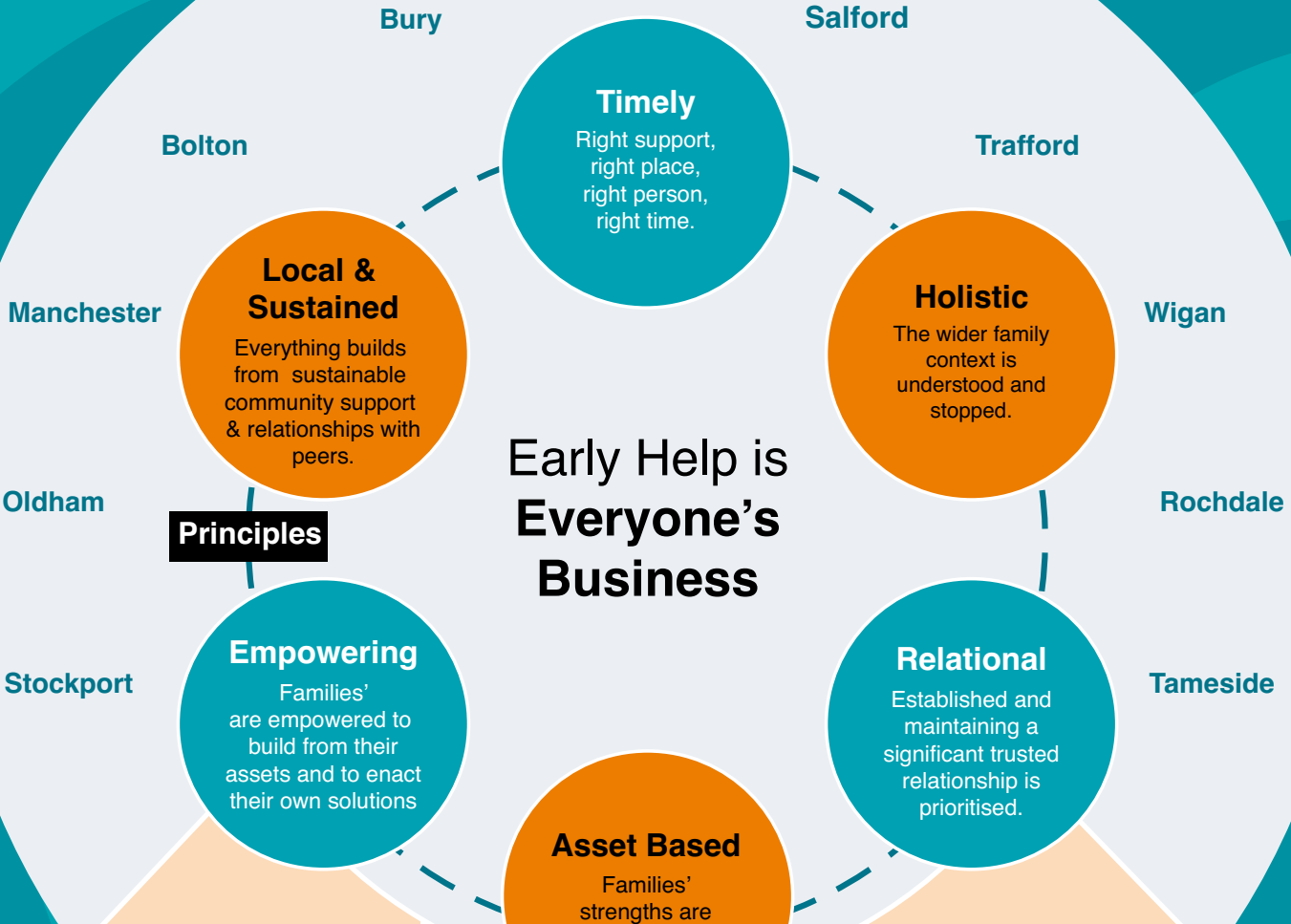
Timely
Right support, right place, right person, right time.

Holistic
The wider family context is understood and stopped.

Empowering
Families' are empowered to build from their assets and to enact their own solutions

Asset Based
Families' strengths are valued, reinforced and drawn upon.

Relational
Established and maintaining a significant trusted relationship is prioritised.



Enabling System Conditions

Accessible support exists in the community and utilises community resources

All families are aware of and able to contribute to what is available - they have a voice

The capacity and capability of the community is supported and strengthened - both on the ground and through strategic commissioning

Leadership & Governance Conditions

Place-based leadership within a high trust culture

Local, blended teams that care about the neighbourhood with a locality identity first (before service identity)

Funding, decision-making and permissions devolved and trusted to local governance

Workforce Conditions

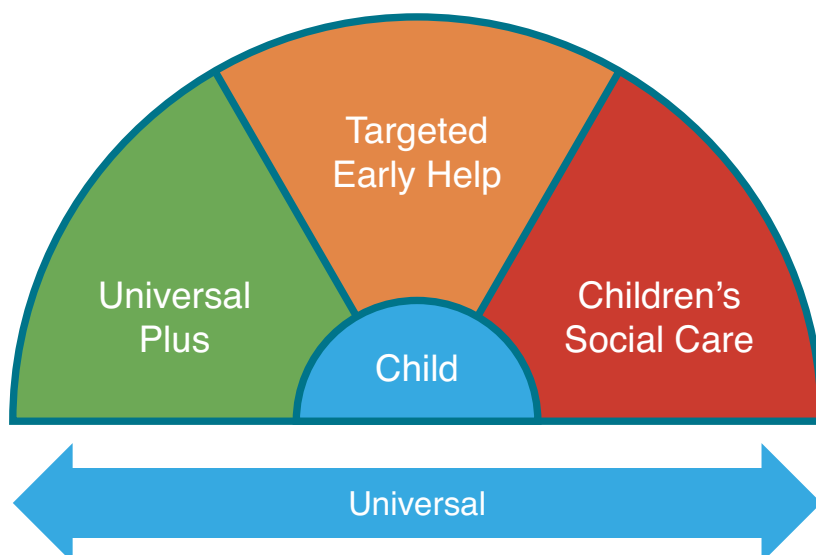
Community located and community connected workforce

Frontline workers feel they own the issue and can design and broker solutions without needed to refer

Practitioners value families as assets and co-designers of strategies - needs are pre-judged

Oldham's Early Help model

The Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership **continuum of need model** sets out the framework for how children and families are supported in Oldham. This was refreshed in February 2021.



Scan the QR code to access the Continuum of Need model

Central to how we work with families is our **Family Help Tool** (Early Help Assessment). This is used by professionals in holding conversations with families to understand their strengths and support needs. It considers the range of issues that may be faced by children and families and is designed to be used in assessing the needs of the family as a whole. Families are asked to consider what is going well, what they are worried about and what needs to happen next. The tool includes a plan template so that professionals and families can work together to agree actions and make commitments for who will do what, and by when.



Scan the QR Code to access the Family Help Tool

How do families get help?

It is really important that as soon as an early help need arises, a child or family is able to access appropriate support. This should involve a conversation with them about what the concern(s) are and how these affect the child's life. It will usually be undertaken by a professional who already knows the family – such as a teacher, pastoral support worker in a school, health visitor or voluntary sector worker.

This universal support is available to all families. If the family agree, a Family Help Tool will be completed, and the assessment and plan will be useful tools in enabling the professional to support the family.

If there are any safeguarding concerns, call the Children's Duty and Advice Team on 0161 770 7777.

If support from a single agency is not sufficient, the family may need support from one or more other services (Universal Plus support). One professional will take the lead in calling together a Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting. This brings together the family, with all the services involved in supporting them to work together in a coordinated way. A TAF meeting record and plan template and good practice guidance are available on the Oldham Council website.

Where a single professional or team of agencies supporting a TAF have identified that they cannot meet the needs of the family, they may seek to escalate to targeted Early Help support with a targeted Early Help worker co-ordinating delivery of the TAF.

Targeted Early Help support is accessed through contacting the Children's Duty and Advice Team on 0161 770 7777. The Family Help Tool is not a referral form, but the team will ask for copies of the tool and TAF plan to help them understand the family's needs and make an informed decision about the most appropriate support.

Targeted early help in Oldham is delivered by two services:

- **Council Family Connect** support families with more complex needs, typically for up to around 6 months.
- **Positive Steps** are commissioned to provide support where needs are less complex, and families need to be supported less intensively, typically for up to around 4 months.

In either case, families will have support co-ordinated by a targeted Early Help worker. Targeted Early Help Teams are organised around the five districts – Central, East, North, South and West.

The Duty and Advice Team also take decisions about whether children with acute needs require statutory social work level intervention by children's social care. This could be due to increasing risk or where there is actual or likely significant harm. This will require social care to undertake a S17 Children in Need assessment or S47 enquiries where there is a concern that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm as outlined in the Working Together Statutory Guidance.

Advice and support about early help

There are two Early Help Partnership Officers (EHPOs) allocated to each of the five districts. They provide advice and support to professionals about Oldham's approach to early help, including guidance about completing Family Help Tools and undertaking TAFs. They also have excellent knowledge about the range of community-based support available to children and families in their district. Contact details for the EHPOs are listed at the end of the **Family Help Tool**.

The Family Help section of the Council website also has details of a range of resources for families, including the Local Offer for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).



Scan the QR code to access Early Help for families

Developing early help – the bigger picture

Our strategy for improving the multi-agency early help system forms part of a wider context of local and national developments. Key local developments include:

- Development of an Oldham framework for Early Intervention and Prevention which aligns with the continuum of need model for children and families.

Prevention Framework



- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, with the move to a Children's Duty and Assessment Team with an emphasis on advice and guidance for partners. This was introduced in January 2023 and supported by Professor David Thorp.
- The Children's Social Care Assessment and Intervention Teams have moved into a district model, enabling closer working with Targeted Early Help Teams to ensure effective stepping-up and stepping-down of support, as well as a stronger focus on the delivery of intervention work.
- Other Children's Services transformation programmes, including the introduction of a targeted "edge of care" programme to support children and families where the child is at risk of being taken into care, a specialist foster care programme and a review of semi-independent living/ supported accommodation for 16- to 18-year-olds (up to 25 if they are care leavers).

- The 0-19 Service was reorganised in 2022, with a move to a district model and the transfer of staff from the Bridgewater NHS Trust into an integrated 0-19 Right Start and School Nursing service delivered jointly between the Council and Northern Care Alliance (NCA), with the shared aim of “children are developing well and ready for school”.
- The Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) project aligns closely with this and aims to integrate pre- and post-birth support to significantly improve the number of children ready for school.
- A new Mental Health Strategy for children and young people is in development. A key priority is to develop a partnership offer to meet children’s and young people’s mental health needs and to increase awareness of services available to support them when they need it.
- A new Domestic Abuse Strategy was agreed in January 2021. As part of this, support is being improved at lower levels of risk, in order to prevent the recurrence and escalation of domestic abuse. The partnership is also developing its training offer, both to strengthen the capacity of professionals working with victims of abuse and to provide more courses to support survivors in moving on from abuse.
- The Safeguarding Children Partnership is implementing the use of the Graded Care Profile 2 Assessment tool during 2023 to strengthen the response to neglect.

A key development is the National Family Hub/Start for Life programme which Oldham is participating in. This will involve the conversion of existing Children’s Centres into Family Hubs as a focus of integrated service delivery for families with children aged 0-19 (25 for children with SEND) and delivery of a range of different services for families. This will integrate skills, knowledge, resources and experience across health, social care, early years, neighbourhoods and community services to better support pregnant women, children and families in each district. The Beever Family Hub opened in July 2023, and there will be at least one for each district together with a network of outreach family centres.

Improving Early Help support also links closely to the development of the place-based working model, with support organised around five districts – North, South, East, West and Central. These have populations ranging from around 41,000 people (North) to 57,000 people (East). The districts have been adopted more widely across the partnership, with a range of other services including the police, GP clusters and adult social care also organised around the same geographies.

Within each district, there are developing multi-agency teams who work closely with services based within each district (such as schools, GP practices and early years providers), and develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of the communities they support – making them more responsive to local needs.

This will align closely with the Family Hub model, with an increasing focus on making a wide range of services accessible to families in the community through family hubs and outreach venues.

The emerging national strategy for reform of children’s social care: Stable Homes, Built on Love, includes piloting new approaches to the delivery of family help through the Families First for Children pathfinders and proposals for a framework to improve the skills and knowledge of the multi-agency family workforce supporting families. The Government is also reviewing the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children. Our Early Help strategy will need to be adapted in response to these emerging national developments.

Our improvement priorities

As part of the national Supporting Families programme, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has developed an Early Help System Guide which sets out key elements of an effective early help system against the themes of family, communities, workforce, leadership and data. The self-assessment process involved discussion with partners and a review of the evidence from engagement with children and families.

Based on Oldham's 2023 Self-Assessment, the three identified priorities for 2023/24 were:

- **Leadership** - there is a senior strategic group accountable for the Early Help system and the partnership infrastructure evidences a focus on early help, whole family and whole system working.
- **Family engagement** - we have well-established mechanisms to gather and act on feedback from families and engage people with lived experience in service design, governance and quality assurance.
- **Workforce** – early help is understood and seen as everyone's responsibility across the partnership of services working with children, adults and families. We have a shared culture and set of core principles that underpin the wider Early Help system.

In order to continue to develop our multi-agency Early Help offer, and improve outcomes for children and families, we have identified six priorities, with family experience at the centre of what we do:





Learning from family experience

Children, families and young people need to be at the heart of our early help system, getting the right support, from the right person at the right time.

To achieve this, we will:

- Embed a culture of gathering and using feedback from service users to inform practice.
- Develop a co-ordinated approach to the engagement of children, young people and families, so that findings can be systematically used to inform the design and delivery of services.
- Develop and support arrangements for co-producing services with parents, carers and young people.

Joined-up multi-agency leadership

To realise the potential of the Early Help system with so many concurrent developments, we need strong multi-agency leadership with a shared vision for what we want to achieve and how we can work together to deliver it.

We will:

- Provide co-ordinated multi-agency governance across early help, family hubs and early years through a combined strategic board, with clear linkages to other key areas such as SEND and children's mental health.
- Continue to develop an ambitious vision for children, young people and families, making the best use of the resources available through national and local programmes to deliver this.
- Work together through the Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership to provide oversight of Early Help delivery and ensure that partners are playing their part in this.
- Complete a partnership wide review of Early Intervention and Prevention across children, adults and community services.
- Agree a shared set of key priorities across the partnership and measures to evidence the progress we are making against these.

Enabling self-help and early intervention

There is a need to shift the balance of support in Oldham's Early Help system so that children's families get help earlier - preventing needs from escalating or problems recurring.

We will

:

- Develop a digital hub of tools and resources to support families in accessing advice, guidance, services and activities which meet their needs.
- Encourage take-up of support opportunities by establishing digital systems to proactively communicate with families.
- Ensure there is an evidence-based parenting offer at all levels of need so that parents and carers can get help more easily.
- Support universal services, particularly schools and early years settings, to deliver effective team around the family interventions.
- Use integrated commissioning to develop the local voluntary and community sector support and ensure it is tailored to the needs of different districts.
- Train staff in districts about the local voluntary, community and faith sector offer, and how to assist families to access this.

Strong place-based partnerships

Developing strong partner relationships in each district will enable services to work together more effectively in supporting children and families. The Family Hub Network will provide focal points for service delivery.

We will:

- Establish a place-based governance model which supports effective co-ordination of multi-agency service delivery to better meet the local needs of children and families.
- Establish at least one family hub in each district which, together with outreach venues, will provide focal points for delivering a wide range of services which meet the needs of families.
- Develop co-ordinated local operating models, including multi-agency Early Help panels, which ensure that children's, adults and neighbourhood services work together effectively to meet the needs of children and families, with a particular focus on the needs of vulnerable children and those with additional needs.
- Co-locate district-based staff teams to support the development of strong working relationships and better information sharing in support of improved outcomes for children and families.
- Ensure that staff in schools and other universal services have identified contacts for services in their district and can access support in getting help for children and families.

Multi-agency workforce development

Achieving the principles of early help delivery depends upon having a workforce which is supported and equipped to deliver this. Creating a shared culture across the children's workforce will enable trusted relationships to be established and sustained with families, providing a strong foundation for working with them to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

We will:

- Explore options for creating integrated Children's Services Teams in each district across social care, health and community services.
- Develop an Early Help resource pack for professionals, providing clear guidance and resources to support consistent practice across the partnership.
- Introduce a shared systemic and restorative model of practice across the children's workforce.
- Deliver a Learning and Development Plan across the partnership to build an understanding of good early help practice and develop the skills to support this.
- Develop a quality assurance framework for multi-agency early help practice, supporting continuous improvement in the quality of support provided to children and families.

Using information to drive improvement

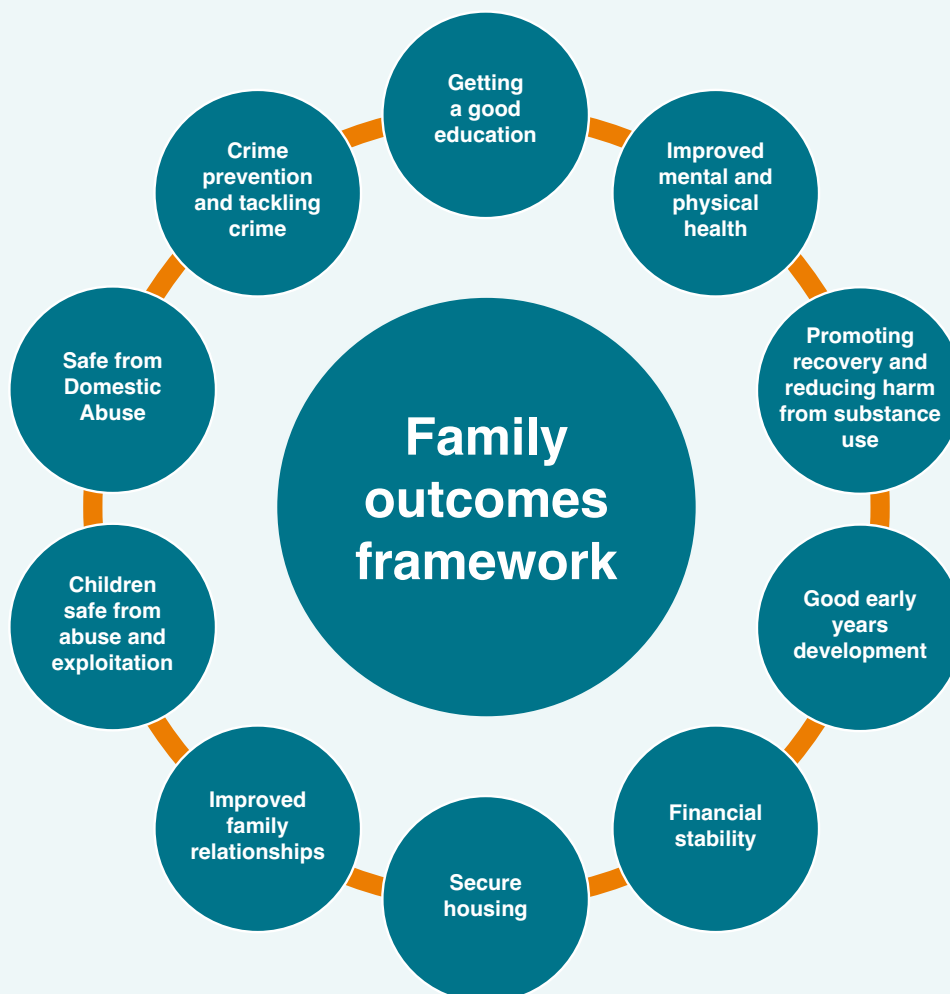
Better use of information is a key enabler of improved services for children and families. Data is currently held in multiple systems, so families often have to tell their stories multiple times. Integration of services needs to be supported by integration of information, linked to a culture of analysis and evaluation which provides the insights to drive service improvement.

We will:

- Ensure that the identification of early help needs is an integral part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Develop systems for bringing together information about early help activity undertaken by partners in addition to that of Targeted Early Help Teams.
- Develop a data warehouse within Children's Services which brings together data from multiple services to provide a joined-up view of children and families to help understand their needs and support improved decision making.
- Embed the Supporting Families outcomes framework across services as a tool to measure the impact of work and inform service improvement.
- Develop a culture of evaluation of activity in order to better inform future practice and commissioning decisions.
- As part of the wider integration of services, create linkages between information systems to support improved sharing of information across education, health and social care.

What will success look like?

The difference the strategy makes will be reflected in the outcomes for children and families – whether they are healthy, safe, happy, have supportive relationships in families and communities, are economically secure and able to participate in learning. We will use the **supporting families outcomes framework** (below) to measure this and enable us to quantify progress.



Outcomes will also be measured across the different districts, and also for individuals with different protected characteristics (gender, ethnic origin, disability) in order to ensure the strategy contributes to reduced inequality in Oldham.

Alongside the outcome measures will be measures of service outputs and the quality of service delivery, which will provide more immediate evidence of the impact of change. Examples of these are given below:

Outputs	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased take-up of self-help and community-based preventative interventions. • Caseloads of numbers of children and families supported by services. • Increased delivery of Team Around the Family activity. • Numbers of referrals to Targeted Early Help and children's social care. • Rates of re-referral to children's social care and Early Help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of impact of Team Around the Family and Targeted Early Help work for children and families, through measuring distance travelled/outcome of the intervention. • Timeliness of response to an indication of need. • Feedback from children and families. • Outcomes of dip sampling audits. • Outcomes of external assessments and peer reviews.

One of our priorities is family experience. How we measure success will also incorporate the feedback we gather from children and families about the difference we are making, whether they feel that their needs are being met, and whether they feel empowered to help themselves.

Governance and accountability

Early help is everyone's business, and the governance reflects the multi-agency partnership which underpins this.

The Early Help Strategy is part of an ambitious programme for the transformation of services for children and young people, which will drive further integration of services across education, health and social care. The Children and Families Early Help Strategic Board has oversight of this, providing multi-agency co-ordination across a number of inter-connected workstreams including early help, family hubs and the 0-19 Service.

The Early Help Operational Delivery Group is accountable to the Board for delivering the actions in the Strategy.

The Oldham Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) provides support in this, with the Partnership's Performance Sub-Group reviewing multi-agency early help performance and quality assurance. The OSCP holds partners accountable for early help delivery, ensuring that statutory partners play their part and supporting multi-agency activity to ensure the quality of early help practice, including delivery of multi-agency training in support of shared practice standards.

