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## **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

### **Report of the Director of Children’s Services**

#### **Early Help in Dudley**

##### **Purpose**

1. This report will provide the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with the details of the progress of Dudley’s Early Help partnership arrangements focussing specifically on Early Help delivery throughout 2021. This includes work around the launch of the refreshed Early Help Strategy 2021-2024, early help demand, delivery and impact of support across the partnership throughout the last twelve months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

##### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that Members: -
  - Note the detail in the report and the early help activity that has been delivered across the partnership over the last twelve months.
  - Support the delivery of the Early Help Strategy 2021-2024 with particular reference to the five pillars of delivery detailed in this report.
  - Support the re-calibration of the contribution of the partnership to early help in the Borough given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their involvement.

##### **Background**

3. A key element of the Early Help operating system is cluster-based working as the delivery methodology for Early Help services across the Borough.
4. Five clusters were established in 2016 as the basis of delivery and support to children and young people 0-18 years (up to 25 years if the young person has a learning difficulty or disability) and their families at Level 3 and below of the Threshold Guidance and Framework for Support 2019.
5. Family Centres exist in each of the cluster areas. Brierley Hill, Halesowen, Stourbridge, Dudley North and Dudley Central.
6. Early Help is led in each cluster by a Family Centre Manager with a team of supervisors, family support workers (including apprentices), youth workers, Early Help Enablers and co-located partners such as school health, voluntary sector, childcare and child health clinics.

7. Whole family service delivery has been underpinned by the Early Help Strategy, most recently refreshed in 2021 to cover the next three years of support to children, young people and their families (2021-2024).
8. Early Help support is centred around lead practitioners from across the partnership using the Early Help Assessment to identify need and the Early Help Family Plan to co-ordinate support to families, to understand impact and to ensure support is closed at a point where families no longer require multi-agency targeted support at Threshold Level 3.

### **Early Help Strategy**

9. Dudley's previous iteration of the Early Help Strategy 2018-2021 had been well embedded through a large-scale modernisation of multiple children's services in 2016/2017.
10. The formal development of the Early Help Offer in Dudley commenced as a direct result of Ofsted's inspection of Children's Services in Dudley in 2016. There was regulatory criticism at that time around service fragmentation and the under-development of assessment processes that could identify children and family's needs early in the problem.
11. Through numerous Ofsted monitoring visits and the 2018 Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection, Dudley's Early Help offer has been examined and identified as a strength being described as 'well developed'. Ofsted's focussed assurance visit in October 2020 described how:

'Early help services have seen an increase in demand during the pandemic, and they have responded effectively in supporting children and families who were adversely affected during lockdown. Ofsted 2020'

12. The Early Help Strategy 2021-2024 focuses on a number of key components:
  - Foreword
  - Useful Links and Contacts
  - Early Help Steering Group Membership
  - Our Vision (on a page)
  - Our Pledge
  - What do we mean by Early Help?
  - Supporting Families Programme
  - Why do we need Early Help?
  - The Dudley Approach to Early Help
  - Dudley's nine step process
  - How are we doing?
  - Our Dudley Early Help Strategy 2021-2024
  - Service user's stories and feedback are used throughout the document

13. Dudley's Early Help Vision 2021-2024:

## Dudley Early Help Strategy 2021-2024

### HELPING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES THRIVE

**OUR VISION**  
Working together to help Children, Young People and Families thrive.  
To make the vision a reality we will ensure we all provide:  
**THE RIGHT APPROACH** – Friendly, reassuring, down to earth conversations and a self-serve ethos helping families to help themselves.  
**IN THE RIGHT PLACE** – All our partners are alert and willing to offer Early Help where children young people and families ordinarily go day to day.  
**AT THE RIGHT TIME** – Help at an early stage of the problem, or early in a crisis life.

**1. DEVELOP OUR CULTURE AND PRACTICE**  
The Early Help Steering Group will hold all partners to account for their contributions to Early Help.  
We will ensure there is good and consistent understanding of needs and thresholds.  
We will include Early Help in induction of new staff.  
We will clarify our governance arrangements.  
We will ensure there is clarity about who can and should act as a lead professional.

**2. BUILD OUR CAPACITY – HELP EVEN EARLIER**  
We will support the roll out of Cluster Connects across the borough.  
We will develop a Volunteers Strategy and Action Plan to increase our Early Help workforce.  
We will seek the support of our community worldwide to prevent issues escalating.  
We will seek to good financial resources across the partnership to increase our Early Help Enable workforce.

**3. MAKE BETTER USE OF INFORMATION**  
We will develop a performance management and outcomes based quality assurance framework commissioners and Service Leaders will use performance reports to hold services to account for the delivery of Early Help.  
We will seek to find better IT solutions to our partnership working.  
We will create an online portal for partners to submit Early Help Assessments, check on progress of an assessment or delegate work to colleagues.

**OUR PLEDGE**

- WE WILL MAKE EVERY CONTACT COUNT
- WE WILL LISTEN TO YOU AND NOT JUDGE YOU
- WE WILL WORK WITH YOU – AND NOT DO TO YOU
- WE WILL GIVE YOU ONE POINT OF CONTACT
- OUR ASSESSMENTS AND PLANS WILL BE UNCOMPLICATED AND ROBUST
- WE WILL TAKE CARE OF YOUR INFORMATION
- WE WON'T PRESS THE BUZZER

**4. THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE**  
We will make sure that families can self-serve where possible.  
We will make our pledge to families meaningful in our day-to-day practice.  
We will develop an engagement strategy – reassuring families about the approach.  
We will seek feedback from families to inform everything we do.  
We will work on ways to build on family strengths and resilience in our work.

**5. FOCUS ON PRIORITY AREAS**  
We will focus on children in the first 1001 days of their lives.  
We will focus on making sure all children can benefit from education and will focus on inclusion, in mainstream education where possible.

14. The vision for the 2021 strategy is centred around 'the right approach, in the right place at the right time' and has the following elements:

1. Develop our culture and practice
2. Build our capacity – help even earlier
3. Make better use of information
4. The family experience
5. Focus on priority areas

15. We continue to have a focus on the core themes of:

- Parenting Matters
- Growing Up Matters
- Health and Wellbeing Matters

16. Next Steps linked to the Vision:

SHOW US OUR STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS – WE WILL TAKE A PROGRAMME APPROACH TO OUR WORK AND WILL HAVE PROJECTS IN PLACE TO MAKE SURE WE DO WHAT WE SAY WE'RE GOING TO DO

<b>Our Dudley Early Help Strategy 2021 - 2024</b>				
1. Develop our Culture and Practice	2. Build our capacity – Help even earlier	3. Make Better Use of Information	4. The Family Experience	5. Focus on Priority Areas
We will ensure we go well with all partners to support the three commitments to Early Help, ensuring all agencies make appropriate contributions and fulfil their responsibilities.	We will support the roll out of Cluster Connects across the borough.	We will develop a thorough wide performance management and assurance based quality assurance framework.	We will make sure that information about the support services which are available to children, young people and families is available in an accessible and easy to use platform, so that every family can self-serve.	We will ensure children in their early years or primary prior the first 1001 days starting with 2 at least 1001 days of child's life.
We will ensure there is good and consistent understanding of thresholds by all practitioners, to ensure families access the help they need.	We will develop a Volunteers Strategy and Action Plan to increase our Early Help workforce.	Commissioners and Service Leaders across the partnership will use performance reports to hold services to account for their role in Early Help and set targets to the Steering Group that they are meeting a difference.	We will make our pledge to families meaningful in our day to day practice, not in particular through use in reviews and evaluations.	We will focus on making sure all children can benefit from education and will focus on inclusion, supporting all children to reach their full potential, including mainstream education where possible.
We will ensure all agencies who work with children young people and their families include Early Help in induction of new staff and will ensure all partners support progress to the steering group.	We will seek the support of our community worldwide to help families where needs are at level 2 or the necessary prevent needs escalating.	We will seek to find better IT solutions to our partnership working and will seek to explore systems which allow to each other to share work to be done.	We will develop an engagement strategy to ensure all families understand what Early Help is and how to access it – reassuring families about the approach.	
We will clarify our governance arrangements to ensure our strategic, operational and oversight to drive the work forward.	We will seek to good financial resources across the partnership to increase our enable workforce.	We will create an online portal for partners to submit Early Help Assessments, check on progress of an assessment or delegate work to colleagues.	We will use feedback from families to inform everything we do.	
We will ensure there is clarity about who can and should act as a lead professional, and what this means.			We will ensure we work to build on family strengths and resilience in our work, rather than working over them.	

17. The final and key element of the strategy is the work required to continue to develop the strategy throughout 2021 to 2024.

This sits under five key themes detailed in the vision:

18. **1. Develop our Culture and Practice**

The steering group will hold all partners to account for their contributions to Early Help, ensuring all agencies make proportionate contributions and fulfil their responsibilities.

We will ensure there is good and consistent understanding of thresholds by all practitioners, to ensure families across the borough get the help they need.

We will ensure all agencies who work with children, young people and their families include Early Help in induction of new staff and will require all partners to report progress to the steering group.

We will clarify our governance arrangements to maximise our strategic capacity and oversight to drive this work forward.

We will ensure there is clarity about who can and should act as a lead professional, and what this means.

19. **2. Build our capacity – Help even earlier**

We will support the roll out of Cluster Connect across the Borough.

We will develop a Volunteers Strategy and Action Plan to increase our Early Help workforce.

We will seek the support of our community workforce to help families whose needs are at Level 2 on the continuum to prevent issues escalating.

We will seek to pool financial resources across the partnership to increase our enabler workforce.

20. **3. Make Better Use of Information**

We will develop a Borough wide performance management and outcomes-based quality assurance framework.

Commissioners and Service Leaders across the partnership will use performance reports to hold services to account for the delivery of Early Help and will report to the Steering Group how they are making a difference.

We will seek to find better IT solutions to our partnership working and will work to identify systems which talk to each other to ensure work is seamless.

We will create an online portal for partners to submit Early Help Assessments, check on progress of an assessment or delegate work to colleagues.

21. **4. The Family Experience**

We will make sure that information about the support services which are available to children, young people and families is available in an accessible and easy to navigate form, so that more families can self-serve.

We will make our pledge to families meaningful in our day-to-day practice, and in particular through use in reviews and evaluations.

We will develop an Engagement Strategy to ensure all families understand what Early Help is and how to access it – reassuring families about the approach.

We will use feedback from families to inform everything we do.

We will work on ways to build on family strengths and resilience in our work, rather than focusing on deficits.

22. **5. Focus on Priority Areas**

We will focus on children in their early years in phases over the next 3 years, starting with the first 1001 days of children's lives.

We will focus on making sure all children can benefit from education and will focus on inclusion, supporting all children to reach their full potential, accessing mainstream education where possible.

Workstreams to support these priorities will form from membership of the Early Help Steering Group which has a range of systems leaders. They are well placed to develop the work of the Early Help partnership further.

23. The launch of the Early Help Strategy 2021-24 is taking place over two phases, a press launch in January 2022 and a partnership engagement session on 21 March 2022 involving the partnership led by Senior Leaders from Police, Health, the Local Authority and the community.

### **Early Help Demand**

24. There has been significant demand placed across the Early Help system throughout 2021.

7755 contacts were made with Dudley's five Family Centres through the calendar year of 2021. The largest number of contacts are focussed on Dudley Central and Dudley North where demand is greatest.

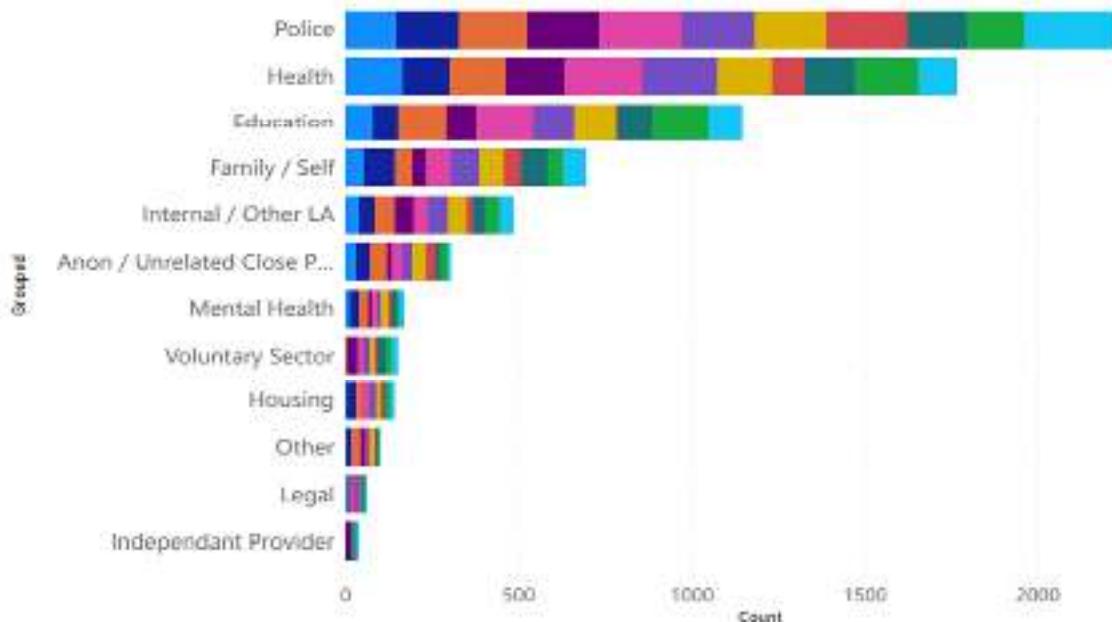


Contacts	2021
Team	Total
Brierley Hill FC Cluster	1511
Dudley Central FC Cluster	1903
Dudley North FC Cluster	1795
Halesowen FC Cluster	1242
Stourbridge FC Cluster	1159
Unknown FC Cluster	145
<b>Total</b>	<b>7755</b>

25. The breakdown of agencies that make contact with Early Help via the MASH or directly to Family Centres is as follows:

### Contacts Started During Period - Referring Agency

Month ● January ● February ● March ● April ● May ● June ● July ● August ● October ● November ● December



Throughout 2021 most Early Help contacts originated from the Police, followed by Health, Education and family members/relatives.

### Meeting Early Help Demand

26. A key element of ensuring Early Help demand is met is translated into Early Help Assessments across the partnership. The Early Help Steering Group's target remains at 200 Early Help Assessments per month. 2021 performance is as follows:

# Early Help Assessments - 2021

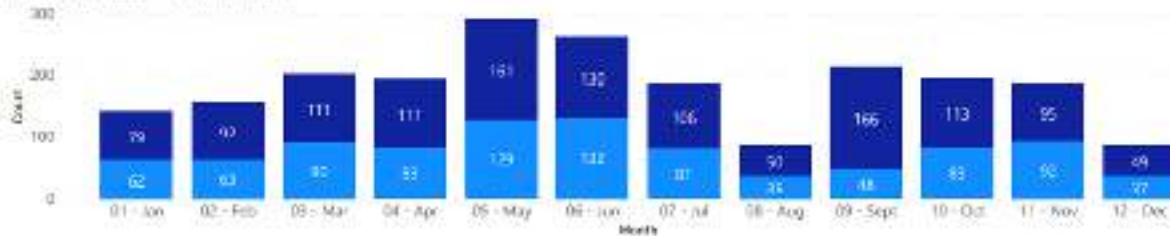
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SPLIT 79

Internal or External External Internal



## Internal and External Split Numbers

Internal or External External Internal



2021 concluded with 2245 Early Help Assessments being undertaken across the Borough, an average of 187 per month (target 200 per month). It is clear that the pandemic has had an impact on Early Help Assessments being undertaken across the Council and partnership and this is being addressed through leaders in the Early Help Steering Group.

- 27. Importantly the split of Early Help Assessments undertaken by Dudley MBC and the rest of the partnership remains a key area of focus. Dudley MBC remains the predominant agency undertaking Early Help Assessments in 2021 (1459 Dudley MBC 65% vs 786 Partnership 35%). Again, rebalancing of assessments across the partnership to at 50/50% split is being addressed through the Early Help Steering Group.
- 28. A clear benefit of Children’s Services having the unified Liquid Logic system is ensuring the smooth transition of families moving to and from Threshold Level 3 and 4.
- 29. The details of children stepping down from Level 4 to Level 3 for 2021 are as follows:

## Step Downs

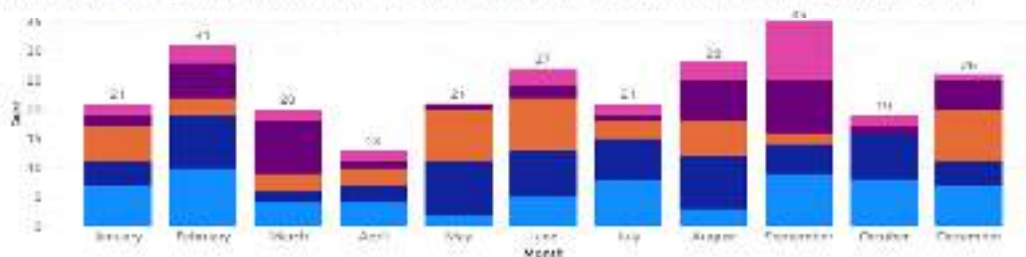
Total Number 2021

289

Step Downs

### Step Downs by Month by Family Centre

Family Centre: Bordesley Hill PC Cluster, Dudley Central PC Cluster, Dudley North PC Cluster, Halesowen PC Cluster, Stourbridge PC Cluster



- 30. The details of children stepping up from Level 3 to Level 4 for 2021 are as follows:

## Step Ups

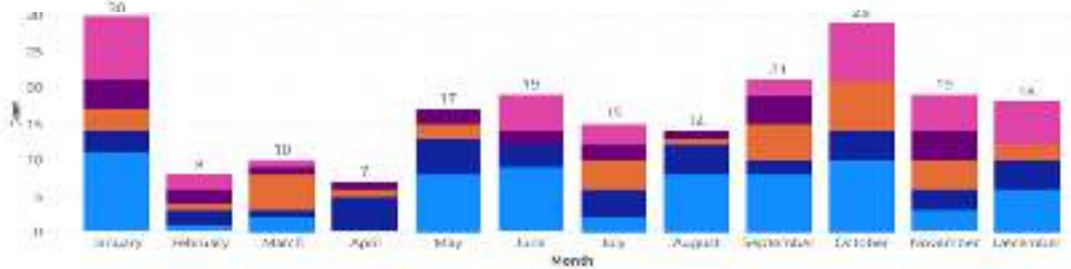
Total Number 2021

235

(See Doc)

### Step Downs by Month by Family Centre

Family Centre: ■ Arley Hill EC Cluster ■ Dudley Central EC Cluster ■ Dudley North EC Cluster ■ Halesowen EC Cluster ■ Roadside EC Cluster



In 2021 54 more children were stepped up than were stepped down highlighting how demand is slightly greater around step down arrangements.

## The Impact of Early Help

- The National Supporting Families Programme is led by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities with a three-year commitment to 2026 from the most recent spending review. Supporting Families is an outcomes-based programme funding through a Payments by Results (PBR)/Grant split concept. Dudley MBC is on track to meet 100% of its 447 families with outcomes met by March 2022.

### Payment by Results (PBR)

#### Strengthening Families

PBRs 2020/21 (Dec)

342

(80% of target)

Project PBRs 2021/22

May	100
June	150
July	160
August	216
September	249
October	262
November	315
December	348
January	361
February	414
March	447

#### Funding Allocation 2021/22



Outcome indicators include improving school attendance, reducing the incidence of domestic abuse, supporting families into employment and ensuring families have sustained progress.



32. A key measure of the impact of Early Help focusses on families who go on to require a Level 4 service within 6 months of support ending from Early Help.



**Dudley** Early Help KPI  
Metropolitan Borough Council

Early Help Effectiveness Key Performance Indicator - Percentage of cases that received an Early Help intervention and were closed in the past 12 months, that were referred for a Level 4 intervention within the following 6 months.  
Intervention for Early Help is defined as having had an Early Help Family Plan within the Episode.  
Intervention at Level 4 is defined as having an open Social Care Referral.

Family Centre	Not Re-Referrred		Re-Referrred		Total
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Brierley Hill FC Cluster	202	90.99%	20	9.01%	222
Dudley Central FC Cluster	481	93.76%	32	6.24%	513
Dudley North FC Cluster	238	89.81%	27	10.19%	265
Halesowen FC Cluster	327	93.70%	22	6.30%	349
Stourbridge FC Cluster	183	95.31%	9	4.69%	192
<b>Total</b>	<b>1431</b>	<b>92.86%</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>7.14%</b>	<b>1541</b>

The last 12 months has seen 93% of children not requiring support at Level 4 within 6 months of their work ending from Early Help.

### Early Help Strategy 2021-2024 Consultation and Representation

33. Service users and professionals from across the partnership have been engaged in the development of the Early Help Strategy 2021-2024 which sets the template for our next three years of work.
34. There has been a significant level of engagement to inform the new strategy. The timeline follows:

22/03/21 - Head of Family Solutions and Service Manager, Family Support, DMBC  
 29/03/21 - Commissioning Engagement Manager, Children, Young People and Families, CCG and Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, CCG  
 29/03/21 - Information Analyst, DMBC  
 30/09/21 - Headteacher, Dawley Brook Primary and Headteacher, St Marys CE Primary  
 30/09/21 - Young Persons Early Help Officer from Partnerships Team, West Midlands Police  
 07/04/21 - Head of Children & Young Peoples Public Health AND Public Health Manager, DMBC  
 07/04/21 - Family Centre Managers – Dudley North, Brierley Hill, Stourbridge, DMBC  
 09/04/21 - Service Director – Early Help, Schools/SEND, DMBC  
 12/04/21 - Head of Community Safety, DMBC  
 12/04/21 - Team Leader, School Nurses  
 13/04/21 - West Midlands Fire Service  
 14/04/21 - Lead for Intervention & Prevention, Senior Early Help Enabler, Family Centre Manager, Dudley Central, DMBC

16/04/21 - Strategic Lead for Children's Services, Dudley CVS, Chair of Dudley Central Cluster Connect, Chief Executive, Citizen's Advice Dudley & Wolverhampton  
16/04/21 - Partnership Manager, DWP  
19/04/21 - Pre-school & Specialist Nursing Service Manager, BCPFT  
20/04/21 - Headteacher, Pens Meadow School  
21/04/21 - Strategic Commissioning Manager, DMBC  
27/04/21 - Designated Safeguarding Lead, St James's Academy  
27/04/21 - Head of Housing Options & Support, DMBC  
30/04/21 - Interim Head of Children, Young People & Families, DMBC

35. Telephone consultation with six families who had received support from Dudley took place and seventeen families completed Survey Monkey questionnaires providing their feedback.

24/05/21 - Finding of scoping exercise presented to Early Help Steering Group.

21/06/21 and 08/07/21 - Focus Groups to inform and shape the first draft of the strategy took place involving;

Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, CCG  
Strategic Lead for Children's Services, Dudley CVS  
Strategic Commissioning Manager, DMBC  
Joint Safeguarding Business Manager, DMBC  
Head of Housing Options & Support, DMBC  
Service Manager, Family Support, DMBC

12/07/21 - Findings of Focus Groups and initial design presented to the Early Help Steering Group

23/09/2021 - Final Draft presented to Dudley MBC DLT

27/09/21 - Final draft of the updated Early Help Strategy to be presented to the Early Help Steering Group for approval

36. Throughout the engagement process, it was clear that the contents and design of Leeds Early Help Strategy was popular across the partnership.

<https://www.leedsscp.org.uk/LSCB/media/Images/pdfs/Early-Help-Approach-and-Strategy-2020-2023-FINAL.pdf>

37. The simplicity and clarity of Leeds messages helped determine how Dudley would convey our message around early help's ambitions for 2021-2024.

### **Conflict of Interest**

38. There is no known conflict of interest for officers or members.

### **Recommendations**

39. The recommendations are as follows:

- Children's Services Scrutiny Committee take note of the detail in the report and the early help activity that been delivered across the partnership over the last twelve

months.

- Support the delivery of the Early Help Strategy 2021-2024 with particular reference to the five pillars of delivery detailed in this report.

Support to re-calibration of the contribution of the partnership to early help in the borough given the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on their involvement.

## **Finance**

40. The Revenue Budget for Family Solutions for 2021/22 is £9.900m, in addition to this the Supporting Families grant is estimated to be £0.985m for 2021/22. However, there are no direct financial implications as a result of this report to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

## **Law**

41. The arrangements for providing support are specified in Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children July 2018.

## **Risk Management**

42. There are no material risks that are linked to the recommendations of this report.

## **Equality Impact**

43. There are no implications of this report for people with designated protected characteristics.
44. Early Help is by its design focused on supporting children, young people and their families who require multi-agency targeted support.
45. The re-calibration of the partnership's response to Early Help is central to ensuring that early help is offered in a timely manner, prior to family challenges escalating by professionals who know the family and their needs.
46. This is a key requirement of returning to pre-pandemic levels of support.
47. Limited opportunities to provide Early Help are likely to require later interventions, possibly at Level 4 where children and families require a social worker. This approach is one the Early Help system is well placed to support if commitment is shared and enacted by all appropriate agencies.
48. The details of consultation with families is highlighted in Section 5 of this report.

## **Human Resources/Organisational Development**

49. There are no human resources or organisational development issues that arise from this report.

## **Commercial/Procurement**

50. There are no human commercial or procurement issues that arise from this report.

## **Council Priorities**

51. 14.1 The recommendations have clear links to Dudley's Borough vision:

DUDLEY 2030...

All schools and colleges performing above the national standard and all young people are able to reach their potential

Young people have high aspirations and prospects of a fulfilling career with opportunity to continually develop new skills.

Council Plan 2022-2025 and Future Council Programme

52. The work detailed in this report is underpinned by the Early Help Strategy 2021-2024 <https://safeguarding.dudley.gov.uk/safeguarding/child/work-with-children-young-people/dudley-early-help/>

There are also clear links and impacts to the SEND Improvement Programme: <https://www.dudleyhealthandwellbeing.org.uk/sendimprovement>

There are evident links to the Children's Services Improvement Plan <https://www.dudleycpp.org.uk/childrenfirst>

53. There are no infrastructure implications as a result of the recommendations of this report to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.
54. There are no climate or environmental implications as a result of the recommendations of this report to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.
55. The focus of this report to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is in providing a robust and impactful 'whole family' early help offer to children, young people and their families.
56. This has clear links to the corporate parenting council priority work given the correlation between children who become 'in need' and their likelihood of then becoming looked after. The Early Help Strategy is focussed on preventing family's needs ever progressing to Level 4 where a social worker is required.



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## **Appendices**

*None*

## **List of Background Documents**

*Hyperlinks included at appropriate sections of this report to Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.*