

Early Help in Bolton (2022-2025)

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1. What do we mean by Early Help?

Early Help is an approach, not a provision and is everyone's responsibility. Early Help provides support as a need is identified, and this can be provided at any point in a child's life. It means that children, young people and families are supported holistically at the right time, as soon as a problem is identified. It is not a specific service but a collaborative approach across all agencies and partners to work with children, young people and families to prevent the problem from getting worse, leading to the need for statutory intervention.

Early Help also means that families are an equal partner in their support and are recognised for their strengths. The purpose of Early Help is to enable families to build on their strengths, promote resilience to sustain positive changes and enable them to find their own solutions in future and to understand and utilise their own family and friends support networks, who can support in promoting positive outcomes long term. It includes universal and targeted services that are designed to prevent and reduce problems from escalating and can also help families move from statutory services back to targeted support.

'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' statutory guidance places emphasis on the crucial role of effective Early Help and focusses on the collective responsibility of all agencies to identify, assess and provide effective Early Help services:

'Providing Early Help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. 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.'

Working Together to Safeguard Children, HM Government, 2018

Bolton's Framework for Action provides guidance on how Early Help should be delivered to facilitate a high quality, collaborative approach to holistic assessment, support and planning and enable positive outcomes. For this to be effective, all agencies are required to work together to:

- Identify children, young people and families who would benefit from support
- Undertake an assessment of need
- Services wrap around the child and family to provide support
- Review progress to ensure that positive change has happened

This might mean when a child or young person:

- Has specific additional needs or is disabled
- Has special educational needs
- Is a young carer
- Is showing signs of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour
- Is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for them, such as substance abuse, adult mental health, domestic violence
- Is showing early signs of neglect or abuse
- Has another indicator within the family, such as, for example; facing financial problems, debt, struggling with household bills, experiencing housing issues.

2. Introduction

There is a long standing and strong commitment to early help and prevention across all agencies and strategic partners in Bolton. Providing early help to children and families is a priority, with a key focus on ensuring children, young people and their families receive the right help at the right time, by the right person.

The main benefits of early help approaches include identifying and promoting protective factors at an early stage and as a result prevent negative outcomes. We will support children, young people and their families to maximise their potential, enjoy a better quality of life and enable them to succeed. Early Help approaches in Bolton will be 'enabling', focused on equipping individuals and communities with the tools to succeed. We will use a restorative and strength-based approach and we will foster self-reliance and resilience rather than dependency.

The majority of people, irrespective of their individual circumstances want to live a fulfilling and where possible active life. They also want to stay healthy for as long as possible while remaining a valued part of the community. We will address needs and the root causes of a problem at an early stage, individuals and families will be supported to cope better and achieve their own future potential.

The strategy outlines our intentions and key priorities to ensure Early Help is understood, accessible and firmly embedded within the working practices of all agencies, promoting a holistic family approach to deliver effective early help in Bolton and ensuring we have a strong, multi-agency and community focused approach.

Our strategy aims to build a culture of Early Help across the partnership, setting out our shared commitment to deliver Early Help, with a shared vision and priorities. Our overall aim, as a partnership, is to reduce risk and improve outcomes for children, young people and families, and to continue to reduce the demand for high cost services.

3. Vision and Outcomes

Working Together in Bolton to deliver Early Help, ensuring that the right help is delivered at the right time, by the right person, in the right place.

In supporting this vision, we have set out a number of outcomes that will enable us to achieve our commitment to delivering effective early help as a partnership:

- Improved outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Integrated support for families delivered in their community
- Less duplication of service provision
- Timely implementation of early help assessment and plans as part of a graduated response to need

This is achieved by;

- Ensuring the provision of early help support across the partnership is available, and family support, where required, is delivered through targeted interventions
- Maximising on opportunities to integrate practice, through leadership, budget and commissioning arrangements
- Ensuring navigation of and access to early help support and services is easy, so that families receive the right help, at the right time, by the right person, in the right place
- Improve the skills of the workforce, so that they can confidently identify unmet needs and risks, respond through early help assessment and work together with relevant agencies to support the family.
- Simplifying systems and processes, including the Early Help Assessment in Bolton

We want children and young people to be able to say

- I feel safe
- I feel part of my community
- My voice is heard
- I enjoy good health and wellbeing

- I am happy and have people I can trust
- I am confident and able to reach my goals
- The people who love and care for me are enabled to do this

Fundamental to the delivery of Early Help are shared principles which underpin much of the work that we, as a partnership, will carry out to support children, young people and families. These principles are:

- The focus of Early Help and interventions will be around Health and Wellbeing, creating healthy, independent and resilient families
- The Child is at the centre of decision making
- All practitioners “Think Family” and recognise the interdependence of all family members on each other’s needs
- We use Relational practice at the forefront of our delivery
- We will be PACE aware/ trauma informed
- Focus on a Team Around the Family approach, with recognition that adults as parents within the family unit, may require dedicated adult services
- There is a strong focus on intervention and sustainable change with families, utilising a restorative, enabling and strength-based approach
- Ensure effective early help systems and processes are in place by utilising the Framework for Action to identify at the earliest opportunity, emerging needs for a child/young person
- The Early Help model reduces bureaucracy and enable ‘swift and easy access’ to support for children, young people and families; moving away from a culture of ‘referring out’ for services.
- Practitioners are supported through clear workforce development arrangements and there is organisational permission to work differently where this will enable a family to achieve best outcomes.
- There is recognition that every practitioner across the partnership, has a part to play.
- Information Sharing arrangements are robust, clear and easy to understand to enable practitioners to share with confidence, and within safe and agreed parameters.

Equality, diversity and inclusion are integral to the work we undertake with families and the impact the work has on their outcomes.

“[Our] values ensure that what we say is aligned with what we do, and how we do it. We want to ensure that all children are able to achieve their full potential but to make this a reality, our work must reflect their reality and therefore is integral to our mission”.

4. Governance

The Bolton Children and Young People's Board will be responsible for driving forward this strategy and providing advice and scrutiny to ensure the quality of the Early Help Offer. The Children and Young People' Board have a shared recognition that Early Help is not the responsibility of one single agency, but is the responsibility of everyone who works with children and their families. The Local Safeguarding Children Partners will offer regular scrutiny and challenge to local Early Help arrangements to ensure they remain effective and achieve better outcomes for children and their families.

This collective commitment will ensure the achievement of the aims outlined in the strategy and will drive a shared positive culture and response to Early Help.

5. Targeted Early Help

Our Local Authority Targeted Early Help Service provides a targeted whole family approach, delivering the Supporting Families programme. The service works with families using strength based approaches to empower them to achieve the best outcomes they can. The service delivered is needs led and the range of interventions offered are informed by evidence based research.

The Targeted Early Help Service Offer is creative and diverse and includes the following;

- Case work with individual families with support from the service's Lead Professional
- Direct work with children and young people
- Team Around the Family, supporting solution focused family change
- Work with schools and other partner agencies through Team Around the School
- Evidence Based Interventions to support Parenting and Home Learning environments
- Targeted Youth Support provision
- Group based delivery of support
- Saturday/weekend offer, within the community
- Transitions support for children in year 6, moving to year 7, with an early help assessment and plan who may need additional support through this stage
- Early Help Access Point integrated alongside the Family Hubs, providing direct support to professionals regarding Early Help support for families

- Supervision for Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools

6. Early Help, Supporting Families and Family Hubs

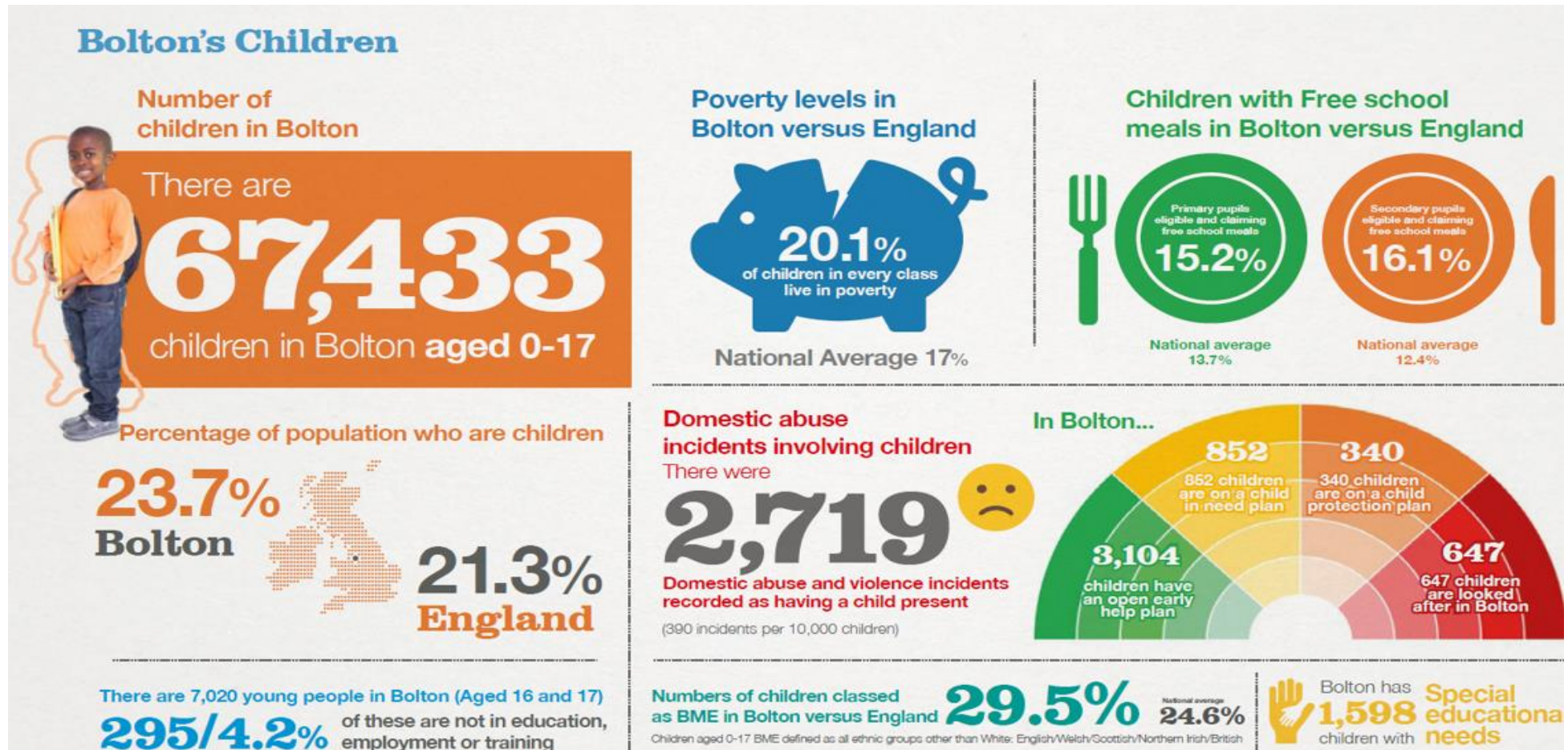
“Family Hubs are a way of delivering the Supporting Families vision of an effective early help system”

Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guide, 2022

Early Help is fundamental to the delivery of the Family Hub model, with the expectation that earlier support will be accessible through this model, at a universal level to reduce escalation. The Family Hub model sets out the need for shared data, leadership, governance and evaluation, aligned to the three Family Hubs principles; access, connection and relationships. These principles and ambitions link directly with our Early Help vision.

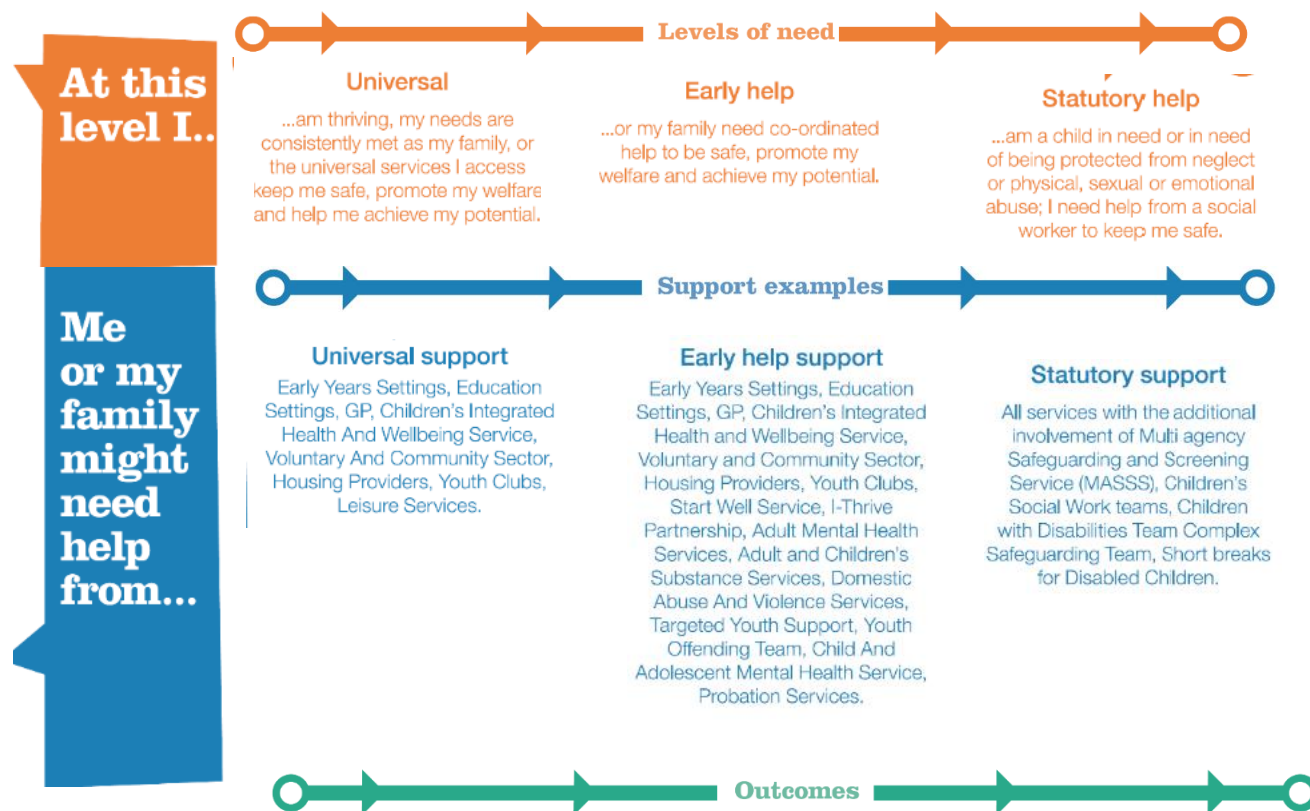
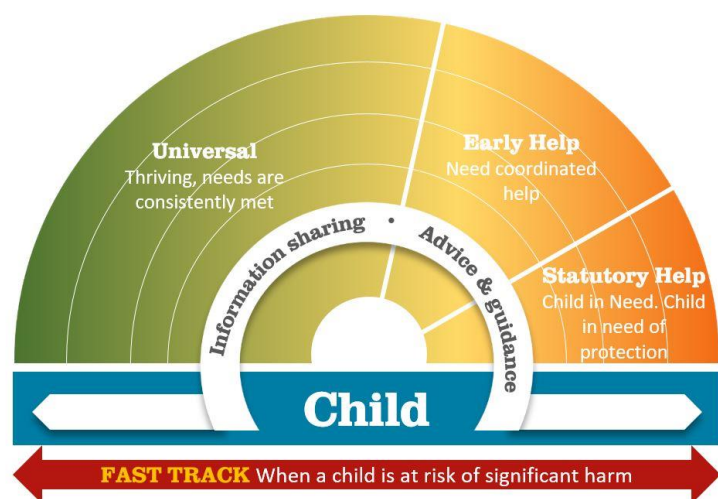
Furthermore, the creation of Family Hubs promotes connectivity with the Supporting Families framework, which focuses on providing help to vulnerable families with multiple and complex problems, to prevent families escalating to crises. This programme will drive Early Help systems to transform locally to ensure we offer joined-up, efficient services, we identify families in need, provide the right support at the right time and see improvements for families in the long term.

7. Bolton's profile



8. Levels of Need

The Bolton Framework for Action outlines how local practitioners work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in our area. It sets out the thresholds that all partners will apply when working with children and their parents.





9. Early Help is Everyone's Responsibility

Working Together 2018, clearly sets out that effective Early Help relies upon local agencies:

- Working together to identify children and families who need Early Help.
- Assessing the need
- Providing relevant services to address the need.

In Bolton, every person working with or engaging with children and families, regardless of organisation, status or position, has a responsibility to support the delivery of Early Help and support the family to access appropriate services to enable positive parenting. Without cross sector shared responsibility whether public, private, voluntary or community, there is a risk of missing an opportunity to get help to children and families quickly and not addressing need at the earliest point.

When we identify need, we must support children and families back on to a safe, supportive and resilient path as soon as possible. At all times, we will aim to get children, young people and families in a position where they can be supported effectively by universal services and help families to help themselves.

10. Nothing about me, without me

In all aspects of our work, we will ensure that the Voice of the Child is at the forefront, with an approach that seeks to understand their lived experiences.

As a partnership, we will support our practitioners to utilise appropriate tools and techniques to enable us to demonstrate that we have listened to the child/young person, and that their views, thoughts and feelings are reflected in the assessment and help to shape their family early help plan.

11. Strategic Priorities

Bolton's Early Help Strategic Priorities 2022-2025		
Family Hubs Principles Access, Connection and Relationships	Timely and holistic	Seamless Early Help pathways of services and intervention supported by a Family approach to Early Help Assessment Children and families should experience seamless pathways on their journey through support and provision and where appropriate, Early Help should be the first consideration in response to emerging needs, where universal and preventative support are no longer appropriate. Entry and exit from services providing support for families should be straightforward, particularly in relation to those who no longer meet the criteria for specialist services.
	Effective Early Help systems and pathways	Using intelligence and information better to improve information sharing, that promotes integrated working through Family Hubs We recognise the need to use intelligence and indicative data to target support earlier and more efficiently. We will promote a common approach to case recording and assessment in early help with agreement from families to ensure better, more timely information sharing which prevents them having to tell their story multiple times, this includes developing family support plans with the family.
	Local and sustained	Integrated Working and a shared place-based approach to delivering Early Help to children and families through Family Hubs We recognise Bolton has nine unique neighbourhoods and for families and children, it is important to access local support and services, near to them. Therefore, it is important that we work to increase community capacity to support effective early help delivery in localities.

	Skilled and resilient workforce	Skilled workforce supported to provide Early Help support. Practitioners within the Family Hub are appropriately trained and have the knowledge and skills needed to provide early help, support, and connect parents who may need it to additional services. A highly skilled, professional early help workforce is critical. To ensure that early help is effective, practitioners need to be valued, their roles understood and have the skills and confidence to meet the challenges of working with children, young people and their families. We want professionals to feel supported to ensure their health and wellbeing, to be confident and competent in identifying need and have a clear understanding of the thresholds for intervention. We will ensure that practitioners have access to tools which support effective practice as well as access to meaningful and relevant training which supports professional development, utilising professional experience and expertise across the system.
	Relational, strengths based and empowering	Families' strengths are valued, reinforced and drawn upon Families and children are safe, connected and supported through positive relationships and local networks. We will promote a restorative, person-centred approach to developing relationships with families and approach Early Help support provision is based on empathy, trust and respect with a focus on finding solutions through collaboration.

12. Measuring Impact

- Number of Early Help Assessments open (partnership wide) and closed as needs met within the period
- Contacts to the Early Help Access Point (% of contacts)
- Number of Targeted Early Help Service cases open and closed as needs met within the period
- Supporting Families - % of attachments resulting in successful outcomes post regression check
- % of contacts at the Integrated Front Door with Early Help Assessment in place

Wider outcomes will be measured and include:

- Improved school readiness and child development
- Improved access to good quality childcare provision
- Reduction in smoking in pregnancy and more smoke-free families
- Reduction of pregnancies and children exposed to alcohol
- Reduction in domestic abuse
- Improved emotional health and wellbeing
- Health Child Programme Visits
- Reduction in children living in poverty
- Improved education attainment
- Increased in the take up Free Early Years Education Funding for 2 year olds.
- Reduction in youth related crime
- Improved access to a community offer through Family Hubs
- More families having access to good food and moving more
- Earlier identification of neglect (less children on CP plans for neglect)
- Children, Young People and Families tell us their experience of early help support has been positive.