Sandwell Children's Partnership

Our Approach to Helping Families in Sandwell

Statement of Intent

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Foreword

We are pleased to introduce **Sandwell's Family Help Statement of Intent**. Underpinned by national policy and statutory guidance, it forms the basis of our new **Family Help strategy** and our approach to how we intend to work together to help and support all families in Sandwell.

Across Sandwell, we want to make best use of the strength of our partnership, through one **Council**, one **Children's Trust**, one **ICS** and one **Police** force, plus an extensive **voluntary and community** and **education** sector. We want to capitalise on this, and the approach described in this document is based on a set of shared principles, where we will work alongside families and communities to design and develop services at local level, through an integrated approach between all partner agencies.

We are sharing our ambition to develop a **Family Help system**. We want to build on the services we already have through a **community** model of helping families, based on the individuality of Sandwell's 6 diverse towns. It means enabling even more families to access universal and community support through our well-established **Family Hubs** and developing more integrated services through **multi-agency teams** at every point within our Family Help system. Over the last 3 years, our Early Help strategy has enabled us to mature as a partnership; so now it's time to build on this and the co-located services already in place across Sandwell.

We want to make sure that we respond swiftly when needs within families are identified, which includes a sharp focus on neglect. We also want to develop the knowledge and skills across the children's workforce to increase confidence and skills to intervene as soon as needs are identified. Underpinning this statement is our **ST*R practice model** because we know that with a shared relational and trauma informed approach embedded across the children's workforce, that builds on strengths, we can have the greatest impact on families.

Through our Family Help strategy, we want to develop our Family Help system alongside our families and communities. We need to make sure we always work with them, building trust and confidence so that they can access local help and support when they need it.

Introduction and approach

Legislative Context

Our work regarding Family Help is underpinned by system transformation at national level. In September 2023, the implementation strategy was launched in response to '**Stable Homes, Built on Love'** and its vision to reform children's social care and early help.

In November 2024, a policy paper titled **'Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive'** saw a continuation of the commitment to deliver whole system reform. This paper progressed into the **Children's Well-Being and Schools Bill** and clear expectations have been set:

- An end-to-end system of **preventative services**, aiming to make best use of family networks and keeping families together in their communities;
- High quality support at the **earliest opportunity** – a whole family approach and is strengths-based and working alongside families; and
- **Decisive interventions** through an expert and **multi-agency child protection response** where children are at risk of harm.

Working Together 2023

Published in December 2023, this statutory guidance underpins the ambitions set out in national strategy and policy papers. It focuses on strengthening multi-agency working across the whole system of support and protection for children and their families; and it emphasises a **shared responsibility** of all partners. This means everyone plays an equal part in taking a whole family approach in identifying needs and responding to them swiftly, whilst not losing sight of the individual child; and thereby within a strong children's system, together we can embed effective and consistent multi-agency child protection practice.

What also stands out is the emphasis on a **whole system approach** to helping families. Whilst early help remains an important part of Working Together 2023, there is an important shift to **Family Help.** Family Help is about making sure children and families can get the right help, at the right time, and in the most straightforward way. It's about building on our existing co-located services and creating a stronger, integrated approach and intervening as soon as needs are identified with support services designed around families.

Within this context, Sandwell Children's Partnership are working collectively to design and deliver services that enable and empower families to support themselves within their own family and community networks, with trust and confidence that when they do need additional help and support, they can access it locally and will benefit from it.

In Sandwell, most children grow up and develop with the support of universal and community-based services, for example, family hubs, health centres, healthy child programme, GP surgeries, voluntary organisations and schools. Some families may need to

access to additional support when a specific problem arises. For others, they may be experiencing more complex issues, within increased needs and risks, that require more help over a longer period.

Our overall aim is to help families at the earliest opportunity and prevent needs and risks increasing, so children can remain with their families in their own communities. Through our **Family Help Strategy** we will describe the approach we will take to achieve this, recognising that our Family Help system needs to be fluid because needs change within families and different services may be needed at different times. It's about a range of responsive services which enable children to feel valued with a sense of belonging so they can remain with their own families in their own communities, wherever it is safe to do so.

Our Family Help system must also be rooted in a shared approach to working with families. Therefore, through our **ST*R** practice model, we will be focusing on building **trusted relationships** with families, understanding the **trauma** they may have experienced and the **impact** this has had; and building on **family strengths**, so they feel confident in asking for, and agreeing to, the right level of support at the time they need it. By doing this, we can enable families to achieve long term, positive outcomes.

Vision

Underpinning our Family Help system is our shared vision for Family Help:

To develop integrated services for children to help families in their communities at the earliest opportunity. With bespoke, community driven multi-agency services, we want to empower families, enabling them to improve their own lives.

All research shows that when children have the best possible start in life, they can grow up feeling confident in their abilities to succeed in life. Across the partnership, we share an ambition for all our children that they will thrive in their own communities in Sandwell, with a sense of belonging and feeling valued.

For this strategy to succeed, it is therefore closely aligned to other strategies and plans:

- Safeguarding Children's Partnership Business Plan
- SEND improvement plan
- Neglect strategy
- Community Safety Partnership strategy
- Youth Justice Partnership Plan
- Family Hubs Delivery Plan

Key Principles

We want to create a Family Help system that reflects national policy and statutory guidance where the focus is on delivering integrated multi-agency services as a **single integrated system** that supports the **wellbeing** of, and **protects** all children from, significant harm, **inside** and **outside of the home.** However, our system must also be underpinned by our shared set of principles across the children's system:

Children & families at the heart of driving change: co-designing services that reflect local and individual needs.

Inclusivity and Diversity: ensuring an inclusive and culturally sensitive approach; tackling structural inequalities and disproportionality; and families feeling confident in the services we deliver.

Community first: encouraging community-led initiatives, so families are empowered to drive innovation that makes a difference to their lives.

Whole system approach: increasing interdependencies so there's swift access to a range of local support that families trust.

Early intervention and prevention at every level: collectively intervening with families as early as possible to prevent needs increasing. When statutory services are required, we prevent the circumstances escalating wherever possible.

Leadership and culture: enabling an accountable workforce to embrace the culture and practice change required for systemic change to succeed.

Early Help within a Family Help System

Working Together 2023 defines Early Help as:

Early Help is support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. It is not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area"

Working Together 2023 also highlights **Family Help** and there is an important shift here to a more **whole system approach** that includes all ages and services across the partnership. Rather than a group of individual services, it is collaborative working across the partnership, including universal and community services, through to more specialist and statutory services- any services that could be involved in working with families.

Within Sandwell's Family Help system, there is a clear aim: for babies, children, young people and their families to receive support from a range of different services, dependent on their needs, so that they receive the right support at the right time.

Underlying this aim is the fact that identifying needs early, building a positive, trusting relationship with families with the right services, is ultimately better for families because it helps prevent needs and risks increasing and improves their outcomes.

Sandwell Families- profile of communities and what data is saying

(town level mapping/ analysis)

Family Help in Sandwell

Universal and Community Family Help

Universal and community services are available to everyone in Sandwell. Our aim here is to ensure families can access **the right support at the right time** to prevent needs increasing. In line with our shared principles and underpinned by our shared **ST*R practice model**, we want to enable families to use their own community and support networks, building their own resilience and not feeling dependent on intrusive statutory services.

Across our six towns, our Family Hubs play a key role in universal and community Family Help. Alongside our Family Hubs, there are other universal and community services, for example, nurseries, schools, and colleges; health services such as GPs, health visitors and school nurses; youth services; and many voluntary and community sector organisations.

Within universal and community Family Help, families are involved in decision making and solving their problems within their own support networks; and any of these services could be the first point of contact for any family in Sandwell who may need information, advice, and support. It's about giving all children the best start in life, identifying needs as early as possible and working alongside families to enable and empower them, making best use of our strong network of community and voluntary organisations.

Enabling change: What we will be different and why:

- Enhance our **information & advice offer** to families to increase community connections so more families feel confident in accessing local services.
- Continue to deliver and develop the **Start for Life programme** and strengthen links with Early Years providers because so we can enable access for more vulnerable families with under 2s and identify children with SEND as soon as possible.
- Embed Sandwell as a **Foster Friendly Borough** so all services contribute to recruiting more foster carers.
- Through our neglect strategy, enable communities and professionals to understand and respond to the signs of **neglect** and **exploitation.**
- Develop a more **preventative approach** for children with **SEND**, including closer working between our Child Development Centre and Family Hubs so there is a more integrated approach to helping disabled children, improved EHCPs and a closer alignment to Social Care and Adult Social Care services.
- Introduce **Family Group Conferencing** and **Family Network** meetings into Family Hubs so more families can devise their own support plans at an earlier stage to enable them to stay together in their communities.
- Continue to develop and improve our **local offer so families have better access to community support.**
- Continue to develop our **youth work offer** in response to the National Youth Strategy, and alongside our Family Hubs.

Additional Family Help

Additional Family Help is available when positive change has not been achieved through universal and community Family Help. Under the Children Act 1989, this is described as **significant impairment;** so additional Family Help is required.

Underpinned by our shared ST*R practice model, the focus remains on building trusting relationships with families, building on their strengths and enabling them to address the needs and risks that are impacting on their children. Whilst universal and community services can remain in place, more specific type of support could be offered to help families who have several needs, for example: mental health and emotional wellbeing support; youth justice services; and bespoke parenting programmes.

Within additional Family Help, community based multi-agency support can be offered in a range of venues, for example, Family Hubs, schools, community settings and in the family home. It could also include personalised interventions; all aimed to prevent further escalation of needs and more intrusive, statutory services being required.

Enabling change: What will be different and why

- In line with statutory guidance, safely align specific **social care services** with **targeted early help services** so families can maintain trusted professional relationships and be helped without the need to *'step up'* to statutory services.
- Develop community-based, **multi-agency Family Help Teams**, so support can be offered to families in their communities with access to a range of Family Help professionals who are able to build trusted relationships with them and offer bespoke help and support.
- Develop our multi-agency **Community Network Groups** so town profiles inform commissioning intentions and resources can be targeted to help address inequalities.
- Roll out and embed our **schools' supervision and support model** linked to school clusters so schools can confidently identify and swiftly respond to any signs of neglect.
- Establish a multi-agency **'Thriving Families'** service so we ensure early identification of vulnerable pregnant women, intervene swiftly and address any vulnerabilities, needs and risks to help keep families together.
- Develop **early warning signs** based on local intelligence and work directly with schools so we can identify vulnerable children who may be at risk of exploitation and youth justice services; and address barriers to school attendance and reduce school exclusions.
- Develop our **targeted youth offer** so more young people can be helped by skilled Youth Workers as part of our integrated Family Help offer
- Strengthen the use of **Family Network** meetings, so more families can devise their own support plans to enable them to stay together in their communities.
- Work alongside families to develop one **Family Help Assessment and Plan** that offer the best services; and that extend seamlessly into more specialist services when needs increase without them having to repeatedly tell their story when needs change.

Specialist Family Help

Specialist Family Help is provided when positive change has not been achieved through either universal and community Family Help, or additional Family Help. Under the Children Act 1989, there are concerns that children **are**, or are **likely to be**, experiencing **significant harm**, either in or outside the home (or both). In these situations, multi-agency specialist Family Help is required, for example, services for disabled children who need more specialist support; children on the edge of care; children within the youth justice system; children experiencing significant harm outside the home; and child protection services. Social workers are likely to the lead practitioner, working alongside existing support services.

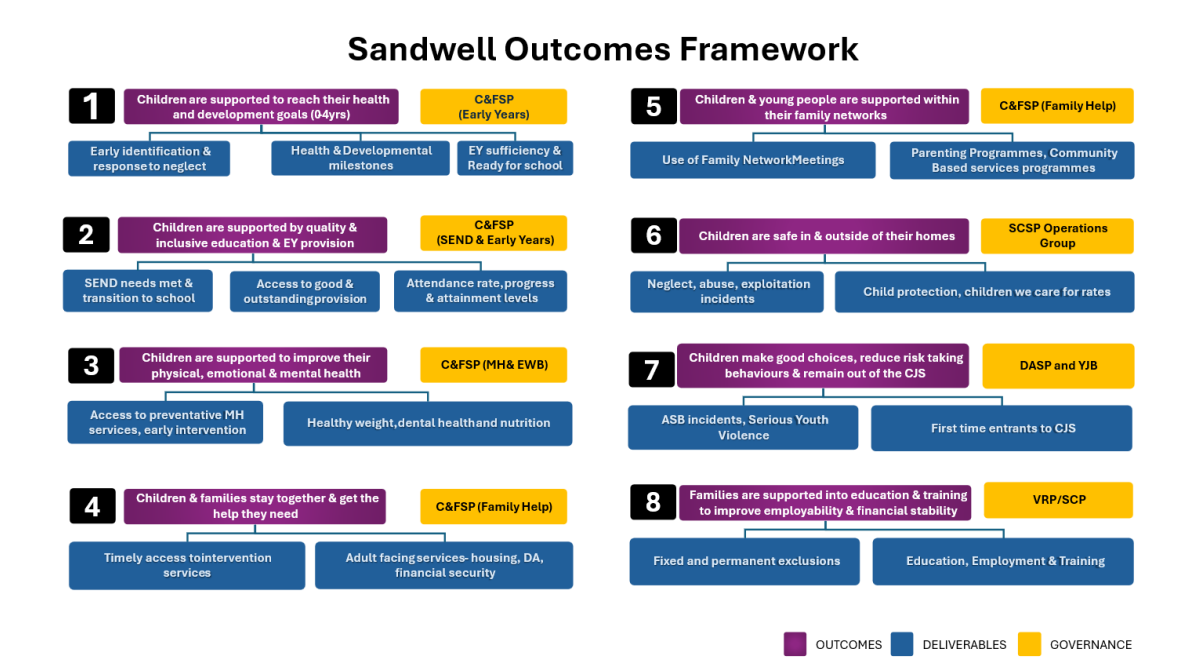
Also underpinned by our by our ST*R shared practice model, practitioners take a relational approach with families, building trusted relationships and offering effective interventions to help reduce risks, prevent further escalation and enable positive, sustainable change.

Enabling change: what will be different and why

- Embed our **multi-agency Integrated Front Door (IFD)**, so we can make proportionate decisions when responding to child welfare concerns through a conversational model, rather than relying on a paper referral system.
- Work with families to develop **one seamless, Family Help Assessment** and **Plan** that extends to **Family Help and Protection Plans** when necessary so we can accurately identify families' needs and offer the best services that build on earlier Family Help.
- Establish **Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams**, including specialist children protection roles, so we respond swiftly to child protection concerns, with a joint approach to information sharing, decision making and managing risk.
- Ensure all children we care for have timely access **health** and **dental** appointments, so they have the right help for their physical and mental health when they need it.
- Ensure the children we care for receive specialist support through our **Emotional and Wellbeing Hub** when needed to help them address the trauma that is preventing them building secure and trusted relationships with their carers.
- Work with partners to increase the number of young people accessing **education**, **training** and **employment** opportunities so they can thrive as adults and fulfil their ambitions.
- Develop a shared set of **principles** between **children's and adult services** so vulnerable young people get the additional support they may need adults.
- Implement a **CwD model** that ensures disabled children and their families can access support through a range of **short breaks**, without the need for Social Work intervention unless necessary.

Ensuring success: Our shared outcomes framework and enablers

Our shared ambition and responsibilities will be evident by a shared outcomes framework that will be used to track and measure progress through appropriately joined up performance measures and qualitative information. Through this framework we will hold each other to account and make sure that our Family Help system is safe is effective.



System Enablers

System Enablers will help us to deliver on our commitments and fulfil our vision.

Community and family engagement-

We will take a co production approach wherever possible, ensuring children, families and communities are fully engaged in designing and developing an effective family help system in Sandwell. This will be led by our voluntary and community sector colleagues and will include working alongside:

- Our children and young people through SHAPE, VOS, FIYA, SPVU, SPDC, CwD
- Our Parent/ Carer groups (SEND Board and Family Hubs)
- Our local communities and faith groups
- Our schools
- Our workforce

Infrastructure

We will develop our infrastructure, making best use of our Family Hub and spoke model to support the design and development of more locally based and co-located family services. This includes:

- The purpose and function of our community buildings
- The role of schools as critical parts of our communities
- The future capability of integrated IT options
- The future use of AI, Data maturity and data sharing,

ST*R shared practice model- **S**trengths-based, **T**rauma-informed **A**nd **R**elational practice ST*R underpins our Family Help system and the way we all work with children and families. With its six component parts, it includes including motivational interviewing and a shared framework of responding to and managing needs and risks within families; and it will help us work consistently to help families in Sandwell.

Governance

Family Help Board

Three workstreams will lead on:

- Universal and community family help
- Additional family help
- Specialist/ statutory family help,

The activity of the workstreams will be overseen by our Family Help Board that is responsible for driving the work within each workstream, ensuring that progress is made against our agreed outcomes and performance measures.

The Family Help Board will report into the **Children and Families Strategic Partnership** that ultimately is accountable to the statutory **Health and Well-Being Board**.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

Through our **Executive Group** and **Operational Group**, our Safeguarding Children's Partnership will oversee this partnership's plan to design and develop our Family Help system, with the necessary assurance from the Family Help Board that the system is safe and effective.

Appendix 1: Timeline of key activity and decisions

April 2022

Launch of our refreshed Early Help strategy

October 2023 to December 2023

Sign up to STaR Practice Model

Families First Pathfinder Bid- shared vision, key principles and proposals across Partnership

Working Together 2023 and Stable Homes Built on Love

January 2024 to March 2024

Transfer to new MASA

C&FSP Workshop- reaffirmed commitment to Pathfinder proposals

C&FSP- refreshed Governance and priorities- strategic commitment to Family Help system

April 2024 to June 2024

New SCP Executive and Operational Groups- refreshed priorities

First SCP Summit- shared responsibility, multi-agency expectations; identification and response

Concept of Help Vs Harm

July 2024 to September 2024

Integrated Front Door and STaR developments

SEND Workshop and Family Help Workshop

Appetite to work differently; system around families; no thresholds/referrals; community response

October 2024 to December 2024

First Family Help Board-

Design our Family Help system with full strategic commitment