



Wolverhampton’s Partnership Approach to Early Help for Children and Families

A partnership document outlining the vision for Early Help that is embedded within a number of multi-agency strategies. The approach is underpinned by a commitment to providing the right support, at the right time, by the right practitioner, enabling families to thrive and reducing the need for statutory intervention. Key principles include child-centered practice, whole-family working, strengths-based and restorative approaches, community integration, and multiagency collaboration.

WOLVERHAMPTON SAFEGUARDING TOGETHER PARTNERSHIP

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1.0. Background

The previous Early Help Strategy (2018–2022) emphasized early intervention through child-centred, whole-family, and community-based approaches. The intention was to deliver an integrated offer with partners taking an increasing role in meeting more common and less acute needs. “Engaging with families as early as possible to enable them to provide a safe, stable and nurturing environment in which children and young people can thrive”. During that period this strategy was a key element of our overall vision to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families and enable them to achieve their full potential.

In 2022, the partnership agreed not to renew the standalone strategy, recognizing that Wolverhampton’s vision for Early Help is embedded across multi-agency strategies rather than in a standalone document.

2.0. Principles & Governance

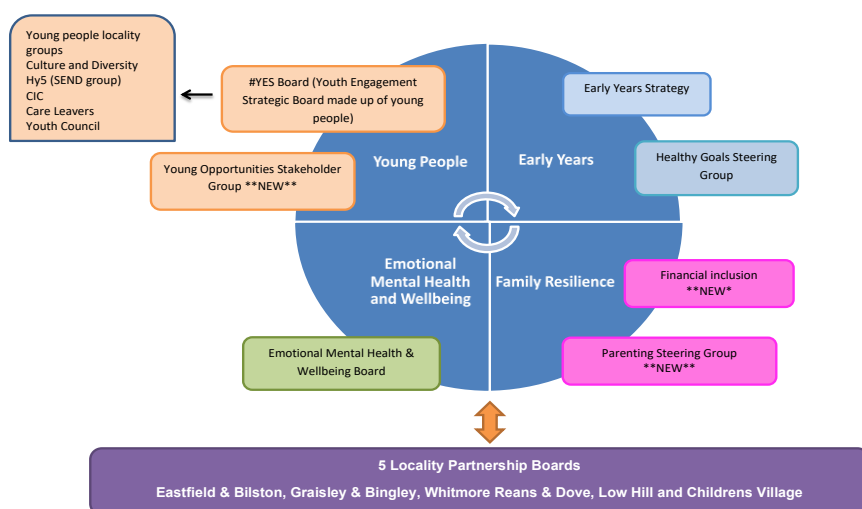
The city’s approach is underpinned by the principle of providing the right support, at the right time, by the right practitioner, enabling families to thrive and reducing the need for statutory intervention. Key principles include child-centered practice, whole-family working, strengths-based and restorative approaches, community integration, and multiagency collaboration.

Early Help is strategically led by the Children and Families Together Board, with oversight from Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together and the Transforming Children Services Board. It is embedded within Our City Our Plan, the Family Hubs Programme, and the Families First for Children Pathfinder.

Current foundations for strengthening families include.

- Early Years,
- Young People,
- Family Resilience, and
- Emotional Mental Health & Well-being.

Each foundation has its own strategy or action plan, driving partnership working and service delivery.



The City's theory of change aligns with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Supporting Families Outcomes Framework, focusing on preventative, restorative, and trauma-informed approaches.

These align to Our City Our Plan objective of Strong families where children grow up well and achieve their full potential;

- Children have the best start in life, with good early development
- High quality education which closes the attainment gap
- Children and young people grow up happy with good physical, social, mental health and wellbeing
- Every young person in the city is equipped for adulthood with life skills and ready for work
- Strengthen families where children are vulnerable or at risk.

In July 2025, the government published its 10 Year Health Plan. Guidance on Neighborhood Health plans will be published shortly. Improving child development and health outcomes go hand-in-hand; healthier children are better able to learn and develop, and children who succeed in education go on to live healthier lives. Therefore, it is important to ensure alignment across Best Start plans and Neighborhood Health plans. Wolverhampton Children and Families Board is working with the local Integrated Care Board to ensure that Neighborhood Health plans have sufficient focus on preventative care and support the healthy development of all children in the City.

3.0. What we know about families in Wolverhampton

The city uses robust data infrastructure to understand and respond to local needs; Family Hub profile data tells us.

- Wolverhampton has a diverse population of 264,000, with 30% aged 0–19. Ethnic minority children represent 56% (vs 33% nationally). Around 30% of households have at least one adult whose main language is not English.
- Over the last 2 years **school readiness** improved from 61% to 64.2% but remains below the national average (67.2%). A high proportion of children do not reach a good level of development by age 5, particularly in areas of deprivation. Speech, language, and communication needs are prevalent.
- Rising numbers of children with **EHCPs**, EHCP rate is ~382 per 10,000 (above national average). SEN Support is ~967 per 10,000. **Speech and language, autism** and **SEMH** as leading primary needs.
- Disparities in **educational attainment**, especially for children with SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds; KS2 Expected Standard: 63%. - KS4 GCSE (9–5 incl. English & Maths;): 39–53%; FSM pupils significantly lower. - **FSM eligibility**: 36% citywide; some hub areas >45%.
- Deprivation scores remain high. Wolverhampton ranks among the top **20% most deprived areas nationally**, with hotspots in The Scotlands, Underhill, and Low Hill.
- **Child poverty** rose from 32.9% in 2020 to 38.3% in 2023, indicating growing financial pressures on families with high levels of child poverty, in Heath Town, Bushbury South, and Blakenhall wards.

- **Housing tenure** shows 52% ownership, 24% social rent, and 20% private rent, indicating affordability challenges. **Housing instability** and overcrowding are linked to poor outcomes.
- **Domestic abuse** remains a significant safeguarding concern across Wolverhampton's Family Hub localities. Crime data for April–September 2023 identifies domestic abuse among the top five recorded offences, highlighting its prevalence within communities, with many children exposed to trauma.
- Rising rates of **anxiety, depression, and self-harm** among children and young people, with increasing demand for **CAMHS** and emotional wellbeing services; Mental health service access (CAMHS data) Waiting times peaked at 19 weeks in Sept 2024, reducing to 9 weeks by Jan 2025. Monthly referrals average 450–700, with tier 2/getting help services accounting for the largest share.

4.0. Stages of Support

The majority of children and young people living in Wolverhampton require support from universal services alone. Practitioners should, where possible, complete an Early Support Plan to help them better understand where additional needs have been identified for the family. All agencies (with the exception of Police) are expected to complete an Early Support Plan and record this on Eclipse. The Early Support Plan should be undertaken with the family to gain consent and to ensure their early engagement in the process. The Family Hubs and allocated Early Support Champions are able to support professionals in signposting and completing Early Support Plan's.

Community-based, multi-disciplinary focused family help services are available to provide seamless support for families, spanning Early Help and Child In Need (Section 17 Children Act 1989) provision. This is inclusive of children with additional needs and disabilities. A Family Help Discussion should be completed with the child, young person, and their family to identify their strengths and needs and to gain support from multi-agency Family Help Services.

Statutory services to children and their families are provided where children and young people need a high level of support or may be experiencing or likely to suffer significant harm. This can include services for disabled children, special school arrangements or specialist physical or mental health provision, for example. It may also include child protection services, working with those experiencing harms outside the home. Whenever appropriate, the referral form should be completed with the child, young person, and family to identify their strengths and needs and to gain their engagement and consent early on. The outcome of any Child Protection enquires will decide whether an initial Child Protection Conference should be convened. If the case meets the threshold is met, it will proceed to a single assessment led by a Social Worker.

See Wolverhampton Thresholds Document for fuller information
[Thresholds of Need and Support FINAL Sep 2025.pdf](#)

5.0. Our Priorities

Our priorities include families with SEND, mental health challenges, minority ethnic communities, and those affected by domestic abuse, housing instability, or poverty. Provision is directed towards.

Targeted Place-Based Support

- Focus on high-need wards using integrated locality models.
- Align Family Hubs and community assets.

Early Years Investment

- Expand access to good quality early years education, parenting support, and speech and language interventions.

Mental Health and Resilience

- Embed mental health support in schools and youth services.
- promote family resilience.

Trauma-Informed Practice

- Train practitioners across agencies in restorative and trauma-informed approaches.

SEND and Inclusion

- Strengthen multi-agency pathways for children with SEND.
- Improve transitions and support for families navigating the system.

6.0. Early Help Maturity

Data, Communities & Locality Working

Regular data feeds and strong data sharing agreements underpin whole family working. Power BI supports needs analysis and risk analytics.

Family Hubs are geographically located and linked to education settings. Locality Partnership Boards use data and local intelligence to tailor delivery plans to community needs.

Workforce Development

A multiagency workforce development plan supports Family Hubs and Families First, embedding shared practice frameworks. Over 680 staff have been trained in attachment, mental health first aid, restorative practice, trauma-informed practice, and other parenting interventions.

Practice & Service Delivery

Family Hubs integrate delivery of services including social care, health, education, housing, SEND, domestic abuse, and financial wellbeing support. Early Support Champions and school link workers assist universal practitioners in identifying needs and initiating support plans.

The Early Help Assessment (EHA) has been redesigned for inclusivity and child focus, now forming a single-family plan. The new Early Support Plan (ESP) operates at the universal level, while the Family Help Discussion (FHD) supports targeted interventions. Recent evidence shows that the new way of working is positively impacting engagement, including wider family members, in plans which is reducing re-referrals. Feedback from partners and families is that the change in language has been positive and is more aligned to restorative practice as it “has the sense of a support plan to help, rather than an assessment completed to.”

The Lead Practitioner role for Family Help is not limited to social workers, promoting a broader professional involvement. Feedback from practitioners and families suggest that having the consistency of one Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) who stays with them wherever possible and does not have to be a social worker is having a positive impact.

Eclipse enables secure access for all partners to a single case management system to complete whole-family assessments improving information sharing and outcome reporting.

Age-Specific Approaches

Pre-birth to 5 Years: Focus on maternal health, perinatal mental health, and early child development. Includes First 1001 Days pathway, Infant Feeding Strategy, and multidisciplinary support.

5 to 11 Years: Coordinated parenting offer, family learning programmes, and support for children with SEND. Includes 'I Thrive' mental health model and expanded Family Hub model.

11 to 16 Years: Enrichment opportunities, leisure offers, and funded holiday provision (HAF). Youth engagement strategies and health-related behaviour surveys are embedded into governance structures of strategy and policy development to ensure the voice of the young person and parent/carer and increased young people's involvement in shaping, implementation, and monitoring of services.

16+ Years: Connexions Service for careers guidance, Youth Employment Hub, and targeted youth work. Family Hubs provide open access and targeted support for vulnerable young people.

Equality, Inclusion & Coproduction

Targeted support ensures accessibility for all. Specialist teams include the Health Inclusion Team and Cherry St SEND & Sensory Hub. Programmes are delivered in multiple languages and tailored to minority communities. Groups include LGBTQ+ Proud Parents and Fathers Group. 32 VCFS organisations are commissioned via the Family Hubs Small Grants Scheme.

Coproduction is embedded through Parent Carer Panels, HY5 SEND Forum, Family OnBoard & Guardians, and the Youth Engagement Strategy (#YES). Family engagement informs service design, branding, and evaluation. Families co-designed the single-family assessment and plan, Family Hub branding, and feedback mechanisms.

Locality Partnership Boards are established in each Family Hub area. These Boards utilise available data underpinned by the JSNA, alongside local intelligence, to identify priorities for communities and development of the local offer. The approach enables delivery plans tailored to neighbourhood needs to be developed.

8.0. Conclusions & Future Direction

Working Together 2023 defines Early Help, it also talks about 'Family Help'. This is a new term that is inclusive of all ages and incorporates a number of services across the partnership. Wolverhampton continues to embed the Early Help practice principles through delivery of Family Help, this is not a single service, but a collaborative, whole system approach, that works across the partnership. This means children, young people and their families receive support at the earliest opportunity from a range of different services, dependent on their needs.

Wolverhampton's early help partnership is robust, integrated, and proactive. It aligns with national reforms and the Families First agenda and is progressing towards embedding the Best Start Strategy 2025, expanding preventative support through Family Hubs and Families First, enhancing data integration and locality commissioning, and strengthening workforce capacity and community engagement. Commitment to equality, inclusion, and co-production as well as data driven decision making, ensures services are accessible and responsive to diverse needs.

Continued government investment will support further transformation and expansion of preventative support.