

# Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**9 September 2024**

<b>Subject:</b>	Family Help Update
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Children and Education, Sally Giles
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## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers the work of the Children and Families Strategic Partnership in the development and implementation of a Family Help system in Sandwell.

## 2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding how Sandwell's Children's Partnership is starting to integrate Early Help into a wider system of Family Help across the Borough, enabled by the the creation of a new Family Help Board.

## 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	Ensuring that children have the Best Start in Life is a key driver for the Council and partners; ensuring that children and families receive the support they need to thrive while ensuring children are safeguarded and protected.
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## 4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Children Act 2004 established the concept of 'Early Help'. It required local authorities to coordinate activities by the partnership to improve outcomes for children and young people but there was no obligation for the Council to provide such services.
- 4.2 Working Together is statutory guidance that sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. It was first published in 1999 and has since been updated periodically to consider findings from serious case reviews, national reviews of child protections and changes in legislations. The most recent updated was launched in December 2023 and introduced some significant changes compared to previous iterations of the guidance.
- 4.3 Working Together 2023 brings together new and existing guidance to emphasise that successful outcomes for children depend upon strong multi-agency partnership working and principles for working with parents and carers which focus on the importance of building positive and trusting relationships and expectations for multi-agency working that apply to all individuals, agencies and organisations working with children, young people and families.
- 4.4 The guidance strengthens how multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (between local authorities, police forces and integrated care boards, or ICBs, in health) work to safeguard and protect children locally. Changes include clarity around the safeguarding responsibilities of senior leaders, as well as emphasising the role of education in safeguarding arrangements and encouraging agencies to include third sector organisations within their arrangements and safeguarding work.
- 4.5 One of the most significant changes in Working Together 2023, is that a broader range of practitioners can be the lead practitioner for children and families receiving support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989; that is, children receiving Child in Need support and/ or on a Child in Need plan. Previously, the lead practitioner for these cases could only be a social worker; in the new guidance, this role can be undertaken by other practitioners, but they would need to be supervised by a manager who is social work qualified.

- 4.6 Both Working Together and the Government response (Stable Homes Built on Love) to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care emphasise the need for a strengths-based approach to working with children and families and providing support before the needs of children and families escalate to the point of needing statutory services.
- 4.7 Work has been taking place in Sandwell in response to the release of Working Together 2023 and Stable Homes Built on Love. A bid was submitted to DfE in December 2023 for Sandwell to become a Families First for Children Pathfinder, this bid was agreed by the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership statutory partners and had 'buy-in' from the voluntary sector. The aim of the pathfinder was to test new ways of working to help more children stay with their families, and further strengthen the Early Help partnership to ensure families suffering from issues such as domestic abuse, addiction, and poor mental health, can receive Family Help at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.8 Sandwell received positive feedback in respect of the bid from DfE but was ultimately not successful, however statutory partners agreed to take forward the key principles of the bid and move towards a 'Family Help' system that supported more integrated, community services and helping families at an earlier stage.
- 4.9 A range of activity has been taking place in Sandwell to implement and test new ways of working:
- Implementation of a new integrated front door
  - Transitioning from Early Help to a Family Help system
  - Building on the success of Family Hubs
  - Development and roll out of a shared practice model that is, in line with Working together 2023, strengths based, trauma informed and relational..
  - Bringing together the Boards for Family Hubs and Early Help and creating a Family Help Board to strengthen governance and oversight.
  - Taking a town-based approach, building on existing networks and relationships between local organisations and using town-based data and insight to commission and re-organise services.

## 5 Implications

<b>Resources:</b>	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Changes to service delivery will be met from existing resources.
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Changes in the way services are delivered will be in accordance with statutory guidance, Working Together 2023.
<b>Risk:</b>	There are no risk implications arising from this report.
<b>Equality:</b>	An Equality Impact Assessment screening is not required for this report.
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	Implementing the changes required in response of Working Together 2023 and Stable Homes Built on Love will strengthen safeguarding in Sandwell. Ensuring that children and families receive the right support as early as possible will improve their long-term health and wellbeing.
<b>Social Value:</b>	Improving outcomes for children and families will enhance community connection, and increase potential of successful lifelong education, training and employment experiences.
<b>Climate Change:</b>	There are no direct associated implications in relation to climate change.
<b>Corporate Parenting:</b>	This report and associated activity of the partnership is considered at the Corporate Parenting Board as appropriate.

## 7. Appendices

None

## 8. Background Papers

None