

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN EARLY HELP STRATEGY

The right help, at the right
time, in the right place.

Revised April 2023 (3rd Edition)



BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

VERSION 3.5 - APRIL 2023

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FOREWORD

We are delighted to present our third edition of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Early Help strategy when responding to the needs of children, young people and families. The strategy is for children and young people aged 0-25 years and their families and sets out an approach to early help across all agencies in Blackburn with Darwen with the aim to enable every child and young person to achieve their potential.

This approach and strategy builds on our existing early help guidance and the partnership work here in the borough. Our early help offer is critical in identifying emerging need and galvanising multi-agency support to respond effectively and creatively to families. We look forward to working with you to make sure that families in Blackburn with Darwen receive the help they need, as soon as they need it.

The strategy will be owned by the Children's Partnership Board and provides a framework and key principles to support multi agency working and the implementation of the strategy. In Blackburn with Darwen we aim to develop a co-ordinated early help offer, embedded within a whole family approach, supported by the CAF assessment that builds protective factors and family resilience and reduces expenditure on costly reactive services.

Effective early help can transform lives by helping parents and carers into employment, stabilising children and young people at school, and removing the barriers to living healthy and productive lives. We know that there are a number of vulnerable children, young people and their families in Blackburn with Darwen who are more likely to experience difficulties in their lives and may need support to help overcome them.

This document will set out some of the progress and achievements in developing our Early Help offer and set out how we intend to continue our progress in the next two years.



Jo Siddle

Strategic Director of Children's Services
Chair of the Children's Partnership Board



Councillor Julie Gunn

Executive Member for Children,
Young People & Education

VISION

Our Early Help strategy is designed to support the ambition of the Children's Partnership Board and the Service Development Board to identify the right help that children, young people families need to prevent needs escalating to a point where statutory intervention would be required and to improve outcomes for all children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen.

This is Blackburn with Darwen's third edition of our Early Help Strategy and it is designed to meet the needs of children and young people aged 0-25, including those who have specific vulnerabilities, and also align with our core mission for the borough's children and young people as set out in the council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027:

Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential



BWD: THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Blackburn with Darwen has faced immense challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic which have been particularly unique to our area. Factors such as intergenerational living, adverse childhood experiences, range of housing stock, digital exclusion and multiple community languages have resulted in a disproportionate impact on some of our most deprived communities.

Demographic Characteristics



The borough of Blackburn with Darwen has a population of approximately 154,700 residents. We continue to have a younger than average population with 22.8% of residents aged 15 years and under in 2021 compared to the England average of 18.6%. However, the number of residents aged 4 and under fell by 10.8% in the last decade (10,056 in 2021 and 11,278 in 2011).

Ethnicity

Blackburn with Darwen contains a rich mix of ethnic groups and cultures:

Ethnicity of residents aged 0 to 19 years		
Broad ethnic group	Number of residents	% of age group population
Asian	20,345	47.04%
Black	410	0.95%
Mixed	1,210	2.80%
White	20,465	47.31%
Other	825	1.91%

Income deprivation

In Blackburn with Darwen, 21.2% of the population was income-deprived in 2019. Of the 316 local authorities in England (excluding the Isles of Scilly), Blackburn with Darwen was ranked the 10th most income-deprived. Of the 91 neighbourhoods in the borough, 50 were among the 20 percent most income-deprived in England.

In the financial year ending (FYE) 2022, there were 12,840 children aged 0 to 15 in families in relative low income and 9,094 children ages 0 to 15 in families in absolute low income across the borough. These figures represent 36.5% and 25.8% of the 0 to 15

age group population respectively. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, "A household is said to be in relative low income if their net equivalised disposable household income is below a threshold set at 60% of median income, while they are in absolute low income if their net equivalised disposable household income is below 60% of the FYE 2011 median income adjusted for inflation".

Evidence suggests the pandemic has had a disproportionate adverse impact on health and wellbeing outcomes for our children, young people and families who are living in low income households.

Neglect

Neglect is the reason for 56% of current Child Protection plans in Blackburn with Darwen and this the most common category of abuse for Child Protection Plans in the borough, with emotional abuse being the given as the reason for 42% of plans in the same period.

This figure is up from 2021/2022 in Blackburn with Darwen and higher than both our statistical neighbours and the England average for 2021/2022. In addition, and at a lower level, indicators are often present that may indicate a future risk of neglect for those children or young people who become subject to CAF or Child in Need Plans.



WHAT IS EARLY HELP?

Early Help is described by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) as 'taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems for children and families before they become more difficult to reverse'. This definition informs the work that we do with children, young people and families.

In Blackburn with Darwen our key principle driving our Early Help strategy is to work to offer *'the right help, at right time, in the right place'*. Early Help is not just about working with children and families in the early years i.e. those aged 0-5 years, but about children across the whole age range into adolescent and early adulthood. Transition points, such as becoming a parent or the transition from primary school to secondary school, are often times when children and young people and their families need more support.

Supporting children, young people and their families is easier to do as problems emerge rather than when they are they require higher end services such as mental health services or children's social care, are not in school or are involved in young offending.

Children, young people and their families often experience a number of issues at the same time. A well-coordinated response by the range of agencies to support addressing the range of issues is the best way to ensure that the offer of help is effective. This is why our CAF assessment and planning process is central to our Early Help Strategy.

Transforming Lives

The Transforming Lives (TL) Partnership began in 2014 and provides a referral point for early help, prevention support and step-down from statutory services. The rich partnership with the statutory and voluntary sector services helps provide systems-wide solutions for the complex family problems.

Adolescent Panel

The Adolescent Panel continues to provide the opportunity for richer, more rounded outcomes for young people through the wider partnership offer.

Links with Primary Care Neighbourhoods and Integrated Care System (ICS)

We are working close with our health and social care colleagues to implement the vision for an all age integrated neighbourhood offer in BwD, where the Primary Care Network (PCN) Integrated Neighbourhood Teams for Health and Social Care (INTs) and Transforming Lives teams all work together seamlessly to provide the better and more sustainable outcomes for residents. This includes tackling the social determinants of health such as loneliness, debt, and emotional wellbeing.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our Early Help approach is based on a set of shared principles:

PRINCIPLE ONE

An understanding of the importance of Early Help and prevention

Early Help means identifying needs within families early and providing preventative support and intervention before problems become complex and entrenched.

All children and young people should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The aim of early help is that the support offered is grounded in the context of family life, including the communities and circumstances in which families live.

PRINCIPLE TWO

The needs of children and families will be met by universal services

Universal services working with children, young people and adults - such as GPs, midwives, health visitors, youth sectors and schools - have a responsibility to ensure families are receiving the help and support they may need. Our ambition is for every universal offer to bring together essential provision for every family.

PRINCIPLE THREE

Intervention in the early years of a child's life is critical

The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of two set the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional and physical development. The Early Years Healthy Development review is the start of work to transform how we support families so they can give their baby the best start for life, whoever they are.

PRINCIPLE FOUR**Schools play a significant role**

Education are key partners in identifying the needs of the child or young person and in the provision of early help, in addition to the provision of quality education to children and young people. We work in four locality teams in the borough working with communities, schools and families to deliver the right help at the right time.

PRINCIPLE FIVE**Voice of the child**

All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account when decisions are being taken about their life. These decisions could be about their family, school or life in the community. This right is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and has been adopted into the United Kingdom legislation, such as the Children's Act 2004. All services and agencies have a duty to comply with this right.

PRINCIPLE SIX**Integrated approaches**

This involves ensuring that, when more than one agency is involved in providing a service, information is shared appropriately between agencies and the provision of support is joined up and co-ordinated. Support offered will be grounded in the context of family life, including the communities and circumstances in which families live.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN**Parents are the primary educators of their children**

The key role of parents and carers in shaping outcomes for children and young people, and providing support to help them, is recognised by applying a whole family approach. This means understanding:

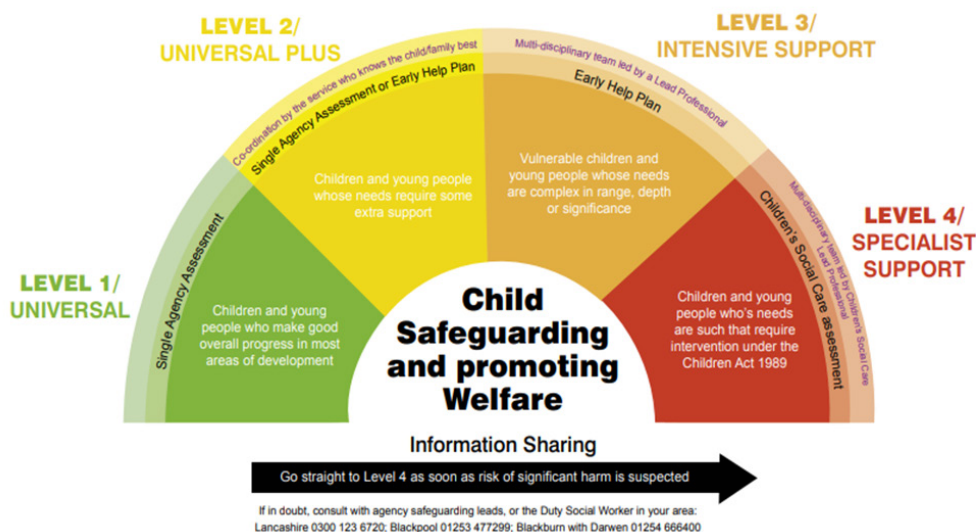
- All aspects of home life
Including work, school/college, social/community and health and wellbeing
- The whole person/whole family situation and what matters most to them
- The impact of what is not working well for all family members
- A family's strengths

WHERE DOES EARLY HELP FIT WITHIN THE SYSTEM?

Levels of Need

The Levels of Need apply to all children and young people - from conception to the age of up to 19 years, or up to 25 years for young adults requiring SEND support. The indicators of possible need listed under each heading are an indication of the likely level of need. Only by talking to children, young people and their families in more detail to explore the context, familial assets and the factors behind the need, will the practitioner be able to form a judgement as to the level of support needed.

Intervention and prevention are essential in order to achieve this.



Blackburn with Darwen Risk Model

The BwD Risk Model provides a way for practitioners who work with families to identify and manage need and risk at an appropriate level and ensure that children and young people are safeguarded against significant harm. It is an evidence-based approach which provides a framework that supports assessment, analysis and a risk-sensible approach to risk management. The model ensures that practitioners are using a common language when considering risk and that all elements of both the child or young person's lived experience and their family networks are considered. It also encourages practitioners to use their professional curiosity to explore all domains within the framework when assessing the child or young person and their family to formulate and test out their hypothesis as to the child or young person's lived experience.

OUR APPROACH

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 makes it clear that safeguarding children and families and promoting their welfare is the responsibility of all practitioners working with children and young people, and that practitioners should understand the criteria for taking action across a continuum of need, including Early Help.

Relational approaches are pivotal when working with children, young people and their families to ensure a difference is made. Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services have been investing in systemic social work practice since 2019.

Consent is needed from children, young people and families at key points in their journey, and can only be disposed of when there is an overriding concern for the welfare of children, young people or families and their safety.

Even when this is the case, only in exceptional circumstances would family's details be discussed and shared with other agencies without their knowledge. Meaningful consent is crucial in helping families feel empowered to make informed decisions and have autonomy, understanding the consequences of the decisions made.

The Early Help assessment in Blackburn with Darwen is still referred to as CAF but it has been greatly developed, shaped and streamlined with parent's children and partners over the last six years. It is our underpinning tool for supporting children and their families, and ensuring that they receive the right help at the right time through a co-ordinated response. The assessment tool is used to capture child and family strengths, unmet needs for members of the family as well as supporting lead professionals to identify risk factors. One document is used to capture the assessment and SMART plan for a whole family ensuring that each individual's needs are captured and a plan detailed as to how this will be addressed. Whilst the needs of parents must be considered, the child/ren's unmet needs must remain the focus of the assessment.

There is a seamless and robust step up and step down of cases from and to the Family Support Service, which has been identified through audit activity from external auditors, and there is an agreed threshold as regards where cases are best supported in terms of the early help offer and the children's social care offer.

Our CAF Link Workers provide advice, guidance and 'hand holding' support for front line practitioners from all partner agencies on undertaking CAFs or in moving a CAF forward that may not be making progress. The role also provides challenge to organisations who are unwilling, or refuse, to take the lead professional role. Workers will where necessary take the LP role to initiate the CAF until an alternative LP can be identified. The role also supports overview and scrutiny of incoming initial CAFs and Family plans and closures, offering feedback and support to make improvements where needed.

The CAF Link Worker also host Lead Professional Network Meetings which take place quarterly with a meeting in each of our four localities. They provide a forum for the Lead professionals to connect to other colleagues in the same locality area to share learning and experiences. The meetings also provide an opportunity to share new data, training, developments, and feedback from audit activity that reflects on the strengths and areas for further development of the practitioners practice and therefore, enhance learning.

Locally based and locally delivered service delivery has been central to the boroughs wider philosophy of 'Transforming Lives' - a whole life course approach to early help and early identification in the borough.

Building on the vision for an all age integrated neighbourhood offer in Blackburn with Darwen, in each of the four local areas there is access to:

- A named Team Leader – providing advice, guidance, and a listening ear about early help issues.
- A CAF link Worker to support with existing CAFs, initiating new CAFs, training, access to the Lead Professional network and Peer support
- Access to the wider Early Help offer parenting programmes, support groups, children's and young people's offer, community and voluntary provision
- Support to navigate access to wider support through Transforming Lives panel

Neglect and GCP2

Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment and was recorded as the initial category of abuse for 48.2% of children subject to Child Protection Plans in England as at 31st March 2021. The borough is committed to improving outcomes for children and families and, to this end, we have developed a thorough Neglect Strategy that sets out our approach to tackling neglect.

Part of the strategy has been to introduce the Graded Care Profile 2 in order to provide a common language through the BwD Risk Assessment, Analysis and Management Model and also through the multi-agency use of Graded Care Profile 2 as an effective tool for assessing neglect. It is an evidence-based approach that measures the quality of

care delivered to an individual child over a short window of time. The assessment uses a graded scale from 1 (best) to 5 (worst) to capture levels of physical and emotional care. This is based on Maslow's hierarchy of need. Working with parents to identify strengths as well as areas for improvement, this approach provides evidence that can inform care and intervention plans. The Graded Care Profile 2 tool does not explore reasons for a particular level of care, but does encourage further interpretation of the reasons at the analysis stage.

In addition, and at a lower level, indicators are often present that may indicate a future risk of neglect for children who become subject to CAF or Child in Need (CIN) Plans. The Neglect Strategy reflects this and is grounded in the culture and ethos of the Blackburn with Darwen partnership. As such, it adheres to the following principles:

- Child-friendly practice
- Voice of the child
- Restorative practice
- Participation of parents and carers
- Preventative and Early Help response
- Holistic approach
- Effective planning and reviews

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Awareness & Trauma Informed Practice

There is a growing recognition that early intervention and collaborative working can be instrumental in reducing trauma and the impact of ACEs. These are a complex range of stressful or traumatic experiences that children can be exposed to throughout childhood, including those that directly harm a child (e.g. abuse, neglect) and those that affect the environment in which a child grows up (e.g. parental separation, domestic violence).

Even in difficult circumstances, ACEs can be prevented. To support and nurture children and young people as they develop and grow, professionals across our partnerships have access to trauma informed training which is then incorporated into their practice.

Working with parents to identify strengths as well as their areas for improvement, this approach provides evidence that can inform care and intervention plans and identifies the support needed much earlier for families with the aim of preventing the negative cycle of intergenerational problems.

We continue to support, develop and align interventions that are from an ACE perspective so that we become ACE-aware and where communities, organisations, services and interventions are ACE-informed.

Relationships

Conflict between parents is a normal part of relationships. Parents may have different ideas, opinions, values and priorities. All parents disagree from time to time. However when it is destructive rather than constructive and involves ongoing conflict and hostile emotional tones which erupt frequently, with the same unresolved patterns this can be stressful and damaging to relationships and this can have an impact on children, young people and the whole family. Family and parent relationships has become part of a routine enquiry in the CAF assessment and early help offer. Practitioners feel fully supported and equipped with tools to carry out interventions and the Pan Lancashire Relationship Toolkit is designed to help you as a practitioner in your role supporting couples in their relationships. The toolkit is designed to give you confidence to have conversations with couples about their relationships.

The aim is to work in a solution focused way, enabling and empowering couples to understand their conflict and see how to resolve their issues themselves, rather than relying on a practitioner for solutions. Children do better when they feel safe and secure, this feeling of wellbeing can be largely generated by exposure to healthy relationships within the home. Improving the health of the relationships of the families you work with is something you can have a real impact on.



CHILDREN'S & YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

In Blackburn with Darwen, we acknowledge the role children and young people can play in shaping service delivery and design and we empower them to use their voice to influence decision-making and enact change.

To this end, we have split our participation efforts into two streams - a participation strategy for our vulnerable children and young people, such as children in care and care leavers, and a generic participation strategy for the population.

Children's voice is also a key requirement of the CAF process. Where the voice of children and young people is not clear within a CAF assessment or throughout the on-going review process, including Team around the Family or Family Plan meetings.

This is challenged through the quality assurance process. This approach applies to all children and young people, including those who are very young and those who are unable to communicate verbally, and it requires workers to see the child's lived experience from the child's viewpoint. We aspire to listen to what our children and families tell us.



WHAT WE WILL DO NEXT

- We are working close with our health and social care colleagues to implement the vision for an all age integrated neighbourhood offer in Blackburn with Darwen, where the Primary Care Network (PCN) Integrated Neighbourhood Teams for Health and Social Care (INTs), voluntary, faith and youth sector, and Transforming Lives teams all work together seamlessly to provide the better and more sustainable outcomes for residents
- Through the early help offer we will support children, young people and families to have opportunities to fulfil their potential
- Roll out e-CAF to the wider partnership
- Publish a Best Start for Life offer

WHAT WE WILL MEASURE

It is important that measures of success are established and agreed. The following outcome indicators will demonstrate the effectiveness of this Early Help strategy and its implementation:

- Increase in the number of families supported through a multi-agency Early Help plan
- Number of families making progress against the goals in their Early Help plan
- Number of families who are satisfied with the support they receive
- Reduction of contacts to the Children's Advice & Duty Service (CADS) – meaning that families are supported by those who already know them
- Number of multi-agency practitioners trained in understanding parental conflict
- Increase in the number of Early Help plans in place at the time of a request for an Education Health Care needs assessment
- Children, young people and families accessing education, employment and skills training to support their future outcomes and aspirations

GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

The Health and Wellbeing Board has overarching strategic responsibility for this strategy which will be monitored through the Children's Partnership Board (CPB).

Individual agencies will be responsible for meeting their own performance management arrangements which the CPB expects will incorporate targets for delivering the wider strategy and meeting shared key performance indicators and outcomes.

Quality assurance and challenge will be provided through the Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership as directed by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. This sets out that *'local authorities should work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs'* and that local safeguarding arrangements should include *'how the safeguarding partners will use data and intelligence to assess the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families, including early help'*.

