

Right  
conversations,

right people,

right time

Our early help  
approach and strategy  
to responding to the  
needs of children and  
families in Leeds

2020 – 2023



Leeds Safeguarding  
Children Partnership



Leeds  
CITY COUNCIL



# Foreword

On behalf of the Children and Families Trust Board, we are delighted to present Right Conversations, Right People, Right Time – our early help approach and strategy when responding to the needs of children and families in Leeds 2020 – 2023.

This approach and strategy builds on our existing early help guidance and is the culmination of a great deal of work by our many partners. It also reflects the wide range of agencies and expertise that we are fortunate to have within our partnership in Leeds.

Leeds' early help approach focuses on shifting the balance of power so that our work with families is led by their voice. This sits alongside our strategy to 'rebalance' the system safely and appropriately away from statutory and specialist services to working with children and families early in the life of a problem. This approach is crucial in improving outcomes for children and young people as well as managing demand and cost pressures.

Our early help offer is critical in identifying emerging need and galvanising multi-agency support to respond effectively and creatively during times of crisis, as was seen during the Covid19 pandemic and associated lockdown. The learning from these experiences help shape and influence our ongoing practice across the Leeds partnership.

This strategy and approach is a great opportunity for Leeds, but to make sure that it is successful we will need the effort and commitment of the entire city. We look forward to working with you to make sure that families in Leeds receive the help they need, as soon as they need it.



**Sal Tariq OBE**  
Director of Children and  
Families Services



**Cllr Fiona Venner**  
Executive Member  
for Children and Families



Leeds Safeguarding  
Children Partnership



Being able to talk  
to staff who have  
a trusting and  
non-judgemental  
attitude

What families tell us they want



## Our commitment – 'Early help is everybody's business'

Leeds benefits from robust, effective, successful and longstanding multi-agency working across the diverse and rich partnership in the city. The Leeds partnership is committed to providing the support that children, young people and their families need, as soon as they need it, when they need it and by the people who are best placed to help. All agencies see early help as part of our 'day job' and work to the following early commitment:

We will provide help and support to those who need it without delay. By establishing positive and trusting relationships with families, we will work with them to identify what they need to address their particular concerns and problems



# What do we mean by early help?

Early help is the term used in Leeds to describe our approach on a whole range of individual social, health and educational issues when providing support to children, young people and their families as soon as problems emerge, or re-emerge.

Families should be enabled and supported to have the right conversations, with the right people and at the right time about their needs or concerns, so that statutory interventions can be avoided where this is appropriate.

Intervening as early as possible, regardless of the age of the child or young person, can positively improve their outcomes.

Early help is a collaborative approach not a provision and relies on local agencies working together effectively with families to identify who needs help and then to meet their varied needs.

Quality work with families already takes place across Leeds, day in and day out, by schools, health services, children centres and other early years' settings, services provided or commissioned through our cluster collaborative model, restorative early support teams and a range of other agencies and services.



## early help work in action

A young person aged 15 with significant learning difficulties began to exhibit heightened anxiety, due to exam stress and academic expectations. The school Pastoral Lead and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) decided to carry out an early help assessment. Previously school were managing the young person's needs as a single agency plan, supported by an Education Health and Care plan.

The early help assessment identified social isolation both in school and at home, heightened anxiety at school leading to self-harming, and parents finding it hard to manage. An early help plan was agreed with the family which included addressing Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs through 1:1 counselling, a referral for direct payments to support independence and for work with the parents to reduce the behaviours at home. In addition school provided support with transition work and a tailored advice package around pathways for next steps in education.

The young person is now feeling less anxious, emotionally supported and the self-harming behaviours have reduced.

Overall the atmosphere within the family home has improved.



Our early help approach includes our commitment to shifting the balance of power so that our work is family led and not led by practitioners. An element of this involves families being supported to come together to utilise their own resources and strengths to overcome challenges.

Early help can be provided through a single agency or a multi-agency response as appropriate to the needs of the child and family and the concern.

The Leeds early help approach in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children also includes proactive and planned support for those children and young people stepping down from statutory social work interventions or specialist care.

Staff who are knowledgeable about children and young people's development

What families tell us they want

Being able to talk to other parents going through the same issues

What families tell us they want



## early help work in action

A housing contractor visited a property and found a young single parent in a distressed state. He took her to the Housing Office to seek help. The tenant disclosed she was a victim of domestic abuse, and her ex-partner was a regular visitor to the area where she lived and had a front door key. She felt frightened and feared for her sons and her own safety.

Housing changed her locks the same day. Discussion was held at the daily domestic violence meeting (MARAC), the Police were informed and an offer of support from Leeds Women's Aid was made. The outcome was that the tenant felt safe with the interventions and worked with housing for a planned move to minimise disruption for her son.

Early in the life of the problem - whatever the age of the child or young person

Early to respond when problems emerge, or re-emerge

Early help

Support in school, home and community through a graduated approach

Help to prevent concerns getting worse and avoid the need for statutory intervention





# Purpose and scope

Leeds is ambitious for its children and young people, with the aim of making the city truly child-friendly, and the best in the UK for children to grow up in. Central to this ambition is to ensure that all children, young people and their families in Leeds receive the help they need as soon as they need it from people they know already:

Right conversations,

right people,

right time

Key to achieving this ambition is a citywide, multi-agency commitment to providing effective, proportionate and high quality early help and supporting families to have their needs met in their local communities.

Staff who know about what services are available and how families can access them

What families tell us they want

The aim of this document is to set out the Leeds approach to early help and our early help strategic aims to:

- Develop culture and practice
- Use resources in the most effective ways
- Make smarter use of information for better outcomes for families

Our approach involves working closely with clusters and schools to support children and young people with the three As:



In addition our aspiration is to align education, health and care needs within our early help approach towards having a shared language and understanding of the needs of children and families.

We work to the Leeds Practice Framework which builds on all aspects of practice and what we know to be useful when assessing, implementing and evaluating what we do.

This includes working within a Think Family Work Family approach to ensure that issues are addressed restoratively and in a family context seeking family solutions.

In Leeds our early help approach has been informed by what children, young people and families tell us about what they find helpful when they need help additional to that which is universally available and key messages from them can be found throughout this document.



This approach and strategy should be considered alongside the Children and Young Peoples Plan 2018 – 2023, Best City for Learning Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Plan 2016-2021, Best Start Plan 2015 – 2019 and Future in Mind Strategy 2016-2020, the Neglect Strategy 2017-2022, Reducing Parental Conflict Programme, the Leeds Approach to Think Family Work Family, SEND Strategy and the Three As Strategy.

## Background – the importance of early help

Common across recent reviews and policy developments such as Working Together 2018 and the Munro Report is the recognition that effective early help for children and families improves outcomes long-term.

Getting practical help with things like budgeting

What families tell us they want

### Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 Chapter 1: Early Help

1. 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.

2. Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from early help
- Undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
- Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child. Local authorities under s10 Children Act 2004 have a responsibility to promote inter-agency cooperation to improve the welfare of children

## early help work in action

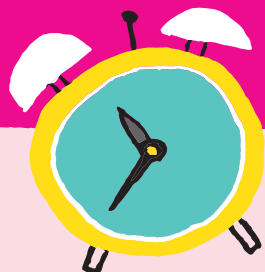
A health visitor was carrying out a scheduled visit to a family with a six week old baby. The family who have moved to the UK in the last six months have an eight year old child who is not attending school. The health visitor helped them to navigate the school admissions process to secure a school place for the child.

Needing to access the right service at the right time – waiting lists aren't helpful

What families tell us they want

## early help work in action

After an escalation in anti-social behaviour and young people offending in key areas of Leeds, partnership work between Police, schools, Youth Justice Service and CATCH identified a group of vulnerable Romanian teenagers responsible. Language and cultural barriers were identified as obstacles to their school attendance and positive engagement. As such the multi-agency team set up the ThinkFIRST course which engages with young people, their families and schools through a diverse programme of high support and high challenge. Local communities, schools and young people report a significant improvement in behaviour and levels of happiness since the work began.



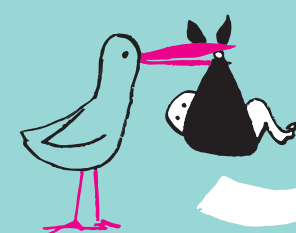
# Why do we need early help?

## – the challenges in Leeds and the local context

Leeds is not alone in experiencing growing challenges in the city. Need and demand are rising rapidly due to: rising child poverty; austerity; growing unemployment, welfare reform; reductions to public service funding; and significant demographic growth and change. As a Core City, Leeds exemplifies the challenges of managing this new and difficult context.

Key challenges include:

### Demographic growth:



In the next decade, majority of growth in older age groups –

**18%**  
growth in 10-15 year olds,

**24%**  
in 16-17 year olds



**10.7%**  
growth in child population in decade to 2016. Predicted to grow by another

**9.5%**  
by 2026  
(over 15,000)  
then slow growth of 1.3% by 2037



**10,000**  
school places have been created in the last five years

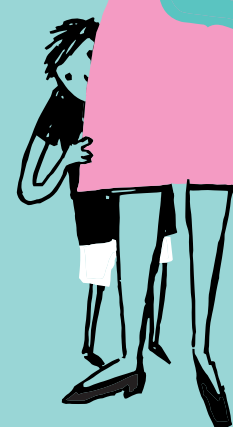
### Impacts of demographic change:

Rising deprivation will lead to rising demand – Bywaters et al – children in 10% most deprived areas are

**10x**

more likely to be in care or on a Child Protection Plan than their peers in the 10% most affluent areas.

Rising diversity impact will be complicated but some of the largest population rises in Leeds have been in ethnicities over-represented in care e.g. Mixed heritage, Black communities.



Most deprived neighbourhoods are facing very high needs and demand e.g. JESS cluster in the South of the city will have on average two pupils in each school class that are open to social work.

### Increasing poverty:

Leeds has become relatively more deprived – moving from a rank of 50th to

**31st**

for the proportion of the population living in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods between 2010 and 2015.



Deprivation data suggests a deepening of poverty in the already most deprived neighbourhoods of Leeds.

Population growth highest in deprived areas, from 2012 to 2016:

Child population up **5%**

Child population in areas in 3% most deprived up

**12%**

– a third of all population growth

Child population in areas in 20% most deprived up

**9%**

– two thirds of all population growth



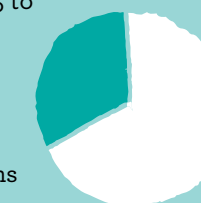
### Increasing diversity:

Proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children and young people in Leeds schools doubled from 17% in 2005 to

**33%**  
in 2017.

Some populations growing rapidly – e.g. 'White Other' tripled in size, Black and Mixed groups doubled.

Unaccompanied asylum seeker numbers are rising, in line with Leeds commitment to be a Compassionate City.



This data makes plain the scale of the challenges for the city, and why we need to provide high quality early help to those families who need this.

So within this early help approach and strategy we understand the need to take into account the lived experiences of families and the impacts of rising deprivation, increasing unemployment and the effects on families throughout our early help practice and adopt a 'poverty lens'.

KEY:

Leeds MD boundary

10% most deprived areas



# The Leeds Early Help Approach

Leeds' early help approach to providing support to potentially vulnerable children, young people, and their families as soon as problems start to emerge - a collaborative approach, not a provision.

## Right conversations, right people, right time

Continual review of circumstances supported by collaborative conversations is the best way of identifying and responding to the needs of children and young people and their families rather than using predetermined thresholds.

For children and young people to receive the right service at the right time, conversations need to be constructive - going beyond a discussion about concerns, to form part of a meaningful assessment and where appropriate, a plan to support the child, young person and their family.

This approach promotes shared responsibility and flexibility, recognises the complexity and individuality of the needs of each child and family and reduces bias of individual professional and agency decisions through debate.

Right conversations,

right people,

right time



Early help

## The 3As - helping every child and young person to Attend, Attain and Achieve

Improving school attendance and attainment have long been priorities in Leeds. The third 'A', 'Achieve', describes our wider ambitions for children and young people to aspire and develop a broader range of strengths and successes: a good family and friendship network; an activity, sport, group or hobby; the chance to play and to be creative in music and the arts; and for all children and young people to learn the knowledge and skills for building relationships and mental wellbeing throughout their lives.



Attend  
Attain  
Achieve

Universal Services

Targeted Services

Specialist Services



## Universal, targeted and specialist services

**Universal** - Most children's needs are met by their family or universal services that are available to everyone, provided as a right to all children, young people and their families.

**Targeted** - Targeted services provide additional capacity and expertise and may use a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach, early help assessment and plan with a Lead Practitioner coordinating support.

**Specialist** - When needs cannot be met in universal or targeted services, a request can be made for specialist services. You may need a discussion about what is available and how to request it.

Early help is everybody's business



## Early help is everybody's business

All agencies in Leeds see early help as part of our day job and work to the following early help commitment:

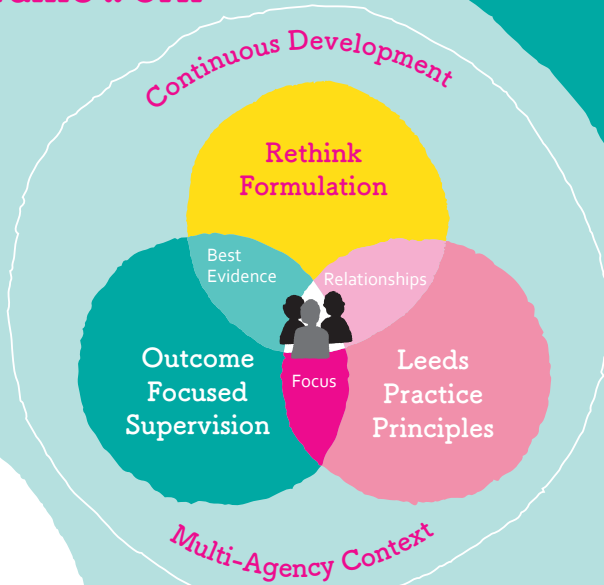
**We will provide help and support to those who need it without delay. By establishing positive and trusting relationships with families, we will work with them to identify what they need to address their particular concerns and problems.**

We will never do nothing when families tell us they need help and we act early before situations or problems become worse. Families can approach anyone working with them who will respond, begin to assess need and start conversations with the right people to identify how help should be provided.

## Leeds Practice Framework

When working with families in Leeds we work to the Leeds Practice Framework covering all aspects of practice and what we know to be useful when assessing, implementing and evaluating what we do. It is not necessarily anything new or unknown. It is a bringing together of best practice that aligns to working restoratively with both families and colleagues. The Leeds Practice Framework contains three key elements of: Rethink Formulation (6Ps); Leeds Practice Principles; and Outcome Focused Supervision existing in the context of continuous development and a multi-agency approach.

## Leeds Practice Framework



## Leeds Practice Principles

- Always working WITH - creating a context of high support and high challenge
- Relationship based
- Enabling the utility of the family-putting the family at the heart of everything we do
- Early in the life of a problem
- One family, one lead worker, one plan and Think Family, Work Family
- Systemic, formulation driven and evidence based
- Transparent - children, young people and families are as fully informed as possible
- Strength focussed
- Recognising that engagement with education is a protective factor
- Accountability, evaluation and sustainability

# How we put early help into practice

It is everybody's responsibility to identify and assess need, through having conversations with children, young people and their families and planning with them to address these needs. Our early help approach is underpinned by: Assess, Plan, Do and Review. The following shows how we work when addressing social care needs. A similar approach is used when meeting educational needs.



## early help work in action

A young person aged 17 was referred to a Restorative Early Support Team (REST) because things at home had come to a crisis and mum wanted him to leave. A REST family support worker got involved and built up a good relationship with mum and supported the young person to move into supported housing for teenagers, take up an education offer and start to address his substance misuse. The young person also agreed to a Family Group Conference and engaged well in the process which helped with improving his relationship with his family.

The outcome is that the young person is now moving into independent living and continues to have a good relationship with his family. Mum has requested further support from the REST with her other children which is significant as she had previously turned down the support when offered.

### Identifies that a child or family need additional support

Conversations take place with the child or young person and their family to assess need. An offer of additional support is provided from within the agency's own organisation.

Single agency early help plan is developed

Single agency develops and agrees a plan with the family.

Progress and plans are reviewed with the family.

Anyone working with a child, young person or family

### Identifies that needs of the child or family cannot be met by their own single agency

A coordinated multi-agency approach is then required which is underpinned by an Early Help Assessment.

Multi agency early help plan is developed

#### My Family Plan

A worker is identified to lead and coordinate the plan, which is developed with the family and agreed with other agencies.

Progress is reviewed with the family and the Team around the Family.

## early help work in action

A third sector mental health support worker is working with a parent of a 12 year old child. The child has recently started getting angry and frustrated at home and refusing to do their homework resulting in detentions at school; however the child is saying that they find the homework too difficult, especially reading. Last week the child was excluded for the first time.

The support worker helped the parent to meet with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) which resulted in school exploring the possibility of additional learning needs and carried out a literacy skills assessment. The support worker also helped with getting the child into after-school homework club which also alleviated the pressure at home. Six weeks later the parent says things have improved and their child is much happier.



### Identifies that a child may be a child in need (Section 17) or is at risk of or has suffered significant harm (Section 47) as defined in the Children Act 1989

They make a contact to Duty and Advice at the Front Door.

#### Duty and Advice

Will have a conversation with the referrer to discuss the concerns and advise the most appropriate course of action.

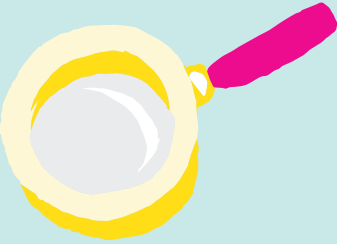
This may include making a referral to Children's Social Work Service, signposting to specialist services or recommending that an Early Help (re) Assessment is more appropriate.



# Our Early Help Strategy



Our aim is to provide effective, proportionate and high quality early help to those children, young people and their families in Leeds – when they need it and how they need it by staff who are confident and skilled. Our ambition is to develop the culture of early help in Leeds where practice, performance management and quality assurance is of consistently high quality and that referral routes are clear and processes are timely, proportionate and effective. Towards achieving our aim and ambition and in addressing our areas for development, our Early Help Strategy has the following three key objectives:



## Governance and accountability

This strategy is owned and overseen by the Leeds Early Help Board which reports to the Children and Families Trust Board (CFTB). The CFTB will monitor progress against the strategic objectives on an annual basis. The effective delivery of the strategy will be reported to the board through highlight reports.

## Action plan and work streams

A detailed plan will be developed to set out what will be required to put into action the aims and objectives of this strategy which will be achieved by the work streams indicated earlier.



## Key indicators for measurement of the effectiveness of the strategy

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

- a) Increase in the number of families supported through a multi-agency early help plan
- b) Number of families making progress against the goals in their early help plan
- c) Number of families who are satisfied with the support they receive
- d) Reduction in the number of statutory social work assessments which result in closure
- e) Reduction in the number of families subject to child in need plans
- f) Reduction of contacts to the front door – meaning that families are supported by those who already know them
- g) Number of early help Interactive Learning Audits carried out where the outcome is 'Good Practice'
- h) Number of practitioners attending Rethink Formulation forums
- i) Number of parents trained in parent led parenting programme
  - j) Number of multi-agency practitioners trained in understanding parental conflict
  - k) Number of multi-agency practitioners trained in Leeds Practice Model and Early Help related courses
  - l) Number of multi-agency practitioners who gain the Early Help qualification
- m) Increase in the number of early help plans in place at the time of a request for an Education Health Care needs assessment
- n) Reduction in the number of Education Health Care needs assessment requests by parents

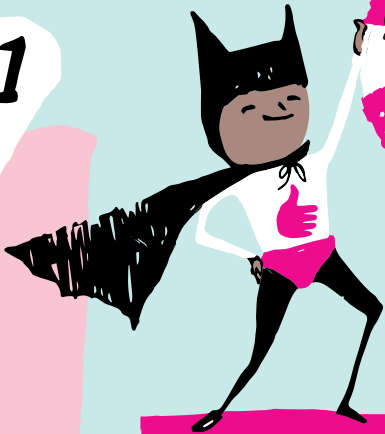
## Develop culture and practice:

Improve early help by continuing to develop culture and practice, across agencies in the city, to embed the Leeds approach.

To support this we will:

- Build on early help workforce development including embedding the Leeds Practice Model and a focus on the 3As – attendance, achievement and attainment
- Develop a Parenting Strategy including expanding parent led parenting programmes
- Review and update practice guidance
- Align early help approaches when working with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

1



2

## Use resources in the most effective ways:

Deploy and target resources efficiently and have clear referral routes and straight-forward systems.

To support this we will:

- Embed and develop practice in the three Early Help Hubs using Earned Autonomy - one for each area of the city
- Review cluster developments
- Continue to align education, health and care resources

3

## Make smarter use of information for better outcomes for families:

Utilise effective and cohesive city-wide systems for case management and data collection to improve service delivery.

To support this we will:

- Standardise reporting by agreeing a set of reports required for key early help partners and performance managers
- Redesign the child and family record, Mosaic, to enable improved case management recording and reporting capability
- Develop a citywide performance management and quality assurance framework



## Ongoing work streams to further develop early help practice

- Workforce Development
- Parenting Strategy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Education

- Earned Autonomy
- Cluster Developments

- Insight – Performance Management and Quality Assurance







## More information

To supplement this strategy, more detailed information about early help work in practice is provided in the Practice Guidance and appendices on the Leeds Safeguarding Children Partnership website

[www.leedsscp.org.uk/earlyhelp](http://www.leedsscp.org.uk/earlyhelp)