



# Early Help for Children & Families Strategy

2017-19



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# Foreword



Welcome to Sandwell's Early Help Safeguarding Strategy which forms an integral part of the wider work of the four strategic boards in Sandwell - Health & Wellbeing (HWB) Board; Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB); Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) and the Community Safety Partnership. It is built upon a vision to ensure children are safe, families are supported and lives are transformed. This is about providing help to all children and families through access to strong universal provision - these are services which are available to everyone.

The aim is to provide help at the earliest point and lowest "level" of service provision so that help is provided quickly and children and families get the help they need to become independent of services.

The strategy is the work of a large number of agencies, organisations and individuals and sets a direction within our duty to protect children. The need for partners to work together to protect children and young people is our prime concern. A significant aim of our partnership, our borough, and the duty of all adults, is to ensure our children grow into happy and successful adults who can take good care of their own families.

The Early Help Safeguarding Strategy relies upon a workforce where staff from across all agencies share the core values, knowledge, skills and abilities to engage well with children and families by building relationships which are based on the strengths within a family. They also need to be focussed on solutions, able to motivate to achieve positive change and be aware of risk and protective factors. We know that by working effectively together we can identify vulnerable children early to ensure that we keep them safe, support their families and transform their lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey Williamson". The script is cursive and fluid.

**Audrey Williamson**

**SSCB Independent Chair**

# Introduction

The Purpose of this Early Help Strategy is to set out a range of activities that will be undertaken between 2017-2019 with the aim of improving the life and prospects of children and families in Sandwell.

The Strategy has been developed by representatives from a wide range of different organisations in Sandwell, including schools, health workers, voluntary and community organisations, Sandwell Police and Fire, and Sandwell Council Children's Services. All agencies share a commitment to work together to achieve the shared ambitions for children and families in the borough. At the very heart of our strategy are the children and families themselves. When we talk about partners and partnership, we include children and families within our partnership.

## We define 'Early Help' as...

an approach to working with children and families who are below the threshold of social care intervention, but require help that may involve more than one organisation that stops problems emerging and supports families to improve their situation.



## The organisations who developed this Strategy also intend that...

families, communities, universal and targeted services will all **work together** more effectively and efficiently to help meet children's and families' needs at the earliest point.

## In practice, our approach means:

- Ensuring that our universal services, which all families can use, help to build resilience and develop the skills they require to meet the needs of their children.
- Ensuring universal services maintain strong links with universal plus and targeted services.
- Encouraging and enabling families to help themselves through the provision of effective information, and developing the capability of communities.
- Maintaining high quality systems and skilled and supported workforces capable of identifying families that need support as early as possible.
- Understanding needs at a community level to commission and provide the right services and interventions to achieve key target outcomes.
- A multi-agency approach which unites provision around families and ensures professionals understand thresholds and have an awareness of the families in the system.
- A strong relationship between our Social Care services and Early Help services, so that practitioners can access advice and guidance to ensure we effectively manage risk and protection for children.
- Wherever possible, our services will work in smaller neighbourhood localities to build networks of support and what support is available.
- Engaging with children and families, using their views to shape the service offer and the way we work with them.
- A rigorous focus on the quality and impact of our services which are continuously monitored.
- Transforming services to ensure our families get the support they need at the right time, by the right people; and to build protective factors and family resilience.

The overriding purpose of this strategy is to ensure that families receive accessible co-ordinated Early Help when they need it. Early Help will happen across a continuum of need, from universal services through to targeted support services where families are experiencing more complex and multiple difficulties.

This strategy is not static. This strategy and its implementation will be regularly reviewed and developed with a full refresh due in February 2018.

# Key Challenges in Sandwell

## The Family Experience of Transformed Services

Workers need to build knowledge of services amongst children and families, and have greater confidence in them.

Workers must engage children, young people and families more to help them find the solutions they need: 'to empower families to define and create a life worth living'.

Families need to be positive about their future and be able to own their own road to change.

## Culture

There needs to be more commitment to work across organisation boundaries. There must be a development of greater trust that partners will not let children and families down.

There needs to be a shared vision and ambition across local organisations.

## Workforce Development

All frontline workers have a clear understanding of the principles of family working and the impact of their work. They need to have access to support and to the right training at the right time.



Whilst there was a consensus amongst organisations that agencies need to work much more closely together, several potential barriers were identified that need to be overcome before this can happen consistently and effectively.

## Fact File

Sandwell is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority out of 326 nationally.

There are, at present, approximately 85,500 children and young people under 20 living in Sandwell. 24.1% of children here live in a workless household.

Of the 41,000 households with dependant children, 1/4 are headed by lone parents, whilst almost 1/5 of these households have at least 1 person with a long term health problem or disability.

## Strategy

Consultation with our partners tells us that while they were committed to delivering early help support, they did not have enough knowledge of what other agencies were doing to feel confident that all families had the support they needed. They expressed the need to improve communication and 'keep it real and honest'.

Key partners need to have a commitment to integrated whole family working.

## Leadership

Partners need to commit to 'a partnership of actions, not just words'.

There needs to be a common purpose across key partners and the commitment to commission outcome based services.

## Delivery Structures and Processes

Professionals from different disciplines must use a shared whole family approach and evidence based tools to deliver a shared vision for early intervention. There needs to be a clear commitment by all partners to a shared analysis of what works and how to meet future demand for services for families.

# Our Ambitions for Children and Families in Sandwell

All children and young people growing up in Sandwell deserve to have the best possible start in life with a wide range of opportunities to grow and develop into healthy, happy individuals and active citizens within our community.



## With our support, all children and young people should:

**Be healthy.** They understand how to maintain emotional, mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing through making good life choices.

**Be safe.** They benefit from positive role models and learn the skills they need to thrive and become healthy adults.

**Be protected** from harm and neglect and grow up looking after themselves. Those around them, including family members, organisations, institutions and members of the public should all play their part in safeguarding our children and young people.

**Enjoy and achieve.** This means getting the most out of life, with supported opportunities for leisure time, fun and friendship.

**Be supported** to develop the life skills that they need for adulthood.

**Make a positive contribution** within their local communities and society, giving them opportunities to engage with others in their local community and to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens as they grow up.

**Achieve economic well-being** by gaining the skills and confidence they need for the future.

**Benefit from help** to inspire them and to develop positive ambitions and aspirations for their future. They can be helped to overcome disadvantages that they face and motivated to strive to achieve their full potential in life.

**Families** play a central role in nurturing children and young people to become self-confident, happy and capable individuals as they grow up and in later life. But however loving and committed parents and carers are, this important role can be difficult, complicated and very challenging at times. Parents and carers should have access to the information and support that they need to develop the parenting skills and tools that are vital to meeting the basic needs of children and young people, and which help them to feel valued and important.

## Our Vision:

**“deliver services at the right time and in the right way to help families meet the needs of their children”**

### In order to achieve our vision we need to:

- Engage with children and families, using their views to shape and monitor the service offer and the way we work with them;
- Grow the Early Help Partnership and secure commitment from a wide range of organisations across Sandwell;
- Understand the needs of children and families in the borough and align resources to meet those needs;
- Children, families and practitioners know what services are out there and how to access them;
- The term ‘Early Help’ is understood in all partner organisations;
- Continue to build positive cross organisational working relationships;
- Practitioners will be clear about and use a simple set of procedures about how we work together, in which they are trained and have good online access;
- Staff will work across organisational boundaries for the benefit of children and families characterised by local networks of professionals, sharing information and an understanding of the priorities and needs of each organisation;
- We have a clear model for family support that practitioners know how to access, with all partner agencies contributing;
- Develop intelligence led commissioning practice based on clearly defined and understood local needs;
- A strong link is in place between our Social Care services and Early Help offer, so that practitioners can access social care advice and guidance to ensure we effectively manage risk and protection for children;
- Effective governance for Early Help is established with clear target outcomes, measures and monitoring frameworks established.

### These working practices will enable us to:

- Operate a rigorous focus on the quality and impact of our services, which is continuously monitored;
- Commission services based on community need, driven by understanding of communities;
- Maintain high quality systems and skilled and supported workforces capable of identifying families that need support as early as possible;
- Develop the capacity in universal services, communities and families themselves to meet the needs of children bolstering and supporting the voluntary and community sector where necessary;
- Design services around family needs, with families themselves.

Families, communities, universal and targeted services will all work together more effectively and efficiently to help meet children’s needs at the earliest point.

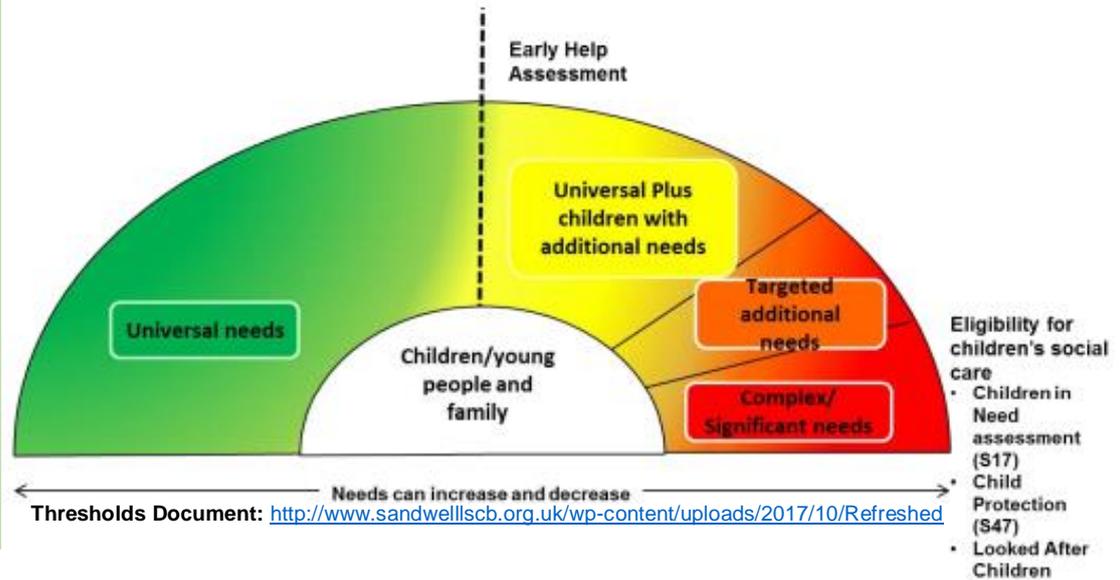


# Identifying Need and Sandwell Family Support Offer

The focus of this Strategy is how partners can work together to build and maintain a strong offer that meets Universal and Universal Plus needs and that effectively links to Targeted and Specialist support

Four recognised levels of need:

- Universal**
- Universal Plus**
- Targeted**
- Specialist**



## 1. Universal

For children with no additional needs and where there are no concerns. Universal services are available to all and will support and enable children and families to be healthy, safe, achieve and make a positive contribution to society. Children and families should access this level of support as their first port of call when they identify they need help, advice or guidance.

## 2. Universal Plus

For children who can be defined as needing some additional support without which they would be at risk of not meeting their full potential. Their identified needs may relate to their health, educational, or social development, and are likely to be short term needs. If ignored these issues may develop into more worrying concerns for the child or young person.

## 3. Targeted

For children who are vulnerable or experiencing the greatest level of adversity. Only a small fraction of children will fall within this band. Children, young people and families will have identified needs that are increasingly complex or unmet and at risk of escalation. A number of different agencies are likely to be involved, and they will intensively support and enable them to address the difficulties they are experiencing in order to prevent them escalating.

## 4. Specialist

For children, young people and families who have identified needs that are increasingly complex or unmet. Children and young people who require statutory intervention or support from Children's Social Care require this level of support because they are at serious risk of harm. They have specialist teams who work with children, young people and families offering focused social work support where needed with key partners.

It is important to recognise that children young people and their families will move between the different levels of need, as their needs change, for example from Specialist to Targeted or Universal to Universal Plus.

## Our Early Help Partnership

Our Early Help Partnership is formed from a diverse range of organisations, community groups, schools, charities, statutory agencies, businesses and many others. It is not restricted to organisations that directly support children and families in Sandwell but is open to *any* organisation that shares the ambitions of the Strategy for greater wellbeing for children and families and a brighter future.

Membership of the Partnership is achieved through a simple sign-up process which asks for a commitment to work together positively with other agencies and to follow some basic partnership principles. There are four levels of commitment available to those who want to join the Partnership: Active Communities; Bronze, Silver and Gold. These four levels of Early Help Partners are detailed in the following pages. Whatever category of membership an organisation or agency commits to, *all* members of the Partnership are equally important and play an essential part in delivering this Strategy.

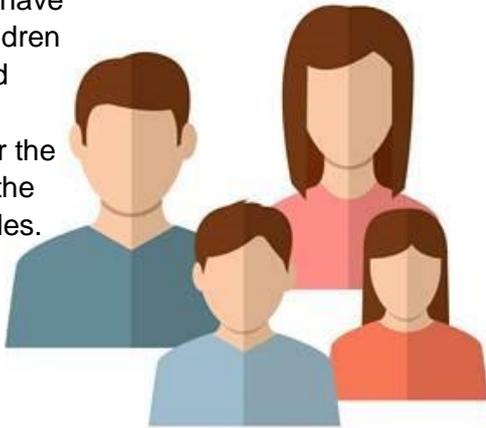


In return for their commitment, members receive a certificate of membership, information, training, advice and support around Early Help work, as well as opportunities to meet with others, showcase their organisation or agency, share good practice and shape ways of working better together in the future. Membership of the Early Help Partnership does not replace the need for partners to attain quality marks or other quality assurance measures which demonstrate the quality of their services; rather, the decision to become an Early Help Partner expresses the level at which the organisation commits to a more complementary and joined-up approach.

# Partnership Principles

All members of the Partnership will sign up to the following principles as the basis for working together effectively:

- A commitment to continuous learning and development for all staff and volunteers who have contact with children and families and continuous improvement for the organisation in the support it provides.



- A commitment to working through points of difficulty or disagreement with other agencies in an honest, positive and constructive manner, recognising the important and valid contribution made by all Early Help Partners.



- A commitment to working with other agencies in an open and supportive manner, sharing information - with the family's consent - when this is helpful, and keeping the needs of children and families as a priority at all times.



- A commitment to grow their knowledge of services and support available for children and families in Sandwell and to proactively work towards new, trusting and productive partnerships.

## Supporting Children and Families: What to do, When

All signatories to the Partnership commitment agree to the following approach for enabling children and families to access early help support and to raising safeguarding concerns should they arise.

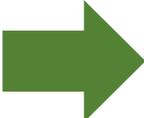
### Active communities

<p>A children and family scenario where some additional support is needed without which the child would be at risk of not meeting their full potential. The situation is well understood. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Use the online Services Portal to find support locally and signpost or refer the child and family to an appropriate service or services.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario which requires or probably requires specialist support. The issues presented require a range of different types of support and/ or there appear to be unknown underlying issues. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Contact the Sandwell Access Centre on 0121 569 3100 as soon as possible for support and guidance.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario where there are safeguarding concerns with serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		

### Bronze Early Help Partner

<p>A children and family scenario where some additional support is needed without which the child would be at risk of not meeting their full potential. The situation is well understood. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Use the online Services Portal to find support locally and signpost or refer the child and family to an appropriate service or services.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario which requires or probably requires specialist support. The issues presented require a range of different types of support and/ or there appear to be unknown underlying issues. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Contact the Sandwell Access Centre on 0121 569 3100 as soon as possible for support and guidance.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario where there are safeguarding concerns with serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		

## Silver Early Help Partner

<p>A children and family scenario where some additional support is needed without which the child would be at risk of not meeting their full potential. The situation is well understood. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Use the online Services Portal to find support locally and signpost or refer the child and family to an appropriate service or services. Add an Early Help Note to the ECAF system.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario which requires or probably requires specialist support. The issues presented require a range of different types of support and/ or there appear to be unknown underlying issues. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Undertake a Early Help Assessment to understand better the needs of the child and family and contact your local COG for advice and follow-up.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario where there are safeguarding concerns with serious risks to the child/ young person</p>		<p>Complete a MARF and contact the Sandwell Child Safeguarding team as soon as possible.</p>

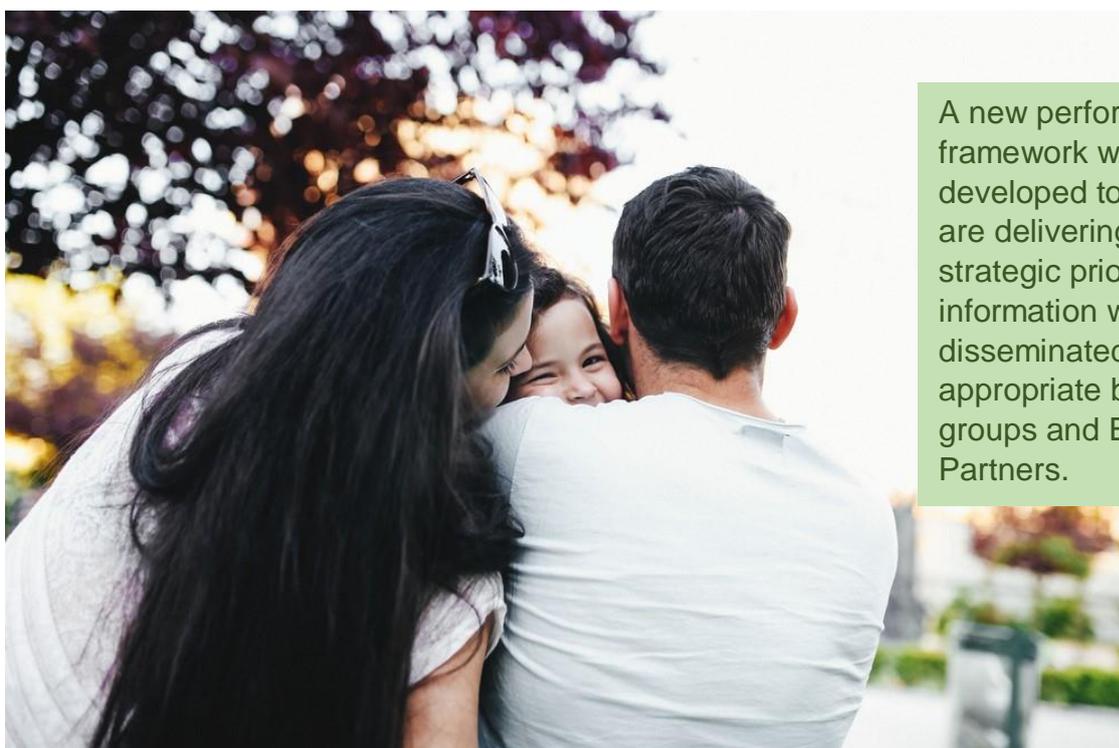
## Gold Early Help Partner

<p>A children and family scenario where some additional support is needed without which the child would be at risk of not meeting their full potential. The situation is well understood. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Use the online Services Portal to find support locally and signpost or refer the child and family to an appropriate service or services. Add an Early Help Note to the ECAF system.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario which requires or probably requires specialist support. The issues presented require a range of different types of support and/ or there appear to be unknown underlying issues. There are no known safeguarding concerns or serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Undertake a Early Help Assessment to understand better the needs of the child and family and contact your local COG for advice and follow-up.</p>
<p>A children and family scenario where there are safeguarding concerns with serious risks to the child/ young person.</p>		<p>Complete a MARF and contact the Sandwell Child Safeguarding team as soon as possible.</p> <p>At least one member of staff can perform the lead professional role to work with partner organisations to address concerns for children and families.</p>

# Strategic Priorities

Priority area	Summary	Required actions	How will we know we've made a difference?
1. Increased knowledge of universal services	To grow knowledge of the range of services that are available to children and families, and increase access to them, through making this information readily available to all service providers and local residents.	Actions include the development of a web-based application which will provide up-to-date, quality information through a user-friendly portal on the broad range of services available to children and families in Sandwell. To consult with families on how they would like to access services.	Indicators: Numbers of services listed on the Services Portal; range, diversity and geographical spread of services; statistics of Portal usage showing regular access by a wide number of different users; evidence that service information is being updated regularly to ensure accuracy of listings; questionnaires to understand how the Portal is being used, and how it can be improved.
2. Grow the Early Help Partnership	To establish and grow the Early Help Partnership by securing a commitment from a wide range of different organisations in Sandwell: involving recognised service providers, and encouraging and incentivising a diverse range of new service providers and community-focused organisations to play their part.	Actions include development of an Early Help Partnership brand, a recognised sign-up and certification process, and a set of activities to promote the Partnership and to approach a range of previously unengaged organisations.	Indicators: Numbers of organisations signed-up to be Early Help Partners; spread of Partners across the four levels of commitment, and diversity of members by geography, size and sector
3. Develop better partnership working between providers	To support Early Help Partners to develop a range of healthy working relationships across the Partnership, working consistently to the Partnership Principles to collectively provide more effective and joined-up support.	Actions include a range of activities to bring organisations together, ranging from informal networking events to more formalised forums at which organisations will share and develop best practice in how to collaborate with each other, for example, by establishing and refining signposting and referral practices. An Early Help Partnership Forum aimed primarily at Silver and Gold Partners will engage statutory partners, including those agencies delivering targeted and specialist services in Sandwell, and will focus on how to improve the journey through support by engaging and involving children and families to review and share their experiences.	Indicators: Perception-based surveys of Partners focusing on their changing experiences of partnership working; changes in the percentage of appropriate MARF referrals received; changes in the percentage of appropriate Targeted Help Assessments received; development of tools or agreed working practices between Partners; case study evidence showing how the journey through support for children and families has been reviewed and recommendations taken forward.

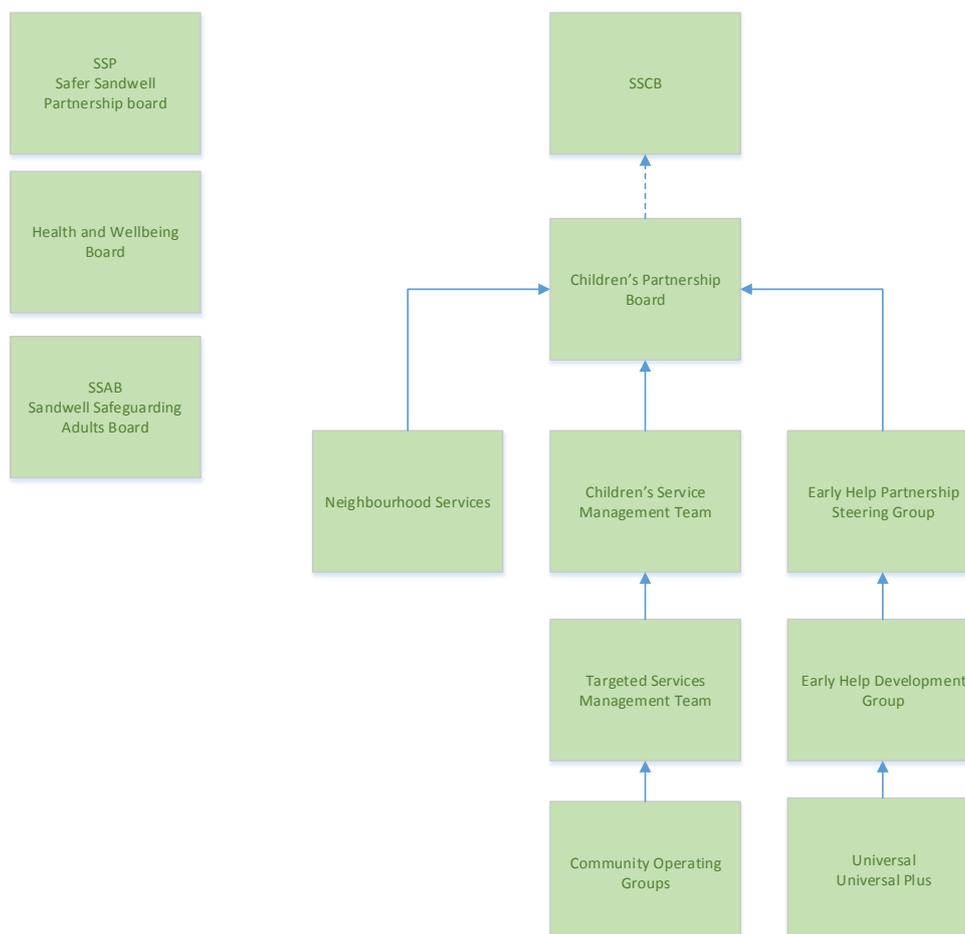
<p>4. Develop intelligence-led commissioning practice</p>	<p>To work more closely with Partners to ensure that all investment in Early Help provision is based on clearly defined and understood local needs.</p>	<p>Actions include a range of activities including information gathering from service providers, Community Operating Groups (COGs) and Locality Offices on what local early help support children and families are currently needing; ensuring all locally commissioned services are listed on the Services Portal; undertaking mapping of capacity and support available based on Portal intelligence to assess gaps in provision; providing support and advice to commissioners, grant panels and those overseeing town partnership plans, sharing information on local needs, gaps and emerging trends; performing a scrutiny role with the aim of ensuring commissioning and grant-making processes are based on sound evidence of need and with an awareness of current capacity.</p>	<p>Indicators: Information gathered on emerging needs from local Partners; Maps of service provision showing gaps in support; records of engagement with commissioners and grant panels which point to improved funding practice.</p>
<p>5. Increase Capacity and Capability at Community Level</p>	<p>To work more closely with communities to develop greater resilience at an individual level and to increase the capacity of community-focused organisations to deliver accessible and appropriate early help support.</p>	<p>a range of support, information and training provision for local support organisations on a range of topics including how services can be made more culturally appropriate and accessible, and how new grassroots projects can be developed, such as empowerment/ self-help initiatives. The Group will also work with local Partners to increase Early Help Partnership Steering Group resources by acting in an advisory role around bids for external funding, and will facilitate collaboration where appropriate, for example where a locality-based provider might benefit from developing a partnership with a specialist borough-wide agency.</p>	<p>Indicators: Evidence of new project initiatives which have developed as a result of local intelligence gathered by the Early Help Partnership Steering Group; amount of external funding secured for local services where applications have been supported by intelligence from the Early Help Partnership Steering Group.</p>



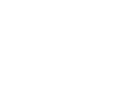
A new performance framework will also be developed to ensure we are delivering on all strategic priorities. This information will be disseminated to the appropriate boards, groups and Early Help Partners.

## Governance: Supporting an Effective Early Help Partnership

Our Early Help Partnership brings together a variety of different providers of diverse shapes and sizes and drawn from different sectors, all committed to supporting better wellbeing for children and families. Individually, it's their commitment, knowledge, passion and expertise that helps make the difference that's needed, but it's also the partnership working that makes them, collectively, even more effective. We recognise that building strong partnerships takes time, that relationships are not always easy and that the world around us is constantly changing, so our Early Help Partnership needs support and accountability to really achieve its potential.



A newly established Children's Partnership Board will ratify this strategy, develop operational practices and monitor performance. This governance model will be shared and recognised across our partnership, unifying our focus and hold the partnership accountable for delivery.



**S** Sandwell  
**S** Safeguarding  
**C** Children  
**B** Board



 Sandwell  
Metropolitan Borough Council

**SCVO**  
connecting • enabling • transforming

Staffordshire and  
West Midlands  
Probation Trust 

2017-19

