BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN BOROUGH COUNCIL

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN

EARLY HELP STRATEGY

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

Revised July 2024 (4th Edition)

BLACKBURN WITH DARWEN
CHILDREN'S SERVICES

VERSION 4 – JULY 2024

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1. FOREWORD

Jo Siddle

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

Councillor Julie Gunn

Executive Member for Children, Young People & Education

We are delighted to present our fourth 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.

Blackburn with Darwen benefits from robust, effective, successful and longstanding multi – agency working across the diverse and rich partnership in the borough. The partnership is committed to providing the support that children, young people and their families need, the right support, right time, right person as soon as they need it.

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.

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.

As a partnership, we have already done a huge amount to ensure that early help is "everyone's business" and we can see the impact of this in terms of improved outcomes, but we know we can always do more and there are new challenges and needs that we need to respond to. This strategy articulates our intent to continue to strengthen our commitment to those in need of support. This includes a strengthened focus on the early help we provide to those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Our place based approach to our early help strategy will build on the great work we are already doing. Blackburn with Darwen's partnership approach to community has always had a 'can do culture' and we know our strength lies in collaboration. I look forward to the year ahead, and the delivery of this strategy – I know the difference it will make. Finally, I would like to thank all our partners in Blackburn with Darwen for all you do; we have much to be proud of and I know that, together, we will continue to do amazing things.

2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EARLY HELP?

Early help is the term used in BwD 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 communities, day in and day out, by schools, health services, family hubs and other early year's settings, services provided or commissioned and a range of other agencies and services.

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 BwD 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.
BwD is ambitious for its children and young people, our core council missions are;

- A more prosperous borough where no-one is left behind
- Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential
- Build healthier, happier and safer communities

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

3. PRIORITIES ON A PAGE

Section 1: Missions and Public Commitments for School Effectiveness

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Corporate Plan 2023-2027

Our core missions

- A more prosperous borough where no one is left behind
- Every child and young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential
- Deliver our climate emergency action plan
- Build happier, healthier and safer communities

Our Values - Proud to be BwD

- **Trust:** We believe in and can rely on each other.
- **Respect:** We embrace diversity and value our differences.
- **Ambition:** We have the courage to try new things and strive to be better.
- **Collaboration:** We achieve more by working together.
- **Kindness:** We are self-aware and considerate in all that we do.

Our outcomes

If we are making progress on our missions, we will see:

- Fewer people living in deprivation
- Increased life expectancy
- Borough closer to carbon neutral
- Higher educational attainment
- More people who need help or support continuing to live in their own homes

"To help achieve our missions, the Council will be innovative and forward thinking and tackle the budget challenge."

Priorities on a Page

Children's Services & Education

Our priorities are aimed at improving our services and delivering good outcomes. They will guide our efforts towards a future in which children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen can grow to have a happy and healthy life, experience success and overcome challenges .

1 Stable homes built on love
We will deliver a transformation programme over the next 12 months to support the delivery of services in line with Working Together and mapped needs of our communities.

2 Right support, right time, right person
We will review and redesign our pathways to services to enable better aligned approach to service delivery.

3 Effective transitions for all ages and needs
By prioritising transitions, we can support children in navigating changes effectively and setting them up for success in their educational and personal journeys.

4 Raising aspirations and fulfil potential
Delivery involves providing children and young people with the necessary resources, opportunities, and support to develop their skills, talents, and abilities.

5 We are Systemic
Delivering systemic practice in children's services is essential for promoting holistic and effective support for children and their families.

6 Best start in life
Delivering the best start in life is crucial for setting children on a path of healthy development and well-being.

Enablers to support the delivery of our priorities

- Partnership & political support
- Visible Leadership
- Best Value
- Trauma informed approach
- Skilled & stable workforce
- Culture & values

Proud to be BwD

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Effective from October 2023

4. BWD: THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Blackburn with Darwen Local Context

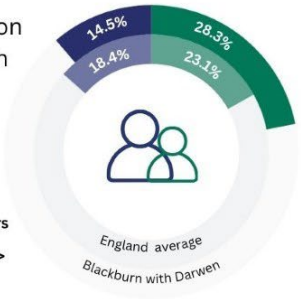
Population

In 2021, the population size of Blackburn with Darwen was...

154, 700

Key:

- **Residents aged 0-19 years**
- **Residents aged 65 years >**



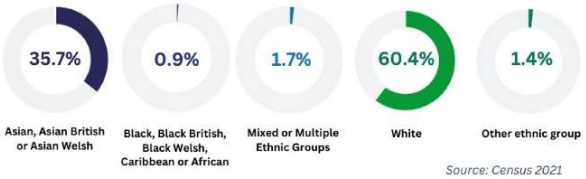
The borough at a glance:

- The borough has a younger than average age profile
- Blackburn with Darwen is the largest borough in Lancashire
- The majority of the borough's residents live in the towns of Blackburn with Darwen and the rest live in rural villages and hamlets that surround these two major urban centres

Ethnicity facts and figures

In 2023, the estimated population size of Blackburn with Darwen was....

157, 503



Source: Census 2021

Most of our residents from Global Majority backgrounds identify as either Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh - Indian (15.8%) or Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh - Pakistani (17.8%), however Census 2021 data also shows that the borough of Blackburn with Darwen is also home to people who identify as Chinese, Bangladeshi, African, Caribbean, Arab and people of multiple ethnicities.

Children and young people

There are approximately **43, 800** children and young people aged 0 - 19 in the borough

28, 274 of these are currently attending our maintained schools and settings

Children eligible for free school meals in primary schools

25.2% Blackburn with Darwen | **24.9%** England average

Children eligible for free school meals in secondary schools

26.2% Blackburn with Darwen | **25.6%** England average

Children eligible for free school meals in special schools

42.1% Blackburn with Darwen | **47.8%** England average

Children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds

59.7% Blackburn with Darwen | **38.7%** England average

Children and young people who speak English as an additional language

37.6% Blackburn with Darwen | **20.8%** England average

Latest published figures provided - January 2024

5. WHAT IS EARLY HELP?

'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023' statutory guidance re-emphasises the crucial role of effective Early Help. Early Help is support for children of all ages that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. It is not an individual service, but a system of support delivered by local authorities and their partners working together and taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision in their area.

Some early help is provided through "universal services", such as education and health services. They are universal services because they are available to all families, regardless of their needs. Other early help services are coordinated by a local authority and/ or their partners to address specific concerns within a family and can be described as targeted early help. Examples of these include parenting support, mental health support, youth service, youth offending teams and housing and employment services. Early help may be appropriate for children and families who have several needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. It is a voluntary approach, requiring the family's consent to receive support and services offered. These may be provided before and/or after statutory intervention.

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 an approach to ensure children, young people and their families receive the right support at the right time to stop problems escalating.

In BwD we believe Early Help is a collaborative approach, not a provision. All children and young people will receive universal services; however, some children and young people because of their needs or circumstances will require extra support to achieve their potential. Therefore, the purpose of Early Help is to work together to provide the help and support to families, before they become overwhelming, long term and costly to the child, young person, family and the wider community.

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.

In BwD every professional working with or engaging with children and families, regardless of organisation, status or position has a responsibility to deliver Early Help and support the family to access appropriate services to enable positive parenting. Early Help can be provided by a range of staff in different organisations, such as health services, schools, early year's providers and a range of voluntary, community and faith sector services. Early Help is the term used by all agencies to describe BwD approach to providing early support to families so that children, young people and their families are safe, happy and ready for school work and life's challenges. Early Help is the right support, at the right time, the right person.

Transforming Lives

The Transforming Lives (TL) Partnership began in 2014 and provides a centralised 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 and the help and support for families. Partnership working enables services to work close with health and social care, embedding 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.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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

PRINCIPLE ONE

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

PRINCIPLE TWO

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 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
Education play a significant role

Schools, colleges, early years and childcare settings, and other educational providers (including alternative provision) all have a pivotal role to play in safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. Their insight and co-operation is vital to the successful in identifying the needs of the child or young person and in the provision of early help, Our Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in May 2023 highlighted the strength in our schools and settings approach stating: “Schools provide a range of excellent proactive support for children and families”.

PRINCIPLE FIVE
Voice of the child

Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child, listen to what they say, observe their behaviour, take their views seriously, and work with them and their families and the people who know them well when deciding how to support their needs.

PRINCIPLE SIX
Effective partnership working

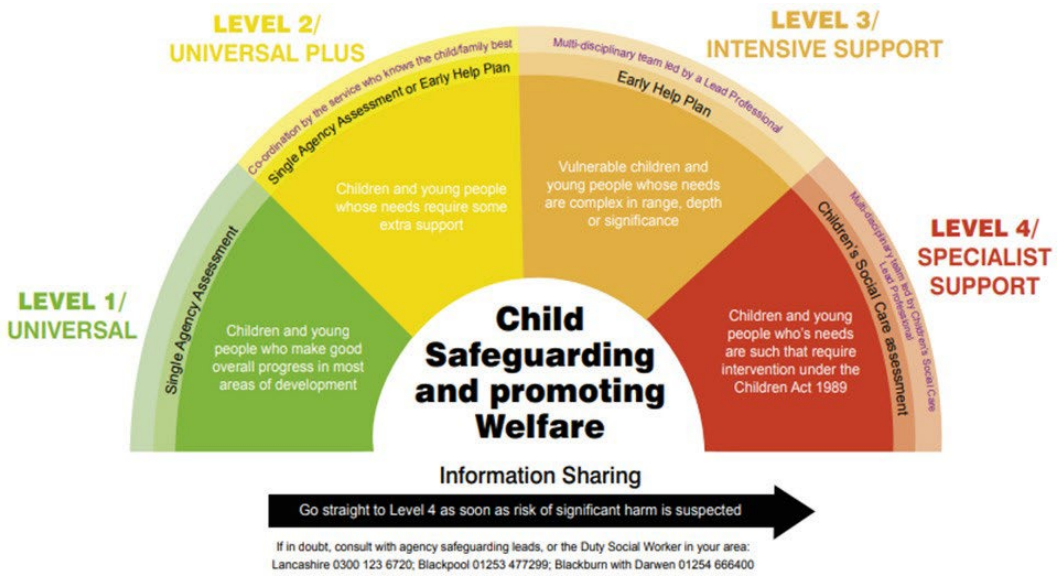
Effective partnership working with parents and carers happens when practitioners build strong, positive, trusting, and co-operative relationships by approaching families and their wider family networks and communities with empathy, respect, compassion, and creativity.

7. WHERE DOES EARLY HELP FIT WITHIN THE SYSTEM?

Continuum of Need and Response (CoNR)

The Continuum of Need and Response Framework applies 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 CoNR framework recognises that all service responses must be directed at preventing vulnerability and meeting the needs identified at the lowest level of intervention.

Early recognition, 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.

8. 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. The department has commissioned the Centre for Systemic Social Work (CfSSW) to train our staff in leadership, management, supervision and practice.

Working with, and consent Early Help is about working with families not doing to families. This begins with families agreeing to or giving 'consent' to work with service using the early help approach. Children and parents should be central to each stage of the process and be supported to drive their own plans and make their own decisions.

The Early Help assessment in Blackburn with Darwen is still referred to as CAF (Child and Family Assessment) 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 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 necessarily 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 TAF plans and closures, offering feedback and support to make improvements where needed.

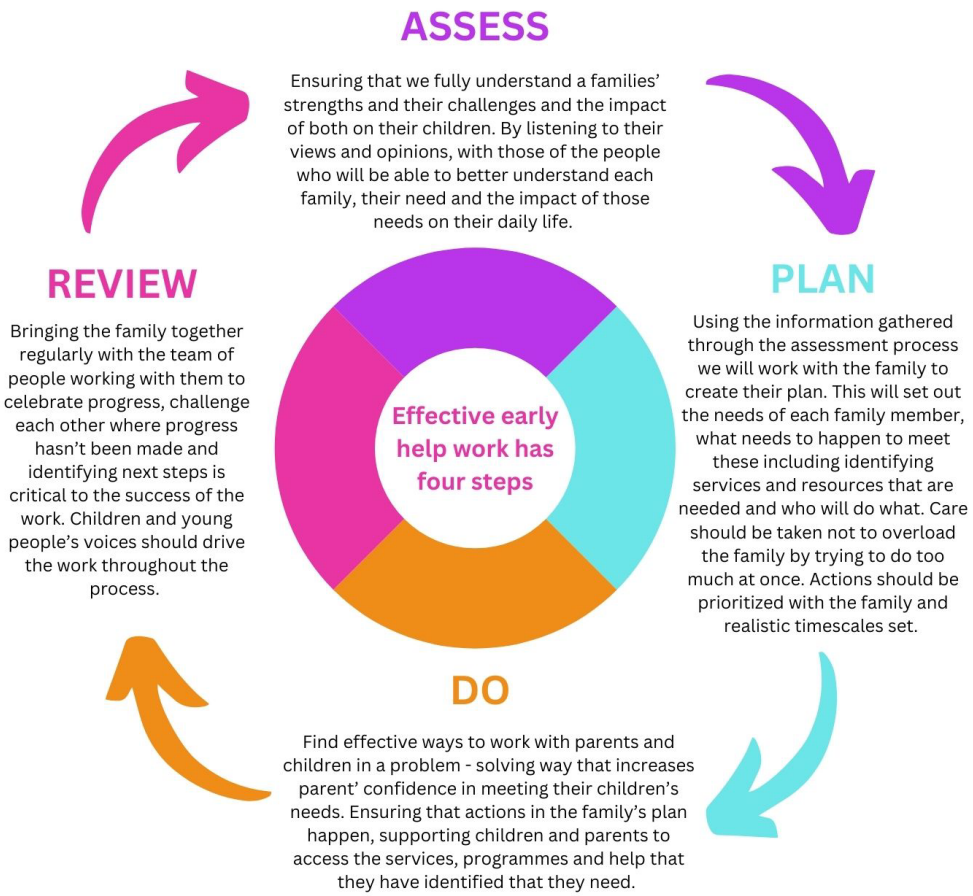
The CAF Link Worker also host Lead Professional Network Meetings which take place quarterly with a meeting in each of our four localities. They provide a forum for the Lead professionals to connect to other colleagues in the same locality area to share learning and experiences. The meetings also provide 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.

The aim is to keep children and their families front and centre of this strategy. We want every child to fulfil their potential, we want to help them build resilience and community connections and empower them to find their own solutions to problems. This will involve intensive whole family system approach and partnership working.

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.

Early help cycle



Neglect and GCP2

The definition of neglect from statutory guidance *'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023'* is:

'The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health and development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy because of maternal substance misuse.

The borough is committed to improving outcomes of children and families and to this, we have developed a thorough Neglect Strategy that sets out our approach to tackling neglect.

Part of the strategy is introducing 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 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

The purpose of this Neglect strategy…

We have the safety of the child at the heart of everything we do, and we are aspirational that every child should achieve their full potential.

The purpose of the SEND strategy…

In BwD we are working together to realise our vision that children and young people with SEND live happy, healthy and fulfilled lives wherever possible within their local community.

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 supported and equipped with tools to carry out interventions and the Pan Lancashire Relationship Toolkits 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.

9. 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 meetings. This approach applies to all children and young people, including those who are very young and those children who are non-verbal, and it requires workers to see the child's lived experience from the child's viewpoint.

Each year, a number of services across Children's Services receive the Investing in Children Membership Award in recognition of their imaginative and inclusive practice. Children and young people who use the services are interviewed during the assessment process to find out how they feel about the support they receive and whether their views, their wishes and their feelings are taken into account and responded to by the service. Evidence from these consultations with children and young people is used to decide if membership is awarded.

10. WHAT OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TELL US

"The early help services helped me so much with my debt and housing and getting back on track with my routine with the children."

"My family support worker helped my mum so much."

"I found the early help approach and assessment was useful. It was nice to be listened to."

11. 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:

a) Increase in the number of families supported through a multi – agency whole family assessment and plan

b) Number of families making progress against their family plan

c) Number of families who close to early help with all needs met

d) An increased number of partner agency leading on assessments and co-ordination of family plans

e) Number of Early Help Audits carried out where the outcome is 'Good Practice'

f) Number of Early Help Audits of the Early Help and Family Support Service regarding direct work and intervention where the outcome is 'Good Practice'

g) Number of multi-agency practitioners trained in understanding parental conflicts

12. GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

The strategy will be monitored by the Children's Partnership Board (CPB). Individual agencies will be responsible for meeting their own performance management and arrangements which the CPB expects will incorporate targets for delivering the wider strategy and meeting shared key performance indicators and outcomes.

Quality assurance and scrutiny and challenge will be provided through the Children's Assurance partnership, using data and intelligence to assess the effectiveness early help being provided to children and families.

A detailed Early Help action plan provides the operational function to ensure that our objectives are addressed appropriately. The Family hub Strategic group will directly report to the Children's Partnership Board with progress on the action plan that will sit under this strategy. Throughout the term of this strategy, regular updates will be given to our children and young people through the Young BwD Foundation and Parent carer panels. This will ensure that we are held accountable in delivering the work to our children, young people and their families.