



Early Help

# Early Help and Prevention Strategy

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2024-2028 (with annual review)



Northumberland  
County Council



# Foreword

## Early Help and Prevention Strategy 2025-2028

We are proud to present Northumberland's Early Help and Prevention Strategy 2025–2028, a shared commitment to ensuring that children, young people, and families receive the right support, at the right time, and in the right way.

This strategy reflects the collective ambition of our partnership, across health, education, social care, and the voluntary sector, to build a system that is proactive, relational, and rooted in the lived experiences of our communities. It is shaped by the voices of children, young people, and families, whose insights have been central to defining our priorities and shaping our approach.

Early Help is not a single service, it is a system of support that recognises the importance of trusted relationships, timely intervention, and community-led solutions. It is about working together to identify emerging needs, reduce inequalities, and build resilience within families and communities.

Over the next three years, we will focus on delivering the ambitions of the Families First Reforms, strengthening our Family Hub network, and embedding inclusive, integrated support across Northumberland. We will continue to champion the importance of emotional wellbeing, school readiness, healthy relationships, and support for children with SEND and their families.

We are grateful to all our partners, practitioners, and community organisations for their ongoing dedication. Most importantly, we thank the children, young people, and families who have contributed to this strategy; your voices have guided us, and your experiences will continue to shape our journey.

Together, we will make Early Help everybody's business.



Audrey Kingham,  
Executive Director of Children,  
Young People and Education



Victoria McLeod,  
Director of Children, Young  
People & Families



Councilor Guy Renner  
Thompson



# Contents

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## What Is Early Help?

### National Context

- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Family Hub & Start for Life Programme
- Reducing Parental Conflict
- Families First Partnership
- Children's Wellbeing Bill
- Healthy Child Programme
- Marmot Review: Health Equity in England

### Local Context

- Voice of Children and Young People
- Voice of Parents and Carers
- What's Working / Challenges

### Northumberland Snapshot

- Demographics and Service Use Data

### What We Achieved: 2021–2024

- Support for Families
- Strengthening Communities
- Developing the Workforce

### Strategic Priorities: 2025–2028

- Best Start in Life
- Emotional Wellbeing, Mental and Physical Health
- School Readiness, Engagement & Education
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Support for Older Children & Young People
- Healthy Relationships and Positive Parenting

### Underpinning Principles

- Voice of Families
- Communities First
- Reducing Inequality
- Father-Inclusive Practice
- Service Integration
- Data Sharing & Shared Intelligence

### Useful Information and Further Reading

# What is Early Help?

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Early Help means recognising when children or families need support as early as possible and having the systems to ensure that they get the advice and support they need when they need it. Early Help is for all children from conception to 18 and can be support for anyone in the family. Early help includes **all services** that provide support to children and their families in Northumberland.





# National Context

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## Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

Successful outcomes for children depend on strong partnership working between parents/carers and the practitioners working with them to understand the context of their lives.

The guidance highlights the need to ensure we take a child centred approach to meeting the needs of the whole family. It recognises that all families can face challenges that make parenting difficult.

Often families can overcome challenges themselves or with the help of relatives, friends and services such as schools, health visiting, and mental health services. However, sometimes families have more significant needs that require more intensive help and support.

The guide also recognises that early help is NOT a service, but a system of support delivered by Local Authorities and their partners working together to take collective responsibility to provide the right support.

The guidance highlights the importance of sharing information effectively between agencies, ensuring that children's needs are assessed promptly and accurately. It stresses the need for early intervention to address issues before they escalate, and clear procedures to be followed when there are concerns about a child's welfare.





# Family Hubs Best Start in Life Programme

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The Family Hub ethos is a 'one stop shop' for families from pregnancy, through the early years and up to 19 years or 25 years for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Family Hubs provide a network for local services to come together to improve access to support, connections between families, professionals, services and providers, and puts relationships at the heart of family support.

The Start for Life Offer focuses on support for families from pregnancy up to a child being 2 years old, including where parents need support with perinatal mental health.





# Reducing Parental Conflict

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This programme aims to support parents to reduce parental conflict (defined by frequency, intensity, and lack of resolution), thereby improving children's immediate and longer-term outcomes. In Northumberland this is known as **Healthy Parental Relationships**, and we have trained our workforce to support parents and carers to improve the quality of their co-parenting relationship whether they are together or separated.





# Families First Partnership

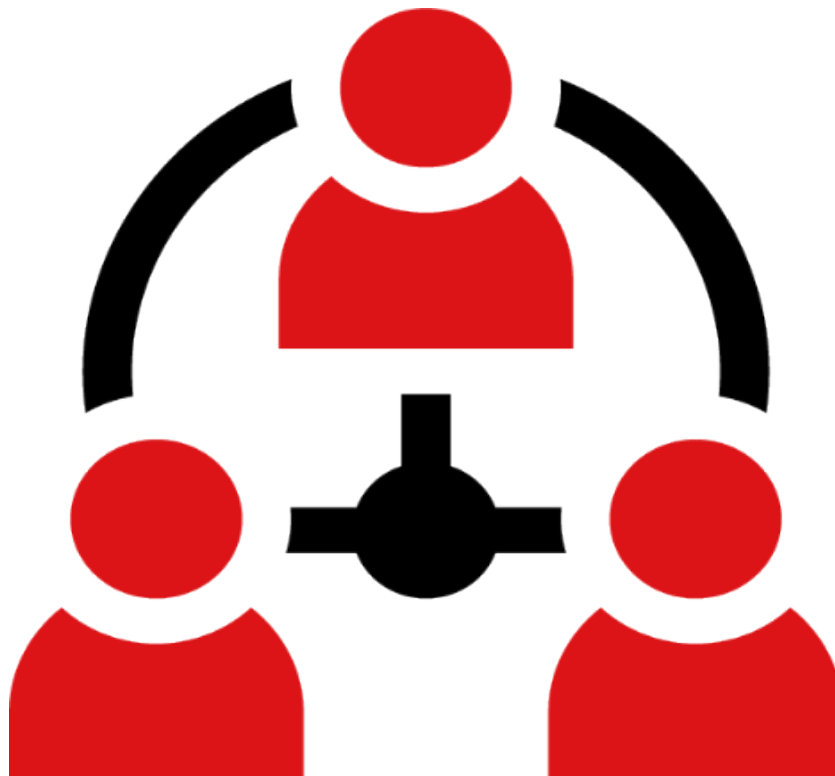
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**The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide, published in March 2025, outlines the UK government's strategy to reform children's social care by emphasising early intervention and multi-agency collaboration.**

The programme aims to rebalance the system towards preventative family support, thereby reducing the need for statutory and acute services.

Key components of the programme include the establishment of multi-disciplinary Family Help teams to provide seamless support to families, the creation of Multi-agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) to enhance child protection efforts, and the integration of Family Group Decision Making to involve families in decision processes affecting them.

The guide also emphasises the importance of information sharing, adherence to the National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children guidelines and delivering evidence-based interventions.





# Children's Wellbeing Bill

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This bill includes a range of changes to remove barriers to opportunity and make sure that the school system is fair for every child, no matter their background.

- Making sure there are free breakfast clubs in every primary school.
- Limiting the number of branded uniform items that a school can require to bring down costs for parents.
- Requiring local authorities to have and maintain Children Not in School registers and provide support to home-educating parents, to ensure fewer children slip under the radar.
- Giving Ofsted more powers to investigate unregistered schools and tackle patterns of poor care in children's homes to keep children safe. This will be complemented by regional and national Child Poverty Action Plans.





# Healthy Child Programme (HCP)

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## Growing Healthy Northumberland 0-19 years

**The Healthy Child Programme is a national prevention and early intervention public health framework for children and young people. Its aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of children from pregnancy through to the age of 19 (25 for SEND), working together with other key partners.**

It provides a framework for services including health visiting and school nursing, offering developmental reviews, screening, support for parenting, improving health behaviours, and emotional wellbeing.

The programme focuses on early intervention and prevention, aiming to identify health and development issues early and provide tailored support to families, with a strong emphasis on reducing health inequalities and promoting lifelong health.

All children, young people aged 0-19 years and their families who are residents or attending school in the Northumberland local authority area can access the service.

The Growing Healthy Northumberland 0-19 service supports children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream education and care leavers who are aged 0-25 years if they have health needs which can be met by the service.

The Growing Healthy Northumberland 0-19 Service works in partnership with other services including Midwifery Services, Family Hubs, NCC Children's Services, Education and Skills, Early Years and Adolescent Service and the Special School Nursing Team.



# Health Equity in England

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## The Marmot Review 10 Years On

The Priority outcomes and Draft Matrix relevant to this Early Help Strategy are presented below and considered:

- Best start in life. Improve early child health, family support and early education to give children in every part of the country the best start in life
- Percentage of children with a good level of development up to 5 years old (DfE)
- Take-up rate of 2yo disadvantage childcare offer (DfE)
- Take-up rate of 3-4yo 15hrs childcare offer
- Oral health: Percentage of 5-year-olds with experience of visually obvious dental decay.

**Given the changing nature of the world of children and families, we will commit to reviewing this strategy annually to ensure that it remains relevant to the local and national context.**





# Local Intelligence

## What families told us

Throughout November 2024, we gathered children and young people's views through a short activity completed with one of our workers.

We wanted to gather views from all age ranges and provided a selection of resources to gather the voices of children and young people, which could be adapted to suit the needs of the child / young person.

We also asked all Northumberland parents / carers to share their views on the key priorities for families in their local area, what is currently working well, and what the areas of challenge are.

**Children and young people** told us they have strong relationships with friends and family, enjoy school in some areas, feel listened to in some areas and younger children felt there was lots for them to do.

Conversely, they also told us they face

- Judgement, prejudice, discrimination
- Listening and understanding - voices 'heard' but not acted upon
- Bullying - social media means you can't leave bullies at school / pressures / fake news
- Negativity from older generation
- Unfair expectations
- A lack of places to meet / hang out that are safe
- Mental health / managing emotions / understanding own issues
- A lack of support / not knowing where to go for support
- Inconsistencies across local areas in Northumberland – services / amenities.





# Local Intelligence

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## What parents and carers told us

**Parents / carers** told us there are many positive aspects of support for families, children, and young people in the community.

Family Hubs provide valuable services; play parks, leisure centers, and outdoor spaces are well-maintained.

Mental and physical health support is accessible, with good GP and A&E services, as well as initiatives like swimming lessons and breastfeeding support.

Charities play a crucial role in supporting children with SEND needs, particularly ASD and ADHD, while community events and social groups foster a sense of belonging.

Additionally, there is strong support for parents who may struggle financially, with access to food banks and subsidised childcare options. Schools are also recognised for their positive impact.

They also told us there are barriers to accessing support, particularly for families with older children, SEND needs, or those living in rural areas.

Many services focus on early years, leaving a gap in provision for children over five years old.

Parents often struggle to navigate complex referral processes, especially mental health and SEND support. Geographical barriers make it difficult for families in rural areas to access services, compounded by transportation costs and limited availability outside working hours.

Financial constraints mean that some families do not qualify for assistance but still struggle to afford essential services. Awareness and communication issues also prevent families from knowing what help is available, and stigma around seeking support discourages engagement.



# Early Help

## Northumberland at a Glance



61,744 children 10,891 of those are under 5  
*(Source ONS Population Estimates 2022)*



783 Children in need  
*(Source: NCC ICS System March 25)*



458 children cared for  
*(Source: NCC ICS System March 25)*



6039 children in low-income working households, 4841 children in low-income none working households



78% take up of 2 year old early years entitlement (NOTE this has fallen as many are moving over to the working families entitlement but there's no way to differentiate between the two)  
*(Source: NCC Early Years Team Jan 25)*



91.5% attendance rate at primary  
*(Source: NCC Census Data Jan 25)*

91.8% attendance rate secondary  
*(Source: NCC Census Data Jan 25)*

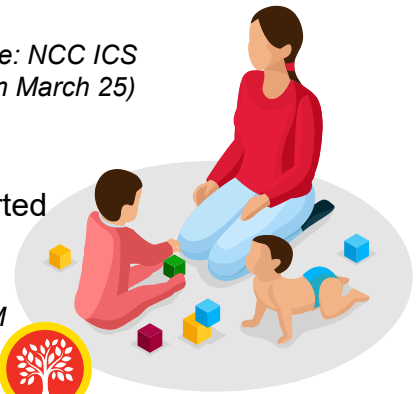
85.4% attendance rate special schools  
*(Source: NCC Census Data Jan 25)*



290 child protection plans  
*(Source: NCC ICS System March 25)*



1245 children currently supported on Early Help Episodes  
*(Source: NCC EHM System March 25)*



14,440 people registered with Family Hubs since Oct 22 – 7000 families  
*(Source: NCC ICS System March 25)*



22.9% of children are eligible for free school meals, 19.2% have taken up the offer  
*(Source: NCC Jan 25)*



2734 EHCP's  
*(Source: NCC Census Data Jan 25)*





# What we achieved in the last strategy period 2021-2024

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## With our families

We said we wanted to provide the right support, at the right place and in the right way.

We have:

- Restructured the Family Help and Family Hub workforce and tightened up processes to improve our ability to meet family needs.
- Introduced and expanded Healthier Relationships programmes for parents, including virtual, out of hours delivery and support for separated parents.
- Introduced the jointly delivered Relax Kids / Charge, expansion of the BE YOU offer, introduced Education Welfare Support Officers, held welcome events in the Children and Young People's Service to look at holistic support at the start of the process for children and young people.
- Increased digital access to services for parents, including online parenting support, support for teenagers, a new app for expecting fathers, and a comprehensive Family Hub website with a Start for Life Offer.
- Ensured programmes remain available both face-to-face and virtually for flexible access.
- Increased joint working and joint delivery with services working with children and families.
- Improved integration and have multiple services delivering from Family Hubs.



## With our communities

We said we would work alongside our local voluntary and community sector colleagues to join up the offer to all children and families.

We have:

- Established 9 Family Panels across Northumberland where parents/carers come together to co-create family support services.
- Mapped voluntary and community services for families, and trained parents of SEND children to provide peer support.
- Developed Parent Champion and volunteering models and used the Frontline app to connect with families.
- Worked closely with our voluntary and community sector partners to link up provision, particularly in relation to the young people's offer.





## With our workforce

We said we will work together to ensure early help is everybody's business with an enabling, empowering multi-agency workforce development offer.

We have:

- Delivered a huge multi-agency training programme and specialised training involving hundreds of professionals working with children and families.
- Promoted a culture of respect, integrity, and equality in working with families.
- Held 8 engagement events for the workforce, promoting co-location and joint delivery across early help.
- Attended 5 Thriving Together network events over the last year (2024/25) engaging with 340 colleagues across the community sector.
- During the school holidays, we supported families in accessing the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, which provided not only nutritious meals but also a gateway to additional support within their local communities. The programme enabled families to participate in a variety of events and activities and children also benefited from camp activities that helped them build new friendships, develop new skills, and engage in a wide range of enriching and educational activities.





# Northumberland's Early Help and Prevention System

## Community Support (Green)

- Local businesses
- Informal peer support
- Faith-based organisations
- Voluntary & community services
- Community support (central icon)
- Online support
- Place & environment
- Family networks





## Universal Services (Blue)

- Schools
- Family Hubs
- Family Hubs Digital Offer
- GP / Primary Care
- Libraries (NCC)
- Early Years Settings
- Post-16 Support
- 0–19 Service (Health)
- Education Early Help Work (NCC)
- Youth Offer (VCS)
- Public Health Initiatives

## Targeted and Specialist Services (Blue)

- Job Centre (DWP)
- Mental Health Services
- Attendance and Exclusion Services (NCC)
- Northumberland Domestic Abuse Services
- Substance Misuse Services
- Probation Service
- Family Placement (NCC)
- Prisons
- Children's Residential Homes
- CAFCASS
- A&E / Secondary Care
- Alternative Education Provision
- Housing Services
- Early Help Front Door (NCC)
- Early Help Work (NCC)
- Special Educational Needs Support
- Allied Health Professionals
- Northumbria Police
- Social Work (NCC)
- Targeted Youth Offer (VCS)
- Communities First (NCC)
- Midwifery (NHCT)
- Public Health / Community Nurse (HDFT)
- Targeted Young People's Service (NCC)
- Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service



# Our Priorities 2025-2028

We know that over the next three years we need to focus our priorities on:

**“ *Every child born in Northumberland has the best start in life* ”**

### We will do this by (actions):

1. Ensuring every child maximises their potential with additional support targeted to those most in need
2. Ensuring high uptake of mandated universal wellbeing checks to identify and support those children who require additional support
3. Involving users when developing pathways and work with partners that impact on the wellbeing of parents and children such as poverty, housing and transport for example
4. Continuing to identify and support parents at the earliest possible opportunity, providing high quality perinatal mental health and parenting support
5. Working alongside the Institute of Health Equity to produce a plan to support this work

### We will measure this through:

- An increase in breastfeeding prevalence at 6-8 weeks
- A reduction in the % of mothers smoking at time of pregnancy
- Increased childhood vaccine take-up
- A reduction in obesity in early pregnancy
- A reduction in the level of obesity in children through the Healthy Weight Programme
- A reduced gap between disadvantaged children and their peers (Good Level of Development)
- The impact of Family Hub support such as Family Wellbeing support and parenting support programmes like PEEP
- Increase in take up of Healthy Start Scheme



# Our Priorities 2025-2028



*Children and young people are supported to have good emotional wellbeing, and mental and physical health*



### We will do this by (actions)

1. Ensuring teams working with children and young people are resilient by providing high quality training opportunities and robust supervision.
2. Regularly reviewing triage processes in early help system so that waiting times for access to support are kept on track and children and young people get the right service.
3. Promoting the Solihull Online Digital Offer that supports parents and teenagers to understand child and young person development.
4. Using data from the National Child Measurement Programme to facilitate targeted delivery in the county.
5. Further developing the preventative model of support for children and young people; Relaxed Kids, Charge Up, Children's Wellbeing Practitioners and Education Mental Health Practitioners, as well as building more relationships in and with our communities.

### We will measure this through:

- Reducing the number of hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in children (aged 0-14 years).
- Reduce number of hospital admissions due to substance misuse (15-24 years)
- Reduce admission episodes for alcohol specific conditions (Under 18 years).
- Oral health: Percentage of 5-year-olds with experience of visually obvious dental decay.
- Reduction in children and young people accessing specialist mental health support (Primary Mental Health and CYPS) due to impact of early intervention support.
- Increase numbers of children and young people accessing preventative based (Relaxed Kids, Charge Up, Children's Wellbeing Practitioners and Education Mental Health Practitioners).



# Our Priorities 2025-2028

**“ Reduce the gap in school readiness and improve engagement in education and good attendance, and pathways into education, training and employment ”**

### We will do this by (actions):

6. Ensure a strong partnership is in place to ensure integrated offers of support at developmental checks are regularly reviewed and maintained.
7. Develop an offer for families with children aged 0-5 that promotes the importance of education and school readiness.
8. Understand better why the reasons why parents choose to electively home educate, and develop a voluntary offer of support for those families who want it.
9. Ensure that attendance is everybody's business and education attendance is included in plans as a protective factor
10. Improving parental engagement with education and attendance.

### We will measure this through:

- Increase the number of children achieving a good level of development at the end of their EYFS journey aged 5 years.
- Monitoring the take-up funded early education entitlements at age 2 years for disadvantaged children, with an aspiration to be in line with or above the national average.
- Percentage of children with a good level of development up to 5 years old (DfE)
- Take-up rate of 3-4yo 15hrs childcare offer
- Increase in the number of children and young people attending school more than 90% of the time.
- Reduce the prevalence of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (ESBA).

**Northumberland County Council**  
County Hall, Morpeth,  
NE61 2EF