

Early Help Strategy

2025-2026



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Foreword



I am delighted to introduce the new Early Help strategy for Cheshire East.

This strategy ensures the effective delivery of the key priorities and outcomes which we all, as partners have a statutory responsibility to co-operate with and contribute to.

Cheshire East's Early Help approach focuses on changing the ways in which we work with families, using a restorative approach shifting the balance of power so that our work with children young people and families is led by their experience. The strategy is just the beginning.

Our early help work is critical in identifying emerging needs and galvanising multi-agency support to respond effectively and creatively during times of need, as well as being proactive and led by insights to offer the earliest possible intervention to support families. We will need to work with partners to embed the framework, develop skills and knowledge in our workforce, and ensure practitioners are confident with the approach.

We want partners and practitioners to feel well supported, knowledgeable and able to meet the needs of children and families as early as possible. We know this is the essential way in which we need to work together with our communities.

Theresa Leavy

**Interim Executive Director
Children's Services**

Background and Introduction

We are pleased to present the Cheshire East Early Help Strategy for 2025–2026. Our 2022–2026 Children and Young People’s Plan sets out a joint commitment that **TOGETHER** we will make Cheshire East a **great place to be young**. **TOGETHER** is our shared definition of co-production as it is inclusive to all.

In Cheshire East, we have strong communities, excellent schools and good opportunities for work and training. Our aim is for every child and family to get the help and support that they need as early as possible in order to succeed. Early help can make the biggest difference in doing this when it is given at the earliest opportunity.

The purpose of this strategy is to present how partners will deliver services to enable children, families and carers to maximise their potential, keep them safe, and to prevent escalation to statutory services.

The strategy sets out the ambition of all the partners in Cheshire East to provide **the right help at the right time**. This will enable children to thrive within their family environment and improve their long-term outcomes and goals. We want to achieve a **Brighter Future Together**.



A challenging future

Cheshire East Council is responsible for providing approximately 500 local public services across an area of over 1,100km² for more than 412,500 residents, across a mix of rural and urban environments.

Cheshire East Council, like many other councils across the country, have been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. This has resulted, in part, from increased demand and costs for special educational needs. The borough has seen significant growth in the number of pupils with additional needs and limited in-borough specialist provisions for SEND, which has not been met by an increase in high-needs funding. A significant deficit has been the consequence. In addition to the financial pressures being experienced by councils across the country; increased demand and complexity of need for adult social care and children's services, with high inflation and interest rates over the last year affecting service delivery and borrowing costs.

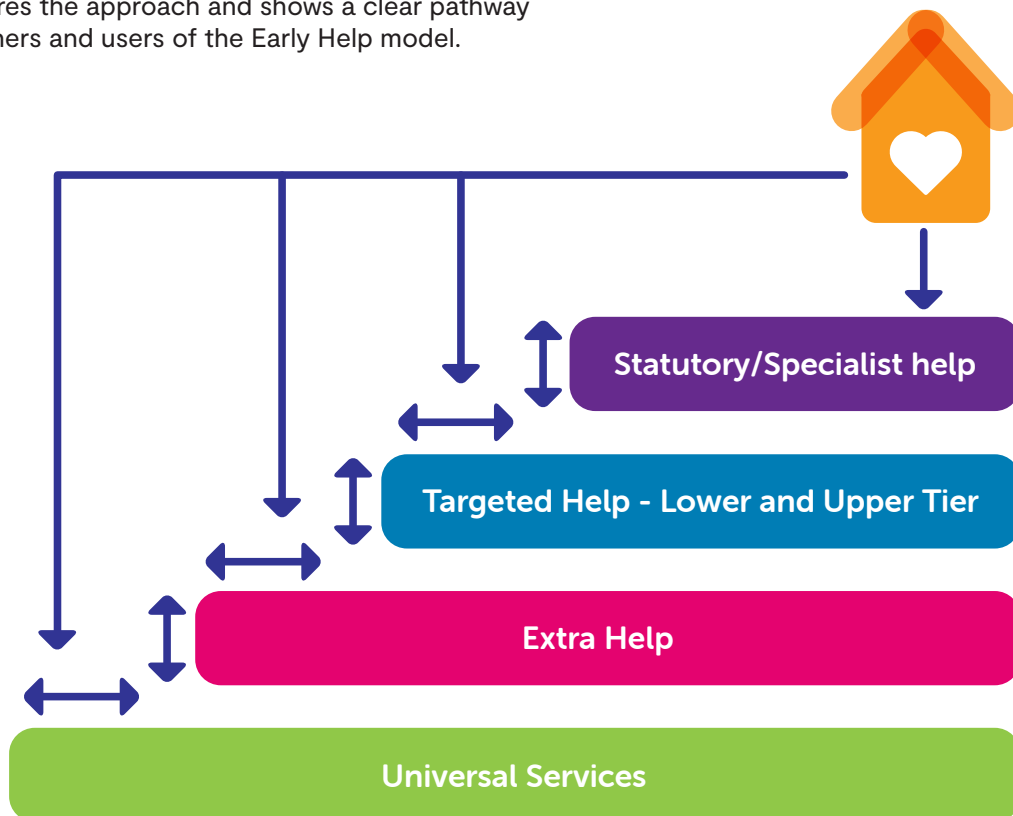


What is early help?

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.

Our principles as a partnership set out our commitment to work together to consider the needs of the whole family in our Early Help model. A lead practitioner from the partnership ensures that families receive a coordinated approach to their support, fully understanding the needs, views and wishes of the children and put them at the heart of the support and services they receive.

Professionals across Cheshire East work collaboratively to deliver services for children and families. The diagram below captures the approach and shows a clear pathway for practitioners and users of the Early Help model.



Cheshire East in Context



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Credit: 5

Population

Cheshire East population¹
412,500

Under 18 population²
80,181

Under 5 population³
20,346

¹ Current Facts and Figures (cheshireeast.gov.uk)

² Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland: mid-2022

³ Business Intelligence team Universal registrations report PowerBi



Education

69%

of children at age 5 achieved a **Good Level of Development (GLD)**

National 68%

63%

of children achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined) at the end of Key Stage 2

National 61%

85%

of children achieved the expected standard on the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1

National 80%

86.6%

of young people who were recorded to be in sustained education, employment & apprenticeships

National 93.9%*

⁶ Explore our statistics and data - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

*To be updated with new data release.



Deprivation

14.7%

of children in Cheshire East are in **low-income** families⁴

National average 20.1%, 2022

16.5%

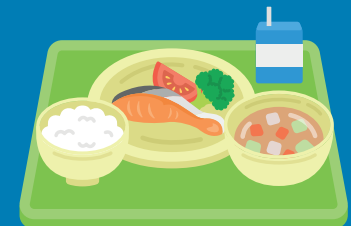
of children in Cheshire East in **primary schools** are entitled to and claiming free school meals⁵

15.3%

of children in Cheshire East in **secondary schools** are entitled to and claiming free school meals⁵

⁴ Children in low income families: local area statistics 2014 to 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁵ https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics



Deprivation in Cheshire East

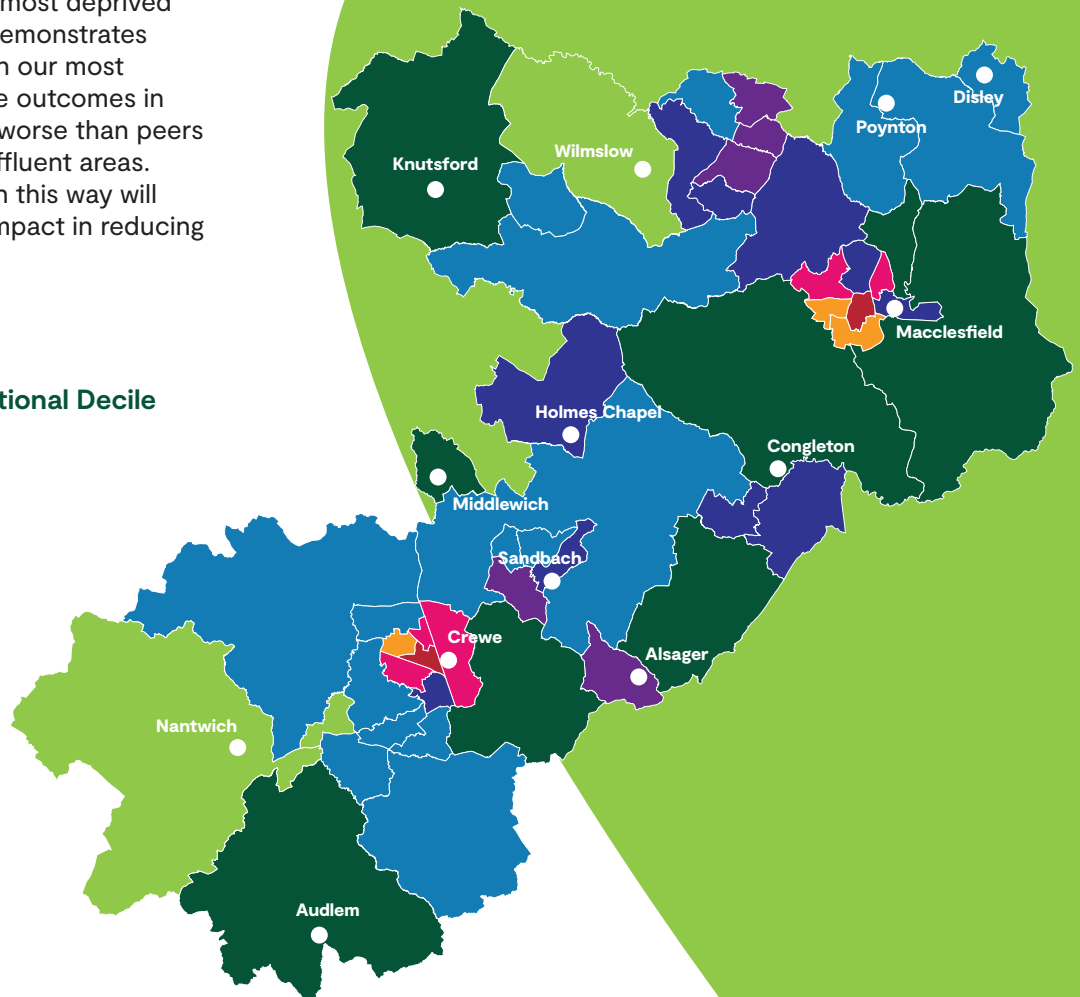
We want Cheshire East to be a great place to be young for all our children and young people and for the vast majority this is the case. Most children in Cheshire East have a level of wellbeing and attainment that is equal to and often higher than the national average.

In Cheshire East we have 244 Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Of the 244 only 36 are classed by the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) as being in the 0-30% most deprived. The north locality has 12 LSOAs in the 0-30% most deprived across Wilmslow, Knutsford, and Macclesfield. The south locality has 24 of which 20 are in the Crewe area and the others across Alsager, Middlewich, Sandbach and Nantwich. This model will allow us more flexibility to target our offer to the families that most need our support across all of our most deprived LSOAs. Our Tartan Rug demonstrates that families who reside in our most disadvantaged areas have outcomes in numerous areas that are worse than peers who reside in our more affluent areas. Targeting our resources in this way will bring about the biggest impact in reducing inequalities.



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Credit: SolStock

LSOA Deprivation - National Decile



Together

TOGETHER in Cheshire East

TOGETHER is our shared definition of coproduction in Cheshire East because it is inclusive to all.

- T**eamwork when designing, delivering and evaluating individual support and services
- O**pen-minded ideas and discussions
- G**enuine communication for all parties involved
- E**qual partners help to shape and improve support for all
- T**rust each other to make the right decisions
- H**onest
- E**ngage and empower children, young people, adults and families
- R**espect for everyone's views and opinions



Working **TOGETHER** as equal partners towards a common goal for all of our children, young people and adults living in Cheshire East.

Our **TOGETHER** Values and Commitment

We will:

- Listen to your views
- Communicate honestly
- Trust each other
- Be person centered
- Adapt to people's needs
- Respect and value all opinions
- Do what we say we will

We won't:

- Use jargon or acronyms
- Give too much information
- Rush meetings
- Take too long to complete our actions
- Be judgemental

Here is some further information about our four key principles of **TOGETHER** going forward, and who is involved in delivering that.

Co-Involvement

We will involve and engage with you from the very start to make you aware of changes to services and policy. Your needs will be identified and views are welcomed at every stage.



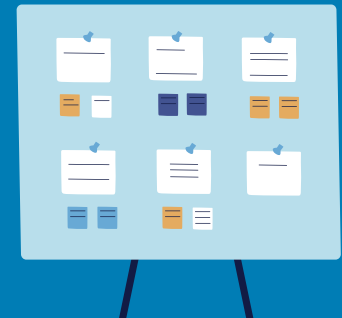
Co-Design

We will work closely with you to plan and design your individual support, services, and policy making sure that children, young people, adults and families are at the centre of those services.



Co-Delivery

We will plan and deliver services together ensuring your voice is heard and acted on at every stage.



Co-Evaluation

We offer opportunities for feedback so that we can improve your experience.



Key Achievements and Timeline

2022-2024



Senior Mental Health Lead uptake in Cheshire East

We have successfully promoted the uptake of training for school based senior mental health leads (SMHL) through our Cheshire East Senior Mental Health Lead Network and Wellbeing for Education Service. The DfE data in September 2024 showed SMHL uptake in Cheshire East as 138 of 160 eligible settings (86%). These figures are compared to 76% across the Northwest, and approximately 76% of state-funded schools and colleges nationally.

We have achieved our ambition of developing **6 Family Hubs**.

We have successfully drawn down the maximum amount of funding in 2023/2024 for the **Supporting Families Programme**. The latest iteration of the programme has bought in just over £3 million to the Local Authority.

We now have an operational **Early Years Forum**, which has the purpose of working as a multi-agency team to drive inclusive early support for our youngest children (0-4 years) with identified SEND needs.

iThrive

We have commissioned the National i-THRIVE Programme Team to facilitate a series of workshops with a focus on coproduction and implementation of our Cheshire East i-THRIVE plan. In September 2024, cross sector partners came together to focus on leading system wide transformation. In November 2024, our first large scale co-production event took place at Macclesfield Town Hall. Work is underway to analyse feedback data in order to inform priorities and implementation planning.

Young Carer's

In August 2023, a new assessment service was introduced for Young Carers. This has enabled teams within Cheshire East to share knowledge, developing a better understanding of the needs of the Young Carer and their family situation. It has encouraged engagement from other Teams earlier on in their support, through better awareness of the needs of Young Carers, and increased referrals. Support plans have a broader range of signposting to other sources of support available in Cheshire East. Awareness and support for Young Carers has improved in schools across the locality and increased engagement of school in their support.

Partnership Family Help Officers

These roles provide advice, support and guidance to practitioners from across the partnership in Cheshire East with regards to Early Help. This allows for assessments, plans and interventions to be strengthened using a strengths-based approach to supporting families. We know families want to be supported within their communities and by those who know them best. Through collaborative working this means more families are getting the right help at the right time.

Solihull Approach

As part of the Family Hub Transformation, Cheshire East have commissioned a range of free online resources for parents and carers in partnership with 'In Our Place'. These resources centre around understanding children's development and place a focus on the importance of emotional health and wellbeing for the whole family.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) Spring 2022

Within our Family Help Service, we have since 2022 launched a new group work offer for children and their parents/carers. This group programme is called Positive Adverse Childhood Experiences (PAACE). The group aims to support people living with the impact of their adverse childhood experiences (ACE's), to develop alternative strategies to manage their emotions, understand the importance of attachments and to work towards building their self esteem and resilience.

Healthy Young Minds

Healthy Young Minds offers an accessible, inclusive service aimed at building resilience in children and young people (CYP) and their families, to address emotional wellbeing issues, at the earliest opportunity, to enable CYP to live their best lives in the future. Healthy Young Minds will run from 2024 to 2029 (with an option to extend to 2031) services are provided by Just Drop In (North), Visyon (South) and CVS Cheshire East who will oversee the establishment of a HYM Alliance bringing together Local Authority, Cheshire East Voluntary sector, Education and Health to work collaboratively together in Alliance for the benefit of children and young people.



Every contact counts

Every Contact Counts

Is a consistent approach in meeting the needs of children and families through a partnership approach whichever front door a family presents at to access services.

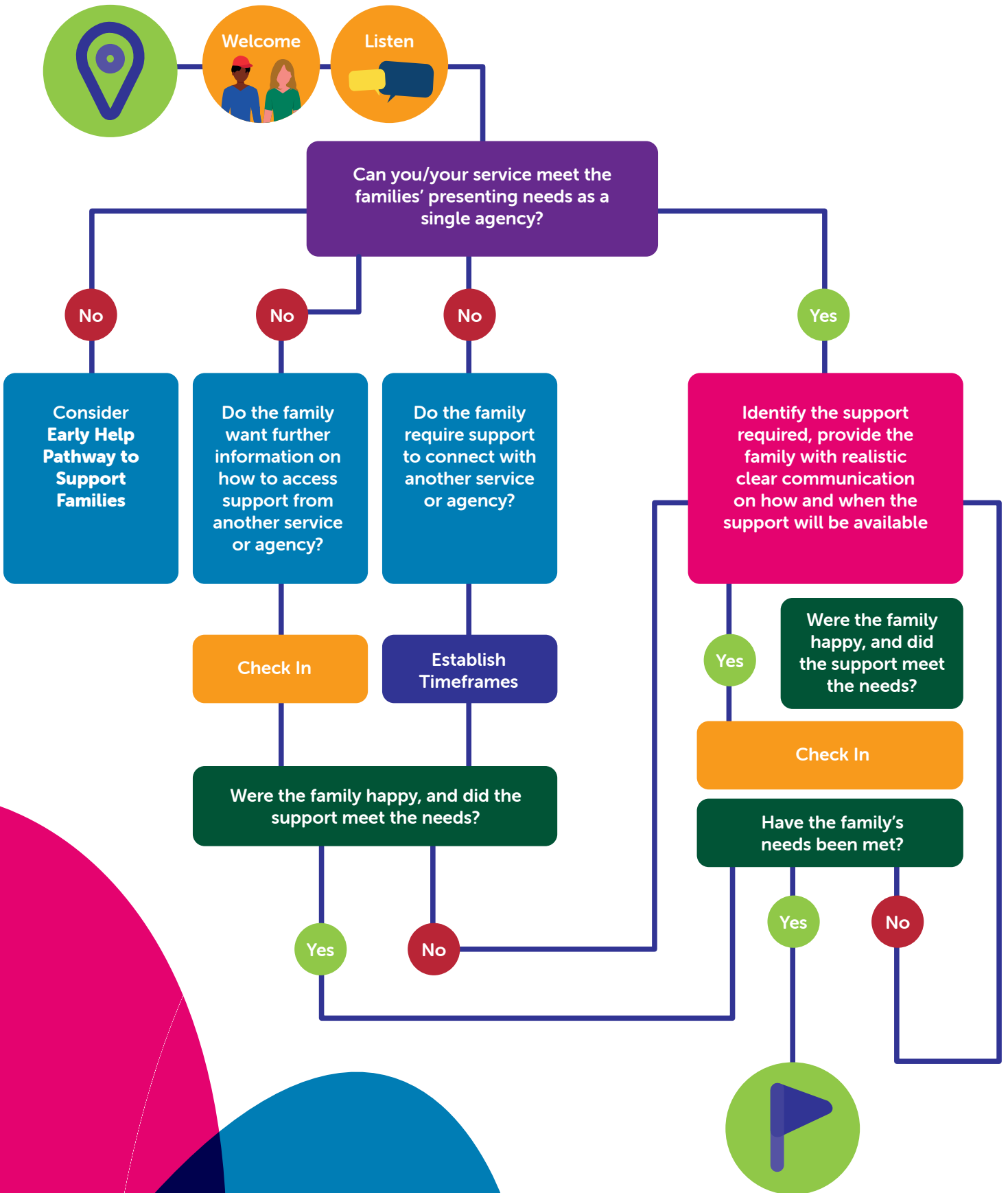
Our principles and practices align with the NHS/Health approach Making Every Contact Count (MECC), taking this MECC approach further across the wider partnership.

Making Every Contact Count (MECC) – NHS/Health Approach

Making Every Contact Count (MECC) is about upskilling the workforce to recognise and act on all opportunities to support individuals improve their health and wellbeing. MECC is a behaviour change approach that encourages positive health and wellbeing choices through individual, organisational and environmental interactions.



Every contact counts



Collaboratives

We have formed eight collaborative areas across the Borough to establish local targeted action plans. These have and will continue to be informed by data and intelligence to improve the way that we work together, prevent duplication and identify the key areas of focus to have a positive impact on the outcomes of children and families.



Collaborative Areas

North Locality

- Congleton
- Macclesfield North
- Macclesfield South
- Wilmslow & Knutsford

South Locality

- Crewe North
- Crewe South
- Nantwich & Rural
- Sandbach/ Alsager/ Middlewich



Collaboratives

March 2023

Mapping and decisions on the collaborative areas.

April 2023 – May 2023

Data was gathered and shared internally (IoD, Public Health, Education, Early Years, SEND, Children's Social Care)

September 2023 – October 2023

Face to Face collaborative events took place (data was shared and area priorities identified).

July 2023

Virtual Launch Events to discuss the approach and next steps.

December 2023

Virtual Check In events took place with all collaboratives (ToR discussion).

January 2024 – February 2024

Follow up face to face meetings. Next steps were discussed and the launch of task and finish groups.

September 2024 – December 2024

Action plans to be formally drafted and the continuation of meetings to determine next steps with regards to the priorities chosen.

April 2024 – May 2024

Further face to face meetings (Tasks and Finish groups to continue and development of action plans).

Our priorities for 2024-2026

The Children and Young Peoples Plan 2022-2026 was developed **TOGETHER** with Cheshire East Youth Council and the Children and Young People’s Trust. The Early Help Strategy is aligned with the Children and Young People’s Plan to provide universal services, prevention and timely targeted support that young people and families need; thus, improving outcomes for all children and young people in the following seven outcomes areas.

Children and young people we care for are able to reach their full potential.



Children and young people feel and are safe.




Children and young people feel happy and experience good mental health and wellbeing.



Children and young people are healthy and make good choices.



Children and young people with additional needs have the support they need to achieve and be happy.



Children and young people have earlier access to support when they need it.



Children and young people leave school with the best skills and qualifications they can achieve and the life skills they need to thrive in adulthood.



Priorities/KPIs

Outcome 1: Children and young people we care for are happy and able to achieve their full potential

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
Carers have access to information in the same way that a biological parent would.	Carers will tell us they have timely access to information for our cared for children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of children in Cheshire East which are cared for. Number of cared for children which have school attendance under 90%/50%. Number of cared for children which are on a part time timetable. Number of cared for children suspended/permanently excluded. Attainment for our cared for children from GLD (attainment of a good level of development) through to post 16.
	Improved engagement of carers with universal services (across Family Hubs, Health, Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS)).	
Ensure our cared for children have enhanced transitions in all phases of education.	Schools tell us they have all the information required to ensure an enhanced and positive transition for our cared for children.	
	Our cared for children tell us they were supported and had a positive transition experience.	
	Reduction in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans issued to our cared for children following transitions.	
	Reduction in the number of cared for children on part time timetables.	
	Reduction in the number of exclusions for our cared for children.	
	Improved school attendance for our cared for children.	
All professionals working with children, young people and families access the free-of-charge Sollihull training courses on Understanding Attachment, Understanding Brain Development, and Understanding Trauma. This is also part of mandatory induction training for any future employees and volunteers.	Our cared for children feel that professionals who work with them offer support and guidance with their health and wellbeing.	
	All partner agencies monitor compliance within their service and ensure all employees and volunteers have completed and implemented the Sollihull Training.	
Ensure our cared for children are prepared to be resilient and well individuals into adulthood that can actively contribute to society.	Our cared for children report knowing where and how to access support when needed.	
Cared For Children influence services planned to support them through participation work to capture their voice and experiences to shape future delivery of services.	Regular and sustained engagement to capture the voice of the child and clear evidence of "you said, we did".	
Our care leavers have easy access to information and advice in a timely way.	Our cared for children tell us they feel supported and have the information and advice they require.	

Outcome 2: Children and young people feel safe

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
<p>The partnership will work together to ensure there is a robust Personal, Social and Health Education offer that reflects the local contextual safeguarding concerns.</p> <p>The eight collaborative partnership areas will align closely with the Safer Cheshire East Partnership (SCEP) and be the conduit to sharing contextual safeguarding information on a local needs led basis.</p>	<p>Practitioners are knowledgeable about contextual safeguarding issues in their area and feel confident to talk to children about them.</p> <p>Parents and carers feel more confident to support children to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>Children and young people will report being able to seek help and support from a trusted adult.</p> <p>Children and young people will have an understanding of contextual safeguarding and know how to keep themselves safe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Borough wide crime/ASB data. · Missing from home data.
<p>The partnership will ensure that there is a differentiated Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) offer in place across all settings to support our children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).</p>	<p>Professionals are confident to adapting the curriculum to provide an inclusive offer. All children will have access to a Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and a Relationships, Health and Sex Education (RHSE) which is inclusive and differentiated to support all children (including those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)).</p>	
<p>All services across the partnership to ensure that where a risk is identified a plan is in place which is inline with our Thresholds of Need document.</p>	<p>Increase in the number of Early Help plans in place across the partnership.</p>	
<p>All services have an awareness of the Safer Cheshire East Partnership (SCEP) plan, and strategies and resources which are available are promoted and signposted too.</p>	<p>There will an increase the Children and Young People being aware of and accessing the range of strategies available to support them to keep and be safe.</p>	

Links

[Safer Cheshire East Partnership – SCEP \(Safer Cheshire East Partnership\)](#)

[Hollie Guard – Personal Safety App – Hollie Guard App](#)

Outcome 3: Children and young people are happy and experience good mental health and wellbeing

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
We will begin to embed the i-Thrive framework across the partnership to emphasise prevention and early promotion of mental health and wellbeing.	Practitioners are knowledgeable of the offer of prevention and early intervention available to support the mental health and wellbeing of our children and young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of schools across all phases which have a nominated Senior Mental Health Lead. Number of professionals who are going to be engaged with at each stage of the iThrive implementation.
The partnership, including Senior Mental Health Leads (SMHLs) from all education settings, will work together to ensure children and young people have access to a range of support and early interventions, reducing escalation and the need for specialist mental health services.	All education settings will have a nominated Senior Mental Health Lead.	
	Children and young people say that they are listened to and supported by trusted adults and are supported to gain advice and early intervention for their mental health and wellbeing at the right time.	
	Parents and carers feel more confident to support their child's mental health and wellbeing and know where to go to gain advice and early intervention.	
We will continue to embed our Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) in all of our schools and settings.	All education settings will have a nominated Senior Mental Health Lead.	
	Children and young people say that they are listened to and supported by trusted adults and are supported to gain advice and early intervention for their mental health and wellbeing at the right time.	
	Parents and carers feel more confident to support their child's mental health and wellbeing and know where to go to gain advice and early intervention.	
We will ensure that all of our children and young people are informed of and have access to a range of early interventions to support their mental health and wellbeing which will prevent difficulties escalating and requiring specialist mental health services.	Children and young people say that they are listened to and supported by trusted adults and are supported to gain advice and early intervention for their mental health and wellbeing at the right time.	
	Parents and carers feel more confident to support their child's mental health and wellbeing and know where to go to gain advice and early intervention	
Professionals are aware that any therapeutic support requirements for any children and young people who have been previously cared and now subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) for are making use of Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund.	Increased access of support funds which the local authority has access too.	
	All staff are aware of the support available for our children and young people previously cared for and/or special guardianship order cases.	
Ensuring robust early identification and support for children and young people' social and emotional wellbeing in our schools and settings.	Increase in the number of school staff who are ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistance) trained.	

Links

[Joint Strategic Needs Assessment - JSNA](#)

Outcome 4: Children and young people are healthy and make good choices

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
Our children and young people are empowered to look after themselves and make good choices.	Health inequalities across Cheshire East should reduce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Immunisation data. · Contact Hub data. · Overweight/Obesity data at reception and at the end of primary (age 10-11). · Smoking and vaping data for Cheshire East. · A&E presentations and admissions. · Teenage pregnancy rates in Cheshire East. · Substance misuse data in Cheshire East. · GP registrations. · Dental registrations.
Access to consistent universal advice and support (telephone advice and support, peer support).	Increased use of the Contact Hub.	
Professionals working with our most disadvantaged children and young people work to seek and ensure relevant advice and support.	Increased uptake across the partnership of Early Help plans. We are made aware of plans which are being led by health and education professionals.	
Improved access to health and leisure activities.		
Develop further community health access through our collaborative working.	Improved outcomes for our children and young people.	
Improved access to health services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) with more available appointments in community venues.	<p>Reduction in children with additional needs being Home Educated.</p> <p>Reduction in non-attended appointments.</p>	

Links

[Live Well Cheshire East – Live Well](#)

[Family Hubs – Family Hub Digital Offer](#)

Outcome 5: Children and young people leave school with the best skills and qualifications they can achieve and life skills

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
Supporting regular attendance at school is everybody's business (any agency working with Children and Families should enquire about school attendance), and if below 95% seek to understand the barriers and ensure that any work completed is documented in the support plan.	Increase in the number of Early Help plans across the partnership in place to support and improve school attendance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · School attendance rates (under 90%/under 50%) for children and young people in Cheshire East. · GLD for Cheshire East (those children that achieve a good level of development). · GLD for Cheshire East for those children living in our most deprived areas. · The number of young people in Cheshire East which are classified as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). · The number of young people in Cheshire East which are classified as Risk of NEET indicator (RONI).
All partner agencies monitor compliance within their service and ensure all employees and volunteers have completed the free of charge attendance training which is on offer.	Increase in the number of professionals accessing attendance training available.	
Our vulnerable cohorts of children and young people have enhanced support with regards to work experience, apprenticeships and supported internships.	Reduction in the number of children and young people in our RONI – Risk of NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training) Indicator.	
	Increase in the take up (amongst our vulnerable cohorts) of work experience, apprenticeships and supported internships. Reduction in our NEET/RONI cohort.	
Enhanced transitions at all phases of education.	Children and Young People's additional needs will be identified earlier.	
All agencies across the partnership need to consider how they can target services to best meet the needs of their most disadvantaged.	All indicators for our disadvantaged children and young people will improve.	

Outcome 6: Children and young people with additional needs have the support they need to achieve and be happy

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
<p>Children and Young People with SEND influence services planned to support them through participation work to capture their voice and experiences to shape future delivery of services.</p>	<p>Regular and sustained engagement to capture the voice of the child and clear evidence of “you said, we did.”</p> <p>Our Parent Carer Forum will report an increase in user satisfaction with inclusive provision across the borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Number of schools in Cheshire East that have an ELSA trained member of staff. · Number of children in Cheshire East with an EHCP. · Number of children in Cheshire East with an EHCP which are on a Part Time Timetable. · Number of children in Cheshire East with an EHCP which have been permanently excluded/suspended.
<p>All services which operate within Cheshire East for Children and Young People are inclusive. Service Leads should always seek to identify barriers to access and make reasonable adjustments to improve access to services for our Children and Young People (and their families) with SEND.</p>	<p>Children and Young People tell us they like/enjoy accessing services with their peers.</p>	
<p>All staff across the partnership have a basic awareness of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and understand how to make reasonable adjustments to be inclusive.</p>	<p>Reduction in children with additional needs being on a PTT (Part Time Timetable)/ Suspensions</p>	
<p>The partnership workforce is confident to identify and support children and young people at the earliest opportunity where SEND concerns are recognised. All staff across the partnership will have an awareness and understanding of the graduated approach.</p>	<p>There is an increase in children and young people in receipt of support.</p>	

Outcome 7: Children and young people have earlier access to support when they need it

How do we support this outcome with Early Help?	How will we know if we are successful?	Baseline Data
All services from across the partnership ensure all professionals working with children, young people and families have an awareness, can promote and signpost to services that are available.	An effective Early Help System and Family Hub Network is in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Number of Early Help plans which are open in Cheshire East. · The breakdown across services of open Early Help plans across the partnership.
The Every Contact Counts approach is embedded across the partnership.	<p>Improved knowledge across Cheshire East of our Early Help System.</p> <p>Professionals from across the partnership liaise and work with each other across services.</p>	
Local Offer/Live Well/Family Hub Digital Offer is well advertised and well accessed.	<p>Children, young people and families report consistent and accurate access to advice and information.</p> <p>Children, young people and families report knowing where to access information and advice.</p> <p>Children, young people and families report gaining support in the right place and at the right time.</p>	
Where the partnership have a waiting list, there is a robust triage process to ensure that children and young people are seen based on a prioritisation of need.		
Professionals and services from across the partnership are aware of how to identify a Young Carer and where support and advice is available.	Increase in the number of Young Carer's identified across Cheshire East.	

Links

[Live Well Cheshire East – Live Well](#)

[Family Hubs – Family Hub Digital Offer](#)

[Get help for your symptoms - NHS 111 – NHS 111](#)

Partnerships



