

West Cheshire Early Help Strategy 2021-24

Foreword

This strategy is a starting point for all West Cheshire strategic partners to consider how early help, delivered in partnership with children, young people and families can improve life chances, particularly for families experiencing complex and multiple difficulties. This means adopting a whole systems approach to service delivery to ensure families receive early help as soon as difficulties emerge.

Evidence and local experience show that providing help at the earliest stage and the earliest age, working in partnership with the family, increasing the reach of children centres, tackling the root causes of problems, and effectively targeting support makes the biggest difference. This needs partners, including the Council, Health, early year's education professionals and the voluntary sector, to work together.

This Early Help Strategy supports and enhances children and families services strategies that currently exist within Cheshire West and Chester Council and describes the most important issues for us relating to early help.

Our priority is to identify, understand and respond quickly to the needs of children, young people and their families. Consistent assessment processes across all early help agencies in west Cheshire will support people to achieve their full potential. Our interventions will help avoid the escalation of problems that many face, will support families to become more resilient and will help them to resolve their problems, avoiding the need for acute services. Ensuring the right early help and prevention services are in place to support at the earliest stage is true now more than ever following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our residents have highlighted that getting the best start in life is important to them and this has been recognised as a council priority since 2016. We all recognise that getting the right early help will open up opportunities later in life. Our ambition is for children and families to achieve the best possible outcomes and through this strategy we are committed to delivering effective prevention and early intervention for all who need us.

Councillor Robert Cernik

Cabinet Member for Children and Families
Cheshire West and Chester Council

National context

Early help is recognised as critical to supporting children to reach their full potential. Ofsted published a thematic inspection of how local partnerships are delivery early help in March 2015. It estimated that over two million children in the UK today are living in difficult family circumstances. It is commonly agreed that investment in early help is effective in meeting the needs of many children and families prior to specialist and acute service intervention as well as producing cost savings overall.

Investing and developing a whole systems approach to child and family practice within early help is key to achieving a workforce that is targeted and impactful and improves outcomes for children at a local level. Our local approach is reflective of the national picture driving forward innovative systems changes that have a significant impact on the lives of our most vulnerable through addressing inequality disadvantage. This drive has been reflected nationally drawing on research which has meaningfully influenced and shaped how we create services at a local level.

Our research and values-based approach has been drawn from the findings from a range of reports and best practice. This includes the Marmot Review 2010 and the 10 Years On review (February 2020), The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning (Dame Clare Tickell, March 2011), Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child-Centred System (May 2011), the Children's Commissioner: Measuring the Number of Vulnerable Children in England, (July 2017), Case for Change independent review (2021) and a range of research from the Early Intervention Foundation.

The follow up to the initial Marmot Review, 10 Years On (2020), found that there is more to do by way of health inequalities, as they are increasing, particularly for those living in more deprived areas. Health is also declining for the population as a whole. The social determinants of health include giving every child the best start in life, and enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives, key determinants that this strategy will support for our residents and communities by offering the right support at the earliest possible time. The Early Years: Foundation for Life, Health and Learning report states that Early Intervention can come at any of the key points in life, to break the cycle and ensuring that individuals are school ready, life ready, then child ready. It is important for children to become adults who have the social and emotional capability to understand the impacts of drug and alcohol misuse, crime and domestic and other violence. This research will help inform this strategy's vision to provide early help and prevention services to those who need it most, at the time they first need it.

The recommendations from the Munro Review have been taken forward nationally and local authorities and their partners have where possible focused on early help and prevention services for families. The Munro Review states that the early help system should be child-centred and should help children and families by working with them to find the solutions which work best for individual families. The system needs to offer equal variety in response to varied circumstances.

Learning for organisations needs to be ongoing and developed further as the Early Intervention Foundation reports a lack of evidence around what support works for families who are facing particular problems, such as domestic abuse or parental substance misuse. This is due to lack of centrally commissioned research, but services could also attempt to evaluate their programmes and what works to support this gap and future learning.

The Case for Change independent review (2021), argues that more needs to be done to help families and to build not break relationships. In the past 10 years (2009/10 – 2019/20) there has been an increase in the number of children in the care system and there has been an increase in statutory spending nationally, with a decrease in non-statutory spending. It is important for there to be a focus on early help and prevention services, so that pressure on statutory services can be eased and councils can afford for funding to be more evenly balanced. The review found that a whole family approach to child protection has been effective at preventing children becoming looked after and reducing the numbers on Child Protection Plans. Similar results have been shown, using this approach at Cheshire West, therefore, the Early Help and Prevention Service will continue to push this model to get the best possible results.

In 2017, the Children's Commissioner for England published the report On Measuring the Number of Vulnerable Children in England, which identified 32 groups of children in England that were categorised as vulnerable. The report offered a number of recommendations, including that any child who needs it can access early support for problems when they first start to emerge. This could include parenting support or a short course of therapy.

In addition to research and reports, action has been taken to provide early help and preventative support to families who need it. The national Supporting Families programme (formerly known as Troubled Families) was first introduced in 2012. The programme has generated a cultural shift in how complex families are worked with. Supporting Families helps thousands of families across England to get the help they need to address multiple disadvantages through a whole family approach, delivered by keyworkers, working for local authorities and their partners.

In 2021-22, the Supporting Families programme will focus on building the resilience of vulnerable families, and on enabling system change locally and nationally. This means ensuring that every area has joined up, efficient local services, able to identify families in need and provide the right support at the right time. Despite the effects of Covid-19 on services, in 2020-21 over 51,000 families nationally had achieved significant and sustained progress across all their headline problems during the pandemic.

The Early Intervention Foundation has published reports on the impact of COVID-19. It suggests that early intervention support need to level up public spending and adapt to virtual and digital provision. Concerns among professionals are that the full extent of the hardships faced by and impact on families during the pandemic have not yet become apparent, so it is important that this strategy considers the response to

COVID-19 for families and ensuring that residents are educated and empowered to raise any issues and supported by services that respond appropriately to needs.

The effects of COVID-19 on children, young people, and families:

NEET – The percentage of all young people in the UK who were not in education, employment or training January to March 2021 was estimated at 10.6%, which is a record low, however these figures are likely significantly impacted upon by the effect of Covid and the ability to record NEET figures during lockdown periods.

Mental health and wellbeing – Young people who reported that their well-being was being affected were much more likely than either those aged 30 to 59 years or those aged 60 years and over to report being bored (76%) and lonely (51%); they were also much more likely to say the lockdown was making their mental health worse (42%). A high and rising proportion of low-income families have experienced a mental or physical health problem as a result of the pandemic – up from 48 per cent between May and July to 56 per cent between September and November 2020.

Poverty – Across the UK, 200,000 children shifted into poverty during the pandemic in 2020 and the Universal Credit reduction in April 2021 pushed even more children into poverty.

Domestic Abuse – In March, April, May and June 2020, there was an average increase of 4,227 in domestic abuse offences, compared to that of 2019. Additionally, there was an increase of 5,256 from March to May 2020, during the first lockdown.

IT'S TIME TO ACT report – This report recommends investing in infrastructure that supports early intervention, having found that there have been higher rates of Covid-19 absence in secondary schools and for those living in areas of deprivation, persistent absence is more prevalent in those experiencing disadvantage. Those missing one day a week or more of school are more likely to experience the risk factors for permanent exclusion.

The report also finds evidence that children below the statutory threshold for support are, during Covid, likely to be experiencing more disadvantage than before the pandemic.

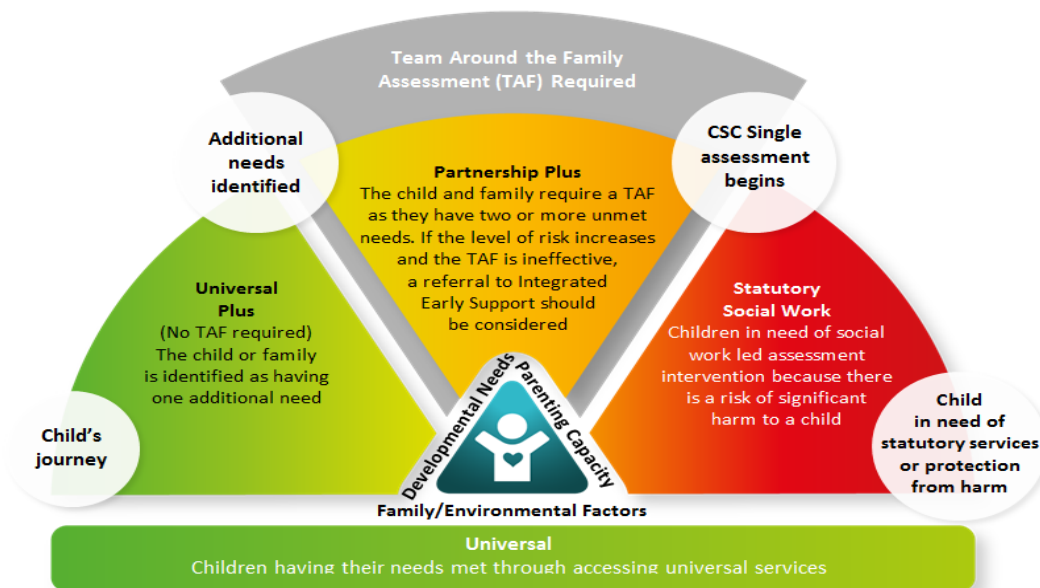
Local Context:

Prevention is a key theme in the Cheshire West and Chester Council Plan 2020-24 and the council has committed to invest in prevention during this period. We will work with services across the council and partner agencies to join up services for children and families, across services including early help, education, youth services, special educational needs, children's social care and health. We will focus on the principles of early help, prevention and the effective use of data and engagement with families to ensure effective use of provisions.

What is early help in Cheshire West and Chester?

Early help is intervening as soon as possible to tackle issues emerging for children, young people and their families. Although research shows that the most impact can be made during a child's early years, problems may emerge at any point throughout a child's life. Effective intervention may therefore be offered at any point in a child or young person's life in order to prevent problems from being entrenched or escalating. Evidence also suggests that an early response is more effective and cost efficient than a later acute one.

Early help is a process which may occur at any point in a child or young person's life. The continuum of need here in Cheshire West and Chester defines the universal plus and partnership plus responses to addressing unmet need.



To support earlier identification and intervention, Safeguarding Children Partnership and Children's Trust partners are committed to using the Team Around the Family approach to the assessment of the needs of children, young people and their families. Each practitioner has an individual responsibility for commencing a TAF where additional needs are identified. This does not necessarily mean that this practitioner will go on to be the lead professional for a resultant plan. The lead professional needs to be the right one for the child and their family.

Partner engagement with TAF, regardless of the fact it is not a statutory assessment is critical to the child and their family. It is recognised that preventative intervention may reduce the need for further intervention in the future. Over time, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of TAF assessments initiated by partner agencies compared to internal Early Help and Prevention services within the Council, particularly due to increases in initiations within education and through Starting Well.

A Team Around the Family plan should be developed following the completion of the assessment and agreed at a multi-agency TAF meeting.

In 2020-21 there was a reduction from the previous year of over 25% in the number of contacts received progressing to Early Help, with an 18% reduction in TAFs initiated during the year. At the same time there was a 20% increase in Children's Social Care referrals, reflecting the impact of Covid-19 and focus on statutory services in the initial stages. It is expected that proportions will return to previous levels during 2021-22.

Features of effective early help

Learning from local serious case reviews has informed practice. Cases show that early help must be informed by robust assessments, using appropriate assessment tools. Accurate application of threshold of the continuum of need is critical to ensure that families receive the right support. Robust supervision in early help cases is critical to support workers in their practice. Supervision and case discussions must develop confidence in practitioners that professional curiosity underpins risk assessment and risk management. Explanation of the symptoms (presenting behaviours) should always be accompanied with hypotheses as to the cause. Robust information sharing is key to a strong multi-agency approach to early help.

Key features of early help include:

- A multi-agency and integrated response that brings a range of expertise through a Team Around the Family approach.
- A relationship with a trusted lead professional who can effectively engage the child and their family and coordinate the support needed from other agencies.
- An approach that empowers the family and helps them to resolve their own challenges and builds resilience for their future. This includes support to move into employment.
- An approach that sees the child or young person's needs in the wider family context.
- Accessible to all.

Our Way of Working

Our Way of Working is about developing a common and consistent approach to working with families. It has been researched and driven forward by the Children's Trust and has a strong preventative approach at all levels across the continuum of need. It is based on shared language and shared understanding across all partners. Many of the families we work with can experience a broad range of difficulties that need support and interventions. We want to work with them in a new, integrated and targeted way to ensure lasting solutions to improve resilience and emotional health and wellbeing.

This approach builds on what children and families have told us around their wishes for the services they receive, which are that service providers:

- Listen and get to know them
- See them as an individual, not just a number, patient or case
- Do not ever judge or assume
- Be reliable, transparent, honest, supportive and trustworthy
- Take a whole family approach – not one size fits all

Through working in a trauma informed way, motivational interviewing is the vehicle we will adopt to engage meaningfully with families in change. It means children and families are able to:

- Tell their story once
- Have a one-page profile
- Ensure the child/young person is the focus
- Ensure that we respond in way that is motivational and innovative to meet their needs
- Bring all services together to make decisions
- Ensures clear communication and that we see the whole picture

An Independent Evaluation of Our Way of Working took place in 2021 and found that the changes in practice to work in a more trauma-informed way are positively impacting on children and families. Benefits include increased engagement, a stronger and more open therapeutic relationship, and empowering families to identify and take ownership of what needs to change. Positive outcomes for children and families are starting to be seen in a range of areas, including physical health, mental health, parenting strategies, communication, safeguarding, reduced school exclusions.

Our Way of Working gives professionals a deeper understanding of historic and current traumas experienced by children and families and there is emerging evidence that the programme changes the nature of the therapeutic relationship with children and families. Our Way of Working has increased pertinence because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The evaluation involved interviews with stakeholders across the partnership. Interviewees were positive about all aspects of the programme, with evidence of widespread implementation and embedding of the approach, including

understanding trauma, moving to a new and shared language, strengthening multi-agency partnership working, and changing various aspects of operational delivery.

The Independent Evaluation identified next steps as:

- Ensure the continued implementation and sustainability of Our Way of Working.
- Embed Our Way of Working into plans, strategies, policies and procedures.
- Engage wider with organisations across the partnership, particularly adult facing services.
- Ensure partnership representation and sharing good practice in workstreams and subgroup.
- Continue training, supporting new staff, and continued professional development (CPD).
- Continue to embed multi-agency group supervision and learning conversation frameworks.

Think Family

The Think Family model has been in place for a number of years for Early Help and Prevention in Cheshire West & Chester and aligns fully with Our Way of Working. A proportion of the adult population experience difficulties which, not only make the individual vulnerable, but can impact on all family members; these include factors such as domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health and disability. Whilst most of these parents are committed to their children and want the best for them; the presence of additional vulnerabilities can sometimes render the parent/carer unable to provide safe and effective care for themselves and/or their child/children. Therefore, professionals need to think about the needs of the whole family regardless of whether it is an adult or child that they are working with.

When considering any vulnerabilities or risks that have been identified, practitioners should consider the support available to the individual and family from extended family, the wider community and other professionals. “Thinking Family” does not require complicated change or for everyone to be an expert in every aspect of family life – it is an approach whereby in their day-to-day roles, all practitioners across adult and children’s services are identifying, considering and appropriately responding to the safeguarding needs of all family members.

Think Family places a responsibility on all practitioners to respond to identified issues from signposting and referral, through to providing services. It requires communication with others working with different family members and coordination of those efforts for the best outcomes for the whole family, using TAF. Think Family should be adopted by all practitioners whether working with children or adults.

Principles of Think Family

1. Working with the whole family requires a co-ordinated approach. Early identification of needs and a timely response is key to supporting families and protecting both children and adults at risk.
2. There should be 'No Wrong Door' - contact with any service offers an open door into a system of joined-up support.
3. Providing support tailored to need – working with families to agree a package of support best suited to their particular situation.
4. The wellbeing of children and their families is best delivered through a multi-agency approach with different services across children's and adults working effectively together.
5. Assessment and subsequent work with families' needs to be made within the context of understanding their individual circumstances and underpinned by a motivational approach to engaging parents, carers and young people.
6. Parenting capacity is best assessed with the joint input of workers from adults and children's services with support where appropriate from services with specialist expertise.
7. Family members will be listened to and their wishes and feelings explored. The needs and beliefs of the adults must not marginalise the needs of the children.

Supporting Families Programme

In April 2015 the initial national Supporting Families Programme, (then known as Troubled Families), was extended with expanded identification criteria and a target for Cheshire West and Chester to support at least 1820 families to successful and sustained outcomes by the expected end of the programme in 2020. The identification criteria for the programme included:

- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- Children not attending school
- Children who need help
- Worklessness and financial exclusion
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Health problems

Locally, Cheshire West & Chester developed guidance to enable the most complex families to be prioritised, ensuring that programme resources focus on those most in need. This five-year target was achieved, as was a further target of 305 set for 2020-21 in an extended 12-month programme in preparation for a full Spending Review. Of the 2125 families supported to significant and sustained outcomes in the first six years of the programme, 180 achieved sustained employment outcomes.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic led to a further extension of the existing programme for 2021-22, with a target of supporting 322 families to sustained and successful outcomes.

The programme requires evidence of success in supporting families through the achievement of outcomes for families and sustaining them through a series of measures. Cases that meet the Supporting Families criteria have access to small amounts of 'Family Fund' support to help families achieved their identified outcomes and have access to Supporting Families Employment Advisor support to help achieve of employment outcomes.

Vision

Our vision is that through effective prevention and early intervention work, the escalation of problems that people face will be avoided and their life chances improved.

Our ambition is that through intervening and responding quickly to identified needs in a joined-up way at the earliest possible stage, problems for children, young people and their families will be prevented from escalating. All partners in Cheshire West and Chester will work together to ensure there is a strength-based approach used by all universal and targeted service providers. This approach will support families to become more resilient, develop their capacity to prevent issues from escalating, resolve problems and avoid the requirement of acute services in the future.

Why is this our priority?

To improve the life chances of children, young people and their families with a range of needs that are impacting on them. This includes people affected by domestic abuse and those with abusing behaviours.

What we will do

- Identify and respond to the needs of children, young people and their families through the use of early help assessment at the earliest opportunity in line with the Continuum of Need.
- Ensure that there is a range of parenting opportunities for families to access support in line with the Continuum of Need.
- Strengthen community involvement to enable children and families to have the best start in life and have happy and healthy futures. Support families to achieve their full potential and thereby mitigate the impact of issues such as child poverty and health inequalities.
- Support the refocusing of resources from crisis intervention to prevention underpinned by Our Way of Working, ensuring that all work with children and families is trauma informed and draws on motivational interviewing approaches to support sustained change.

Early Help and Prevention Service

Cheshire West and Chester has a single integrated front door; i-ART, the single point of contact, relating to children and their welfare, for members of the public living in west Cheshire and professionals such as GPs, health visitors, teachers and police officers. The team will offer advice and will support families and professionals to receive the most appropriate help with concerns about the welfare of a child and families requiring a multi-agency response and individuals affected by domestic violence and abuse. A social work manager is supported by senior social workers, i-ART officers, social workers, early support officers, independent domestic violence advocates and partners from agencies such as health, police, housing and drug and alcohol services.

The Early Help and Prevention Service is comprised of:

- family case work
- support for people affected by domestic violence and abuse
- targeted support services; including parenting support
- support for young people leaving school and moving into further education or employment
- accessible targeted youth services to engage young people across the borough
- community safety to help protect our local communities.

The service's parenting team works directly with families at the partnership plus on the continuum providing both one to one and group interventions designed to achieve positive outcomes for families and children, recognising the impact parental conflict has on child outcomes as part of service delivery.

*“Being able to identify the signs of relationship difficulties and provide early support to prevent conflict between parents can make a positive difference not only to children's outcomes, but also to the health and wellbeing of adults and families”
Creating a Local Family Offer lessons from local authority pioneers 2017*

Each service within Early Help and Prevention will work toward the common vision, priorities and aims set out in this strategy.

Our services

Starting Well

Cheshire West and Chester Council commissioned a new and innovative integrated service that will be known as the 'Starting Well Service' from January 2018 to bring health and education together to provide every child with the opportunity to have the best start in life. The establishment of this integrated service for west Cheshire involved the reconfiguration of children's centres in line with the outcomes of public

consultation ahead of the launch of the service. The service brings together Early Years Workers with Health Visiting, Family Nurse Partnership and 5-19 Health and Wellbeing practitioners.

The Service aims to deliver a high-quality preventative service to improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families across Cheshire West and Chester. Support is co-ordinated for families to help parents make positive change.

Teams are based in the main children's centres across Cheshire West and Chester, with further services tailored to local needs available through linked sites.

Key challenges

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that will be felt by our children, young people and families for years to come.
- Public service budgets – we recognise that there are budget challenges. Public service budgets are reducing. It is critical that preventative work remains high on the agenda so that the future demand on acute services is reduced.
- The impact on families of the changes to the benefits system.
- Increasing numbers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- Increasing volume of contacts at children's services front door service, i-ART.
- To focus on increasing the numbers of holistic assessments and interventions for children and families by universal services prior to contact with the integrated front door i-ART.
- To ensure that the service reflects national requirements within The Best Start for Life Strategy and the modernised Healthy Child Programme, which both will provide the evidence-based detail and governance for the delivery of Public Health services for 0–5-year-olds and 5-19 year olds (25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

Casework

Working with families is an intensive, high quality family support and advocacy service for families with multiple and complex issues. Families are advocated for and empowered to become more independent members of their community. They are signposted to effective support and participate in the multi-agency TAF assessment.

The team support families with multiple and complex issues that include:

- parents or children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
- children who have not been attending school regularly
- children who need help
- adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness

- families affected by domestic violence and abuse
- parents and children with a range of health problems
- vulnerable children and young people who need support to achieve positive changes in behaviour, circumstances and satisfaction.
- Group support packages to help children who have witnessed domestic abuse.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 created a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, controlling or coercive. It aims to ensure that victims have the confidence to come forward and report their experiences, safe in the knowledge that the state will do everything it can, both to support them and their children and pursue the abuser. The Act places a duty on local authorities to support victims of domestic abuse to feel safe and be safe.

The aims of the Act are to:

- Raise awareness and understanding about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on victims and their families.
- Further improve the effectiveness of the justice system in providing protection for victims of domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice.
- Strengthen the support for victims of abuse by statutory agencies.

In response, Cheshire West have developed a new Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) Strategy 2020-25 with the aim for all residents of Cheshire West and Chester to live lives free from domestic abuse and to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and their families who experience domestic abuse, by creating an environment that supports disclosure and recovery for those who are harmed and provides challenge and support for those who harm.

This will be delivered through 5 priorities:

- Assessing risk
- Intervening earlier
- Providing services for those who are harmed
- Providing services for children and young people
- Challenging those who harm and giving them effective support to change

Partners across West Cheshire have agreed to share information by way of Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). There are multi-agency meetings focused on increasing the safety of people who are at high risk of harm due to domestic abuse. MARACs are promoted nationally as the best practice response to domestic abuse. During the meeting, up to date information is shared and a risk management plan developed.

Parenting

The Parenting team facilitate a range of parent courses available to families who are supported via a TAF and have complex and multiple needs. Programmes not only increase our capacity to support children and families, but the experience can build wider interpersonal, social and communication skills, enhance learning and develop networks of support to sustain positive change.

Community Safety

The Community Safety Team work to protect our local communities and reduce crime and disorder in West Cheshire. They make up three Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Units along with three dedicated Police Officers. The Community Safety Team work to ensure:

- all our families, children and young people are supported to get the best start in life
- vulnerable adults and children feel safe and are protected
- cleanest safest and most sustainable neighbourhoods in the country

Working in such close partnership with the police reduces duplication and ensures that we maximise the resources available to respond to community safety concerns including ASB reports. Community Safety staff are also accredited with a number of police powers under the National Community Safety Accreditation Scheme to tackle anti-social behaviour, and staff undertake annual training in relation to these powers.

The team work closely with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) on a range of priorities, including:

- to reduce re-offending and exploitation (including serious organised crime, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation).
- to reduce anti-social behaviour and the negative impact of alcohol and substance misuse.
- to increase the number of DVA reports to offer support to more victims, children and perpetrators.
- to reduce killed and serious injuries on the roads and improve road safety.

Youth Services

The Youth Services provide young people aged 11 - 19 years, up to 25 years if special educational needs (SEND) or a care leaver, with the opportunity to achieve the best possible opportunities, experiences and positive outcomes. We want them to fulfil their potential and thrive.

The Youth Work Strategy 2021-24 sets out clear commitments for supporting those who are accessing youth provision:

- To feel safe, secure and part of their community
- To be treated fairly
- To have their voice heard
- To have access to and support from trusted adults with the knowledge, skills and experience for safe and effective youth work practice
- To have somewhere to go that feels their space
- To have something to do that will encourage engagement and learning
- To have someone to talk too that will offer informal learning and interventions so they can make healthy positive choices

Young people can expect informal, engaging and interactive support, advice and guidance from our trained staff. This includes advice on drugs and alcohol, smoking, sexual health and healthy lifestyles.

We aim for young people to be informed, explore their values and beliefs and to discuss risk-taking behaviours and the consequences. This enables young people to make positive, healthy choices about their lives, reach their full potential and thrive.

Young people can seek one-to-one support when they need it, on any worries or concerns they may have. This could include, self-harm, mental health and wellbeing, Teenage Relationship Abuse (TRA) and hate crime - what it is and how to report it.

Contextualised Safeguarding

Children and young people may be vulnerable to neglect and abuse or exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives. These threats can take a variety of different forms, including: sexual, physical and emotional abuse; neglect; exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Children who are exploited are often vulnerable because of chaotic or traumatic experiences in their lives, making them targets for perpetrators, gangs and networks.

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. In the last two years the local authority and partner agencies have developed a more effective response to Contextualised Safeguarding that has led to a significant increase in the number of children being considered both via the Contextual Safeguarding Hub and the Operational Group.

Employment and Training

Each year a number of young people leave school and do not move into education, employment or training. These young people are known as NEET (not in education, employment and/or training). At Cheshire West, we aim to support young people to help them plan for the future and make the most of their life and career opportunities - our aim is to support young people into making successful and sustained transitions into education, employment or training.

The Council has a responsibility to track the destinations of young people (up to their twentieth birthday) and provide support/advice if they are not participating.

NEET young people have direct one to one support from Young Peoples Service via the Journey First programme.

Journey First

Through this programme, Cheshire West, in conjunction with Cheshire East and Warrington councils, are providing additional support to vulnerable children and adults. At Cheshire West, the children and young people's element of this programme supports young people who are, or are at risk of becoming, part of the NEET, Children in Care, Care Leavers or SEND population. The 3-year Journey First programme, was launched in September 2020. The programme provides intensive 1-2-1 support for young people aged 16-24 and adults across Cheshire and Warrington. The programme works with young people to identify and strengthen their skills and reach their goals, whether that be support with job searches and employment or access to further education or training.

T levels

Introduced in September 2020, T levels are courses which follow GCSEs and will be equivalent to three A levels. The government developed T levels in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work, further training or study.

T levels are delivered at colleges across Cheshire West and Chester and will be supported as an option for those on the Journey First programme by trained and informed staff.

How will we know if we have made a difference?

We are committed to supporting families to achieve better outcomes for children and we want to narrow the gap by improving the outcomes for children who experience higher levels of disadvantage than their peers.

Within Cheshire West's Early Help and Prevention Service, workers evidence outcomes using the Early Help & Prevention Outcomes Guide. This guide has been developed to ensure that all case workers operating across the service are supporting, delivering and coordinating achievements for families in a consistent and standardised way.

All early help services share the responsibility for improving outcomes for children and their families as well as their service specific outcomes.

Some of the key measures that provide assurance that we are meeting our aims and making a real difference are:

- Complex families: number of complex families open to Early Help & Prevention and partner agencies achieving significant and sustained outcomes
- Early help and prevention re-referrals: percentage of EHP Family Case Work episodes within 12 months of a previous EHP Family Case Work episode
- Education, Health and Care Plans: percentage of those aged 16-17 who have a current EHCP and are participating in learning
- Youth Engagement: percentage of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Domestic Abuse: percentage of re-referrals to Domestic Abuse Intervention and Prevention teams (DAIPS) within 12 months of an intervention

We have an aspiration that in 2022-23 we will look to work with all partner agencies within the partnership and involve young people and parents and carers in the development of a multi-agency Early Help Strategy.

Strategic Links and Governance Arrangements

This strategy and its subsequent action plan will be subject to a robust governance process to ensure that the visions, priorities, aims and actions are reflective of Cheshire West's values and the Children and Young People's Plan goals. The governance process will provide stakeholders and partners with information and the opportunity to give their opinion where appropriate.

Early Help and Prevention is a key strategic outcome of the Cheshire West and Chester Children and Young People's Plan 2020-24, alongside four other strategic priorities:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- Early Years and School Readiness
- Children in Care and Care Leavers

Governance arrangements are in place within West Cheshire Children's Trust to ensure work to deliver this Strategy is coordinated at the multi-agency Early Help and Prevention Board that reports to the Trust Board as shown in the diagram below.

This Strategy also links to key overarching strategies for the borough, including the Council Plan 2020-24 and Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-24, as well as specific strategies of and within partnerships such as the Safeguarding Children Partnership and Health & Wellbeing Board

