

Family Help Strategy

Together making a difference



‘Our vision is for every child and young person in Westmorland and Furness to have the best start in life, to grow, to thrive, and to be prepared for a successful adult life.’

2024 - 2028



Westmorland
& Furness
Council



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Introduction

Our ambition is for Westmorland and Furness to be a great place to live, work and thrive; a place where there are opportunities for children and young people to live happy healthy lives, safeguarded from harm in the place they call home and within their community.

We are ambitious for our children – we want to provide the right support for them to start well, to both learn and train well in excellent local settings, with the aim of young people becoming confident adults contributing to society as tolerant global citizens.

Every child is unique and precious; our role is to value and advocate for all our children, working in partnership with their families so that together they play an active part in the decisions that affect their lives.

It is our belief that we are more effective when we work together and through a more holistic approach across all sectors to make things happen more quickly for the common good.

As leaders and service providers we are committed to delivering consistently good statutory services, despite the increasing complexity and challenging context of doing so. To achieve this, we will make sure we have the capacity to deliver what we say we will do, by aligning our resources and working through our collective structures.

This is the first Family Help Strategy since becoming a new council in April 2023 – the strategy provides a framework for our work at early help level which is grounded in the belief that early intervention and prevention are essential to promoting positive outcomes for children and families.

To ensure our strategic approach is coherent, we will align our priorities and actions with those captured in other key strategies and plans, this strategy is aligned to the **Ambition for Every Child (Children and Young People's Plan)**.



Councillor Janet Battye
Lead Member Children's Services



Mil Vasic
Director of Children's Services

National Context

Our Family Help strategy will build on, and support the delivery of, following key national drivers.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 - prioritises enhancing multi-agency collaboration across the entire support and protection system for children, young people and their families, maintaining a child-centred approach while adopting a holistic family focus.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 19 - places a duty on states to protect children from all forms of maltreatment or exploitation and to provide support to children and their carers to prevent and/or reduce the incidence of maltreatment. 'Prevention includes public health and other measures to positively promote respectful child-rearing, free from violence, for all children, and to target the root causes of violence at the levels of the child, family, perpetrator, community, institution and society.'

Supporting Families - The Early Help Systems Guide offers a framework to streamline Early Help systems towards common objectives and measurable progress. Furthermore, the **National Supporting Families programme** aims to bolster resilience by offering comprehensive support to families at the earliest opportunity.

Family Hubs - are a place-based way of joining up locally in the planning and delivery of family services. They bring services together to improve access, improve the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and put relationships at the heart of family support.

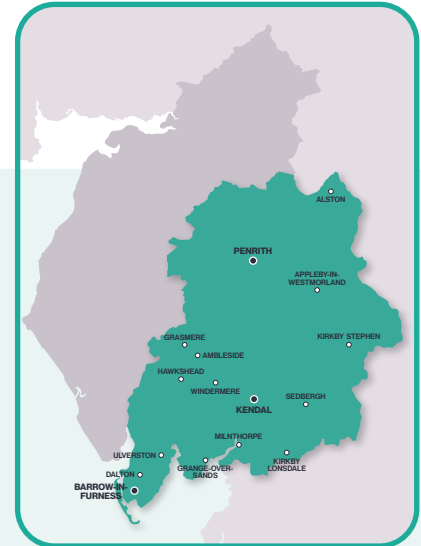
'Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy' 2023 - as a response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. This strategy outlines substantial transformations to both children's social care and Early Help, highlighting several key ambitions. Among these is the emphasis on providing 'Family Help' to ensure all children, young people and their families receive timely, inclusive and easily accessible support.



Local Context

The population is **226,592**, of whom around 15% are young people aged 0-15. This is lower than the national average of **18.5%**.

We are the **3rd largest local authority** in England and Wales by land area; covering an area of **3,760 square km**.



Of our usual residents, the greatest proportion identified their ethnic group as **'White British' (94.6%)**; this was much higher than the national average (74.4%). (Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021)

245 Cared for Children aged 0-17 and **177 Care Experienced aged 16-24** who have reached the threshold for receiving leaving care services

71 (1.6%) of our 16-17 year olds are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET); this is below the national average (3.4%).

(Source: National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS) - March 2024).



15,387 (14%) of households are in fuel poverty (low income, low energy efficiency). This is above the national average (13%) and there are 7 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) where levels of fuel poverty twice or more the national average.

(Source: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero - 2024 (2022 data))

17.9% of children live in relative low-income families, this is slightly lower than the national average (19.8%).

(Source: Department for Work and Pensions - 2023)

There were **42,300** residents who were disabled under the equality act (18.7%); this was slightly higher than the national average (17.5%).

(Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021)

8.6% of Reception pupils were obese and **19.9%** of Year 6 pupils were obese; slightly lower than the national averages (9.2% and 22.7% respectively).

(Source: NCMP)



There are **149** schools in Westmorland & Furness.

4,353 (13%) of pupils at school have Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support, the same as the national average (13%).

1,565 (5%) of pupils at school have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This is slightly higher than the national average (4%).

3,007 pupils at schools in Westmorland and Furness (10%) are classified as being from an ethnic minority group (including white minorities); this is much lower than the national average (37%).

1,292 (4%) of pupils at school have a first language that is known or believed to be other than English; this is much lower than the national average (20%).

65% of pupils residing achieved a good level of development in Reception; below the national average (67%).

60% of pupils met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2; similar to the national average (60%).

42% of pupils achieved grades 5 or above in English and Mathematics GCSEs; below the national average (45%).

5,983 (23%) of pupils at school were persistently absent in the academic year 2022/23 (i.e. missed 10% or more sessions), this is above the national average of 21%.

240 (0.8%) of pupils at school are recorded as being young carers; this is higher than the national average (0.5%).

4,463 (14%) of pupils at school are known to be eligible for free school meals. While this is lower than the national average (24%), there are some wards where levels of free school meal eligibility are much higher than the national average, with one ward almost twice the national average (42%).

(Local figures, source: School Census – Spring 2024).

(National average figures, source: DfE 2023).



This data explains the scale of the challenges for children and young people in Westmorland and Furness and why we need to provide high quality Family Help to those families who need it.

What our Children and Young People told us

A crucial part of understanding the local context in Westmorland and Furness is listening to, and acting upon, the voice of children and young people. Children and young people have told us that they are ambitious for their futures and want to have a wide range of opportunities available to them. Opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem are important to them.

Through regular surveys and direct work with children and young people they have told us that their priorities are:

- Feeling safe in their communities and in their homes
- Doing well at school, with help to progress into training or work
- Receiving support earlier for their health and well-being, in particular their mental health
- Taking part in activities or visiting places that are inexpensive

They feel worried about bullying online and on school buses, achieving at school without the support they need and the risk to their health by vaping.

They would like to: feel more comfortable approaching the pastoral support in schools; see a more flexible curriculum for those struggling to cope full-time; receive education as early as possible about the dangers of vaping; and see better access to multi-purpose spaces for 11–18-year-olds.

Listening to children and young people is at the heart of our Family Help Strategy.



Family Help Vision

Our vision is for every child and young person in Westmorland and Furness to have the best start in life, to grow, to thrive, and to be prepared for a successful adult life.

If problems emerge, communities and organisations work together with children, young people, and families to co-ordinate the support to improve the overall well-being and quality of life, of all Westmorland and Furness's children and young people.

What is Family Help?

“Family Help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child’s life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Family Help can also prevent further problems arising, for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care, or in families where there are emerging parental mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse.”

Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018

Working alongside Parents / Carers

We recognise that parents and carers are integral to the Family Help strategy, and their role as primary caregivers means they are often the first to notice signs of emerging difficulties in their children. In Westmorland and Furness we recognise the importance of engaging parents early in the process, ensuring that support is not only timely but also tailored to meet the specific needs of each family. We recognise that every family is unique, with different strengths and challenges. Our Family Help strategy will strengthen the work we do across the partnership to work closely with parents, so that we can design interventions that are more effective and relevant to the family's circumstances.

Building strong, trusting relationships with parents is a cornerstone of our Family Help strategy. This trust allows for open communication, where parents feel valued and understood, and are more likely to engage in the support offered. By empowering parents with the necessary resources, knowledge, and confidence enables parents to respond confidently to their children's needs and building family resilience.

Furthermore, the **“Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023”** guidance underscores the need for a coordinated approach among all professionals involved. By collaborating with parents, schools, health services, and social care, a comprehensive support network is created. This network ensures that the child's needs are met holistically, addressing not only immediate concerns but also promoting long-term positive outcomes.

Working as a partnership

In Westmorland and Furness, we have adopted the phrase Family Help to encompass Early Help, Early Intervention and Prevention. Family Help is a partnership model of delivery, that includes Health partners, Police, Education, Local Authority, Voluntary and Community sectors working together to identify needs within families as early as possible, by using an Early Help Assessment (**Guidance on Family Help Assessments can be found here**) with families so that they have access to the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

Family Help is part of a system-wide approach to supporting the needs of children and their families and works alongside **Cumbria Threshold Guidance and the Continuum of Need**.



Our Family Help Model

Family Help involves all partners having a shared responsibility to look for signs that children and families need help, and then to communicate and act quickly to address these needs. Providing good Family Help considers what is happening for everyone in the family, a 'whole family approach' and the needs of all children, young people and their networks are considered in the assessment and support provided.

Our model is simple so that everyone can understand it. Family Help in Westmorland and Furness either sits in '**Universal and Community Family Help**' or when a family's needs become more complex '**Targeted Family Help**.'

Universal and Community Family Help

Most children and families will never come into contact with statutory or specialist services, and their needs met through universal and community services.

This includes all young people up to the age of 19 years, or 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities.

These services ensure families can access the right support at the earliest opportunity, within their local areas and prevent concerns escalating, helping families to help themselves, and preventing a reliance on statutory services. In Westmorland and Furness these services are provided by lots of different agencies such as nurseries, schools, and colleges; GPs, midwives, other NHS services and 0 to19 public health nursing services, including health visitors, libraries, youth services, and voluntary & community organisations. In some circumstances these services may be the starting point for any family requiring information, advice, and support.

Some children and young people are likely to need extra help to be healthy, safe and achieve their full potential. They are usually best supported on a voluntary basis, by those who already work with them such as Family Hubs, children centres, various health professionals or schools. These services are well placed to recognise, co-ordinate and respond when Family Help may be necessary so that support is coherent and addresses family vulnerabilities early.

At this stage, an early help assessment **may** be opened to coordinate a collaborative response to the emerging needs of children, young people, and their families.

Targeted Family Help

Targeted Family Help is where families have not been able to effect positive change with the support of universal services and they need additional support. This may be an enhanced, more intensive and/or specialist support.

It might include parenting intervention, mental health and emotional well-being support, targeted youth support, youth justice services, and specific housing services. Targeted Family Help can support children and families who have multiple needs, or whose circumstances might make them more vulnerable. At this stage, a Family Help Assessment will be in place to ensure a coordinated response to the needs of children, young people, and families, with their voice at the centre of all planning and decision making.

Westmorland and Furness Partnership Family Help offer

To deliver the model we will focus on 4 key areas:

- Family Hubs and Best Start for Life
- Strengthening our Partnership support and Healthy Child programme
- Youth Support
- Targeted Family Help and Parenting approach's

Family Hubs

A key component to delivering this strategy is the Family Hub model, through our 'place based' Family Hubs, families will be able to access services from a variety of partners for the right help at the right time. Family Hubs bring together existing Family Help services to improve connectivity between families, professionals, and services, placing relationships at the heart of our approach.

The **Family Hubs** will include a physical and virtual offer, accessible for families with children of all ages, from 0-19 or up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and embedding the **Start for Life** offer at their core.

Access

More accessible –
through clearly branded
and communicated hub
buildings, virtual offers,
and outreach.

Connections

Better connected
– Family Hubs drive
progress on joining up
professionals, services,
and providers – through
co-location, data sharing,
shared outcomes, and
governance. Moving from
services organised for
under-fives, to families
with children of all ages,
reducing fragmentation.

Relationships

Relationship-centred –
practice in a Family Hub
builds on family strengths
and looks to improve
family relationships to
address underlying
issues.



Best Start for Life

The Westmorland and Furness Family Help Strategy will underpin the delivery of our **Start for Life offer**, helping to ensure we are giving families access to the right information when they need it, with a clearly accessible, coherent and joined-up offer that sets out the support that families may need.

0-19 Healthy Child Programme

We want to ensure there are clear pathways between our services and support for families is as seamless as possible. The Healthy Child Programme, which offers every child and their family a range of support, helping them to grow, develop and thrive through pregnancy, birth and up to the age of 19, is a key partner.

The Healthy Child Programme identifies the interventions and services that children and families need to receive to help them achieve their best health and well-being outcomes including screening tests, immunisations, developmental reviews, and information and guidance to support parenting and healthy choices.

Partnership Support Approach

This includes:

Team Around the Setting

The Team Around the Setting approach is a way for schools and Early Years settings to meet with Family Help services and partners for a shared conversation about the children and young people they are worried about, preventing small worries turning into bigger problems.

Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) Supervision

Reflective supervision offered to all practitioners working directly with children and young people, in a DSL role.

Supervision is provided by a Qualified Social Work Manager on a monthly or termly basis based on the needs of the DSL and their setting.

Our aim is to support the DSL with their well-being and practice whilst focusing on achieving positive outcomes for every child. As well as 1-1 supervision and to support collaborative working, DSL supervision can also be requested as group supervision. This will allow wider support and reflection, with individuals bringing their unique skills and perspectives into a supportive group learning environment.

Family Help Panel

A multi-agency meeting that can discuss Family Help plans where there are challenges and will offer support, advice and guidance to move the plan forward.

Agencies work together to pool resources with professional expertise to provide Family Help that is outcome-driven and solution-focused. This supports the family to become more resilient and self-reliant, with a focus on preventing a child or young person from requiring more complex intervention support in the future.

Targeted Family Help

Targeted Family Help will provide an enhanced level of personalised support for the whole family where presenting needs are more complex.

This will be through adopting a strength based, solution focused approach with a Targeted Family Help Worker who will deliver intensive support, working with the family through an 'early help' assessment and family plan.

Family Group Decision Making

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is a family-led, solution focused and strengths-based process which can help a child's wider family to come together to agree a family plan. It offers a practical way of upholding children's rights, as set out by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which details the right of the child to have their views respected in decisions made about them.



Our offer for Young People

The development of our offer for young people is a high priority.

We know that over 85% of a young person's waking hours are spent outside of school and formal education.

We know that due to the rural geography of Westmorland and Furness, accessing services and leisure facilities for families and young people is a challenge, therefore we will work within local communities to provide inclusive opportunities for all our young people regardless of where they live.

In September 2023 the Government released **statutory guidance for local authorities** which places a duty on us to secure services and activities for young people, including those with learning difficulties, to improve their development and well-being. We have taken the key principles of this guidance and used it as a key component in shaping our Family Help Strategy and key priorities.

Priority 1: Recreational leisure-time activities/facilities and community engagement

We will champion inclusivity and provide opportunities for all young people to participate in clubs, sports and informal physical activities, community projects, cultural activities, volunteer work, and local decision-making processes to foster a sense of belonging, purpose, and empowerment. This will promote good physical health and enable individuals to become active members of society, develop leadership skills and champion their voice.

Priority 2: Educational support

Tailored educational programs (including educational leisure-time activities) will cater to both academic and personal development - focusing on life skills, career readiness, and continuous learning opportunities, raising aspirations and preparing young people for successful transitions into adulthood. By addressing educational disparities and providing targeted support, we will enhance educational outcomes and opportunities for all.

Priority 3: Mental health and well-being services

In the face of increasing mental health challenges it is critical that across our partnership we provide accessible mental health and well-being services. Together we will ensure that young people have access to timely, confidential, and effective mental health support, including counselling, peer support programs, and early intervention services. These resources will build resilience, promote good mental health and emotional well-being, and prevent issues from escalating.

Next Steps

We have listened, and we know that there is work to be done to better coordinate and develop our local youth offer. Following the key principles of the **statutory guidance**, and underpinned by the **nine essentials** of a local youth offer, we will collaborate with our communities and local public, private, community and faith sector partners, and engage with the diverse range of our young people, to further assess our local needs, enhance our provision, build on our strengths, better promote and evaluate existing services and prioritise underserved groups. By doing so we will ensure that we truly address the diverse and evolving needs of our young people and will measure this by regularly reviewing outcomes to ensure we are improving youth well-being across all 5 domains:

- Physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- Protection from harm and neglect
- Education, training and recreation
- The contribution made by young people to society
- Social and economic well-being



Our Priorities

Our 6 key priorities:

Enhance collaboration and partnership working among local agencies

We will ...

- Ensure we listen and respond to the specific priorities our children and young people have raised
- Develop and deliver our 'Family Hub' model
- Develop a shared outcomes framework to evidence the difference made for children and families
- Foster effective multi-agency collaboration and information sharing
- Establish clear roles, responsibilities, and protocols for partnership working
- Promote joint planning, decision making, and shared accountability
- Develop integrated systems to streamline service provision and avoid duplication
- Continue to listen to young people to develop our youth offer

Embed a culture of 'Family Help' across all services

We will ...

- Promote a proactive approach to identifying and addressing needs at the earliest opportunity.
- Embed the '**Signs of Safety**' (SofS) methodology across the partnership.
- Strengthen the capacity of professionals to recognise early signs of vulnerability and risk
- Develop a robust system of early identification, referral, assessment, and support.
- Strengthen the accessibility to pathways of support services through the development of our 'Family Help Front Door'
- Strengthen the Targeted Family Help offer
- Embed systemic practice as a way to work in partnership with families and professional networks

Strengthen family resilience and promote positive parenting

We will ...

- Provide accessible and tailored support to families through the Family Hub model.
- Strengthen parenting skills and knowledge through a consistent approach led by a new parenting strategy.
- Promote healthy family relationships
- Strengthen our work supporting Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)

Improve the Family Help experience

We will ...

- Develop the digital offer
- Develop a Family Help Communication, Participation and Engagement Strategy
- Make better use of the tools we have available to implement a strong accessible digital offer for families
- Gain the voice of families to review and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of Family Help

Improve the educational outcomes and life chances of children and young people

We will ...

- Identify and address barriers to educational success
- Enhance Family Help support and guidance to schools and educational providers through the 'Team around the setting' model
- Improve SEND inclusion and attendance

Improve our use of data and quality processes to drive improvements

We will ...

- Implement a senior strategic group with representation across the partnership, which is accountable for developing and driving the use of data for the whole Family Help System.
- Develop and Implement a Family Help Quality Assurance Framework
- Ensure that case management systems are accessible to partners working with families, and they allow us to quantify all issues affecting the family and report on all issues and outcomes in a quantifiable way.

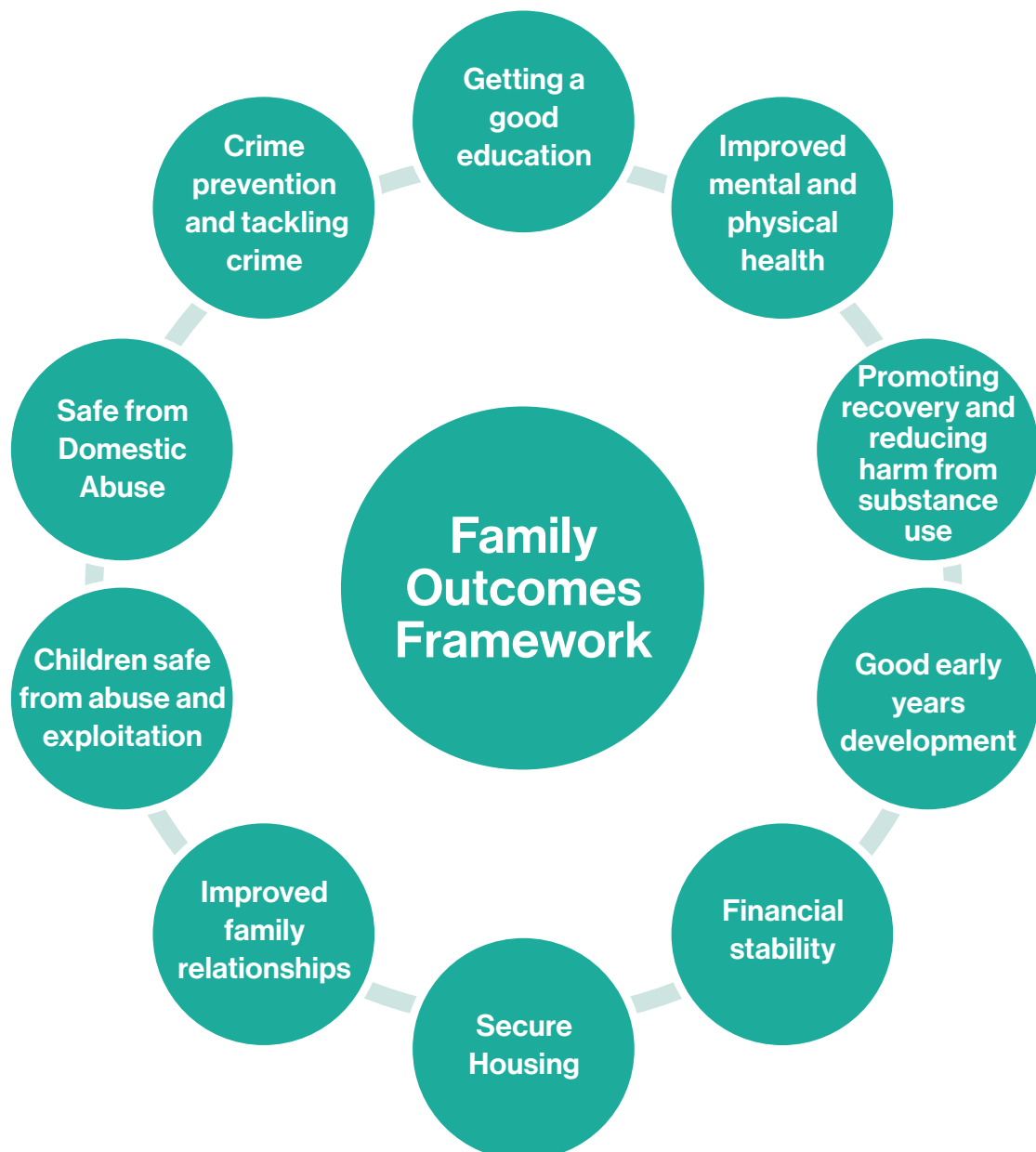


What we hope to achieve together

The image below identifies the desired results or changes that our Family Help Strategy aims to achieve - we call these outcomes. Outcomes typically focus on improving various aspects of families' and individuals' lives such as increased parental confidence or improved school attendance.

The 10 outcomes we are focusing on are the same as those in the Government's **Supporting Families Programme Guidance**. It is the responsibility of the Family Help Partnership Board to develop an 'Outcomes and Performance Framework' that will outline the ways we will assess and measure.

- How well we achieve these outcomes.
- How effective our intervention and support is.



How we will know

There are specific things we can look at to assess and measure how well we achieve our desired outcomes - we call these performance measures. Our performance measures provide quantifiable data which helps us to track and monitor our progress, evaluate our impact, and make informed decisions about allocation and service improvements.

Ultimately the voice of families and their experiences will be the key measure of success for us in Westmorland and Furness.

The Outcomes and Performance Framework being developed by the Family Help Partnership Board will provide more detail, this will include key performance measures that indicate how successfully we...

- Reduce the number of children requiring statutory services, in particular those who need to be supported as “children in need” and those who require a child protection plan.
- Increase rates of GLD (good level of development) and school readiness for children as they start primary school.
- Improve rates of school attendance and attainment.
- Reduce rates of fixed term and permanent exclusion.
- Reduce rates of children and young people impacted by grooming and offending.
- Reduce the proportions of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and young people whose education, employment or training status is not known.
- Reduce number of children experiencing homelessness or being threatened with homelessness.
- Improve child health on key public health measures.
- Increase parent and young people’s employment.

To understand if this strategy is making a difference we will also use a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures to measure its impact, including...

- Surveys, interviews and observations
- Gathering feedback from those involved in the strategy including, families, children and young people and workers.
- Conducting focus groups to help us to understand people’s lived experiences and the support they have received
- Documenting case studies and success stories that highlight positive change
- Using these narratives to describe the impact of Family Help and help us to identify best practices.



Making it happen

Our Partnership Family Help strategy is reliant upon collaboration with professionals, families and communities. Together we are committed to providing an inclusive and accessible Family Help offer for all our families, children and young people. The implementation plan will set out our ambitious plan of work and will explain the practical steps we will take to bring this strategy to life, to enable us to deliver on our vision and transformation of Westmorland and Furness's Family Help system.

The Family Help Partnership Board will be responsible for ensuring the effective delivery of our partnership implementation plan, and will also undertake an annual self-evaluation using the **Early Help System Guide**.



Translation Services

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