



Early Help Strategy

April 2019 - 2022



Together...Keeping Children Safe

Contents

1. Foreword	3
2. What is Early Help?	5
3. Context	7
4. Partnership working context	11
5. Vision, principles and approach	13
6. Outcomes & measuring success	17
Appendix	19



1. Foreword

This Early Help Strategy is central to delivering our partnership ambition for children, young people and their families to thrive and contribute to our community.

This partnership strategy is central to delivering our shared ambition for children and young people. It has been co-produced with partners and reflects the views of children and their families as we recognise that early help is a collaborative approach, not just an isolated service provision. It secures a collective commitment and accountability for the delivery of broad, accessible and responsive early help provision. This approach will empower families to take control over their lives. It also strengthens local networks and builds community capacity to support families and help them develop the skills and independence needed to be less reliant on public and statutory services.

This strategy will steer our joint endeavour to effectively support vulnerable children and families. It sets out how all partners will work together to learn from local and national evidence of what works to ensure that our early intervention is focused on the children and families who need it most. We will use selective targeting through analysis of demographic risks and where identified problems require more intensive support, provide this at the earliest opportunity for those most in need. In this way we are confident we will use our shared resources effectively and deliver sustainable outcomes for vulnerable families. As partners, we are committed to working together to align resources, share learning and develop practice.

This strategy is for staff across Buckinghamshire at all levels. It is supported by multi-agency guidance and procedures which will help front-line practitioners in their everyday working environment.

Together with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children's Partnership Board, we would like to commend this Early Help Strategy to you.



Warren Whyte
Cabinet Member for
Children's Services
(May 2017 to March 2020)



Tolis Vouyioukas
Children's Partnership Board
Chair and Corporate Director,
Children's Services Directorate



Debbie Richards
Children's Partnership Board
Vice-Chair and Director of
Commissioning and Delivery for
Buckinghamshire CCG

i 30 April 2020 - Councillor
Mark Shaw became Cabinet
Member for Children's Services



This strategy will:

- **Explain what we mean by early help in Buckinghamshire**
- **Share the values that underpin the development and delivery of services**
- **Set out Buckinghamshire's ambition for the impact of early help**
- **Outline how we will know we are making a difference: our success criteria evidenced by an effective performance monitoring**
- **Hold partners to account for effective early help delivery**

2. What is early help?

Early help is the identification of and response to emerging problems children, young people and their families face. It is a way of working that supports families to overcome these challenges and avoids things becoming worse and harder to resolve. Timely and flexible support is evidentially better for children and families, prevents escalation and is as a result, more cost effective. Early help is provided through a range of different services: universal which are open to all, targeted provision, and specialist services. It is also embedded in communities where provision is available to families through informal support, local networks and voluntary activity which add real capacity and value to our collective early help offer.

“Early intervention means intervening as soon as possible to tackle problems that have already emerged for children and young people and aims to stop those problems from becoming entrenched”

Early Intervention. Dept for Children Schools and Families (2010)

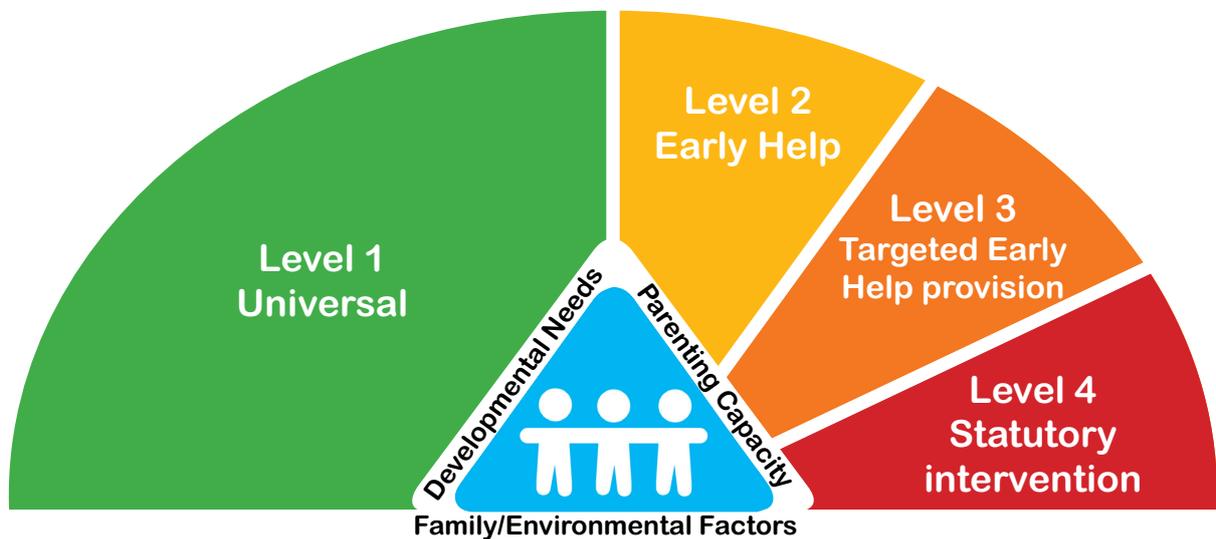
“Early intervention means identifying and providing early support to children and young people at risk of poor outcomes, such as mental health problems, poor academic attainment, or involvement in crime or antisocial behaviour. Early intervention is relevant at any age from conception to early adulthood. It involves a wide range of activities. It is more intensive than or additional to the help that is typically available through universal services such as early years settings, schools and GP’s”

Realising the Potential of Early Intervention, EIF (2018)

Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

- Identify children and families who would benefit from early help
- Undertake an assessment of the family or child's needs for early help.
- Provide appropriate targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child

Early help in Buckinghamshire consists of all the support available to children and families at levels 1, 2 and 3 of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board's Thresholds document. It also enables children and young people moving away from statutory support (level 4), to sustain the progress they have achieved and promote their increasing independence.



Level 1 – children whose needs are met within universal services. May need limited intervention to prevent needs arising (universal – available to all)

Level 2 – children with additional needs identified that can be met through a single agency response and partnership working (early help)

Level 3 – children with multiple needs requiring a multi-agency coordinated response with a lead professional (targeted early help provision)

Level 4 – children with a high level of unmet and complex needs or a child in need of protection (statutory intervention).

3. Context

The Buckinghamshire context

In Buckinghamshire, there is strong political and organisational support to ensure that the early help offer is visible, accessible and contributes to both the Children's Services improvement journey, in response to the 2018 Ofsted inspection judgement and the delivery of the SEND reforms to improve outcomes for children and their families in Buckinghamshire.



Buckinghamshire has a total population of approximately 534,700. 30% of the population is aged 0-24 years, slightly higher than the South East (24%). The population overall has increased by 29,400 (4.6%) from 2011 to 2016 and is projected to increase by 107,200 (20%) from 2015 to 2039. Although a largely rural or semi-rural county, a quarter of residents live within the towns of Aylesbury and High Wycombe. A third of residents live in rural areas, compared to 20% across the South East (ONS Mid-Year Estimates 2015).



Approximately 122,200 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Buckinghamshire. This is 22.9% of the total population in the area (534,700 people), which is slightly above the English average of 21.3%. Currently, the population aged 0-19 tends to be clustered to the south of Buckinghamshire in Wycombe, Chiltern and South Buckinghamshire. There are fewer young people in the more rural areas. By 2031, Aylesbury and Wycombe will be home for 70% of 0-19 year olds.



Buckinghamshire is home to an increasingly diverse population - 21% of the 0-19 year old population is of an ethnic minority (Black and Minority Ethnic or Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), compared to the South East average of 14% (based on Census 2011). It is estimated that the BAME population aged 0-19 year will reach 47,000 by 2031 compared to 26,000 in 2011, making Asian and Asian British the largest groups in the younger and adult populations. To accommodate the rising population in the county, significant building is anticipated in Buckinghamshire including the need for affordable housing. From 2013 – 2033 it is estimated that there is a need for 9,600 affordable homes and 15,000 high specification dwellings across Buckinghamshire. The majority of new house builds will be around Aylesbury and High Wycombe and around the northern county border with Milton Keynes.

Around two thirds of demand for Children’s Services is situated in:

- [Aylesbury and High Wycombe](#), which together account for approximately half of all service users
- [Chesham](#) is the next biggest town in terms of service users - between 5 and 8%
- [Buckingham, Amersham, Burnham & Lent Rise, Beaconsfield, Marlow and Princes Risboroug](#) all have high proportions of service users across children’s services
- [Rural areas](#) account for between 5% and 11% of service users depending on the service

Overall increases in demand for statutory services over the last five years are included in the table below. In line with national trends, escalating demand into statutory social services are further grounds for increasing our focus on targeted and timely early intervention and the positive impact this can have on improving the lives of children and families. This requires a partnership approach to maximise early identification opportunities and responding quickly to provide proportionate and effective early help support. We know this will prevent matters from becoming worse and will enable children and families to be self-reliant and able to face new challenges without the need for statutory intervention or further early help.

Service	% increase 2013 - 2018
Children in Need ¹	53%
Children subject to Child Protection	160%
Children Looked After	14%
Youth Offending service clients	42%



¹ Children in need as defined by the Department for Education. This includes every child who had an open referral at some point during the year whose referral decision was not “No Further Action”. This will include all the CP and CLA but it will also include children on CIN Plans and those who were assessed but did not then progress to a plan.

Drivers for change - National context

National evidence is informing policy development towards a more co-ordinated, problem solving service delivery model to ensure better use of resources. Many local authorities have already taken decisions to streamline and co-ordinate early help services. This provides a more integrated service offer and enables them to target resources at those most in need of support to achieve sustainable outcomes for children and families reducing demand on statutory services.

Work undertaken by the Early Intervention Foundation, the Local Government Association, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, the Dartington Social Research Unit, MP Frank Field's review on the Foundation Years, MP Graham Allen's review of early intervention, among many others provide a growing body of evidence that early help can reduce demand on more reactive and expensive services.

Enabling children, young people and their families to reach their full potential has been a common theme in recent reviews commissioned by successive governments (Munro, Marnet, Tickell). They all independently reached the same conclusion that it is important to provide help early in order to improve outcomes. Nationally, interest is growing in an evidence base for early intervention, in particular a need to demonstrate effectiveness to produce cost savings in more specialist and acute services. It is important to recognise that early intervention is not a one-off fix but a highly targeted process and approach – a way of working with specific outcomes

Multiple or complex challenges impact negatively on a family and children living within that family. It is the combination of problems which has most impact on children. Problems for children commonly appear in the early years and in adolescence – key times for brain development as well as physical development.

“While early intervention cannot solve all problems, it can substantially improve children’s lives if it is delivered to a high standard and is directed to the children and families who need it the most.”

Realising the Potential of Early Intervention”, EIF (2018)

“The wider, long term benefits that accrue to the whole of society have the potential to provide the biggest pay-offs. They are critical to understanding the value of early intervention and why it should be prioritised.”

Realising the Potential of Early Intervention, EIF (2018)

Many early help services are focused on a particular age group, a single issue or one approach. Feedback from children and families captured nationally has consistently shown that this is not the best approach to improve outcomes and build resilience.

Problems within a family invariably link together and impact across the family. For example, parental mental health issues are likely to impact on their employability but also on the attendance, behaviour and attainment of their children in school. Similarly, one child's serious or long term disability or learning difficulty brings both mental and financial pressures onto the whole family, while domestic abuse or relationship problems are proven to have serious consequences for the long term outcomes of children. These families with multiple needs: mental ill-health, domestic abuse and substance abuse are all indicators of increased risk of harm.

“A single disorder can negatively affect parents’ capacity to meet their children’s needs, but the co-existence of these types of problems has a much greater impact on parenting capacity.”²

Tackling one problem or one individual is less likely to be effective than dealing with everything that is going on for the family as a whole. In Buckinghamshire, the early help lead practitioner model enables coordination of effective multi-agency support for families and children, to provide the best opportunity of positive outcomes.

² Children’s Needs - parenting Capacity. Child abuse: Parental mental illness, learning disability, substance misuse and domestic violence. 2nd Edition (2011) Heady Cleaver, Ira Unell, Jane Aldgate. London TSO. (page 202)



4. Partnership working context

This document will steer and enable partners to help deliver the four priorities in the current Children's and Young People's Plan.

1. **Keep children and young people safe and in their families wherever possible**
2. **Enable and support children, young people, parents and carers to overcome the challenges they may face**
3. **Improve children and young people's health and well-being**
4. **Provide opportunities for children and young people to realise their full potential**

The Children's Partnership Board

The Children's Partnership Board is responsible for providing strategic direction and oversight of the implementation and delivery of early help in Buckinghamshire. The group develops and owns the Early Help Strategy, and monitors and evaluates the impact of early help described in the joint performance framework.

Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board

Local Safeguarding Children Boards are multi-agency partnerships that are responsible for coordinating local arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and ensuring that these arrangements are effective. The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board will monitor the effectiveness of early help across the partnership and supports multi-agency training and a consistent understanding of Buckinghamshire's early help approach amongst all stakeholders.

The impact of our early help offer will deliver the outcomes described in this strategy and will be jointly scrutinised by the Children's Partnership Board and the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board to ensure high quality early help services are delivered. This strategy also aligns with the work that is being led by the Integrated Care System Partnership Board.



The partners critical to the success of the Early Help Strategy include:

- Children, young people and families
- Buckinghamshire District Councils
- Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Buckinghamshire College Group
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Bucks Healthcare NHS Trust
- Schools and Early Years settings
- National Probation Service
- Parent Carers Forum
- NHS England
- Oxford Health Foundation NHS Trust
- Public Health
- Thames Valley Police
- Thames Valley Probation (Community Rehabilitation Company)
- Youth Offending Service
- Voluntary and Community Sector

5. Vision, principles and approach



Our Vision

We want all children and young people in Buckinghamshire to live in resilient families, to be happy, safe and healthy, and to grow up with skills, knowledge and attributes to be confident and independent, ready for adult life.

As partners we will work together and alongside volunteers and communities to provide a seamless service for children and their families. This will prevent the escalation of need and ensuring targeted, timely interventions that achieve positive outcomes for children and families which are supported by effective multi agency practices.

Our ambitions



Thriving children, young people and families with real, positive outcomes.



Building and improving family and community resilience.



Stronger partnerships making effective use of all resources.



Children and families only have to tell their story once.



Moving resources from statutory services to Early Help provision over time.



Our Principles

The early help partnership has adopted the following shared principles:

Work to families' strengths – recognising and developing existing strengths of children, parents and carers and take the time to understand their needs fully.

Focus on preventing problems before they occur and offer timely, flexible and responsive support when and where it is required.

Build the resilience of children, young people, parents and communities to support each other.

Work together across the whole system aligning resources to best support families to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.

Base all that we do on evidence of what works, what is needed and what will be effective for families. We must be brave enough to innovate and honest enough to stop things that are not working as well as we want.

Be clear and consistent about the outcomes we expect and measure our performance against them.



Our Approach

To be effective, early help requires full commitment to consistent, solution-focused, multi-agency working. We recognise that all professionals within the partnership have vital contributions to make to improve the quality of life of children, young people and their families. As a child or family can experience a range of problems all at once, early help requires a multilevel, holistic family approach. Early help is about working with children and families together - a truly collaborative approach to providing effective support.

Our work is underpinned by a commitment to:

- Be pro-active.
- Early intervention is 'everybody's business'
- Protect the most vulnerable
- Promote resilience, independence, health and wellbeing
- Make better use of collective resources
- Develop a confident partnership workforc

Early help - delivered in partnership

In Buckinghamshire, early help is a collaboration between Council services and the wide range of organisations who work with children and families. Early help services cannot be viewed in isolation, but instead as a complimentary continuum of support from universal services through to statutory or acute provision, all of which are focussed on improving the lives of children.

The delivery of our early help strategy is predicated on a joint commitment to shared outcomes, which will evidence the impact we make for families by intervening early and providing the right support at the right time, enabling sustainable outcomes and building family resilience. A critical ingredient to successful working is the commitment of individuals and families to make changes in their lives.

Early help provides support for those children, young people and families at risk of poor outcomes. All our work is child and family-centred, consent-based and focussed on working collaboratively with families to overcome the issues they face, build their resilience and leave them better able to manage future challenges.

Families who may require early help are identified by a wide range of practitioners, in many different ways, for example:

- A health visitor sees a family finding it difficult adapting to a new baby at home
- A member of school staff observes that a child may have behavioural or emotional issues
- A school nurse notices a young person's persistent absence from school
- An antisocial behaviour officer is worried that a young person may be putting themselves at a greater risk of offending or entering the criminal justice system
- An adviser is concerned that a parent may be subject to a benefit sanction
- A housing officer notices a family struggling with debt and at risk of eviction
- A drug or alcohol worker feels that children in the family home may be vulnerable through the risk taking behaviour of adults
- A social worker feels there is a need for additional support for a child even though there are no child protection concerns
- A youth worker is concerned that a young person is at risk of sexual exploitation
- A General Practitioner recognises that a child is struggling to cope with his/her parent's separation
- A probation officer identifies that an individual, with children, may be having problems settling back into their family home

Buckinghamshire early help model

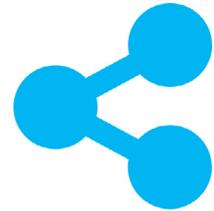
Our early help partnership offer is delivered through our integrated network and core Family Support Service operating across three locality networks which are:



Proactive
in terms of the early
identification of need.



Targeted
provision of support
to those children and
families most in need.



Connected
to partners, providers
and critically, families
and communities.

We are committed to using our network of family centres to support the identification of emerging needs and provide informal and peer support at a universal level. Our early help offer will be timely, responsive and flexible, available to those in most need and, by establishing and maintaining strong links to schools, early years settings and health providers we will increase our ability to work together for the benefit of the children and families who need our support

A strong, vibrant and valued community and voluntary sector will add depth and variety to the early help offer and create greater community and individual resilience to promote independence and reduce reliance on formal service provision.

Our locality teams are based in accessible community settings and provide direct, practical support for children, young people and families. Lead practitioners coordinate agreed support plans that are developed through a clear understanding of the family context, needs and support priorities. By working together with the family and key partners, we will all contribute towards achieving the outcomes we have agreed with the families we are supporting.

Our integrated teams have a range of skills and specialist staff in key areas such as SEND, youth work, parenting and early years. This will ensure that the support offered is appropriate both in terms of age and the issues faced. Working alongside other professionals as a team around the family, this model will provide effective targeted and outcome focused support. We will strengthen our links to schools and settings to ensure that, together with education colleagues, we are enabling all children to achieve their potential. This will be achieved through provision of appropriate support for them and their families, which recognises all service users as individuals with specific needs, ambitions and strengths

6. Outcomes

We will know we have been successful if the following outcomes are delivered:

Children and young people are:

- Safe, happy and confident
- Resilient, engaged and able to learn well
- Supported by their families and communities and, when necessary, by professionals to thrive and be successful

Communities:

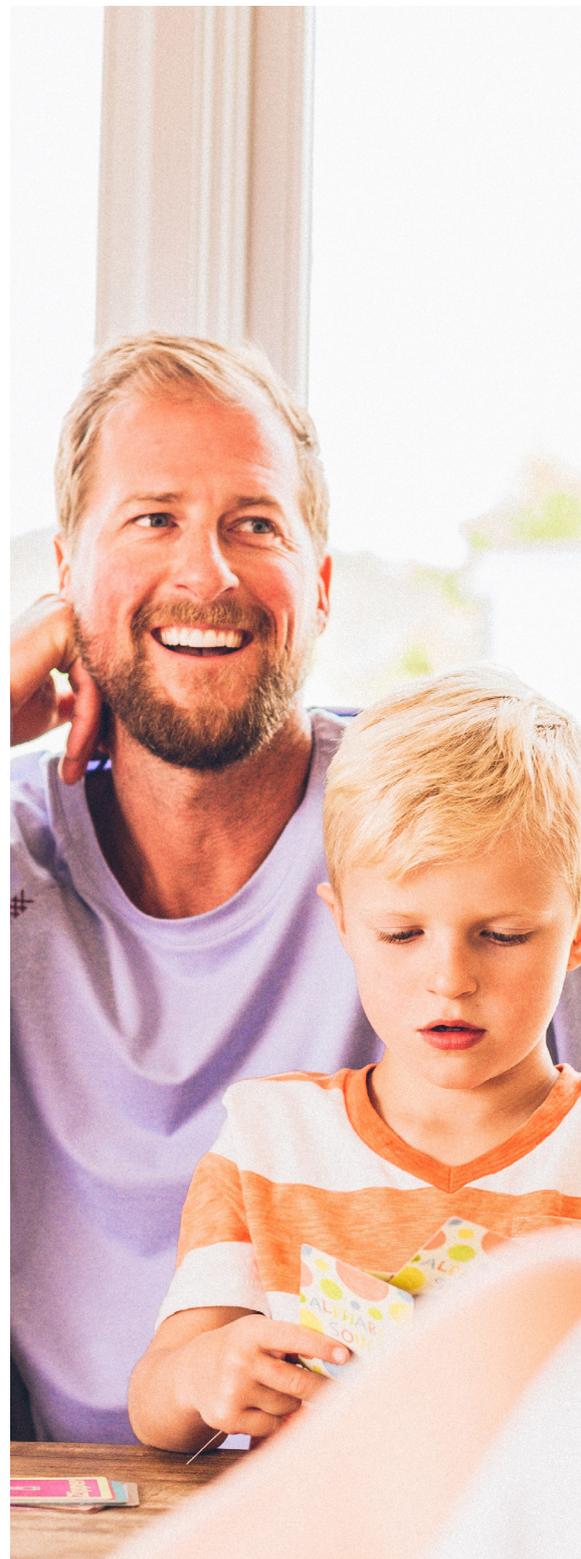
- Accept collective responsibility to support children and parents
- Utilise local assets and skills to build community capacity that supports social support networks
- Are providing sustainable support through individuals, community groups, business and voluntary organisations
- Are understood and valued by practitioners as being part of the early help solution

Parents:

- Are supporting one another in their communities
- Know where to get help if they need it
- Have trusted relationships with practitioners, neighbours and other parents
- Are well informed about how best to help their children develop and are motivated to make great choices

Practitioners:

- Focus first on families and their strength
- Work closely with families to understand what they need, and build trusting relationships
- Have a shared vision and understanding of outcomes and success
- Are skilled, knowledgeable and are co-creating and co-delivering approaches that work



Measuring success

As an Early Help Partnership, we have an agreed framework which provides core performance indicators which evidence the impact of our early help support in key areas which impact on children's outcomes. This is reported quarterly to the Children's Partnership Board and Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board.

Individual agencies within the partnership retain responsibility for the provision of data to support reporting against this framework. We will include feedback directly from children, young people and families to understand the impact that we have on their lives, as part of our measures of success.

In all areas, success will be measured by the outcomes experienced by children, young people and their families. We will also use national and peer group benchmarking to ensure that together, our partnership is delivering appropriate outcomes.

Buckinghamshire Early Help Partnership Performance indicators

Hearing the child's voice and its influences on the family journey

- Children, young people and families will tell us we have made a difference through feedback from service users

Right Service, Right Time

Reductions in:

- Number of contacts into First Response (Children's Social Care)
- Number of referrals into Children's Social Care
- Number of re-referrals to Children's Social Care (within 12 months of previous plan completion)
- Number of children and young people requiring statutory intervention

Increase in:

- Share of contacts (%) received in First Response, allocated to early help services
- Number of early help assessments
- Number of young carers identified and young carer assessments complete
- Number of contacts signposted effectively via appropriate information, advice and guidance or to Bucks Family Information Service (BFIS)

Reductions in:

- Number of Post 16 young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training NEET/unknown
- Number of fixed term exclusions from school for children and young people
- Number of permanent exclusions from school for children and young people
- Number of Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) assessment requests
- Incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour relating to families with children under 16
- Number of first time entrants to youth justice system

Improving educational outcomes and opportunities for all

- Increased attendance for school age children engaged with early help services
- More adults in paid work and less reliant on benefit

Appendix

Useful links

Children's Services strategies including the Children's Strategy 2016-18

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/our-plans/our-strategic-plan/childrens-services-strategies/>

Buckinghamshire County Council Strategic Plan

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/our-plans/our-strategic-plan/>

Thresholds document

<http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/thresholds-document/>

Further Guidance on the Thresholds document

<http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/thresholds-document/>

Good Practice Guide/Early Help Toolkit

<http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/professionals/early-help-toolkit/>

Safer Bucks Plan 2016-2017

<http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/1287/safer-bucks-plan-2016-17.pdf>

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Strategy

<https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/advice.page?id=ginScCY9QWo>

Early Intervention Foundation

<http://www.eif.org.uk/>

Understanding the development of an effective local early help offer. LGA

http://ncasc.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TW3_ISOS_LGA.pdf

How early intervention can improve outcomes for children, Early Intervention Foundation

http://ncasc.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TW3_EIF.pdf

Realising the Potential of Early Intervention.

<https://www.eif.org.uk/report/realising-the-potential-of-early-intervention>

Working together to Safeguard Children . Department for Education 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>