



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Protecting and Supporting Families in Health and Care

BMHP5021

**An Examination and Analysis of How the 'Early Help'
System Is Signposted to UK Families by Their Local
Authority Website**

Component 2: Written Report

Student name: Olga Maculska-Migovska

Student number: 2242936

Lecturer's name: Amanda Jones

Introduction

This report examines how Leicester City Council, Norfolk County Council and Tower Hamlets Council use their websites to signpost Early Help and related family support. It evaluates each website's visibility, navigation, clarity, accessibility, range of services and self-referral routes before comparing their effectiveness and recommending improvements. The analysis considers publicly available information rather than the quality of services delivered after referral.

Early Help addresses emerging family difficulties before they escalate and require statutory intervention. It forms part of local safeguarding arrangements by coordinating support from local authorities, health, education, police and voluntary organisations. The Early Help System Guide identifies accessible information and clear routes to support as features of an effective local system (Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 similarly promotes timely, family-centred support through multi-agency working (Department for Education, 2026).

Explanation of the Early Help System

The Early Help system provides coordinated support when difficulties first emerge, before family needs become complex or reach crisis point. It is available throughout childhood and may address parenting, mental health, domestic abuse, housing, finances, school attendance, substance misuse, behaviour and development. Its purpose is to strengthen family resilience, improve outcomes and reduce the need for intensive intervention.

The Early Help System Guide describes Early Help as a local partnership system rather than one council service. Universal and targeted support may involve local authorities, education, health, police and voluntary organisations (Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Families may request help directly, or practitioners may identify emerging needs. An assessment considers the family's strengths, concerns and desired outcomes. A jointly agreed plan allocates actions and responsibilities, while a Lead Practitioner coordinates professionals and provides consistent contact. Progress is reviewed and support adjusted according to changing needs.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 places Early Help within a continuum of help, support and protection. Family Help integrates targeted Early Help with support for children in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Department for Education, 2026; Children Act 1989). Early Help remains distinct from child protection. When significant harm is suspected, section 47 requires the local authority to make enquiries. The system must therefore provide accessible voluntary support alongside a clear route to statutory protection.

Explanation of Multi-Agency Working

Multi-agency working involves professionals from different organisations coordinating their knowledge, responsibilities and actions to support children and families. Partners may include social care, education, health, police, housing and voluntary organisations. Interdisciplinary working similarly combines different professional specialisms. Both approaches are necessary because interconnected family difficulties are rarely addressed effectively by one service.

The Children Act 2004 provides the legal basis for cooperation. Section 10 requires local authorities and relevant partners to cooperate to improve children's wellbeing, while section

11 requires specified organisations to safeguard and promote children's welfare (Children Act 2004). Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 identifies local authorities, Integrated Care Boards and police as statutory safeguarding partners, supported by education and other services (Department for Education, 2026).

Within Early Help, a coordinated assessment and family plan establish needs, outcomes and professional responsibilities. A Lead Practitioner provides consistent contact, while Team Around the Family meetings support joint review and decision-making. Information sharing is essential because one organisation may hold information that changes the understanding of need or risk.

Multi-agency working can improve early identification, provide holistic support and reduce duplication. However, jargon, incompatible systems, unclear thresholds and poor information sharing may weaken cooperation (NSPCC, 2023). Effective partners must therefore understand their roles, communicate, challenge assumptions and involve the child and family.

Evaluation of Leicester City Council Website

Leicester City Council provides the clearest route to Early Help. Its homepage prominently displays Children, young people and families, with a description covering parenting, childcare, Early Help, social care and reporting a child at risk (Leicester City Council, n.d.-a). Families can therefore identify the appropriate section without understanding the council's professional structure.

The support page presents nine clearly labelled categories, including Early Help, child protection, social care, domestic and sexual abuse, offending and leaving care (Leicester City Council, n.d.-b). This needs-based organisation reflects the accessible local offer promoted by the Early Help System Guide (Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022).

The Early Help page explains in plain language that support is available when problems emerge. It covers parenting, behaviour, mental health, housing, domestic abuse, school attendance and finances. Parents, carers and young people over 16 may request support by telephone or email. It also explains that a Lead Professional completes an assessment, agrees an action plan and coordinates services (Leicester City Council, n.d.-c).

Search, contact, accessibility and translation functions are available. However, translation is not positioned beside the referral route, while information is divided between the council and Family Hub websites. Terms such as EHA and MARF may also be unfamiliar. These limitations do not fully reflect the requirement for clear and simple public-sector information (Government Digital Service, 2024). Nevertheless, Leicester combines visible signposting, understandable categories and practical self-referral information.

Evaluation of Norfolk County Council Website

Norfolk County Council displays Children and families among its principal homepage services, although Early Help is not named at this stage (Norfolk County Council, n.d.-a). Within this section, users can select child safety, SEND, Family Hubs, young carers, adoption and fostering. Early help for children and families appears as a separate option with a short explanation (Norfolk County Council, n.d.-b). This supports the Early Help System Guide principle that families need clear routes to local support (Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022).

The Early Help page uses supportive language and explains that assistance is available before difficulties become serious. It supports families with children under 18, or up to 25 with SEND, and recognises adult financial or mental health difficulties affecting children. Families can obtain online or face-to-face support through Best Start Family Hubs and a clearly labelled request option (Norfolk County Council, n.d.-c). This reflects the preventative, family-centred approach promoted by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 (Department for Education, 2026).

The request page provides separate routes for families and professionals, allowing users to request a specific service or describe a general need (Norfolk County Council, n.d.-d). However, information is divided between the council website, Family Hubs, Community Directory and external services. Norfolk also acknowledges incorrectly coded or insufficiently descriptive headings within its Early Help form, creating barriers for screen-reader users (Norfolk County Council, 2026). This conflicts with public-sector accessibility principles (Government Digital Service, 2024). The INTRAN language link is also unclear. Norfolk therefore provides effective self-referral but remains digitally fragmented.

Evaluation of Tower Hamlets Council Website

Tower Hamlets provides extensive Early Help information, but it is difficult to locate from the homepage, which prioritises parking, Council Tax, waste and benefits. Families must find Children and family care within Health and social care before Early Help becomes visible (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, n.d.-a). This creates an indirect route for users unfamiliar with the council's structure.

Support is presented as MAST Early Help and Children and Families Service. Although MAST means Multi-Agency Support Team, the abbreviation may be unclear to families (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, n.d.-b). Once found, the offer is comprehensive. It supports families from pregnancy to age 19, or 25 with SEND, and addresses housing, finances, parenting, mental health, family breakdown, behaviour and substance misuse (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, n.d.-c). This reflects the whole-family approach of the Early Help System Guide (Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022).

MAST combines social care, Early Help, health, housing, education and police. This reflects section 10 of the Children Act 2004 and the multi-agency expectations of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 (Children Act 2004; Department for Education, 2026). Families can use a request form, telephone or email, while urgent safeguarding and out-of-hours routes are also provided. Assessment, action planning, Lead Professional and Team Around the Family processes are explained (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, n.d.-d).

However, information is divided across several pages and uses terms including MAST, EHA and eEHA. Multiple email addresses may also confuse families, while no language option is prominent. These barriers conflict with clear and simple public-sector communication (Government Digital Service, 2024). Tower Hamlets therefore provides strong multi-agency support but less accessible signposting.

Comparative Analysis

All three councils provide substantial information about Early Help, but they differ considerably in how easily families can find and understand it. Leicester offers the clearest initial signposting because its homepage explicitly includes Early Help within the Children, young people and families category (Leicester City Council, n.d.-a). Norfolk also places Children and families among its principal services, but Early Help is identified only after entering that section (Norfolk

County Council, n.d.-a). Tower Hamlets provides the least direct route because users must locate Children and family care through Health and social care before encountering its Early Help offer (London Borough of Tower Hamlets, n.d.-a).

Leicester and Norfolk organise support through clearly separated, needs-based categories. Leicester is particularly effective because safeguarding, Early Help, social care, domestic abuse and support for young people are presented as distinct options (Leicester City Council, n.d.-b). Norfolk similarly provides prominent routes to Family Hubs, SEND, child safety and Early Help (Norfolk County Council, n.d.-b). Tower Hamlets offers comprehensive support after the relevant section is located, but abbreviations such as MAST, EHA and eEHA require users to understand professional terminology. This conflicts with the expectation that public-sector information should be clear and simple to use (Government Digital Service, 2024).

Each authority provides online and alternative routes to support. Leicester offers self-referral by telephone and email, Norfolk separates family and professional request forms, and Tower Hamlets provides a form, telephone numbers and several email addresses. Norfolk's recognised accessibility defects in its Early Help form may disadvantage screen-reader users (Norfolk County Council, 2026), while Tower Hamlets' multiple contacts may create uncertainty. Leicester provides general Translate and Accessibility functions, although language assistance is not prominently positioned beside its Early Help referral information.

Overall, Leicester City Council communicates Early Help most effectively and accessibly. Its principal advantage is not a wider range of services, since all three provide broad support, but the visibility, logical organisation and clarity of the route from the homepage to self-referral. This most closely reflects the accessible and family-centred local offer promoted by the Early Help System Guide (Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022).

Conclusion and recommendations

All three local authorities provide Early Help and related family support, but the visibility and accessibility of this information differ. Tower Hamlets offers comprehensive multi-agency support and clear safeguarding routes, but families must search through several levels of the website and interpret professional abbreviations. Norfolk provides supportive explanations, clearly separated services and self-referral. However, Early Help is not identified on its homepage, information is spread across several platforms, and its request form has recognised accessibility problems.

Leicester City Council provides the most effective and accessible signposting. Its homepage immediately directs users to Children, young people and families and explicitly identifies Early Help within this category. Support is then organised into large, clearly labelled sections according to the user's needs. Families can understand what assistance is available, how to request it and what will happen after contact.

Early Help and family support should be clearly visible on the first screen of every council homepage rather than placed under general council or health services. A prominent Get Help and Support button should lead directly to needs-based categories, including parenting, mental health, SEND, domestic abuse, housing, financial difficulties and child safety. Each category should use plain language and provide clear online, telephone and face-to-face contact routes. A visible language selector and information about free interpretation should appear at the top of every support and referral page. Tower Hamlets should remove or immediately explain abbreviations, Norfolk should correct its inaccessible form, and Leicester should connect its council and Family Hub pages more clearly.

Reference List

Children Act 1989, c. 41. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Children Act 2004, c. 31. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Department for Education (2026) Working together to safeguard children 2026: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Department for Education and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022) Supporting Families: Early Help System Guide. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-early-help-system-guide> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Government Digital Service (2024) Understanding accessibility requirements for public sector bodies. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Leicester City Council (n.d.-a) Homepage. Available at: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Leicester City Council (n.d.-b) Early help for children, young people and families. Available at: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/children-young-people-and-families/support-children-and-young-people/early-help-children-young-people-and-families> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

London Borough of Tower Hamlets (n.d.-a) Homepage. Available at: <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Home.aspx> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

London Borough of Tower Hamlets (n.d.-b) About Early Help. Available at: https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/health_social_care/children_and_family_care/Early_Help/About_Early_Help.aspx (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Norfolk County Council (2026) Accessibility statement for norfolk.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/44459/Accessibility-statement-for-norfolk.gov.uk> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Norfolk County Council (n.d.-a) Norfolk County Council homepage. Available at: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

Norfolk County Council (n.d.-b) Early help for children and families. Available at: <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/article/40407/Early-help-for-children-and-families> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

NSPCC (2023) Multi-agency working in child protection. Available at: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-protection-system/multi-agency-working-child-protection> (Accessed: 12 August 2026).

