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1. Introduction

This report examines how the Early Help system is signposted to families on the websites of three local authorities: Leeds City Council, Norfolk County Council, and Southwark Council. These councils have been selected to provide different approaches to presenting information about Early Help and family support services. The report will firstly outline the Early Help system and it uses safeguarding, followed by a discussion of multi-agency working and its importance. It will then evaluate each of the three local authority websites, focusing on how effectively they communicate Early Help services. A comparative analysis will highlight key strengths and weaknesses, before concluding with recommendations to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of online information for families.

Local authorities play a central role in delivering Early Help services and ensuring that families can access appropriate support. Local authority websites serve as a primary source of information and guidance for families seeking help. The effectiveness of these websites is therefore critical in determining whether families are able to access timely support. Factors such as clarity, accessibility, organisation of content, and ease of navigation all influence how effectively Early Help is communicated. The Early Help system is designed to identify and respond to needs at the earliest possible stage, preventing issues from escalating into more serious concerns that require statutory intervention. It operates as a preventative framework within the wider safeguarding system and is closely aligned with the work of local safeguarding partnerships, which coordinate multi-agency efforts to protect children and promote their welfare.

2. Main body

The Early Help system is a structured approach to identifying and addressing the needs of children, young people, and families at an early stage. It is based on the principle that early intervention can prevent problems from becoming more serious, by reducing the need for more intensive and costly interventions later. According to the Early Help System Guide, Early Help involves providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from early years through teenage

years. (NSPCC 2023).

A key feature of the Early Help system is its voluntary nature. Families are encouraged to engage with services and play an active role in decision-making. This collaborative approach helps to build trust and ensures that support is tailored to the specific needs of each family. Accessibility is a crucial aspect of Early Help. Families must be able to recognise when they need support and understand how to access it. Local authority websites therefore play a vital role in providing clear and accessible information. If information is difficult to find or understand, families may delay seeking help, increasing the risk of issues escalating. Early Help is not a single service but rather a coordinated network of services delivered by multiple agencies. These services may include parenting support, mental health services, educational support, and assistance with housing or financial difficulties. The system often involves an early assessment process, where professionals work with families to identify needs and develop a plan of support. This plan is typically reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains effective. Department of Education (2022).

Multi-agency working is a central component of effective safeguarding and Early Help provision. It refers to the collaboration between different organisations and professionals, including social services, healthcare providers, schools, and voluntary organisations. According to Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026), safeguarding is most effective when agencies work together to share information, assess needs, and coordinate interventions. Effective multi-agency working relies on clear communication, shared responsibility, and mutual understanding of roles. Professionals must be able to share relevant information in a timely manner while maintaining confidentiality. There must be clear processes in place for coordinating support and resolving any disagreements between agencies. Local authority websites should reflect this collaborative approach by clearly explaining how services work together and how families can access coordinated support. However, this is often an area where communication can be improved, as the complexity of multi-agency systems can be difficult to convey in a simple and accessible way. The purpose of multi-agency working is to ensure that children and families receive comprehensive and holistic support. Many families face complex and interconnected challenges that cannot be addressed by a single service. For example, a child

experiencing behavioural difficulties at school may also require mental health support and assistance for their family. By working together, agencies can provide a more coordinated and effective response. NSPCC (2025)

Evaluation of Local Authority Websites

Leeds City Council

The Leeds City Council website provides a structured approach to presenting Early Help information. The site includes dedicated sections for children, families, and safeguarding, with clear headings and logical navigation pathways. Information is generally written in plain English, which enhances accessibility for a wide range of users. One of the key strengths of the Leeds website is its organisation. Services are grouped into categories, allowing users to identify relevant support quickly. The site also provides links to additional resources, which can be helpful for families seeking more detailed information. Information about Early Help is sometimes distributed across multiple pages, requiring users to navigate between sections. This can make it more difficult for users to gain a comprehensive understanding of available services. Additionally, the website relies heavily on text with limited use of visual aids such as diagrams or videos, which could enhance user engagement. Leeds City Council (2026)

Norfolk County Council

The Norfolk County Council website offers a comprehensive and detailed overview of Early Help services. It provides extensive information about the types of support available, eligibility criteria, and referral processes. This level of detail can be particularly useful for professionals and families with complex needs.

A major strength of the Norfolk website is the depth of information provided. Users can access detailed explanations of services and processes, which can help to build understanding and confidence in the system. The site also includes clear contact information and guidance on how to access support. The volume of information can also be a weakness. The site may appear overwhelming to users who are seeking quick and straightforward answers. The layout could be simplified to improve

usability, particularly for individuals with limited digital skills or literacy. Additionally, the use of professional terminology may make it less accessible for some families. The Norfolk County Council website offers a comprehensive and detailed overview of Early Help services. The Norfolk County Council website offers a comprehensive and detailed overview of Early Help services. Norfolk County Council (2026)

Southwark Council

The Southwark Council website adopts a user-friendly and accessible approach to presenting Early Help information. The site is designed with simplicity in mind, using clear headings, concise language, and logical navigation. One of the main strengths of the Southwark website is its focus on accessibility. Information is presented in a straightforward manner, making it easy for users to understand what support is available and how to access it. The site also provides clear signposting, directing users to relevant services with minimal effort. However, the simplicity of the site may also result in a lack of depth. Compared to Norfolk, the Southwark website provides less detailed information about processes and service structures. While this may not be a significant issue for most users, it could limit its usefulness for those seeking more comprehensive guidance. Leeds provides a balanced approach, combining elements of both accessibility and detail. However, its effectiveness is somewhat limited by the fragmentation of information across multiple pages and the lack of visual engagement.

A common weakness across all three websites is the limited use of visual tools and interactive features. Incorporating elements such as videos, infographics, and interactive guides could significantly enhance user understanding. Additionally, while all three websites reference multi-agency working, they do not always clearly explain how services collaborate in practice. Southwark Council (2024)

Comparative Analysis

The comparison of the three local authority websites highlights significant differences in how Early Help information is communicated.

In terms of accessibility, Southwark performs the strongest. Its use of simple language, clear structure, and concise information makes it particularly effective for families seeking immediate support. The website is easy to navigate and provides clear instructions on how to access services.

Norfolk, on the other hand, excels in providing detailed and comprehensive information. This makes it highly informative but potentially less accessible for some users. The volume of content and use of professional terminology may create barriers for families who are unfamiliar with the system. Leeds provides a balanced approach, combining elements of both accessibility and detail. However, its effectiveness is somewhat limited by the fragmentation of information across multiple pages and the lack of visual engagement.

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3. Conclusion

Conclusion

This report has examined how the Early Help system is communicated to families through the websites of Leeds, Norfolk, and Southwark local authorities. It has highlighted the importance of Early Help as a preventative approach within the wider safeguarding framework, as well as the role of multi-agency working in delivering effective support.

The analysis demonstrates that while all three councils provide valuable information, their approaches differ significantly. Norfolk offers the most comprehensive and detailed content but may be less accessible due to its complexity. Leeds provides a structured and balanced approach but could improve navigation and user engagement. Southwark stands out for its accessibility and user-friendly design, making it particularly effective for families seeking quick and clear guidance. Overall Southwark Council appears to provide the most effective and accessible information.

Its clear language, logical structure, and strong focus on user experience make it the most suitable for ensuring that families can easily understand and access Early Help services.

4. Recommendations

-several recommendations can be made to improve how Early Help is communicated local authority websites: Gov.uk (2023)

-Websites should incorporate visual and interactive elements, such as videos and infographics, to enhance understanding.

-Information well-organised, reducing the need for users to navigate across multiple pages.

-priority must be given on explaining multi-agency working, helping families understand how services collaborate.

-Websites should be regularly reviewed and tested with users to ensure they meet the needs of diverse populations. [Gov.uk](#) (2018)

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