



Bedfordshire
county council



Positive parenting

A strategy for parenting
support to promote better
outcomes for children in
Bedfordshire



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Introduction

Bedfordshire's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is required to produce a Parenting Strategy, in accordance with Government guidelines, by April 2008. It aims to "develop a strategic approach to the design and delivery of parent support services that informs the local Children and Young People's Plan" (Parent Support Guidance for Local Authorities October 2006).

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership monitors the outcomes that children and young people in Bedfordshire are achieving.

Its key responsibility is to improve the range of services available and their performance in order to improve the well being of children in Bedfordshire.

Well being means all aspects of children's health and development:

- Staying safe
- Being healthy
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Benefiting from economic well-being

Parents have a huge influence on outcomes for their children, so parenting support can make a significant contribution to improving all outcomes for children.

This document is an overview of Bedfordshire's parenting strategy and provides the framework for development of parenting support services and joint working across adult and children's services.

The Positive Parenting Strategy has been formulated by a multi-agency Parenting Stakeholder Group, led by the Children's Services Head of Commissioning, Early Intervention and Prevention. Accountability for the final strategy will be through the Strategic Partnership's 'Be Healthy' Sub-Group.

The Strategy will be a working document supported by a delivery plan, which will be published separately. Ongoing consultation and involvement with parents, children and young people, and with staff working with families in Bedfordshire will continue to ensure the continued development and strengthening of the strategy.

It is important that at the point of service delivery, parents feel ownership of the support they are offered and reassured that services have been developed with the understanding of parental need.

1. What is positive parenting and why is it so important?

i) The Parenting Context

There are compelling arguments, both nationally and locally, for a strong multi-agency and integrated approach to support parents and positive parenting. The 'Every Child Matters' Outcomes Framework was published in December 2004 and identified five essential outcomes for children and young people with associated performance targets to measure success in meeting these outcomes.

The role of parents in supporting the achievement of successful outcomes has been emphasised in a raft of Government legislation and policies, including the 2004 'National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services', the 2005 Schools White Paper 'Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – More Choice for Parents and Pupils', the 2006 Cross-Government 'RESPECT Action Plan', the 2007 HM Treasury/DCSF documents 'Aiming High for Children : Supporting Families' and Aiming High for young people: A 10 year strategy for positive activities'

"A positive parenting style has a strong and beneficial impact on children's outcomes and can act as a protective factor against other risks, including relationship breakdown. There is also evidence suggesting that good, enthusiastic parenting is not determined by social class or ethnic background and importantly that it can be learned."

Aiming High for Children : Supporting Families, HM Treasury/DCSF 2007

"Parents and families are the strongest influence in young peoples' lives, significantly shaping their values and aspirations"

Aiming High for Young People: a 10 year strategy for positive activities', HM Treasury/DCSF 2007

It is the Government's intention that greater integration of children and young people's services will mean that parents and carers from whatever background will have more and better information, advice and support and have access to integrated support when needed.

1. What is positive parenting and why is it so important?

National trends in parenting

- There have been major changes in parental employment patterns and in the way that caring responsibilities are shared
- Parents are having children later
- Most parents are juggling caring for their elderly parents as well as their children
- Parents of teenagers are increasingly saying they want more help
- There is more variety in family structure and relationships
- There are more single parent family units
- Increased ethnic diversity in society is reflected in more diverse patterns of family formation
- Increasing numbers of young adults live with their parents

(‘Every Parent Matters’ DfES 2007)

The National Service Framework (NSF) Standard 2 : Supporting Parents or Carers has been a key driver for the ‘Every Child Matters : Change for Children’ Programme. The framework gives guiding principles and markers of good practice that the Government requires all Local Authorities and NHS organisations to deliver.

The Cross-Government Respect Action Plan (2006) demonstrates that parents play a critical role in assisting the development of a child’s values and behaviour and calls for an improvement in parenting provision nationally through Children’s Centres, Extended Services and measures to improve the workforce capacity, including a National Parenting Academy, which has been established for the training and support of front line staff through accredited programmes and introduction of national occupational standards.

‘Think Family ; Improving the chances of families at risk’ (Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion Task Force 2007) places greater emphasis on systems that think about the whole family and has no ‘wrong door’ ; where contact with any one service gives access to wider support. (Families at risk are defined as families with multiple and complex problems such as worklessness, poor mental health or substance misuse. This includes those that already have complex and ongoing problems and those who are at risk of developing them.)

In addition, every Local Authority is required to identify a single Parenting Commissioner with responsibility for assessing need, identifying gaps in services and ensuring that parenting support is appropriately reflected in the Children and Young People’s Plan.

1. What is positive parenting and why is it so important?

ii) The Bedfordshire context

National measures of deprivation and disadvantage point to Bedfordshire as being generally affluent, particularly in its rural areas. However, there are areas of significant deprivation, largely centred in Bedford, with pockets both in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. These areas are characterised by high unemployment, low qualifications, educational under-achievement, reliance on social benefits, poorer health and premature mortality. They also experience higher levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

- The population in Bedfordshire will increase to an estimated population of **460,800** by 2011.
- Children between 0-19 years will make up **22.1%** of Bedfordshire's population by 2011
- Bedfordshire has **219** schools and will have **35** children's centres by April 2010 and **40** Extended Schools clusters by 2009-10
- Total number of pupils attending maintained schools **63,931** (Jan 2007)
- **17.8%** of pupils attending maintained schools have Special Educational Needs (Jan 2007)
- There are **153,867** households across all Bedfordshire districts.
15.6% comprise couples with two or more dependent children
2.5% comprise a lone parent with two or more dependent children
- **11.3%** of Bedfordshire's population are from black and minority ethnic groups, largely concentrated in Bedford Borough. BME representation is highest among younger people – 10% of those under 20 years in the county and 11.3% of young people under 16 years in Bedford Borough.

The majority of parents in Bedfordshire are doing a good job compared with parents in other parts of the country and some are doing so in very challenging circumstances using their own resources and informal networks of support.

However there are other more vulnerable families who are not being helped by services and others who may have one or two additional needs but whose situation may escalate without preventative support. For these parents their own level of difficulties and needs make it very hard for them to meet the needs of their children.

Some parents face extra challenges when their child has additional needs which mean they need to adapt their usual parenting style to support their child. In order to improve outcomes for all children in Bedfordshire, work to support parents in meeting their responsibilities is crucial.

2. A positive parenting strategy

The aspiration of Bedfordshire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership is for all children and young people in Bedfordshire is that they will feel safe, valued and supported to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to society.

Bedfordshire is committed to making parenting support services available in an accessible way to improve outcomes for children. It acknowledges that there are differing levels of need in children, young people and parents across the County and plans to implement a range of preventative and targeted parenting support to reflect this variety of needs.

i) Definitions

For the purposes of this strategy

'Parents' refers to anyone acting in a parenting role, eg. mums, dads (including teenage parents and parent carers), step-parents, grandparents and foster-carers.

'Parent Support' refers to any form or provision of services, resources or assistance which will support parents in their role.

'Parenting Support' is defined as any formal activity or programme whose specific purpose is to assist parents or carers in promoting positive outcomes for their child. These may be individual or group-based, but are normally focused and short term. They are aimed at developing parenting skills (eg play, behaviour management, communication skills etc) and enhancing the quality of the parent-child relationship by improving family functioning, parent self-esteem, well-being and mental health, and the emotional and behavioural development of children.

'Family Learning' refers to activities where adults and children learn together and there are clear learning outcomes for both children and adults

'Positive Parenting' - in consultation with local community, voluntary sector and other agencies and services working directly with children and their families, a number of **definitions** of positive parenting support have been identified. Most people agreed that Positive Parenting is **Loving, Firm** and **Consistent** and includes:

- Getting the best out of family life
- Recognising a child's needs are underpinned by love and being responsible for ensuring those needs are being met
- Providing a safe environment
- Being nurtured and encouraged
- Providing clear boundaries

2. A positive parenting strategy

- Providing opportunities for growth and development
- Ensuring respect for one another within the law
- Promoting truth and honesty

In the Government document 'Parenting Support : Guidance for Local Authorities 2006' a number of key principles are described to underpin positive parenting:

- Authoritative (warm and firm, not harsh parenting);
- Attachment, initiated pre-birth and especially important in early months;
- Parental involvement, in the form of interest in the child and parent-child discussions : how parents interact with their children is key;
- Positive parental expectations, beliefs and attitude; and
- Parental supervision

ii) Supporting Parents

Recognising the diverse cultural and economic backgrounds in Bedfordshire, the Strategy places the family unit at its heart and values effective models of parenting that are already in place. Where appropriate, parents will be empowered and supported to establish peer and family parenting networks.

However the Strategy recognises the factors that impact on family life. such as unemployment, poor health, low income, low literacy and numeracy levels, poor mental health or substance misuse problems, and acknowledges that adults and children have differing needs. It takes into account that some adults may need additional support in order to benefit fully from parenting services.

It also supports the provision of complementary services, such as family and intergenerational learning and mentoring which may contribute to positive parenting; providing benefits and continuity for both parents and children.

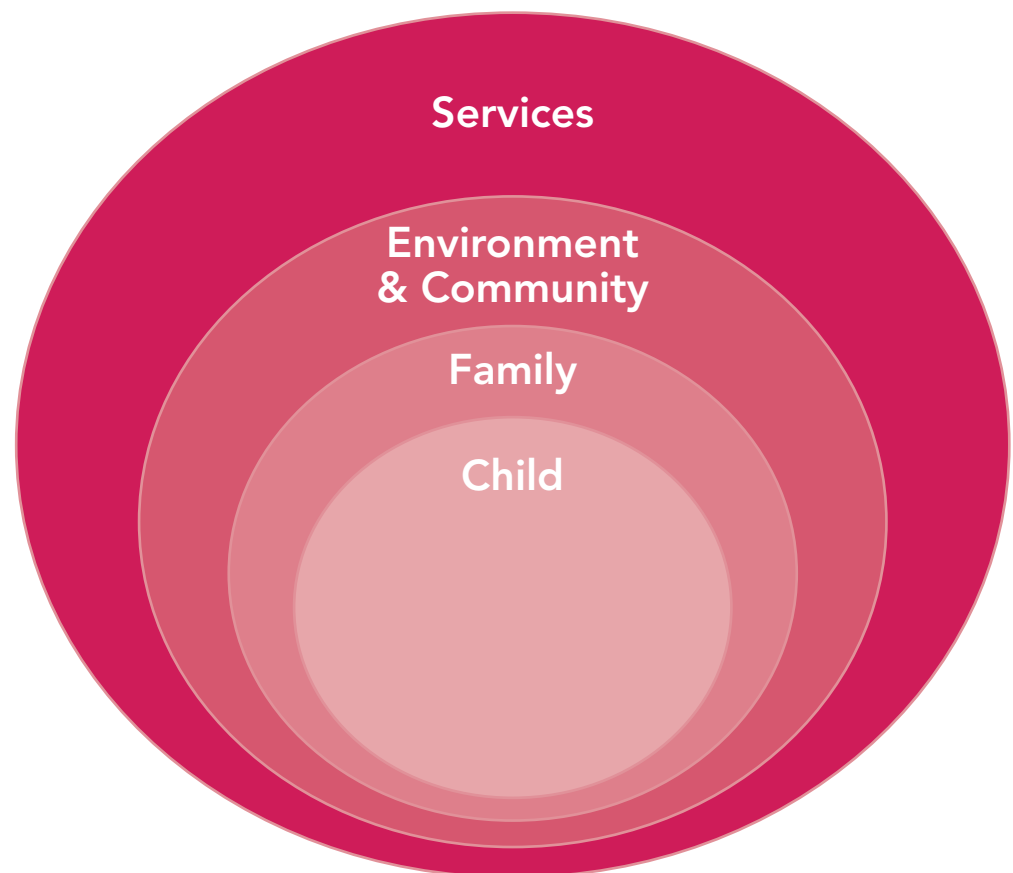
2. A positive parenting strategy

iii) Integrated services

Linking the Positive Parenting Strategy with preventative services will provide better outcomes for children in relation to all aspects of their health, welfare, development and behaviour. This Strategy is designed to ensure that parenting support services help the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership achieve the objectives set out in its Children and Young People's Plan and the improvements required in identified priority areas of the plan.

The strategy must be well co-ordinated and commissioned and supported by complementary integrated processes to ensure that from the perspective of the parent who is seeking help:

- information about services will be readily available, including signposting to support for families
- they will be able to tell how services available can specifically help them
- how those services can be accessed – through self referral or professional referral
- those services that are free at the point of delivery and those paid for by the parent



3. Describing the levels of need

In order to achieve consistency in the way children's needs are understood and communicated between professionals, the Children Young People's Strategic Partnership has developed brief descriptions of the levels of children's needs. This includes:

- Community and universal services
- Services targeted at parents and children with additional needs
- Specialist services for parents and children with the most complex needs

A framework describing the needs of children and young people and the main services providing parenting support for the three levels of need is attached at **Appendix 1**. It is not a comprehensive service directory of everything that is available, but the document gives some examples of the most important services showing what they provide and how they are currently working.

The Strategy aims to provide an integrated approach to positive parenting services across all levels of complexity so as to be able to meet the full range of needs of children and families. This includes the following:

- Developing **the capacity in local communities** to provide support for parents from within the resources of the locality
- Recognising that all parents may need additional help sometimes and a range of basic services should be made available as part of **universal services**
- Offering **targeted services** for parents of vulnerable children with additional needs and children in communities with higher than usual levels of need and vulnerability
- Offering very **specialist services** for parents of children with complex needs, including those families who are caught in a long term cycle of low achievement.

Within this framework services may often need to be flexible to meet a range of parenting support needs. For example in some localities universal providers offer many targeted services for children with additional needs because the levels of need in some communities are very high. All professionals working with children and their families should be aware of the range of provision that is available.

Level 1 - Universal services

Universal services are provided by GPs and other primary health professionals, schools, nurseries, early year's groups and play services. They meet most families' needs most of the time. They are the foundation of all children's services provision and have always offered support and guidance for parents.

3. Describing the levels of need

• These traditional universal services have now been supplemented by Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools, which will bring many of these services together and often combine statutory and voluntary sector involvement. Voluntary sector organisations play a significant role as providers of universal children's services.

• Parenting support that is provided or accessible through universal services is vital. The role of parenting support in universal services is to:

- promote better outcomes for all children by giving guidance about positive parenting in a setting that everyone can use which needs no special referral and to which no stigma is attached
- engage isolated and hard to reach families
- enable parents and children to make full use of universal health and educational provision (i.e. take up services which some parents may otherwise find hard to access and accept)
- identify more complex problems, support families, signpost and refer parents elsewhere if necessary

• The DfES Extended Schools prospectus issued in June 2005 stated that "by 2010, all children should have access to a variety of extended services in or through their school." The core offer for mainstream and special schools includes parenting support. The parenting support component has been defined in more detail as:

- access to parenting groups using structured, manual-based parenting programmes
- family learning sessions to allow children to learn with their parents
- information sessions for parents at phase transfer
- offers information about nationally and locally available sources of information, advice and support

3. Describing the levels of need

Level 2 - Targeted parenting services for children with additional needs

Targeted parenting support is more likely to address specific needs and risks, linked to the achievement of specific outcomes. This level of parenting support is often provided in groups or individually for more complex problems. It also allows for rapid identification of children at risk of significant harm who may need referral to children's services.

Staff will often work together on a number of outcomes for individual children and families showing early signs of difficulty.

Level 3 - Specialist services

Specialist parenting support is provided as part of a care package where a number of professionals are involved and where the needs being met are complex or there is a high level of risk or need.

These services need to provide:

- very specialist and intensive parenting programmes linked to intensive family support to prevent family breakdown or reduce the risk of further serious problems such as offending or mental health problems
- services to families who have a child with an illness or disability, for example family support and respite care
- well co-ordinated lead professional management of the case to ensure that all the right services are involved and working towards an agreed care plan
- regular review of the care plan to ensure that it is co-ordinated and effective.

Many specialist services working with families with complex needs are provided by the voluntary sector who are often well placed when it comes to working with families at risk.

The key parenting services working with children who have complex needs are:

- Commissioning and co-ordination of intensive family support services
- Youth Offending Service
- Services for children, young people and parents with complex disabilities or mental health problems
- Carers Services

4. Strategic Commissioning

i) Commissioning parenting support services

The current priorities for commissioning services are set out in the children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Commissioning Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan Review.

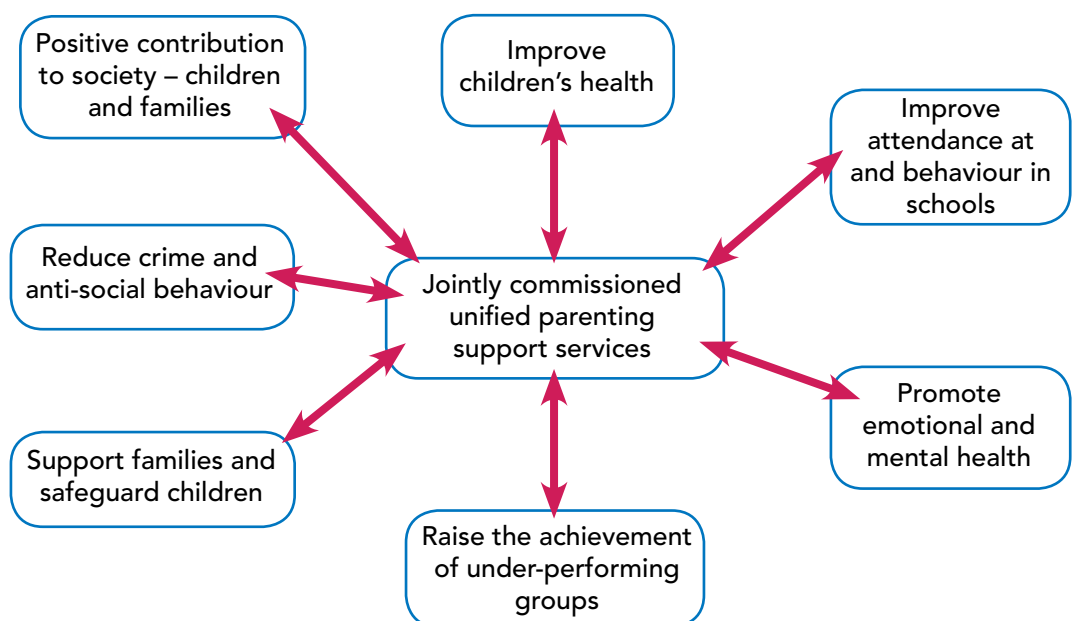
A table showing the strategic pathway for commissioning parenting support is given at **Appendix 2**.

Government guidance (Parenting Support : Guidance for Local Authorities in England' October 2006) requires the identification of a single Commissioner of Parenting Support Services to provide a strategic and comprehensive approach to the development of a continuum of support for parents. In Bedfordshire this named role will be undertaken by the Head of Early Intervention and Prevention within the Children's Services Commissioning Directorate. The responsibilities of the post will be integrated into the work of the multi-agency Joint Commissioning Group.

ii) Integrated commissioning arrangements

Bedfordshire has integrated its parenting commissioning into its overall commissioning arrangements. In this way there will more cohesion in service delivery with all parenting support providers working within a joint commissioning strategy which meets the full range of children's needs and achieves the priority areas from the Children and Young People's Plan.

Impact of joint commissioning for parenting support



5. Developing the Parenting Workforce

- The Government has funded the setting up of a National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) made up from a consortium comprising the Family and Parenting Institute, Kings College University and Parenting UK, in order to effectively deliver quality assured, standardised parenting support cross the country. The Academy will be implementing national occupational standards supported by training and support for staff and volunteers delivering parenting support. In Bedfordshire work has begun on the development of an integrated workforce strategy for children and young people which will focus on the roll out of accredited training for staff and parent educators.

6. Strategy Delivery Plan

- The Strategy will be underpinned by a Delivery Plan which will ensure the continued development of parenting support over the short, medium and longer term. The Delivery Plan will cover areas such as:
 - Engagement and involvement of parents. Their views on the shape of services to meet their needs and what those services might look in the future will be a key action and an ongoing requirement.
 - Integrated implementation and delivery - working and consulting with relevant agencies and professionals involved in providing parenting support and those working with families.
 - Ensuring the strategy is integral to the joint commissioning arrangements and resource identification
 - Commissioning accessible, high-quality evidence based parenting support
 - Developing capacity for a trained and skilled workforce able to access nationally recognised training
 - Ensuring quality in parenting support provision is maintained and kept under review in line with national occupational standards
 - Communication strategy to support positive parenting particularly to vulnerable and hard to reach groups and avoid stigma
 - Regular review of the Strategy by the Parenting Stakeholder Group to ensure it is responsive to needs of families in Bedfordshire
 - Monitoring and evaluating the impact - establishing a cycle of continuous improvement to measure improvement in outcomes.

Appendix 1

A framework to describe the needs of children and young people

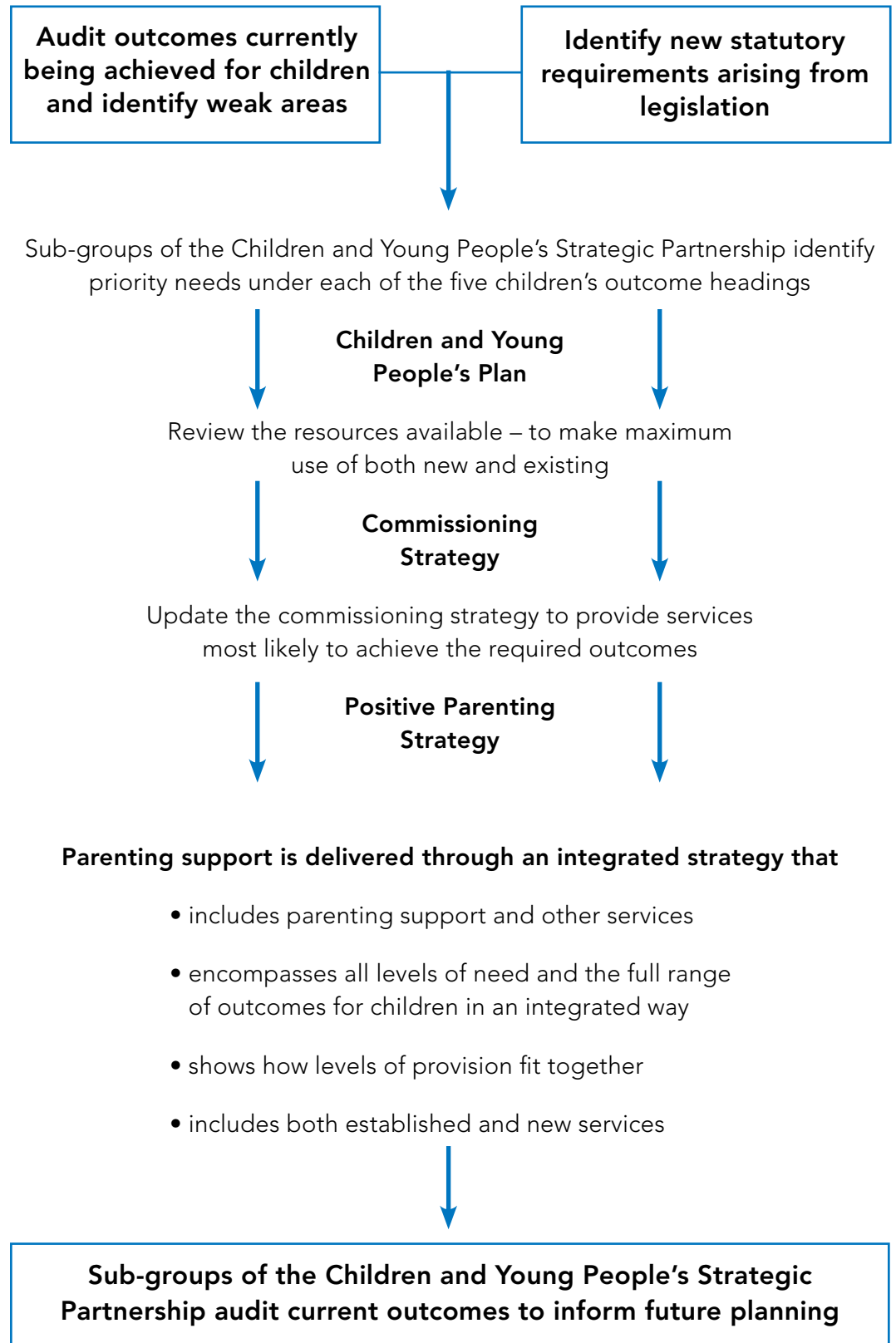
Children with no identified additional needs	Children with additional needs		Children with complex needs
<p>These are children and young people who make good overall progress in all areas of development. Broadly, these children receive appropriate universal services, such as health care and education. They may access leisure and play facilities, housing or voluntary sector services.</p>	<p>These are children and young people who would benefit from extra help in order to make the best of their life chances. These are 'children with additional needs'. Their needs can often be met with a single agency response however the support of other agencies may be required.</p>	<p>These are children and young people who have a greater number of needs. Often they require a holistic and multi-agency approach and services.</p>	<p>These are children and young people whose needs are complex, prolonged or critical. They require a multi-agency assessment and provision of specialist services. They include children who may be at risk of abuse or neglect.</p>
<p>Whenever possible, provision for children with additional needs will be made within universal settings</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—————→</p>			
	<p>Services targeted to meet a range of additional needs of increasing complexity. The aim is to avoid problems escalating</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—————→</p>		
		<p>Services for children with the most complex needs, requiring intensive multi-agency input</p> <p style="text-align: right;">—————→</p>	

Appendix 1

The main services providing parenting support for the three levels of children's needs

Children with no identified additional needs	Children with additional needs	Children with complex needs
Community groups, informal local groups and child minders —————→		
General Practitioners —————→		
Extended Schools —————→		
Behaviour, learning and family support within school —————→	Behaviour, learning and family support with additional external provision to schools	
Children's Centres and nurseries —————→	—————→	
Health Visitors & School Nurses —————→		
	Youth Inclusion Support Programmes —————→	
	Mentoring and befriending services —————→	
	Drugs & Alcohol Misuse Service —————→	
	Counselling Services —————→	
Locality Parent Support Advisors /Primary Mental Health Workers —————→		
	Youth Offending Team parenting team —————→	
		Family Support Services (on behalf of social care - NCH / Manor Farm / FAST) —————→
		Children's Services intensive commissioned Family Support —————→
		Bedfordshire Children's Social Care —————→
		Youth Offending team allocated cases —————→
		Education Welfare Services —————→
		Child and Adolescent Mental Health Parenting Services —————→
		Child Development Centre —————→

Commissioning parenting support in the improvement of outcomes for children in Bedfordshire



Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please contact us - details below.

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