

THINKING ABOUT YOUR LOCAL SYSTEM

A guide to to conducting a
system assessment



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Visit <https://foundations.org.uk/our-work/reports/family-hubs-planning-framework> to download the other Family Hubs Planning Framework resources.

About Foundations

At Foundations, the national What Works Centre for Children & Families, we believe all children should have the foundational relationships they need to thrive in life. By researching and evaluating the effectiveness of family support services and interventions, we're generating the actionable evidence needed to improve them, so more vulnerable children can live safely and happily at home and lead happier, healthier lives. Foundations was formed through the merger of What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF).

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INTRODUCTION

Getting started

Early intervention services are important for preventing or reducing the negative impacts of adversity and difficulties experienced by a child or family. These services are vital for supporting children and families who need it, and for identifying those who may need more support. Ideally, the system should seamlessly connect all the different services and organisations that work with and for families to improve outcomes for children and families.

This resource will help you take a system-wide approach to improving outcomes for children and families in your local area. It will help you get off to a good start with your local partners to:

- Understand the effectiveness of early intervention services
- identify areas for improvement
- work together to create positive change.

Taking a systems perspective will give you new insights into the interdependencies and shared interests across local agencies and services. It allows you to explore the relationships and connections between different types of support, how they engage and interact with families and with one another. This is most effective when underpinned by connected governance and strategy focused to improve impact on outcomes.

What's in this resource?

This resource will help you map your local system of support by bringing together information about your local system arrangements, and gathering experiences and perspectives from stakeholders in your local system.

The step-by-step guidance will support you to:

- collate the information you need to build a fuller picture of your local system arrangements
- map the current strengths of your local system
- identify areas to develop.

Having a better understanding of the interdependencies between local services and organisations – and what their shared interests and priorities are – will help you to:

- make sense of the complex web of services, agencies and organisations in your local area

- identify and understand the issues and experiences of families you want to reach
- strengthen connections between local services by bringing together different services and developing shared approaches
- take stock of current strengths
- identify gaps and barriers to access for local families
- plan your local Family Hub approach.

System assessment is one part of a contextual assessment that will support you to develop your local Family Hub approach.

It will be helpful to familiarise yourself with the [system assessment tool](#) at the end of this resource before you begin.



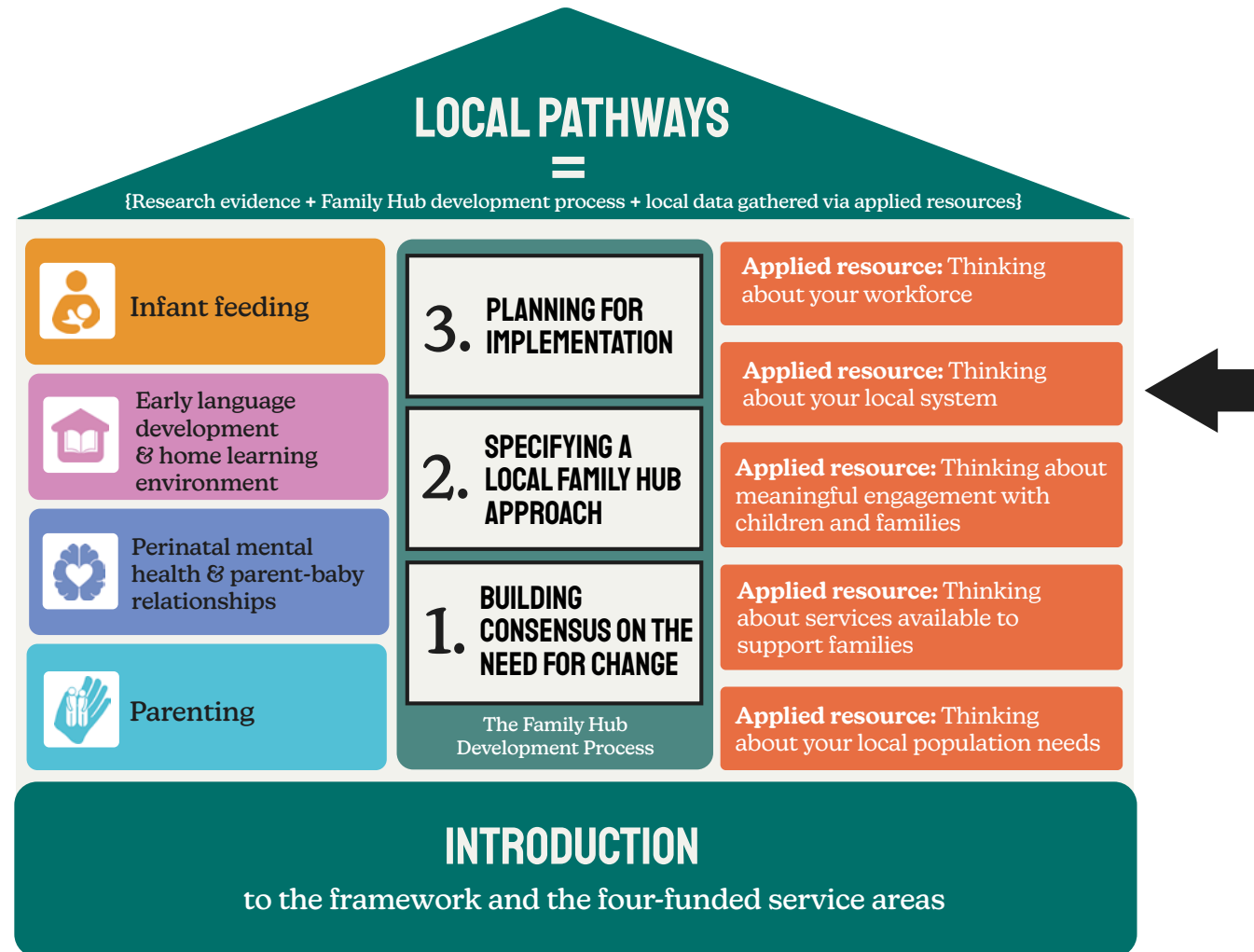
WHAT IS A LOCAL SYSTEM & WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

To improve children's outcomes in the early years of life, local areas need an effective system of support for children and their families. The system should seamlessly connect all the different services and organisations that work with and for families.

Early childhood systems are complex. They involve many different stakeholders and organisations from across early education, childcare, health, family support, training and employment, and information and advice. Different parts of the system are likely to be responding to different national and local policies at any one time.

Figure 1

The overall structure of the Family Hubs Planning Framework alongside the processes necessary for planning and implementing the Family Hub model in your local area.



The arrow shows where thinking about your local system sits within the wider framework of resources and processes.

What is a system assessment and how will it help me?

A system assessment involves bringing together information on local system arrangements and collecting different experiences and perspectives of your local system. This will give you diverse insights, which you can use to build a fuller, shared awareness of your system amongst key stakeholders.

Taking a systems perspective gives people new insight into interdependencies and shared interests across agencies and services. It also highlights the issues for families who are navigating a complicated web of services and professionals. As stakeholders build their awareness, they should prioritise the voices of children, young people and families from across the system and treat it as key information.

This resource will support local stakeholders to:

- assess the strength of local early intervention support for families
- Use their breadth of agreement about what the challenges are and what improvements to prioritise.

By following the steps in this guide, you will have a better understanding of the existing strengths of your local system and the areas you need to develop.

Figure 1

The three steps of systems assessment



By using this information alongside your population needs assessment, you will have a clearer, shared understanding as you **build agreement** on the right Family Hubs approach for your local context. Stakeholders are often short on time because of the pressures they face. The steps and activities in this resource can support you to work with them in a structured way so your discussions will pay dividends in the long term – reducing duplication while raising awareness of strategic priorities, services and roles across the system. By making sure that stakeholders fully understand the challenges and strengths

of the current situation, you can develop Family Hubs in a way that will meet the needs of your families effectively.



PAUSE & REFLECT

A key reflection from local leaders has been to ensure enough time is allocated by those involved in this activity. Time dedicated to build relationships with others involved and invest together in space to undertake the activity will support you in the long term as you develop a shared understanding and approach to overcome challenges.

To get a deeper view of your local system, you could use our early years maturity matrix.¹ This matrix outlines the characteristics of a well-functioning system, which include effective arrangements for strategy and planning, leading change, delivering effective support, and evaluating progress. These four dimensions – plan, lead, deliver, evaluate – form the structure of the matrix. The key elements are described at four different progress levels; Basic Level, Early Progress, Substantial Progress and Mature. This allows you to rate the current position of your local area and identify steps for improving the rating.

¹ See: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/eif-maturity-matrix-maternity-and-early-years>

MAPPING YOUR LOCAL SYSTEM

This part of the resource takes you through the three steps of mapping your local system:

1. Identify what you already know about your local system
2. Learn from strengths to fill the gaps
3. Collate your information ready to share.

Step 1: What do you already know about your local system?

First, consider what you already know. This knowledge will help you prepare for the next step: learning from strengths and filling any gaps in your evidence.

To answer this question, you will need to ask a group of key stakeholders to think about:

- what you already have in place across your shared local system
- where there are strengths
- where there may be gaps.

Each service in your system should be represented in this group from the start. You will also need to consider how to include feedback from children, young people and their families, especially those whose voices are often not heard.



PAUSE & REFLECT

A key consideration for stakeholders is how they can create a support system that meets the needs of local communities. How can you support stakeholders to reflect on ways to ensure services and interventions are accessible? and on ways to ensure intervention materials and sessions are relevant and are culturally appropriate? Consider how public sector bodies are working with community and voluntary sector organisations to create a more comprehensive support system that is responsive to diverse community needs.

You can use the [system assessment tool in appendix A](#) of this resource to structure discussions with your stakeholder group that allow you to identify strengths and gaps in your local system.

You could also draw on recent activities, such as your early help system guide,² your internal reporting or the EIF early years and maternity maturity matrix.³ In step 2, we look at some wider examples of evidence. You will probably need to collect different types of evidence to help you reflect and develop a rounded awareness of the whole system.

It is vital to involve your data team from the start. By including the lead data personnel across the system at this stage, you can make sure they understand what is needed in terms of gathering and integrating multiagency data that allows you to respond effectively to local needs as you build your Family Hub approach. If local stakeholders understand the national and local strategic priorities, they will be more likely to provide access to relevant data across the system. For this to happen, you may need to overcome technical issues, such as matching up systems, making the data accessible to those who need it, and developing a shared language and presentation for analysis.

You can find guidance on key stakeholders in the Family Hub implementation toolkit published by the National Centre for Family Hubs.⁴ You should make sure you have good representation as you develop a shared understanding and ambition for Family Hubs in your local area.

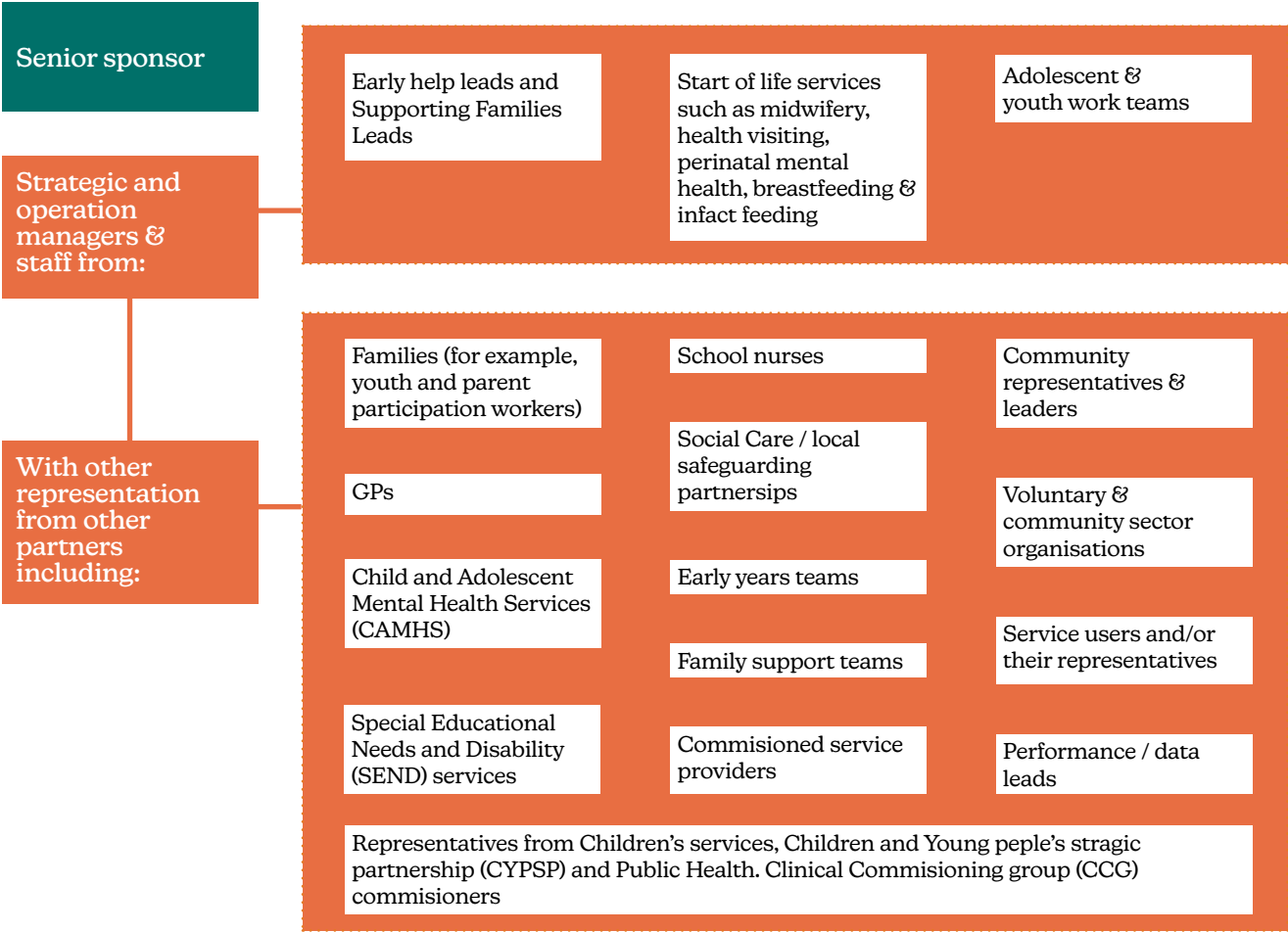
2 See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-early-help-system-guide>

3 See: <https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/eif-maturity-matrix-maternity-and-early-years>

4 Available at: <https://www.nationalcentreforfamilyhubs.org.uk/>

Figure 2

Who are the key stakeholders in the Family Hub system?



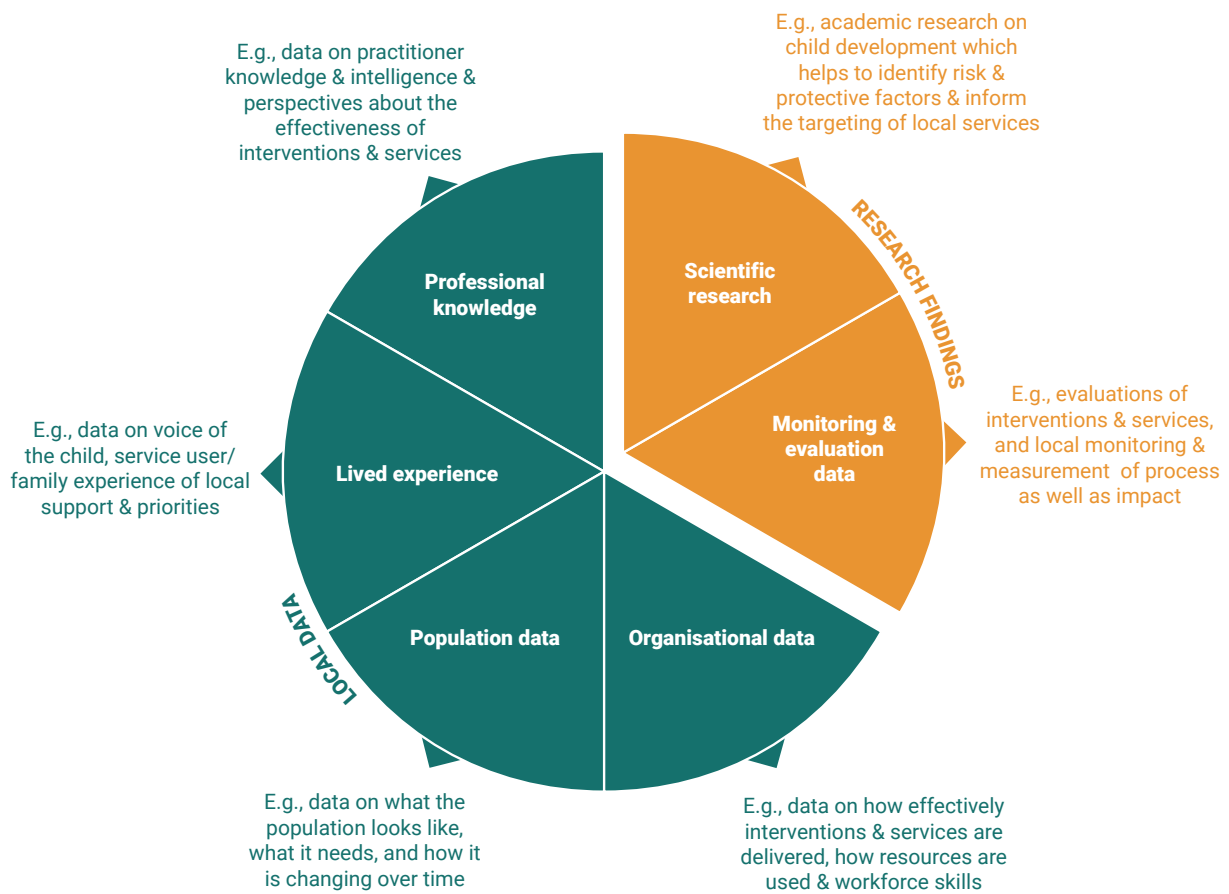
Source: adapted from the Family Hubs implementation toolkit (National Centre for Family Hubs)

Step 2: Learn from strengths to fill the gaps

In this step, you will strive to fill any gaps in your system evidence that you identified in step 1. First, reflect on the possible sources of evidence you could use to fill any gaps. Figure 3 below shows the different types and sources of evidence and data you may be able to use.

Figure 3

Using and generating evidence - combining research findings and local data



Think about which evidence and data sources are available to you locally, including those mentioned in table 1 below:

- Do your key stakeholders have a good understanding of these sources, and will the sources give you enough information to begin your Family Hub development process?⁵
- Do your data sources reflect the diversity of your local area?
 - in terms of services?
 - in terms of communities?

Table 1

Evidence and data sources	
Data source	Description
<u>Early help system guide</u>	This is an important source of data and analysis on local multi-agency arrangements for children, young people and families. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities asks each local authority area to complete the self-assessment tool in the guide once a year.
<u>Reducing parental conflict planning tool</u>	The Department for Work and Pensions asks local areas to complete the assessment in this tool each year as part of the national reducing parental conflict programme.
Population Needs Assessment	This involves the collation and analysis of local information from across the system. Representing the range of services supporting families including community and voluntary sector and faith organisations.
Self-assessments	This includes self-assessments for inspections, regional improvements, and using EIF maturity matrices (for example, on maternity and early years services).
Service reviews, performance reports, quality assurance and inspection reports	For example, service and local partnership audits, peer reviews, annual reports and sufficiency reports.

⁵ See: <https://www.nationalcentreforfamilyhubs.org.uk/toolkits/the-family-hub-development-process/>

Data source	Description
Local partnership strategies and plans for children, young people and families	These may be joint strategies or individual service strategies.
Equality impact assessments	For example, done as part of a service transformation or an improvement project.
Other (please note any other sources you may find useful)	

With your stakeholder group, look for strengths in your existing data and local evidence by asking the following questions:

Which parts of your data really give you the information you need to show impact and respond well to needs?

- What does it help you to do?
- How have you got to this stage with it? Who is involved?
- Do other stakeholders agree?
- Do other sources also give you easy access to the information you need?
- What do these sources have in common?

Exploring these examples further, consider:

- What impact have these had on your local provision and the outcomes for children, young people and families?
- Does the feedback from children, young people and families confirm this impact?



PRACTICE EXAMPLE: USING A STAKEHOLDER SURVEY TO ASSESS, SPARK DISCUSSION & TAKE ACTION

One local area developed a stakeholder survey which supported them to extend their reach across the system to gather views around the health of the wider system. This was then used to feed into the key stakeholder discussions and enabled them to be more aware of existing strengths, and address some of the gaps they had identified.

- Have you gathered and explored recent lived experiences, including those of minority ethnic children and families, around engaging with family support services?
- Can this information be easily accessed and understood by stakeholders? What format is the information in?
- Can this be replicated for other data elements?

At this stage, you can use the system assessment tool to encourage discussion and bring together information that represents your whole system as you prepare to build consensus on the need for change. The tool can support you to:

- explore interdependencies between different parts of the system
- consider innovation across the system
- reimagine services.

Thinking across your system can support you to identify, reflect and take action on intersectional approaches to improving equality, diversity, equity and inclusion.

Collating and reflecting together on high quality and meaningful data from across your local system, such as outlined in Table 1. will support you to target and evaluate progress. Visible senior leadership support across your system will facilitate partnership approaches to implementing shared strategies to make progress.

Step 3: Collate your information ready to share

You should now have brought together the key information from across your system. Next, think about how you can share this in a way that allows all stakeholders to view the information and ask the following crucial questions:

- What is this telling us about our system? Consider access, connectivity and relationships.
- What does this mean for our services in the local system?
- What does this mean for our families?
- What does this mean for our staff teams working across the system?
- What do we need to find out more about?

The answers to these questions, along with the key considerations in table 2 below, will inform your next steps.

Table 2

Evidence and data sources

Establish the right team	Build a shared interest	Understand the key outcomes you would like to achieve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a view of the whole system, which services need to be represented? • Do the people nominated have decision-making responsibility? • How can you make sure you get a well-rounded view of the different parts of your local system? What information will you use to support this? See figure 3. • Do those involved enable you to capture a range of perspectives from your local area? • Are those involved representative of all groups and communities within your local population? • Consider engaging with support services early. Including the lead data and estates staff across the system at this stage will ensure they understand what you are asking for so you can respond effectively to local needs as you build your Family Hub approach. • Consider planning for contingencies and building capacity from the start. • Encourage and value openness, reflections and identifying possible solutions as a group. This will support a shared ownership and understanding of your local narrative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having support from strategic leaders across the system in terms of decision-making and time commitment will empower the group to make decisions and work together. • Make sure key stakeholders are aware of local priorities across the whole system. • Make sure stakeholders understand the drivers for developing Family Hubs nationally and locally. • Encourage stakeholders to share their understanding of the barriers and facilitators to equality, diversity, inclusion and equity that exist across the system. • Consider how this links to the priorities of different services and their motivations to improve. • Consider how you can work towards a shared investment in solving issues such as IT compatibility, accessibility, using buildings, developing a shared language and presenting information for analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure there is a shared understanding of the national Family Hubs Development Process and how this fits your local context. • Be clear about what activity you need to do to prepare for stage 1 of the Family Hubs development process, based on a shared awareness of your local system strengths and areas to develop.

Now comes the opportunity to put all this information you have collated together. You could create a set of slides to present the most important information to consider and potential lines of enquiry to influence discussions. You could then use the slides to reference evidence from across the system as you build consensus on the need for change. The activity supported by the system assessment tool will allow you to identify possible lines of enquiry to share and consider with your group. These lines of enquiry may need further analysis and refinement as you set priorities for your local context.



PRACTICE EXAMPLE: DEVELOPING AN INTERACTIVE MULTI-AGENCY WORKSHOP

One local area used the template to develop an interactive workshop for multi-agency partners across the early help system. The process was an opportunity to open discussions with colleagues and work together to agree the best ways to strengthen connections across the early help agencies.

REFLECTIONS

By following the steps in this resource, you will be better prepared to develop your Family Hub approach and strengthened your view of your local systems. The key considerations in table 2 can support you to open deeper conversations with your stakeholders.

You should now have a more thorough shared understanding of the strengths in your local system arrangements and the most important areas to develop. You will also have identified any areas that need more work for you to understand your local system.

- Did you bring together the key people to understand the national and local strategic priorities shaping your local system?
- Did you bring together a broad range of information to develop a thorough understanding of your local system?
- Did you have good representation from across the spectrum of services and organisations?
- Did you have good representation from the families your local system is seeking to reach?
- Do you have a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitators of access and inclusion in your local context and clear strategies for making progress?

REFLECTIONS [CONT.]

- Have you developed a shared narrative with stakeholders that you can use to communicate the strengths of the system and the areas to develop?

For more information about local learning, see our report on leading and delivering early childhood services: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/leading-and-delivering-early-childhood-services-10-insights-from-20-places-across-england-and-wales>

For more research and information involving children and families from minority ethnic backgrounds:

- <https://foundations.org.uk/our-work/reports/developing-local-approaches-to-improve-services-for-minority-ethnic-children-and-families/>
- <https://www.nationalcentreforfamilyhubs.org.uk/toolkits/integration-and-relational-practice/>
- <https://www.nationalcentreforfamilyhubs.org.uk/toolkits/access-and-inclusion-2/>

APPENDIX

1. Systems assessment: System assessment tool [\[Download\]](#)