

Executive Summary – Derbyshire Best Start in Life Local Plan

Early childhood is a vital period of physical growth and rapid brain development. The experiences children have from conception to the end of the Reception Year shape their social, emotional and language skills, laying the foundations for lifelong health, learning and wellbeing.

In July 2025, the Government launched the [Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life](#) Strategy alongside their commitment to invest £500m for the national roll out of Best Start Family Hubs. The Government’s strategy focuses on supporting children and families in the early years to build strong foundations and ensure that a child’s background does not determine their future success. A three-year Programme is starting on 1 April 2026.

Derbyshire’s Best Start in Life (BSiL) Local Plan sets out a comprehensive, systemwide approach to improving outcomes during this crucial stage, from conception to the end of the Reception Year. The plan aligns with the national mission to ensure every child has the best start in life - the chance to achieve and thrive with adults that support and respond to their needs.

The plan is built around the National ambition that by 2028 75% of children will achieve a Good Level of Development. This represents a significant investment in early years that aims to reduce inequalities and close achievement gaps for disadvantaged groups, so that all children have the opportunity to succeed.

Strategic Priorities

The plan identifies four priority areas for improving early years outcomes aligned to local need:

1. **Improving access to and quality of Early Years provision across the sector**, including the Reception Year.
2. **Developing a network of Best Start Family Hubs** to coordinate services and improve accessibility.
3. **Creating a systemwide Early Years Strategy**, aligning partners across education, health, social care and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector.
4. **Increasing support for parents**, including recognising their vital role as children’s first educators.

Service Offers

The plan outlines five core service offers:

- **Home learning and parenting support:** Expansion of evidence-based programmes including the Triple P parenting programme and PEEP Learning Together Programme, targeted outreach, and development of a digital offer.

- **Early education and childcare:** Increasing sufficiency of high-quality inclusive places and boosting early years entitlement take up.
- **Transition in the Early Years:** Strengthen transition arrangements and support planning to effectively address the individual needs of all children to improve quality and ensure a tailored approach.
- **SEND support:** Strengthening early identification of need, ensuring timely, coordinated high quality support and intervention for all children.
- **Maternal and early years health:** Strengthening joint working between health and early years teams, with a focus on infant feeding and targeted community health support.

System Enablers

Six enablers support delivery of the plan:

- **Family Hubs and service integration**
- **Early years workforce development**
- **Family involvement**
- **Monitoring, evaluation and learning**
- **Accountability and governance** through the Early Years Strategic Board
- **Funding and resource alignment**

Derbyshire Best Start in Life Local Plan

Vision

Derbyshire's vision is that every child will be supported to have the best start in life and achieve their full potential.

Derbyshire's target set by the Department for Education is that by 2028 75.8% of children in Derbyshire (and 57.7% of children eligible for free school meals) will achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the Reception Year.

Our long-term ambition across Derbyshire is to ensure that every child has the best start in life. Through sustaining improvements in the early years and continuing to narrow the attainment gap for the for disadvantaged children.

Priorities

To achieve this vision, we will focus our efforts on the critical developmental period from conception to the end of the Reception Year.

Four priority action areas have been identified that will allow us to develop a Derbyshire Best Start in Life offer and ensure we respond to local need and deliver improvement in early years outcomes.

- **Improving access to and quality of Early Years provision across the sector, including the Reception Year.** Ensure sufficient high quality inclusive early years provision to meet needs of all Derbyshire families. Enhance effective communication, information and guidance for families. Strengthen support, advice and challenge to early years providers to enable them to delivery high quality inclusive research informed practice.
- **Develop a network of Best Start Family Hubs to coordinate services and improve accessibility.** Best Start Family Hubs will primarily be in areas with higher levels of need and deliver a comprehensive outreach offer to reach disadvantaged families and those with known vulnerabilities so that needs can be identified at the earliest opportunity.
- **Develop a system-wide Early Years Strategy, aligning partners across education, health, social care and the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE).** The strategy will ensure all parts of the Early Years system are working collegially towards shared priorities, identification of need and collaboration in workforce development opportunities to increase efficiency.
- **Increase support for parents in their crucial role as their children's first educators.** Enhance and embed opportunities to engage with universal advice and support, to empower parents to confidently engage in their children's Early Years learning journey.

Case for action

The period from conception to the end of Reception Year is a critical stage for physical growth, brain development and the formation of social, emotional and language skills.

Evidence suggests that around 90% of a child’s brain development occurs by age five, meaning early experiences shape future learning, health and life outcomes.

To enable all families to be successful in providing the Best Start for their children, it is recognised that early intervention and collaborative support is essential. Our plan aims to break down barriers and reduce inequalities in access to education and family support.

Local Context for Best Start in Life Delivery

Families in Derbyshire can face a range of challenges including deprivation and poverty, adverse childhood experiences, having English as an additional language, accessibility and quality of Early Years education and childcare, challenges with early identification of need, access to timely information and support, capacity of the workforce and fragmented services.

Local Early Years Foundation Stage data shows Derbyshire children perform below national averages in most Early Learning Goals, with especially low outcomes for children with English as an additional language and those eligible for Free School Meals. This highlights the need to reduce inequalities and improve early years outcomes.

Derbyshire has a strong and diverse Early Years sector, but rising need, financial pressures and workforce challenges are affecting capacity.

Despite national constraints, Derbyshire has maintained twelve Children’s Centres. New Best Start in Life funding for Family Hubs provides an opportunity to shift from a mainly targeted offer to a more universal, integrated system that increases reach and improves outcomes.

Good Level of Development

In England, children’s learning and development from birth to the end of the reception year is guided by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. A child at the end of reception is assessed using the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. A Good Level of Development is achieved when a child meets the “expected” level in 12 key Early Learning Goals across the prime areas (communication, physical, personal/social/emotional) and the specific areas (literacy, maths). Multiple factors affect GLD including health, early education and social factors.

In 2024-2025 the data showed that Derbyshire performed below national averages across most ELGs.

Performance by Early Learning Goal

	Early Learning Goal	Difference vs national average
Strengths	Listening, attention and understanding	+0.9%
	Speaking	+0.4%
Weakest areas	Word reading	-1.4%
	Writing	-1.3%
	Gross motor skills	-0.6%

Children perform above the national average in listening, attention, understanding and speaking. This reflects sustained local authority-led work to strengthen these early learning areas and provides a strong foundation for early literacy development.

Improving outcomes in word reading and writing is a key priority. A coordinated, system-wide approach is being developed to support progress in these areas. Physical development is a current priority, recognising that this is the essential foundation for children’s writing development. Projects are being targeted to respond to local need and ensure the greatest impact.

EYFS data for 2024-2025 also shows that Derbyshire’s GLD outcomes were below national levels across most child characteristic groups.

GLD by Child Characteristics

	Group	Difference vs national average
Strongest group	Children not eligible for free school meals	+0.8%
Weakest groups	Children with English as an additional language (EAL)	-5.9%
	Children eligible for free school meals (FSM)	-4.2%

This EYFS data for 2024-2025 highlights the need to focus on reducing inequalities, particularly for children with EAL and those eligible for FSM.

Child health outcomes and parental behaviors

Derbyshire performs strongly against several health indicators associated with early development, such as vaccination uptake, healthy weight at age 4–5 and dental health at age 5.

However, some outcomes are weaker than national figures on indicators closely linked to early development:

- Premature births (<37 weeks gestation): +8.8 per 1,000 births
- Breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks: -6.6%

Smoking during pregnancy remains a system priority due to its impact on birth outcomes and child development. Smoking rates at the time of delivery are falling locally and ongoing efforts are needed to sustain this progress.

An assessment of children’s vulnerability identified that Chesterfield and Erewash had the highest proportions of children with recognised social care and education vulnerabilities. This has informed their prioritisation for the initial roll out of Best Start Family Hubs.

Current local service offer

Derbyshire has a well-established Early Years service that includes Early Years Improvement Officers, specialist SEND practitioners, a Families Information Service and sufficiency officers. The service has strong reach across the county.

At the time of publishing the Best Start in Life Plan, there were 642 Early Years providers and Early Years provision in schools across Derbyshire with over 18,200 children accessing Early Years Entitlements from 9 months until they start the reception year.

The local authority is required to publish an annual Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency Report, this is published on the Derbyshire website -

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/early-years-childcare/sufficiency-assessment/childcare-sufficiency-assessment.aspx>

The Early Years and childcare provision across Derbyshire consist of a mix of private, voluntary and independent sector providers alongside local authority-maintained schools. Derbyshire has retained nursery school provision across the county. Many settings offer support beyond education to children and families to ensure that children's holistic needs are met. However, schools and Early Years settings have faced increased pressure due to rising levels of need from children and families, financial pressures and significant workforce recruitment and retention challenges. The local authority continues to offer support to help mitigate and overcome these challenges.

Derbyshire has maintained a network of 12 Children's Centres, ensuring continued access to statutory services and targeted early help. As part of this offer, Derbyshire Family Help delivers evidence-based parenting programmes and family support for families with children aged 0–5. However, funding constraints have limited the ability to provide universal support. Best Start in Life funding provides a significant opportunity to strengthen the existing foundation and work with partners to build a more universal, accessible and integrated early years offer that increases reach, reduces inequalities and improves GLD outcomes.

Derbyshire Community Health Services delivers the 0–19 Healthy Child Programme. The 0–5 team - Health Visitors and Community Nursery Nurses - provides mandated health and developmental checks, targeted interventions and activities to support children's development. Additional commissioned services include Intensive Health Visiting, the Infant Feeding Service and Oral Health Promotion and Prevention.

The Best Start in Life strategy provides greater scope for closer collaboration between Early Years and Health. Opportunities exist to jointly develop workforce resources and shared professional development. One area this will be prioritised will be the alignment of the 2–2.5-year health check and the EYFS Progress Check at Two are not consistently aligned.

The local authority recognises the impact of adverse childhood experiences on child development and therefore will take a trauma informed approach to support children and families.

Core Best Start in Life services

Derbyshire's Best Start in Life offer is built around five core service areas. Together, these services strengthen early development, reduce inequalities, and ensure that families can access the right support at the right time.

1. Home learning environment and parenting interventions

We will strengthen and expand our parenting and home learning environment offer across the Derbyshire Early Years System. We will use evidence-based programmes that can be

adapted to meet the needs of children and families within local communities. Evidence-based programmes will be delivered in a range of settings, ensuring families can access high-quality interventions and support that builds positive parent-child relationships, promotes early learning, increases parental confidence and improves outcomes for children. Ongoing family feedback and outcomes monitoring will guide continuous development and improvement.

Priority actions:

1. Commission Triple P parenting programmes, focused on parent-child relationships and parental confidence.
2. Commission PEEP Learning Together Programme to be used across Derbyshire, ensuring tailored delivery to reflect the developmental needs of each community.
3. Prioritise outreach and engagement in communities where outcomes for children are less than predicted.
4. Develop targeted programmes focussed on specific areas of development where outcomes for children are less than predicted.
5. Establish a digital workstream to extend the digital offer for families, improving accessibility and engagement.

Measures of progress:

- Enrolment, attendance and outcomes data for Home Learning Environment and Parenting programmes.
- Case studies to capture and share best practice.
- Measures of access to and engagement with the digital offer.

2. Early Childhood Education and Care access and quality

We will prioritise the sufficiency of high-quality early education and childcare places, particularly in areas of disadvantage and in communities with high levels of additional need. Improving equity of access, quality of provision and staff capability will support all children - including those with SEND - to thrive in their early years and be well prepared to start their reception year.

Priority actions:

1. Expand school-based nursery provision, with a focus on disadvantaged areas and areas where there is an undersupply of high-quality early years provision.
2. Increase the take-up of early education entitlements.
3. Increase the take-up of Early Learning for Twos across Derbyshire.
4. Ensure children with SEND and children in care can access inclusive early education provision.
5. Conduct a detailed supply and demand mapping to inform sufficiency planning.
6. Provide high quality continuing professional development opportunities for Early Years practitioners across the system that aligns with national and local priorities.

7. Provide high quality support, advice and challenge to Early Years settings and schools that aligns with national and local priorities.

Measures of progress:

- Overall GLD outcomes and progress towards the 2027/28 target.
- GLD outcomes for disadvantaged children.
- Take-up of early education entitlements, including a focus on the Early Learning for Twos funded places.
- Take-up of full entitlement hours for children with SEND and children in care.
- Quality indicators across Early Years settings and schools.
- Take-up and impact of training delivered by Derbyshire's Early Years Service.
- Engagement levels with Derbyshire's Early Years Service.
- Childcare and Sufficiency Assessment data.

3. Transition to school and Reception Year

High quality practice in the Reception Year is central to improving GLD outcomes. We will support Early Years teachers and staff in schools to support all children holistically to ensure a successful transition into school.

We will work with families and professionals to ensure smooth and inclusive transitions from Early Years settings into school for all children.

Priority actions:

1. Strengthen shared individual support plans for children with SEND, ensuring consistent information sharing about a child's strengths and needs between feeder settings and schools.
2. Guidance to support successful transition for all children, throughout Early Years and across key stages will be shared with all education providers in Derbyshire.
3. Derbyshire's Early Years Improvement team will work alongside other agencies to offer targeted support to underperforming schools.
4. Support schools and settings to make accurate and robust judgements when completing the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
5. Establish systemwide approaches to school improvement to ensure a shared vision for high quality reception practice and consistency in the quality of support given to schools.
6. Develop a consistent view of factors that contribute to Reception Readiness. Create materials and support aligned to best practice and research.
7. Work with the 5-19 public health nursing service to develop a universal Reception Year touchpoint to identify public health needs.

Measures of progress:

- Feedback on transition experiences from children, parents/carers (including priority families), settings and schools.
- Overall GLD outcomes and progress towards the 2027/28 target.
- GLD outcomes for disadvantaged children as evidence of closing the inequality gap.
- Consistent reception readiness materials and messages across the system.

4. SEND support

We will strengthen processes that enable early identification of needs and ensure children with SEND receive timely, coordinated equitable and high-quality support. Families of children with SEND will have access to advice and guidance to support them throughout their child's journey.

Priority actions:

1. Develop a robust consistent approach to assessment, based on developmental stages, which supports early identification of need.
2. Ensure availability of evidence-based interventions which positively impact upon a child's progress, preventing the need for greater intervention in the future.
3. Extend the Portage home visiting role to ensure every Best Start Family Hub has a specialist Early Years SEND practitioner.
4. Streamline the Early Years Inclusion Fund application process to ensure that Early Years providers are able to access the support they need.
3. Streamline the process to request specialist support for Early Years children with SEND.
4. Establish clear referral routes to wider community health, education and wellbeing support for those identified during early detection screenings.
5. Review and enhance the Early Years SEND helpline to ensure parents, practitioners and health professionals can access timely support and advice.
6. Develop a digital offer for SEND support through the Families Information Service Hub.
7. Improve the digital SEND Local Offer for Early Years children and families in line with national and local priorities.

Measures of progress:

- Family feedback on ability to access quality SEND advice.
- Increase in the number of successful applications to Early Years Inclusion Fund.
- Increase in successful requests for specialist support for Early Years children with SEND.
- Monitoring and analysis of digital offer usage.
- Monitoring of referral routes to ensure timely support for children.
- Workforce consistently applies child development knowledge alongside the needs of the child.

5. Maternal and early years health services

We will strengthen partnership working across health, social care and education to improve children's outcomes and reduce inequalities. This will build on joint working such as

Keeping Babies Safe and reflections of learning from case reviews. Whilst Derbyshire is not in receipt of Healthy Babies funding, Public Health will continue to invest in the earliest years due to the impact on later outcomes.

The 0-19 service will work with Best Start Family Hubs and the Early Years Improvement team to target universal and preventative activity in communities where engagement is low and/or need is high, with the intention of identifying needs earlier and supporting families to get the right help at the right time.

Priority actions:

1. Deliver the priorities of the Derby and Derbyshire Infant Feeding Strategy.
2. Continue to reduce smoking in pregnancy, given its impact on birth outcomes and child development.
3. Develop joint workforce development opportunities across health and Early Years.
4. Target universal health and wellbeing activity in communities with identified needs.
5. Promote take up of Healthy Start and healthy nutrition practices.

Measures of progress:

- Increase breastfeeding rates at 6-8 weeks and reduce inequalities in breastfeeding rates.
- Reduction in smoking at time of delivery (SATOD).
- Numbers of 0-19 staff participating in joint training with Early Years staff.
- Reduction in numbers of early years referrals to Children's Social Care.
- Increase take-up of Healthy Start.
- Case studies to illustrate of partnership working and improved outcomes for children and families.

System enablers

Six key system enablers will underpin the delivery of Derbyshire's Best Start in Life priorities.

1. Service integration & Best Start Family Hubs

We will develop a network of Best Start Family Hubs providing coordinated access to services for children and families. Through strong partnership and multiagency working, Best Start Family Hubs will strengthen and join up parenting support, health and early education services improving equity of access to early intervention and support and improving families' experiences of Early Years services.

We will:

- Work with parents and communities to develop a Best Start Family Hub core offer.
- Develop hub and spoke sites to ensure services are delivered in welcoming, accessible and trusted locations, building on the current Children's Centre infrastructure and wider education and community spaces.
- Develop a targeted outreach approach to connect with families who do not typically engage with Early Years and family services.

- Work with health, children’s services and local communities to ensure alignment with Neighbourhood Health and Families First Partnership Programme priorities.

Priority actions:

1. Establish Best Start Family Hubs in Chesterfield and Cotmanhay and identify suitable spoke sites for district wide engagement.
2. Identify suitable locations for roll out of Best Start Family Hubs across the remaining six districts and boroughs.
3. Establish outreach functions to effectively engage families, particularly those not accessing services.
4. Establish Best Start Family Hub specialist teams, including SEND, Health, Family Help and Early Years practitioners.

Measures of progress:

- Numbers of families accessing Best Start Family Hubs.
- Families Information Service engagement data analysis.
- Family feedback on how well services are joined up.
- Monitoring data on referrals and waiting times for key services.
- Individual impact case sampling for children accessing services.
- Tracking improvements in child health, developmental milestones, family wellbeing, and service accessibility.
- Gathering qualitative feedback from families regarding their experiences and outcomes.

2. Workforce capacity and capabilities

We will focus on develop a confident, capable, and professional Early Years workforce with the skills and expertise needed to deliver high-quality practice. Workforce development will be evidence-based, support career progression, and strengthen Early Years education and family support.

Priority actions:

1. The Early Years Service will ensure there is a high-quality, research-informed training offer that meets the needs of Derbyshire Early Years practitioners across the Early Years system.
2. High quality support, advice and challenge to the Early Years sector.
2. Establish multi-agency systems to promote shared learning and a strong, collective knowledge base.
3. Develop leadership capacity across the Early Years Sector.
3. Work with partners to support recruitment and retention, strengthening capacity across universal and targeted Best Start services.
4. Promote consistency, continuity and inclusive practice across the system.

5. Build a workforce across local authority teams and partners with the skills and knowledge required to support the Early Years sector and respond to emerging priorities.
6. Support workforce wellbeing and resilience across the Early Years sector.
7. Establish systems to review workforce capacity, skills and wellbeing through Best Start governance arrangements, using data on recruitment, retention, training uptake and staff feedback to inform planning.
8. Establish a county-wide trauma informed approach for Early Years.

Measures of progress:

- Uptake of training, including leadership training and new to workforce training.
- Workforce indicators: vacancy rates, turnover, caseloads, sickness absence, new starters, time to recruit for local authority roles.
- Indicators of highly qualified staff and leadership capacity.
- Quality indicators of provision.

3. Family Involvement

We will strengthen family involvement by expanding the ways in which parents and carers can share their views, shape service design, and participate in decision-making. We will also work closely with voluntary and community sector partners to ensure families' voices are heard through trusted relationships.

Priority actions:

1. Establish Best Start in Life parent engagement mechanisms, with a focus on underserved communities, ensuring parent voice is represented in decision-making forums.
2. Establish regular feedback sessions with voluntary and community sector organisations to share knowledge about family needs and priorities.
3. Develop and establish a high quality and accessible digital platform for families, including effective and consistent use of social media.

Measures of progress:

- Numbers of parents participating in engagement activities.
- Evidence of service changes in response to parent feedback.
- Increased parental engagement with services and improved awareness of available support.
- Digital platform engagement and feedback data.

4. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Robust monitoring, evaluation and learning will ensure that services are effective, responsive and continually improving. We will use high quality data and feedback to understand impact, drive improvement and escalate concerns when progress is below expectations. Insights from monitoring and evaluation will directly inform service redesign, commissioning

decisions and workforce development priorities, with changes tracked and reported through governance arrangements.

Priority actions:

1. Standardise information sharing across health visiting, Best Start Family Hubs, early education settings and schools.
2. Embed regular collection of parent/carer and practitioner feedback.
3. Develop a unified data dashboard with associated routines, including escalation processes where improvement is off-track.

Measures of progress:

- Routine high-quality collection of parent/carer and practitioner feedback.
- Evidence that monitoring, evaluation and learning insights inform decisions and lead to adjustments in practice or approach.

5. Accountability and governance

Derbyshire takes a systemwide approach to Early Years through the Early Years Strategic Board (EYSB), which brings together partners from education, health, social care and the voluntary sector to provide coordinated leadership for the Early Years system. The Board champions the Early Years Foundation Stage and ensures joined up planning, delivery and monitoring of services that contribute to a best start in life for all children. The Board has Cabinet Member representation and workstreams structured around each of its strategic themes.

The EYSB will oversee delivery of the Best Start in Life Local Plan, ensuring alignment with Best Start Family Hubs, health services, social care and national requirements. It will monitor progress, identify risks, underperformance or timescale slippage, and agree remedial actions where needed.

Best Start Family Hubs will form the universal foundation of Derbyshire's Families First Partnership Programme and will be aligned with Families First governance, pathways and workforce models, enabling seamless progression into targeted Family Help and wider partnership services when additional needs emerge.

Priority actions:

1. Strengthen links between the EYSB, workstreams and operational delivery managers.
2. Establish effective oversight through the Health and Wellbeing Board and Children and Young People's Delivery Board.
3. Align EYSB workstream actions with the Best Start in Life Local Plan.
4. Ensure clear systems for tracking and monitoring workstream actions, risks and impacts.
5. Ensure effective systems of communications between EYSB, families and the Early Years Sector.

Measures of progress:

- Broad, multi-agency participation in EYSB and workstream activity.
- Regular EYSB and workstream meetings held as planned.
- Summaries of EYSB and workstream actions shared with the Early Years sector.
- Reporting and monitoring frameworks are in place with clear processes for tracking progress.

6. Funding

Resource allocation will be aligned to agreed priorities and targeted toward improving key outcomes. A detailed Best Start in Life delivery plan will be developed and agreed in the first six months, in line with Department for Education funding requirements and allocations for specific elements of delivery.

Priority actions:

1. Develop clear funding plan that aligns with priorities and ensures the sustainability of service delivery.

Measures of progress:

- A robust clear Best Start in Life delivery plan aligned to DfE funding allocation, with key performance and budget monitoring.