

# Liverpool's Best Start in Life Local Plan



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## Foreword by Jenny Glennard

Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

Every child deserves the chance to thrive, no matter where they begin. In Liverpool, we share a deep commitment to ensuring that our youngest children grow up healthy, safe, confident, and ready to learn. The early years matter profoundly. They shape a child's relationships, wellbeing and the foundations of their future learning and life chances. For children who need a little more help, this window of time is even more critical.

The evidence is unequivocal: integrated, place-based early years support reduces inequalities and improves outcomes for children and families. Early intervention does more than respond to need — it prevents difficulties from escalating and can transform a child's future. When services work seamlessly together, families experience a system that is easier to navigate, more responsive and more effective.

Families are their children's first educators, and the everyday interactions between parents/carers and their children lay the foundations for lifelong development. Our role is to strengthen these relationships, build confidence and empower communities so that every child is surrounded by the support they need to flourish.

This plan sets out our ambition for an early years system that feels coherent, connected and rooted in strong partnership. It means working across health, education, care, and the voluntary and community sector to remove duplication, reduce unnecessary handoffs and ensure that every family feels listened to, respected, and supported.

We are united around a bold and important outcome for 2028:

**71% of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception, and 56.4% of children eligible for free school meals reaching the same milestone.**

This is not just a target - it is a promise to our children and our city.



## **Foreword by Councillor Joanne Kennedy**

**Cabinet member for Employment, Educational Attainment and Skills**

Too many families still face barriers shaped by poverty, inequality, or limited access to the right support at the right time. This plan is our response - a collective pledge to change that.

Parents and carers are at the heart of children's development, from early pregnancy to throughout their early years and beyond. When they feel supported and empowered, children thrive.

Our Family Hubs approach strengthens this by connecting families with high-quality early learning, inclusive services and welcoming community spaces that make sense to them. We want every family to experience support that is joined-up, compassionate and rooted in local relationships.

The early years can be a time of vulnerability, but also a time of extraordinary opportunity: By investing in this pivotal stage, we invest in a fairer, healthier, and more hopeful future for every child in Liverpool.

I am proud of the partnerships behind this plan: health services, schools, early years providers, voluntary and community organisations, and the families whose voices have shaped its direction. By working together, we can build an early years system that is inclusive, accessible, and grounded in dignity and respect.

Together, we can build a system that families trust, that celebrates strengths and that gives every child the best possible start in life.

# Our Vision

We want every child in Liverpool to grow up healthy, safe, confident and ready to learn to enable them to reach their potential in life.

We will achieve this by working with children and families, to create a Best Start Early Years culture that provides joined up whole family support and brilliant care and early education.

We will actively seek to support children and families from disadvantaged and/or under-served communities to reduce the inequalities in outcomes for children.



# Why this matters - Key insights

## Early years in Liverpool - Key indicators



We have **26,421** 0-4 year olds

### Breast Feeding



Around **7 out of 10 (72.3%)** of babies have breast milk as their first feed. This is slightly higher than nationally (71.9%)



**46.8%** of mothers are still breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks compared to 52.7% nationally

### Dental Health

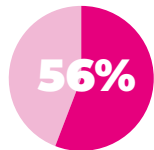


1 in 3 children have experienced dental decay by the age of 5 which is **1.5 times** higher than England

### Poverty



**3 out of 10 children** live in poverty



of children living in poverty are from in-work families

### State of health

estimates the 3 main issues for children from Liverpool will be:



Mental health



Child obesity



Child poverty

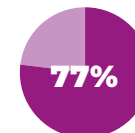
### Obesity



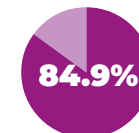
**29% of children** aged 4-5 years were either overweight or obese, which is significantly above the national average of 23.5%

### Childcare places

Percentage of 2 - year olds accessing their funded childcare place



Actual



Expected

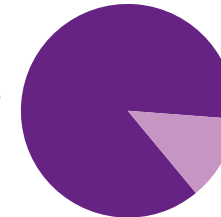
## Good Level of Development (GLD)

A good level of development is a statutory assessment of children's development at the end of reception year and is made up of an assessment of each child's outcomes in relation to 7 areas of learning:

Communication and Language / Physical Development / Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) / Literacy / Mathematics / Understanding the World / Expressive Arts and Design

Percentage of children achieving age expected development at the 2 - 2.5 year check

**Achieved  
87%**



**Not achieved  
13%**

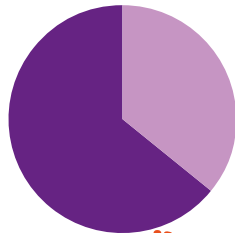


## What does a Good Level of Development (GLD) look like in 2024/25

**Liverpool 64.3%**  
**Nationally 68.3%**

**Liverpool**

Did achieve GLD **64.3%** (3257)

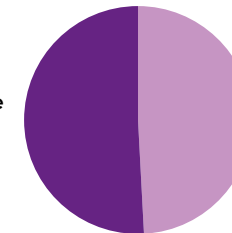


Did not achieve GLD **35.7%** (1808)

**Liverpool 51%**  
**Nationally 51.3%**

**Children on FSM**

Did achieve GLD **51%** (582)



Did not achieve GLD **49%** (559)

The learning areas where the greatest number of children are not meeting expected outcomes are:

**Literacy and Mathematics**

## Liverpool School Data



The percentage of children achieving GLD ranges from **26.8% to 86.7%** across primary schools

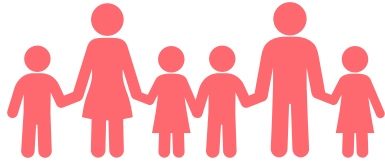
**65** schools achieved less than Liverpool average

**45** schools achieved more than the Liverpool average

**37** of our schools achieved lower GLD rates than were contextually predicted

**English as an additional language, children with SEN support and deprivation levels** are all key factors in affecting some schools' GLD levels. However by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils with EAL **outperform** pupils who speak English.

## Health



**94%** of children in Liverpool receive their 2 - 2.5 year review with 87% of children achieving age expected development



The relaunch of 0-19 Health Service with a stronger focus on reaching families earlier - specifically during pregnancy and early childhood

## Antenatal education



Implementation of a new evidence - based programme and digital offer has increased engagement

## Liverpool's Good Level of Development (GLD) statistics



### GLD is improving each year

**6%** increase since 2021, compared with 3% nationally

**4%** increase in boys achieving GLD in 2024/25 - gender gap is closing

**33.3%** of children with Special Educational Needs support achieve GLD compared to 26.4% nationally

## Early years childcare provision



**89.9%** of Liverpool nurseries rated GOOD or above

**86.2%** of Liverpool childminders rated GOOD or above



Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Fund (SENIF) now utilised to enhance a whole - setting approach to inclusive practice

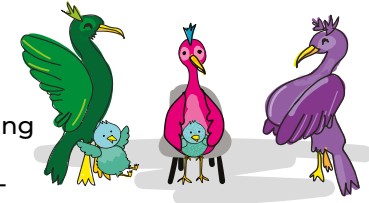
## Family Hubs and Family Panels

Liverpool has launched **12** Family Hubs across the city, building on the strong infrastructure of Children's Centres

Each Family Hub has a designated SEND link worker



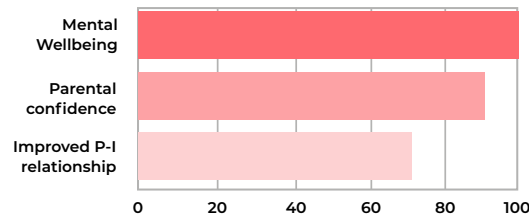
**5** Best Start Family panels in communities throughout Liverpool, creating a stronger coproduction mechanism with diverse communities and existing parent - voice groups



## Parenting Support

**100%** of parents accessing community support for mild - moderate perinatal mental health/ relationships support showed a significant improvement in their mental health.

**90%** reported an increase in parental confidence, and **70%** felt their parent - infant relationships improved



## Home learning and language development

Implementation of a WELLCOMM tool:

**22%** increase of children achieving expected levels of communication, speech and language after intervention, with significant change observed for children with EAL and also for children with additional needs



Parents accessing the evidence - based parenting and home learning environment offer report improved parental confidence, less stressful home environments, an understanding of how they can influence their child's learning and improvements in their mental well - being



## Working towards UNICEF baby friendly initiative accreditation (Breastfeeding)

Quarter 3 2025/26 indicates **55.3%** of Liverpool babies being breastfed at 6 - 8 weeks. This exceeds 55% local target set for 2030

# Links to other Strategies

The Best Start in Life local plan will deliver action that supports the ambitions of several existing local and national strategies / plans:

## Key Local Strategies:

- State of Health in Liverpool 2040 Plan – first goal: The Next Generation
- Families First programme plan
- Family Help Partnership Strategy 2024-2027
- Delivery of Healthy Child Programme
- Liverpool Healthy Weight Strategy 2018-2028
- City-wide Poverty Strategy and Action Plan (in development)
- Cheshire and Merseyside Altogether Smiling Programme (oral health)
- UNICEF Child Friendly City plan
- Liverpool Vaccination Engagement Action Plan (2026)

## Key National Strategies:

- [Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life \(2025\)](#)
- [NHS 10-year Health Plan \(2025\)](#)
- [The Child Poverty Strategy \(2025\)](#)
- [The Schools White Paper, “Every Child Achieving and Thriving” \(2026\)](#)

**The Best Start in Life local plan is not an additional strategy** but a mechanism to mobilise and coordinate action in partnership with families, across many parts of the system that support early childhood development including health services, children’s services and the community and voluntary sectors. Two more detailed actions plans will sit behind this plan that will monitor, review and evaluate the impact of work across the priority areas in this plan:

- The city-wide Best Start early years action plan
- The Best Start Family Hub Programme delivery plan



# Our Priorities

The priorities for the plan have been identified through stakeholder discussions across the early years system. This plan will detail key priorities under the 3 objectives of the national Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy:

1. Better support for families earlier
2. More accessible early education and childcare
3. Improving quality in the early years, including in reception year

**Crossing Cutting themes** that run through all the priorities are:

- Early identification and consistent pathways so children with emerging needs receive help earlier
- Deploying resources to ensure targeting support for children who need the most support, based on sound data and intelligence. This includes boys, children eligible for free school meals and children with SEN support, children with English as an Additional Language, (EAL).

- Evidencing impact
- Engaging dads, male carers, partners and wider family networks



# 1. Better Support for Families Earlier

## Family Hubs in Every Community

- Deliver 12 Family Hubs based on neighbourhood footprints, delivering a whole-family, multi-disciplinary model focused on early identification of needs and timely, coordinated support.
- Position Family Hubs as a universal, accessible contact point for health, family support and early learning, through co-location of services and joint delivery aligned with local priorities.
- Strengthen outreach and engagement, ensuring consistent communication and proactive support to prevent escalation of need.

## Better Digital Support for Families

- Enhance and strengthen co-ordination of the digital offer for families, ensuring seamless access to high-quality information, guidance and support that is integral to all service delivery.



- Implement an intelligence and information portal to capture data for children aged 0–4, enabling improved understanding of development, attendance, health and early attainment, identification of required intervention and smooth transition between services.

## Community Assets, Literacy and Inclusion

- Increase utilisation of community and cultural assets - such as libraries, museums, parks - particularly for families living in the most deprived areas, to strengthen early learning and literacy.



- Improve integration of early, relational, and community-based support, incorporating peer support and parent champion models as a core strategy for engaging under-served and disadvantaged children and families.

### **Public Health, Perinatal and Early Support Pathways**

- Deliver the new 0 - 19 public health model, emphasising early identification, early help and a single point of service contact.
- Increase access to continuity of carer model during pregnancy for the most vulnerable groups.
- Develop and embed a coordinated perinatal mental health and parent–infant relationship pathway, including workforce training across multi-disciplinary teams.
- Deliver an evidence-based, city-wide parenting and home learning offer from conception onwards, supporting the home learning environment, early literacy, healthy child development and parenting, with targeted support for families at risk of poor outcomes.

- Achieve stage 3 UNICEF Community Baby Friendly accreditation to ensure that breastfeeding support and environments are meeting families’ needs

### **Governance, Voice and System Leadership**

- Use the early years governance structure to drive innovation, good practice sharing and continuous improvement through ‘test, learn and grow’ approaches. As well as joining up workstreams to support wider health and social outcomes.
- Integrate Best Start Family Panels into the early years infrastructure to systematically capture and act upon parent/carer voices.



## 2. More Accessible Early Education and Childcare

### Strengthening Early Identification, Inclusion and Access Across the Early Years System

- Ensure children not accessing early education are identified, seen and supported, enabling early intervention.
- Improve system effectiveness to increase uptake of funded 2-year-old places by families receiving additional support (FRAS).
- Strengthen the integrated 2-year learning and health review process, improving early identification and support for children not meeting developmental milestones and whose families are receiving additional support.
- Strengthen the SEND sufficiency position by creating a more flexible and responsive system that can meet changing levels of need. This includes ensuring every child can access high-quality, inclusive early education and childcare through strengthening

practitioner confidence in delivering inclusive provision and increase the number of SEND places in priority areas

### Workforce Recruitment, Retention and Development

- Address recruitment and retention as two priorities across the early education sector by focusing on:
  - ▶ increasing the number of suitably qualified, skilled practitioners,
  - ▶ improving training quality to address the gap in practitioner skills and qualifications,
  - ▶ reducing turnover through strengthening continuous professional development / career pathways
  - ▶ raising the profile and recognition of early educators' contribution to children's development.



### 3. Improving Quality Across the Early Years System

- Implement a city-wide communication, speech and language pathway, improving service navigation, coordination of interventions and training for the universal workforce.
- Strengthen coordination of quality and training support for early education settings, ensuring a coherent, data-informed workforce and setting development offer, prioritising areas of high deprivation and under performance.
- Adopt a coaching and modelling approach to workforce development to improve engagement and effectiveness.
- Develop and implement bespoke EYFS safeguarding training in partnership with Liverpool Safeguarding Board
- Provide opportunities for peer learning to share effective practice, utilising insights of our stronger early education providers to support others in the area and enable scale up of good practice.
- Promote and embed a culture of high-quality play and strong adult-child interaction across the early years system to support early development and reduce inequalities.
- Enhance ordinarily available provision by increasing the strategic use of the Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund (SENIF) to support whole-setting inclusion and promote effective application of the graduated approach.
- Strengthen partnerships and digital support to ensure effective and consistent transition into schools for all children, with a particular focus on those with additional needs or vulnerabilities.

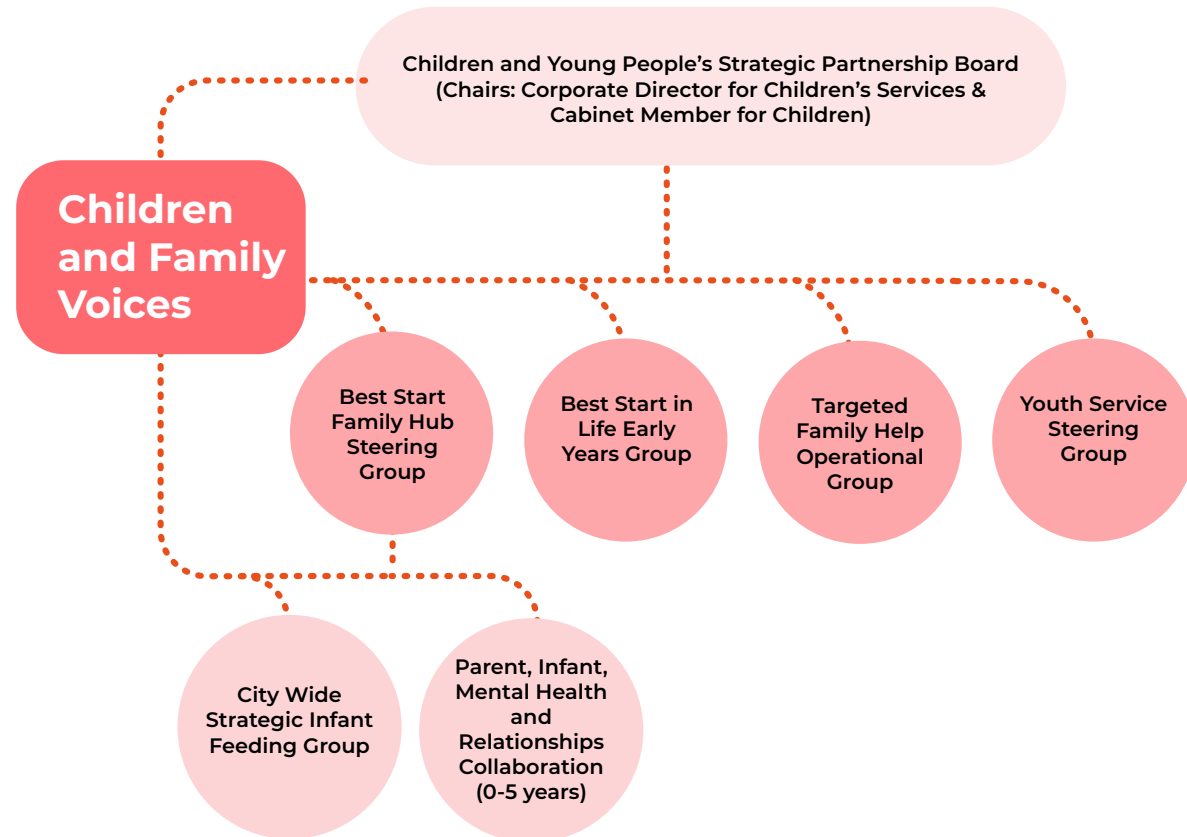


# Principles

- **Putting our children first** - ensuring every decision, action and system is shaped around what is best for the child. Prioritising the safety, wellbeing, learning and development, and emotional security of each child.
- **Proportionate universalism** - ensuring universal access while targeting additional support where it is most needed
- **Prevention and early intervention** - acting early to improve outcomes and reduce long term costs
- **Evidence based practice and coproduction** - combining research evidence with the expertise of families and practitioners in the development and delivery of services
- **Greater system integration** - reducing fragmentation and strengthening collaboration so families don't have to tell their story many times and can be navigated to the right support at the right time.

# Governance

This structure enables the integration of workstreams to address wider health and social outcomes



# Measuring Impact

## What will success look like for children and families in Liverpool

- More children will reach their good level of development at the end of reception and be ready to learn.
- More families will feel informed, supported and connected to resources in the city to support their health, social, emotional and learning needs
- More families with additional needs will receive timely access to appropriate support in their community
- More families will secure an early years' place for their child.

## Government Target for Liverpool:

- 71% of all children achieving a GLD in Summer 2028. This equates to 461 more children achieving GLD across the city .
- 56.4% of children eligible for free school meals achieving a GLD. This equates to 82 more children achieving GLD across the city.

## Key Indicators:

- Narrow the GLD attainment gap between children in receipt of 'free school meals' and their peers.
- Increase the percentage of eligible children from 9 months who take up their free entitlement in schools and early years providers
- More detailed indicators will be outlined in the two action plans that sit behind this plan.



# References

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The Schools White Paper, "Every Child Achieving and Thriving" (2026)

