



Democratic Services

Location: Phase II
DDI: 01895 250692
CMD No: 2026/1684

**To: COUNCILLOR SUSAN O'BRIEN
CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION**

- c.c. All Members of the Children, Families & Education Select Committee
- c.c. Julie Kelly – Corporate Director, Children’s Services
- c.c. Tehseen Kauser – Director of Children’s Social Care
- c.c. Antony Madden – Children’s Services

Date: 07 April 2026

Non-Key Decision request

Form D

BEST START IN LIFE 2026-2031

Dear Cabinet Members,

Attached is a report requesting that a decision be made by you as an individual Cabinet Member. Democratic Services confirm that this is not a key decision, as such, the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 notice period does not apply.

You should take a decision **on or after Wednesday 15 April 2026** in order to meet Constitutional requirements about publication of decisions that are to be made. You may wish to discuss the report with the Corporate Director before it is made. Please indicate your decision on the duplicate memo supplied and return it to me when you have made your decision. I will then arrange for the formal notice of decision to be published.

Ryan Dell
Democratic Services

Title of Report: Best Start in Life 2026-2031

Decision made:

Reasons for your decision: (e.g. as stated in report)

Alternatives considered and rejected: (e.g. as stated in report)

Signed Date.....

Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education

BEST START IN LIFE 2026-2031

Cabinet Member & Portfolio	Councillor Susan O'Brien, Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education
Responsible Officer	Tehseen Kauser, Director of Children's Social Care
Report Author & Directorate	Antony Madden, Children's Services
Papers with report	Best Start in Life Strategy 2026-2031

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>The Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031 sets out a clear, ambitious and evidence driven plan to ensure every child in Hillingdon grows up safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn. The strategy focuses on four core priorities: better support for families, healthy beginnings, more accessible early education, and improving early years quality, supported by strong partnership working across health, education, social care, and the voluntary sector.</p> <p>This report seeks Cabinet Member approval to endorse the Best Start in Life Strategy so that the accompanying delivery plan can be fully implemented from 2026, enabling the Council and its partners to act early, reduce inequalities, strengthen family resilience, and improve long term outcomes for children across the borough.</p>
Putting our Residents First Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents and the Council to create:</p> <p>Thriving, healthy households across the borough, underpinned by an efficient, well-run, and digitally-enabled Council that works collaboratively with partners to deliver services which improve the lives of all our residents</p>
Financial Cost	<p>The Best Start in Life programme presents no new direct financial pressure to the Council, as delivery for 2025/26 is funded through the Best Start Family Hubs Development Grant provided by the Department for Education.</p> <p>This grant covers early speech and language interventions, Home Learning Environment programmes, parenting support, workforce capacity, and development of the Best Start in Life Local Plan.</p> <p>Future delivery beyond March 2026 will be met through planned government allocations for 2026–2029, with no additional Council funding required based on current planning.</p>
Select Committee	Children, Families & Education Select Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet Member:

1. Notes the strategic direction and priorities outlined in the strategy; and
2. Approves the proposed strategy and timelines.

Reasons for recommendations

1. Noting the strategic direction and priorities is sought as the Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031 sets out a clear, evidence driven vision for improving early childhood outcomes across Hillingdon, grounded in local needs, lived experience, and national guidance. The strategy identifies key challenges including inequalities, rising SEND needs, speech and language delays, parental wellbeing pressures, and gaps in early development which require a coordinated and preventative whole system response.

The strategic direction articulates four core priorities:

- Better Support for Families;
- Healthy Beginnings
- More Accessible Early Education;
- Improving Early Years Quality

Each supported by measurable commitments designed to strengthen family resilience, improve health, enhance early learning, and raise Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes across the borough. Noting this direction ensures visibility of the overarching ambitions and the collective multiagency plan necessary to drive improved long-term outcomes for children aged 0–5 and their families in preparation for mid and late childhood as well as young adulthood.

2. Endorsing the strategy and timelines is required to enable the Council and partners to move to full implementation of the delivery plan from April 2026, ensuring Hillingdon is able to meet national expectations set through the Best Start Family Hubs programme and the Government's target for 75.5% of children to achieve a Good Level of Development by 2028.

The timelines proposed in the strategy reflect local readiness, national funding schedules, and the need for coordinated multiagency mobilisation, including workforce development, expanded parenting and Home Learning Environment programmes, strengthened early identification pathways, and improved access to childcare in high need areas. The strategy also aligns with the national requirement for local authorities to strengthen their early years system leadership, develop integrated Family Hubs, and publish a Best Start in Life Local Plan by March 2026.

Cabinet member endorsement enables the governance, partnership arrangements, and delivery structures to proceed at pace, ensuring that children and families benefit from earlier support, more accessible services, and improved early development outcomes.

Alternative options considered/ risk management

- Do nothing/ continue current arrangements
 - Rejected - existing provision would not address widening inequalities, rising SEND need, speech & language delays, or gaps in school readiness.
- Delay the strategy until all national guidance is finalised
 - Rejected - The DfE requires implementation of parenting and HLE interventions from April 2026, and publication of a Best Start in Life Local Plan by March 2026.
- Implement only limited/ thematic initiatives (e.g., SLC only, childcare only)
 - Rejected - Early years outcomes depend on multiple interconnected factors, such as, family help, health, early education access, SEND provision and workforce development, and a narrow approach would reduce impact.
- Not utilise or partially utilise the DfE Grants
 - Rejected - Risks losing the ringfenced grant, reduces local readiness and delays April 2026 implementation.

Key Risks and Mitigations

- Insufficient capacity to deliver at required pace;
 - *Risk:* Strategy requires significant leadership, coordination and data capability.
 - *Mitigation:* Development Grant funds additional capacity; multi-agency Delivery Group meets monthly to maintain pace.
- Delay in Cabinet Member approval impacts statutory timelines;
 - *Risk:* Late approval could prevent meeting DfE requirements for March 2026 Local Plan and April 2026 rollout.
 - *Mitigation:* Readiness work (recruitment, planning, data development) already underway to enable rapid mobilisation.
- Recruitment delays for key roles (Parenting, HLE, Early Years roles)
 - *Risk:* Slower rollout of evidence-based delivery, especially in priority areas.
 - *Mitigation:* Job descriptions written, interviewing underway, and training pathways established under grant funding.
- Potential reduction in on site access;
 - *Risk:* Fewer access points could reduce reach for vulnerable families and early intervention.
 - *Mitigation:* Family Hubs model expands locality based, outreach and faith setting delivery to maintain or increase access.
- Failure to meet GLD targets or reduce inequalities;
 - *Risk:* GLD target of 75.5% (61.3% FSM) by 2028 could be missed without coordinated intervention.
 - *Mitigation:* Strategy includes measurable KPIs, termly monitoring, integrated early help, SEND pathways and strengthened early language/HLE programmes.
- Data integration and information sharing challenges
 - *Risk:* Lack of consistent data across health, education and care could limit early identification and monitoring.

- *Mitigation:* Development Grant funds the development of a data dashboard and integrated datasets under Delivery Group oversight.

Democratic compliance/ previous authority

This proposed strategy will have ongoing oversight by the Corporate Management Team and annual performance reporting to the relevant select committees and the Department for Education. The Cabinet Member has the constitutional authority to approve service specific strategies.

Select Committee comments

None at this stage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Introduction and Strategic Context

1.1 The *Best Start in Life Strategy 2026–2031* provides a shared boroughwide vision to ensure every child grows up **safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn**. It responds to clear evidence that early childhood experiences shape long term health, educational attainment and life chances.

1.2 The strategy is built on strong research foundations including the Marmot Review, national early years evidence, and local analysis showing widening developmental inequalities, rising SEND need, and significant speech, language and communication delays across Hillingdon.

1.3 National policy drivers including the Government's *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* programme require Local Authorities to publish a local Best Start Plan and begin delivery of evidence-based parenting and Home Learning Environment (HLE) interventions from April 2026.

2. Case for Change

2.1 Local data shows one in five children in Hillingdon live in low-income households, developmental gaps emerge before age five, and SEND/ complex needs are increasing. Early years settings report sharp rises in speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and greater complexity of developmental needs.

2.2 Access barriers persist for families experiencing deprivation, language barriers, homelessness or low parental confidence, requiring expansion of accessible Family Hub delivery and locality-based support.

2.3 Without strengthened early intervention, children are at greater risk of poorer health, reduced school readiness, and long term social and economic disadvantage reinforcing the need for a whole system and preventative approach.

3. Summary of Strategic Priorities

3.1 Better Support for Families

- Strengthen early identification and timely family help through Family Hubs and integrated pathways.
- Expand evidence-based parenting and Home Learning Environment programmes.
- Improve coordination of SEND support, early intervention, and parent carer involvement.
- Enhance safeguarding, trauma informed practice, and family resilience.

3.2 Healthy Beginnings

- Improve early health outcomes from pregnancy to age five, focusing on oral health, healthy weight, immunisations, and maternal wellbeing.
- Boost uptake of key health interventions, including Healthy Start vouchers and health visiting contacts.
- Strengthen parent infant relationships and emotional wellbeing through joined up perinatal and early years mental health support.

3.3 More Accessible Early Education

- Increase the take up of funded childcare, particularly for disadvantaged two year olds.
- Expand childcare availability in high need areas and support inclusive provision for children with SEND.
- Improve pathways into childcare through Family Hubs, early years providers and the Family Information Service.

3.4 Improving Early Years Quality

- Strengthen early communication, language, and mathematical development so more children reach a Good Level of Development.
- Improve workforce skills and leadership through professional development, communication rich practice, and collaboration with Stronger Practice Hubs.
- Ensure high quality, inclusive provision that prepares all children for a successful transition into school.

4. Evidence Based Approaches Within the Delivery Plan

4.1 The proposed delivery plan embeds evidence-based interventions such as WellComm speech and language screening, Early Words Together, and structured parenting pathways (e.g., Nurturing Programme, Solihull/Togetherness, SEND specific approaches). These are nationally recognised for improving early communication, parental engagement and school readiness.

4.2 A whole system approach will enable earlier identification of developmental and health needs, improving long term outcomes and reducing pressure on specialist and statutory services.

4.3 Family Hub delivery, informed by parent voice and community insight, ensures services are non-judgmental, culturally responsive and accessible, features consistently highlighted by Hillingdon families as critical.

5. Governance and Accountability

5.1 Implementation will be overseen by the Best Start in Life Delivery Group, with multiagency leadership across health, education, early years, social care, and the voluntary sector.

5.2 The Delivery Group reports into the Children’s Health and Care Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board, providing system accountability and enabling strategic oversight, risk management and performance monitoring.

5.3 Progress will be monitored using a dedicated performance framework, aligned to early years KPIs and GLD targets, with regular review cycles and data-informed decision making.

Financial Implications

The recommendations in this report create no new unfunded financial pressures for the Council. Delivery for 2025/26 is fully supported by the £166,583 Best Start Family Hubs Development Grant, which is ringfenced for preparatory activity, must be spent within the current financial year and has detailed actual and committed spends at time of writing.

Grant funding covers key readiness activities including early speech and language intervention (WellComm), Home Learning Environment coordination and training, parenting programme delivery, data development and capacity to implement the Best Start in Life Local Plan.

From April 2026, implementation of the strategy will be funded through provisional multiyear national allocations (2026–2029) under the Best Start Family Hubs and Best Start in Life programme, supporting revenue and capital costs for Family Hubs, HLE programmes, parenting interventions, leadership capacity, and integrated neighbourhood services. The provisional allocation for financial years 2026-29 of the programme is £2,575,600.

The strategy is expected to deliver long term cost avoidance across education, SEND, health, and social care through improved early identification, higher school readiness, reduced escalation of needs, and strengthened preventative pathways.

Delivery risks, such as grant compliance and meeting DfE timelines are mitigated through monthly multiagency delivery oversight, active recruitment and training, and mandatory financial reporting requirements including the Statement of Grant Usage due by April 2026.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The proposed recommendations will have a significant and positive impact on Hillingdon residents, particularly families with young children, by improving access to early help, strengthening family resilience, and ensuring children receive the support they need at the earliest stage.

Improved outcomes for children aged 0–5

The strategy is designed to ensure children grow up safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn, supporting early brain development, communication, emotional wellbeing and school readiness. Families will benefit from earlier identification of need and timely intervention, reducing developmental gaps and future disadvantage.

More accessible and joined up support through Family Hubs

Residents will experience improved access to services across health, early years, SEND and family support via Family Hubs, outreach, libraries, toddler groups and faith based settings. This reflects parents’ feedback requesting accessible, non-judgmental support close to home.

Strengthened support for families experiencing disadvantage

The strategy directly targets inequalities including poverty, homelessness, language barriers and parental wellbeing challenges by improving access to high quality childcare, parenting support, early language interventions and targeted help in areas of highest deprivation.

Enhanced support for children with SEND

Families of children with SEND will benefit from strengthened early identification pathways, improved coordination between professionals, and greater access to evidence based interventions and inclusive early education. This is a key local priority due to rising levels of complex needs.

Healthier communities

Residents will benefit from improved oral health programmes, increased immunisation uptake, Healthy Start access, support for healthy weight, and stronger maternal and perinatal mental health services. These improvements will contribute to healthier children and reduced demand for acute services.

Expanded childcare access supporting working families

Increased availability and take up of funded childcare, particularly for disadvantaged two year olds – will support parental employment, financial stability, and improved child development outcomes.

Stronger community resilience and collaboration

Feedback from the multiagency stakeholder event involving over 130 professionals, where 92% reported improved understanding and 96% stronger collaboration, demonstrates that the strategy strengthens community cohesion and joint working across services supporting residents.

Putting residents first

The recommendations fully align with the Council's vision of putting residents first by:

- Ensuring families have access to timely, high quality support
- Prioritising improved outcomes for the most vulnerable
- Strengthening local services based on resident feedback and lived experience
- Reducing inequalities and improving life chances from the earliest stage

By endorsing the strategy and enabling the delivery plan to proceed, the Council will create a more equitable, preventative, and resident centred early years system that improves outcomes for children and strengthens communities across Hillingdon.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS:

The Equality Impact Assessment of the Best Start in Life Strategy demonstrates that the proposal is strongly aligned with the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. The strategy is built on a substantial evidence base, including child development and health data, parental consultation, multi-agency engagement, SEND intelligence, and national research. These insights highlight persistent inequalities affecting specific groups, particularly children with SEND, families in poverty, minority

ethnic communities, multilingual households, parents with perinatal mental health needs, and those experiencing unstable housing.

Overall, the strategy is expected to have significant positive impacts, especially for groups facing entrenched disadvantage. These positive impacts include: earlier identification of developmental needs, expanded Family Hubs in deprived areas, enhanced SEND pathways, improved maternal and child health interventions, better access to childcare, and strengthened multi-agency coordination.

In conclusion, the assessment finds that the BSIL Strategy is likely to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for families across Hillingdon, provided the identified mitigation actions are embedded and monitored. The strategy uses evidence-based, targeted approaches that disproportionately benefit those experiencing the greatest disadvantage, supporting a fairer start for all children.

Consultation & Engagement carried out (or required)

The Best Start in Life Strategy has been shaped through extensive coproduction with residents, parents, professionals, and partners across Hillingdon. Families played a central role, including 498 parents who responded to the Family Hub user survey in October 2025, all of whom recommended the service, providing clear feedback on accessibility, support needs and service improvements. The Family Hub Parent Group, including parents of children with SEND, contributed directly to service design, improvements to the online offer, and the chair is a member of the Best Start in Life Delivery Group to ensure ongoing parent voice in governance.

A major stakeholder event with over 130 participants from health, education, early years settings, community and voluntary organisations strengthened the strategy, with 92% reporting improved understanding of local support and 96% reporting deeper collaboration. Themes from this event shaped the strategy's priorities on early help, SEND pathways, parental wellbeing and speech and language development.

Development of the strategy has been further informed by multiagency input through the Best Start in Life Delivery Group, bringing together health, early years, social care, education and voluntary sector partners. This group meets monthly to shape priorities, review data, and oversee systemwide delivery planning.

Co-production is embedded throughout the delivery plan, ensuring the strategy reflects lived experience, professional expertise and robust evidence. This positions Hillingdon to deliver an integrated, accessible and responsive early years system shaped by those who use and deliver it.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

There are no additional finance considerations beyond those highlighted in the financial implications section of this report.

Legal

Use of funds under the grant must comply with the relevant grant conditions. There are no legal impediments to the recommendation set out within the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

APPENDIX

Best Start in Life Strategy (2026–2031)

Best Start In Life Strategy

2026 - 2031



 **BEST**
 **START**
 **IN LIFE**



HILLINGDON
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Foreword



I am extremely pleased to introduce Hillingdon's Best Start in Life Strategy - a shared vision rooted in a simple but profound belief; when we give every child the strongest possible start, we shape not just individual futures but the future of our entire community.

The early years are extraordinary. They are the foundation upon which every child builds their health, learning, wellbeing and life chances. They influence how children grow, how they relate to others, and how they navigate the world. In these first months and years, the opportunities we create and the challenges we prevent have an impact that lasts a lifetime. Here in Hillingdon, our ambition is clear and unwavering: every child will have the best possible start in life. To grow up safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn.

This vision belongs to all of us as a community as well as our services, our partners, and our families.

Families today face complex pressures, and we recognise that achieving this vision demands both honesty and determination. We continue to see inequalities surrounding gaps in early development, challenges in speech and language, increasing demands on parental wellbeing, and a rising need for support. These pressures, both local and national, shape the daily reality for many of our residents.

And yet, the opportunities ahead of us are greater than the challenges we face. Together, we have the chance to act early, prevent need from escalating, and strengthen the environments in which children grow. We seek to reduce inequalities, improve life chances, and ensure support is accessible where and when families need it most. We look to build communities that nurture resilience, confidence, and aspiration, as well as, communities where every child is able to thrive, not only in their early years but throughout their entire lives.

To deliver on this shared ambition, Hillingdon has set out clear strategic priorities:

- Better Support for Families
- Healthy Beginnings
- More Accessible Early Education
- Improving Quality in the Early Years.

These priorities reflect our collective commitment to work differently, think boldly, and focus relentlessly on what matters most. This strategy is a commitment that every partner across Hillingdon stands together, united in purpose and driven by the belief that every child deserves the very best start in life.

As we move forward, let us continue to collaborate with ambition, act with compassion, and lead with the conviction that the work we do today will transform the lives of children tomorrow.

Together, we will ensure that every child in Hillingdon not only has the chance to thrive but truly does thrive.

Susan O'Brien
Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education

"Giving every child the best start in life is crucial to reducing health inequalities across the life course. The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual, and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years (starting in the womb) has lifelong effects on many aspects of health and well-being – from obesity, heart disease and mental health to educational achievement and economic status."

Marmot Review, Institute of Health Equity

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"As Chair of the Hillingdon Family Hub Parent Group and a parent carer of two children, one of whom is autistic, I deeply value the early years for all children, particularly those needing extra support. Family Hubs and Children's Centres have shown me the importance of accessible, non-judgmental services that support the whole family and ensure parents feel heard and supported at the right time."

This strategy reflects the importance of prevention, early intervention and co-production, and recognises that lived experience must sit alongside professional expertise in shaping effective services. I welcome the commitment to reducing inequalities, strengthening family resilience and improving outcomes for all children, and look forward to continued collaboration to ensure the strategy delivers meaningful, inclusive support for families across Hillingdon."

Mohini Khalon - Chair of the Family Hub Parent Group

1. Introduction and our Vision

Hillingdon's *Best Start in Life* Strategy sets out a shared vision that:

Every child in Hillingdon will have the best possible start in life: safe, healthy, happy, engaged, valued and ready to learn



The Government's *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* strategy, sets out an ambitious goal to ensure that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to reach their full potential, with a national target for 75 per cent of five-year-olds to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028.

We place babies, children and families at the heart of our work, using a strengths-based, trauma-responsive and relationship-focused approach that supports the entire family during the crucial early years. Working together across health, education, and community services to improve development, health and wellbeing from pregnancy through

early childhood, ensuring parents and carers receive the highest quality guidance and services to strengthen family resilience, and create nurturing environments where children can thrive.

Achieving this vision requires a clear focus on what matters most. Guided by local data, family feedback, and national evidence, we have identified key priorities and commitments that will drive change and deliver impact. These commitments reflect the challenges and opportunities unique to Hillingdon and ensure resources are targeted where they will make the greatest difference.

Giving every child the best start in life:



A loving, secure and reliable relationship with a parent or carer to support a child



Emotional wellbeing



Brain development



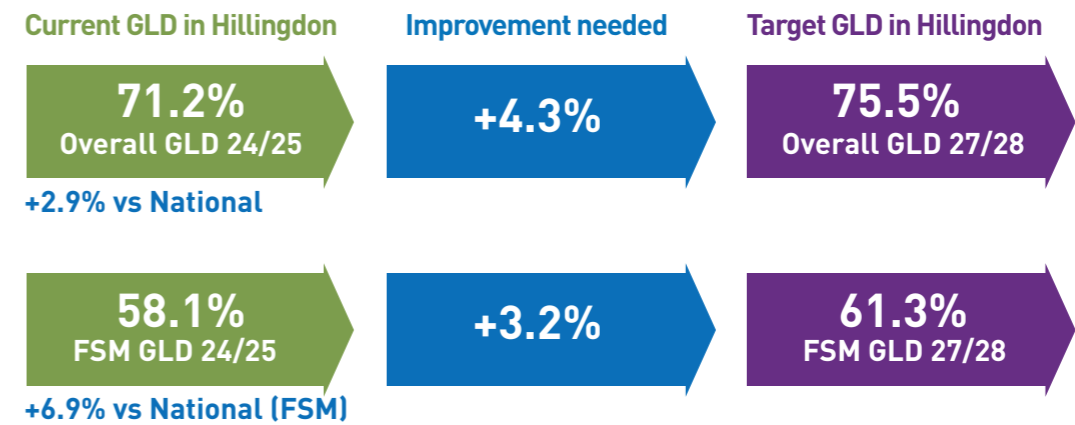
Language development and ability to learn



Capacity to form and maintain positive relationships with others

Hillingdon's targets

Supporting this vision is the Department for Education's objective for Hillingdon to improve the overall Good Level of Development (GLD) in alignment with national standards. The specific targets set for Hillingdon are shown below:



In order to attain this Good Level of Development by 2027/28, we will strive to achieve the following targets:

GLD overtime target	25/26	26/27	27/28
Overall	72.6%	74.1%	75.5%
FSM	59.2%	60.2%	61.3%

In Hillingdon, we understand children's learning and development starts before birth and are influenced by many factors, including health, home environment, parenting, financial security, and additional needs. These components combine to build a strong foundation for learning, helping children to flourish and achieve positive outcomes as they grow older. This plan seeks to incorporate all these considerations.



2. Why This, Why Now? The Need for Change

It is widely evidenced that children who get the support needed in their earliest years are more likely to thrive at school, develop strong social and emotional skills, enjoy better health, and go on to lead fulfilling, productive lives. While genetics play a role, it is the quality of early relationships and environments that most powerfully shape a child's trajectory. Providing caring and stable support helps children's

brains develop well and makes them stronger, while social problems like neglect or an unstable environment can cause lasting harm.

Ensuring every child in Hillingdon has the best start in life is one of the most effective ways to improve long-term health, educational achievement, and social outcomes across our borough for each child.

The challenges

- **Persistent inequalities:** Challenges such as poverty, insecure housing, health inequalities, having English as an additional language, adverse childhood experiences, social disadvantages and limited access to services are especially significant for groups such as children with Special Educational Need and Disabilities (SEND), those from global majorities, and Cared for Children, increasing their risk of poorer outcomes without timely intervention.
- **School readiness gaps:** Data consistently shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to meet early learning goals, widening the gap before formal education begins.
- **Speech, language, and communication delay** – In Hillingdon, the most common primary need among pupils identified with SEND for the 2024/25 academic year was Speech, language, and communication needs, affecting **9,253** pupils (32 per cent). [Research by Speech and Language UK](#) shows that children who struggle to talk and understand words are six times more likely to be behind in English at age 11, 11 times more likely to be behind in Maths at age 11, more likely to have poor mental health, and twice as likely to be unemployed as an adult.

- **Parental wellbeing:** Parental wellbeing is identified as “the single biggest factor for a child’s wellbeing”, with [research](#) showing that up to 20 per cent of new and expectant mothers experience perinatal mental illness.
- **Rising demand for support:** Increasing numbers of families need help with mental health, emotional wellbeing, SEND and early intervention services.
- **National and local pressures:** The cost-of-living crisis, workforce pressures, and evolving demographics mean services must adapt to meet ever changing and complex support needs



The opportunities

We know timely and early intervention works. Investing in children's early years reduces long-term costs, improves health and education outcomes, increases life chances and strengthens communities through stronger families.

By acting now, we can:

- **Prevent problems before they escalate:** Access to the Family Hub Service can improve school readiness, reduce hospitalisations, and lessen the need for support from Youth Justice Services. For example, children living near a Sure Start Centre performed better in their GCSEs and had lower rates of criminal convictions. ([Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2025](#)).
- **Reduce inequalities and improve life chances:** “The period from pregnancy to age three is the most crucial, when the brain grows faster than at any other time; 80 per cent of a person’s brain is formed by this age. This is a window of opportunity to lay the foundation of health and wellbeing whose benefits last a lifetime and carry into the next generation.” ([World Health Organisation, 2018](#)).
- **Assist home learning and parenting:** Everyday interactions between children and caregivers are one of the strongest predictors of early language and literacy. Effective parental engagement can add three plus months of learning progress in a year ([Education empowerment fund](#)).
- **Build resilience in families and communities:** “Caregivers do not exist in a vacuum; we need family-friendly communities that create non-judgmental environments, encourage help-seeking and ensure that early childhood is prioritised locally”. ([The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood](#), 2021).
- **Deliver better value for public services:** There are strong economic benefits, improved academic outcomes and better long-term life outcomes. For every £1 invested in quality early years care and education, saves the taxpayer £7 in later interventions across the education system and other public services (Early Education and Childcare Coalition, 2024). The Heckman Curve shows that the highest rate of economic returns comes from the earliest investments in children. ([The Heckman Curve](#)).
- **Continue to put our residents first:** By strengthening Hillingdon’s safe, resilient, and connected communities. Enhancing access to quality services supports children and families, encourages independence, and creates opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Why now?

- **Evidence is clear:** The earlier we act together, the greater the impact. Securing a successful start for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds can mean the difference in achieving good GCSE grades and higher earning potential as an adult (DfE, 2025).
- **Local data highlights urgency:** In Hillingdon, one in five children live in a low-income household, and developmental gaps consistently appear before age five.
- **National policy alignment:** Government priorities emphasise Family Hubs, early years’ investment, and integrated services. Also, Children’s Social Care in Hillingdon continues on its transformation journey to help ensure we deliver more coherent, accessible, and joined-up early years and family support services. This is to further strengthen the effectiveness of support, modernise practices, and ensure services remain responsive to the needs of children and families across the borough.
- **Community expectation:** Families have told us that they need accessible, joined-up support that makes a real difference.

3. Our Principles as a Partnership

Who are 'we' and who is the strategy for?

Supporting children to have the best start is not just the responsibility of parents and carers; it's a shared responsibility across our whole community. In Hillingdon, this includes everyone involved in a child's life, particularly during their early years, including health professionals, early education and childcare settings, social care, voluntary, faith and community organisations, and, most importantly, children and families themselves.

When we say 'we', we mean **all** partners involved in a child's early years working together to break down barriers, reduce inequalities, and ensure every child in Hillingdon has the strongest possible foundations for their future alongside their parents and carer.

The Best Start in Life initiative is coordinated by the Family Hub Service within the local authority, which maintains strong links with multiagency work.

The Best Start in Life Strategy is based on what families in Hillingdon have told us, what our local data shows, evidenced based practice and national guidance. It focuses on what matters most to families and sets out clear, practical steps to help every child thrive. By reviewing the government's 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' framework, we identified the key needs in our borough and created a joined-up plan that brings services together across health, education, social care and the voluntary sector. This plan turns our shared vision into real actions, making sure children and families get the right support at the right time while staying in line with national best practice. We will continue to review and develop this plan so that we consistently enhance outcomes for children.



This strategy is our commitment to ensure every child in Hillingdon has the best possible start in life and is based on the following:

- **Putting children and families first:**
We will ensure the needs of children and families are at the heart of everything we do. Driven by data, services will be designed around what matters most to families, making support accessible, inclusive, and responsive.
- **Tackling inequalities:**
We are committed to reducing gaps in outcomes by focusing on those who face the greatest challenges in a timely manner. By targeting resources where they are needed most, we will help every child reach their potential and increase their life chances.
- **Investing in timely family help:**
We will act early before problems become entrenched or escalate, by providing timely, evidence-based support during pregnancy and the early years. This approach will prevent long-term difficulties and improve life chances.
- **Valuing the early years:**
The earliest years shape lifelong health, learning and wellbeing. Therefore, we will value this crucial period of life to reduce inequalities, strengthen family foundations, and give every child the best chance to thrive.
- **Working together:**
No single person or organisation can achieve this alone. We will strengthen partnerships across health, education, social care, and the voluntary sector to deliver joined-up, family-centred services.
- **Listening and learning:**
We will listen to families, involve them in shaping services, and continuously learn from the views of children, parents and carers' feedback as well as reliable data. Our approach will be flexible, dynamic and responsive to changing needs.
- **Measuring impact:**
We will track progress against clear outcomes, ensuring accountability and transparency. Success will be measured not just by improved statistics, but by the real difference we make in children's lives.
- **Scaling innovation:**
We will broaden and embed new practices by collaborating with a range of diverse partners. By sharing expertise and supporting pilot projects, we aim to create sustainable, adaptable models that extend our impact across the borough. This will help us deliver wider support, drive ongoing improvement, and ensure lasting results.



These principles are drawn from a strong evidence base, including national guidance such as the Best Start for Life Review, local population and health data, and the voices of Hillingdon families and practitioners. They reflect what we know works in the earliest years and what families have told us they value most. As a partnership, we will use these to shape commissioning, service design, workforce development and practice across health, education, social care and the voluntary sector. They provide a common set of principles that will guide all our early years work and ensure consistency, accountability and shared focus on improving outcomes for children and families.

4. Growing up in Hillingdon - Where we are in 2026

Hillingdon is one of London's largest and most diverse boroughs. Children aged 0-5 years number 24,371, accounting for 8 per cent of the population (2021 census).

The borough has a high turnover of families, largely due to its proximity to Heathrow Airport, London's main international gateway. This transient population presents challenges for continuity of care and early years support.

Hillingdon is also one of the most linguistically diverse boroughs in London, with 107 languages spoken and 22.1% of families using a language other than English at home. This diversity enriches the community and requires culturally responsive, accessible services.

Poverty is a major risk for children's development, health and wellbeing in Hillingdon, which ranks among the top 36 per cent most deprived areas nationally. About one in five children live in low-income households, with the cost-of-living crisis increasing financial strain. In 2025, 32.4 per cent of homeless households (440) include dependent children, demonstrating the scale of homelessness affecting families.

The early years sector is seeing an increase in both the number and complexity of children with SEND, as well as higher levels and a broader range of needs. From September 2024 to August 2025, Early Help Notification (EHN) and Ruislip Garden Assessment Centre referrals rose compared to the previous year. More children are presenting with complex medical or developmental conditions, including Down syndrome, global developmental delay, epilepsy, and sensory impairments. Throughout the year, Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) remain the most common primary needs.

Hillingdon uses a locality-based model to ensure families receive support close to home. Hillingdon Family Hub Service presently consists of Family Hubs as well as Children's Centres with a focus on decreasing children's centres and increasing Family Hubs. A wide range of professionals are available at these centres and work together to promote child development, learning, health and family wellbeing. Services include midwifery, health visiting, support for children with special educational needs, youth services, and community resources. Presently, there are two Family Hubs in Uxbridge and Hayes, and ten other sites across Hillingdon, with more Family Hubs on the way in 2026 and beyond.

Services are tailored to what each community has told us they need evidenced with relevant data and are delivered in locations such as parks, libraries, toddler groups, and pop-up events, as well as online so that parents can access support easily.

Although Hillingdon, was not included in the original government funding, we have progressed a family-centred, child first approach to delivering the Best Start in Life. This included the implementation of the Family Hub Strategy (2023-2025), which provides integrated services for families and children aged 0-19 years (up to 25 for those with SEND). The strategy supports the delivery of accessible and coordinated services across the borough, ensuring continuity of provision through Family Hub locations.

Developments as part of the Family Hub Strategy (2023-2025)

Increased access – Ensuring families can easily access help and support:

- From April 2024 to March 2025, Family Hub Services supported more than 13,000 families through 80,000 attendances. Almost half of these families face factors like low income or children with additional learning needs.
- Our Care and Support Directory for children, young people and families was launched as the single digital point of access for all services in Hillingdon, listing more than 600 organisations and support sources for residents.
- Increased access to services for children aged five to 19yrs within the Family Hubs and some Children's Centres.
- Expanded outreach to seldom-heard families, with weekly sessions in Northwood and Heathrow Villages and termly drop-ins in approximately 26 locations including toddler groups, place of worship and libraries.

Explore our online care and support directory

Giving you access to thousands of services, events and organisations.



HILLINGDON
LONDON



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE
AND FAMILIES

careandsupport.hillingdon.gov.uk/families

2. Connection – Professionals working together through a shared approach

- Launched Family Hub Network Training in January 2025 for all professionals working with children and young people (0–19 years), delivering 37 courses to 353 workforce members in one year. One-third of participants were from external sectors such as health, education, and the community.
- Hosted a partnership event in September 2024 for 130 people across various sectors. 92% gained a better understanding of available support, and 96% strengthened their networks.
- Facilitated effective collaboration among multiple agencies and partners to provide coordinated support for families, so that families experienced more seamless support.
- Conducted service mapping to identify gaps and streamline referrals, with input from partners and alignment with the Thrive Framework.

3. Relationship - Services prioritise strengthening relationships, building on family strengths

- Developed the Family Hub Parent Group, which is made up of parents including those with children with SEND, which meets monthly and plays an active role in shaping services. Their contributions led to improvements in the online parenting offer, feedback processes and the Care and Support Directory, with the Chair also representing parent voice on the Family Hub Strategic Board.
- Coordinated the Five to Thrive activity across the borough and led training initiatives to integrate the Five to Thrive principles into daily practice, ensuring staff use attachment-focused practice to strengthen bonds and support healthy parent-child relationships.

What do families say about Hillingdon's Family Hub Service?

Satisfaction rating: 4.85 out of 5



In October 2025, 498 parents and carers took part in the Family Hub Service user survey. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with every respondent (100%) recommending the service to others.

Parents and carers consistently praise the welcoming staff, diverse range of engaging activities, and safe, supportive environment. Many highlight the positive impact these services have on their families and appreciate the dedication shown by staff. Feedback also included a request for more sessions and improving the booking system to make it easier to book sessions.

Every member working there is so welcoming and friendly. I had always loved being there with my kids. My younger one is an additional needs child, I was looking for a place where he can stay and play without being judged and I am glad I found this place... I have also attended Autism awareness programme with them.

Every member working there is so welcoming and friendly. I had always loved being there with my kids. My younger one is an additional needs child, I was looking for a place where he can stay and play without being judged and I am glad I found this place... I have also attended Autism awareness programme with them.

Helped with toilet training advice, helped with getting ready for nursery. Really welcomed, never felt judged and always very supportive.

I would 100% recommend this to anyone with a baby. It allows you to meet with other parents in a safe and comfortable environments

... helped my child with speech and socialising.

5. Hillingdon's Best Start in Life Road Map

The roadmap below highlights key services supporting families from pregnancy through a child's first five years in Hillingdon, illustrating the local network for children ages 0 to five. This is not a comprehensive list of every service in Hillingdon, and each family's journey may look different.



CONTINUED...

AGE 1-3 YEARS

- Health Visitor developmental reviews at two to two years and six months
- Parenting programmes such as Early Bird and The Nurturing Programme
- Online parenting workshops
- 0 to fives activities such as stay and plays
- SEND activities including attention building sessions and speech and language support
- Specialist SEND support
- Families receiving the Early Learning for two-year-olds entitlement or the Working families' early years entitlement funding for childcare
- Transition to childcare
- *Home Learning programme- Early Words Together (Coming soon)*

AGE 3-5 YEARS

- 3 and 4 year olds receiving the early years entitlement funding for childcare
- Pre-school immunisations at three years and four months
- Transition to primary schools
- National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) for children aged four to five years.

**FAMILY HUB NETWORK
INCLUDING WIDER SERVICES AND SUPPORT**

- Family Information Service
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Information, Advice and Support Service
- Courses for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL)
- Finance, benefits and work employment services
- Health and well-being activities and services
- Parenting programmes, workshops and family learning, including dad's groups
- Children's Integrated Therapies- Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health support (CAMHS)
- Specialist support services such as Children's Social Care, SEND support, Family Time Service
- Nurseries, Childminders, Playgroups and Schools
- Family Help Service
- Youth and Adolescent Services



Priorities Overview:



Priority 1

Better Support for Families

The right support, at the right time, in the right place

What this will mean for a child:

*'I have a secure, stable and caring home'
'I have the support I need, when I need it'
'I feel listened to and valued'*



Where are we now?

Families in Hillingdon are supported through a wide range of early learning and child development opportunities, including a strong universal core offer of parent/carer and baby/toddler groups, such as Stay and Play, home-learning support (although these are not currently evidenced based), targeted help for developmental delay or SEND, and guidance with transitions into school. Their health and

wellbeing are promoted through initiatives that address physical health as well as emotional wellbeing, with strong referral pathways to other professionals. Families are also offered antenatal and parenting courses, practical workshops, financial and employment support, and 1:1 whole-family assistance to help them thrive, whether in the Family Hub Service or in the home through Home Start and Portage.

Family story (Home-Start Hillingdon)

After the trauma of losing her mother on the day her twins were born, Sonya became isolated and anxious about leaving home. A Home-Start Hillingdon volunteer provided calm, play-based support for the twins and confidence-building encouragement for Sonya, helping them venture out to the park, attend the local children's centre, and settle into nursery. As Sonya's confidence grew, she secured a job, and the twins thrived—happy in their relationships and learning.

Sonya said: *"The impact that you've had in our lives is amazing. I'll always tell people how you helped me become me again. I would never have found the strength to approach going to work, let alone leaving the house, if it weren't for you. I'm so happy I made the choice to accept your help. The difference you have made to my children is life changing."*

Hillingdon currently delivers a range of parenting and home learning programmes and workshops from pregnancy to age five, offered both face-to-face and online. However, our reach remains limited, and there is a clear need to increase the focus on evidence-based support. To address this, we will establish a dedicated **Parenting and Home Learning Team**, to deliver a cascade model across schools, faith groups, and community organisations, enabling greater reach and long-term sustainability.

We actively seek **feedback from parents/carers** and engage them in shaping our services to align with their needs and aspirations and have an active Family Hub Parent Group, which is representative of parents from across the borough. We collaborate closely with the Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) to ensure that parents' experiences with maternity and neonatal services are actively considered in driving service improvement. Additionally, we engage with the Parent Carer Forum to enable parents of children with SEND to meaningfully contribute to the development of these services.



Our **outreach** model is designed to ensure accessibility within local communities, especially for those who may not typically engage with universal provision. We aim to increase access to seldom-heard families by listening and learning from these families about what they want and need. To further enhance our approach, we recognise the important role of faith organisations as trusted community resources and relationship centers and will seek to strengthen our partnerships with these groups.

Family Help in Hillingdon ensures that vulnerable families receive support as soon as challenges emerge, helping to

reduce inequalities and improve long-term outcomes. The Stronger Families Hub acts as a single point of contact for families and professionals, offering clear referral pathways and timely access to services. Strong multi-agency teamwork means risks are identified early, and children receive the right support quickly to stay safe, healthy, and well. Practitioners are trauma-informed and understand when and how to raise concerns, working together effectively so that children can develop well, and families can thrive. Clear processes for information-sharing and case coordination ensure that professionals from different agencies can collaborate confidently and efficiently.

Family feedback (The Nurturing Programme)

I attended the Nurturing Programme. To begin with I really felt a lot of pressure and anxiety about attending. From the second I walked in, I was made to feel very welcome, comfortable and listened to by the staff, and they had loads of tips & tricks and recommendations to other support available.

By week two, I could already see a difference, and so could my family, in my approach to certain situations and negative behaviours. I learned so much and the right strategies to use to get the best outcome.

By week three and four, I actually enjoyed coming to the group, and I found the information given really helpful. When we first did a checklist for how life at home was, it was rather low scoring, but by the end of the ten weeks it's like I had a different way of life for the better.

I'm not saying that it's perfect because there are still some things that I am working on, but day-to-day life has improved beyond ways I could ever imagine.

I really felt that I connected with the staff and opened up to them about a lot of things. I felt like they were there for me more than just the group — my personal life as well — and made me feel positive when I didn't feel good. They always listened when I needed them to, and I will be forever thankful for everything they've done to support me when I needed it the most.

Support for children with SEND is a key part of Family Help. A range of child-centred services are available, including specialised programmes for autistic children, Portage home-based interventions, targeted groups, and practical guidance from the SEND Advisory Service and SENDIASS. Early identification is strengthened through the Early Years Tracking Panel, which brings partners together to coordinate timely intervention and appropriate placements. This collaborative approach promotes inclusion, removes barriers to learning, and improves outcomes before children start school.



Hillingdon is enhancing its Best Start for Life initiative by improving data integration, family help services and early identification systems, enabling more timely recognition and effective support for vulnerable children.

Moving forward, together we will ...

Commitments	What do we want to achieve?	How will we measure success?
1. Design, create and produce services with families	Families feel that they can shape how services are designed and delivered, and their feedback that is valued.	Year on year, more families give feedback on service design. Parent voice embedded in decisions and co-designing interventions that support early childhood development and family wellbeing.
2. Better identify children in need of family help	Families benefit from an integrated data report that helps professionals quickly spot when they/ their child may need extra support. Early years settings in areas with lower GLD use WellComm screening consistently, so every child gets a fair assessment, and families clearly understand their child's strengths and needs. Clear and well-communicated referral pathways enable families to easily access the right services when developmental delays are identified.	More children are identified early through robust data sharing and the WellComm Toolkit, especially those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and SEND.
3. Improve access to services in disadvantaged areas	More Best Start Family Hub Services are located where they are needed most, in areas of high deprivation. Faith organisations and civic leaders collaborate to strengthen existing efforts and address unmet community needs.	Increasing the number of Best Start Family Hubs with a focus on placing them in areas of high deprivation. Greater collaboration between faith groups and civic bodies as demonstrated in participation of partnership groups such as Stronger Families.
4. Expand access to parenting and Home Learning Environment (HLE) programmes	Families can easily access a wider range of high-quality, evidence-based parenting and HLE programmes so they feel more confident, supported, and able to build positive relationships and routines at home.	Increase in parenting programme with 80% of parents reporting an increase in parenting skill and confidence. Increase in evidenced based Home Learning Environment Programmes for 2 to 4 year olds with parents reporting an increase in frequency of children's engagement in early learning activities.
5. Enhance support for children with an additional needs and SEND	Families receive timely, well-coordinated support through a dedicated professional in every Best Start Family Hub who helps them identify needs early and quickly connects them to the right local services. Young children awaiting an autism diagnosis are supported sooner through the 'Waiting Well Initiative', which strengthens early intervention offers, ensuring families on Child Development Centre (CDC) waiting lists get proactive guidance and help when they need it most.	A trained and dedicated SEND professional is in each Best Start Family Hub. Increase proportion of children receiving early pre-diagnostic support by 20% by 2030 (baseline to be established 2025/26).
6. Strengthen support so every baby and child has a safe, nurturing start in life	Parents can easily access trauma-informed support, helping them build safe, stable family environments where children thrive. Professionals have the skills to spot and respond to domestic abuse and neglect, ensuring services work together, so families get timely help, supporting safer and more nurturing environments.	Fewer unborn and newly born babies as well as young children made subject to child protection plans due to the impact of domestic abuse or neglect. Increased number of children remaining safely in parental care.

Priority 2

Healthy Beginnings

Strong foundations for physical health from pregnancy through the early years

What this will mean for a child:

'My parents/carers keep me healthy, so I don't get poorly from things we can avoid'

'I am healthy and happy'



Where are we now?

Hillingdon has a **comprehensive health offer** for families with young children which is integrated with Family Hub Service serving as the main access points. It includes midwifery teams who offer antenatal and postnatal care and health visitors provide universal and targeted support from pregnancy through to school age, including developmental reviews, well-baby clinics, and infant feeding advice and specialist clinics. Moving forward, Family Hubs, Child Health Hubs and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams planning includes working even closer together to provide seamless, coordinated support for children and families.

Families have access to a variety of activities designed to **promote healthy living**, supported by four leisure centres, one of which includes an integrated Family Hub. Working with maternity services, GPs, Family Hub Service, Health Visitors promote infant feeding, mental health, healthy weight, oral health, school readiness, and routine immunisations, and encourage uptake, especially where access barriers exist.

The **Hillingdon Health Visiting Service** supports all families from pregnancy to school age (0–5) with five key health and development reviews, including antenatal, new birth, and developmental contacts at 6–8 weeks, 9–12 months, and 2–2½ years. These reviews help identify emerging needs early and enable timely intervention and we are working towards increasing the uptake of these reviews. Working with maternity services, GPs, Family Hub Service, Health Visitors promote infant feeding, mental health, healthy weight, oral health, school readiness, and routine immunisations, and encourage uptake, especially where access barriers exist..

A helping hand ...

In 2025, more than 3,700 families got a helping hand with children's dental health through more than 700 lively sessions in children's centres, family hub service venues. Supported by the Oral Health Promoter from Whittington Health NHS Trust, families learned fun ways to brush twice daily, cut sugary snacks, and swap bottles for cups. Exciting new activities included sensory-friendly workshops, healthy food demos, tooth fairy parties, and toothbrushing story times.



Community midwifery teams at Hillingdon Hospital are essential in supporting women, birthing people, and families, though a 2024 Care Quality Commission inspection highlighted staffing and safety pressures, resulting in a rating of 'requires improvement' for maternity services. In response, the trust has launched a comprehensive improvement programme, backed by its executive team, to enhance safety, staff numbers, communication, and introduce a more holistic, person-centred approach to care, we are committed to ensuring that every family receives safe, compassionate, and high-quality support from pregnancy through to early parenthood.

The **Children's Integrated Therapy Service (CITS)** brings together speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists to deliver assessment and therapy for children with additional needs. Along with other specialist services, such as the Child Development Centre, Neonatal Clinic and Immunisation Team.

Hillingdon promotes **healthy nutrition** for under fives through a strong early-years offer that brings together oral health, infant feeding, and vitamin supplementation. Families receive practical support on weaning and healthy eating, alongside borough-wide oral health initiatives and Healthy Start vitamins which are actively promoted to ensure children under four and pregnant/breastfeeding women receive essential nutrients, with work underway to increase uptake across the borough. Breastfeeding rates in Hillingdon remain above the national average, with 74 per cent at four to eight weeks compared to 55.6 per cent nationally. Support is provided through clinics, peer groups, drop-ins, and one-to-one consultations to help families start and sustain breastfeeding. The focus moving forward is on achieving Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) accreditation, the only evidence-based intervention for hospitals and communities to improve infant feeding outcomes, including breastfeeding initiation and continuation.

Parent-infant relationships are also supported through Family Help, with midwives, health visitors, Family Hubs & Children's Centres, and early years settings working together to strengthen early bonding. Practitioners use consistent tools—such as Five to Thrive and parent-infant observation—to support parents in understanding their baby's needs and recognising early signs of bonding or mental health difficulties. When families need additional support, they are connected quickly with community resources such as Perinatal Mental Health services, Talking Therapies, Home Start, Dads Matters, and CAMHS Under fives. Effective coordination across these services ensures quick access, sustained support, and improved emotional wellbeing for both parents and children.

Dental health in Hillingdon remains a significant focus of improvement with 33 per cent of five-year-olds experiencing decay and many needing hospital care. In 2025/26, a boroughwide oral health program provided toothbrush packs, fluoride toothpaste, supervised brushing, educational videos, group sessions, SEND support, and regular activities for families and young children. Initiatives included a pilot to help families register with dentists and promote positive toothbrushing habits. Additionally, a quarter of five-year-olds have not received all MMR vaccinations, which is 9.3 per cent below the national average. Immunisation clinics have moved to community spaces to enable better accessibility, however efforts continue to further the planned improvements taking place at this time.



Moving forward, together we will ...

Commitments	What do we want to achieve?	How will we know if we are successful?
7. Promote oral health and help children and families access dental care.	At age five, fewer children experience oral health decay, and emergency hospital visits for dental issues have decreased.	Less hospital admissions for dental caries for 0 to fives (baseline 362.6 per 100k in 21/22-23/24) Improvement in dental decay (baseline 32.9 per cent in 23/24)
8. Increase childhood immunisation coverage	More children are protected from preventable diseases by having all their recommended vaccinations before starting school. Staff to feel confident to talk about vaccines.	Increase routine vaccination coverage from 89per cent to ≥95 per cent by age five in every neighbourhood by 2027 Reduce variation between neighbourhoods to within ±2per cent by 2027
9. Increase the uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers and Vitamins	Pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and children have access to vitamins and vouchers	At least 52 per cent enrolment of Healthy Start Vouchers by 31 March 2026 and continue to increase this to 60 per cent by 31 March 2027 (currently 47 per cent uptake, compared to London Average of 60per cent).
10. Increase the number of children achieving and maintaining healthy weight.	Children are eating a balanced and nutritious diet, with fewer children with excess weight at Reception age.	Reduced percentage of children at Reception age with Body Mass Index (BMI) equating to overweight/obesity measure to 18.5 per cent in 2027 (baseline 19.9 per cent in 24/25). Increase Early Years settings with the Healthy Early Years London Award from 34 per cent to 50 per cent.
11. Increase take-up of key health visiting contacts, particularly for priority families and in underserved communities.	Children's health and development needs are identified early; support is provided promptly, and families are connected to essential services for improved outcomes and stronger growth.	Take-up for 2 to 2.5-year health reviews increases from 74.8per cent (24/25) to 83% by March 2026 and then a year on year increase. Year on year, the number of children who score above the measure for typical development for communication in the Ages and Stages Questionnaire increases (baseline to be established in 25/26).
12. Improve maternal health and reduce maternity inequalities	Families in the most deprived neighborhoods receive targeted, culturally sensitive maternity support. Pregnant women get proactive help to quit smoking and easier access to neighborhood-based resources. Access to antenatal education and postnatal support is improved, and more babies benefit from breastmilk for longer.	Reduce Smoking at time of delivery (SATOD) to ≤three per cent (Hillingdon Baseline: 3.3-3.4%) Reduce neighbourhood variation in stillbirth and neonatal mortality by 20per cent by 2030. (Hillingdon Baseline 3.9 per 1,000) Increase personalised maternity pathway access for Black, Asian and deprived women. (Core20PLUS5) Ensure all our service users have appropriate access to interpreting services to support perinatal education including information around breastfeeding. Continue to work towards gold BFI accreditation.
13. Enhance emotional wellbeing for parents and children, strengthening parent-infant bonds and relationships	Babies experience secure and nurturing relationships, parents feel confident and supported in early parenthood, and early relational difficulties are identified and addressed through joined-up support.	More fathers engaging in services around parent-infant attachment Increased use of <i>Five to Thrive</i> , parent-infant observation tools, and consistent relationship-focused practice across the partnership. Reduced proportion of babies and infants requiring higher-level intervention due to relationship-based concerns or early emotional health difficulties. Improved access rates to Perinatal Mental Health, Talking Therapies, and CAMHS Under fives for families identified through Family Help.

Priority 3

More Accessible Early Education

Boost funded childcare participation, especially for two year olds, and expand spaces where demand is highest

What this will mean for a child:

'I can access my funded hours at a nursery of my parents/carers' choosing'



Where are we now?

Delivery of early learning and childcare provision in Hillingdon is through both private and voluntary providers, including childminders, day nurseries and pre-schools, and through schools, including academies.

Hillingdon has 181 registered childminders, 58 school-based nurseries, 97 group Private Voluntary and Independent (PVI) settings

e.g. day nurseries, nurseries in independent schools and playgroups and one local authority-maintained nursery school. There are 6,594 places in group PVI settings and 1,044 childminder places. Hillingdon also has an Early Years Assessment Centre, which offers specialist assessment and support for children aged 3-5 (and some 2 year olds) with significant and long-term SEND needs.

Families In Need funding

The Families In Need funding has benefited T enormously. *"Since the passing of T's dad and nan, the only bit of routine and familiarity we have been able to keep is that of nursery. So having the extra hours kindly funded by your team, has helped to provide T with some much-needed stability, and has also strengthened his development, having this extra time at nursery"* C.D.

The Families' Information Service (FIS) offers information and advice to parents looking for childcare to meet their needs. The FIS also manages the delivery of the early years entitlement funding scheme, which involves checking, validating and processing funding claims and dealing with the queries that arise from these, from parents, childcare settings and schools. The FIS also collates the data for the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, that identifies the areas of the borough where there is a lack of childcare.

We have rapidly expanded childcare capacity to meet the significant increase in early years funding; from the original 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds to a much broader offer now including 30 hours for eligible children from 9 months to 4-year-olds, and the Early Learning for 2-year-olds entitlement. Since September, the Childcare team has been working to expand 620 places for children under the age of three and have to date created 617 places (Feb 26).

According to a childcare survey conducted by Coram (2020), children with SEND access far less of their free entitlements than any other children. Hillingdon is committed to inclusion and helps early years settings and schools include children with SEND by providing flexible funding options. Early years Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) provides early years settings with resources

for eligible children, such as extra staff, equipment, or practitioner training. Ensuring that children with SEND have access to their full entitlement remains a key commitment.

A continued area of development will be promoting the take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds. Although the number of eligible children has fallen significantly over time (from 1,608 in Spring 2015 to 655 in Autumn 2025), there are still children who would benefit from accessing childcare. For these children, early education can support learning and development, without which they may otherwise fall behind their peers.



Moving forward, together we will ...

Commitments	What do we want to achieve?	How will we know if we are successful?
14. Increase the number of families accessing childcare funding, with a focus on Early Learning for two-year-olds	More families access childcare through their two-year-olds entitlement and Early Years Pupil Premium.	Take up increased by five per cent - from 54% in Spring 2025 to 71.9% by 2028. Increase the take up of the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) by 10% (baseline - 219 children in receipt of EYPP, Autumn term 2025).
15. Increase availability of childcare	Any child who would like to access their funded childcare hours will be able to access a place, across childminders, early years providers, school based nurseries.	Increase childcare in priority wards with insufficient childcare places for under-fives including Belmore, Pinkwell and Yeading, to meet likely parental demand.
16. Increase in children with SEND accessing childcare	Children with SEND can access their full funded entitlement	Increase the number of SENIF applications by 5% compared to the previous year by reviewing the application process to identify and remove barriers to access.



Improve Early Years Quality

Investing in people. Preparing children for school

What this will mean for a child:

'I am confident, independent and ready to start school'

'I can follow instructions, communicate my needs and ask for help'

'I am curious, interested and ready to learn'



Ensure children enter school ready in communication, social, emotional, physical, and learning skills. Invest in professional development, leadership, and inclusive practices to deliver high-quality care and education for every child.

Where are we now?

Children in Hillingdon generally achieve expected Good Level of Development (GLD) scores and Writing, Word Reading, and Fine Motor Skills stand out as Hillingdon's strongest Early Learning Goals (ELGs), compared to national averages.

All groups of children, including those eligible for free school meals, receiving SEN support, or speaking English as an Additional Language, outperform national averages. However, over the last three years, children in Hillingdon have found Comprehension, Speaking, and Number Patterns more difficult. This shows there is still a need to focus on helping young children improve their language and communication skills, as these are important for their learning and future success.

Recent Early Years Foundation Stage (EUFS) data from 2025 shows that about 18% of children do not meet expected communication and language standards. Therefore, enhancing early language development continues to be a priority given its influence on long-term outcomes.

Currently 58.5per cent of children eligible for free school meals reach their Good Level of Development in Hillingdon, compared to 71.4 per cent of children not eligible for free school meals. And only 33% of children with SEND reach this benchmark. We need effective, timely help for these children, and those who are behind in certain areas of learning, so that all children can thrive.

'From babies to children in their early years and all the way through to early teens, reading brings profound and wide-ranging benefits that can have a lifelong positive impact on children's lives' (BookTrust 2025).

"Parent and toddler groups provide valuable and valued spaces for parents and children to enjoy time together, relax and play. In our busy lives, they are a haven where families can spend quality time and strengthen their connections with each other and with their community. These groups provide fantastic opportunities for children to have fun, grow and thrive." Sally Hogg, Senior Policy Fellow, Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL), Faculty of Education, Cambridge University.

Hillingdon's Family Hubs, Children's Services, Libraries, Toddler Groups, and places of worship warmly welcome children and support parents and carers in fostering their child's growth and development. Whilst Early years settings and schools focus mainly on the child's development, all these settings provide opportunities to develop early language, social, emotional,

and cognitive skills, providing a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Moving forward, we will foster high-quality, encouraging interactions both at home and in early years settings, and to ensure that home learning environment programs are embedded throughout the borough to promote early communication, play, and parental confidence.

Early Years Quality

In Hillingdon, the Early Years Quality Improvement Team (EYQIT) helps schools and early years settings deliver high quality education and childcare by offering advice, support, and training in line with Early Years Foundation Stage requirements. The team promotes workforce development, inclusive practice, and uses data-driven approaches to strengthen leadership and improve outcomes for all children. The Inclusion Network also provides opportunities for networking, sharing best practice, and professional development that extend beyond SEND-specific issues, fostering a culture of inclusion for all learners.

We work closely with our region's Stronger Practice Hub, sharing its professional development resources and encouraging participation. The hub lead provides in-person training locally, showcasing best practices. Our goal is to establish a local Stronger Practice Hub to boost early years

provision where it will have most impact, fostering collaboration and building a resilient community across the borough.

The Education Endowment Foundation, in partnership with Hillingdon's Education Improvement and Partnership Team, is delivering a two-year project in selected schools which aims to improve communication and language outcomes for children in the early years. The project focuses on workforce development by providing high-quality, evidence-informed professional development and resources for school leaders and teachers to improve early years pedagogy. By building leadership capacity and teacher confidence, the programme aims to develop a skilled, reflective early years workforce and foster a strong, collaborative learning community, giving every child in Hillingdon the best possible start in life.

The Early Years Quality Improvement Team worked with the BBC to provide training and promote the CBeebies parenting support website among early years providers, giving families easy access to practical advice and video resources.

Schools and settings widely shared these resources with parents and carers, with some tracking significant engagement online. Services such as Family Hubs and SEND Advisory Service also integrated the resources into their support offerings.

This collaborative approach has helped all children, especially those with delayed skills, by equipping educators and families with effective strategies for language development. Hillingdon will continue promoting the CBeebies Parenting website to embed it as a key resource in supporting children's early communication and long-term success.



The Family Hub Network training offer also enhances overall workforce capacity by providing training and development opportunities to the entire Early Years sector, fostering more consistent and high-quality early intervention support.

Moving forward, together we will ...

Commitments	What do we want to achieve?	How will we know if we are successful?
17. Boost early language and mathematical skills	Children have good speech, language and communication skills, along with a love of books, so that they are ready for school and make good progress from their starting points. Children achieve at least the expected standard in maths and early language by age 5.	Improved achievement in the Communication and Language Early Learning Goal from 81.6 per cent to 85 per cent and in the Maths Early Learning Goal from 79 per cent to 82 per cent by 2029, at the end of the early years foundation stage.
18. Develop a borough-wide transition strategy	Children transition smoothly from early years to school, ensuring this is a positive experience.	At least 80per cent of schools and early year s settings will adopt the transition framework, with schools reporting that the framework has been effective.
19. Develop leadership and excellence in our workforce	Children experience language-rich environments by establishing three Communication and Language Hubs, each led by a Communication Champion who will support surrounding schools.	By July 2027, at least 21 schools and early years settings will have received training to implement language-supportive teaching approaches. By July 2029, at least three schools will be equipped to deliver training and on-going support to other Hillingdon schools.
20. Ensure high quality provision	Children benefit from safe, nurturing, and stimulating environments Children receive timely intervention and benefit from inclusive high-quality practice	We aim for 95per cent of PVI early years settings to receive information about Early Years Teacher Status pathways through outreach, training sessions, and on-site visits, encouraging sign-up and completion of EYTS qualifications. Percentage of schools and early years providers graded at the expected standard or above by Ofsted.



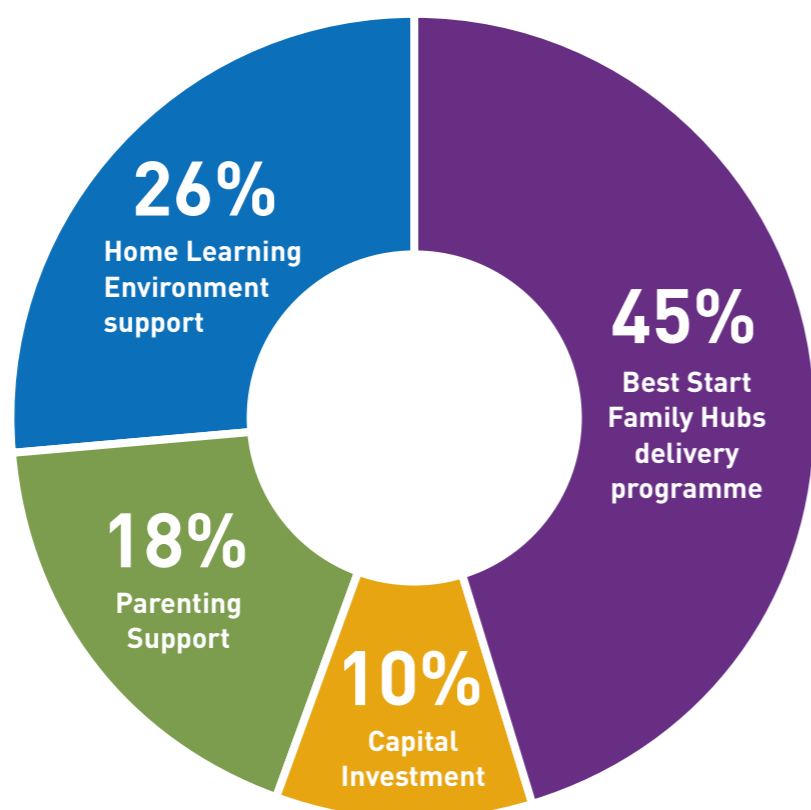
6. Accountability, Progress and Review

The Department for Education has confirmed that Hillingdon will receive funding to deliver Best Start Family Hubs as part of the national *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* strategy.

Hillingdon has received a **Development Grant** to support the groundwork required for implementing the Best Start in Life (BSiL) and Family Hubs programme, to build the necessary foundations for delivery, including planning, partnership development, programme design, data and insight work, and early preparatory activity across health and early years services.

Hillingdon has a **provisional allocation for 2026–2029** and is subject to meeting programme expectations. Funding will support the development of Best Start local plans and integrated neighbourhood health services, with detailed delivery guidance to follow ahead of April 2026.

Allocations cover revenue and capital investment across core programme strands, with expected spend broadly aligned to the following distribution:



The funding model combines a fixed allocation with an additional variable component weighted to reflect local levels of deprivation, ensuring resources support areas with greatest need.

We have received capital funding to increase childcare spaces for children under three years old. Additionally, school-based nurseries can apply directly to the DfE for capital grant to develop childcare provisions for children aged three and under, with assistance from the local authority.

Delivery of Hillingdon's *Best Start in Life* Strategy is supported by a comprehensive governance and accountability structure designed to ensure effective system leadership, transparent oversight, and consistent progress toward improved early years outcomes. The strategy is overseen by the Best Start in Life Delivery Group, which provides operational and strategic coordination across the local authority, health services, early years providers, the voluntary and community sector, and parent/caregiver representatives.

The Delivery Group's remit includes monitoring delivery across all workstreams, ensuring alignment with national policy and local priorities, and maintaining a focus on prevention, integration, and equity of access.

The Delivery Group reports formally to the Hillingdon Children's Health and Care Partnership, which provides multi-agency strategic oversight and ensures coherence with wider children's services and integrated care priorities. In turn, the partnership escalates key issues, risks, and progress updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board, providing system-wide assurance, democratic accountability, and clear visibility of impact across partners. This tiered governance structure ensures that leadership, decision-making, and accountability are clearly defined and that progress remains a shared responsibility across the system.

The delivery group also collaborates with key strategic groups, such as the Children and Young People's Transformation Group for family help and early intervention, the SEND merged ambitions group, the Safeguarding Partnership for child protection, and the Stronger Families Partnership, which brings together children's services, health, education, voluntary and community sectors, as well as community voices.

Hillingdon's test-and-learn approach enables us to grow services in a way that truly reflects the hopes, strengths, and lived experiences of families. By starting small, listening carefully to what children, parents and carers tell us and learning from real-life delivery, we can continually shape support that meets families needs and close to where they live. Family Hubs provide the heart of this approach—welcoming spaces where new ideas can be piloted, adapted and strengthened alongside the families who use them. This ensures that support evolves with our community, remains rooted in what works and helps to give every child the brightest, healthiest and most nurturing start in life.

A robust performance and monitoring framework underpins the governance model. Progress will be tracked using a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and measurable outcomes aligned to the "How will we know we are successful?" sections within the strategy. The primary indicators of success will be the percentage of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of Reception, benchmarked against national performance, historic Hillingdon trends, and statistical neighbours. Particular emphasis will be placed on the percentage of disadvantaged children achieving GLD, as well as monitoring the size of the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers locally and nationally.

Performance data will be reviewed termly, enabling regular assessment of progress, early identification of emerging concerns, and responsive action. An annual refresh of the strategy will ensure that priorities remain aligned to evolving needs, demographic trends, and changes in national policy or guidance. The Best Start in Life Delivery Group will receive regular updates and will undertake termly risk reviews, escalating high-impact risks to the Health and Wellbeing Board where necessary and developing mitigation and contingency plans to maintain delivery momentum.

This structured approach ensures that progress is measured systematically, governance is transparent, and challenges are addressed promptly. Through strong leadership, clear accountability, and a rigorous performance framework, Hillingdon will maintain its focus on securing the best possible start in life for every child, reducing inequalities, and driving sustained improvement across the early years system.



Locally

This strategy builds on and connects with our existing and future commitments, including:

- Hillingdon's Council Strategy [Council strategy 2022-2026 | Hillingdon Council](#)
- Hillingdon's Health and Wellbeing Strategy (currently in consultation) [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026 to 2031 | Hillingdon Council](#)
- Local Area SEND & AP Strategy and Local Offer [Hillingdon Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy - Hillingdon Council](#)
- Hillingdon's Education Strategy 2025-2030 [Education Strategy 2025-30 - Leap](#)
- Stronger Families and Family Help Strategy 2026-2031

Nationally

Hillingdon's *Best Start in Life* strategy is strongly aligned with key national priorities and frameworks that collectively emphasise prevention, early intervention, and improved long-term outcomes for children and families. The Department for Education's *Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy (2025)* and the earlier *1001 Critical Days Vision (2023)* provide the national foundation for improving early childhood development and ensuring that every child can achieve and thrive—principles mirrored directly in Hillingdon's focus on early years support, strengthened family help, and reducing inequalities. The *10-Year Health Plan for England (2025)* reinforces this by shifting the national system toward community-based, digitally enabled, preventative health approaches, which aligns with Hillingdon's ambition to deliver integrated, locality-based services that identify needs early and reduce escalation.

Similarly, the Family First Partnership (FFP) Programme (DfE, 2025)—with its emphasis on Family Help, multi-agency safeguarding, and family-led decision-making—supports Hillingdon's commitment to build a connected system that wraps support around families from pregnancy through adolescence. The national Healthy Child Programme (0–19) further underpins Hillingdon's offer through its evidence-based framework of health visiting, school nursing, screening, and developmental reviews, ensuring consistent prevention and early identification across the borough.

Alignment with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework ensures that children's learning and development from birth to five are supported through high-quality early education and care.

Finally, the government's Levelling Up mission strengthens Hillingdon's focus on tackling inequalities by ensuring that every child—regardless of background or postcode—has access to equitable, high-quality health, education, and early years support. Together, these national frameworks reinforce and legitimise Hillingdon's local priorities, ensuring that the borough's *Best Start in Life* strategy is both locally responsive and nationally aligned.



7. Moving Forward

Hillingdon is well positioned to build strong foundations and help deliver even better outcomes for babies, young children and families. With this strategy, we are setting out a clear and ambitious direction, expanding access to high-quality early education and funded childcare, strengthening timely family help, health provision and embedding evidence-based approaches that nurture positive relationships, wellbeing and early learning from pregnancy through to school entry and beyond. Our focus on integration, prevention and equity will ensure families receive the right support at the right time, in the right place.

Looking ahead, we will work even more closely with our partners—across health, education, social care, community groups, and parents—to create one connected system for young children and families. We want support to be easy to access, welcoming for everyone, and shaped by what families need and experience every day.

We will use data and feedback to guide our decisions, support and train our staff, and always look for ways to improve. By working together and sharing responsibility, we will make sure every child in Hillingdon is healthy, safe, valued, and ready to start school with confidence and a strong foundation for their future.



