

Notice of Meeting



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Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday 15 April 2026 at 6.30 pm
in Council Chamber Council Offices
Market Street Newbury

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Date of despatch of Agenda: 7 April 2026

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Gordon Oliver on 01635 519486

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**Agenda - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on Wednesday 15
April 2026 (continued)**

To: Councillors Dominic Boeck (Chairman), Owen Jeffery (Vice-Chairman), Paul Dick, Billy Drummond, Jane Langford, Alan Macro, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, Emily Daly, Charlie Gale, Hobbs, Natasha Rowe and Wilson

Substitutes: Councillors Adrian Abbs, Dennis Benneyworth, Martin Colston, Carolyne Culver, Clive Hooker, Janine Lewis, David Marsh, Matt Shakespeare and Richard Somner

Agenda

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1	Apologies for Absence To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any).	5 - 6
2	Minutes To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 December 2025.	7 - 14
3	Actions from previous Minutes To receive an update on recommendations and actions following the previous Committee meeting.	15 - 18
4	Declarations of Interest To remind Members of the need to record the existence and nature of any personal, disclosable pecuniary or other registrable interests in items on the agenda, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct .	19 - 20
5	Petitions Purpose: To consider any petitions requiring an Officer response.	21 - 22
6	Education Outcomes Purpose: This report sets out the attainment of Children and Young People in West Berkshire and is intended to brief members on the issues this presents for our cohorts of children and young people, and the implication therefore to act within our powers and responsibilities.	23 - 42
7	Exclusions Purpose: This report provides an overview of exclusions of Children and Young People (CYP) in West Berkshire and is intended to brief members on the implications for our cohorts.	43 - 56



**Agenda - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on Wednesday 15
April 2026 (continued)**

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| 8 | West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan
Purpose: To present the Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028, which sets out the West Berkshire approach to improving early childhood outcomes from pregnancy to age five. | 57 - 108 |
| 9 | Executive Forward Plan
Purpose: To advise the Committee of items to be considered by West Berkshire Council's Executive and for Members to decide whether to review any of the proposed items prior to the meeting indicated in the Plan. | 109 - 122 |
| 10 | Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme
Purpose: To receive new items and agree and prioritise the work programme of the Committee. | 123 - 124 |

Sarah Clarke.

Sarah Clarke
Executive Director - Resources

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Gordon Oliver on telephone (01635) 519486.



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Agenda Item 1

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee -
15 April 2026

Item 1 – Apologies

Verbal Item

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DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 4 DECEMBER 2025

Members Present: Dominic Boeck (Chairman), Owen Jeffery (Vice-Chairman), Paul Dick, Billy Drummond, Jane Langford, Alan Macro, Louise Sturgess, Martha Vickers, Clive Taylor, Charlie Gale and Natasha Rowe

Also Present: AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children's Services), Neil Goddard (Service Director - Education and SEND), Melissa Perry (Principal EWO/Lead Officer for Safeguarding, Education) and Rebecca Wilshire (Service Director - Children's Social Care), and Olive Kayongo (West Berkshire SEND Parent Carer Forum)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Tony Wilson

Absent: Emily Daly and Catherine Hobbs

PART I

26 Election of Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Owen Jeffery be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

27 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28 Actions from previous Minutes

Members reviewed the updates on actions from previous meetings.

For Action 25-11, it was noted that a detailed update could not be provided until the Council-wide review of business support had been completed.

29 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

30 Petitions

There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

31 Children's Scrutiny Board Report: Local Authority Statutory Duties Around Attendance

Melissa Perry (Principal Education Welfare Officer/Lead Officer for Safeguarding) presented the report on Local Authority Statutory Duties Around Attendance (Agenda Item 7).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Officers indicated that the reasons for absenteeism were multi-faceted.

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- After the Covid pandemic, attendance in West Berkshire had been worse than the national average, but performance had since improved, and it was now better than average.
- Members noted that there was no explicit mention of bullying in the report – officers indicated that this was one of a wide range of issues affecting attendance.
- It was explained that each school sought to address issues through its own tailored action plan.
- Officers confirmed that the statistics in the report included pupils from Traveller communities.
- It was suggested that West Berkshire Council should compare itself to similar local authorities. Officers explained that, with the exception of Reading, the other Berkshire authorities were regarded as statistical neighbours.
- Officers were encouraged to read the Covid and Recovery Task and Finish Group report, since this had highlighted impacts on attendance and had recommended reallocation of resources to address these.
- Members asked if there were individual schools that had been particularly successful in improving attendance, and whether learning could be shared with other schools. It was confirmed that schools were matched so weaker ones learned from stronger ones.

Action: Officers to provide detailed statistics on individual schools that had been most effective in improving attendance.

- It was suggested that leaders of strongly performing schools could be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to share insights on how they had improved attendance.
- It was requested that acronyms be explained in all future reports.

Action: Officers to explain acronyms in all future reports.

- Officers explained that the Attendance Team only provided advice to schools and did not employ any Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). However, many schools employed their own family workers. The importance of providing early support for families was recognised.
- It was noted that the Council offered comprehensive training for schools and their attendance leads, and was in regular contact with schools throughout the year to discuss their needs.
- Officers confirmed that the Attendance Working Group included representatives from: the Parent Carer Forum, Youth Service, Thames Valley Police, Youth Justice Service, schools, Social Care, Complaints, Virtual School, and the voluntary sector.
- Members asked if the loss of Council EWOs had put extra pressure on schools, and if this had led to issues around attendance. Officers explained that the role of local authorities in relation to attendance had changed, and the Council was managing as best it could to meet statutory responsibilities.
- It was noted that funding had been devolved to allow schools to employ their own staff, and the current WBC service had been co-designed with schools.
- Officers confirmed that stats were used to inform how resources were deployed to deliver focused projects with schools.

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- It was hoped that the Attendance Strategy would lead to improvement. Officers indicated that the Strategy would continue to evolve over time.

The Committee voted to suspend Standing Orders to permit Olive Kayongo (SEND Parent Carer Forum Chair) to speak. Ms Kayongo made the following points:

- Some children and young people were unable to attend schools because their mental health was so severely impacted.
- Some children experienced suicidal thoughts and were being kept home for safeguarding purposes.
- Some neurodivergent children experienced significant challenges - although they wanted to be educated, they struggled to be in school.
- Local evidence suggested that the problem was getting worse for SEND children.
- Parents had told the Parent Carer Forum that they found it challenging to navigate the system - some were worried about fines, while others struggled to communicate that their children could not attend school for medical reasons.
- Key groups were autistic children and those with sensory difficulties. In some cases, children were in school, but they were not receiving education, because they could not learn in that environment. Others could not get beyond the school gates.
- Parents needed to be heard and services co-produced to support them.

Members entered into further debate and the following points were discussed:

- It was confirmed that alternative options to school were explored where appropriate, including the iCollege. The aim was to identify issues as quickly as possible.
- Officers indicated that reasons for persistent absence were multi-faceted and staff worked with each school to develop tailored plans.
- It was stressed that, as with safeguarding, every service within Children's Services had a part to play in addressing attendance.
- It was explained that 'persistent absence' referred to attendance rates of less than 90% and 'severely absent' referred to attendance rates of less than 50%.
- Members noted that some schools had members of staff appointed to lead on attendance, which delivered good results. These roles often included other responsibilities (e.g., safeguarding, or behaviour) that were linked.
- It was suggested that it may be helpful for the Committee to do a deep dive scrutiny review to look further at issues around attendance.

ACTION: The Committee to programme a deep dive review on Attendance.

RESOLVED to note the report.

The Committee voted to resume standing orders.

32 **Ofsted School Inspection Reports**

Neil Goddard (Service Director – Education and SEND) presented the report on School Ofsted Inspections (Agenda Item 8).

The following points were raised in the debate:

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- Although Ofsted had appeared keen to listen when engaging with partners, the revised assessment framework did not seem to reflect feedback provided, and there were concerns about how the new inspection process might be implemented. It was stressed that all new inspections would be led by HM Inspectors, which would generate learning that would be shared.
- It was noted that the tables in the report referred to percentages rather than absolute number of schools.
- Members asked about the different categories of schools and the Council's role with each. Officers indicated that they would be happy to explain the categories and stressed that every child educated in West Berkshire was the Council's responsibility. Members indicated that they would welcome additional training.

Actions:

- **Officers to provide a briefing for Members on the different categories of schools.**
- **Members to liaise with Democratic Service re future training needs.**
- It was acknowledged that Ofsted inspections were just one measure of a school's success.
- Officers provided reassurance that parents and pupils had an opportunity to contribute to the Ofsted assessment process.
- It was recognised that one word Ofsted inspection outcomes had been problematic. Although this would be replaced by a scorecard that gave a broader view, it could still not provide a complete picture.
- Members expressed concern that parents may solely use Ofsted inspection results to choose schools for their children. Officers agreed and recommended that parents visit schools to understand how they could meet their needs. Also, it was noted that periods between inspections could be long, and so inspection results could be out of date.
- It was noted that every school rated as 'inadequate' had an action plan. The Service Director for Education and SEND had termly meetings with the headteacher, chair of governors, and principal school improvement advisor allocated to the school, to monitor implementation of the action plan. Officers also met with Ofsted every half-term, and Ofsted undertook regular monitoring visits with schools.
- Officers confirmed that they monitored all schools across a range of indicators throughout the year. If they had concerns, then they would raise those with the school. Support could be provided to the governing body, or the governing body could be replaced if appropriate. Officers had support meetings with each school annually. There was also a multi-disciplinary Schools Causing Concern Group, which could put in place packages of support for schools that were struggling.
- It was noted that each school was controlled through its governing body. The Council had more powers in relation to non-academy schools, but if officers had concerns about academy schools, they could speak to Ofsted. Support was offered to academies where it was appropriate to do so by the Council and through academy chains.
- Members congratulated Theale CofE Primary School in achieving an outstanding grade in all aspects of their latest Ofsted inspection.

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- Members indicated that they would welcome the opportunity visit a school.

RESOLVED:

- (a) To be informed of the latest Ofsted inspection outcomes for schools in West Berkshire;
- (b) To use the information to help inform its future work programme.

33 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025 (EX4745)

Rebeca Wilshire (Service Director – Children’s Social Care) presented the report on the Ofsted Inspection of Children’s Social Care (Agenda Item 9).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- Members noted that the Early Help Partnership had been identified as an area requiring improvement. This was partly outside of the Council’s control, as it needed partners to engage. However, both the proposed Children and Young People’s Board, and the newly formed West Berkshire Safeguarding Partnership included key partners who could help to develop the Early Help Partnership.
- Officers confirmed that Children’s Social Care had good relationships with health visitors and school nurses, but the development of Family Hubs would help to improve partnerships further and identify emerging issues even earlier.
- It was suggested that senior managers could take on cases themselves to reduce pressure on their teams. Officers confirmed that while this happened occasionally, particularly for adoption, it was not done routinely, because it was important for children to have continuous relationships with their social worker. Also, if Ofsted saw significant numbers of cases allocated to managers, then they would deem those cases to be ‘unallocated’. This happened in September 2023 when Ofsted undertook a focused visit. They had indicated that the service had been significantly away from being rated as ‘good’ at that time.
- It was highlighted that agency staff currently accounted for just 10% of social workers, down from 33% two years ago. Some of those were in the process of converting to permanent positions.
- Officers confirmed that more young carers had been identified and were being supported. Although there were some carers waiting to be assessed, this did not preclude the Council from providing support. Family Hubs would provide additional support within local communities, which would be accessible to young carers.
- It was noted that recording had improved to ensure that the voice of young people was better captured. Also, as social workers finished their engagement with families, they sought regular feedback from the parents and children. Additionally, from January 2026, audits would include calls to families and children.
- Officers gave assurance that timelines would be developed for the action plan. Some of the actions were linked to with the Family First Partnership reforms. From April 2026, the Council would be required to identify its first flagship Family Hub. Similarly, central government would set out dates by which family help actions would need to be completed.
- The Committee agreed to formally extend their congratulations to the Executive on the ‘good’ Ofsted rating.

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Action: The Chairman to write to the Leader of the Council to congratulate the Executive on the 'good' Ofsted inspection result.

RESOLVED to note the report.

34 **Executive Forward Plan September to December 2025**

The Committee considered the Executive Forward Plan (Agenda Item 10).

Members asked to see response to the Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task Group. It was noted that the Task Group's report had previously been circulated to the Committee.

Action: The Task Group's report to be recirculated for information.

There was discussion around the Schools Funding Formula. It was noted that this was set nationally. Officers offered to share the detailed papers that went to the Schools Forum.

Action: Officers to share Schools Funding Formula papers that went to the Schools Forum.

It was noted that the Forward Plan did not go beyond March 2026, and it was requested that this have a forward view of 6-12 months in order to give the Committee a chance to identify items for pre-scrutiny.

Action: Officers to update the Forward Plan

Officers confirmed that the Youth Council report was being amended and it was expected that this would come to the next meeting of the Executive as originally planned.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

35 **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee considered the proposed Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme (Agenda Item 11).

Members of the public had suggested topics for scrutiny, including:

- The Council's approach to SEN Tribunals and
- The Council's policy on Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

It was noted that work was underway to look at SEN Tribunals, and the Council was in the process of developing an EOTAS policy.

The following changes to the work programme were agreed:

- Attainment of Children on Free School Meals to be considered at the March meeting.
- SEN Tribunals and the EOTAS Policy to be considered at the September meeting.
- A deep dive to be carried out on School Attendance.

Actions:

- **Develop terms of reference for a deep dive on School Attendance.**
- **Officers to respond to members of the public who had proposed topics for scrutiny.**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 4 DECEMBER 2025 -
MINUTES**

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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**Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Recommendations and Actions Tracker**

The Recommendations and Actions Tracker is a standing item, and documents the progress of formal scrutiny recommendations and suggested actions for improvement made by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee at its public meetings. Items will remain on the tracker until a response has been provided to the Committee by the Executive, council departments, and/or external partners.

Formal Recommendations to Executive

Ref	Meeting date and agenda item	Scrutiny recommendation	Lead	Target date	Last update	Response	Status

Formal Recommendations to External Partners

Ref	Meeting date and agenda item	Scrutiny recommendation	Lead	Target date	Last update	Response	Status

Suggested Actions for Improvement to Council Departments/Partners

Ref	Meeting date and agenda item	Action	Lead	Target date	Last update	Update	Status
25-2	5 June 2025: LGA Review of Children's Social Care	Officers to confirm qualifications gained by i-College students	Neil Goddard	Feb-26	Apr-26	Data has been provided and is being anonymised prior to release.	In progress
25-3	5 June 2025: Ofsted and CQC Thematic Review Into Children Who Are Not in School	Officers to bring an update on the family hubs to a future meeting of the CYP Scrutiny Committee.	Dave Wraight	Mar-26	Feb-26	This is an agenda item for the 3 March 2026.	Complete
25-5	5 June 2025: Ofsted and CQC Thematic Review Into Children Who Are Not in School	Officers to bring a report on exclusions to a future meeting of the CYP Scrutiny Committee	Neil Goddard	Sep-25	Feb-26	This is an agenda item for the next meeting on 3 March 2026.	Complete

25-8	5 June 2025: Work Programme	Discuss potential Task and Finish Groups at the September meeting.	Gordon Oliver	Sep-25	Jan-26	<p>The Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task and Finish Group report proposed a possible task and finish group in relation to smart phones, social media use and online safety for young people in West Berkshire.</p> <p>However, the UK Government announced on 19 January that it would be carrying out a consultation on children's social media use and bans on phones in schools to protect young people's wellbeing and ensure safer online experiences.</p> <p>A local review would involve unnecessary duplication, so it is proposed not to progress this proposal.</p>	Complete
25-11	11 September 2025: Child Protection Annual Report 2024-25	Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services to look at business support resources in Children's Services to see if there is a need that is not being met.	Cllr Heather Codling	May-26	Feb-26	A detailed update cannot be provided until the Council-wide review of business support has been completed	In progress
25-16	4 December 2025: Local Authority Statutory Duties Around Attendance	Provide detailed statistics on individual schools that had been most effective in improving attendance.	Melissa Perry	Feb-26	Feb-26	See spreadsheet and email from Melissa Perry - forwarded to Members on 18 February 2026.	Complete
25-17	4 December 2025: Local Authority Statutory Duties Around Attendance	Explain acronyms in all future reports.	All officers	Mar-26	Feb-26	Reports will be checked by the Principal Policy Officer (Scrutiny and Dem Services) prior to issue.	Complete
25-18	4 December 2025: Ofsted School Inspection Reports	Officers to provide a briefing for Members on the different categories of schools.	Gordon Oliver	Mar-26	Feb-26	Information sent to Members 2 February.	Complete
25-19	4 December 2025: Ofsted School Inspection Reports	Members to liaise with officers re training needs	All Members / Gordon Oliver	Mar-26	Feb-26	<p>Following discussion with officers, it is proposed to have four training sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education - SEND - Early Help and Safeguarding - Corporate Parenting <p>These will be added to the Member training programme for 2026/27</p>	Complete
25-20	4 December 2025: Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025	Chairman to write to the Leader of the Council to congratulate the Executive on the 'good' Ofsted inspection result.	Cllr Dominic Boeck	Jan-26			

25-21	4 December 2025: Executive Forward Plan	Mental Health Task and Finish Group report to be recirculated to Members.	Gordon Oliver	Dec-26	Feb-26	The Children and Young People Mental Health Report was presented to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 July 2025 - the agenda and minutes can be viewed on the Council's website. The response is due to be considered by the Executive on 19 March 2026. Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee - 15 July 2025	Complete
25-22	4 December 2025: Executive Forward Plan	Officers to share Schools Funding Formula papers that went to the Schools Forum.	Neil Goddard	Dec-26	Feb-26	The funding formula was agreed at the meeting on 1 December 2025, and the final formula rates/allocations were brought for information on 19 January 2026 - the agendas and minutes can be viewed on the Council's website: Schools Forum - 1 December 2025 Schools Forum - 19 January 2026	Complete
25-23	4 December 2025: Executive Forward Plan	Officers to update the Forward Plan to provide 6-12 month forward view.	AnnMarie Dodds	Feb-26	Feb-26	The Forward Plan has been updated, with items programmed to September 2026.	Complete
25-24	4 December 2025: Work Programme	Officers to respond to members of the public who had proposed topics for scrutiny.	Neil Goddard	Dec-26			

Last updated: 07-Apr-26

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee -
15 April 2026

Item 4 – Declarations of Interest

Verbal Item

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee -
15 April 2026

Item 5 – Petitions

Verbal Item

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Education Outcomes

Committee considering report:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee:	15 th April 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	7 th April 2026
Report Author:	Ashley Milum – Service Director, Education and SEND

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the attainment of Children and Young People (CYP) in West Berkshire and is intended to brief members on the issues this presents for our cohorts of children and young people, and the implication therefore to act within our powers and responsibilities.
- 1.2 The report draws specific attention to our underrepresented CYP, specifically those who are classified as ‘Disadvantaged’ - DfE characterises disadvantaged children as those in receipt of Pupil Premium.
- 1.3 The report also outlines contextual information about the historic and current school improvement/effectiveness offer.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 It is recommended the CYP Scrutiny review the data relating to attainment, specifically with regard to Disadvantaged cohorts;
- 2.2 That CYP Scrutiny Committee endorse the variety of activity underway (as captured below in section 5) by school effectiveness and wider education colleagues in Summer Term 2026 to enhance the school improvement offer in order to improve outcomes for all pupils.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	With effect from April 2026, the Council has reviewed the funding arrangements for the school effectiveness function and invested £325k to strengthen capacity for early intervention, enhanced monitoring and more tailored support and challenge. This creates an ongoing revenue commitment which will need

¹ Source data – LGA inform

	<p>to be managed within the Council’s medium term financial planning, alongside any associated costs of implementing the improvement activity set out in this report (including programme design, quality assurance and audit activity).</p> <p>A review of the traded (buy-back) offer may have financial implications for both cost recovery and income stability. Options to re-balance what is funded as a core universal offer versus what remains traded could reduce income or create transitional pressures (e.g. redesign and implementation), but may also improve sustainability by reducing volatility in buy-back uptake and ensuring sufficient capacity to identify risk early and intervene effectively. Any revised pricing/offer should therefore be assessed for affordability for schools, impact on traded income, and alignment with the Council’s statutory and strategic responsibilities.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>Implementation of the enhanced school effectiveness approach and review of the traded (buy-back) offer may have human resource implications, including workforce planning to ensure sufficient capacity and an appropriate skill mix to deliver earlier intervention, enhanced monitoring, quality assurance and governance/audit activity. This may require recruitment and retention activity and/or re-prioritisation of existing roles, alongside training and development to support consistent practice (including the use of data, visit notes and intervention pathways).</p> <p>Any changes to operating model, service offer or ways of working may require appropriate employee engagement and, where necessary, formal consultation. There may also be increased workload and employee wellbeing considerations associated with more intensive support and challenge activity, requiring clear prioritisation, supervision and performance management arrangements.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>Education Act 2002 places responsibility on governing bodies and headteachers for standards and curriculum delivery.</p> <p>Support and intervention in schools (DfE, 2025): Defines roles of local authorities and Regional Directors; processes for identifying schools <i>eligible for intervention</i>; and powers (e.g., IEBs, additional governors, warning notices, schools with serious concerns, and academies requiring intervention).</p> <p>Education Act 1996 (Section 13A) Duty “to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential in maintained schools and other education and training providers, so that all children and young people benefit from a</p>

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

	<p>good education.” – This applies to all schools and academies.</p> <p>School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Requires local authorities to exercise education functions with a view to promoting high standards.</p> <p>Education and Inspections Act 2006 Defines the strategic role of local authorities in education improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Championing the needs of children, young people, and families ○ Planning, commissioning, and quality assuring education services ○ Challenging schools and commissioning support where needed ○ Intervening in governance and leadership of maintained schools ○ Raising concerns about academies directly with the Department for Education
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>There is a risk that, without timely and effective identification of underperformance and subsequent support and challenge, outcomes for children and young people—particularly disadvantaged cohorts—will not improve and may deteriorate further. Failure by individual schools to act on identified priorities could lead to continued weak attainment, persistent absence and/or high suspensions, and may increase the likelihood of statutory intervention (e.g. warning notices) and/or escalation via the Department for Education/Regional Director and inspection outcomes.</p> <p>There is also a reputational risk to the Council if the authority is perceived as not providing sufficient strategic oversight and support to secure improvement, particularly given the Council’s duty to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential. Additional risks include inconsistent take-up/engagement with the enhanced offer across the system, capacity constraints affecting the pace of delivery, and weaknesses in the quality, completeness or sharing of performance information that could delay intervention or undermine confidence in decision-making. These risks will be mitigated through the strengthened core school effectiveness offer, transparent use of data to prioritise support, and the planned governance improvement, quality assurance and audit activity set out in this report.</p>
<p>Property:</p>	<p>N/A</p>

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

Policy:	The Council will need to update its policy framework for how it discharges its education improvement role, including the expectations and operating model for school effectiveness support, early identification of risk, and the use of non-statutory and statutory intervention (including escalation routes and associated recording/assurance processes). In addition, the Council will need to review the policy position on traded (buy-back) services to clarify which elements form part of a core universal offer and which remain traded, including principles for charging, eligibility, and engagement. Related policies and procedures may also require alignment, including information governance and data sharing arrangements with schools, quality assurance/audit approaches (e.g. governance and Pupil Premium assurance activity), and partnership terms of reference for any strategic education improvement partnership.
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	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	x			<p>The 2023–2025 outcomes across early years, primary and secondary indicates disproportionately poor performance and inequality for disadvantaged pupils in our area.</p> <p>These gaps have proved resistant to improvement and now require a coordinated, system-wide strategy.</p> <p>This recommendations therefore stand to make a significant positive contribution to equality.</p>
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

Environmental Impact:		x		None identified
Health Impact:		x		None identified
ICT Impact:		x		None identified
Digital Services Impact:		x		None identified
Council Strategy Priorities:	x			The proposals set out in this report support the Council's strategy priorities by strengthening the Council's ability to promote high standards and improve education outcomes, with a particular focus on reducing inequality for disadvantaged children and young people. Establishing a clearer core school effectiveness offer, earlier identification of risk and targeted support and challenge will help to improve attainment, attendance and inclusion, and support children to achieve and thrive. The development of a disadvantaged learners 'Belonging and Thriving' strategy and strengthened partnership arrangements across the local education system will further support delivery of improved outcomes and long-term life chances.
Core Business:	x			The proposals in this report represent a material change to the Council's core business in relation to education improvement, including how the Council discharges its statutory responsibilities to promote high standards and the fulfilment of children and young people's potential (Education Act 1996, s13A) and to exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards (School Standards and Framework Act 1998). The enhanced core school effectiveness offer, strengthened use of data for early identification of risk and clearer escalation routes will support the Council's strategic role and powers in relation to maintained schools causing concern (including

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

				warning notices and intervention powers set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and reflected in the Department for Education’s statutory guidance Support and intervention in schools, updated November 2025), and will strengthen the Council’s oversight and ability to raise concerns appropriately in relation to academies.
Data Impact:		x		The data impact will be key to the delivery of this work. The Council will need to work with schools to agree and implement a consistent performance dataset (and associated reporting/thresholds) that will underpin early identification of risk, prioritisation of the core offer, and the targeting of support and challenge. This will require clear information governance arrangements, including a documented lawful basis for processing and sharing data, agreed data standards and definitions, data quality assurance, secure handling and retention, and transparency with schools about how information will be used within the non-statutory and statutory intervention pathway.
Consultation and Engagement:	Work with Primary Headteachers Forum and Secondary Headteachers Forum will follow.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Council recognises the importance of educational outcomes for all of the children and young people in West Berkshire. In 2025 the Executive introduced a new set of areas of focus with the first one being “We will strive to ensure that all children, regardless of background or circumstance, have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This will include closing the attainment gap”. This paper highlights some of the existing measures in place, some of the key challenges that are facing the Council and some of the options for improvement in the service.
- 4.2 Early Years performance remains strong overall (72.1% achieving a Good Level of Development in 2025, up from 64.7 in 2022), but disadvantaged pupils sit in the bottom fifth nationally.

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

4.3 Phonics results (in Y1) place West Berkshire in the 69th percentile for all pupils, and in the 99th percentile for disadvantaged pupils.

4.4 Outcomes at KS2 are not improving:

KS2 RWM (Reading, Writing and Mathematics) Expected Level – Attainment for non-disadvantaged pupils

LA and Regions	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change from previous year
West Berkshire	61.0	67.0	69.0	70.0	NA	NA	62.0	62.0	62.0	63.0	1.0
South East	61.0	68.0	71.0	72.0	NA	NA	65.0	66.0	67.0	69.0	2.0
Statistical Neighbours	61.3	68.5	70.7	71.4	NA	NA	64.9	66.0	66.0	67.3	1.3
England	61.0	68.0	71.0	72.0	NA	NA	66.0	67.0	68.0	70.0	2.0

KS2 RWM Expected Level – Attainment for disadvantaged pupils

LA and Regions	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change from previous year
West Berkshire	33.0	35.0	35.0	39.0	NA	NA	32.0	32.0	25.0	33.0	8.0
South East	37.0	44.0	47.0	48.0	NA	NA	38.0	39.0	41.0	43.0	2.0
Statistical Neighbours	35.1	42.4	44.3	45.4	NA	NA	36.4	37.1	37.1	39.1	2.0
England	39.0	48.0	51.0	51.0	NA	NA	43.0	44.0	46.0	48.0	2.0

4.5 Key Stage 2 combined outcomes (57.3%) place the authority in the 89th percentile nationally, with disadvantaged outcomes in the 100th percentile.

4.6 Although most pupils achieve well at Key Stage 4, disadvantaged pupils sit in the 95th percentile for Grade 4+ English and maths, and the 98th percentile for Attainment 8.

4.7 Inclusion indicators reinforce this pattern. Disadvantaged attendance is in the 91st percentile, and suspension rates sit in the 92nd percentile, with disadvantaged pupils suspended at higher rates than national disadvantaged peers.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 This section provides an overview of the context within which West Berkshire's education improvement support system has operated:

Background

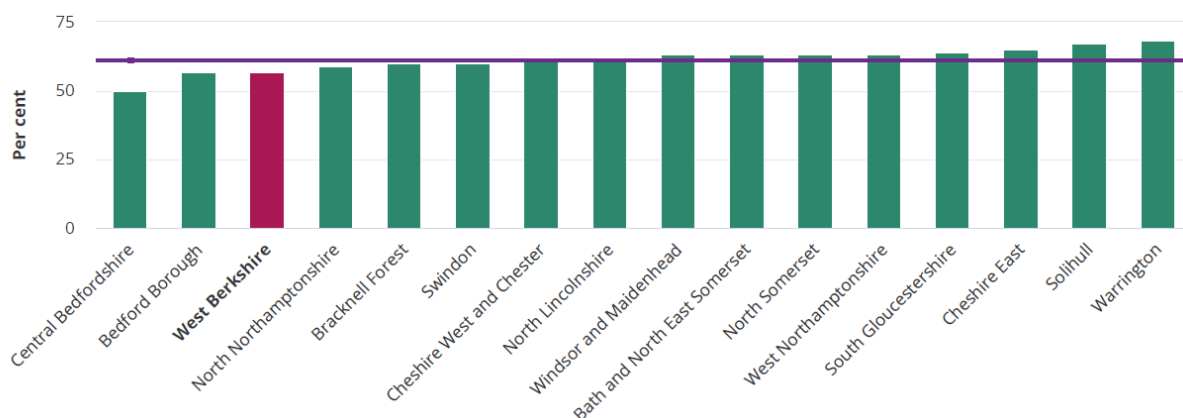
5.2 The school improvement offer in West Berkshire has historically been a 'buy-back' service. Schools have been provided a menu of activity and support that they have 'opted in' to purchase from the council. The consequences of this approach are that education colleagues have not had strategic oversight of the performance of all schools and have consequently been unable to identify issues early and intervene to improve outcomes for all pupils. This has led to limited oversight and resource to intervene where children's outcomes are poor.

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

- 5.3 The most recent Ofsted inspection programme for schools has determined that 95% of schools in West Berkshire are rated good and outstanding. However, the published outcomes for disadvantaged CYP (Children and Young People) are not positive. Changes to the Schools Ofsted framework with effect Nov 2025 includes a review of schools data and performance - it is expected that this approach will highlight more accurate performance on outcomes for pupils.
- 5.4 With effect from April 2026 West Berkshire council have reviewed the funding arrangements for the school effectiveness function and have invested £325k in the service to ensure that a programme of early intervention and more tailored support can be delivered. An evidence based approach will underpin the prioritisation of the service and data will be shared with all schools to ensure full transparency.
- 5.5 On 6th April, WBC received a letter from DfE Regional Director [Appendix A], highlighting KS2 outcomes in West Berkshire as a notable concern, in particularly for Disadvantaged CYP and for KS2 Attainment.
- 5.6 The Government (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – MHCLG) have produced a Local Outcomes Framework (LOF) for the Local Government sector from February 2026. The LOF is a summary of key performance measures for the sector across 16 different outcome areas. MHCLG will use the LOF to review Council performance and to ensure continuous improvement across individual councils and the sector as a whole. Education features heavily in the new framework, and a summary of how West Berkshire Council compares to current statistical neighbours is included below.
- 5.7 As can be seen from the information below there are some areas where there needs to be a clear improvement in performance and other areas where the West Berkshire performance is comparatively high¹.

Percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours

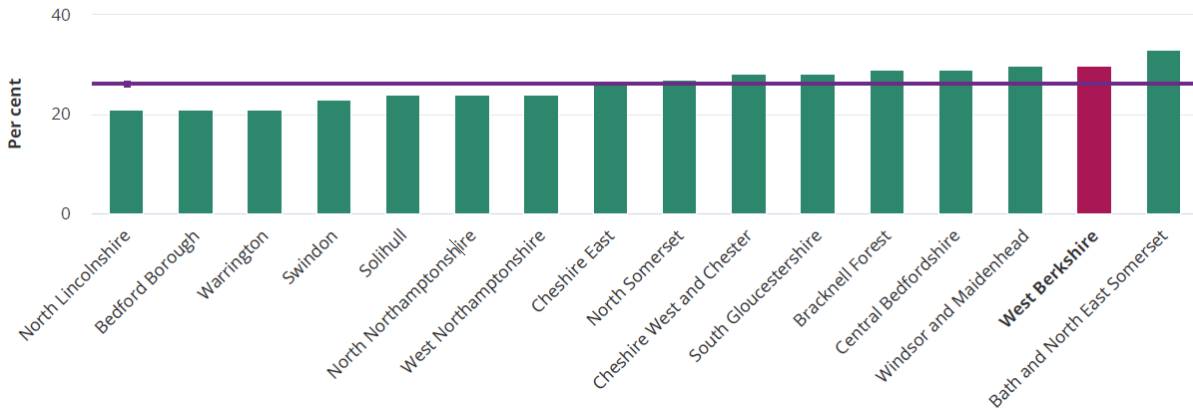


¹ Source data – LGA inform

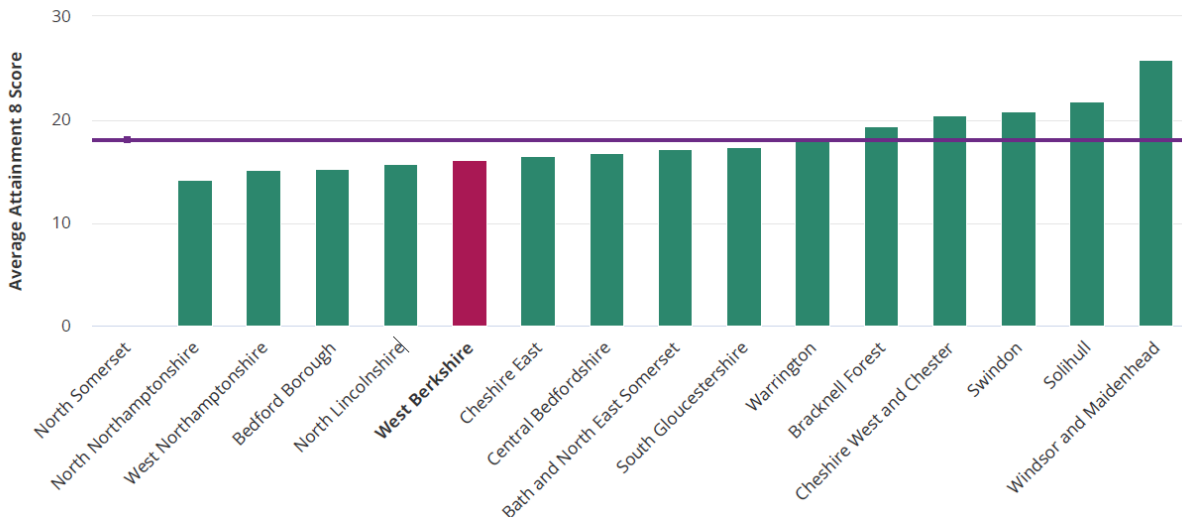
¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

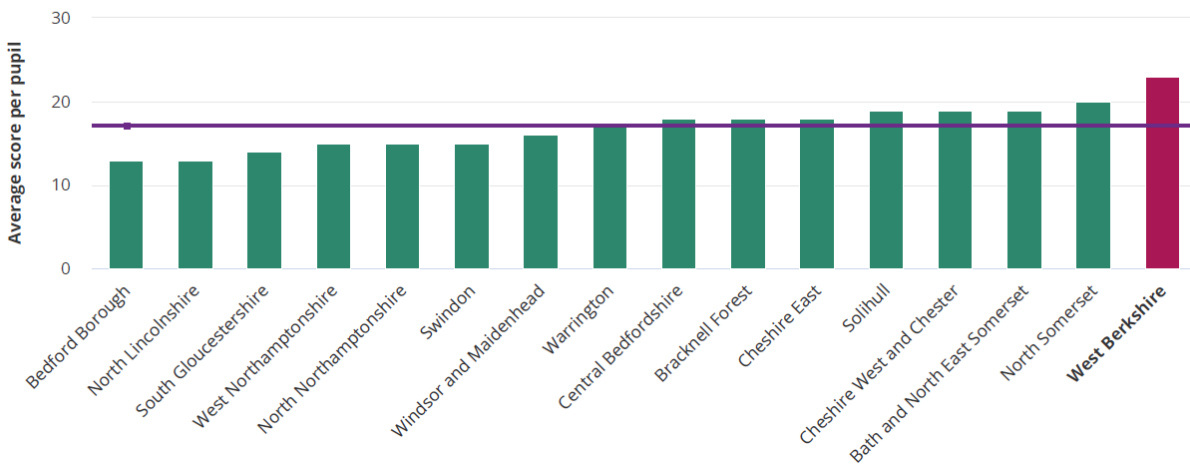
Key Stage 2 attainment “disadvantage gap”, difference in attainment between students who are known to be disadvantaged / are not known to be disadvantaged (DfE) (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



Average Attainment 8 score for children in need at key stage 4 (2023/24 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



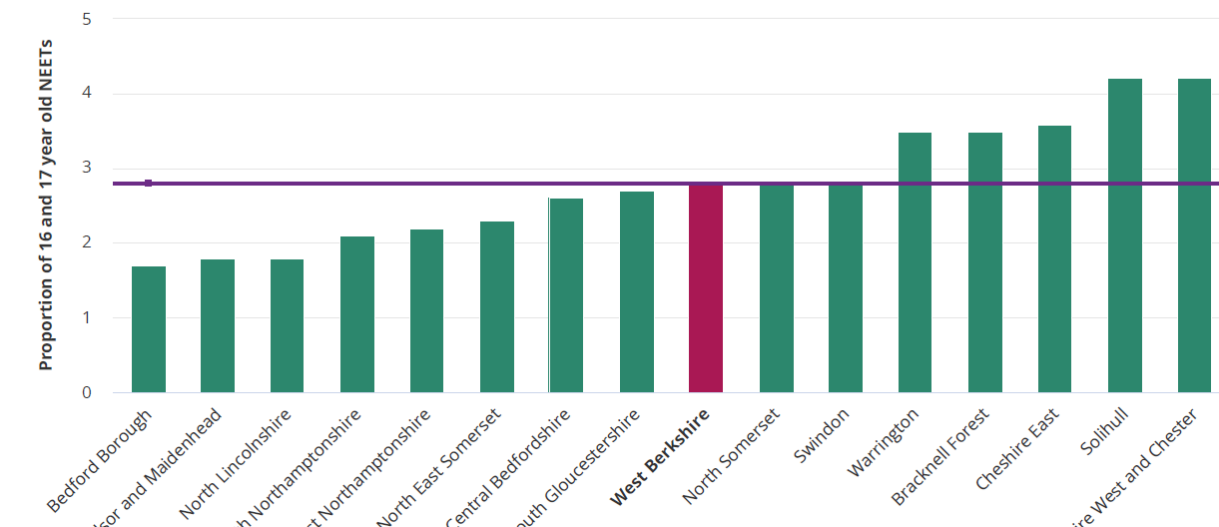
Key Stage 4 attainment 8 “disadvantage gap”, difference in attainment between students who are known to be disadvantaged / are not known to be disadvantaged (DfE) (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



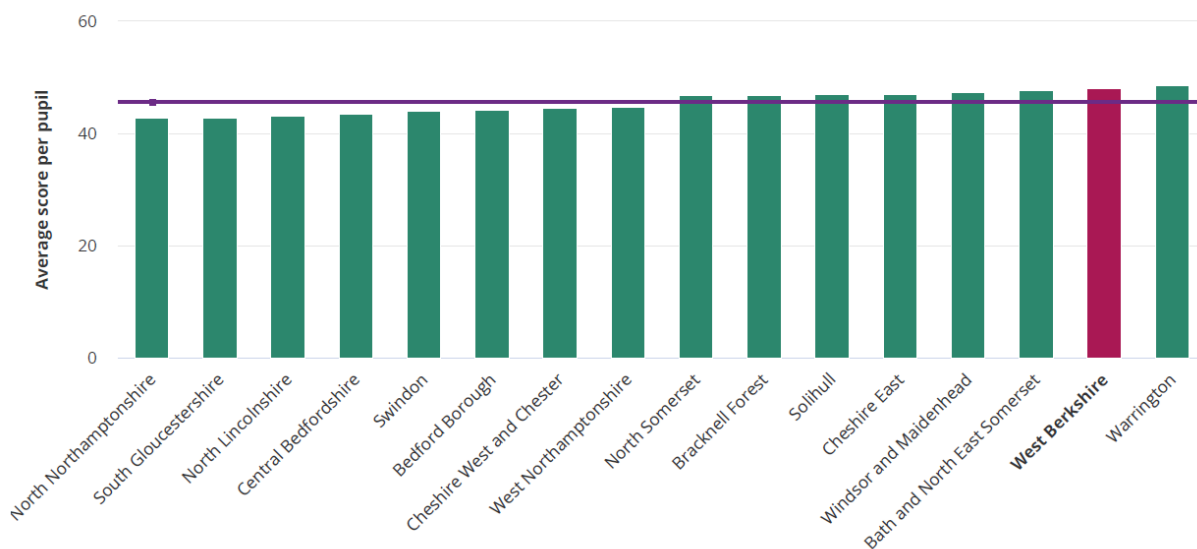
¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

Proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) (2025) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



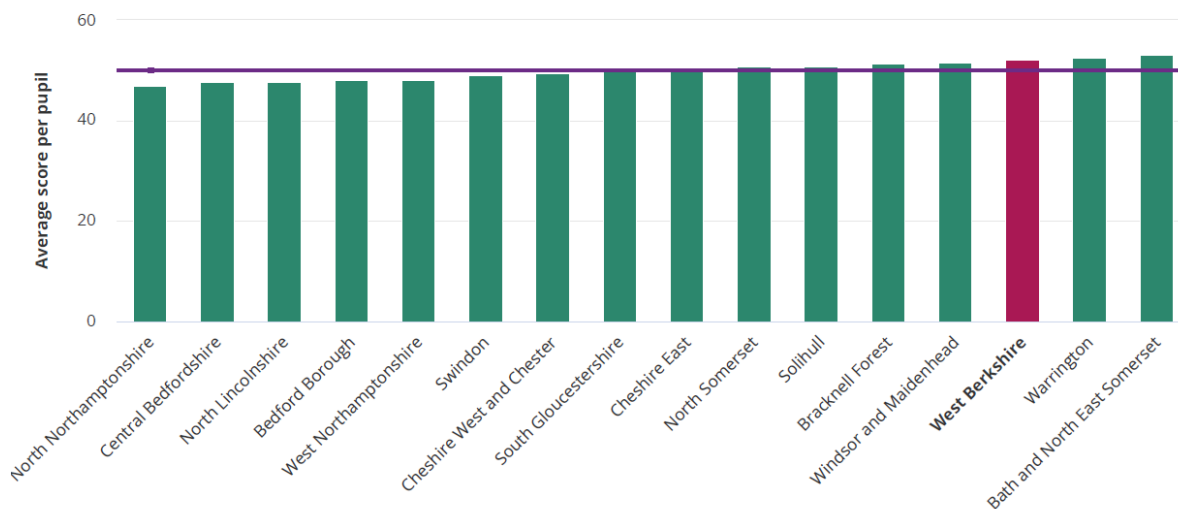
Average Attainment 8 score (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



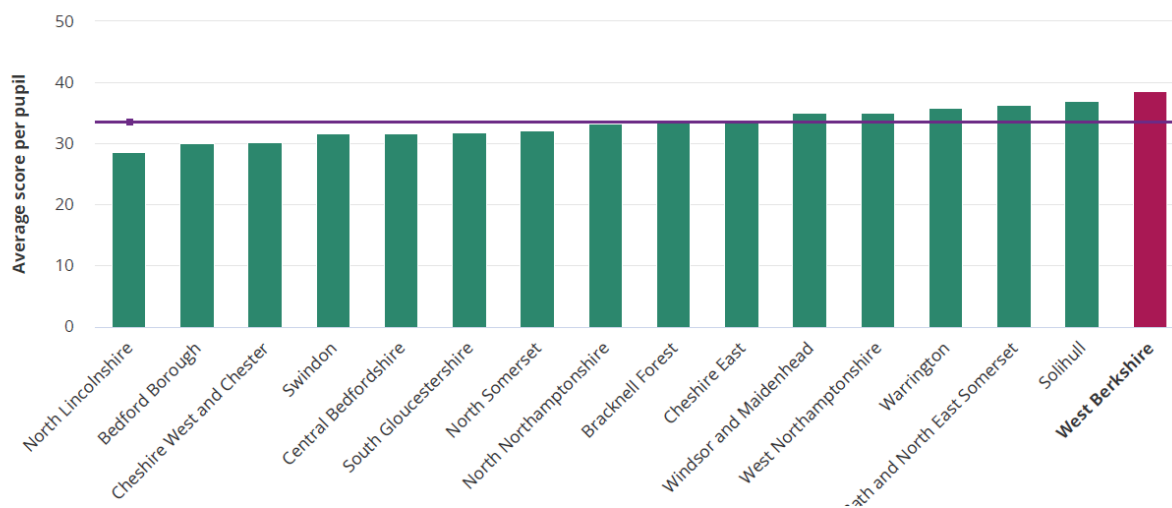
¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

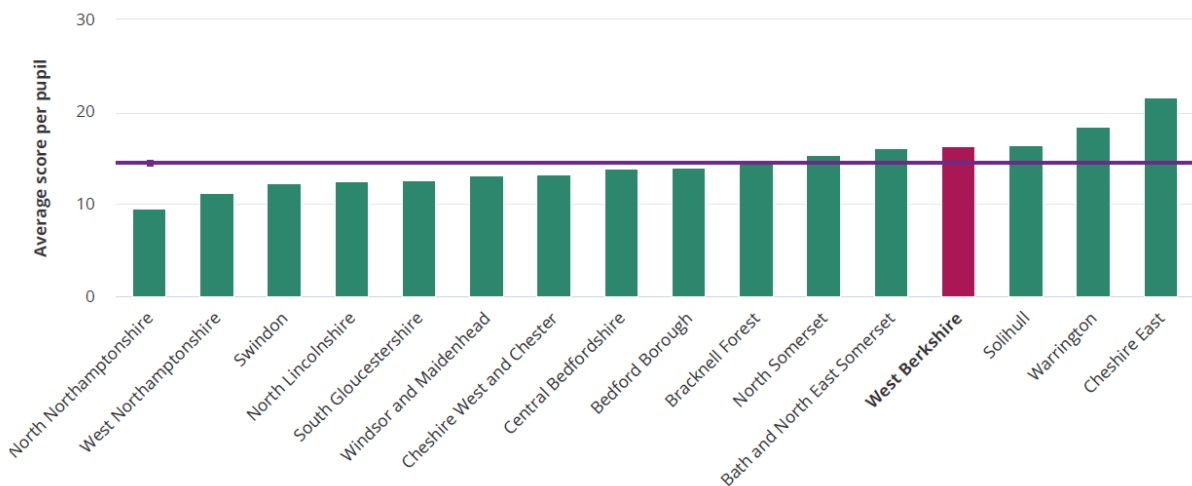
Average Attainment 8 score - pupils with no identified SEN (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



Average Attainment 8 score - pupils with SEN without a statement (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



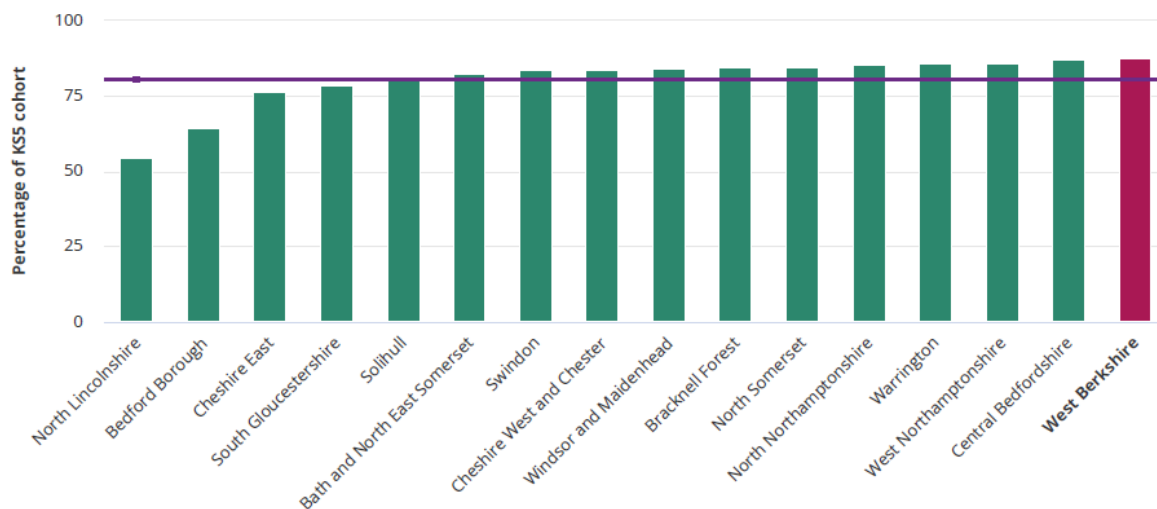
Average Attainment 8 score - pupils with a statement of SEN or EHC plan (2024/25 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

Percentage of 16-18 cohort with SEN in sustained education, apprenticeship or employment (2022/23 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours



Percentage of persistent absentees in state schools (10% or more sessions missed) (2023/24 (academic)) for West Berkshire & West Berkshire CIPFA nearest neighbours

Area	Persistent absentees - all schools (10% of sessions) 2023/24 (academic)
	%
North Lincolnshire	20.6
North Somerset	20.3
Solihull	20.2
North Northamptonshire	20.0
Cheshire West and Chester	20.0
Swindon	19.1
Windsor and Maidenhead	19.1
South Gloucestershire	19.0
Central Bedfordshire	18.7
Bedford Borough	18.4
Bath and North East Somerset	18.3
West Northamptonshire	18.2
West Berkshire	18.2
Cheshire East	16.9
Warrington	16.5
Bracknell Forest	16.2
Areas mean	18.7

Source:

Department for Education, Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Percentage of persistent absentees in state schools (10% or more sessions missed) ,

Data updated: 25 Jul 2025

Proposals

5.8 To assist with the improvement on specific areas of focus, the Council is proposing to invest in the following areas of activity:

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

- Codify 'Core Offer' for School Improvement visits, and corresponding Visit Notes;
- Establish Non-Statutory Intervention to provide appropriate support and challenge ahead of serving a Warning Notice;
- Design a School Governance Improvement Programme in collaboration with National Governance Association, and accompanying audit programme;
- Quality Assure the Headteacher Performance Management that Governing Boards are undertaking;
- Work with schools to develop value for money to ensure financial sustainability, and effective use of Pupil Premium funding;
- Develop a disadvantaged learners 'Belonging and Thriving' strategy linked to Attainment, Attendance and Suspensions/Exclusions.
- Develop and share a performance data set with schools that will underpin the prioritisation for West Berkshire council's intervention with schools.
- Establish a strategic education improvement partnership that will ensure the delivery of the 'Belonging and Thriving' strategy, as well as developing the Partnership between schools in West Berkshire.
- WBC Internal audit will carry out an audit of schools' use of Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) aligned to schools published policies and procedures.

6 Other options considered

Other options considered were to do nothing which would not deliver the requisite improvement to educational outcomes for all children and specifically outcomes for disadvantaged children.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 West Berkshire's education attainment, and the disadvantage gap specifically, needs urgent development.
- 7.2 These inequalities are contrasting with the area's strengths: strong overall attendance, high-quality practice within special schools, and above average GCSE outcomes for many pupils. These strengths show that strong practice is currently isolated.
- 7.3 Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that the current school improvement model is not impacting attainment for disadvantaged learners, and CYP more broadly.

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

7.4 For these reasons, Members are asked to support the recommendations.

8 Appendices

Appendix A – Letter from Dame Kate Dethridge

Background Papers

None

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position:

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

Wards affected: All wards

Officer details:

Name: Ashley Milum
Job Title: Service Director, Education and SEND
Tel No: 01635 519806
E-mail: ashley.milum1@westberks.gov.uk

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

Document Control

Document Ref:		Date Created:	
Version:		Date Modified:	
Author:			
Owning Service			

Change History

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1			
2			

¹ Source data – LGA inform



Department
for Education

Department for Education

Sanctuary Buildings

Great Smith Street

London SW1P 3BT

Tel: 0370 000 2288

www.education.gov.uk

6 February 2026

Sent by email: annmarie.dodds1@westberks.gov.uk

Dear AnnMarie

KS2 Outcomes in West Berkshire

Firstly, I would like to start by thanking you and your team for meeting me on Monday 2nd February to discuss outcomes in West Berkshire schools, particularly at KS2. We agreed from the outset that by any measure, (GLD/phonics/Key stage 2) standards are unacceptably low for all pupils and in particular for disadvantaged cohorts in too many of your schools. Unfortunately, this has been the case for a number of years.

To give a sense of perspective, we looked at the following data:

Key Stage 2:

- KS2 outcomes have been consistently below the national average in West Berkshire, despite relatively low levels of disadvantage. Only 57% of pupils met the expected standard in RWM in 2024/25, compared to a national average of 62%. Outcomes in West Berks have hovered around 56% postCovid, so are not showing signs of improvement.,
- At least 49 schools (3 have results suppressed so I have not included them) have results that declined in 2025 compared to their 2024 results. That's 60% of schools on a declining trajectory.
- The national average for outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in 2025 was 47%. More than 50% of schools in West Berkshire (with results not suppressed), have results below this figure. 30% of those schools had results below 30%. However,

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

there is one standout: Theale CE Primary, where 90% of disadvantaged children achieved the expected standard. This shows what can be achieved and it is clear that schools need to learn from best practice here.

- Only three schools in the LA received a letter for having outcomes in the top 25% for disadvantaged pupils. These are Theale CE Primary, Hungerford Primary School and Robert Sandilands Primary & Nursery.

Phonics:

- 2025 data: 78% achieved the expected standard = LA ranking at 107th out of 153 Local Authorities.
- 2024 data: 79% achieved the expected standard = LA ranking at 93rd out of

153 Local Authorities. So West Berks, whilst improving the % by one from 2024 to 2025, has slipped down a rankings charts suggesting other local authorities are improving their results more quickly.

- Phonics - disadvantaged pupils:
 - 2024 data: Out of your 54 schools, 38 had results below the national average. That's 70% of your schools not meeting the average attainment for their disadvantaged children.
 - In 2025 the situation for disadvantaged children is similarly bleak. Only 56% of these children reach the expected standard by the end of year 1, ranking the LA as 149th out of 152, one of the worst in the country.

GLD:

- Overall looks good but masks some severe underperformance. In 2024, you only had 10 schools whose performance is above the national average of 70% (I accept that some results are suppressed). When you then look at the trajectory of these children into Year 1 and the outcome of the phonics assessments, there are few signs of improvement or optimism.
- Again, there are exceptions: The Willows School, with high levels of deprivation in Newbury, had a fairly low score of 66% achieving GLD in 2024, but phonics and KS2 results show great progress under difficult circumstances. As with Theale, you need use schools like The Willows to support other schools. If you do not, it is hard to see how you will ensure all your schools reach the target of 75% achieving GLD by 2028.

I asked you what was being done to both support schools to improve their results and also to hold leaders to account more effectively. You explained that due to a history of under investment, the school improvement service has been running well below capacity for a number of years and therefore unable to perform the functions you would want, despite your efforts to highlight the actions needed to ensure effective and sustained improvement.

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

This arrangement meant that schools determined the nature of improvement activities, and work carried out by the School Improvement team was often limited to supporting head teachers during Ofsted inspections rather than driving genuine school effectiveness.

Although most of the schools in West Berkshire are judged to be good or outstanding against the old OfSTED framework, we discussed the fact that many of these schools will be eligible to be inspected over the next couple of years and a history of poor outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children, is unlikely to secure a similarly positive judgement in the future.

We discussed a couple of schools in particular which had exceptionally low outcomes for pupils and I asked why the team hadn't chosen to intervene using some of the tools available, for example establishing an Interim Executive Board or sending a Warning Notice. You explained that the limited resources available meant that even low-cost interventions, such as issuing warning letters or installing interim executive boards, were not always feasible due to the lack of capacity to follow up and manage these processes effectively.

You also highlighted that the lack of a robust, centrally funded school improvement strategy resulted in persistently poor outcomes for children, especially in primary schools, with West Berkshire ranking 11th out of 11 statistical neighbours.

I was encouraged by the plans outlined for a comprehensive **reset of school improvement in West Berkshire**, including recruiting additional school improvement advisors, implementing annual school evaluations, and establishing a more systematic approach to intervention and accountability, with a focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils.

You also mentioned that you had recently established an Education Scrutiny Committee in West Berkshire. It is surprising that one hasn't existed previously. I would be happy to attend at some point in the future to set out the DfE's concerns about performance across education in the LA.

It is clear that at officer level there is a commitment to bring about the improvement changes that are needed and a desire to ensure all schools can learn from the few that do perform well.

I look forward to meeting again before the end of the summer term to hear about the plans that are being put in place to ensure that outcomes improve across the board.

This includes your commitment to look at which West Berkshire schools are participating in the NELI programme and encourage eligible schools to apply for this free resource; sharing the best practice from Theale CE Primary regarding outcomes for disadvantaged pupils more widely across West Berkshire schools and conducting deep dives into inclusion and pupil premium strategies in all schools to ensure funding is effectively reaching disadvantaged pupils.

You will be aware that, as part of our Universal RISE offer, West Berkshire headteachers have been invited to be part of a programme to support improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, with a particular focus on Yr R. This is a free resource, facilitated by some of the leading experts in this field. I know you have been allocated 20 spaces, and

¹ Source data – LGA inform

Education Outcomes

I hope that you will be ensuring the leaders of schools displaying the most concerning data will be attending this programme.

I also committed to talk to Park House to understand why the school had admitted no children with EHCPs in the last academic year and to ensure that they are complying with the Fair Access Protocols.

I am copying this letter to the Leader of the Council, Lee Dillon MP for Newbury and Olivia Bailey MP Reading and West Berkshire and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Early Education) and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Equalities)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "K. Dethridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dame Kate Dethridge

Regional Director, South East Regions Group

Department for Education

¹ Source data – LGA inform

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Exclusions Report

Committee considering report:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee:	15 th April 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	7 th April 2026
Report Author:	Roslyn Arthur and Crystal Elkabbas

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of exclusions of Children and Young People (CYP) in West Berkshire and is intended to brief members on the implications for our cohorts. It is structured into two sections: Primary Data and Secondary Data.
- 1.2 The report presents exclusions data from 2020/21 onwards, benchmarked against national figures, statistical neighbours, and local comparators. It also provides context for the data, highlighting key strengths, current challenges, and our strategic response.
- 1.3 Additionally, the report identifies emerging concerns, captured under the heading ‘Risk of Future Exclusions’.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 It is recommended that the CYP Scrutiny Committee familiarise themselves with the data relating to exclusions.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee endorse the Strategic Response (as outlined in section 5.20) to support the reduction of exclusions and the promotion of inclusion.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	This report is for information only and does not in itself commit the Council to additional expenditure. However, the trends and capacity constraints highlighted (including increasing numbers of pupils at risk of exclusion, demand pressures on iCollege, and limited specialist SEN placement availability) may contribute to future cost pressures across the High Needs and alternative provision system if exclusion levels and complexity continue to rise. Any future proposals arising from the findings (for example, changes to

Exclusions Report

	<p>commissioning arrangements, service capacity, or expanded preventative provision) would be subject to separate decision making and would require a full financial assessment and identification of funding sources.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>There are no direct Human Resource implications arising from this report, which is provided for information only. The activity described is delivered within existing staffing arrangements; however, the demand and capacity issues highlighted (including increasing numbers of pupils at risk of exclusion and pressures on iCollege and the Exclusions and Reintegration Team) may have workforce and workload implications should further actions be developed in response. Any future proposals affecting staffing levels, roles, training requirements, or service capacity would be subject to separate decision making and would be considered in consultation with HR and relevant stakeholders.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>This report is provided for information only and does not, of itself, give rise to additional legal implications. The local authority and schools must continue to act in accordance with the relevant statutory framework and guidance in relation to suspensions, exclusions and the provision of suitable education (including the Council's duties to secure appropriate alternative education for eligible pupils). If any future recommendations are brought forward in response to the issues highlighted (for example changes to alternative provision commissioning, service arrangements, or the Fair Access Protocol/SLA with iCollege), these would be subject to separate decision making and would be reviewed to ensure legal compliance.</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>This report is for information only and does not introduce new risks in itself. However, the increased numbers of pupils at risk of exclusion and the capacity constraints described (including within iCollege and the Exclusions and Reintegration Team) highlight ongoing delivery risks for the Council and the wider system. In particular, sustained increases in exclusions, alongside limited alternative provision capacity, may increase the risk of the Council being unable to consistently meet its statutory requirements to secure suitable education for eligible children who are out of school (including provision under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996). There are also potential reputational, financial and safeguarding risks if pupils are not able to access appropriate full-time education in a timely way. Any future proposals arising from this report would be subject to separate decision making and would include an assessment of risks and mitigations.</p>

Exclusions Report

Property:	There are no property implications associated with this report			
Policy:	This report is provided for information only and does not, of itself, require changes to existing Council policies. The work described sits within the Council's current policy framework for children and young people, including arrangements relating to inclusion, suspensions and exclusions, alternative provision and SEND. The findings may, however, inform future policy development (for example, refinements to local processes such as the Fair Access Protocol and related service arrangements with iCollege, and/or the Council's approach to commissioning and quality assurance of alternative provision). Any proposed policy changes arising from this report would be subject to separate decision making and the Council's usual governance, consultation and equality impact assessment processes.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		This report does not propose a change to service delivery. However, the exclusion trends described, and the capacity constraints within alternative provision and wider SEND support, have the potential to affect educational outcomes and access to provision for children and young people. Equalities considerations will continue to be embedded through ongoing monitoring of exclusions and suspensions data, use of early intervention and reintegration support, and review of local processes (including Fair Access and alternative provision arrangements) to help ensure equitable access to suitable education and support.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		Exclusions and access to alternative provision can disproportionately affect some groups with protected characteristics, particularly disabled pupils (including those with SEN and/or an EHCP) and, depending on local patterns, pupils from certain ethnic

Exclusions Report

				backgrounds or other protected groups. The Council and partners will continue to consider protected characteristics through analysis of exclusion and suspension data and through the design and targeting of preventative, early help and reintegration activity, to identify and address any disproportionate impacts. Any future proposals arising from this report would be subject to an equality impact assessment and appropriate consultation.
Environmental Impact:		x		None
Health Impact:		x		None
ICT Impact:		x		None
Digital Services Impact:		X		None
Council Strategy Priorities:		X		This report supports delivery of the Council's strategic priorities by providing a clear evidence base on exclusion trends and system pressures, helping to focus improvement activity on inclusion and improving outcomes for children and young people. The issues highlighted (including rising numbers of pupils with SEND at risk of exclusion, capacity constraints in alternative provision and iCollege, and increasing complexity of need) relate directly to priorities around early intervention, safeguarding and support for vulnerable families, and reducing inequality. The report also links to the Council's statutory responsibilities to secure suitable education for eligible children who are out of school, and to longer-term financial sustainability by informing work to strengthen commissioning and quality assurance and reduce reliance on high-cost, reactive placements.
Core Business:		x		This report relates directly to the Council's core business in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities for children and

Exclusions Report

				young people’s education, including duties associated with suspensions and permanent exclusions and securing suitable education for eligible children who are out of school (including provision under Section 19 of the Education Act 1996). The issues highlighted around rising exclusions, reduced timetables and capacity constraints in alternative provision (including iCollege) are relevant to the Council’s role in ensuring timely access to appropriate provision, oversight and quality assurance of alternative provision arrangements, and supporting the inclusion of children and young people with SEND in line with the Council’s wider statutory duties.
Data Impact:		x		None
Consultation and Engagement:				

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 Seven primary school exclusions were issued in 2024/25, a notable increase from two in 2021/22 and higher than national, local and statistical comparators.
- 4.2 Analysis of primary exclusions indicates that, with one exception, all pupils excluded since September 2021 have had SEN. No primary aged pupil with an EHCP has returned to mainstream primary provision following exclusion.
- 4.3 In the secondary phase, forty-seven exclusions were issued in 2024/25, a significant rise from fifteen in 2021/22, exceeding national, local, and statistical benchmarks. The number of excluded secondary pupils registered as K code (requiring support) or with EHCPs has increased since 2022/23.
- 4.4 Currently, 161 pupils are identified as at risk of exclusion, including 87 with SEN. Future risks primarily relate to iCollege’s capacity to provide full-time education for excluded pupils, particularly given rising SEN needs and the potential impact on preventative in-reach provision.

5 Supporting Information

Background

Primary Permanent Exclusions

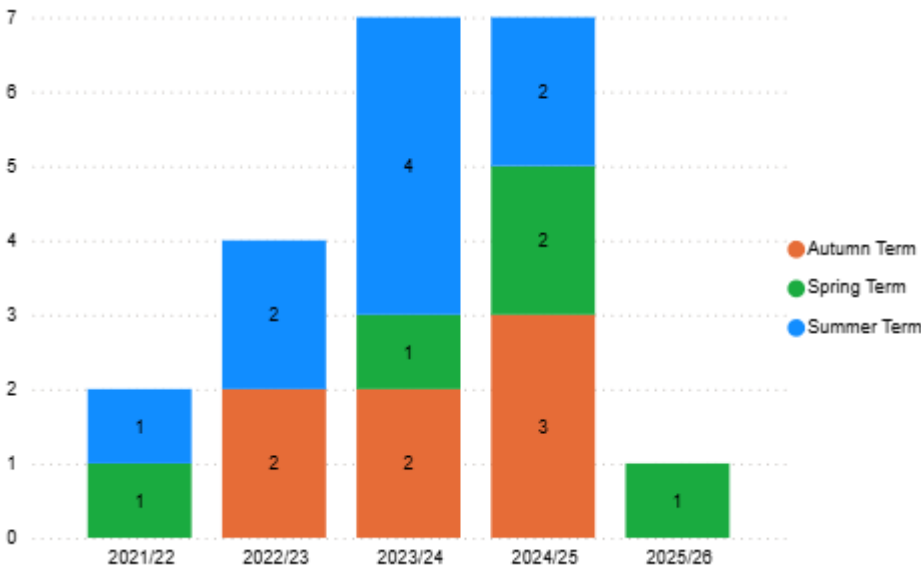
5.2 No primary exclusions were issued during the Autumn Term 2025. The Exclusions and Reintegration Team has provided extensive support to schools, guiding them to appropriate teams and agencies, including the Promoting Inclusive Practice Service (PIPS), to identify alternatives to exclusion. Available interventions include:

- Six-week turnaround programmes delivered by iCollege (PRU)
- Extended 10–12 week interventions where appropriate
- Bespoke school-based support, which may involve targeted staff training, actionable recommendations following observations, and timetable adaptations to better support individual pupils

5.3 While primary exclusions have decreased since September 2025, there are ongoing concerns:

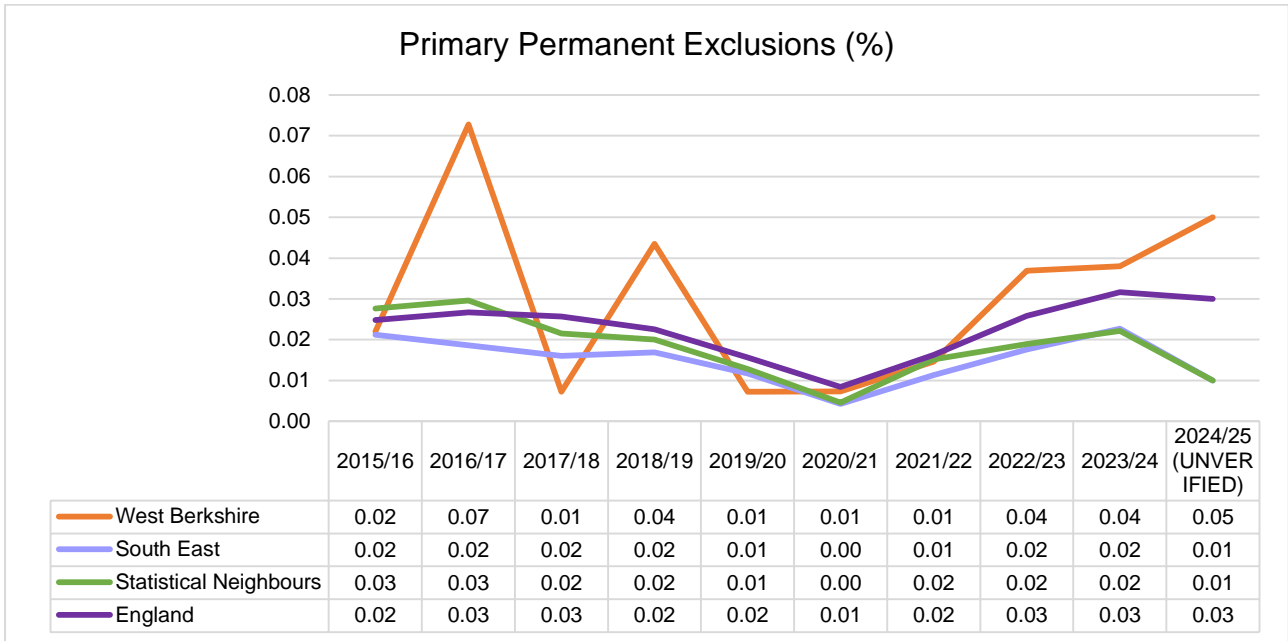
- An increase in pupils on reduced timetables, limiting access to full-time education
- A rise in the use of school-commissioned alternative provision, including placements with providers that are not Ofsted-registered schools

Primary Exclusions:



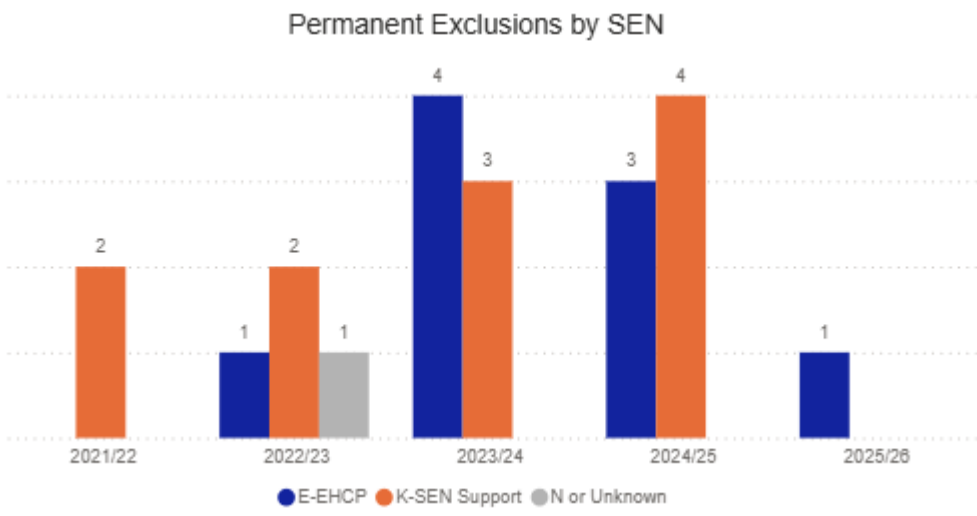
5.3 The most recent verified data indicates that primary exclusions in West Berkshire exceed those of national, local, and statistical comparators.

Comparative Exclusions Data:



Primary SEN Permanent Exclusion Data

5.4 Analysis of primary school data indicates that, with one exception, all primary exclusions since September 2021 have been issued to pupils with SEN. Emergency Annual Reviews are conducted either prior to, or immediately following, an exclusion for a pupil with an EHCP in a mainstream school. These reviews consider possible alternatives to the exclusion and ensure that EHCP requirements are fulfilled. Where an exclusion proceeds, education is provided from day six by iCollege, which may deliver a bespoke package, including commissioning external alternative provision to meet the pupil’s needs. In 2024/25, all seven primary exclusions involved pupils with an EHCP either in place or in progress, and none have returned to mainstream provision.



Risk of Future Primary Exclusions

5.5 The Exclusions and Reintegration Team actively monitors pupils who have been highlighted by schools at risk of permanent exclusion. The current cohort is significantly higher than previous years, comprising:

- 31 pupils at risk of permanent exclusion with SEN;
- Of these 19 have an EHCP, 7 are in process of applying for an EHCP and 5 are K code;
- 10 pupils at risk of permanent exclusion are supported by a social worker.

5.6 Inspiration@icollege serves as the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for primary-aged pupils, providing full-time education and a six-week preventative intervention for those at risk of permanent exclusion. The PRU has a capacity of 12 pupils and is currently operating at full capacity, which may constrain our ability to prevent future permanent exclusions.

5.7 Ongoing shortages of Primary Specialist SEN schools are limiting our capacity to secure appropriate specialist placements for pupils with SEN who are struggling in mainstream settings.

Secondary Exclusions

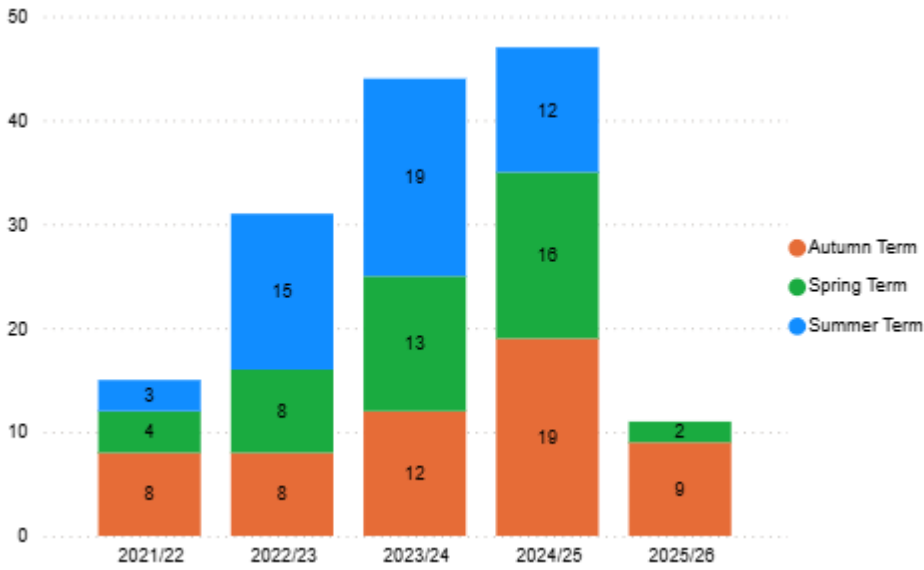
5.8 Forty-seven secondary exclusions were recorded in 2024/25, representing a substantial increase from fifteen in 2021/22.

5.9 Changes in school leadership, the establishment of new Multi-Academy Trusts, and a limited range of viable alternatives to exclusions have all contributed to the exclusion figures observed in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

5.10 The Exclusions and Reintegration Team (ERT) has provided extensive support to schools, signposting appropriate teams and agencies to assist pupils. Interventions have included six-week preventative programmes delivered by iCollege or temporary placements at alternative schools. Collaborative approaches between schools have increased, with institutions supporting one another to provide short-term behaviour interventions for individual pupils.

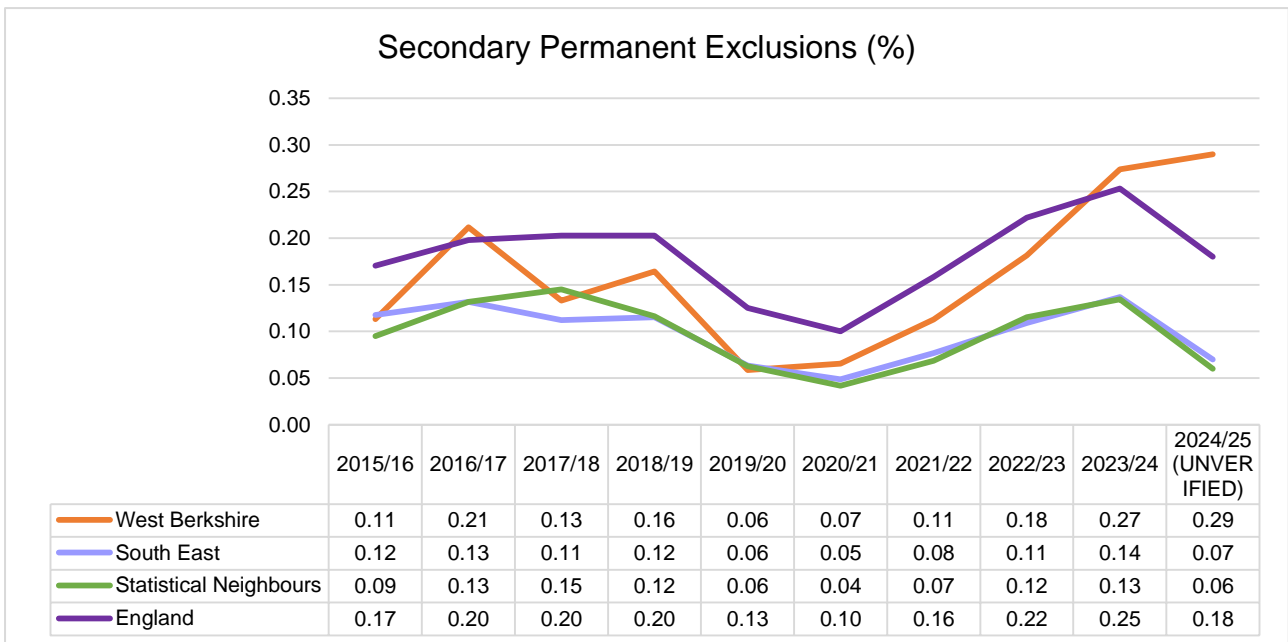
Exclusions Report

Secondary Exclusions:



5.11 The most recent verified data indicates that secondary exclusions in West Berkshire exceed those of national, local, and statistical comparators.

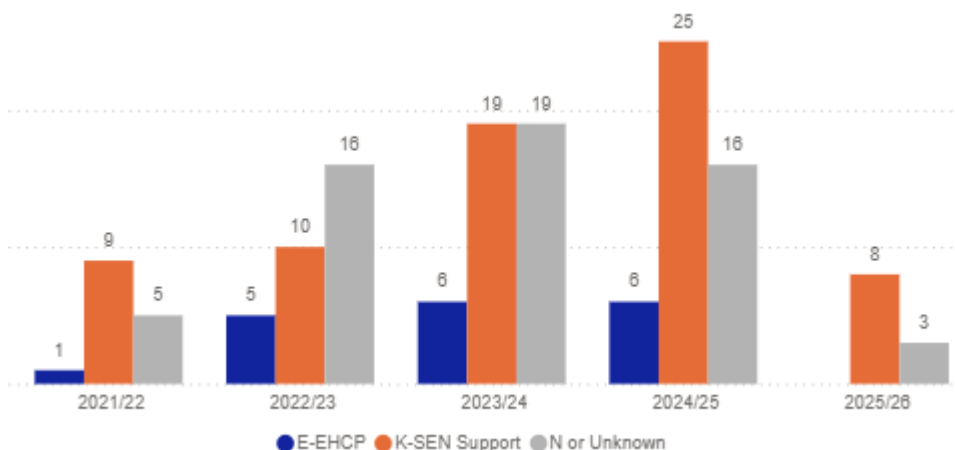
Secondary Comparative Exclusions Data:



SEN Exclusion Data

5.12 The number of excluded secondary pupils registered as K-code (requiring support) has shown a steady upward trend, while exclusions for pupils with an EHCP have remained relatively stable. In 2021/22, 67% of excluded pupils had SEN. This proportion decreased in 2022/23 but has gradually risen over the subsequent three years, returning to the same level observed in 2021/22.

Secondary SEN Exclusions:



Risk of Future Secondary Exclusions

5.13 The Exclusions and Reintegration Team meets termly with Secondary Senior Leadership Teams to monitor pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Across West Berkshire, there are currently:

- 130 pupils identified as at risk of permanent exclusion;
- 33 pupils flagged as imminent cases;
- 71 pupils with SEN at risk of permanent exclusion, including 21 with an EHCP.

5.14 Integration@icollege, the Pupil Referral Unit for secondary-aged pupils, provides full-time education and a six-week preventative intervention for those at risk of permanent exclusion. The unit is currently operating at full capacity, which limits our ability to prevent future exclusions and constrains our statutory responsibility to provide education following an exclusion.

5.15 There remains a shortage of Secondary Specialist SEN schools, affecting the Council’s capacity to place pupils with complex SEN needs who struggle in mainstream settings. In response, and in line with recent DfE White Paper guidance, work is planned to expand the Capital Programme for Inclusion Bases.

Context and Key System Factors Influencing Exclusion Rates

5.16 As below:

- Growth in the number of pupils with SEMH EHCPs;
- Insufficient specialist provision across the local area;
- Capacity constraints within iCollege;
- Reduced capacity within the Exclusions and Reintegration Team (ERT);
- Shortage of specialist placements for pupils with EHCPs;
- Limited availability of mental health support services;
- Significant gaps in external mental health provision, including prolonged waiting times for assessment and diagnosis;

Exclusions Report

- Rising numbers of pupils being referred to Children's Services;
- Increasing prevalence of families presenting with multiple and complex needs;
- Due to national pressure on EP recruitment, there is limited capacity.

The following strengths have been highlighted when addressing exclusions:

- Exclusions and Reintegration Team (ERT) have strong relationships with our school Headteachers and leadership teams which supports with a high support/high challenge approach. School Headteachers reach out to the Authority to work together to find alternative solutions to exclusions;
- ERT facilitate the Secondary Pastoral Collaborative Networking, where best practice of inclusion, culture and ethos and new guidance are shared;
- Strong operational relationships between iCollege and the LA have been developed;
- iCollege provides all statutory Section 19 education for pupils excluded from a mainstream school;
- Secondary schools value Pupils at Risk meetings with the LA, enabling collaboration to find ways to engage and support pupils at risk of exclusion;
- Schools actively participate in the Fair Access Protocol (FAP) process and work to successfully reintegrate pupils who have previously been Permanently Excluded from other schools.

5.17 The following challenges have been highlighted when addressing exclusions:

- A sustained increase in permanent exclusions, with a total of 54 issued and upheld in 2024/25 (excluding those rescinded by schools or not upheld by Governors);
- Rates of both suspensions and permanent exclusions across West Berkshire schools, at both primary and secondary levels, in 2023/24 exceed those of the South East statistical neighbours, and national benchmarks;
- Data from Pupils at Risk meetings indicates that 161 pupils across the authority are currently identified as being at risk of exclusion.
- Capacity of the ERT service;
- Capacity at iCollege (PRU) to offer preventative out-reach support to support schools avoid exclusions;
- Capacity at iCollege to fulfil Section 19 statutory duty to provide full time education to excluded pupils, especially as the number of exclusions increases at any one time and therefore pupils are being delivered education on reduced hours;
- In the primary phase, there is an increase in EHCP applications, alongside a rise in exclusions involving pupils with EHCPs and growing demand for specialist placements.

Strategic Response

5.18 As below:

- West Berkshire is currently in discussion with iCollege to finalise the draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the provision of alternative education for children and young people who are either at risk of permanent exclusion or have already received a permanent exclusion. These discussions aim to ensure that the SLA clearly defines the scope,

Exclusions Report

responsibilities, and quality standards of support, providing a robust framework to meet the educational needs of pupils while supporting their reintegration where appropriate.

- The revised Fair Access Protocol, which governs the reintegration of previously excluded pupils into mainstream schools, has been agreed by schools and is due to commence in February 2026.
- West Berkshire is finalising a draft Service Level Agreement with iCollege to secure high-quality alternative education for pupils at risk of, or subject to, permanent exclusion.
- A dedicated Manager for Children with a Social Worker within the Virtual School was appointed 18 months ago.

Proposals

- 5.19 This report has been submitted following a request from the committee, for information only.

6 Other options considered

Report is for information only.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The trend in Primary Exclusions (PEX) indicates a continued increase, with rates over the past two years significantly exceeding those of the Southeast and our statistical neighbours.
- 7.2 The number of pupils identified to the Local Authority as being at risk of exclusion has increased, with a particular concern regarding the proportion of primary pupils with SEN.
- 7.3 Schools receive timely and robust support and challenge from the team, supported by strong partnership working between schools, iCollege (PRU), and the Local Authority.
- 7.4 Schools continue to work collaboratively with the Local Authority and remain open to exploring alternatives to exclusion, resulting in a significant number of at-risk pupils achieving alternative outcomes and avoiding exclusion.
- 7.5 The ability to sustain this level of support, and to fully meet statutory duties, is increasingly challenged by capacity constraints within the team and across wider support services.

8 Appendices

Secondary Exclusion Data

School	PEX		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Denefield 5404	4	6	5
John O'Gaunt 4001	4		1
Kennet 4042	1	5	6
Little Heath 4052	1	9	9
Park House 4038	8	9	6
St Bartholomew's 5402	3	4	6
The Downs 5406			
The Willink 4031		1	1
Theale Green 4002	6	6	8
Trinity 4055	3	4	6
Brookfields 7028			
The Castle 7007	1		
Newbury College* 8001			
iCollege* 1111			
Total secondary	31	44	48

Background Papers:

None

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position:

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

Wards affected: All wards

Officer details:

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Document Control

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Owning Service			

Change History

Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1			
2			

West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026-2028

Committee considering report:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee:	15 April 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	
Report Author:	Dave Wraight

1 Purpose of the Report

To present the Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028, which sets out the West Berkshire approach to improving early childhood outcomes from pregnancy to age five. Drawing on a local needs assessment, collaboration with families and professionals, and the national Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy (2025), the plan provides a framework for reducing inequalities, strengthening family resilience and improving goal levels of development and health outcomes across the district.

2 Recommendation(s)

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are requested to note the Best Start in Life Plan and scrutinise it.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary																														
Financial:	<p>Predominantly this will be funded via the new “Best Start Grant” (See table below).</p> <p><u>Table 1: Distribution of your funding allocation across the relevant programme strands for financial years 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29.</u></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Strand</th> <th>%¹</th> <th>2026-27 Allocation ²</th> <th>2027-28 Allocation</th> <th>2028-29 Allocation</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme</td> <td>50%</td> <td>£321,600</td> <td>£263,000</td> <td>£270,100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital</td> <td>12%</td> <td>£64,300</td> <td>£65,600</td> <td>£66,900</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Parenting support</td> <td>17%</td> <td>£92,500</td> <td>£93,700</td> <td>£97,800</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Home learning environment support</td> <td>21%</td> <td>£119,000</td> <td>£120,500</td> <td>£125,800</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td></td> <td>£597,500</td> <td>£542,700</td> <td>£560,500</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Strand	% ¹	2026-27 Allocation ²	2027-28 Allocation	2028-29 Allocation	Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - programme	50%	£321,600	£263,000	£270,100	Best Start Family Hubs delivery grant - capital	12%	£64,300	£65,600	£66,900	Parenting support	17%	£92,500	£93,700	£97,800	Home learning environment support	21%	£119,000	£120,500	£125,800	Total		£597,500	£542,700	£560,500
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However, there will be a revenue requirement due to how the Family Hub budgets are currently made up.

There are large income targets within the Family Hub which under the Best Life family Hub Programme will no longer be 100% achievable.

Current targets.

Cost Centre	Income Target
90840	-72,670
90845	-11,810
	-84,480

Proposed reformed targets.

Cost Centre	Income Target
90840	-40,000
90845	-4,000
	-44,000

Pressure of £40,480.

These services have only recently moved over to Children's Social Care, from Education services. So, CSC finance has not yet been able to identify how this will be funded.

There are also elements within the Family Hub budgets which are incorrectly funded by the DSG (£50k). These will initial be picked up by the grant, until corrected through the 2027/28 Budget build process.

Jon Beadle

Senior Accountant CSC

Human Resource:	<p>There are no current defined staffing changes being requested as part of this proposal. As such there is no requirement for HR advice at this time. Should that position change going forward then further advice will need to be sought at that time from HR.</p> <p>Paula Goodwin</p>			
Legal:	<p>As a Council, having strategic arrangements in place for children’s wellbeing, early years and help represent best practice and provide assurance that our duties around improving these aspects alongside reducing inequalities and sufficient childcare are being effectively delivered.</p> <p>Nicola Thomas</p>			
Risk Management:	<p>There is a section of the Best Start Local Strategic Plan that highlights the risks to delivery of the plan and consequent mitigations.</p>			
Property:	<p>The Family Hubs are based in four locations across the district, there are plans in place to further develop and enhance the different hubs so they can fulfil the needs and expectations of a Best Start Family Hub.</p>			
Policy:	<p>‘Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life’ strategy, July 2025</p> <p>Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025 Setting the foundations for lifelong health</p> <p>West Berkshire State of the District Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Report</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			<p>The plan’s emphasis on targeted outreach, co-design, flexible delivery, and enhanced support for disadvantaged groups provides strong opportunities to reduce inequality if implemented consistently. Ensuring that services remain accessible in multiple formats online, in-person, and through outreach</p>

				alongside culturally responsive practice and data-driven targeting, will be essential to preventing differential access and ensuring that the plan actively narrows existing inequalities.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			The plan explicitly prioritises reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for families who may face additional barriers, such as those from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, families experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, parents with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and children with SEND. It also commits to developing an inclusive, culturally responsive workforce and creating accessible services through Family Hubs, outreach, and digital pathways. By strengthening early identification and removing access barriers the approach is designed to promote equity, reduce discrimination, and ensure that children, parents, carers, and staff with protected characteristics experience fairer and more responsive support.
Environmental Impact:		X		No specific environmental impact
Health Impact:	X			Improving health in the earliest years has a profound and lasting impact on children’s development, wellbeing, and life chances. This system-wide action not only improves outcomes in childhood but also helps prevent long-term conditions, reduces future health costs, and promotes a healthier population over the life course.
ICT Impact:	X			ICT support underpins system integration through shared data systems, dashboards, and improved information-sharing pathways across health, education, early years and the voluntary sector, enabling more responsive, joined-up support and reducing duplication – this is an aspiration from Government with further guidance awaited.

Digital Services Impact:	X			The plan sets out the development of a digital front door, including improved online booking, AI-supported signposting, and accessible information for families, alongside enhancements to digital access for rural and digitally disadvantaged communities.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			The Best Start Local Strategic Plan supports two of the Councils strategic priorities: A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all and Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Core Business:	X			The Local Authority already runs Family Hubs, the additional attention and focus from central Government on the Best Start in Life will enhance and further develop the existing core business of family Hubs
Data Impact:	X			The Best Start Local Strategic Plan places effective use of data as high importance enabling West Berkshire to target resources where they will make the greatest difference and to track improvements in outcomes over time.
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Families and carers – including 69 participants in formal consultation and 220 respondents to the 2025 Family Hub survey.</p> <p>Practitioners – Early Help staff and Family Hub teams.</p> <p>Key partners – Public Health, Health Services, Schools, Early Year Settings, Voluntary and Community organisations, Statutory Services, and the Parent Carer Forum.</p> <p>Multi-agency professional events – Total Place event, and four themed workshops</p>			

4 Supporting Information

Introduction

4.1 The purpose of this report is to present the West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028. The plan sets out how partners across Family Hubs, health, education, early years and the voluntary and community sector will work together to deliver the national Best Start in Life reforms and ensure that all children in West Berkshire enter school healthy, safe, curious and ready to learn.

Background

- 4.2 Early childhood is a critical period for development, with long-term implications for health, wellbeing and educational attainment. While West Berkshire performs above national averages on many indicators, significant inequalities persist, particularly in early communication, maternal health, access to early education, and outcomes for children in disadvantaged communities.
- 4.3 The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025 and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlight widening gaps between the most and least deprived families and emphasise the need for early identification, preventative support and integrated delivery models. The national Best Start in Life Strategy places responsibility on local authorities to coordinate early years systems and to achieve challenging targets by 2028, including increasing GLD results and improving family access to Family Hubs and funded early education.
- 4.4 In 2024–2026, extensive consultation and collaboration was undertaken with families, early years providers, health partners and the voluntary sector. Feedback consistently stressed the need for more coordinated pathways, improved access in rural areas, enhanced parenting support, stronger SEND pathways and a clearer, more visible early years offer.
- 4.5 The Best Start Local Strategic Plan is West Berkshire’s response to this evidence.

Proposals

- 4.6 The Plan proposes the development of an integrated Best Start system built around five strategic priorities:
- 4.7 Improve child development outcomes
- Deliver targeted early language, communication and social-emotional interventions.
 - Strengthen inclusive practice and SEND early identification.
 - Expand evidence-based parenting and home-learning programmes.
- 4.8 Improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities
- Strengthen perinatal mental health pathways and infant feeding support.
 - Enhance oral health, immunisation and healthy lifestyle programmes.
 - Address maternal and infant health inequalities in deprived communities.
- 4.9 Increase uptake of high-quality early education
- Promote funded entitlements and support sufficiency planning.
 - Improve recruitment, retention and skills in the early years workforce.
 - Embed inclusive practice across early years settings.

4.10 Strengthen family resilience

- Expand integrated Family Hub delivery with co-located multi-agency teams.
- Improve referral pathways, shared assessment approaches and outcomes-based accountability.
- Increase family access to universal and targeted programmes.

4.11 Strengthen children and family voice

- Establish parent panels, digital engagement platforms and regular feedback loops.
- Embed co-design in service development and evaluation.
- Use family insight to shape targeted offers, especially for equalities groups.

4.12 Delivery Approach: A multi-agency delivery group will lead implementation, reporting to the Children & Families Strategic Group and the Health & Wellbeing Board. The plan includes a detailed three-phase timeline (2026–2028) and a KPI framework covering child development, inequalities, health, early education and engagement outcomes. Best Start funding (£1.7m over 2026–2029) will support Family Hub expansion, workforce development, digital systems, parenting interventions and rural outreach.

5 Other options considered

- 5.1 Several alternative approaches were considered and rejected as they do not meet the criteria as set out in the Governments 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' Strategy and would therefore forfeit the grant funding:
- 5.2 Maintaining the current model without the Best Start Grant: Rejected because existing services, although established, are not sufficiently resourced to address persistent inequalities, workforce pressures, rural access barriers or rising complexity of family need.
- 5.3 Focusing resources solely on targeted families rather than a universal-plus model: Rejected because evidence shows that universal early years offers create visibility, reduce stigma and provide broad prevention benefits. A universal-plus model ensures equity and early identification while still directing intensive support where need is greatest.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028 provides a comprehensive, evidence-based framework for improving early childhood outcomes across West Berkshire. It aligns with national expectations, addresses local inequalities and responds to the voices of families and professionals. Through strengthened Family Hubs, integrated pathways, targeted interventions, digital innovation and robust performance monitoring, the plan seeks to ensure that every child in West Berkshire has the best possible start in life. The plan will enable the partnership to mobilise

delivery, secure funding, and progress system changes that will deliver measurable improvements for children, families and communities.

7 Appendices

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix B – West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan

Background Papers:

None

Officer details:

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West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE

March 2023

Contents

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Section 1: Summary details

<p>Directorate and Service Area</p>	<p>Children’s Services, Family Hubs</p>
<p>What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).</p>	<p>West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028</p>
<p>Is this a new or existing function or policy?</p>	<p>New Plan</p>
<p>Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).</p>	<p>The West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan sets out a whole-system, multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children from conception to age five.</p> <p>Summary of Possible Impacts:</p> <p>Reduced inequalities for priority groups: The plan directs resources to families facing socioeconomic disadvantage, rural isolation, minoritised communities, children with SEND, and those requiring perinatal or emotional support. Targeting is based on local deprivation data, developmental vulnerability, rurality, and access gaps.</p> <p>Improved access to early education and childcare: Promotion of funded entitlements, workforce development, and strengthened inclusion practices aim to increase uptake, especially among disadvantaged two-year-olds and children with SEND.</p> <p>Improved health outcomes: Support for perinatal mental health, infant feeding, immunisation outreach, and oral health programmes directly benefit populations experiencing health inequalities.</p> <p>Stronger support for families with additional barriers: Flexible delivery (digital, in-person, outreach) and improved scheduling aim to improve access for working parents, rural families, fathers, young parents, and families with multiple children.</p>

Equity Impact Assessment

	<p>Enhanced inclusivity and cultural responsiveness: Targeted activity for minoritised ethnic communities, SEND-informed practice, and trauma-informed training help ensure equitable access and culturally competent services.</p> <p>Does the proposal bias, discriminate, or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups? No – the proposal is designed to reduce, not reinforce, inequality. Based on the content of the plan, there is no evidence of discriminatory intent or likely discriminatory impact. The plan explicitly prioritises groups at risk of poorer outcomes, including minoritised communities, low-income families, SEND families, young parents, working parents, fathers, families experiencing domestic abuse, and rural households. Invests in accessibility, including outreach models, flexible scheduling, digital and non-digital access routes, and culturally responsive approaches. Promotes inclusive practice across early years settings, Family Hubs, and health services, supported by workforce training in trauma-informed, SEND-informed, and inclusive communication practices.</p> <p>The strategic direction is strongly aligned with principles of equity, inclusion, early intervention, and targeted support. When implemented as designed, the plan should improve fairness and reduce structural inequalities faced by several protected or disadvantaged groups.</p>
Completed By	Dave Wraight
Authorised By	Rebecca Wilshire
Date of Assessment	04/02/2026

Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p>Context / Background</p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>The West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan (2026–2028) has been developed in response to new national guidance, updated local need, and extensive co-production with families and professionals.</p> <p>New national policy requirements. The 2025 national strategy Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life sets new expectations for local authorities, including GLD attainment targets, expanded childcare entitlements, strengthened perinatal support, and greater use of Family Hubs. Local areas must now produce a formal Best Start plan and align with national funding requirements.</p>
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	<p>The plan builds on the strengths of established Family Hubs in West Berkshire but responds to updated needs, national expectations and the voices of families. It sets a clearer, more integrated and outcomes-driven blueprint for the next three years. Core themes include good levels of development, early language, perinatal wellbeing, early education access, reducing inequalities, and strengthening family resilience—all framed within a whole-system partnership model.</p>
<p>Proposals</p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>The Plan proposes the development of an integrated Best Start system built around five strategic priorities:</p> <p>Improve child development outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver targeted early language, communication and social-emotional interventions. • Strengthen inclusive practice and SEND early identification. • Expand evidence-based parenting and home-learning programmes. <p>Improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen perinatal mental health pathways and infant feeding support. • Enhance oral health, immunisation and healthy lifestyle programmes. • Address maternal and infant health inequalities in deprived communities. <p>Increase uptake of high-quality early education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote funded entitlements and support sufficiency planning. • Improve recruitment, retention and skills in the early years workforce. • Embed inclusive practice across early years settings.

	<p>Strengthen family resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand integrated Family Hub delivery with co-located multi-agency teams. • Improve referral pathways, shared assessment approaches and outcomes-based accountability. • Increase family access to universal and targeted programmes. <p>Strengthen children and family voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish parent panels, digital engagement platforms and regular feedback loops. • Embed co-design in service development and evaluation. • Use family insight to shape targeted offers, especially for equalities groups.
<p>Evidence / Intelligence</p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<p>1. Quantitative Data Sources</p> <p>These datasets provide the analytical foundation for identifying priority groups, inequalities, and required interventions.</p> <p>a. JSNA (2025): Growing inequalities between communities. Pockets of child poverty in otherwise affluent areas. Rurality-related access barriers. Variation masked by good population averages.</p> <p>b. West Berkshire Director of Public Health Annual Report (2025) Inequalities across maternal health, infant wellbeing, obesity, oral health. Persisting gaps between most and least deprived communities. Significance of the first 1,001 days.</p> <p>c. EYFSP Outcomes / Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data: Local GLD (72.1%) Significant gaps for children eligible for FSM (44.7%).</p> <p>d. Childcare Sufficiency Data & Local Deprivation Indices: Uneven take up of high-quality early education. Workforce shortages and provider stability concerns.</p>

- e. Health Visitor ASQ-3 and screening data: Identifiable delays in communication, physical development, and social-emotional skills.
- 2. Service-User and Stakeholder Consultation: The plan contains rich consultation information from families, practitioners and partners.
 - a. 2025 Formal Co-Production Process (69 professionals and families): What families/practitioners said: Family Hubs are warm, safe and trusted. Strong multi-agency collaboration already exists. Challenges: duplicated assessments, gaps in parenting support, rural access issues, inconsistent pathways.
 - b. October 2025 Family Hub Survey (220 parents): Families value the emotional wellbeing benefits (reduced isolation, better mental health, confidence). Ask for: more baby groups, dad-friendly sessions, more sensory sessions, afternoon/evening availability.
 - c. Total Place Event (January 2026) Need for shared facilities and co-location. Desire for consistent communication channels. Stronger referral pathways. Clearer local offer and shared intelligence. Workforce development and joined-up training.
- 3. Evidence Supporting the Ability to Deliver Climate Commitments: While the plan is not primarily climate-focused, several elements impact the climate and environment agenda:
 - a. Place-based and rural outreach model: Reduces unnecessary family travel. Encourages delivery in community venues (lower carbon footprint). Supports 15-minute-neighbourhood and active travel principles.
 - b. Digital front door and hybrid delivery: Reduces travel emissions. Supports digital inclusion while maintaining options for those who cannot access tech.
 - c. Co-location of services: Cuts down on both practitioner and family travel. Enables efficient estate use, reducing duplicated room/energy use.

Equity Impact Assessment

<p>Alternatives considered / rejected</p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.</p>	<p>Several alternative approaches were considered and rejected as they do not meet the criteria as set out in the Governments 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' Strategy and would therefore forfeit the grant funding:</p> <p>Maintaining the current model without the Best Start Grant: Rejected because existing services, although established, are not sufficiently resourced to address persistent inequalities, workforce pressures, rural access barriers or rising complexity of family need.</p> <p>Focusing resources solely on targeted families rather than a universal-plus model: Rejected because evidence shows that universal early years offers create visibility, reduce stigma and provide broad prevention benefits. A universal-plus model ensures equity and early identification while still directing intensive support where need is greatest.</p>
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Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Equity Impact Assessment

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The plan significantly improves outcomes for babies, young children, and young or first-time parents through strengthened early development, health, and parenting support.			
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The plan enhances early identification, inclusive practice, and coordinated SEND support, improving outcomes and reducing barriers for children with disabilities.			
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Equity Impact Assessment

Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The plan improves perinatal wellbeing, infant feeding, and emotional support, giving pregnant women and new mothers stronger, earlier, and more accessible help.			
Race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The plan reduces racial inequalities through culturally responsive, targeted support and improved access for minoritised families.			
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The plan improves equity for rural families by expanding outreach, mobile delivery, and digital access to services.			
Areas of deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The plan reduces socio-economic inequalities by prioritising deprived communities for targeted early development, health, and family support.			
Displaced communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Care experienced people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Equity Impact Assessment

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
The Armed Forces Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

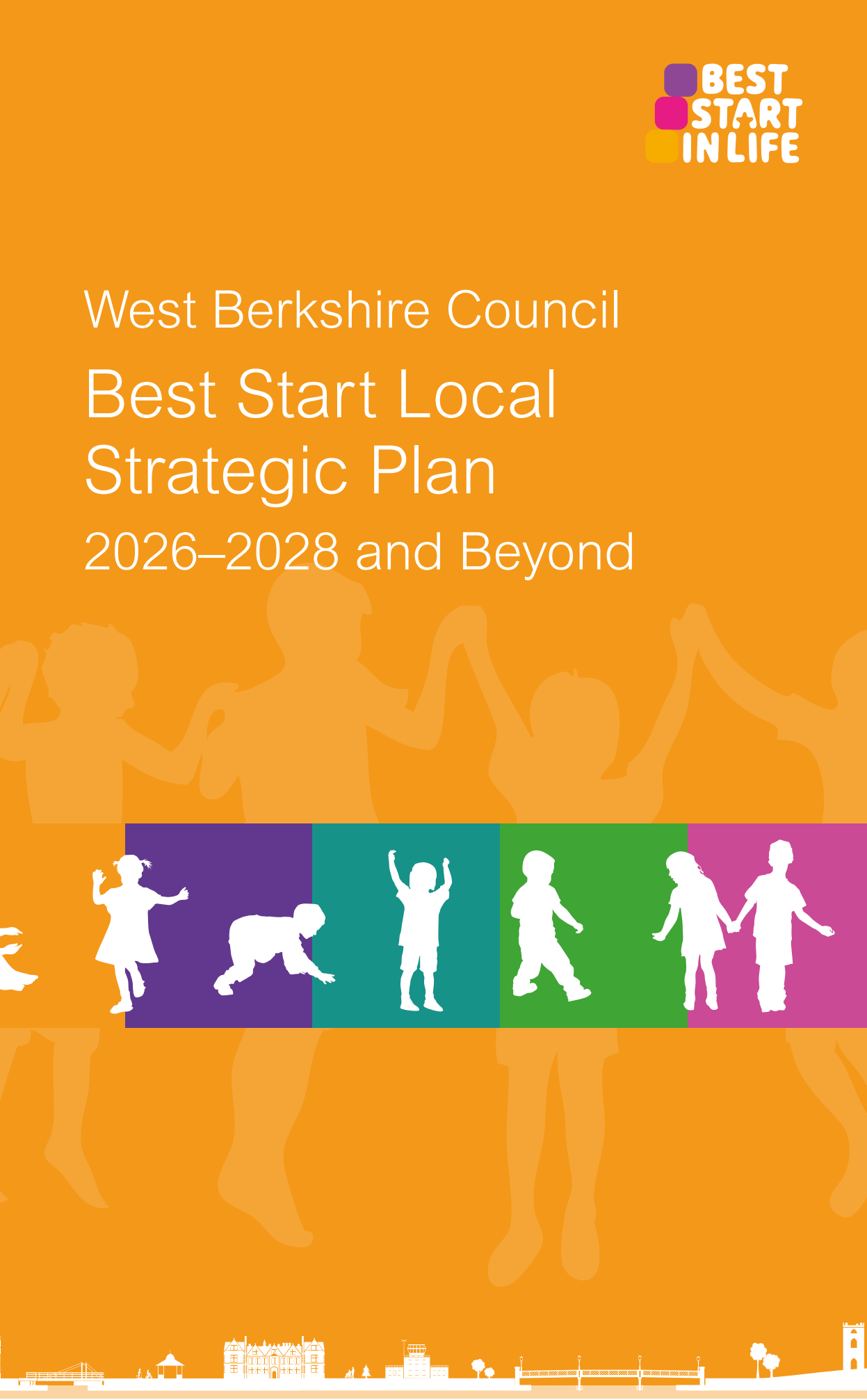
Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	
Person Responsible for Review	
Authorised By	

EDI employee related EQiA's should now be sent to Human Resources hrenquiries@westberks.gov.uk

West Berkshire Council Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028 and Beyond





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Foreword

The earliest years of a child's life shape their future more profoundly than any other stage. From brain development and emotional wellbeing to communication skills and school readiness, the foundations built before age five can influence health, opportunity and life chances for decades to come, as highlighted in the Director of Public Health's Report 2025 .

In West Berkshire, we are committed to giving every child - in every community - the best possible start in life. Our families tell us that they want services that are easy to access, joined up, welcoming and responsive to their needs. Practitioners and partners tell us they want to work in a system that supports collaboration, reduces duplication and enables early help to reach families when it matters most.

This Best Start in Life Local Plan is our shared response. It sets out a bold and practical roadmap for strengthening our Family Hubs, improving health and early education outcomes, and ensuring that our most disadvantaged children receive the targeted support they need. It builds on the dedication of our workforce, health partners, schools, and voluntary and community organisations — all of whom play a vital role in shaping a strong Best Start offer.

We recognise the challenges we face: the rising complexity of need, inequalities between communities, pressures on childcare availability, and the realities of rural access. But we also recognise our collective strengths. This plan brings together data, partnership insight, family voice and national evidence to chart a path forward.

Our ambition is simple but powerful:

Every child in West Berkshire should enter school happy, healthy, curious and ready to learn — with the foundations in place for a bright future.

We extend our thanks to the families, practitioners and partners who have contributed to this plan. We look forward to continuing this journey together, delivering meaningful improvements for our youngest children and their families.



Cllr. Heather Codling

Portfolio Holder – Children, Education and Young People's Services



AnnMarie Dodds

*Executive Director
(People - Children's Services)*

Executive Summary

The early years of a child's life lay the foundations for lifelong health, learning and wellbeing. The West Berkshire Best Start in Life Local Plan (2026–2028) sets out a clear, ambitious and evidence informed blueprint for how we will ensure every child - regardless of background - is supported to thrive from pregnancy through to age five and beyond.

West Berkshire is already home to strong early years provision and long established Family Hubs. However, our JSNA and local 0-19's needs assessment highlights persistent inequalities in early development, health outcomes, access to early education, and support for families experiencing disadvantage or living in rural communities. The plan responds to these challenges through a place based, integrated Best Start system, delivered in partnership with families and communities.

Our vision

By 2028, West Berkshire will provide a seamless and inclusive Best Start offer that strengthens family resilience, improves child development and health outcomes, reduces inequalities, and ensures children arrive at school ready to learn and ready to thrive.

Our goals

- Improving early development outcomes, particularly in communication, language and personal social skills.
- Reducing health inequalities, and strengthening perinatal and infant wellbeing.
- Improving health and wellbeing outcomes for parents and children
- Increasing uptake of high quality early education and childcare.
- Strengthening family resilience through integrated support.

Our approach

The plan commits to:

- Working corroboratively with system partners to deliver improved outcomes for children
- Expanding and enhancing Best Start Family Hubs across the district.
- Promoting the Stronger Practice Hub alongside local Early Years programmes and expertise in order to raise early years quality and inclusion
- Scaling evidence based parenting and Home Learning Environment programmes.
- Driving innovation through digital tools, co production and test and learn models.
- Using data driven targeting to allocate resources to areas of highest need
- Ensuring children's and families' voices shape all stages of design and delivery.

What success will look like by 2028

- Increased proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development, with a specific focus on improving GLD for children eligible for Free School Meals.
- Strengthened perinatal wellbeing and infant feeding outcomes.
- Increased uptake of early education entitlements.
- Significantly increased family engagement with Best Start Family Hubs.

This plan represents a collective commitment across West Berkshire Council, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (Thames Valley Integrated Care Board from April 2026), health partners, early years settings, schools, and the voluntary and community sector. Together, we will deliver a stronger, more equitable start for every child.

Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy - July 2025

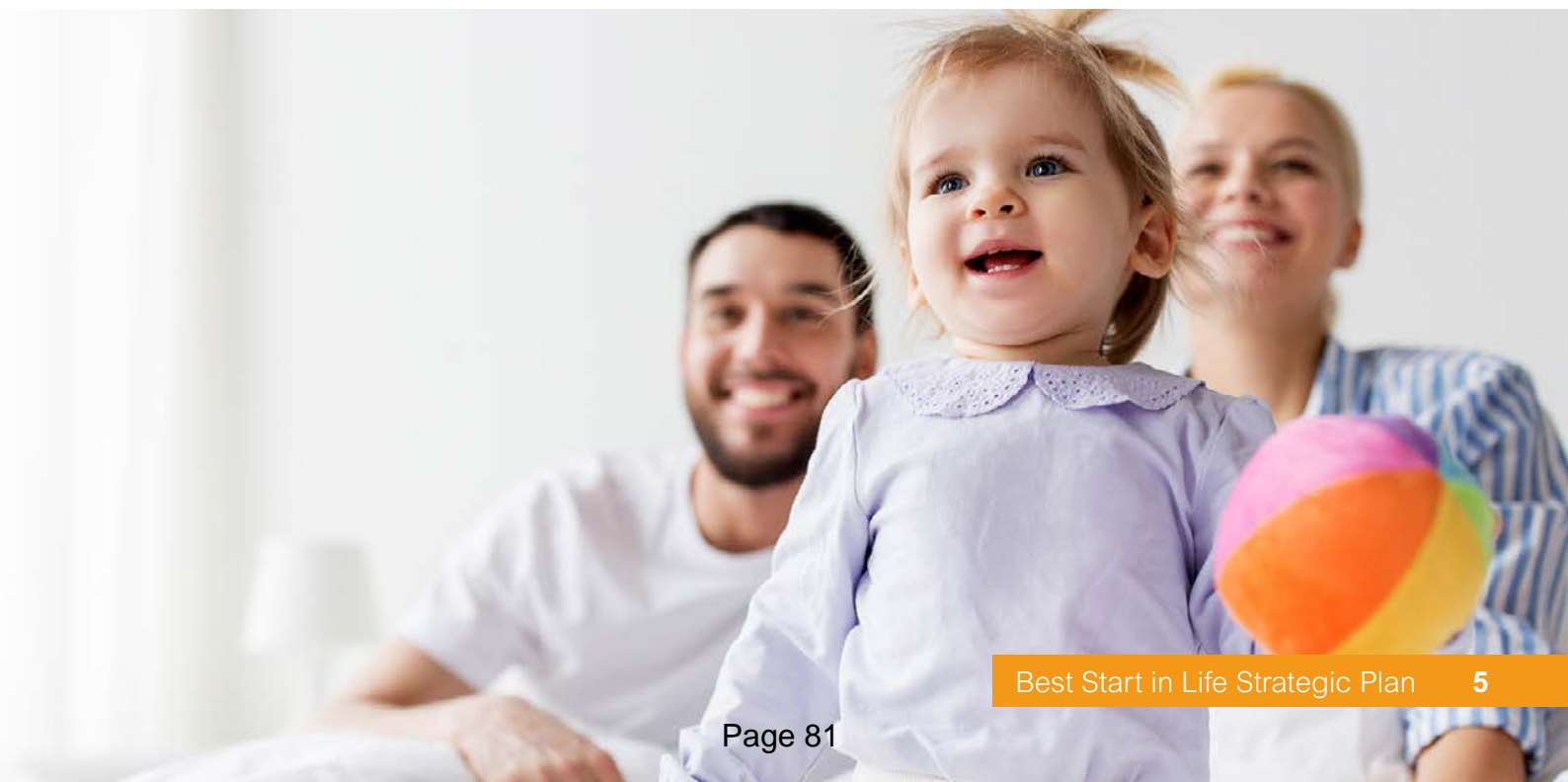
The 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' strategy, published in July 2025 by the Department for Education and supported by the Department of Health and Social Care, addresses persistent gaps in early childhood development and aims to ensure that 75% of five year olds achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. It responds to evidence linking early years experiences to lifelong outcomes and seeks to reduce inequalities by investing in family services, expanding funded childcare, and improving workforce quality. The strategy emphasises integrated support through Family Hubs and national investment to give every child the best possible start.

Local authorities are entrusted as delivery leaders of this strategy because they hold essential local insights and can coordinate health, education, and family support effectively.

Through the implementation of the Best Start in Life Strategy, Local Authorities are responsible for creating tailored local plans, meeting GLD targets, and using dedicated funding to close developmental gaps. Councils are tasked with integrating services through Family Hubs, collaborating with health partners, and ensuring quality standards are achieved,

supported by national guidance and robust national and local performance monitoring frameworks.

This plan sets out how West Berkshire can work together across services, families and communities to give every child the best start in life.



West Berkshire Best Start in Life

- Vision and Ambition

Our vision is that every child in West Berkshire grows up healthy, happy, curious and ready to learn, with the foundations for lifelong success firmly in place from the very start. We are committed to creating a Best Start system that is inclusive, ambitious, and transformative, ensuring that no child is left behind regardless of background or circumstance.

Our approach will focus on quality, accessibility, and collaboration. We will expand access to high quality early education and childcare, invest in workforce development to attract and retain skilled practitioners, and embed evidence based parenting and health interventions.

By 2028, West Berkshire will deliver a seamless, integrated Best Start system that empowers families, reduces inequalities, and enables children to enter school ready to thrive.

Our vision will be achieved through enhanced Best Start Family Hubs, offering a comprehensive local core offer that brings together health, education, and community support. All families will benefit from high quality early education, accessible digital services, and joined-up pathways from pregnancy through to age five and beyond (0-19 and up to 25 years with SEND), ensuring consistent, personalised support at every stage.

Building on our strong foundation of Family Hubs in Thatcham, Calcot, Newbury, and Hungerford, we will expand and innovate, focusing on underserved communities and embedding evidence based practice.

Our ambition is to create a collaborative system where professionals, families, and communities work together, guided by data and driven by the shared goal of giving every child the best possible start in life.

Early childhood development is shaped by health, education, family support, and community factors. No single service or agency is able to meet the complex needs of children and families alone.

By aligning local delivery with the national Best Start in Life strategy, our integrated approach will ensure that resources are used effectively and that all agencies are working together via shared principles.

Implementation of this plan across our multi agency partnership creates joint accountability and a common vision, ensuring that families will experience a seamless system rather than disjointed services that are difficult to navigate.

Key Principles:

- **Equity:** Prioritising families facing disadvantage and children with emerging or additional needs.
- **Integration:** Providing a joined up offer across health, education, family services, and community support.
- **Innovation:** Embedding evidence based and test and learn approaches to accelerate impact.
- **Voice:** Ensuring children and family voices shape design and delivery.

Committing to integrating our approach across West Berkshire reduces duplication, closes gaps in provision, and maximises our resources, leading to better outcomes for children and families.

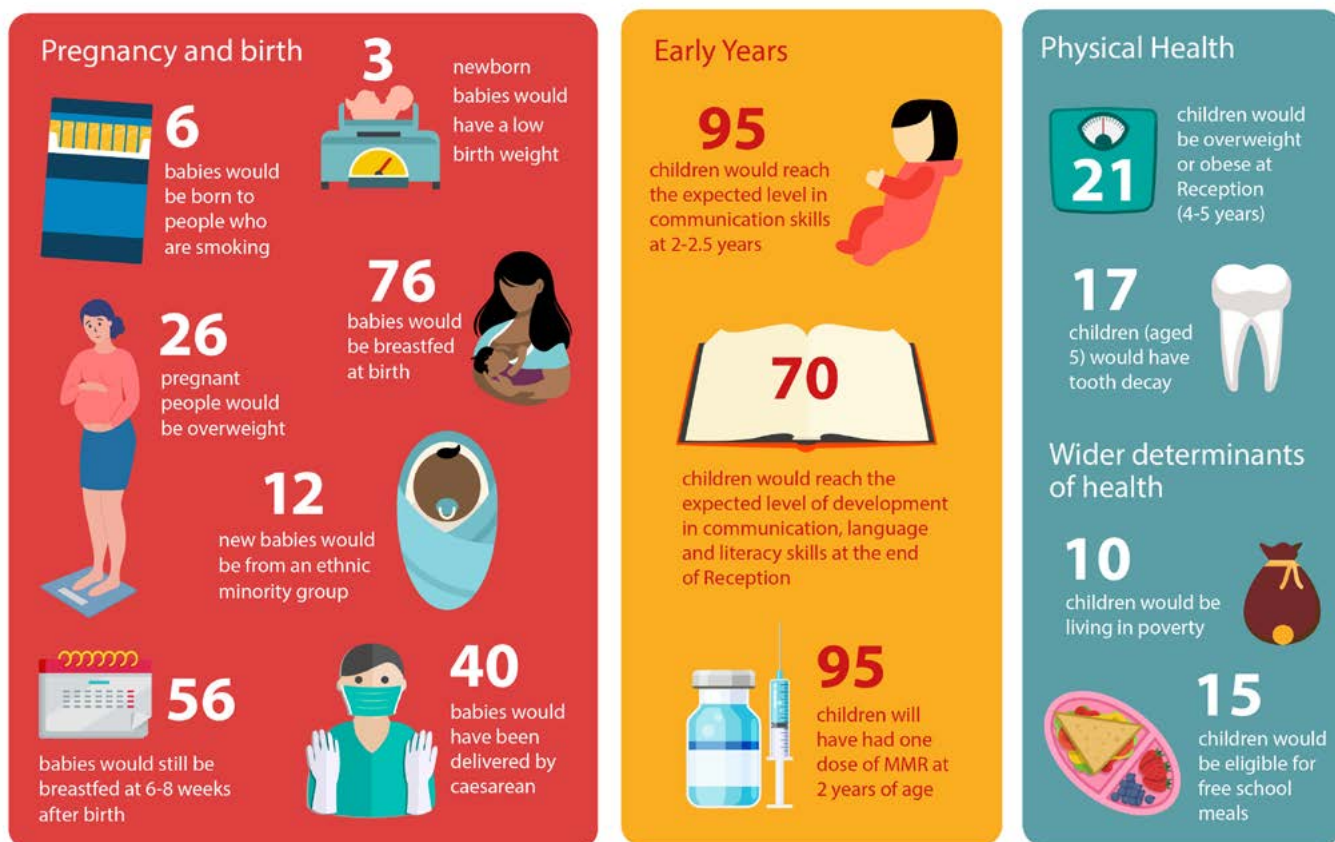
Local Needs Assessment

West Berkshire is home to around 165,000 residents, including approximately 10,000 children under five. The 2025 JSNA highlights an ageing population, growing inequalities across several communities, and pockets of child poverty. These factors create a clear imperative for targeted early years support, robust early identification pathways, and preventative services.

The importance of the first 1,001 days of life, from conception to age two, is highlighted in the 2025 West Berkshire Director of Public Health Annual Report. Overall, health, wellbeing and development outcomes for children and young people are better in West Berkshire than the national average. However, there are clear health inequalities

linked to geography, deprivation and specific vulnerabilities. These inequalities are the avoidable, unfair and systematic differences in health between groups. The report sets out notable gaps between the most and least deprived communities (see Figure X below) and shows that some inequalities are persistent or worsening. It also emphasises that population averages can mask important variation within West Berkshire and hide underlying inequality. The report calls for stronger collaborative action and continued investment in early years services, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive. This underpins our shared commitment that all children in West Berkshire should start school happy, healthy, curious and ready to learn.

If West Berkshire were a town of 100 children:



Taken from: West Berkshire State of the District [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\) Report](#)

Differences in health outcomes and risk factors between the least and most deprived areas in West Berkshire



Most Deprived

Life Expectancy at birth (females) **83.6 years** Life Expectancy at birth (males) **78.6 years** Infant Mortality (Deaths per 1,000 live births)* **5.5 per 1,000** Maternal mortality rate* **18.7 per 100,000**

Maternal Obesity* **32.4%** Low birth weight babies* **8.4%** Breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks* **51%** Women attending 1st Antenatal appointment* **56.9%** Child Obesity (Reception) **32.7%**

Under 18's Conception Rate* **17.8 per 1,000** Babies whose first feed was breast milk* **59.1%** Women taking Folic Acid Supplements* **10.1%** Tooth Decay in 5 years olds* **35.1%** Good level development in Reception age **40.5%**



Least Deprived

Life Expectancy at birth (females) **89.3 years** Life Expectancy at birth (males) **83.3 years** Infant Mortality (Deaths per 1,000 live births)* **2.5 per 1,000** Maternal mortality rate* **9.79 per 100,000**

Maternal Obesity* **19.8%** Low birth weight babies* **6.3%** Breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks* **62%** Women attending 1st Antenatal appointment* **69.6%** Child Obesity (Reception) **18.8%**

Under 18's Conception Rate* **7.7 per 1,000** Babies whose first feed was breast milk* **81.3%** Women taking Folic Acid Supplements* **27.9%** Tooth Decay in 5 years olds* **12.8%** Good level development in Reception age **66.8%**

Sources: Child and Infant Mortality and in England and Wales 2021; National Dental Epidemiology Programme (NDEP) for England: oral health survey of 5 year old children 2022; Fingertips; Maternal mortality 2021-2023; Child and maternal health profiles

*Denotes national data for illustrative purposes only



Current Challenges and importance of action:

Like many Local Authorities, West Berkshire faces significant challenges in ensuring every child has the best start in life. Developmental gaps between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers remain persistent, with some children entering school without the language, social, and emotional skills they need to thrive. Families can struggle to access timely, coordinated support, particularly in rural and underserved areas of our district, and rising demand for childcare and health services places pressure on existing provision. Workforce shortages and recruitment difficulties further impact the quality and consistency of early years education and family support. These challenges risk widening inequalities and limiting opportunities for children during the most critical stages of their development.

Addressing these challenges is essential to improving outcomes for children and families in West Berkshire. By taking a whole system approach—bringing together primary care, maternity services, education, children’s services, and community health services to provide integrated support through Best Start Family Hubs—while also expanding access to affordable, high quality childcare, strengthening early years education, and enhancing health and parenting support, we can ensure every child receives the right help at the right time.

Tackling inequalities early will lead to better school readiness, improved health and wellbeing, and stronger family resilience. Investing now in Best Start services will not only transform life chances for children but also reduce long term costs to education, health, and social care, building a stronger, fairer future for West Berkshire.

The link between good health for children and good levels of development is clear;

Brain & cognitive development

- Proper nutrition, sleep, and physical health support brain growth.
- Chronic illness, malnutrition, or frequent infections can affect memory, attention, and learning.
- Early health problems can have long-term effects on school performance.

Physical development

- Good health allows children to grow at a normal rate and build strength and coordination.
- Illness or poor nutrition can delay motor skills like walking, running, or fine hand movements.

Emotional & social development

- Healthy children tend to have more energy to explore, play, and interact—key ways kids learn social skills.
- Poor health can lead to stress, irritability, anxiety, or social withdrawal.
- Mental health is part of health: supportive, low-stress environments matter a lot.

Immune system & resilience

- Children in good health miss fewer school days and have more consistent learning experiences.
- Feeling physically well helps kids cope better with challenges and transitions.



Current Challenges –

- Gaps in early language and communication development, particularly for children living in deprived areas and those eligible for free school meals.
- Unequal accessibility to high quality early education and childcare.
- Rising demand for SEND support and early intervention.
- Significant health inequalities, affecting maternal health, infant feeding, early child wellbeing and childhood obesity

Data Sources:

- EYFSP (Early Years Foundation Stage Profile) outcomes
- Health visitor checks and ASQ-3 developmental screening
- Local deprivation indices
- West Berkshire Director of Public Health Annual Report
- West Berkshire JSNA
- Feedback from families and practitioners

Co Design and Family Voice

Our Best Start approach is grounded in genuine collaboration with families, practitioners, and partners. Throughout 2025, West Berkshire undertook extensive engagement activity that has shaped both the priorities and delivery model of this plan.

This included a formal consultation process involving 69 professionals and families using Early Help services, alongside meetings and interviews with schools, voluntary sector partners, statutory partners, and the Parent Carer Forum, all of whom contributed rich insight into what is working and what needs to change across early years and family support.

This collaborative work highlighted significant strengths - particularly the quality of multi-agency collaboration, the approachability of staff, and the fact that Family Hubs are already experienced as welcoming, flexible and trusted spaces. At the same time, partners identified key system challenges, including duplicated assessments, gaps in early years parenting support, inconsistent access in rural areas, and inadequate coordination across agencies, all of which now directly inform the improvement priorities within this plan.

Family voice has been central to shaping the Best Start offer. In October 2025, a dedicated Family Hub user survey captured feedback from 220 parents and carers, providing a detailed understanding of family experience. Families consistently described hubs as warm, welcoming, and non judgemental, with staff frequently going “above and beyond” during times of difficulty. Families valued the safe, inclusive environment, the high quality of activities, and the strong focus on child development, social connection and emotional wellbeing. Many reported reduced isolation and improved mental health as a direct result

of attending hubs, with first time parents in particular highlighting increased confidence and reassurance. Families also shared clear priorities for development, including more baby groups, sensory sessions, support for dads, afternoon options for working parents, and an improved booking system.

Our approach was further strengthened through the multi agency Total Place event in January 2026, which brought together a wide range of partners to explore what they need in order to fully engage in a joined up Best Start system. The session generated a rich picture of the conditions required for meaningful collaboration and the collective ambitions partners hold for families across West Berkshire.

Across the event, partners consistently emphasised the importance of strong infrastructure, including access to shared facilities, consistent communication channels, clear referral pathways, and reliable data on activity and outcomes. Participants stressed that to collaborate effectively, they require clarity on the local offer, trusted relationships, and mechanisms to share intelligence, reduce duplication, and maintain consistent practice across the system. They highlighted that colocation, keyworker approaches, and shared training would significantly improve professional coordination and enable earlier, more responsive support.

The event also revealed a collective desire for a more connected network of organisations -one where partners know who to contact, understand each other’s roles, and have access to centralised, regularly updated information. This included suggestions for advisory panels, better networking opportunities, community champions, and digital or face

to face structures that strengthen trust, transparency and joined up working.

There was agreement that the voices of families and communities must be heard directly -through face to face engagement, listening exercises, simple digital tools, and accessible feedback mechanisms.

Partners shared a clear, unified vision of what success should look like:

- a system where families no longer have to repeat their stories;
- a focus on prevention and early intervention
- professionals working together more efficiently and consistently;
- reduced referrals;
- improved information sharing; better attendance and developmental outcomes for children;
- a motivated and confident workforce supported by training, shared tools, and a strong collaborative culture.

The Total Place event reinforced and deepened the themes that emerged from our family and practitioner led work throughout 2025. Demonstrating a shared commitment across agencies to creating a streamlined, relationship based, community informed Best Start system, grounded in collaboration, transparency and shared responsibility.

The insights we have gained in this process directly shape the ambitions and delivery model set out in this plan, they are reflected in our service design commitments, and support identification of our priority groups - helping us to target Best Start support where it will have the greatest impact.

Target Groups

Analysis from national research, JSNA, consultation work and Family Hub user engagement highlights clear groups who face additional barriers or disproportionately require early intervention. These findings directly inform our targeted approach.

Families Facing Socioeconomic Disadvantage

The workshops identified persistent inequalities and noted that some families struggle to access consistent help until concerns escalate. Families facing poverty, unstable housing, or financial hardship were more likely to require practical support such as advice on housing, benefits, and essential resources.

Rural and Geographically Isolated Families

Both professionals and parents highlighted inconsistent service access in rural areas, with travel distance and limited sessions acting as barriers to engagement. This group requires enhanced outreach, digital delivery, transport sensitive delivery and flexible access models.

Families from minoritised communities

National research clearly identifies that children and families from ethnic minorities tend to face significant disadvantage where it comes to maternity and early year services.

Families of Children with SEND or Emerging Needs

Parents repeatedly emphasised the value of specialised information, behaviour support, and neurodiversity informed parenting programmes, noting gaps in early years SEND support. Families of children with emerging or additional needs also reported a dependence on staff who act as “lifelines” during crisis or complexity.

Pregnant Women and Families Needing Perinatal or Emotional Support

Survey findings show high demand for breastfeeding support, maternal mental health support, and help during difficult transitions such as postnatal depression, grief, or domestic abuse. These families benefit from responsive, safe and relationship based support, already praised within hubs.

First Time Parents and Families Seeking Confidence Building Support

Many first time parents and young parents described Family Hubs as essential spaces for increasing their parenting confidence, reducing anxiety, and receiving reassurance from skilled staff. This group values structured programmes, guidance, and learning opportunities.

Working Parents

Families asked for more afternoon sessions, indicating that traditional scheduling limits access for those balancing employment. This group requires flexible, extended and hybrid delivery models.

Fathers and Male Carers

Parents called for “more dad focused groups” and more inclusive session design. Dad specific engagement is a known gap and is therefore included as a priority target group within this plan.

Families with Older Siblings or Wider Age Ranges

Some families noted a need for groups for older siblings or multi child households. This informs our commitment to developing inclusive, whole family session models.

This plan embeds the insights we have gathered and sets the intention and commitment to create continuous co production opportunities as part of our Best Start future.



Strategic Objectives

Our plan focuses on progressing five key strategic priorities – these priorities, shaped by our co production activity - align with the Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy’s action areas - such as expanding access to childcare, early years education, strengthening health interventions, and improving workforce quality. Whilst also responding to our shared principles and our local realities and challenges, such as improving outcomes for children eligible for free school meals, prioritising our underserved communities and the need for improved streamlining of service pathways for families;

Our logic models below set out how we are going to deliver our strategic priorities and the outcomes we wish to achieve

Safeguarding and Family Help alignment

Our plan for implementation of our Best Start system is aligned with Family First Partnership reforms pathways by

- Ensuring early identification of emerging needs through health visiting, early years settings, and Family Hubs.
- Providing whole family support that prevents escalation into statutory services.
- Integrating referral routes across Family Hubs, Triage, and Family Help and safeguarding teams.
- Embedding trauma informed practice across practitioners.
- Increasing shared case discussion opportunities and aligning multi agency Family Help plans.
- Reducing duplication through clearer pathways and shared assessment frameworks.

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
Improve Child Development Outcomes	Best Start Family Hubs, early years workforce training, Health visitors, CYPIT Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Service, targeted interventions for FSM and SEND, evidence based language and communication programmes and the successful local programmes ECAT.	Deliver speech and language support, signpost the SLT Early Years Enquiries Line, embed inclusive practice, provide targeted home learning resources, support play and early years physical activity, run parenting programmes. Deliver developmental reviews, health promotion and early identification of developmental delays.	Increased access to early language interventions, more families engaged in home learning, improved SEND support pathways.	Improved early communication and social emotional skills, increased parental confidence.	Higher proportion of children achieving GLD by 2028, narrowed attainment gap for FSM children, better school readiness.

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
Improves Health and Reduce health inequalities	Health visitors, perinatal mental health specialists, oral health programs, vaccination campaigns, Public Health Grant	Holistic assessment of the family's health needs as undertaken by Health Visitors. Expand perinatal mental health pathways, deliver breastfeeding and infant feeding support, run oral health, immunisation outreach and healthy lifestyle programmes for children	Better access to health services, improved parent-infant bonding, higher vaccination rates for disadvantaged communities, reductions in hospital admissions related to tooth decay, reductions in admissions for non-intentional injury	Better maternal and paternal mental health, improved feeding practices, reduced dental decay.	Reduced health inequalities across different health outcomes, improved physical and emotional wellbeing for children and families, reductions in infant mortality reduced obesity prevalence at age 4/5 years between the most and least deprived communities,
Increase uptake of high quality early education	DfE Funding for 15 - and 30 hour entitlements, workforce development programs, inclusive practice training.	Promote funded childcare/early years education offers, recruit and retain skilled practitioners, embed SEND inclusion in settings.	Higher uptake of funded places, improved workforce quality, increased capacity in early years settings.	More children accessing high quality provision, improved inclusive practice, improved transitions for children with emerging SEND needs.	Better educational outcomes, reduced attainment gaps, better transitions from one phase of education to another, stronger foundations for lifelong learning.
Strengthen family resilience	Integrated family help teams, shared data systems, Best Start Family Hubs.	Deliver whole family interventions, embed outcomes based accountability, improve service coordination.	More families accessing integrated support, improved data sharing across agencies.	Increased family stability, improved parental confidence and coping strategies.	Reduced demand for crisis interventions, stronger family networks, improved child wellbeing.

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
Strengthen Children and Family Voice	Parent panels, co design workshops, digital engagement platforms.	Engage families in service design, run feedback sessions, use digital tools for outreach.	Increased family participation in planning, improved responsiveness of services, community ownership recognising 'it takes a village to raise a child'	Families feel heard and valued, services better tailored to needs.	Sustained engagement, improved trust in local services, stronger community partnerships.



Mobilising Delivery

We will mobilise delivery of the Best Start Plan objectives by establishing a coordinated, whole system approach that brings together early years education, health, family support, Family Hubs and community partners under a shared set of priorities. Embedding a strong partnership approach will ensure that each organisation

plays a clearly defined role in improving outcomes.

Continued momentum and mobilisation of multi agency roles and responsibilities will support this plan to be embedded across our West Berkshire partnership successfully.



A multi agency delivery group will work to convert high level aims and strategy priorities into measurable action, using shared training, joint decision making, and integrated pathways that increase consistency for families. This unified model ensures consistent, systemic progress in

early language, GLD attainment, perinatal support, and timely access to health and family services.

To ensure rapid and sustained implementation, we will combine strong operational leadership with a partnership

driven approach that uses shared data, collective intelligence and family voice to guide decision making.

Our partnership model enables data sharing, joint analysis and delivery, for example;

- Public Health will provide population level insights on oral health, immunisation, inequalities and infant mortality;
- Primary Care data will highlight local trends in infant wellbeing and maternal health needs;
- SEND services and Educational Psychology will guide early intervention, training and case planning;

and Community Health, such as Speech and Language Therapy, will co deliver targeted language programmes back into early years settings.

Workforce development will also be delivered collaboratively: early years educators, health visitors, midwives and voluntary sector practitioners will take part in joint training, strengthening consistency in quality and inclusive practice across the system. Through co design with parents and aligned governance across all partners, this model ensures implementation remains agile and responsive, driving continuous improvement and maximising impact for children and families.

Partnership Model:

- **Core Partners:** Health (Health Visitors, midwives, primary care), Children and Family Services, Education, Childcare Providers, Stronger Practice Hubs, Schools, Voluntary sector, Community groups.
- **Extended Network:** Local businesses, libraries, leisure services.
- **Governance:** Best Start Partnership Board reporting to Children & Families Strategic Group and Health and Well Being Board.

Our Core Best Start Offer:

Our Core Best Start Offer brings together the core elements of early years education, health and family support into a single, consistent package for families across the district

Parenting programmes and Home Learning Environment (HLE) support:

This includes a strong focus on parenting programmes and the Home Learning Environment, with tailored support for ages 0 - 4, and additional targeted offer for 3 – 4 year olds to support school readiness. Families will benefit from consistent access to universal parenting groups, targeted courses, developmental play sessions, literacy and language initiatives, and practical home learning guidance.

Healthy Babies: Healthy Babies pathway strengthens perinatal mental health support, infant feeding, and parent infant relationships, ensuring that the earliest months are protected and nurtured through an integrated health visiting and maternity partnership.

Support for children with additional needs: Support for children with additional needs is central to our core offer. Family Hubs will host SEND trained early years professionals who can guide families through early identification, referral pathways, and best practice inclusion strategies.

Broader 0–5 services: Wider 0–5 services including early education, public health offers, safeguarding pathways and voluntary sector support - will be delivered onsite from Family Hubs, digitally and through community outreach. This blended approach ensures that support is consistent, visible and adaptable to different levels of need, helping us to reduce inequalities and improve child development outcomes at population scale.

To ensure continued co production and inclusion of families lived experience in our Best Start system, we will implement a structured Family Voice and Co Design Framework that includes:

- Parent Panels for each Family Hub locality.
- Regular feedback cycles incorporating surveys, focus groups, and digital channels.
- A digital engagement Family Hub offer, including improved booking systems and AI supported signposting and information for families.
- Co production of targeted offers, especially relating to equalities, rural access, and SEND.
- Direct involvement of families in evaluating service impact, including dashboard reviews and annual partnership summits.

Place: Location and Access

West Berkshire families are currently served by four Family Hub locations:

Thatcham – Thatcham and neighbouring areas sit in an overall low deprivation part of the district, however pockets of concentrated higher deprivation are situated next to the Family Hub location, with further localities also showing higher child poverty rates. Indicating potential unmet need and priority families within reach of the Family Hub. Families here benefit from the largest Family Hub building offering established co located services with Health and VCS partners at the Hub as well as outreach into surrounding villages.

Newbury - Newbury concentrates a higher share of the district's population growth and contains denser, mixed income neighbourhoods. Some Newbury wards such as Greenham historically show higher deprivation and need than more rural parts of West Berkshire served by the other Hubs. Families here should benefit from

a new prominent Family Hub site at The Phoenix Centre with better transport links, a larger catchment area for universal and targeted Best Start services for previously underserved families.

Calcot and surrounding area – Calcot Family Hub sits in an overall lower deprivation part of the district. Due to the Hub reach area bordering Reading, which has significantly higher deprivation than West Berkshire, Families living near the local authority boundary may experience spill over pressures (housing density, cost of living, transport to work/childcare) creating a mixed need audience for universal and targeted support. Families here benefit from the Hub being co located within the grounds of a large and diverse infant and junior school community, as well as offering outreach into surrounding villages.

Hungerford and surrounding areas – Hungerford operates a full community outreach offer due to the absence of a dedicated Hub building. Hungerford Family Hub model relies on a strong local presence and relationships with community organisations to utilise outreach venues trusted by local families. Hungerford is the most deprivation sensitive area of the four due to the combination of pockets of higher child poverty and rural deprivation – creating additional access barriers for families (transport, digital connectivity). With 40%+ of the district defined as rural, distance to services and cost/time of travel can suppress uptake of early intervention services. Families here benefit from the Family Hub staff team's co location within Hungerford Nursery School community and an agile flexible outreach Family Hub offer.

Our Best Start place based approach is directly informed by what families and partners told us via our 2025 consultation work with them and insights gathered via operational delivery across four current

Family Hub sites. Neighbourhood Health approach has a synergy and overlap with the Best Start place based approach and will generate mutual benefit

Parents highlighted that access varies significantly across West Berkshire, with rural communities, working parents and families with young babies facing the greatest barriers. They also emphasised that Family Hubs provide safe, welcoming spaces that reduce isolation and strengthen community connection, but that more flexible timings and outreach are needed to reach every family.

In response, our focus on location prioritises hub activity in our most disadvantaged areas, while expanding mobile, pop up and village based delivery to ensure families in more isolated communities have equitable access. By grounding our decisions in the lived experiences of families, we are creating a Best Start system that is not only geographically well placed but genuinely shaped by the people who use it.

Location ambition: Our strategic approach to place ensures that the Best Start offer reaches the families who need it most, while maintaining a universal and inclusive model of support. Our ambition is that 70% of Family Hub provision is located within the most deprived 30% of communities, tackling inequalities where they are most evident and creating visible, trusted points of support for families. At the same time, we will ensure continuity of support for existing families and develop accessible provision for rural and semi rural communities, recognising that geographical isolation can be a significant barrier to early years engagement.

Outreach: To strengthen accessibility further, we will implement an outreach programme, bringing mobile Family Hub sessions, early education, health partner

clinics, and targeted family support directly into villages, estates, and community venues.

Digital access: Digital access will be enhanced through promotion of the national Best Start digital hub and the development of a local digital offer that supports booking, signposting and information access for parenting and HLE sessions.

This mixed delivery model ensures that families can access help in person, online, or within their own community - reducing barriers and improving take up of key Best Start interventions.

Local System Integration

Achieving the ambitions of the Best Start in Life strategy requires seamless integration across health, education, early years, family help and the voluntary and community sector.

Working closely with health partners such as the Thames Valley ICB and Berkshire West services, we will align Family Hub offers with the development of the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and Universal Healthy Child Programme and ChatHealth service, ensuring that health and family support pathways are closely coordinated.

Family Hubs will act as the bridge between early years services, health professionals and parents - reducing duplication and creating smooth referral journeys for families. Alignment with primary care via co located sessions and signposting for connected health initiatives will ensure that support remains responsive to evolving local need and informed by real time feedback. Integration with Family Help and Safeguarding pathways will ensure that universal and targeted support sits seamlessly alongside statutory services.

Data, insight and governance will form the backbone of system integration. We will formalise shared outcomes, joint pathways and data sharing agreements across all agencies to ensure families experience a single coherent system.

- Integrated partnership working
- Data, insight and governance
- Responding to local service gaps and needs

Workforce Development

A high-quality, stable, and confident Best Start workforce is essential to achieving our Best Start objectives. Best Start in Life guidance highlights workforce capacity, recruitment and retention, and SEND capability as critical challenges in delivering the Best Start in Life reforms. In West Berkshire, we will implement a multi-agency workforce development plan that builds on existing skills while addressing known gaps across health, early years, education, family support, and the voluntary sector.

Our workforce plan will include:

Joint training across agencies, using Family Hub co location to deliver CPD on trauma informed practice, inclusive communication, emerging SEND needs, perinatal and parent infant wellbeing, and developmental screening.

Regular reflective practice, supervision, and shared learning sessions to create a consistent culture across hubs and partner organisations.

SEND capability development, including building on national investment in early years SEND training and increasing local workforce confidence to identify needs early.

Strengthening recruitment and retention by promoting career pathways across early years settings, hubs, health, and community partners.

Use of Stronger Practice Hub to disseminate evidence based practice and support childcare settings to improve quality and inclusion.

Early Years team to continue to develop the expertise and knowledge of the local workforce in order to improve children's GLD outcomes.

Peer and volunteer roles, building community capacity by increasing recruitment and training and widening the early years workforce, including father focused support and parent champions.

Targeting and Resource Allocation

Our approach to targeting is rooted in evidence, ensuring resources are directed where they will achieve the greatest impact. Using local data on deprivation, SEND prevalence, health inequalities, early language vulnerability, and EYFS outcomes, we will identify priority neighbourhoods, early years feeder settings, and communities at heightened risk of poor outcomes. This will enable us to layer Family Hub universal services with targeted interventions, ensuring that the intensity of support matches the level of need. Through continuous monitoring of take up, outcomes and service reach, we will refine where and how resources are deployed to maximise effectiveness.

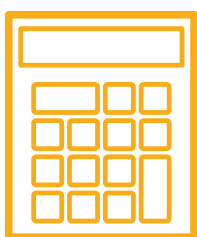
To sustain delivery, we will align our funding streams - including Best Start DfE allocation Family Hubs, the public health grant, Reducing Parental Conflict grant within a coordinated financial plan. This alignment will enable greater stability, reduce duplication, and support investment in community led initiatives that extend reach into groups less likely to access statutory services. Opportunities to commission community organisations will also allow us to diversify our engagement methods, enhance cultural relevance, and create alternative entry points for families who face barriers to traditional

services. This strategic approach to resource allocation will ensure long term sustainability and measurable improvements in outcomes for children and families.

- Data driven targeting to focus resources
- Alignment of funding streams for maximum impact
- Opportunities to extend impact via innovation and partnerships

West Berkshire has received a provisional £1,700,700 Best Start funding allocation for 2026–2029.

DfE Best Start Funding expectations:



Programme delivery - 50%

Capital - 12%

Parenting support 17%

Home Learning

Environment support - 21%

Best Start Funding will support:

Family Hub refurbishment and expansion, supporting the development of new and existing hub sites to meet national Best Start in Life guidance.

Expansion of parenting programmes, including evidence based interventions for 0 - 4s and targeted offers for families requiring additional support.

Home Learning Environment initiatives designed to improve early communication, literacy and readiness for school.

Creation and maintenance of the digital front door, enabling families to access information, booking systems and signposting through a single

online platform with support for digitally disadvantaged families to access it.

Investment in improved digital and data systems to allow for efficient monitoring, reporting and partnership intelligence sharing.

Workforce development, including multi agency training across health, early years and family support, with a focus on SEND inclusion and early identification.

Rural outreach expansion, including pop up services and flexible programme delivery in isolated communities.

Commissioning voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners to co deliver parenting, early years, health and community support offers.

Strengthening early years uptake work to improve access to high quality early education and childcare across the district.



Measuring Progress

Measuring progress in our Best Start Local Plan is essential to ensuring that the commitments made through the national Best Start in Life Strategy translate into meaningful improvements for children and families in West Berkshire.

We will adopt a clear, outcomes driven approach that tracks both population level change - such as improvements in EYFSP,

and service level indicators, including family engagement, uptake of funded childcare, and perinatal mental health support.

Through quarterly dashboards, mid year reviews, case studies and annual partnership reports, we will maintain visibility, identify trends early, and adapt delivery where needed.

Delivery Timeline & Key Milestones

Our phased delivery timeline moves from system building to full implementation and long term sustainability.

- Phase 1 -** establishes core foundations: reporting to the Partnership Board, needs assessment, digital family hub pilots, and integrated data dashboards.
- Phase 2 -** focuses on rolling out early language programmes, parenting interventions, workforce development and Stronger Practice Hubs.
- Phase 3 -** scale successful innovations and strengthen home learning initiatives.
- Beyond 2028,** we will focus on sustaining an integrated system and sharing best practice regionally.

Phase	Timeline	Key Actions
Phase 1: Foundations	Q2 2026 – Q4 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish Best Start Partnership Board - Complete local needs assessment - Mobilise Family Hub expansion plan - Pilot digital front door for families - Develop integrated data dashboard - Roll out targeted early language programmes - Establish child and family voice - Commission evidence based parenting interventions
Phase 2: Implementation	Q1 2027 – Q4 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workforce development programme - Promote learning from Stronger Practice Hubs in childcare settings - Commission community-led projects - Expand home learning environment and parenting initiatives
Phase 3: Scaling & Innovation	Q1 2028 – Q4 2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scale successful pilots - Annual review and refresh delivery plan - Sustain integrated early years system - Partnership agreed - Child friendly district
Beyond 2028	2029 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embed continuous improvement cycles - Share best practice regionally

KPIs and Metrics

Our KPIs align local priorities with national Best Start in Life ambitions. Indicators track child development, inequalities, family engagement, early education access, maternal mental health, breastfeeding, health visiting, access to togetherness and parent/carer voice.

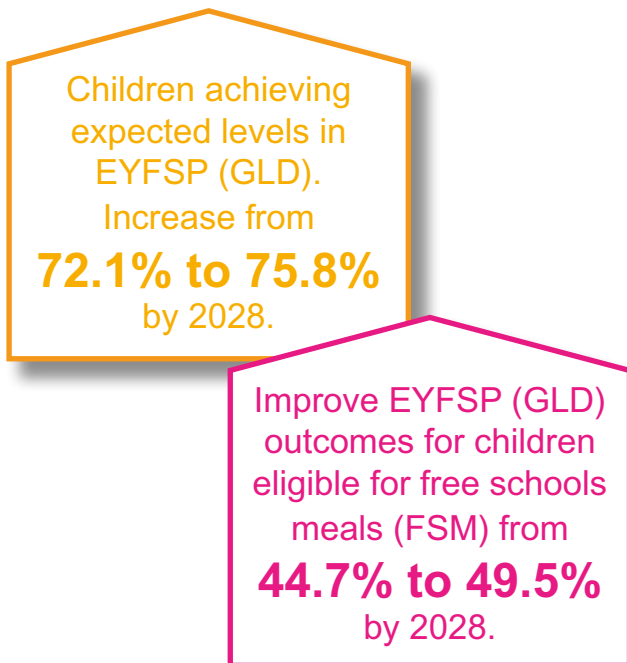
Ambitious 2028 targets - including raising GLD to 75.8% and funded 2 year old uptake to 85% - provide measurable points of progress.

Baselines give a clear starting point, ensuring our data led approach drives targeted improvement.

Objective	KPI	Baseline (2025)	Target (2028)
Improve child development	% children achieving expected EYFSP levels	72.1%	75.8%
Reduce inequalities	% children eligible for free school meals achieving expected EYFSP levels	44.7%	49.5%
Maternal mental health	% mothers accessing perinatal mental health support	45%	70%
Access to early education	% eligible 2-year-olds in funded childcare	68%	85%
Family engagement	% families using Family Hub services	40%	75%

2028 Targets:

The targets that we have been set locally reflect the national ambition to transform early outcomes and the distance we need to make locally for children, particularly those who are most disadvantaged. It is of note that some of the foundations laid during the early years will see benefit and outcomes over their whole life course.



Achieving these results requires strong multi agency delivery, targeted intervention and early identification.

Tracking Metrics & Milestones:

Quarterly dashboards will monitor developmental outcomes, service access and engagement so the partnership can respond quickly to emerging needs. We will also seek to capture softer changes that make a real difference for families, for example, increased confidence, reduced social isolation and stronger parent-child relationships. Introducing a mid point review in 2027 will refine approaches, scale successful pilots and adjust underperforming interventions. Annual public reports will ensure transparency, accountability and continuous learning.

- Quarterly dashboard tracking developmental outcomes, service uptake, and family satisfaction.
- Annual review with partners and families to adjust strategy.
- Mid point review in 2027
- Annual public report

Governance & Partnership

Our governance model ensures strong leadership across health, education, early years, family help and the voluntary sector – shaping, delivering and overseeing the system. West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board has identified Best Start in Life as one of its three priorities, committing to working together as system partners to improve health outcomes for children and families. The Children’s Strategic Multi-Agency Partnership will provide strategic oversight supported by the Health and Wellbeing Board and related subgroups covering health, community engagement, SEND, early intervention and Families First pathways. Quarterly Best Start multi agency working group meetings strengthen accountability and alignment with national Best Start priorities.

- Childrens Strategic Multi Agency Partnership
- Subgroups: Health & Wellbeing, Community Engagement SEND Priority 1 Early Years delivery Group, SEND Priority 2 early Intervention Delivery Group, Family First Partnership Delivery group
- Quarterly Best Start multi agency working group meetings
- Annual stakeholder summit.

Scaling Innovation

Innovation underpins our transformation approach. Using test and learn cycles, we will trial digital Family Hub tools, AI supported information services, and integrated health/early years outreach models. Stronger Practice Hubs will support us to adopt evidence based practice at pace. Successful innovations will be embedded into core services, ensuring sustainability and long term impact.

- Test and learn cycles
- Sharing best practice
- Building sustainability

Sustainability

We will embed effective interventions into core delivery, strengthen the early years workforce, and build community capacity through peer led programmes. Integrated data systems will ensure shared understanding of need and progress. Aligning multiple funding streams including Best Start, Family Hubs and public health will create financial resilience and support long term system transformation.

- Test and learn pilots for digital tools and voluntary and community sector engagement in delivery.
- Embed successful interventions into core services.
- Workforce development: training in evidence based early years practice across multi agency partnership.
- Build community capacity through peer led programmes.
- Maintain integrated data and information sharing systems for continuous improvement.
- Community capacity: Support voluntary and peer led initiatives to sustain impact beyond 2028.

Risk and Mitigation

Identifying and engaging with potential risks, whilst proactively understanding how we can mitigate them will allow us to create a Best Start delivery system that is resilient, equitable and capable of meeting the national mission.

Workforce Capacity and Skills

Risk: Demand for early years, health and family support services continues to rise, placing pressure on an already stretched workforce. Recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in early years and SEND roles, may limit the scale or quality of delivery.

Mitigation: Implement the multi agency workforce development plan including joint CPD, early identification and SEND training, strengthened career pathways, and collaboration with Stronger Practice Hubs. Expand use of peer supporters and voluntary sector partners to increase capacity.

Childcare Sufficiency and Provider Stability

Risk: Providers may struggle to meet demand created by expanded childcare entitlements or may experience financial instability, limiting access to high quality early education.

Mitigation: Strengthen sufficiency planning with providers, use capital investment to increase capacity, support workforce recruitment, and create localised incentives for settings in high need areas.

Digital Exclusion and Barriers to Access

Risk: The digital Family Hub and online systems may not reach all families,

especially those without digital confidence or consistent internet access.

Mitigation: Maintain hybrid access options including telephone, in person and outreach support. Provide assisted digital help through hubs, libraries, community venues and utilising 'Let's Talk' to support access. Ensure all digital tools are simple, mobile friendly and accessible.

Rising Complexity of Family Need

Risk: Increasing complexity - particularly around neurodiversity, mental health, domestic abuse and financial hardship - may increase demand beyond service capacity.

Mitigation: Strengthen early identification pathways, embed multi agency planning, expand targeted parenting offers, and ensure staff are trained in trauma informed and inclusive practice.

Rural Access Inequalities

Risk: Families living in rural or transport limited areas may not be able to access consistent early years or family support.

Mitigation: Expand mobile delivery, pop up sessions and village based activity. Partner with local community organisations and schools to host provision. Ensure enhanced digital and telephone access complements face to face delivery.

Financial Pressures and Sustainability

Risk: Pressures on public sector budgets may affect long term delivery and the ability to scale successful models.

Mitigation: Align multiple funding streams including Best Start, Family Hubs, Public Health and external grants. Commission VCS partners to diversify delivery. Embed evaluation to demonstrate impact and inform future investment decisions.

Data Sharing and Information Governance

Risk: Fragmented data systems and inconsistent information sharing may limit the effectiveness of early identification and joint planning.

Mitigation: Strengthen outcomes based accountability, introduce shared dashboards, improve consent and referral pathways, and explore solutions to enable safe, efficient information flow.

Cross cutting system risk

Individual mitigations may be less effective if system partners do not adopt a shared, collaborative approach to delivery. Without consistent commitment across health, education, family hubs, early years and the VCS, some risks - such as workforce capacity, rural accessibility and rising complexity - may increase or shift between agencies rather than being reduced.

To mitigate this, strong governance and monitoring of the progress of this Best Start strategic local plan, including a risk management plan, shared ownership of KPIs, regular joint planning cycles and clear escalation routes, can ensure risks are managed collectively rather than in isolation.

Implementation

The Best Start Local Strategic Plan will be implemented through a detailed Best Start Delivery Plan, which translates our strategic ambitions into clear, actionable programmes of work across the partnership. While the Local Plan sets the vision, priorities and long term outcomes aligned to the national Best Start in Life Strategy, the Delivery Plan operationalises these commitments by specifying the actions, timelines, leads and resources required to achieve them.

It will organise delivery into phased milestones, outline measurable performance indicators, and set out the responsibilities of each partner - health, family hubs, early years, education, family help, and the voluntary and community sector - to ensure coordinated implementation. The Delivery Plan will also provide the mechanism for monitoring progress through quarterly dashboards and governance cycles, enabling the partnership to adapt approaches based on real time data, emerging needs and feedback from families. In doing so, it ensures that the high level ambitions of the Best Start Local Plan are embedded in day to day practice, driving consistent improvement and meaningful impact for children and families.

Equalities Impact Statement

This plan prioritises families most at risk of poorer outcomes, including those experiencing socioeconomic inequality, rural isolation, and health disparities. We recognise that children with SEND, families from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, young parents, care experienced parents, and families facing domestic abuse may require targeted support. Our interventions, workforce development, and resource allocation model ensure that provision is inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive.

Family voice and co production will continue to inform equality actions across the plan.

Appendix : Best Start Delivery Plan 2026-2028



We are committed to being accessible to everyone. If you require this document in an alternative format or translation, please call Children and Family Services on Telephone 01635 551111.

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WBC/C&FS/DW/0226

The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

1. This document gives 28 clear days notice of key decisions which the Executive and Individual Executive Members or Officer expect to take.
2. The document is updated as required and is available to the public on the Council's website.
3. The Executive is made up of the Executive Leader, Deputy Leader and eight Executive Members with the following portfolios:

Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Deputy Leader and Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services	Councillor Heather Codling
Adult Social Care and Public Health	Councillor Patrick Clark
Finance and Resources	Councillor Iain Cottingham
Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside	Councillor Nigel Foot
Planning and Housing	Councillor Denise Gaines
Environment and Highways	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment)	Councillor Tom McCann
Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation	Councillor Justin Pemberton
Strategy and Governance and Commercialisation	Councillor Vicky Poole

4. Key decisions are those executive decisions which are likely to result in spending or savings which are "significant" in relation to the budget for the service or function in question, or in terms of the effect on communities living or working in two or more wards or electoral divisions. All contracts above £500,000 require a key decision in accordance with the Constitution.
5. The Regulations and the Council's Constitution provide for urgent key decisions to be made, even though they have not been included in this document in accordance with General Exception and Special Urgency provisions.
6. The Forward Plan will also contain details of intended review activity by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and its Sub-Committee(s) or another body e.g. Task Group associated with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.
7. Copies of the Council's Constitution and agenda and minutes for all meetings of the Council may be accessed on the Council's website.
8. For copies of reports or other documents, and for detailed information regarding specific issues to be considered by the Executive, individual Member or officer please contact the named Lead Officer for the item concerned.
9. For further details on the time of meetings and general information about the Plan please email executivecycle@westberkshire.gov.uk or by writing to the address below.

Publication Date: 1 January 2026

Nicola Thomas
Service Lead
Legal & Democratic Services
West Berkshire Council, Council Offices
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
20 Jan 2026	Schools Funding Formula 2026/27		Yes	Portfolio Holder: Deputy Leader, Children and Family Services			Lisa Potts	Open
29 Jan 2026	Finance, Property and Procurement resource allocation		No	Executive			Shannon Coleman-Slaughter	Fully exempt Information relating to any individual.
12 Feb 2026	2025/26 Performance Report Q2		No	Executive			Beatriz Teixeira	Open
12 Feb 2026	Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2026-27		Yes	Executive			Shail Vitish	Open
12 Feb 2026	Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27		Yes	Executive			Shail Vitish	Open
12 Feb 2026	Revenue Budget		Yes	Executive			Elizabeth Griffiths	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	2026/27							
12 Feb 2026	Quarterly Financial Performance Report - Q3 of 2025/26	To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets and provide a year-end forecast.	Yes	Executive			Toby Bradley	Open
12 Feb 2026	Capital Budget 2026/27		Yes	Executive			Richard Quayle	Open
12 Feb 2026	Westwood farm options		Yes	Executive			Mark Lewis	Open
12 Feb 2026	Standing item: Asset Disposal		No	Executive			Richard Turner	Open
12 Feb 2026	Contract for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive		Yes	Executive			Sarah Wood	Open
16 Feb 2026	Revised		No	Portfolio			James Read	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	UKSPF funding plan			Holder: Community Engagement , Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation				
27 Feb 2026	Parking Review Amendment Order No.35 (A4 Thatcham area)		No	Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways			Neil Stacey	Open
27 Feb 2026	Parking Review Amendment Order No. 36 (various locations)		No	Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways			Neil Stacey	Open
19 Mar 2026	Children's Mental Health		No	Executive			Steven Bow	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	and Emotional Wellbeing Task Group Recommendations							
19 Mar 2026	Motion to Council - decisions following public consultation		No	Executive			Martyn Sargeant	Open
19 Mar 2026	Standing item: Asset Disposal		No	Executive			Richard Turner	Open
19 Mar 2026	Oral Health Needs Assessment		No	Executive			Steven Bow	Open
19 Mar 2026	2025/26 Performance Report Q3		No	Executive			Beatriz Teixeira	Open
26 Mar 2026	Stanford Dingley Parish Design Statement	To consider adoption of the updated Stanford	No	Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing			Paula Amorelli	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	(2026)	Dingley Parish Design Statement						
27 Mar 2026	Parking Review Amendment Order No 37 (various locations)		No	Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways			Alex Drysdale	Open
27 Mar 2026	Three Year Highway Improvement Programme 2026/27 - 2028/29	To seek the approval of the Executive Member for Environment and Highways to implement the Draft Three Year Highway Improvement Programme 2026/27 - 2028/29 and proceed with the first year 2026/27 of the programme.	Yes	Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways	Consultation is not formally undertaken as the programme is based on objective data from technical surveys. However, any comments received from stakeholders during the previous 12-month period are considered and all local Ward Members and Town/Parish Councils are		Andrew Reynolds	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
					advised of scheme details in advance of work commencing. The full programme will also be published on the Council's website.			
10 Apr 2026	2026-27 Network Management Works Programme	To seek approval of the proposed Network Management Works Programme for 2026-27.	Yes	Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways			Neil Stacey	Open
21 May 2026	Review of Ethical Investment Policy Relating to the Council and Berkshire Pension Fund		No	Executive			Richard Howroyd	Open
21 May 2026	Environment		Yes	Executive			Emily Ashton-	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	Strategy Annual Progress Report						Jelley	
21 May 2026	All Age Autism Strategy		Yes	Executive			Hannah Cole	Open
21 May 2026	Education Outcomes		No	Executive			James Stuart	Open
21 May 2026	Playing Pitch Strategy		Yes	Executive			Jude Thomas	Open
21 May 2026	Automatic Fire Suppression Systems		Yes	Executive			Richard Turner	Open
21 May 2026	Planning Enforcement Plan	For the Executive to consider the outcome of the Draft Planning Enforcement Plan 6 week consultation and to approve the Plan.	Yes	Executive			Laura Callan	Open
21 May 2026	Care Quality	The purpose of	No	Executive			Paul Coe	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	Commission Self-Assessment	<p>the report is to share the self-assessment document developed in line with the requirements of the Care Quality Commission (CQC)'s programme of Local Authority Assurance. The assurance process focuses on Adult Social Care but takes account of associated activity by other departments including Housing, Commissioning , Public Health, Human Resources and others. The development of</p>						

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
		an Annual self-assessment report is a new requirement. It forms part of the 'Information Return' to be shared upon notification of an Assurance visit.						
21 May 2026	New Procurement Strategy & Think Local Social Value Policy		No	Executive			Richard Howroyd	Open
21 May 2026	Approval of the Landscaped Area Crookham Common for the Exercise of Commoners' Rights	To seek a formal resolution from the Council confirming that the area commonly referred to as the "landscaped area" on Greenham and	No	Executive			Paul Hendry	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
		Crookham Commons is now in a fit state for the exercise of commoners' rights, in accordance with Section 3 of the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act 2002.						
21 May 2026	Standing item: Asset Disposal		No	Executive			Richard Turner	Open
21 May 2026	Devolution of Ramsbury drive play area to Hungerford town council		No	Executive			Matt Hart	Open
28 May 2026	SACRE agreed syllabus		Yes	Individual Executive Member Decisions			James Stuart	Open
11 Jun 2026	Highways		Yes	Executive			Sarah Wood	Open

Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	Term Maintenance Contract							
2 Jul 2026	Standing item: Asset Disposal		No	Executive			Richard Turner	Open
2 Jul 2026	2025/26 Performance Report Q4		No	Executive			Beatriz Teixeira	Open
24 Sep 2026	Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report		No	Executive			Karl Davis	Open
24 Sep 2026	Early Help Response Hub Annual report		No	Executive			Georgie Hicks	Open
24 Sep 2026	Care Leaver Annual Report		No	Executive			Karl Davis	Open
24 Sep 2026	Youth Justice Annual Plan		No	Executive			Dave Wraight	Open
24 Sep 2026	West	To ensure that	Yes	Executive			Steven Bow	Open






Decision Due Date	Title	Purpose	Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No	Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision	Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members	Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer)	Lead Officer e.g report author	Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information)
	Berkshire Health Visitor and School Nurse (0-19s) Recommissioning	the necessary approval processes are followed and scheduled within the required timescales						
	Henwick Worthy Masterplan		Yes	Executive			Jude Thomas	Open

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Item	Scrutiny Theme	Purpose	Lead Officer	Portfolio Holder/ Lead Member	Pre or post decision?
04 June 2026					
Response to DfE Regional Director comments	Corporate Effectiveness	To present the proposed response to issues raised by the DfT Regional Director	AnnMarie Dodds/ Ashley Milum	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision
SEND Recovery Plan	Policy Effectiveness	To present plans for addressing rising demands and backlogs in Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA)	Ashley Milum/ Emma Ferry/ ICB Rep (TBC)	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	Pre-Decision
School Viability Review	Partnership Effectiveness	To consider the long-term viability of schools in West Berkshire in the context of declining birth rates.	Ashley Milum	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision
10 September 2026					
SEN Tribunals	Corporate Effectiveness	To provide an update on SEN Tribunals in West Berkshire.	Emma Ferry	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision
Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Policy	Policy Effectiveness	To present the draft EOTAS Policy for review.	Emma Ferry	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	Pre-Decision
Families First Update	Policy Effectiveness	To provide an update on how the Families First Programme is being implemented in West Berkshire, bringing professionals together to ensure children and their families receive clear, joined-up support.	Rebecca Wilshire	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision
Children's Services Complaints and Compliments Annual Report	Corporate Effectiveness	To present the Children's Social Care Complaints Annual Report for 2025/26, including feedback from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman	Sue O'Brien	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision
Child Protection Annual Report 2025-26	Corporate Effectiveness	To report upon the performance of services for children and young people subject to a child protection plan between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, providing breakdown and commentary regarding the quality of practice within West Berkshire's child protection conference process and to make recommendations for any required remedial action.	Nicola Robertson	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision
03 December 2026					
Childcare Sufficiency Assessment	Policy Effectiveness	To provide an overview of childcare provision in West Berkshire and whether this is sufficient to support working parents and ensure that every child is able to access their entitlement to free early education and care.	???	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	Pre-Decision
Update on response to DfE Regional Director comments	Corporate Effectiveness	To provide an update on the local education system's response to issues raised by the DfT Regional Director	AnnMarie Dodds/ Ashley Milum	Cllr Heather Codling (Children and Family Services)	CYPSC Decision

02 March 2027

Council Strategy Priorities

-  Priority Area 1: Services We Are Proud Of
-  Priority Area 2: A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All
-  Priority Area 3: Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency
-  Priority Area 4: A Prosperous and Resilient West Berkshire
-  Priority Area 5: Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice

Scrutiny Themes

- Policy Effectiveness
- Corporate Effectiveness
- Partnership Effectiveness

Last updated:

02 April 2026