
West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026-2028

Report being considered by: Health and Wellbeing Board
On: 7 May 2026
Report Author: Dave Wraight
Report Sponsor: Councillor Heather Codling



Executive Summary

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.

1. Purpose of the Report

To provide the Health and Wellbeing Board oversight of 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 Health and Wellbeing Board are requested to note the Best Start Local Strategic Plan 2026–2028 recognising the shared endeavour across the partnership.

3. Implications

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	Predominantly this will be funded via the new “Best Start Grant” (See table below).

Table 1: Distribution of your funding allocation across the relevant programme strands for financial years 2026-27, 2027-28 and 2028-29.

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

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	Income
Centre	Target
90840	-72,670
90845	<u>-11,810</u>
	<u>-84,480</u>

Proposed reformed targets.

Cost	Income
Centre	Target
90840	-40,000
90845	<u>-4,000</u>
	<u>-44,000</u>

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:

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.			
	Paula Goodwin			
Legal:	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.			
	Nicola Thomas			
Risk Management:	There is a section of the Best Start Local Strategic Plan that highlights the risks to delivery of the plan and consequent mitigations.			
Property:	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.			
Policy:	'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life' strategy, July 2025 Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025 Setting the foundations for lifelong health West Berkshire State of the District Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Report			
	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			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 alongside culturally responsive practice and data-driven targeting, will be essential to preventing differential access and ensuring that the plan actively narrows existing inequalities.

<p>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p>	X		<p>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.</p>
<p>Environmental Impact:</p>		X	<p>No specific environmental impact</p>
<p>Health Impact:</p>	X		<p>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.</p>
<p>ICT Impact:</p>	X		<p>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.</p>
<p>Digital Services Impact:</p>	X		<p>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.</p>

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 for approval. 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.

5. Proposal(s)

- 5.1 The Plan proposes the development of an integrated Best Start system built around five strategic priorities:
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.

5.6 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.

5.7 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.

6. Options Considered

- 6.1 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:
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.

7. Conclusion(s)

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.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan

Background Papers:

None

Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Priorities Supported:

The proposals will support the following priorities:

- Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
- Help families and young children in early years
- Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
- Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

The proposals contained in this report will support the above Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities by improving child development outcomes by delivering targeted early language, communication and social-emotional interventions; strengthening inclusive practice and SEND early identification; expanding evidence-based parenting and home-learning programmes. Improving health outcomes and reduce inequalities by strengthening perinatal mental health pathways and infant feeding support; enhancing oral health, immunisation and healthy lifestyle programmes and addressing maternal and infant health inequalities in deprived communities.

West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE

March 2023

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Equity Impact Assessment

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> <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>

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	<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 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. 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. 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 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.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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 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> <p>e. Health Visitor ASQ-3 and screening data: Identifiable delays in communication, physical development, and social–emotional skills.</p>

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	<p>2. Service-User and Stakeholder Consultation: The plan contains rich consultation information from families, practitioners and partners.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>b. Digital front door and hybrid delivery: Reduces travel emissions. Supports digital inclusion while maintaining options for those who cannot access tech.</p> <p>c. Co-location of services: Cuts down on both practitioner and family travel. Enables efficient estate use, reducing duplicated room/energy use.</p>
<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>

Equity Impact Assessment

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

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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"/>				

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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			

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
				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"/>				
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	